

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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Harry Thomason
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
October 17, 2014
Hot Springs, Arkansas

Objective

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

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

Transcript Methodology

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

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

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

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

Citation Information

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

Scott Lunsford interviewed Harry Thomason on October 17, 2014, at the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Great honor, Harry. I can't thank you enough for . . .

Harry Thomason: Well, it's always my honor to do anything for anything that has the name Pryor attached to it, quite frankly.

SL: You know, it is amazing how that name just really puts people at ease, and they're so happy to be a part of it.

[00:00:17] HT: You know, one of my first childhood memories, not the first, but one of the first is—uh—[*sound of motorcycle passing*]

Trey Marley: Can we pick that up again?

HT: . . . motorcycle . . .

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

HT: . . . driving past. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

HT: No.

SL: We're gonna run into that some on this.

HT: That's okay.

SL: Yeah.

[00:00:31] HT: I'm—I'm used to it. You know, one of my first memories i—is being with my—my dad, and I couldn't have been over six or seven years old. And I know I always rode with him—he would pick up produce 'cause he was in the grocery store business . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . to Camden, and I remember one day, for some reason, we were at the Camden newspaper . . .

SL: Hmm.

HT: . . . and I met Mr. Pryor. Not Senator Pryor. I met Senator Pryor's dad. And for some reason that's always stuck in my mind. And—and so, I was raised and I—not far from him, and I was raised in south Arkansas, in Hampton, and—uh—and I had a really good life.

[00:01:09] SL: Okay. So, first thing we have to do is ask—uh—you've already told me you live—you were born in Hampton, Arkansas.

HT: Right.

SL: Not far from Camden, is that right?

HT: Oh, it's twenty miles from Camden.

SL: Twenty miles? Uh—and the year you were born is 19 . . .

HT: I was . . .

SL: . . . 40?

HT: . . . I was born in—I was born Thanksgiving day, 1940.

[00:01:26] SL: Okay. And—uh—the Z in your name is Zell . . .

HT: The Z . . .

SL: . . . Z-E-L-L.

HT: . . . the Z in my name stands for Zell. And—and—and it's for, Z-E-L-L, and it's for the famous actor of the [19]30s and [19]40s, Harry von Zell—and musician—[19]30s and [19]40s. Uh—and—uh—my—I call her an aunt, but she was really a first cousin, and she was part of the war effort in Washington, you know. Uh—she worked for the government, and—uh—she had a—uh—brief time that she dated him, and so—uh—about the time I was born, and . . .

SL: Oh!

HT: . . . so, I ended up with Harry Zell. It was not a good year—it was 1940, so it was not a good year to stick von in front of anything.

SL: Right. Right.

HT: [*Laughs*] You know, with the war coming on.

[00:02:17] SL: No kidding. Um—okay, so, today, Harry, is October 17. We're at the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas. And you're sitting across from Scott Lunsford, which

is probably the most difficult thing you'll do this next hour.

HT: I doubt that.

SL: Um—[*TM coughs*] and—um—it—we're here on behalf of the Pryor Center. And we're recording this in high-definition video and audio, and we will send you raw footage, every inch of raw footage we do here tonight, and we'll eventually get you a transcript. That takes a little bit longer. And if there's anything in there you don't like, just tell us and we take it out because we're about you telling your . . .

HT: Right, right.

SL: . . . story the way you want it told.

HT: Right.

SL: So, it's your interview. And if you're comfortable with that, then . . .

HT: I'm very comfortable . . .

SL: . . . we'll just keep go . . .

HT: . . . with it.

[00:03:06] SL: Thank you so much. Okay. So, born in Hampton, Arkansas. Named after a—uh—uh—movie star musician in the middle name.

HT: Right.

SL: And—uh—now, you mentioned that your dad was in the grocery

business?

HT: Right.

[00:03:21] SL: We—tell me about your dad. What was your dad's full name?

HT: My dad was Travis Thomas Thomason, and—uh—[clears throat] he was right at that age—who—uh—he was from—a bunch of brothers and—and at least three sisters, and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . he was—uh—too old—somebody had to stay and run the farm, and that always bothered him that he didn't get to go to ward—World War II. The other—the other brothers did, and—uh—uh—they made a lot of the great battles of the war and that and—some were at D-Day, some were at the Battle of the Bulge, and so—uh—I—from my earliest years, I remember—I could have only been two or three, I started—about something big was going on, and that people in my family were worried about other people in my family, you know. [00:04:16] I remember waking up—and again, I—I was—it—uh—I couldn't have been over three—in Hampton one Sunday morning, and my mother says—we lived near the school, and she says, "Come here, I want you to look at this." And she took me to the door, and we looked out, and as far as you could see, there were tents and army



vehicles and military people because they had troop movement, and they had bivouacked there for the night. So, I got to take my dog, Ted, and we went over and wandered among the troops, and they gave me K rations [*SL laughs*] and—uh—you know, and so it was a—uh—it was a great memory, you know.

SL: They didn't give you any silk stockings, did they?

HT: No silk stockings. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well—um—so that's remarkable that you can remember that—that far back, really.

[00:05:05] HT: That's the only—I—I remember that, and I remember the day the war was over.

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: Because that same relative that had—uh—dated Harry von Zell, I remember she was at the house that day. She was home from Washington for some reason. And I just remember everybody all of a sudden started cheering . . .

SL: Wow.

HT: . . . and so forth. And—uh—that was the day—uh—that the war ag—in Europe was over.

[00:05:33] SL: And did your uncles make it back safely?

HT: All of 'em made it back. My Uncle Harold, who—uh—I was close to all my uncles and especially to him, and—uh—and he died

several years ago, but he told me all these great stories after forty years of not talking about it. He just—I would . . .

SL: Opened up.

HT: . . . set on his front porch, and he would blurt 'em out to me and—and talking about at the end of the war, they were—he was near the Ardennes forest—uh—he w . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . ran an artillery unit. And—uh—and they would shell the Germans and—and—but somehow they got to be friends, he did, with one of the German soldiers, which is . . .

SL: Verboten.

HT: . . . a mile away across the line.

SL: Yeah.

[00:06:20] HT: And on weekends, he and a couple of the other soldiers—this German soldier's parents lived in the area. And they would go with him, and they would have—uh—they would have lunch or dinner. The family would fix what—he said it—they didn't have much, but they would fix food for him, and then they would have dinner, and then they would—uh—he would go back across the lines and . . .

SL: And . . .

HT: . . . start shelling again.

SL: . . . shell the heck out of 'em.

HT: Right. So.

SL: That's unusual. I've never heard of that kind of thing happening. We've interviewed several veterans . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . but nothing like that, that's . . .

HT: Well, I'd not heard that before . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . but he actually—I—I think he might have made some contact with the guy years after the war, like, in the [19]50s . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

HT: . . . or the [19]60s.

SL: Uh-huh.

HT: Somewhere about there.

[00:07:03] SL: Mh-hmm. I've heard of that . . .

HT: Yeah. So.

SL: . . . happening before. So—um—your—um—uh—it's not unusual for veterans not to talk about the war.

HT: Correct.

SL: And—just—there's been a rash of them opening up 'cause they've gotten old enough to where if they don't . . .

HT: Right, if they . . .

SL: . . . say anything about it, no one will ever know how . . .

HT: If they don't tell their story, it'll never be known.

SL: . . . awful it was. Yeah.

HT: . . . so—uh . . .

