

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

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**Arkansas Memories**

A.B. Thompson  
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford  
October 10, 2022  
Turkey Scratch, 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 17th 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; and
  - annotations for clarification and identification.
- 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 A.B. Thompson on October 10, 2022, in Turkey Scratch, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: So today is October 10, 2022, and we are in Turkey Scratch, Arkansas, at the A.B. Thompson store here at the corner. And—um—my name is Scott Lunsford. I'm with the Pryor Center at the University of Arkansas, and sitting across from me is A.B. Thompson. And, A.B., it's a great honor to be here with you today. Uh—we're going to record this interview. You'll get a transcript. Uh—you'll get to see what we've done. Um—and we'll ask that you read the transcript, you look at the video, and if there's anything that you're not comfortable with sharing with the rest of the world, we'll take it out. Uh—we're not here to embarrass anybody or to get anyone in trouble. Uh—so [*laughs*]*—uh—but at the same if—you know, you—we'll talk about anything you want to talk about. Uh—my questions are—will mostly be about you. I like to start with your earliest memories. I like to—uh—ask about your mom and dad and your grandparents—uh—great-grandparents if you knew them. So it's just kind of a get-to-know-each-other phase at first. But I'll—I'll try to take you from your earliest memory to the present day. So—uh—having said all that, are you pretty comfortable*

with being here and—and doing this today? Are y—is it okay that we keep going and we record this?

A.B. Thompson: So far, so good.

SL: Okay, that's a great answer. [*Laughs*] All right. So first of all, tell me what *A* and *B* stand for.

[00:01:53] AT: Well, *A* stands for Arthur. *B* is just a middle initial.

SL: Just never given a name like . . .

AT: I'm a junior, so I got the same name my daddy had.

SL: Okay. All right, and his *B* was just an initial, too?

AT: Yeah.

SL: Wow. That's good. Well, I love the name. Um—so when and where—where were you born, A.B.?

[00:02:20] AT: Well, I—I've progressed there, but I'm still sleepin' in the same room I was born in.

SL: Is that right?

AT: Yeah. I was born right—right here in—not this store, but my house.

SL: At the house next door.

AT: Yes.

SL: And what—what year and day was that?

AT: That was—uh—October the fifteenth, 1933.

SL: Well, we're right close to your birthday.

AT: Yep.

SL: Nineteen thirty-three. Does that make you—you'll be ninety?

AT: Eighty-nine.

SL: Eighty-nine? Well, congratulations. That's—that's an achievement in itself. So—um—what was your—um—your father's name was also A.B. Thompson?

AT: Yeah. He was—he went by Arthur. I came along, though. I was A.B.

SL: Okay, so he was au—Arthur B. Thompson.

AT: Mm.

[00:03:22] SL: I see. And what about your mother's name?

AT: Her name was Jessie. Maiden name—her maiden name . . .

SL: Uh-huh?

AT: Jessie Holtzclaw.

SL: Holtzclaw. *H-O-L-T-Z* . . .

AT: *C-L-A-W*.

SL: . . . *C-L-A-W*? Well, do you know how they met?

AT: Well, no, not really. They both—my mother grew up right across the creek from me here.

SL: Uh-huh.

AT: The Vineyard area. And my dad grew up in this area, so I don't know how they met but it was—they were pretty close proximity

to one another.

[00:04:08] SL: Do you—uh—what—do you have an earliest memory about your mom?

AT: Uh. Nothing really special I can think of.

SL: I—I can remember—my mother washing dishes was one of the earliest memories I have.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Seemed like she was always at the sink.

AT: Well, I bar—I remember Mother being here at the—not this store, but the old store.

SL: Uh-huh.

AT: Is that—from early—early times.

[00:04:49] SL: So she worked at the store.

AT: Oh yeah. She—see, my dad farmed, and at one time he wa— had a sawmill and a sorghum mill . . .

SL: Ooo.

AT: . . . and a grist mill.

SL: Yeah.

AT: We ground corn, of course.

SL: Mh-hmm.

AT: Didn't run 'em all time, but he had all that plus the store to look after, and Mother helped him with the store.

SL: So back in the timber days, was that Howe company that was buying up all the timber, all the lumber? Howe Lumber Company?

AT: Yeah, that's—that was down south.

SL: Uh-huh.

AT: They were headquartered I think in Wabash.

SL: I think that's right. I think that's right.

AT: They'd—far as I know, they didn't have any . . .

SL: Any interest up here.

AT: . . . holdin's around here.

SL: Around here. So—um—I'm tryin' to think about the mills. Now the grist mill—um . . .

[00:06:03] AB: Grist mill was—mill was ground corn. Made meal or chops. Change the screen, you can make either one outta corn. And it's probably better known as a hammer mill. And—uh—he had one of them. And then he—he had a groundhog sawmill.

SL: So is—does—uh—is there a stone involved in the grist mill? Is it like a grindstone kind of thing or . . .

AT: Well, the only one we had was all metal.

SL: All metal? Okay.

AT: Now, early on they might've had the—in fact, they did have stones.

SL: Yeah. My dad used to say—uh—like a mule pullin' a grindstone.

AT: Hmm.

SL: You know, around. [00:07:09] So—um—what about—then was your grandfather on your dad's side, did he have this [*phone rings*] property? Did they inherit it from him or . . .

AT: Not that I know of.

SL: Okay.

AT: He's the [*phone rings*] only grandparent I ever knew was my . . .

Peggy Thompson: Hello.

AT: . . . Grandfather Thompson.

SL: Uh-huh.

AT: And he—from the time I can remember, he lived with us. My dad took care of him . . .

SL: Mh-hmm. Yep, yep.

AT: . . . as opposed to the other way around. As far as I know, he didn't—didn't own any land or . . .

[00:07:53] SL: So you think that your father was just—um—just a rev—a very smart investor, and he bought early and kept working the—the property and harvesting wha—what was available?

AT: Well, he—uh—worked at various jobs when he was a youngster.

SL: Uh-huh.

AT: At one time he—he worked for Solomons down—that had a lot of land down Elaine-Lambrook area down there.

SL: Uh-huh.

AT: And he was a rider on a—their plantation. I think that was just one of his earlier jobs. And then when he and my mother got married and moved here where we are now and they built the house and the store. Now how he managed to do that, I don't know. Might have been with help of my grandfather on my mother's side.

SL: On your mother's side.

AT: And—'cause he was a fair-sized farmer, owned land and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

AT: But that's—uh—that's how we got—got to this—this point and livin' here.

[00:09:35] SL: Do you—do you . . .

AT: And I been here ever since.

SL: Well, I can't blame you. [*Laughs*] So—um—do you member much about the—your grandparents on your mother's side? Did you ever meet them?

AT: No, I didn't know them. They were all . . .

SL: They were gone already?

AT: Yes.

SL: Okay.

AT: 'Cause my moth—my daddy's mother died when he was eight months old.

SL: Oh my gosh.

AT: The grandfather on his side is all I ever knew. He lived—I don't know. I was—oh, probably eight or ten years old when he died.

SL: Uh-huh.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:10:24] AT: I was goin' to school, I know, at the time. But I don't remember . . .

SL: So the . . .

AT: . . . what year.

SL: So your—it was your father that died when you were . . .

AT: No.

SL: No.

AT: My grandfather . . .

SL: Oh, your grandfather. That's right.

AT: . . . on my father's side.

SL: Okay. All right. [00:10:44] So—well, let's talk about your—how you remember the home when you were growing up. First off did y'all have electricity?

AT: No.

SL: No?

AT: Had a coal-oil lamp.

SL: Yep.

AT: And I can't remember the year that we got electricity, but I was, I don't know, I was around ten years old. So it was—I'm thinkin' it was probably in the early [19]40s.

SL: Yeah. So that would've been start around—starting World War II when we entered the war, maybe?

AT: Yeah.

[00:11:36] SL: Yeah. And so—but before electricity, were y'all usin' batteries for anything?

AT: Oh yeah, yeah. We used batteries for the radio and certain other things, but lights we used coal-oil lamps.

SL: Right. And the radio—do you member what programs you got to hear when you were young?

AT: So the war had started. That—course, December the seventh, [19]41. And I know we listened to news all the time, tried to keep up with how things were progressing with the war.

SL: All of America was doing that.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. So do you member—did you hear that broadcast about the Day of Infamy you know, nineteen—or December 7, wasn't

it?

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Yeah.

SL: A day in infamy when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

[00:12:50] AT: Yeah, I remember that kinda like it was yesterday.

SL: There you go. A lot of people feel the same way.

AT: Yeah.

SL: That really changed everything, didn't it?

AT: Yes.

SL: 'Cause we were kind of not committed to this world war stuff and all this stuff that was going on in Europe and—but that kind of—that was the straw that made the difference.

AT: And what was so different in my memory of that time frame was the dedication of the whole population of the United States. They all didn't go to the front carrying a gun, but they were all pullin' their load back home. I doubt if we'd ever see the kind of dedication of the whole country to one mission like we saw to World War II.

SL: It did galvanize . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . the whole country. And for good reason.

AT: Right.

[00:14:06] SL: So did you have any older brothers or sisters or . . .

AT: No. I was an only child.

SL: Well.

AT: I don't know whether I was so good they didn't think [*SL laughs*] they could improve on it or whether I was so bad they were afraid to take another chance.

SL: Well, it was probably a toss of a coin. [*AT laughs*] Every other day one way or the other but—so did you—I know it was a small community, but I'm sure you had neighbors.

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: And did—do you remember any of the families sending their kids off to war around you?

AT: Well, yeah. The Williams family is one that I remember that was—lived pretty close to us here. I'm just not too sure.

SL: About any of the others. I wonder if they made it back. Did the Williams boys make it back, or was it just one child that went, one son?

AT: They had several. . .

SL: Oh, they did?

AT: . . . several children, but I think they all made it back.

SL: Okay.

[00:15:34] AT: [*Clears throat*] Then the Brock family's another family that lived in the neighborhood. And I think they had some members, you know, involved in the conflict. But closer out that's all I can think of right now.