SL: Yeah. Yeah. So—um—your father was in the grocery business.
What . . .

HT: Mh-hmm.

[00:07:33] SL: And your mother, was she a—a—a homemaker?

HT: Uh—she was a homemaker when I was four—first born and—and
helped him run the grocery store, and later she became a
employee of the US Department of Agriculture and retired . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . there, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm. And what was her name?

HT: Pauline Marie Means.

SL: Okay.

HT: *M-E-A-N-S.*

SL: And was she from—um—uh—Hampton as well or . . .

HT: Well, she was from Woodberry. [*Laughs*]

SL: Woodberry. Now where is that?

HT: Which is betwee—Woodberry was about six or seven miles from
Hampton.

SL: Uh-huh.

HT: Sort of toward Camden.

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: And—and it was a tiny—a tiny little hamlet, but—uh—when my Grandfather Means was first raised there, there was an academy, and—uh—he became a—he was, in effect, a college professor and a farmer, and he would teach at the Woodberry Academy, I believe it was called, and—uh—which was basically a college prep . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

HT: . . . place, you know.

SL: Well, that's good.

HT: Yeah.

[00:08:36] SL: So—um—let me think for just—I was gonna ask you something else. Oh. So, did you know your grandparents on either side?



HT: I did. I knew—uh—I knew all my grandparents very well. Spent loads of time with them because my brother, Danny Thomason, who's a doctor in Little Rock now, of course, he had polio as a child.

SL: Mmm.

HT: Or meningitis. They never quite determined it, but he was ill for

so long. So, while he was in the hospital and so forth, I would spend—I would alternate time with my grandparents. And—and—and my—my grandfathers had one thing in common. It's like—I'd all—'cause I liked it. I would sleep in—on, like, a pallet or a mattress in front of the fireplace, and they would tell me stories, and—uh—and so, they instilled that storyteller into me because they told some wild tales and—and some great stories. Uh—you know, as I was a child, I would lay there in the dark with the fire reflecting off my face and listen to their stories.

SL: So . . .

[00:09:45] HT: And I'm right now trying—I—I—I think PBS—I was telling a couple of stories about a—not—not—only one or two were Arkansas based—about strange things that have happened that are ver—verifiable and there are witnesses or odd things or things that make you say, "Hmm!" And it appears that PBS is going to buy it, you know, with me just—and it's all about storytelling there. It's not—like my friend Ken Burns who takes still pictures—anything. It's just a guy on camera telling a story. In the dark, by the way. [SL laughs] Of course, 'cause that's . . .

SL: Of course.

HT: . . . that's the way I remember it.

SL: Yeah.

HT: So . . .

SL: Yeah. Well, that's good. I mean, that's what . . .

HT: Well, yeah, I'm—I . . .

SL: . . . that's what we're all about, I mean . . .

HT: That's right.

SL: . . . we—we . . .

[00:10:27] HT: I just did a test for 'em, and—uh . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

HT: . . . and—uh—a company owned by Ron Howard and his partner, Brian Grazer, you know, they—and a guy from Arkansas, Ed Wilson, who's from . . .

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HT: . . . Rison, Arkansas. We're—in Los Angeles we're gonna hang out with other people from Arkansas. [*Laughs*] But—uh—they're out trying to sell this, too, because they loved this test so much, and it's about the greatest maritime disaster of all time. The gr—that the US is familiar with. There have also been, in other parts of earth, greater maritime disasters, but it wasn't the *Titanic*. It was the *Sultana*, and you might have never heard of it.

SL: I have heard that . . .



HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . name. Tell—go ahead and . . .

HT: Not many people have. They . . .

SL: Te—tell the story.

[00:11:09] HT: Recently, they have, but—but the *Sultana* was a—uh—a steamboat. And when the Civil War was over, it was certified to carry 385 people, but they'd transported all the prisoners from Andersonville and everywhere to—uh—to Natchez, and they put 'em all on this steamboat, and it already had a full load of passengers. But there was a—there was a military officer that told the captain of the boat—said, "We don't care. As long as a person can put a foot on this boat, you put 'em on the boat." And so it loaded up to almost three thousand people.

SL: Oh my God.

HT: And—but what people didn't know—the people that owned the steamship company, not the captain—but they had made a deal with the officer to give him a dollar for every person he could get on the board because the US government was paying full freight, you know, to haul these guys upstream to Cairo, Illinois, where they were dispersed to the railroads and so forth. And this guy'd been in trouble once before, and actually, Lincoln came to his

aid, but I don't tell that in the story I tell but—and so, nine miles upstream at Osceola, nine miles upstream from Memphis at Osceola about 3:30 in the morning, the boilers blew on the thing, and there were . . .

SL: Whoa.

HT: . . . people in the water everywhere. One of the units had a pet alligator, and this guy was stupidly tryin' to take it upriver. The alligator had a feast, you know. And you could hear the band playin' right before—they had a little band, improvised band, on the boat and right b—the—'cause they were celebrating getting to go home. And so it dumped everybody into the water.

[00:12:50] On the osaoh—Osceola side, there was a big plantation, and all the slave owners, all the—I mean, the slave owner had freed all the slaves, but they were still working for him and . . .

SL: Sure.

HT: . . . with him when—and there was a Confederate officer tryin' to make his way back downstream to Vicksburg, and that's where they started. I was mistaken when I said Natchez. Uh—just to his people—he ran to the owner, and the owner said, "I'll try to get my people that were slaves to help," and they all pitched in. And so, all night long they rode out, they got bodies, they

brought 'em back to shore by—but there were so many dead people, and by—by daybreak you could—you'd heard the explosion downstream. They knew something happened. By daybreak bodies were beginning to flow past—back past Memphis. And—uh . . .

SL: Wow.

HT: And so, all the Memphis belles, even though it'd been a very divisive war, you know, they turned out with all their petticoats and everything to swathe the bodies and to swathe the wounded in their petticoats. And when it was over, over eighteen hundred people—they had over eighteen hundred people that had died, you know. And—uh—uh—and you're probably wondering why nobody's ever heard of it. [00:14:01] Because the same day that that happened, they ran John Wilkes Booth to ground, and they captured and killed him, and it got three sentences in the *New York Times*. Most other papers, it didn't even get a mention until weeks or months later and—and . . .

SL: Just blown past the . . .

HT: . . . and it was just lost to history.

SL: . . . news cycle.

HT: Yeah. It was lo—lost to history. So it's—that kind of . . .

SL: That's a great story.

HT: . . . storytelling.

SL: I mean, it's a horrible story, but it's a . . .

HT: But it's—it's something . . .

SL: . . . it's significant.

HT: . . . that . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . people oughta know about and nobody's ever—ever heard of it, so—uh—but anyway, I sorta got off track there.

SL: No, you [*HT laughs*] didn't. That's good because—uh—these are stories that you heard as a child, right?

HT: Mm—that's true, that one.

SL: Uh—well . . .

HT: My Grandfather . . .

SL: . . . let's talk about the . . .

HT: . . . Means had told me.

[00:14:46] SL: We—we—so, those were your mother's relatives that were telling those stories, or was it both . . .

HT: Well, both—both sides.

SL: Both sides?

HT: Both sides.

[00:14:54] SL: Well, let's talk about your dad's parents. Where—where were they, now?

HT: Well, they lived outside of Hampton.