SL: Well, it's a small community. But it—I would think that something like that would affect everybody.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And it's hard to see a young'un leave and not know if they're comin' back. And I just wondered how—so what happened around—let's talk about—you're living in the home that you were born in.

AT: Yeah.

[00:16:35] SL: Do—were you given chores around the house early on?

AT: Well, yeah. We—as a family, we all had chores, and I did whatever I could do.

SL: So . . .

AT: I more or less did what they told me.

SL: So I'm assuming you probably had a garden next to the house.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Did you work in the garden some?

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: And then of course, there's the laundry, washing clothes, puttin' it on the line.

AT: I never did do much laundry. [*Clears throat*] All my growin' up time, in addition to my grandfather livin' in the house with us, we had a country school. And early on it was a one-teacher school, and then it became a two-teacher school. Just went through the eighth grade. And from the time I can remember, teachers boarded with us. And Mother workin' in the store, Dad usually kept personal help at the house, so they'd do the cookin' and washin' up. So most of the time she had help doin' that. So I didn't get involved in that too much. I still don't.

[00:18:18] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, that takes talent to avoid that if you can. So what about makin' your own bed? Did you make your own bed every mornin'? Were you expected to do that?

AT: No, not ever morning. Only when I was told to for some reason, company comin' or something.

SL: Right.

AT: If Mama told me to, I did.

SL: That's good. So what about livestock? Did y'all have chickens and . . .

AT: Yeah, we had chickens and cows, hogs. And my daddy was a cow buyer. He would buy and sell livestock. Mostly cows and

hogs. And chickens to some extent. And he would make the comment to me, "This helps keep money move—circulatin' in the community."

SL: Yep.

AT: Said, "If they got somethin' to sell," well, he would buy it. And all he had was a pickup truck, so it didn't take but a couple of three cows or a few hogs to make him a load, but he'd haul the business to the stockyard to sell 'em. Whereas some of 'em didn't have that option, you know.

SL: Right.

AT: And which gave them money to buy their needs, and he thought it was a good move on everybody's part.

[00:20:16] SL: That is—that's something you don't think about as much anymore.

AT: No.

SL: 'Cause it's—stuff is available everywhere.

AT: Right.

SL: You don't even have to leave your home and you can get it brought to you. It's just a—it's a different world now. But so what about dinner or brek—were you expected to be at the table at a certain hour for lunch or for dinner or for breakfast? What—how—what was a daily routine for you growin' up?

AT: Well, we pretty well had a routine, but so far as havin' a time in my mind, I was usually always close enough they could call me.

[*Laughter*] Come on to dinner or come home to supper. Or they wake me up and told me to get up, breakfast time.

SL: Well, you had—you kinda had the life of Riley here. You just . . .

AT: I had some good folks, and they . . .

SL: Yep.

AT: . . . were good to me.

SL: Yeah.

[00:21:36] AT: I probably did have—had it too easy, but . . .

SL: Well, we . . .

AT: . . . when I had somethin they wanted me to do, I did it. And I didn't ever question their authority. And if they were here today, I wouldn't today.

SL: Right. [*Laughs*] That's right. Well, that's good. I mean, you know, you had some discipline . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . about you. Did—do you member ever gettin' in any kind of trouble?

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: Oh, yeah. [*Laughs*]

AT: I would get—I'd like to get my mother to—had a crowd and tell—

we used to have peach trees in the yard all around the house.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And peach tree is not a long-lived tree.

SL: Right.

AT: And of course they eventually died out. And I'd tell them—  
people in my mother's presence that she killed 'em all breakin'  
switches off, limbs off—switches for me. But . . .

SL: I've had a few switches.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. I mean . . .

[00:22:59] AT: But now—on my dad's side, in my whole life, he only  
whipped me twice, and I remember both of 'em. [*Laughs*] He  
didn't have to . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . any more.

SL: That's right.

AT: But if they both told me to do something, I knew it was—wasn't  
an option and that I was to do that.

SL: You were paying attention.

AT: Yeah.

SL: It got—they had gotten your attention.

AT: Yeah.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's right. Well, but I think everybody kinda went through some of that. I mean, I think it's part of growin' up. You know, you might not know better the first time and—but if it come around a second time, then that be a different story, and you wouldn't expect to see it a third time, I would assume.

AT: So that usually brought out a talk.

[00:24:01] SL: So what about—so news was what you primarily remember about the radio. Did they play—did you listen to any music on the radio?

AT: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

SL: What was it?

AT: We got—we'd listen to the Grand Ole Opry on Saturday night.

SL: And that was a treat, wasn't it?

AT: Yeah.

SL: It sounded really good. I—we had a—one of those big radios, wooden—big, wooden radios that sat on the floor, and I member listening to boxing fights. Did you ever listen to boxing?

AT: I never was crazy about fights, so I didn't . . .

SL: Well, I wasn't crazy about the fights.

AT: I remember 'em bein' on.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And a lot of people, boy, they would set their time schedule to

be sure and be by the radio when the boxing match came on.

SL: I can remember—I mean, I didn't really—first time I was listening to 'em I was so young I didn't really get the whole concept, and of course we were just listening to it, but my dad gave me his watch that had a second hand on it, and so I just timed the bell. And I just wanted to—I would tell Dad if the bell was one second or two seconds early or late. [*Laughter*] You know, I'd look at that—[*phone rings*—I'd concentrate on that watch. You know, not so much—I was listening for the bell. So it was entertainment, you know, just like the music from the Grand Old Opry was and the—I don't remember listening to much news. It was a different time, of course.

AT: Yeah.

[00:25:49] SL: But I remember having only a radio for that entertainment. What about music in the home? Did—was there a piano in the home or . . .

AT: Later on, years later, it was—we got my aunt's piano brought to the house but—'cause she moved and didn't have room for it or something. Anyway, that's when we got a piano, and it just stayed there.

SL: Nobody played it?

AT: I don't recall. They gave—my folks gave me piano lessons when

I started to school for a year or two, but I didn't take to it too good, so . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . I never did really learn to play piano.

SL: Well, it takes a different kind of discipline to . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . to do that. [00:27:03] Well, all right, so now what about church? Did y'all go to church every Sunday?

AT: Yes, sir.

SL: And I'm betting that you had different clothes.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Clean, fresh . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . ironed, Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes.

AT: Yeah. Yeah, we put on our other clothes [*laughs*] to go to church.

SL: Right. That's right.

AT: From the time I was a little kid, my mother started takin' me to church, and Daddy went too, most of the time, but we—Mother was raised up in a Christian church over at Vineyard. Which is—you know where Vineyard is?

SL: Hm-mm. But that's—I—you were saying—you mentioned that

earlier.

AT: You know where Rondo is?

SL: Yeah, I have been through there.

AT: Okay, Vineyard is on the same highway back this way from—not anything there now.

SL: Right.

AT: Used to be a few stores, you know. But—fact, one of my uncles had a store there at one time. But I don't think that—Mr. Bennett has a store there. And Mr. Turner.

SL: Turner.

[00:28:42] AT: So Bennett, Turner, and Holtzclaw had stores there at the same time at one time period back then. But . . .

SL: So you're going to—your mom's taking you to church . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . at early age.

AT: She took me to Marvell. That was the closest church, Christian church to us, and she started takin' me to the Christian church in Marvell.

SL: So it was like First Christian Church or . . .

AT: Yes.

SL: Yeah.

AT: First Christian Church.

SL: Well, did you enjoy it?

AT: Oh, yeah. It was just—well, I just knew that's where I was supposed to be. When Sunday came, I just—it wasn't a question of "Do you wanna go to church?" Get ready. [*SL laughs*] We're goin'.

SL: Well, what about in the middle of the week? Did they have activities for the kids in the middle of the week?

AT: I don't recall. That was just how we did things. If we did, then I'm sure I went, but that wasn't a regular thing, you know, down through the years. We might have a Wednesday night service.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Somethin' like that.

[00:30:13] SL: Were there Sunday school . . .

AT: Yeah, oh, yeah . . .

SL: . . . and Sunday school teachers?

AT: Sunday school and church on Sunday. Definitely had that. And most of the time Sunday night church, too.

SL: Do you remember any of the other—were there socials like picnics or anything that the church would put on where people would gather and picnic or—what about baptisms?

AT: What about what?

SL: Baptisms.

AT: Yeah, at the Christian church, that's part of it, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And that was a—the only [*unclear words*] tryin' to think about joinin' the church, course, was baptized. Is that what you were gettin' at?

[00:31:22] SL: Yeah, I mean, you know, there were—some baptisms take place in the church.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Maybe just, you know . . .

AT: Well . . .

SL: . . . a few drops of water on a head or maybe . . .

AT: . . . the Christian church had a baptistry in the church. And I was baptized in the church. But a lot of—well, the closest church to me was Baptist Church down in County Line. And they had a baptisms down at the creek, you know . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . places like that. But they met in the schoolhouse.

SL: Okay.

AT: What's now the school consolidated.

SL: Right.

AT: The church inherited the buildin'.

SL: Right.

AT: They tore down and rebuilt the nice, big church and . . .

SL: Yeah, all these smaller communities—I know in Phillips County—  
and Marvell's in Phillips County, isn't it?

AT: Marvell's in Phillips County.

SL: Yeah.

AT: I live in Lee County.

SL: I know.

AT: That's the line out there for Lee County.

[00:32:41] SL: So where do the schools consolidate in Lee County?  
What . . .

AT: Well, the school district here was half and half. Half out of  
Phillips County and half . . .

SL: I see.

AT: . . . out of Lee County.

SL: Yeah.

AT: So when that consolidated, it split. The Phillips County half went  
to Marvell.

SL: Oh, okay.

AT: The Lee County half went to Rondo.

SL: Rondo.

AT: And then Rondo went to Marianna. Marianna now's the only  
school district in Lee County.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And Marvell, of course, is still a separate district. But I went to school in Marvell. I lived right here on the line. And then I didn't go to Rondo. I went to Marvell.

[00:33:33] SL: So how did you do in school? Were you a good student?

AT: Well, I was either awful lucky or I was pretty good.

SL: [*Laughs*] Did you . . .