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: They lived out in the country, and they were farmers and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . uh—uh—but—uh—uh—m—that grandfather's favorite books were all written by Zane Grey [*SL laughs*], and I'm sure he'd read every Zane Grey book . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . twenty times. My other grandfather, my Grandfather Means, I mean, you know, he subscribed to every magazine you subscri—subscribed to then, and for years I remember trying to get into his stack of *National Geographic* magazines so I could see . . .

SL: The . . .

HT: . . . naked women.

SL: Yeah, of course.

HT: [*Laughs*] So . . .

SL: And who didn't? [*Laughs*]

HT: . . . so—uh—they were—both sides are—you know, of the—of the spectrum, but—uh—they were both wonderful storytellers, and they were both—uh—you know, they were both—loved to read and loved to read to me.

[00:15:50] SL: So—uh—part of our business are names. Do you—
can you remember the names of both sets of grandparents?

HT: Mh-hmm.

SL: Full names? If you could give those . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . that'd be great.

HT: Uh—my—[*clears throat*]-my grandfather was named James
"Jim" Means.

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: And my—and the grandmother on that side was Mary Morrison
Means. And—uh—on the other side, my grandfather was Arthur
Thomason, and my grandmother was—uh—uh—[*clears throat*]
Bernie Benson Thomason.

[00:16:28] SL: Well, let's talk about your house that you grew up in
just a little bit. Was it in town or were you . . .

HT: The house—the house I grew up in was—was in town, and it was
actually connected to the store. Ah, when—uh . . .

SL: Not unusual.

HT: . . . until I was—uh—uh—older and—uh . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . in high school, actually—uh—it was—uh—and so the store
was up front . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . but, you know, there was a pretty good house back—there was just a connecting way which was storage for groceries and so forth.

SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[00:16:55] HT: And the—actually, by the time I was nine or ten, my—my mother believed in letting me do anything I wanted to do. And I had also in that space between the house and the store added a darkroom, and I photographed pictures, and I would process the film and . . .

SL: At nine or ten?

HT: . . . make prints. Yeah, when I w—when I was eleven, she gave me developing fluid as one of my birthday presents . . .

SL: That's real trouble.

HT: . . . and three white enamel—and three white enamel trays. So.

SL: Excellent.

HT: Yeah.

SL: That's so fine.

[00:17:24] HT: And so—uh—and so, I—I grew up and—uh—being cared for, actually, by the customers, you know . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . people could come in and check me out. And—uh—that's

sort of how law enforcement has changed. One time they'd hired—I was raised by—by black nannies that I loved—I love with all my heart, and they kept up with me, and I kept up with them until—till they died and—and—but early they made a mistake, and they hired a woman who was not stable.

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: And—uh—so after they let her go, a month or so later—and—and they let her go nicely. It was no—no—I mean, and she was just not stable . . .

SL: Right.

HT: . . . you know. And so—uh—she knew Mom would be in the front of the store . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . if Dad were gone somewhere and that I would be back there in—in the crib by myself with Mom just running back and forth between customers to check on me. [00:18:25] And so, she came in the back door and kidnapped me. And—uh . . .

SL: Ohhh.

HT: . . . so my mother apparently came back, totally panicked, called the sheriff—uh—and the sheriff and the deputies were out looking for me, and they finally found this woman some miles away, you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . carrying me in her arms, you know, taking care of me. And so, nowadays, what would it be? You would be arrested, and you would be charged with kidnapping and so forth and—but the sheriff, who was a legend of his own—uh—you know, he took me from the woman, and he said—I've forgotten what her name was. I—I th—I think it was—well, I'm not sure what it was, but he took the—he took me from the woman. He said, "Now listen. Don't do that again." And that was the end of it.

SL: That was it.

[00:19:18] HT: And she never did it again.

SL: Well.

HT: So.

SL: She got it.

HT: Right.

SL: Yeah.

HT: And so that was . . .

SL: That's so beautiful.

HT: . . . that was justice in Calhoun County in . . .

SL: Well, she may have felt like . . .

HT: . . . 1942.

SL: . . . it was her—still her job.

HT: Well, she d—she did, and everybody understood that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

HT: . . . you know, and—uh—but . . .

[00:19:35] SL: That's a—that's amazing. Okay, so the—the house,
the back . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . of the store—I'm going to assume that you guys had
electricity from the time that . . .

HT: Oh, absolutely, we had electricity and—uh . . .

SL: And a telephone?

HT: Uh—absolutely.

SL: Okay.

HT: But it was a telephone like everybody in Camden had, too.

SL: The party phone.

HT: You picked it up, and the operator asked who you wanted, you
know, and—uh . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

HT: . . . or—and give you all the latest gossip, too [*laughter*], if you
wanted.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:19:59] SL: Well, the operator knew . . .

HT: And the—when the older people . . .

SL: . . . where everyone was at any moment, right, I mean . . .

HT: Right.

SL: "Where is John?"

HT: That's right. That's right.

SL: "Well, John's over visiting Mike and" . . .



HT: And it was a small telephone company then. It's still there. It was the Bailey Telephone Company. I've forgotten what it's called now. And Mr. Bailey, who put the telephone lines in, had the telephone company, and even when I was at college age, you know, I would be madly in love with a girl, and [*SL laughs*] I would call her all the time, or she would call me collect all the time. And Mr. Bailey's operators knew to take that off, put it on a side bill, and every time it got up to thirty dollars, Mr. Bailey would call and say, "Harry, your bill's up to thirty. You better give me a little something on it," so my parents never knew it. 'Cause their phone bill never changed. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's so beautiful.

HT: And that's not something you can do in a big city.

SL: No.

HT: Or . . .

SL: No, it's not.

HT: . . . with a dial phone or touch-button phone or any kind of

phone.

[00:20:59] SL: Okay. So, telephone, electricity, running water.

HT: Oh, absolutely.

SL: No air-conditioning.

HT: No air-conditioning.

SL: Attic fan, or . . .

HT: Attic fan.

SL: Uh-huh. And . . .

HT: Attic fan, and a lot of—and smaller fans in the summertime . . .

SL: Right.

HT: . . . that you would . . .

SL: Window fans.

HT: . . . have out, too. Right, right.

SL: The kind that had the big bow in 'em and . . .

HT: Well, no, they were . . .

SL: They were . . .

HT: . . . actually smaller fans . . .

SL: Right, right.

HT: . . . I mean, I—they . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . the best I remember, you know.

[00:21:30] SL: What about a sleeping porch? Did you have a

screened-in porch that . . .

HT: No, this one didn't have—it had . . .

SL: Okay.

HT: . . . a nice front porch, you know, which sort of—forty-five—I mean, or 90 degree to the store, but no sleeping porch, you know. And in the back we had a small pasture, and we always had horses, and we . . .

SL: Oh!

HT: . . . always had dogs. And so—and the horses were part of the family. They were like pets.

SL: Chickens?

HT: I believe—and—yes, we did have some chickens at one time for the eggs . . .

SL: And . . .

HT: . . . I do remember that.

SL: . . . did your mom have help in the kitchen or . . .

[00:22:05] HT: Oh, she always—there was always a—the nanny that raised me, she also cooked. She did everything for the family, and she was—and my parents really took good care of them, too. They're all—were family friends, and we loved them all.

SL: Did they live on the property, or . . .

HT: No, no.

SL: . . . were they in the . . .

HT: They . . .

SL: . . . other part of town, the . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

HT: They lived in the quarters, of course, which was wrong, but that's what it was called.