AT: I did get pretty good grades.

SL: Did you have a favorite subject?

AT: Not really. I've always liked history. I guess history would've been maybe a favorite.

SL: Di—was that also one of your—I mean, did you have a favorite teacher growin' up?

AT: Well, if I had a favorite it would've been a lady that boarded with us and taught here in the country. Miss Greenfield. And she was a good person and a good teacher, too.

[00:34:52] SL: I think it's—I think the kids that do the best in school have a good relationship with their teacher.

AT: Yeah.

SL: That it's not—and . . .

AT: Well . . .

SL: . . . it changes from . . .

AT: . . . I was always brought up if I got in trouble, it never was the teacher's fault. It was always my fault. [*Audio drops out briefly*—as to what it was, no questions asked. If I got in trouble at school, I was in trouble at home. Again, no questions asked. So . . .

SL: That's . . .

AT: . . . my folks had a lot to do with that.

SL: Yeah, you know, growin' up, everybody knows what everybody's doin'.

AT: Yeah.

SL: I remember by the time I'd walk home from school that—and I got home, my mom knew everything [*AT laughs*] that I had done or [*SL laughs*—you know, it was just this network of folks that just talked and looked after each other.

AT: That's right.

SL: I think it's part of looking after each other.

AT: It was.

SL: I don't think it was meant to be a bad thing.

AT: Right.

SL: I think they were tryin' to make sure that everyone was okay and safe. I think it was—I think it's a part of being part of the

community. But I like that no questions asked.

AT: Yeah.

SL: I mean, that was the bottom line, yeah.

AT: Well, you know, it—if they thought that the teacher's fault, maybe sometimes, I never knew it.

SL: Right.

AT: It was always my fault. And worked out pretty good.

[00:36:33] SL: So I—I wanna get back to the dinner table 'cause I feel like that it's the family together all in one place, and they're talkin' to each other, and they're catchin' up with each other. Do you member . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: Did you all . . .

AT: I won't say it was twelve o'clock on the nose, but it was pretty close. Twelve o'clock we all . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . we ate dinner.

SL: So . . .

AT: I didn't learn about lunch until I got grown.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Dinner was at noon. [*Laughs*]

SL: Right. That's right. That's right. Well, s . . .

AT: Then we had supper.

SL: Supper at night.

AT: Yeah. And I don't remember a certain time frame, but with as many of us as was involved and together there, I'm sure it was six or seven o'clock, something like that. We probably had supper then. I know I never missed it [*SL laughs*], but I can't remember what time it was.

SL: Just one time?

AT: I said I can't remember what . . .

SL: Oh, what time. Okay.

AT: . . . what specific time it was.

[00:37:58] SL: Yeah. Yeah. So at your dinner table, it was usually your mom and your dad and you, and it was your grandfather that . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . was livin' with you?

AT: But he died when I was pretty young.

SL: Okay.

AT: He was the only grandparent I ever knew.

SL: Right.

AT: But he passed away when I was pretty young, so most of the time it was me and my mother and daddy and usually the

teachers that boarded with us.

SL: Well, that's good. So the—as a boarder she was—she shared the family table.

AT: Yeah.

SL: That's good. And that's probably out of respect to her that she, you know, was invited, and I'm sure that she was thrilled to be there with you guys. So do you remember any of the conversations around the table? Was it pretty much what was goin' on with the farm or the mill or . . .

AT: Yeah, it's probably just general stuff. I don't know that I remember specifically anything we talked about. But anything—there wasn't anything taboo. If you had somethin' on your mind, you talked about it, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: But I don't remember any specific line of conversation we always had or anything.

SL: Yeah. During the war, it was probably something sometimes about the war.

AT: Oh, sure. It was—dwelt on that. Yeah.

[00:39:33] SL: Yeah. Yeah. So what about grace? Was there—was your father always the one that would say grace, or did y'all pass that around the table? Or did—was grace said at dinner? Or at

supper?

AT: No, they started me to doin' it when I was pretty young. I was usually the one that said the blessing.

SL: That's good. I—were you proud to do it? I mean, I . . .

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: Yeah. I think that's a good tradition.

AT: Yeah, I think so, too.

SL: I mean, you know, sometimes it was—most of the time at my house, it was one of the parents that would say it.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And we'd all say amen. Course, I had four other siblings, too. But so after dinner would the help do the dishes, clean the table, and . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . do the dishes and . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: You didn't have to mess with that.

AT: Right.

[00:40:44] SL: How 'bout your schoolmates? Did you have any good friends in school?

AT: Well, yeah. We [*clears throat*]*—*I went through the sixth grade out here in the country. Then I went—started Marvell in the

seventh. And all my high-school buddies went to college—that went to college went to Arkansas State. Except I had two Chinese boys in my class, Henry and Howard Alan Xu went to the university. So that separated me from . . .

SL: From the . . .

AT: . . . from the others, you know.

SL: Right.

AT: And so of course, I made some friends in college that I pretty much kept the rest of our lives. And most of them have not—didn't live close by, you know. When I came back home, well, there was different territory here.

[00:42:17] SL: Right. Right. So when you were goin' to school in Marvell, I'm assuming that there were more kids, by the time you got to Marvell . . .

AT: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . in your class. So did they have sports . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . in Marvell? Did you . . .

AT: Well . . .

SL: . . . take part in any of the sports?

AT: I was a manager.

SL: A manager.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And that—was that for basketball, football, track?

AT: Well, football. I can't remember if I had basketball, but I might've done some of that, too.

SL: Yeah.

AT: I wasn't real talented athletically. I was more suited to carrying the water buckets and [*laughter*] . . .

SL: Yeah. The support role. Yeah. Yeah. Well, it's an important thing, you know, that's an important job.

AT: They let me go with the crew, you know, even though I wasn't playin'.

SL: So you guys would get on a bus and go play someone . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: School down the road a little bit.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Friday-night football?

AT: Yeah.

[00:43:37] SL: Yeah. So other childhood relationships. I mean, once you were in a bigger school, you probably got aligned with more kids and more time together. Was—were there movie theaters in mal—in—oh, where you went to school? Did they have—the town have any movie theaters?

AT: Oh yeah, we had a m . . .

SL: Marvell. Is that w—that was the closest movie theater was in Marvell?

AT: Right. As a youngster, I didn't go to movies much. I don't guess my dad had anything against the movies, but for some reason, they didn't go, and so I didn't go.

SL: Well, it's a pretty big trip from here.

AT: Yeah.

SL: To Marvell just to go see a movie.

AT: And as my folks didn't go to movies.

SL: Yeah.

AT: They went to two or three that I can remember. *Gone with the Wind* was—had a big fanfare and . . .

SL: That's right.

AT: . . . they had to go see it. And Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. I remember them goin' to that one. But other than that, that's all I remember—movies I remember them goin' to. It course when I got old enough to go by myself, drive myself [laughs] . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . well, I started goin'. Back in my early childhood, I didn't go to a lot of movies.

[00:45:35] SL: So when did you start drivin'?

AT: Legally? [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, both ways.

AT: Oh, I think I got a—back then I could get a permit around fourteen.

SL I don't think that was uncommon, especially if you lived out . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . in the country. And I think the law respected that that, you know, you were providing—you were helping.

AT: I think I could drive legally when I was fourteen.

SL: The—yeah, seemed like they started with a learners permit when I . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . was that young. But you were supposed to have a parent in the car with you . . .

AT: Right.

SL: . . . if you were drivin'. So . . .

[00:46:29] AT: But I think it was fourteen. Back then we had some kind of a license that we could drive. Maybe they just—might've been somethin' with the law—local enforcement, what they did, you know.

SL: Right.

AT: They didn't enforce that.

SL: So y'all—I know you had at least a pickup truck, right?

AT: Had what?

SL: A pickup truck?

AT: Yeah, pickup. Daddy usually had a pickup truck, not a car. But during the war years, the pickup's all we drove. The gas . . .

SL: 'Cause of rationing?

AT: Rationing and all. We got—used it in the pickup and let the car sit out.

SL: Yep.

AT: And in fact, I think the car we had is—when the war broke out was a [19]37 Chevrolet.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And I think when Daddy replaced it, it was with a [19]47.

SL: Wow.

AT: So we didn't drive a car during those years but—and the truck he would try to trade in more often to keep it pretty current.

[00:48:12] SL: So let's see. You must have been in Fayetteville in the . . .

AT: Fayetteville?

SL: . . . mid [19]50s?

AT: [Nineteen] fifty-one to [19]55.

SL: So had you been to Little Rock or Memphis or any big towns before you came to Fayetteville?

AT: To school?

SL: No, just, I mean, visit.

AT: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I'd been to Little Rock and Memphis both.

SL: Were trains involved? Did you ever ride the train to Memphis or . . .

AT: No, I was tryin' to think. I believe I rode the train. My aunt—one of my aunts lived in Camden.

SL: Camden.

AT: Seems like I rode the train down to Camden was my first train ride, to visit them.

SL: What were the—what were your aunt's names and what were the names in Camden, the family name?

AT: Well, her maiden name was Holtzclaw, but she married a Harrell.

SL: Harrell.

AT: Harrell. They had—Harrell.

SL: So did they have a son named Don?

AT: They didn't have any children.

SL: They didn't? Okay. I know some folks in—from Camden, so . . .

AT: Do you?

SL: Yeah. And Don—and the Harrell family was one of 'em, but I

didn't know anybody besides Don Harrell, and I don't know how he would be related but . . .

[00:49:56] AT: They moved to Camden and built a frozen-food locker plant. And they operated it. That's what they did in Camden.

SL: Camden. I remember that you could smell the paper mill when you were in Camden. Fr—was it from Pine Bluff?

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: It was in Camden, maybe. I . . .

AT: I don't know where it was, but I know you can smell it there.

SL: Boy. It was so sweet smelling. I mean, just—it was hard. It's that heavy . . .

AT: They said—one fella told a story. He was on a train goin' through Camden and said his wife changed the baby three times before she found out [*laughter*] it was the paper mill.

SL: I believe that. I believe that. It was an awful smell. It really was. So—well, that's interesting that you went to Camden as an early train ride.