[00:22:33] SL: Right. So, when it came time for meals, was there a set schedule? Were you expected to be at the table in a certain time in the morning, or did you . . .

HT: No . . .

SL: . . . come home at noon for lunch from school?

HT: . . . for meals we were expected—there was a general time that you knew meals would be. But when I was in school, yes, I would walk across the street 'cause we lived right across the street from the school, and Katie, the maid while I was in junior high and so forth, or Margariette, the one after that who was Katie's daughter—I mean, you know, they would fix lunch for everyone. And it was usually at twelve o'clock. And at dinner—we knew that dinner would be around seven o'clock. [00:23:26] And that's another—I was talking to someone the other day—the other remarkable thing was, we had those horses, and there

were a bunch of us, and every one of the gang I hung around with in Hampton became very successful. They were either generals or they were college presidents or they were bankers, like Searcy Harrell from Camden, who was killed last year in h— when his plane crashed.

SL: Right.

HT: And you know—and we would ride off on—if school were out in the summertime, we would tell our parents, "Oh, we're gonna ride. We'll see you tonight." And you know, and we were, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, and twelve. And you just didn't think anything about it. I can't imagine anybody doing that now. And our parents wouldn't worry about us. They would expect us to show up for dinner. And we all showed up for dinner. We never missed. And so . . .

SL: Well, I wanna get back . . .

HT: . . . it was a remarkable world.

[00:24:23] SL: I wanna get back to dinner, but how close is Hampton from the Ouachita River?

HT: About fifteen miles.

SL: Oh, so you—well, you wouldn't ride to the . . .

HT: Well, yes, yes, we did. In fact, we had ridden to the river several times. Yeah. And it would be an all-day round trip for

us, but yes, we did that.

SL: Was it still pretty active commercewise, the Ouachita back then?

You know, at . . .

HT: I don't remember . . .

SL: . . . one point it had paddle wheels, and . . .

HT: No. I don't remember seeing many boats other than fishing boats on the Ouachita River during that period.

SL: Okay.

HT: Yeah.

[00:25:05] SL: Okay. So, dinnertime at sevenish. All the family's there. Now, I've forgotten, you have brothers and sisters?

HT: I have one brother.

SL: One brother.

HT: Danny, who's a doctor in Little Rock.

SL: Okay.

HT: Yeah.

SL: And y'all would be expected to be there for dinner . . .

HT: Abbo—absolutely.

SL: . . . and—did anyone ever—did anyone say grace?

HT: Always.

SL: At the ah—and it was your father?

HT: It was rotated. It was rotated.

[00:25:33] SL: Was there a Bible in the house? Were there . . .

HT: Oh yeah. My dad was a deacon in the church, and my mother taught a Sunday school class, and we went to church on Sunday.

SL: Baptist?

HT: We were Baptist. We were Baptist, I mean, but I always have to qualify that now and [*SL laughs*] say, "We weren't Baptists like there are Baptists today."

SL: Right.

HT: I mean, you know, we were from—maybe I was lucky here, but the Baptist church I was in was moderate and inclusive and— [*laughs*—I can't imagine the things that—because everybody that—you take the extreme Baptists now, and if you say you're a Baptist, everybody just presumes you're one of them.

SL: Right.

[00:26:19] HT: No, there're all kinds of Baptists, you know. [*Horn beeps*] We don't wanna stone everybody to death and so forth. And you know, and I was from a town—yes, we had our own lesbian, too. And everybody knew it. Nobody ever said it. And if you dare—and she hung out at the—one of the joints drinking or smoking all day. She did that a lot. She was in business for herself, too. And if you were the unfortunate soul that came there and said a word about her, the rednecks that were there

would beat the heck out of you, you know. You weren't allowed . . .

SL: So . . .

HT: . . . to say anything bad about our girl.

SL: So she had respect.

HT: She had respect. She had respect. And I just—and most people I tell that to, they don't believe it, but no—yeah . . .

SL: Oh, I believe it.

HT: I mean, ever—yeah. And we had a couple other gay people. People knew they were gay and—everybody knew they were gay, but that was it. You didn't do that, you know, so.

SL: So . . .

HT: So I was raised in a—I was, fortunately, raised in a good town.

SL: In a moderate . . .

HT: In a moderate place.

SL: . . . Baptist church.

HT: Right.

[00:27:31] SL: So, you were expected to go to Sunday school each Sunday.

HT: Yeah.

SL: And attend service.

HT: Right.

SL: Do—were there anything through the week that you were expected to do?

HT: No.

SL: That's good.

HT: No, we—there was always, you know—Baptists always had that Wednesday-night prayer meeting.

SL: Yes.

HT: I remember going sometimes and not going, you know. And so, it was—I didn't look upon religion as shutting other people out. I looked upon it as inclusive. And so did the Methodist church where the rest of my relatives went, which was two blocks away.

SL: Right.

HT: Block away.

SL: Right.

HT: You know, and so, it was a good life.

[00:28:15] SL: So, I'm assuming you had Sunday go-to-meetin'

clothes that you would put on for church each . . .

HT: We dressed better . . .

SL: Best [*HT laughs*] to . . .

HT: . . . to go to church.

SL: Dressed up a little bit.

HT: That's all you can say. You—we dressed better.

[00:28:29] SL: [*Laughs*] You know, I forgot to ask—do you know how your mom and dad met?

HT: I—the best I remember the story—my mom and dad met because my mom was trying to make another guy jealous.

[*SL laughs*] And she stood, and she just introduced herself to my dad, and then it went from there. And that was back in their high school days, actually, so.

SL: High school sweethearts. That's not . . .

HT: Right.

SL: . . . unusual at all.

HT: Right, right.

[00:29:05] SL: So tell me a little bit—did you—were you expected to make your own bed?

HT: We were expected to make our own beds. Even though we had a maid coming in. And we all complained. [*SL laughs*] "But Katie will be here in a little while and she"—"Make your beds." But we had to make the beds.

SL: And what other—were there any other chores around the house that you were expected to do?

HT: Just whatever was assigned. There was nothing regular. But we did—we had to feed the horses because they were our horses. But really, they were my dad's horses, too. And we had to feed

the animals and take care of the dogs and things like that. And then, that's what was expected back—I don't think we ever questioned it. I'm sure we must have, but I don't remember it.

[00:29:51] SL: And tell me about the heat in the house.

HT: The heat was a gas heat with a heater, you know, a ?low-slung? heater, open flame in each of the rooms.

SL: Okay. Yeah, that's . . .

HT: Now, they would be a safety violation . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . of course, but . . .

SL: Yeah. Yeah. I still have a rent house that has one . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . built into the wall. Yeah.

HT: So—yeah, so—heaters and so there was no problem of staying warm. We had plenty of heat. We could have used more cool, but . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

HT: . . . plenty of heat.

SL: No kidding.

HT: Plenty of heat.

[00:30:28] SL: Well, tell me a little bit about—besides the horse riding, were you involved at all in sports growing up?



HT: Oh yeah, I was—my whole life was sports, and I was a basketball player and a football player. For some reason, I played baseball, but I never warmed up particularly to the game. I mean, you know, it seemed a little slow to me, and I got bored easily.

SL: Right.

HT: I think I had attention deficit disorder, but—and so, yeah, I lived and—once football season—I never drank a Coke again until the end of football season.

SL: Now why is that?