AT: Yeah.

SL: I—wh—I mean, there was some kind of line between Marvell and Memphis too, wasn't there? I mean . . .

AT: Yeah. You would—you had to go to Helena to catch it . . .

SL: Oh, you did?

AT: . . . catch a train goin' to Memphis. You caught it in Marvell, then you had to—if you caught the train in Marvell, went to Helena, then you had to—probably a layover, I don't know.

SL: Right.

AT: But I never rode a train to Memphis. And not many people around here did that I know of.

SL: Yeah. There was some kind of—it must have just been out of Helena. I think—did they call it the B Line or somethin' or . . .

AT: Well, that was a . . .

SL: . . . or was that a smaller engine?

AT: . . . Missouri Pacific. Oh, there was a—there might have been a smaller deal came through Marvell. No idea what they did call it.

[00:51:57] SL: Yeah. So I gotta believe that Fayetteville was quite an experience for you.

AT: Oh, yeah. I enjoyed that. I was—I've been asked how I chose or how my folks chose Fayetteville university, you know. When I grew up—well, to back up a little bit, my dad was always on the school board here, the local school board. And back when we had country school, we had a county supervisor of schools. Kind of the superintendent for all of the country schools was at the courthouse in Marianna, you know. After they got bigger

schools, each one of 'em had a superintendent.

SL: Right.

AT: But all these country schools, they had a superintendent, and her name was Miss Alma Futrall.

SL: Futrall.

AT: Futrall.

SL: Futrall Hall.

AT: And her brother, Tom Futrall, went to the university or helped start the thing or something. Anyway, she went there, too. She's real educated. And back then the country supervisor had to sign the warrants for the local school teachers along with the secretary of the school board, which my daddy was.

SL: Ah.

AT: So once a month we had to go to see Miss Alma to get him to— get her to sign the warrants to pay the teachers. And every time we were talkin' to Miss Alma, she was promotin' the University of Arkansas. So I knew I was goin' when I was way down in the grades because Daddy thought it was the thing to do that I should go to college, and she had already sold him on the University of Arkansas. So when I graduated high school, that's where I went.

[00:54:33] SL: So what was your major in college?

AT: Agriculture with a major in economics.

SL: That's pretty heady stuff.

AT: Well, if you let it be. [*Laughs*]

SL: If you let it be? [*Laughs*]

AT: But I was kinda doin' what I wanted to do. It wasn't hard for me to manage.

SL: Yeah. Well, that's the secret. If you're doin' what you want to do, if you're takin' what you want to take, what interests you . . .

AT: In fact, economics, I had to take—you know, general ed curriculum, I had to take a couple of courses. And I liked economics because it didn't have any labs to it. [*SL laughs*] If it was a three-hour course, you just went in three hours a week. And most of agriculture you had from one—three—two to four hour labs, you know. So I went on and took some more econ courses like land appraisal and . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . stuff like that. And enough that I had a minor in economics.

SL: That's a good decision. I bet it served you well.

AT: Well, yeah, it was, lookin' back on it, it was pretty good thing to do.

[00:56:12] SL: So I wanna jump back. Since we're sitting here in

the current A.B. Thompson Store, what do you remember about the original A.B. Thompson Store?

AT: That's what I grew up in. And I built this one.

SL: So tell me about what a typical day in the original one was like.

AT: Well, a typical day Daddy would open it up pretty early in the morning, and he'd close it up when folks quit comin', and that was usually around ten o'clock at night.

SL: Wow. [*Coughs*] Excuse me. That's a long day.

AT: Yeah. So you know, he'd usually come in or leave my mom when he'd shut everything going on the farm. Or in the afternoon when things was closin' down, well, he'd come out to the store and let her go to the house and do whatever she needed to do. But a typical day was just, for me, was just to be hangin' around the store and . . .

SL: So . . .

AT: . . . every once in a while, they'd have me puttin' up merchandise on the shelf or markin' it or somethin' like that. And I'd wait on a few people. But . . .

SL: So . . .

AT: . . . I te—I like to tell folks that I have a lot in common with the Chinese. Both of us were raised up in stores. [*Laughter*] [*SL clears throat*] Couple my classmates and good buddies were

Chinese boys in Marvell.

[00:58:28] SL: Well, that's interesting. So were they—were their families field hands or was this—when did the . . .

AT: No, they had stores.

SL: They had stores.

AT: Yeah. That's why I said me and the Chinese had a lot in common 'cause we both raised up in stores.

SL: Both had stores. And so were the clients—tell me about the customers comin' in. What—who were the customers?

AT: Well, mostly local people, but we had more local people in the country back then than we do now. But they would come in and get lunches, and back in the early days of the store, they'd get groceries. They would come on Saturday, maybe, and buy groceries.

[00:59:28] SL: So . . .

AT: And later on when I closed this one up, mostly what I was doin' was lunch business. Had snacks, soda pops, and stuff like that.

SL: Right.

AT: Didn't have much grocery business as such 'cause people are not cookin' like they used to, either.

SL: Yeah. That's true.

AT: But I built this store in the [19]70s. Yeah, [19]70s. And the

other store set right beside it, and I just moved in through the back door and through the side door this way into this one.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And then I got a house mover to pick it up and move it back and . . .

SL: And set it back off.

AT: . . . and set it back there. Yeah.

[01:00:30] SL: Yeah. So I'm tryin' to remember when the farming got more industrial, when the . . .

AT: Well . . .

SL: . . . laborers out in the fields were . . .

AT: It was a . . .

SL: . . . replaced with machines.

AT: It was a gradual thing. But I can't point to 1965 or . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . you know, a year. But I—as it got more industrialized, specialized, people left the country. They didn't need as many.

SL: That's right.

AT: So that's when the business [*phone rings*] went from grocery business to lunches, you know. [*Phone continues*] Hello. Hello.

Voice on phone: Hello.

AT: Yes.

VP: Hi, this is Sarah Moxon of the Department of Visa and MasterCard. How are you doin' today?

AT: Doin' pretty good. I can't understand you, though. [*Voice continues*] Well, you need to slow down. I can't understand you. You're talkin' too fast. I can't understand you. [*Hangs up*]

SL: I'm gonna open one of these for you.

[01:02:26] AT: I know you had all this water sittin' out here for a purpose.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, it's like anything else. It's just gettin' to it. So before all the—I mean, I would assume that the stores—this store and the earlier store were—most of their clients were people that were working the fields in some way. And . . .

AT: Well, yeah.

SL: . . . back then [*AT clears throat*] was the major crop cotton?

AT: Nearly all of it was.

SL: Yeah. But before cotton, didn't they have to—did they clear the trees out to grow the cotton?

AT: Yeah.

SL: Is that the way that worked?

AT: Yeah, they had to clear the land. Most of that was done before my time, though.

SL: Right.

[01:03:32] AT: But when I was growin' up, it was—we did some land clearin'. But it wasn't a major thing. And then it—before my time and in the early years, it was mostly done by hand. Hand labor, you know. And then when I came along, it was—most of the clearin' was done with machines.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Bulldozers.

SL: Right.

AT: And they did a better job. Cut it down lower, and you farm right over the top of it. And then you had stump grinders you could get rid of the stumps with.

SL: Yeah. You might—before that might take a whole day to do one stump, right?

AT: Oh . . .

SL: Or more.

AT: More. You just didn't mess with 'em. You just farmed over 'em or around.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Until the grinder came along. And if for some reason you did wanna get one up, you had to take a track hoe or somethin' and dig it up [*laughs*], you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Wasn't easily done.

[01:05:07] SL: So did the—did y'all give people credit in the stores?

AT: Yeah.

SL: And that wor . . .

AT: Daddy always did a credit. And I still do to a certain extent.

Mine is more for handy—being handyman for somebody than for really needin' direct credit, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: But they can send their hands by for lunches and stuff like that, you know, and I'll send 'em a bill. But Dad actually did some—kind of a furnishin' business for several folks. He'd carry 'em till fall, and they'd pay him. Some of them didn't, too.

SL: Yeah. Well . . .

AT: If I had all those on the books, I'd be in pretty good shape.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah. [01:06:21] Do you—I mean, are any of those old books still around?

AT: Do what?

SL: Are any of the older books still around, the, you know, the accounts and stuff? Did they—did you keep any of those from the old store?

AT: Oh, I've got all I ever had here.

SL: Yeah.

AT: They're back in storage over there.

SL: Huh. Well, you know, I would think that your store was—in some cases were—was vital to everybody, that they . . .

AT: Was what?

SL: Vital. They needed . . .

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: They needed the food, or they needed the tool, or they needed the part or they, you know—and without it then they . . .

AT: Early on it was very vital.

SL: Yeah.

[01:07:16] AT: And then—well, at one time, startin' in Marvell, there was one, two, three, four country stores in this area. One over here in Big Creek Corner. One at ?McNelson? Lake. And two midway between here and Marvell, plus this one. So there was a lot of country stores. And none of 'em operatin' anymore.

SL: Yeah. And don't you think that's because of the industrialization?

AT: Yeah.

SL: Didn't need the hands anymore. You had the machines.

AT: Well, and everybody got a car.

SL: There's that too. Yeah.

AT: Whole lot of difference to get a car and runnin' to Walmart than

it was gettin' on a mule and ridin' to Walmart.

SL: Big difference. Big difference. [01:08:23] Well, you wanna talk about your time in Fayetteville? You talked—you know, we know that you did agri with a major study in economics, and I'm assuming you did pretty good in both cases. So what about—where did you live when you were in Fayetteville?

AT: Well, I lived—I pledged Sigma Nu fraternity.

SL: Okay.

AT: And they had got a new house in 1950. They'd been in it one semester when I started.

SL: Is that the one on Dickson? Dickson Street?

AT: Arkansas.

SL: Arkansas Avenue.

AT: Arkansas Avenue.

SL: Okay.

AT: Pi K A house was next door, and then Sigma Nu house. And they all—they have moved up again. They're down on Stadium Drive and have built a new house since I lived up there. But that's where I lived. That's the old—I think my senior years some of us got an apartment and lived out of the house. And we had the boys comin' in to fill the house up anyways.

SL: Right. So did you work when you were in college?

[01:09:57] AT: Well, yes and no. The ag school had a place over there on the—the dairy building, we called it. Wasn't a classroom building. Had a bulletin board. And some farmer around was gettin' in a new bunch of chickens and needed some help on a particular day, usually a Saturday, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Well, he had posted that you'd sign your name if you—he'd tell you he needed three people. First three that got there and signed their name, well, they'd show up. And that would be like vaccinatin' chickens.

SL: Wow.

AT: Baby chickens.

SL: Wow. [*Laughs*]

AT: You know how you do that?

SL: No, I don't, but I can't—I can imagine.

AT: Well, you got a squeeze bottle with a dropper on it.

SL: Yeah.

AT: You take a box of chickens and reach it in, and you get one chicken. And you learn to pick him up, and as you do, you take that finger and throw his head over. That makes his eye open. You put a drop . . .

SL: In the eye.

AT: . . . in the eye. That's how you act—that vaccinates 'em for early chicken diseases, you know. And that was one of the things when they'd get a new shipment of chickens, you know, they'd just have chicken boxes stacked to the ceilin' to fill one of those houses, you know.

SL: Right.

[01:11:46] AT: So it took a lot of people vaccinating to do it in a hurry and to get 'em all out. And that was one of the things we did. But it was just a—not a steady job, but you could sign up for jobs that paid you something. And we did that.

SL: What wa—do you member what the pay was?

AT: Oh.

SL: Per hour back then? I'm . . .

AT: Wasn't very much.

SL: No, I would think it'd be not much.

AT: Back in the [19]50s it was probably three or four dollars an hour.

SL: If that, yeah.

AT: If that.

SL: If that, yeah. I was thinkin' it'd be a lot less than that but—so what di—did you—what did you do for fun when you were in Fayetteville?

AT: For what?

[01:12:43] SL: What did you do for fun?

AT: Fun?

SL: Yeah.

AT: Well, there was usually weekends something going on, either dances or there's—was a—one of the independent dorms or one of the fraternities would be having something, you know, and it wasn't hard to get an invitation to most of it. So you could do that. And either that or maybe take a date and go to a movie.

SL: So did you do much dating when you were there?

AT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: I mean . . .

AT: I probably went out with more girls than the average.

SL: [*Laughs*] Well, so did you have much dating experience back here before you went to Fayetteville?

AT: Yeah. Yeah, I dated in high school pretty good.

SL: Yeah? So you were kind of a popular guy?

AT: Oh, I just asked a lot.

SL: Yeah.

AT: They'd go out—I didn't go steady with anybody. I'd just date a different one. It might have been because of necessity. I couldn't get a date with the same one twice. [*Laughter*] So

what I'd do then, I'd go with the—just different girls. I didn't go steady, I don't guess, with anybody but the girl I wound up marryin'. I didn't get married until after I got outta college, came back here, started datin' a girl in Helena. And when I was thirty, I got married.

SL: So now what was . . .

AT: She was . . .

[01:15:00] SL: What was her name?

AT: Betty ?Shadden?.

SL: Betty ?Shadden?. Okay. And tha—didn't that—know that name. So what was her family—what did her dad do and her . . .

AT: Kate, her mother, worked for the telephone company. And her dad wanted in good—excuse me—wasn't in good health when I first knew him. So I don't really know what he did.

SL: Kay.

AT: But he wasn't, you know, he wasn't workin' when I met her and started takin' her out.

SL: Yeah.

AT: I'm sure I knew what he did at one time but I . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . don't remember what it was.

SL: Yeah. [01:16:04] So did you do the—back then it was pretty traditional for the suitor to go to the father and ask for his daughter's hand. Did you . . .

AT: Well . . .

SL: . . . mess with that?

AT: I don't know whether it was the thing to do or not, but I didn't.

SL: Kay.

AT: But I dated her seven years before I married her.

SL: Seven years? [AT laughs] You had to make sure. She had to make sure [laughs] . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . that—more like she had to . . .

AT: But I didn't do—I mean, we didn't go steady all that time.

SL: Yeah.

AT: I dated other people. She did, too. I wanted one that if they wanted me to stick around I—it's pretty obvious to me a lot of girls when they decide to get married, they'll take the first one that asks 'em.

SL: [Laughs] Is that right? Well . . .

AT: The way it appears to me comin' up, you know. So I wanted one that would stick around and wait on me, you know.

SL: Yeah. Well, so . . .

AT: And she did.

SL: Hmm?

AT: I said, and she did.

SL: And she did. She made the grade.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. And apparently you did, too.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. [01:17:33] So did y'all get married in Helena?

AT: Yeah. At the Baptist church.

SL: That was a pretty big church, wasn't it?

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Probably the biggest in town.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Kinda strange. Both of my wives—after the first one died, well, that's when I married Peggy. Her husband had died, too. And but both of 'em was brought up Baptist, you know. But I told 'em they both made pretty good Christians. [*Laughter*] They both went to church with me.

SL: You mean compared to you or compared to your church?

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

AT: No, I say—they converted.

SL: Oh, they did.

AT: They converted over and went to church with me.

SL: Well, there you go.

AT: So—which is—course they were Christian to start with.

SL: Right.

AT: But they weren't goin' to the Christian church. They went to the Baptist church. I tell 'em they make pretty good Christians.

[01:19:01] SL: So did y'all end up havin' any kids?

AT: Did we what?

SL: Have any children? Did y'all have any children?

AT: Yeah. We had two.

SL: And—boy and a girl or . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Boy first, and then the girl?

AT: No, had the girl first. And she's a—her name's Jessie Elizabeth.

Jessie was my mama's given name, and Elizabeth is my aunt's—  
one of my aunt's middle names. And so we called her Beth. She  
goes by Beth. And she's still single. She's never married. She  
works for the state in Little Rock.

SL: Oh, yeah. I re—Peggy told me that. That you . . .

AT: Who?

SL: Oh, no, that was your sister that's in—isn't it your sister that's in Little Rock, or is that your daughter? It's your daughter. That's right.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. So is she still workin', or is she . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[01:20:25] AT: She's worked in the office with two or three governors 'cause when Hutchinson came in, he transferred out to the—still worked for him, worked for the state, but not in his office. She's in the department of environmental quality or something. Anyways.

SL: Okay.

AT: That—they had a building at Maumelle?

SL: Yep.

AT: Maumelle, I think.

SL: So does she—is she—does she enjoy that? Is she . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . happy there?

AT: She's a people person. She reads people well, and she's sure good workin' for that front desk, you know.

SL: Right.

AT: And evidently she's done a fairly good job because she started working for 'em first job—I think first job she had was that.

SL: For a governor?

AT: Yeah. And she's still workin' for 'em. [01:21:41] And my son—he goes by Art. He's a third. He's [*SL laughs*] same name I am. And I overeducated him. He's an engineer, mechanical engineer. I couldn't get him back to the farm. He lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, works as an engineer. And apparently doin' pretty good. He's a—I don't have to support him.

SL: Well. There's that. That's a good sign. [*Laughter*] There's hope.

AT: One son.

SL: Okay.

AT: Henry.

SL: Henry.

AT: So I've got one grandchild.

SL: Have you spoiled him yet?

AT: Hadn't been around close enough to him to spoil him much.

SL: Yeah? Well, you better get on that.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

AT: I think he's a pretty good boy. He comes and visits me some.

We usually take him somewhere he hadn't been before. Here in the states.

SL: Right.

AT: We had [*unclear words*] foreign pictures. [*Laughs*]

[01:23:14] SL: So we hadn't really talked about what you liked to do with your time off or—you know, when growin' up, did you ever go fishin', or did you like fishin' growin' up?

AT: I grew up here in the woods next to—well, we got a creek runs through where my place is a mile and a half down the road.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And I don't know how many years it's been since I've been hunting of any kind. But when I was a kid I'd, like most kids, go out and rabbit hunt with a stick, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And but didn't do much of that. And there was—my dad had several families, colored families, livin' on his place. And they were always goin' coon huntin' or poh—it'd turn out to be possum huntin'. They very seldom got a coon. It was mostly possums. But they'd let me go with 'em, you know, and I loved to do—go with 'em, not so much for the hunt, but they'd get the dogs in the woods started runnin' . . .

SL: Yep.

AT: And they'd sit out on a log, build a fire, and start tellin' stories, you know, and I loved to listen to some stories 'cause they usually had some good ones, you know.

SL: Right.

AT: That was the entertainment I enjoyed. And all those dogs or trees—course, they'd go get the coon or the possum, usually, and then come back to the log, [*laughs*] you know, till they found somethin' else.

[01:25:20] SL: So . . .

AT: But that . . .

SL: Go ahead.

AT: And I went squirrel hunting to keep my dad from goin' by his self a few times 'cause he liked to squirrel hunt. And he liked to eat squirrels, too. He just—he would hunt. If he got two or three, he'd come back and stop at the barn and clean 'em, come on in the house . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . and he or Mama one would cook 'em, and he'd set down and eat 'em. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, you know, quite a few people did that, especially . . .

AT: But that's all the hunting I did.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And I done very little fishin'. I just 'bout as soon watch paint dry as to fish. [*Laughter*]

SL: Oh, brother. I love to fish, but I grew up around that. And to this day, I still love to fish. I can't get enough.

AT: And I don't care for fish.

SL: Oh, I don't eat 'em.

AT: To eat?

SL: I never keep anything.

AT: So I . . .

SL: I just toss 'em back.

AT: So I have no real impetus to make me wanna go fishin'.

SL: [*Laughs*] I just like the challenge, you know.

AT: Yeah.

[01:26:42] SL: And I like catchin' big fish.

AT: Well, if I ever caught one, I would like it.

SL: Yeah.

AT: But I'd usually catch and the ol' big one would be as big as my hand.

SL: Oh. [*AT laughs*] Well, some of those are good eatin', but I—my dad used to fish to put protein on the table. I mean, and we'd catch a mess of fish.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And he'd either clean 'em there at the river or take 'em home and clean 'em in the sink.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Mom didn't like that.