HT: A Coca-Cola. I don't know. I thought—by the way, that was a smart thing to do, but . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . I should've just never drank a Coke. I just thought it depleted my . . .

SL: Sapped your . . .

HT: . . . strength and sapped me. [00:31:21] And you know, and I played under what is allegedly the toughest high school football coach in the country. His career had already been mostly spent by the time he got to me but—and us, but he was always—he was known as the toughest guy 'cause he was just—the way he mistreated us, I mean, and kicked us around and everything,

and the remarkable thing is we loved this guy.

SL: Yeah.

HT: You know. I mean, we loved . . .

SL: Like a drill sergeant.

HT: . . . him and still do, I mean, you know, it's—and—but he—I give him credit for forming most of our lives, you know.

SL: And his name?

HT: Boyd Arnold. Coach Boyd Arnold.

SL: I've heard that name.

HT: Oh yeah, you've heard—I mean, he was—I was talking to Red Parker, and Red said, "Don't worry, he treated me the same [*laughter*] way," you know. And he did, and it's—and he treated generations that way, and . . .

[00:32:27] SL: Do you think—I'm assuming that you grew up with a radio.

HT: Absolutely.

SL: Do you think the radio fostered the football affair? I mean, s . . .

HT: I think it did. And the fact that Red Parker was playing somewhere, and Red Parker's dad was sort of a friend of my dad. And when I was small—and Red was older than I was by twenty years, you know, but—by the way, he's still coaching.

SL: Is that right?

HT: Red Parker at—well, he was last year at ninety-two years old.

SL: Where at?

HT: He was coachin'—well, it's cal—it's Harmony Grove—not Harmony Grove. Somethin'—it's a little town between here and Little Rock that's off sort of toward Bauxite or Benton or somewhere in there, but it's . . .

SL: You should nominate him for a Pryor Center interview.

[00:33:25] HT: Oh my gosh, if he's able to do it, yeah, I would.

Call—and Larry Lacewell, who was with . . .

SL: Larry Lace . . .

HT: . . . the Dallas Cowboys forever, you know.

SL: Yeah.



HT: He coached under Red, and I remember him. This is how wild Red Parker was. I remember Larry Lacewell saying—they'd moved up to college. They were coaching then. Coach Parker was the head coach at Arkansas A&M in Monticello, and Larry Lacewell was his assistant. And Larry said, "You know, we had this trip to this big convention, coaches convention, in Miami, and I thought"—'cause Larry sort of was on the wild side, and he said, "I thought, 'This is gonna be so great.'" And said, "I remember we got there, and Coach Parker said, 'Boys, we're going out tonight.'" And Larry said, "The next thing I know,

we're on a miniature golf course. [SL laughs] We've all drinkin' 7UPs, and Coach Red Parker sayin', 'Boys, this is the life, isn't it?'" you know, so—but Red Parker's dad was a friend of my dad, and so—and I'm not sure what Red Parker's dad did. I think he was in the cattle business and everything, but when I was very small, he gave me a goat and a cart. And so, I was the only kid in town that had a goat and a cart, and you know—and so, I would ride that thing a lot, you know. [SL laughs] It had a harness and cables and would . . .

SL: Great.

HT: . . . just like drivin' a horse with a cart, you know. It was just a goat. I loved that goat.

[00:34:48] SL: You didn't deliver newspapers with that, did you?

HT: I never delivered newspapers.

SL: Okay.

HT: I think the wa—the problem with me delivering newspapers—I just couldn't get up that early. [SL laughs]. And then newspapers had to go out early.

SL: Yeah.

HT: Unless you were doin' the *Democrat*. It went out in the afternoon . . .

SL: At noon, yeah.

HT: . . . then, but that interfered with football practice, so . . .

SL: That's right.

HT: . . . I escaped the newspaper delivery system.

[00:35:09] SL: So, you and your friends rode horses, probably
played football out in . . .

HT: We did.

SL: . . . field and maybe some baseball, basketball . . .

HT: Everything.

SL: . . . hoop on the side of the barn or . . .

HT: Right.

SL: Right.

HT: No, we broke into the gym.

SL: Oh.

HT: We had a secret way we could get into the gym, and . . .

SL: And everybody knew about it.

HT: I—pretty much [*SL laughs*] everybody knew about it. And they
let us get in and play . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . you know. And so . . .

SL: Yeah.



[00:35:38] HT: I have a remarkable picture on my wall in Los

Angeles, and it's of us, and we're all about—we're somewhere

between nine and eleven years old—it's different in the group, and it's a whole—it's a starting eleven with a backfield, you know, the line, everything else, and when people come—and it says on it—somebody gave me this picture, and it says, "The A team." And they say, "What does that mean, you know. The A team. Were you guys the first team, and it was Little League football or something?" I say, "No. It's about what these guys accomplished." That's—and there are at least—there's a famous heart surgeon, who's written a couple of books. There was Searcy Harrell, Woody, as I knew him, who had a chain of banks and a little bit of everything else. There was another guy that was at Arkansas A&M as part of the administration. There was one that was a general, and there were two that founded major trucking lines that are still with us. And I thought, how—what a remark—and, oh, a lot of doctors and dentists and one guy that taught at Tulane was a—kind—and I thought, you know, what a remarkable group of people—I—came out of that school. I'm the lowliest. I'm just a [*SL laughs*] filmmaker, you know.

SL: Just a filmmaker.

HT: And—no, really. And everybody else did well. I didn't, so.

[00:37:09] SL: Well—Clyde Scott? Do you member listening to Clyde Scott?

HT: I remember listenin' to Clyde "Smackover" Scott. You know, I remember—it must have been in 1954 or [19]55—I know there was a game that we won 6-0, and I was glued to that radio, and I think it was for the championship, you know, the Southwest Conference championship. So yes, I remember Smackover Scott. Know his daughter Marsha very well.

SL: Of course.

HT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Yeah, we got to spend a few days with . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . Clyde, and he was—it was a great interview. He . . .

HT: Well, he was . . .

SL: . . . he opened up. He's such a shy . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . person, you know. And it took Marsha and Bud Whetstone to finally convince him to let him . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . do it, or ma . . .

HT: So it was a . . .

SL: . . . be willing to do it.

[00:38:00] HT: Yeah, I remember. And I remember being upset when Clyde Scott's—when the coach, and I—forgetting his name

now—left, you know, to go to Tennessee.

SL: Oh. Yeah, I know . . .

HT: Yeah, I just . . .

SL: . . . who you're talking about.

TM: Gerald—what was his . . .

HT: I'm sorry?

TM: I was trying to think of his name. I can't remember, either.

HT: Oh, gosh, I can't—I'm gettin' old. I can't remember that name.

SL: Well, that's okay.

HT: But—yeah, so I followed the Razorbacks from the time I was a kid.

SL: I think that was a statewide thing.

HT: Oh, it is. It is.

SL: And I think it—I think it drew—drove the football culture early . . .

HT: It did.

SL: . . . on.

HT: It did.

SL: And continues to . . .

HT: And continues.

SL: . . . to this day.

HT: And . . .

SL: It's amazing. Okay, I wanna get back to the radio.

HT: Okay.

[00:38:48] SL: Music. What kind of music—did you listen to music on the radio?

HT: I'm not conscious of listening to music or really paying attention to music until I sort of—until 1955 when . . .

SL: Rock and roll start . . .

HT: . . . Bill Haley and r—and . . .

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

HT: . . . "Rock Around the Clock" comes along. But my parents . . .