AT: No.

SL: But she liked havin' the fish to eat, you know. [01:27:18] So anyway, that—tryin' to think what else. You were talkin' about the stories on the hunting trips. Do you member any favorite story of that?

AT: No. And probably what I—way they'd tell it, it wouldn't be something I could repeat to most people.

SL: Well, there you go. I mean, that's what happens out in the woods.

AT: But I enjoyed listenin' to 'em, you know. And if they had a pretty good night, they'd have an [*unclear words*] full of possums, you know. Four or five of 'em. But they would—I had a .410 gauge shotgun. My daddy bought me a single-shot .410. And when the dogs treed and had located—put the spotlight on the possum, they'd let me shoot him out.

SL: Yeah?

AT: I'd get to shoot the possum. It was my part of the huntin' trip, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: So I did that a few times, but I never did do much huntin', fishin,  
anything.

[01:28:53] SL: So y'all would cook the possum, then.

AT: Huh?

SL: You'd cook the possum and eat it?

AT: They did. I never ate one.

SL: Yeah. I've never had possum. I don't know that I'd want to.

AT: I don't care for any wild game.

SL: Yeah.

AT: When you get away from cows and hogs, well, I'm about done.

SL: Yeah. Well, you can't forget chickens, now.

AT: I don't care for chicken.

SL: You don't care for chicken?

AT: Anything on two legs, I don't want it.

SL: What about frog legs?

AT: I've never eaten any frog.

SL: They're a lot like—it's a lot like chicken, surprisingly.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Well, if I go somewhere and—to eat dinner or somethin' and  
chicken's what they servin', I'll eat a little chicken. But so far as

bein' in favor of chicken eatin', I'm not. But pork and beef, I'm pretty good on them.

[01:30:11] SL: Yeah. Yeah. So how long had you run this store?

AT: Well, my mom and daddy had the old store.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And I grew up in it. And then when they passed on, well, it was mine to run, and as long as there's people in the country, we had a decent business. I would—I'd have somebody worked in the store. I wouldn't have to be in here all the time.

SL: Right.

AT: And I ran into—people kept movin' out of the country. And finally I just shut it down.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Didn't have enough business to keep the lights on.

SL: Yeah.

AT: I've still got 'em on but [*SL laughs*] just because I got a office back there.

SL: Right. Right. So do you think that you'll end up sellin' this stuff or sellin' the business and—what . . .

AT: Oh, I would—if somebody came here along and was interested in the store and would buy what merchandise I got, I'd furnish 'em the buildin' free of charge if they'd pay the utilities.

SL: Yeah.

AT: For as long as it took for them to get to makin' money . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . where they could afford to pay the rent, well . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . I wouldn't charge 'em. But if they'd pay the insurance and the light bill, well, that'd be all they'd have to do. I'd do that just to have a business, a goin' business here, which would have people circulatin' a little more, maybe.

SL: Yeah.

[01:32:26] AT: But I haven't had anybody interested . . .

SL: Well . . .

AT: . . . enough to . . .

SL: . . . times have changed.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Hadn't they?

AT: But right here where the location is, right in the middle of what little I got, I don't really wanna sell it, you know, sell the land, the buildin', and it all. But if somebody wanted to be in business, I'd make it very attractive for 'em to get in business. I'm not lookin' for—like I say, they could get in business without me havin' income . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . off the buildin'. They just keep it up and pay the utilities, well, I'd go without rent.

SL: I would guess the taxes would be somethin' to contend with, too.

AT: Yeah.

SL: That's a pretty big building.

AT: That's part of the—what I'm considering [*laughs*] utilities.

SL: Yeah.

AT: The—just the expense of the business.

[01:33:47] SL: Right. Well, so . . .

AT: But you was askin' me about college.

SL: Yeah.

AT: While ago.

SL: Kay.

AT: I enoyed every minute of it, I guess, and if I hadn't've needed to come back here—my dad wasn't in good health. Mother wasn't in the best of health, either.

SL: Right.

AT: If he'd've told me—said, "Son, I'll keep you in school if you'll take engineering or architecture or any of the harder stuff," it wouldn't've made any difference. I enjoyed goin' to school. I would've taken most anything and just stayed in school if that'd

been all I had to look at.

SL: Well, it's attractive.

AT: But when I got that B.S. degree, I came on back home, started farmin' and . . .

SL: Well . . .

AT: . . . started the store, lookin' after the store.

SL: . . . I'm sure you felt that was the right thing to do.

AT: I did.

SL: I mean . . .

AT: But that has—my son, he didn't wanna do that. So that's okay, too. I'd love to have him here.

SL: Yeah.

AT: If he could do his engineering and . . .

SL: Remotely.

AT: . . . you know, make enough, but . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . I don't know whether it'd be enough opportunities for him that way.

[01:35:45] SL: So what was the—I mean, outside of the university, what else did Fayetteville do for you or mean to you? It seems like to me that Fayetteville offers a diversity of the student population. Course there was football. I know that was big.

AT: Well, yeah. I'm a football fan. You asked me what I did for entertainment. That's the big one right there. I liked to go watch football games.

SL: Yep.

AT: But far as Fayetteville as a town, I can't think of anything in particular it did for me, but I'm sure it added to the experience, you know. But I liked the university. And of course the university is a combination of schools put together.

SL: That's right.

AT: You got ag school, business school, engineering, architecture—you got . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . anything you wanna branch out in, you can.

SL: Right.

[01:37:14] AT: And I took stuff over—few elective courses over in business school that I thought I needed like accounting and . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . some more economic stuff.

SL: Yep.

AT: But so I keep—more or less keep my own books, and I figured that was a big part of—regards to what I did.

SL: Right.

AT: I needed to know how to do that. And somethin' was goin' down the rat hole, I needed to know how to find it. [*SL laughs*]

SL: Yeah. [*AT laughs*] Especially if you put it there.

AT: Yeah.

[01:38:10] SL: Well, have you got any local stories about this area that you can tell us? Any characters to talk about or events that happened around here that you enjoyed or didn't enjoy? You know, somethin' . . .

AT: Well, you know, I've always enjoyed or had an interest in survey.

SL: Survey.

AT: Yeah. And just like this road right here is the county line . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . but it's also the baseline of Arkansas.

SL: Is that right?

AT: Where we're sittin', we're in township 1 north. Across the road I'm in township 1 south.

SL: I understand that.

AT: Seven miles from here is the starting point of survey for the Louisiana Purchase monument. You might've seen the sign on 49 . . .

SL: Yep.

AT: . . . just a little ways this side of 49. That always interested me and makes—goin' north/south you're in townships. East and west is reh . . .

SL: Counties?

AT: Range lines.

SL: Range lines. I don't know what that is.

[01:40:03] AT: I got another word I'm lookin' for. It won't come to me, but I'm in range 2 east because they're six-mile-square townships.

SL: Okay. Right.

AT: Thirty-six sections.

SL: Right.

AT: Startin' in the northeast corner, one, two, three, four, five, six. So since I'm in the west side of range 2, we're in township—we're in section 6 . . .

SL: Oh, okay.

AT: . . . right here. I'm in section 5 here.

SL: That's [*laughs*] . . .

AT: . . . 'cause I'm a mile from the section line back there. And the reason these roads don't match up—right here there's 126 links.

SL: Kay.

AT: I believe. Old surveyor's chain had 100 links in it and sixty-six

feet long. And an acre is ten square chains. A chain wide and ten long is an acre. And I think roughly two and a half chains square is an acre. Whatever it takes to make ten square chains. But these roads miss each other because of an error in the survey back when they made the original survey. Course they was goin' through raw country . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . back then.

SL: Right.

[01:42:06] AT: Woods. Draggin' those chains and hangin' over—snatched it to get it loose stretchin' the chain . . .

SL: Yep.

AT: . . . so forth. There was all kinda reasons. Plus, I think the way they did it, they'd get a line of sight, and they'd hit a tree. They'd pick the stake up, walk around a tree and stick it . . .

SL: Stick it again.

AT: . . . down and keep goin'. Well, their theory was they would stay on line, you know, givin' and take every time they did that. But that would get you off a little bit.

SL: You bet it would.

AT: So what accuracy . . .

SL: It gets worse the further you get away from that mark.

AT: To be that accurate today, a surveyor won't come out when it—  
won't hit nothin'. To get correct, he's gotta get over on what  
was done before. In other words, if you don't hit the old line,  
you're not correct. You may be doin' it accurate, but you're not  
correct. You gotta do what wa—oh, excuse me. You gotta  
follow . . .

SL: That's all right. You have to do it . . .

AT: . . . what was done before.

SL: Was done before. Yep.

[01:43:29] AT: And . . .

SL: 'Cause that's what everybody's based on—based their stuff on  
from the original line.

AT: Yeah. And you get out here another mile—I think right here is  
si—166 lengths. Dang near two chains discrepancy. You go  
down another mile and you're 126. [*SL laughs*] Then you go  
another mile, you're 106, and another mile carries you across  
through the Big Creek bottoms. You're out on the other side.  
It's 96 lengths in the opposite direction.

SL: In the opposite direction. [*Laughs*]

AT: So all of this bein' error in survey, but the corners of the two  
counties miss that much, and they're all long on this side. All  
long on that side.

SL: Right.

AT: Until you get out to Big Creek, and when they crossed the creek, why, they missed it 96 lengths, which is the opposite direction. So long end'd be on the Lee County side.

SL: So . . .

AT: And from there on, I don't have it by memory. But if you would think there was any place accurate, this oughta be. 'Cause I'm on the baseline.

SL: Right.

[01:45:12] AT: The startin' point east and west. North and south.

And I'm in the second range line, which is seven miles from the starting point. But yet this is what difference in error.

SL: That's fascinating.

AT: Yeah.

SL: So I mean, I guess property owners have to go by . . .

AT: Original.

SL: . . . that original stuff.

AT: Original stuff.

SL: E—and even if it was wrong.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Not accurate.

AT: Yeah.

SL: That's the problem, then.

AT: That's what the correct . . .

SL: The technology's gotten so good now, you just fire a laser, a laser line.

AT: This forty right here, and I got this forty. And I get over on you and clear it and build me a fence and keep it seven years, it belongs to me. Did you know that?

[01:46:26] SL: I think I knew something about that.

AT: Yeah.

SL: I've heard that before.

AT: So that—and you don't change it. You gotta go by the old line, you know. And another place they got off—you know the difference between north . . .

SL: And true north?

AT: True north and compass north?

SL: Well, I know that compasses have a compensation dial for what's north and true north.

AT: And do you know it changes every year?

SL: No, I [*laughs*] didn't know that.

AT: It changes a . . .

SL: Because of the tilt of the Earth?

AT: . . . few seconds. Degrees. It's measured in degrees, minutes,

and seconds.

SL: Seconds. Right.

AT: And if you go run a line between us and we use a compass to do it . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . that compass is so—it's roughly six and a half degrees—let me get this straight—east of true north. So if you start out on—and you go 1,320 feet, which is a mile. It's 2,600 in a mile—and you're six degrees off, look . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . how many feet off you're goin' to be . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . when you go a mile. And a . . .

SL: You already . . .

AT: . . . lot of those lines were run by—you know, early on by a fella takin' a compass, runnin' a line between him and his neighbor.

SL: Right.

AT: Well, he's six and a half degrees off to start off from the word go. [*SL laughs*]

[01:48:28] SL: Well, so there's no remedy to that, right? I mean, you gotta go back.

AT: No, you stay with what's been done before you.

SL: Yeah.

AT: You can't correct it unless the neighbor is willin'. If the neighbor is willin', well, then you can do it. You can move the line. I've got a place up here, forty acres . . .

SL: Yep.

AT: . . . that I inherited from one of my aunts. And my neighbor had the forty next to me.

SL: Okay.

AT: Well, there's two established roads. The highway's on his . . .

SL: End.

AT: . . . east side.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And this county road's on my west side. We didn't know exactly where the line was, so you know what we did?

SL: I would guess you'd take the middle of the road.

AT: We took the middle of the road, and we chained it off, and made our line halfway between [*laughs*]. So and we . . .

SL: I think that makes sense.

AT: . . . built a fence on it and . . .

SL: Yeah.

[Recording paused]

[01:49:46] SL: So, A.B., we just took a little break. You and I got—

I don't think we've made a passing grade yet.

AT: Oh.

SL: According to Peggy. And everyone else on the other side of the counter here. They think that we could do better than . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . what we've been doin', and so I don't wanna go agin' 'em on anything. So but you were talkin' about your daddy. Now what about your daddy?

AT: I said he—he got—he went through the fourth grade on a part-time basis. He wasn't—he didn't get to go to school every day, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And so he didn't get very much of a formal education. But he was always determined that he was gonna send me to school. But my goin' to school taught me why things that he did and things that he taught me was—where he was comin' from. And he taught me how to survey a field or piece of land and how to identify the legal description of land. And he had to be self taught on all this stuff. And just for example, people would come to the store to ask him if they was gonna borrow money on somethin' and had—owned a piece of land how to—what the description of it was. And he could tell 'em. Said, "Well, you got

the northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of sixty-six, township 1 south or north, range 1 east, 2 east," whatever it was. And he could draw it out on a piece of paper and show it to 'em. And I don't know how he learned it, but he did, when he didn't have the opportunity to go to school. And it just gets to me emotionally to talk about it. I don't know how good he was, but what he knew, what he taught me. And that was one of the things I skipped over when we were talkin' a while ago. And then one of the advantages I received, I guess you'd say, by goin' to college. I don't figure it made me any smarter than anybody else, but it helped me to understand what he had taught me. And it's just like land descriptions and—that's just one part of it. Most of what I learned was just reinforcin' what he had taught me. I took a course in college in land appraisal, which covered the description and how to determine what that was. And it just explained to me what he had taught me.

[01:55:11] But one of the big advantages or things that helped me in life goin' to the university was bein' in a fraternity. I'm not sayin' all of 'em are just alike.

SL: Right.

AT: But most people have the idea about fraternities are just a bunch of drunks livin' together, you know?

SL: Yes, sir.

AT: But I was fortunate to get in Sigma Nu fraternity. Well, that's a good companion to bein' in college. 'Cause a fraternity is, in effect, a business. It's a self-governed group on a college campus. But you got to take care of your own business. And I guess I was, again, very fortunate. But I served in every office, I think, in the fraternity, from the minor offices all through to bein' president of the chapter. And that taught me stuff that I wasn't gettin' in the classes up on campus, you know. How to take care of business, the business of the fraternity, which led to take care of business when I got out of school. And the group that I was in—I'm not sayin' we didn't have anybody that drank. We had a few boys that did. But it wasn't the focus of the fraternity. And in fact, if you couldn't drink and stay in control, you got in trouble with the fraternity. And it just kinda goes back to somethin' that—this lady that was county supervisor of schools. My daddy would talk to her. So she was always promoting the university 'cause that's where she went. And her brother, Tom Futrall, was one of the higher ups up there.

SL: Right.

AT: Back over the years. But he—people were tellin' him if—most kids run off to college, it just ruined 'em, you know. And he

would—it was her idea whether he should send me to college.

[01:59:10] And she told him somethin' that I think is very true.

She told him, "Don't worry about him." Said, "You're gonna get

back what you send up there." I thought that sounds very true.

What's in a guy is gonna come out. Or a girl, or whatever.

Anybody's had the right upbringing at home, they're not gonna

change. And it was very beneficial to me to have the different

levels of experience that taught me things that you need in life

that you wouldn't get in a classroom. And I just wanted to

throw that out as to—everything that you do can be beneficial,

or it can be not beneficial. It just depends on you. So my

experience as a whole, I think, has been good. And it's why I

enjoyed goin' to school. And—because if you got your head on

straight, you're gonna get a lot of benefits that you wouldn't get

outta life.

SL: So did you realize at the time how important it was for you to be there, or did that not . . .

AT: Yeah, I did.

SL: You did? So that's good. I mean, that drove you. That kept you in the lanes, and it inspired you that your father had that much faith in you.

AT: I had a good time. But I wasn't a drinker when I went. And I'm

not one today. I'm just glad Dad had the confidence in me to send me, to give me that opportunity. I guess I've said enough about that, so what . . .

SL: Well . . .

AT: . . . else you wanna talk about?

SL: You know, let me say that that's what good fathers do.

PT: Offering the car.

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh.

AT: Do what?

[02:03:11] SL: They wanna talk about your dad's reaction to comin' from the farmland, flat-earth farmland down here and seeing what you had ahead of you when you got up into the hills of the Ozarks there in Fayetteville.

AT: I don't know that I understand that question or not.

SL: Well, apparently he got back here and told your mom that [*laughs*] you're gonna be walkin' all of these hills, and he'd decided to give you the car while you were there.

AT: Yeah. Yeah, they drove that bog truck for a while, and then he bought another vehicle. But that was just a—put it on me to not abuse the confidence that he placed in me by letting me do that.

SL: I think—of course, not all the kids had cars up there back then, did they?

AT: No. There were several in the house that did.

SL: Yeah.

AT: But they weren't in the majority.

SL: So I would guess the boys with the cars immediately had friends that kinda relied on them to get 'em around and . . .

AT: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . and all that. And so you probably got caught up in that, too. But . . .

AT: Well, sure.

SL: You know, you were—I mean, it seems to me that the idea of the fraternities and the sororities is to give another home, a second home, to the kids comin' up and a second family.

AT: That's true. That's true.

SL: And they look out for each other. And you know . . .

AT: You do, and you have to learn to support the group and have rules and regulations to go by. And you're runnin' a small business is what you're doin'. And it holds true back in the real world, too, you know.

SL: You bet.

AT: You can mess up, or you can take care of business.

[02:06:08] SL: You know, I wanna—I get the impression it wasn't hard for you to not get caught up in the drinkin' and the partyin'

that some of the—that your faith was such that that just wasn't attractive to you at all. And I think you felt a responsibility to your family to be—do the right thing.

AT: I always thought I was crazy enough [*SL laughs*] sober.

SL: Yes.

AT: I didn't need nothin' to drink.

SL: I—yeah, I can see that. That's a good way to look at it. That's probably true of everybody, really. They really don't need to be drinkin'.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Already crazy enough. It is crazy enough without that.

[02:07:02] AT: It's—the biggest danger is too many people drink and can't control it.

SL: Right.

AT: And so why put yourself in that position? I think I had as much fun as my buddies that were drinkin'. In fact, somebody standin' off to the side lookin' wouldn't know which was which as far as havin' a good time.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Still stayin' in the path of what was right all the time.

SL: Right. Well, I wanna congratulate you on that 'cause I know for some folks that would be a hard thing to do 'cause you kinda

wanna be accepted into a group. And you might respect or admire someone, and then to see them go down the wrong path—it's kind of heartbreaking in a way. But at the same time, you showed the stamina to be true.

AT: Yeah.

SL: To yourself. So that—I wanna congratulate you on that 'cause not everybody can do that.

[02:08:20] AT: I appreciate that.

SL: So that kept you—that helped hold your attention to the classes and the homework and the studies. You . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . you really embraced all that, the form of college, the whole idea of gaining strength with knowledge.

AT: But I knew that had to come first.

SL: Yeah.

AT: 'Cause if I didn't make grades, I'd've been back here farmin' a whole lot sooner.

SL: Yeah. But in the end you—because you felt a responsibility for this home. So you must've had really wonderful folks. I know we haven't talked much about your mother, but I—you know, it just sounds to me like . . .

[02:09:35] AT: I had the best of both, father and mother both,

'cause they worked together. And both of 'em supported each other. And that's what I try to do with mine.

SL: So growing up, did you—you probably didn't think of that, but you were witnessing it all the time every day.

AT: Yeah.

SL: But you know, when we get out in the world away from what—the way we were raised, and you see how it is in other families, it's not always so good.

AT: No, it's not.

SL: And you really don't appreciate how—the advantages you had early on until you see what can happen when it doesn't go right, you know.

AT: But I wasn't tryin' to put across that I was perfect. And I've tasted about everything they put in a bottle. But I've never been drunk in my life.