SL: Okay.

HT: . . . loved big band music, and today I off—I have—one of the channels I have marked on, you know, Sirius Radio is music from the 1940s 'cause I love it and reminds me of them. And I love all the big bands, so I'm sort of the big band expert, so.

SL: Well, amazing music.

HT: And—it's amazing music.

SL: Amazing players.

HT: Amazing players.

SL: And the . . .

[00:39:36] HT: And knowing the way they recorded the records—and I have to explain this to my grandchildren, you know. No,

they didn't get to do like you guys do. Put auto-tuner on it, stop and start. Once that—they put that needle on that—down on that wax, they had to get it perfect all the way through, or they had to start over. So . . .

SL: One mike.

HT: Yeah. So . . .

SL: One mike.

HT: And one mike, and so, you just . . .

SL: The vocalist positioned to . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . accommodate the band.

HT: And most musicians today, to tell the truth, couldn't make it because they couldn't use the modern tools that they have to make themselves sound what they think is good, but . . .

SL: Well, and they—maybe they couldn't even—they—you had to play together . . .

HT: You had to . . .

SL: . . . in the big band.

HT: That's correct.

SL: That was the deal.

HT: That's correct, so.

[00:40:23] SL: Well, so what about radio programs?

HT: Oh, I remember . . .

SL: *Lum and Abner* or . . .

HT: I actually, you know, with the Hot Springs Film Festival we're doing this part of the interview. I met Chet Lauck's grandson last night, and I'd met him before, and we talked about that because when I was driving over from Little Rock yesterday, I saw a sign that said man ou—Mount Ida—there's a direct—and for some reason, it just made me think of *Lum and Abner*. I remember listening to *Lum and Abner*—my parents listening to *Lum and Abner*. I was not—I—the first program that I have a really clear memory of that's something I wanted to tune in every week was something called Lux Radio Theatre. And Lux Radio Theatre was nothing except [*crowd noise in background*]—like HBO takes a movie and shows it. It was current movies, but they were in an audio form, and they would play it. And so if it was a movie I didn't see, I'd listen to it on Lux Radio Theatre, you know. So it was quite amazing. I do remember *Suspense* and . . .

SL: *The Shadow*.

HT: . . . I remember *Gunsmoke* . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . which wasn't the guy we knew as Matt Dillon playing him, it

was another well-known actor, so—from New York. I can't think of his name.

[00:41:52] SL: So, did the family kind of gather around those times to listen to it . . .

HT: We did . . .

SL: . . . as you grew up?

HT: . . . for certain programs, and I remember in the mornings if I were home sick or something, my mother was always listening to Arthur Godfrey [*SL laughs*], which was *The Tonight Show*, but it's just . . .

SL: That's right.

HT: . . . in another form. And you know, so—yes, radio was important. And then by the time—by 1950 I remember I go—I believe it was 1950, I got for Christmas a transistor radio.

SL: Oh yeah.

HT: And it was just about . . .

SL: Oh yeah.

HT: . . . that size, about that thick, but from—so from then on, I was listenin' to music by myself and—rock and roll then. [00:42:45]



Elvis came along, I mean, and I—I'm jumping too much forward for you . . .

SL: Oh, that's all right . . .

HT: . . . I'm sure, but . . .

SL: . . . we—I'll get us back.

HT: . . . Elvis comes along, and my pig—my cousin, who was Jim Harold from Camden.

SL: Relation to Don?

HT: Related, but not . . .

SL: Okay.

HT: But sort of distantly. And Jim Harold was several years older than I was, but he became a disk jockey while he was a—you know, he was still in high school—on KAMD in Camden and he kept telling me, "Hey, almost every Saturday this guy comes by named Elvis Presley [*SL laughs*] on his way to Louisiana to" . . .

SL: The Hayride.

HT: . . . "*The Louisiana Hayride*" . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . "and I want you to come meet him. You would really like him, and I really like him." And so, I never took him up on that.

SL: Oh.

HT: But I should have.

SL: Oh, what a . . .

HT: That was—I was . . .

SL: The King in your presence.

HT: . . . already—I was, like, a senior in high school by then, you know.

SL: You had other things on your mind.

[00:43:42] HT: Yeah, and years later I made a movie in Little Rock called *So Sad About Gloria*, and it was a—it was not a great movie, you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . but it was the best we could do at that time. And you know, and so, it's—after the movie comes out, it goes to a few theaters, and I know Malco Theatres picks it up and so forth. And I get a call—this was in the [19]60s and I—and so, one night real late I get a call. And it's a guy said, "Harry, I got your number from a friend of mine named Bob ?Kennerman?, but I'm just tellin' you, I'm with Elvis, and we've rented a theater tonight. We're goin' to see your film." You know, and they did, and then Elvis had him call me back and tell me how much he loved that film. So [*laughs*] . . .

SL: That's good!

HT: . . . I've always . . .

SL: That's good.

HT: . . . had a . . .

SL: So it was a good film.

HT: . . . warm spot for Elvis. That's right.

SL: Yeah.

HT: That's right. So.

[00:44:42] SL: Yeah. So, let's talk a little bit about moving images.

What—do you remember your first movie theater experience?

HT: You know, I don't—I can't tell you what it was, but I remember it was at the Joy Theater in Hampton because that's the only theater we had. And what I'm conscious of watching at the Joy Theater in Hampton in those days is Gene Autry movies and Roy Rogers movies, which were on ever Friday and Saturday and I—we always went. I remember going to see *Gone with the Wind*, which it must have been the second or third release, with my mom there and some other important Hemingway films and so forth that they would turn the school out to go see this film. The studios knew how to [laughs] . . .

SL: How to get the kids in.

HT: . . . how to promote that.

SL: Yeah.

HT: Right, right.

SL: Yeah.

HT: We went to see *Moses* and, you know, and . . .

SL: Right.

HT: . . . but—so, stuff like that. So, it was—I've always loved theaters.

[00:45:44] SL: Did the theater have a balcony?

HT: It had a balcony.

SL: And is that where the African Americans sat?

HT: That's where the African Americans sat.

SL: And everyone could smoke in the theater.

HT: Oh, everyone could smoke. I mean, I don't see why every theater in America, and every car and house for that matter, didn't burn down [*SL laughs*], you know. But no, my dad smoked, but he would only smoke outside, you know. There was no smoking allowed in our house. And I—till this day it—I mean, if I walk in a house, I can tell you if anybody's ever smoked in there. You know, it bothers me. It all just comes back. Ugh! Somebody's been smoking in this house, you know.

[00:46:20] SL: You know, we haven't really talked a whole lot about your mom and dad. Can—do you remember—what is your earliest memory of your mother?

HT: Oh, my earliest memory of my mother was her singing 'cause she was always singing. She was actually a very good singer. And from the pictures I have and from what I remember, she was also very beautiful. My dad was very quiet, and Mother took

care of all the social things. And she was very good at it, and she made her children feel like they were very loved, and she took good care of us. And was not always our defender. I remember getting in—he was three years older than I was, but I remember getting in a—when they first moved there, I remember getting in a fight with the kid next door, who turned out to be a filmmaker himself. And I came in crying. I couldn't have been over six or seven, and my mother said, "Well, the only way you're ever gonna stop this—you gotta go back out there and whip him." [*Laughter*] And I did, and it stopped, and we were . . .

SL: Friends for . . .

HT: We were friends forever, and . . .

SL: Yeah.

HT: . . . I actually—I—and pretty soon, I was larger than he was. He was sort of small in frame, so . . .

SL: That's great.

HT: . . . so that's the kind of mother I had, you know.

[00:47:42] SL: Well, so, does that—did you all have a piano in the house?

HT: We did. We had a piano.

SL: That's big.

HT: Yeah.

SL: That's really big.

HT: And my brother's a fabulous piano player. I, however, cannot play a note.

SL: Di—were you enticed to take piano lessons early?

HT: No.

SL: No.

HT: Not really. She—I could—at one time, I could play the trumpet fairly well, but [*SL laughs*] you know, but never good enough to do anything, but . . .

SL: To join a band. You never were in a rock . . .

HT: Right.

SL: . . . and roll band or . . .

[00:48:14] HT: Well, no, but I was in a jazz band in high school, and there was another jazz band called the Hungry Five in the Hampton High School, and they were fantastic musicians. They later got a recording contract. I mean, this—and you know, and it didn't go anywhere but—and the other jazz band was in it, too, and I could never understand why we won and they didn't, but later they were told, well, they were seniors, we knew they were great. You guys were in the seventh grade . . .

SL: Needed encouragement.

HT: . . . we gave you the prize, you know. Had somebody—you weighed the judging then.

SL: Right.

HT: So—but anyway. So that was the extent of my band activity.

SL: Well, now, are we bumping up on your time? I don't wanna cut . .

HT: You . . .

Randy Dixon: We're just under an hour.

HT: Okay, we'll go . . .

RD: So . . .

HT: . . . a little longer. I . . .

RD: [*Unclear words*]

SL: I really don't—I don't wanna cause any . . .

HT: Yeah.

SL: . . . grief . . .

HT: I mean . . .

SL: . . . anywhere down the . . .

HT: Oh, no, you're not gonna . . .

SL: . . . line, here.



HT: . . . cause any—I mean, the main thing is we had a great childhood because there were such characters in the community, I mean. And one we remember—and my brother actually put

out an album of stories where he just told the stories on tape and it—I mean, a CD and it—told 'em on a CD and it—so—and the story that we always start off with when either one of us are asked to tell these kinda stories is Paddy Oliver. [00:49:32] Paddy Oliver was the town drunk. And . . .

SL: Is that *P-A-D-D-Y*? Or . . .

HT: *P-A-D-D-Y*. Paddy Oliver.

SL: Like Irish Paddy.

HT: Irish Paddy Oliver.

SL: Patrick. Call him Paddy.

HT: And he—and we—our store was not, then, at that time, was not in the main part of the town. It was probably ten or twelve blocks down the highway toward Warren, you know, and so—and Paddy would go to town every day, get drunk [*SL laughs*], and he would—we'd see him goin' in in the morning. He would be sober. And we'd see him comin' back at night, at six o'clock at night, and he would be totally drunk. [00:50:12] And so my brother and I came up with the idea, and we told our mother, "We wanna give Paddy a Christmas present." And my mother encouraged things like that. She thought that was fine, you know. And she said, "I'll bet what Paddy needs is some socks. So why don't I go buy quite a few pair of socks, and you guys

can give it to Paddy." So. So, she bought the socks, and she wrapped 'em, and my brother and I waited, and it was Christmas Eve, and it was very . . .

SL: Oh.

HT: . . . cold. And we waited on Paddy to come home, and he—I guess it was Christmas Eve, so he came a little later than usual. It was already dark. And we were waiting there, and he was drunk. But he was a pleasant drunk, always, and you know, and we said, "Paddy, we got a Christmas present for you." And he stopped, and he was taken aback. And said, "Why?" And said, "Well, we just wanna give you a present," you know, and so my brother—we must have been about maybe twelve and eight then, you know. So we gave Paddy the present, and I know we—and it's a—was a streetlight right out there, and it was pretty dramatic [*laughs*], actually, you know. And Paddy opens the present, and the socks are there. And he just starts crying, I mean, you know, and we felt bad, you know, but—and we just waited. We didn't know what to say. And finally Paddy says—he just looks at us, and he says, "Thank you." And he says, "Somebody loves dear old Paddy. Somebody loves dear old Paddy." And he walked off. And we didn't think anything about it. But—we like to say it happened the next day, but I'm sure it

didn't. But within the next month or so, Paddy would come back sober each day.

SL: Wow.

[00:51:56] HT: And you know, and within a year or two, he had been made the head of maintenance at the Calhoun County Courthouse, and there—and he retired as the head of—and so we like to think that Christmas gift had something to do with it.

SL: I'm . . .

HT: And he retired a very—everybody did love Paddy. He just didn't know they loved him, you know, so. Anyway.

SL: That's a great story. I love that story.

HT: Oh, I can—I'll tell these things all day long. You . . .

SL: Well . . .

HT: Don't encourage me.

SL: . . . that's why we spend all day doing . . .

HT: [*Laughs*] Don't encourage me.

SL: . . . these interviews. [*RD laughs*] Yeah.

HT: So . . .

[00:52:25] SL: You know, I'm gonna—there may be some questions—David, do you have any questions on the word stuff? Did I miss anything?

HT: I just moved on you. Did I foul you up?

TM: You're fine.

HT: I didn't mean . . .

TM: You're fine.

SL: You're fine.

HT: . . . to do that.

TM: [*Unclear word*]

SL: So, at the end of this, I wanna make time to make sure we've got spellings . . .

RD: Yeah, just a couple of minutes.

SL: . . . and places right.

HT: Yeah.

SL: Just a couple of minutes. So . . .



[00:52:51] HT: Well, I'll tell you, I'd like to tell you—I've seen two people killed in my life.

SL: Okay.

HT: And they were both on election nights. And you know, because—before TV was widespread and everything, you know we all went to the courthouse . . .

SL: Absolutely.

HT: . . . lawn at night. There were big blackboards, and there were guys up there painting, I mean, you know, they would write in chalk all the numbers from what precinct, and . . .

SL: Yes.

HT: . . . you stayed there till it was over.

SL: Yes.

[00:53:19] HT: And so, one night my parents were on the courthouse square, and I was still at home, but I was gonna walk up there with another friend of mine. And we walked toward town, toward the courthouse. And just as we were passing a bar, there'd been some sort of election brouhaha, and a guy falls out of the—comes out of the store. And it's just, like, the distance from . . .

SL: Us.

HT: . . . not more than six feet, and the guy comes out, and another guy comes out with a gun and just shoots him in front of us. I mean, I remember feeling the heat from the gunfire . . .

SL: Wow.

HT: . . . you know. And we just did nothing but run, you know, and it was . . .

SL: Of course.

HT: . . . over a political argument. So I didn't think anything about it. [00:54:02] And the next year, went in a car with folks—with my car to the courthouse to watch the election returns, and on our way back home, we see a guy trying to cross the road, and a

car hits him, and I know he just spirals up into the air and comes down right in front of our car. And my dad stopped the car in a panic. But I thought, "So the only two people I've ever seen killed [*laughs*] were" . . .

SL: Election nights.

HT: . . . "both on election nights," you know. Elections were a serious event in Calhoun County, you know, so.

SL: Well, ye—absolutely.

HT: Right.

SL: And it was between Democrats.

HT: Oh, that's true. [*Laughter*]

SL: Wasn't any animosity.

[00:54:37] HT: We had a—you know, we had a Republican, and he was treated every bit as the gay guy and the lesbian woman, but he was a good guy. You didn't pick on him, but—Mr. Bradley was a Republican. But he's the only one I ever knew, you know.

SL: Well, they were sparse.

HT: And I only wish all Republicans like him—were like him now, you know.

SL: Yeah. No kidding.

HT: He was a good guy, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

HT: He would certainly be a Democrat now, if you checked—how much it changes, and that reminds me. My uncle—well, my great-grandfather was the marshal, and you know, so it's sort of law—a lot of law enforcement in our background. [00:55:13] And then my uncle by marriage was a guy who was six foot ten named Benton Ritchie, and he was the sheriff of Calhoun County . . .

SL: Okay.

HT: . . . at one time, you know. And so—and I mentioned Paddy Oliver.

SL: Yeah.

HT: And so, my Uncle Benton was running pretty well ahead of the pack for reelection.

SL: Kay.

HT: And Paddy—this was while Paddy was still drinking. This was before the socks, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[00:55:37] HT: And some—and Pa—there was a crowd, and somebody asked Paddy, sort of making fun of him 'cause he was drunk, who he was gonna vote for, and he named the other guy.

SL: Uh-oh.

HT: And they said, "Well, why? Why aren't you gonna vote for

Benton Ritchie?" And he said, "'Cause I dreamed last night I died and I went to heaven. And Saint Peter told me—said 'Paddy, I want you to take this piece of chalk, climb this ladder, and I want you to write all your sins on that blackboard up there.'" And he said, "While I was climbing up the blackb— climbing up the ladder, I met Benton Ritchie coming back down for more chalk." [*Laughter*] So, it almost cost him the election. So, anyway.

SL: Oh, what a great guy. What a great story.

HT: Anyway. I will—if it's okay with you guys, I'll quit, but . . .

RD: Hey . . .

SL: Well . . .

RD: . . . can we come back? Would you—can you—can we . . .

HT: I—oh, yeah, I'm tellin' you . . .

RD: . . . do this again?

HT: . . . I'm game, you know.

RD: We can get more and more hours of this. Right?

SL: Oh, yeah, there's no question.

RD: Yeah.

SL: I'm sure you're probably booked this time around?

[00:56:36] HT: I am. I'm down but—you guys are not coming to LA for anything, are you?

RD: Well, we could.

SL: Well, I—my—I'm married to a lady that's from Long Beach.

HT: Well.

SL: And I go there once . . .

HT: We could—we can . . .

SL: . . . or twice a year.

HT: . . . do it either place. Or I'll come back here. I'm here every couple of months, but I'll . . .

SL: I would love that.

HT: I'll be back.

SL: It would be wonderful. I mean it . . .

RD: Oh, if you could—'cause we could go for hours and hours . . .

SL: Oh yeah.

RD: . . . with this.

SL: I mean, I haven't gotten you . . .

RD: You do great stories.

[00:57:05] SL: I haven't really talked about your school and your teachers and grades . . .

HT: Oh, well, yeah, I mean . . .

SL: . . . and all that s . . .

HT: Oh, I've got . . .

SL: . . . all that school st . . .

HT: See, but—though—I mean, I could . . .

RD: Well, and you teaching. [*Laughter*]

HT: Yeah, our . . .

SL: Yeah, your teaching, yeah. And coaching and . . .



[00:57:20] HT: Oh, when your brother-in-laws first ran for—first ran against McClellan for the Senate, you know, I mean, it was gettin' tight and so forth, and they called me at the last minute, said, "Well, we gotta do a thirty-minute film. We've gotta air it on television tonight." [*SL laughs*] And you know, and I said, "What kind?" He said, "We wanna film where there's a crowd of people asking questions, and David answers 'em." I said, "That's gonna be tough, you know, to get the film developed."

SL: Yeah.

HT: Randy'll remember this. Ray-Chris Productions was where you got your film . . .

SL: Oh, I . . .

HT: Yeah. So.

SL: . . . remember Ray-Chris. Yeah.

HT: [*Clears throat*] So I said, "Okay, well here's the way we're gonna do this." Said, "We're gonna"—and they said, "You'll only have David this morning." [*SL laughs*] The sen—I mean, I said . . .

SL: Golly.

HT: . . . "Are you cra"—they—and he said, "We don't think you can do it," and that's why they called us because we were the low guys on the totem pole. They knew if anybody would do it, we would, and so. [00:58:15] So I said, "I'm—kay, yeah, we can do it," and they said, "Really? You can do it?" And I said, "Yeah. We can do it. Give us the candidate." And we met him in a backyard of somebody's house over in North Little Rock. And we set up the camera, and we had two of our crew there, and you know, we had one of them go home, get a sport jacket to put on. And we set a few chairs up. And we put David—and Barbara was setting up there with him. We put him up there, and we put the camera back so we were just clipping the shoulder of one of our guys. [00:58:44] And [*SL laughs*] I remember David looking at us, and he said, "Who's gonna ask the questions?" I said, "David, I'm just gonna read 'em. I'm just—I'm gonna—I'll read you the questions, and you just answer them after I completely stop talking." And he said, "Well, what about a crowd?" And I said, "Well, we can take care of that. We can do that later." He said, "I don't understand how you're gonna do this. And this has gotta be on tonight?" [*SL laughs*] And he was reluctant to do it, you know, but he finally

said, "Okay, I'll do it." So we asked him the question, and we'd clip a shoulder . . .

SL: Over the shoulder.

HT: . . . and then it's—and in the meantime, we had two of our guys out calling every Sunday school class and everything they could get together. And after lunch, we brought all that bunch back and set 'em in chairs and turned the cameras around facing the house. And then we cut . . .

SL: And did the reaction shots.

HT: . . . it all together, and we did [*SL laughs*]*—and you know, and we took it to Ray-Chris, and we got it done, and we were, at the last minute, feeding it live into the . . .*

SL: Film chain?

HT: . . . this Channel 11, at that time. And so, we did that and I—and David called me that—I mean, the senator called me the next day, and he said, "That was really good how you did that." [*SL laughs*] Said, "I just couldn't wrap my head around how you were gonna do that." I said, "To tell the truth, I couldn't wrap my head around how we were gonna do it, either." But we lucked out, so, you know.

SL: So that was the senate race.

HT: Yeah.

SL: I was in California getting married at that time.

HT: Right.

SL: It's . . .

[01:00:08] HT: Oh, we had—that's the way we got our—that's the way I got my film start in politics, but that's a whole nother set of stories . . .

SL: I know.

HT: . . . about the coaches that were my crew. And about how I'm tellin' about it later in a speech I made somewhere, and there were several thousand people, and the guy that was the candidate at that time that we—didn't know he had a staff of high school football coaches and basketball coaches as his camera crew. He said—he ga—he was the chairman of this outfit, the Insurance Brokers of America, and he got up, and he said, "I never knew that until just now." I didn't realize he was in the audience, so—anyway, it was Frank Whitman . . .

SL: [*Claps*] That's fun . . .

HT: . . . you know, so. Anyway.

[01:00:49] SL: Thank you, Harry.

HT: Always been [*someone claps*] . . .

SL: So, let's just get together . . .

HT: Tell your sister I said hello, and I . . .

SL: I will. I will.

HT: And I—we love 'em both so much.

SL: I know that.

HT: So, anyway.

SL: I appreciate that.

[End of interview 1:00:59]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]