SL: Yeah. Well, it's a good place to be. It's the best.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Best. Best place to be. [02:11:19] So is there anything else you wanna say about college and being in Fayetteville? I mean, we . . .

AT: Well, the main thing is some people have a bad idea about fraternities and sororities. I tried to get in one, but I never could

get in a sorority [*laughter*] but . . .

SL: Well, that's bad.

AT: But they're good.

SL: Yeah.

AT: If you had [*unclear words*]. I was fortunate enough to be in an organization that didn't promote that kinda stuff. 'Cause we had parties and all that stuff, but we were expected to act right. And if we didn't, we were in trouble with the group. In fact, we . . .

SL: Well, that's the way it should be.

AT: . . . we put a few people out . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . over the years because they wouldn't conform to actin' right.

SL: Right.

AT: And that covers a whole lotta territory when you're expected to act right.

[02:13:05] SL: So I wanna go back to here, to Turkey Scratch. And I, you know, I've involved with music and the history of music, and I knew people early on that were in the music business and became successful. And one of the folks that I met and knew was Levon Helm because he was in Fayetteville.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And he hooked up with Ronnie Hawkins. I don't know if you

remember Hawkins. I know you remember John Tolleson.

AT: Yeah.

[02:13:47] SL: And I can gi—I can tell you a Tolleson story. My brother, Gary, who is ten years older than me, took me to Fayetteville High School. I was in grade school, I'm guessing. And—just to hear John Tolleson. And—because he was dating the girl across the street from us, so we'd see him, you know. And he was there settin' up his piano. The rest of the band wasn't there. It was just him, and he was trying out the microphone. And he played, at the time, a popular song, of course. And it was "She's a Woman."

AT: Yeah.

SL: It'd just been made famous by the Beatles. And I have to tell you, as a kid in grade school, when I heard John Tolleson rehearsing that just by himself on the piano, I was hooked. And I played in bands from then on all the way into college.

AT: Yeah.

SL: 'Cause he was so good. It sounded so good to me. I mean, he was just belting it out, and it was so full, and he was playing the heck outta the piano. It was an upright piano, decent piano, you know. I—and it was just a big experience for me. And so I wa—I lit up when you said you knew about John Tolleson. And I

don't know if you knew much about Ronnie Hawkins and the Hawks, but . . .

AT: Not a lot, but I know who they were.

[02:15:21] SL: Yeah. Well, I think he was quite a bit more rambunctious than John Tolleson was. I always felt like John was pretty even . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . as a guy. So and I've interviewed John. I'm not sure if he's posted or not, but we've got an interview of John Tolleson where yours'll be. So you'll be joining him there.

AT: Well, whatever you do with it, I just hope something good comes out of it.

SL: Yeah. Well, we're doin' fine. So did you know Levon at all? Did you talk with him at all or did you have any experiences with Levon growin' up?

AT: With who?

SL: Levon Helm?

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: Well, let's talk about . . .

AT: He grew up here . . .

SL: . . . Levon.

AT: . . . on the place. But I mean, we didn't talk a lot and that sort

of thing.

SL: Yeah.

AT: I'd say I watched him grow up.

SL: Well, I always heard he was a real trickster, a real jokester and he liked to—he loved to laugh.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And you know, how'd he . . .

[02:16:36] AT: But his daddy, Diamond Helm . . .

SL: Yep.

AT: . . . would—well, I won't say he pushed him, but he would—he was always behind him takin' he and his sister . . .

SL: Modean.

AT: Modena?

SL: Is that . . .

AT: No, I'm talkin' about Linda.

SL: Oh, okay. Oh, Lin—that's right. I'm thinkin' Modean Cate.

AT: Modena didn't perform with him.

SL: Yeah.

AT: She was—Modena was my age, and we were in school together.

SL: Okay, yeah.

AT: Had class together.

SL: Okay.

AT: But Levon and Linda were younger. And so I worked with 'em. But they were entertainers from high school on up. And their daddy would take 'em places, you know. They would perform different things. And then, course, Levon just kept goin', and he got to be famous in his own right, you know, in the entertainment business. [02:18:05] But they were both good kids, and they were talented, and their daddy helped 'em all he could, you know. He was just a farmer like the rest of us.

SL: Right.

AT: But that's another thing. If you got it in you, it's gonna come out.

SL: Yeah. One of his CDs is *Dirt Farmer*. You know, he made a whole CD about farming.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And I've seen film clips of him coming back here and just loving to be on a tractor again. You know, he—and you could tell that he knew how to handle a tractor.

AT: Yeah.

SL: You know, he was sincere about the farming and the struggles with family farming and, you know, he always—there was something about him that just was just sensible about life. I mean, he just had a good head on his shoulders about what it

took to get along and do the right thing. But he had his own problems, too, of course. He went through a whole lot of problems. But he ended up being one of the most respected musicians in the world.

AT: Yeah. Yeah.

[02:19:48] SL: First off he—an incredible drummer. [AT laughs]

And in the drumming world, he's like way up there. But to also be an incredible drummer and sing at the same time—there's very few singing drummers ever.

AT: Yeah.

SL: So he raised the bar quite a bit. There're all kinds of famous people that wanted to quit what they were doing and come play with Levon because of the way he was and how he could do it. There was something about him. Anyway. So did you know Diamond more than you knew Levon or . . .

AT: Oh, I knew 'em both well.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And the thing I know about Diamond is he supported, I guess you'd say, a lot of Linda and then I think Linda wound up gettin' married, and Levon went on with his part of the entertainment.

SL: So there was Anna Lee Amsden.

AT: Anna Lee was a cousin.

SL: Yeah. And then there was Mary Cavett. Is that—that was her last name, I think.

AT: Yeah.

[02:21:11] SL: I think they were neighbors.

AT: I think they were kin, too.

SL: Yeah. I think Mary Cavett and Levon were—I'm not sure if they were kin or not. And then there were the Cagles.

AT: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: I've interviewed Terry Cagle.

AT: I don't know that one.

SL: Well, he's more my age.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And he's a drummer. And he plays and sounds like Levon. It's the funniest thing. And when we go to dances, he's in a band that plays a lot of Levon's music, and I have to tell you, every time they do, the dance floor is just packed.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And everyone knows every word, and they sing along with 'em. It's just an amazing phenomenon that—well, at least that's the way it is in Fayetteville.

AT: Yeah.

SL: I think they had a sweet spot in their hearts for Fayetteville

'cause that's kinda where they got together.

AT: Yeah.

SL: All those guys got together so—anyway. If you think of anything else about Levon or Diamond or that group of folks, I feel like that they are, just like you, they're just kind of married, and they come back here, and they talk about this place . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . often. Any time I've talked with 'em. I've interviewed most all of 'em, and it's a special place here.

[02:22:45] AT: You mentioned a while ago about friends I had growin' up. There was a man made—just across and lived on a place while he was—daddy before I came along. But he wound up raisin' two grandsons, Leland and Arthur Thomas. And they were a little bit older than me, but we were right here together, and we played together and all growin' up. So they were good friends of mine. And then in the community, we had—well, there's not as many now as there was when I was growin' up. So we had a lot of colored people and colored kids. And I had—I played with them, too. And a lot of good friends, you know, with the colored kids. And they were—well, back then we played together. Their parents supported them from—like mine did me. From—actin' right. If I went over to one of their houses and I

got outta line, they'd get on me just like they did their kids. And the same token if they were—we were in my place, they got outta line, my folks would get after them, too. They supported each other. Which I think was a great thing.

[02:24:53] SL: In one of my interviews with Bubba Sullivan, he said almost exactly the same thing. Almost exactly, that when the—with African Americans as kids, they loved each other, they played together all the time. And if they were at their house, and they got outta line, why, those parents would, you know, give 'em a whoopin' or give 'em a talkin'.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And the same thing would happen over at his house. And it didn't matter. All this Black and white stuff didn't really matter. They played together, but they went to different schools.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And somehow that didn't get in the way of the relationships they had.

AT: No.

SL: But you know, I think eventually it probably did 'cause as you got older and you weren't out just playing out in the fields or in the street or in the yard or goofin' off together, you started to become young men. And you know, your interests started to

diverge. And those—that division line just—I don't know, it just—you know, things changed. [02:26:03] Now do any of your friends—have they kept in touch with you?

AT: Yeah.

SL: Both Black and white?

AT: Yes.

SL: Because that's the way it was with Bubba, too.

AT: Yeah.

SL: No matter how old they got, they would still talk. They would call, or they'd come see each other or check on each other. It was real. It was a real friendship. So it's just so—I can't tell you how close this exact same words came out of Bubba's mouth. Did you know Bubba Sullivan? He was down in Elaine. He went to Elaine school.

AT: That name is familiar to me but I can't really place him.

SL: Yeah. Berbon—his dad was Berbon Sullivan. *B-R—B-E-R-B-O-N*. Yeah, he had a record store there in Helena. And he helped start the Helen—the music festival up there however—thirty-five years ago.

AT: The blues festival?

SL: Uh-huh, the King Biscuit.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Anyway. Okay. [02:27:14] So now I learned on our break that this place acted as a post office even though it wasn't a post office.

AT: Well, there was a lot of people lived in this area, more so than now, and we had a string of mail boxes out across the road in front of the store. And a lotta those folks were concerned about other folks messin' with the mail. And if they got a check or anything important, they didn't want it put in the mail box. Put it in our mail. And we'd put it in the store, put it in pockets under the counter, you know, and people'd come to the store and ask for their mail just like going to the [laughs] post office.

SL: What?

AT: And if they were gonna send a money order and—most folks back when I was a kid, they didn't have checkin' accounts. They all sent money orders when they ordered somethin' or had to help some of their folks off somewhere else. They always brought the money orders to the store, and we sent the money orders for 'em, you know. Through the mail, that is.

SL: Right.

AT: They wrote—we didn't write money orders. They wrote 'em. And give us the receipts, and we gave it to 'em when they came back to the store. But we—I grew up almost runnin' a post

office. [02:29:15] Plus that, I was a substitute mail carrier for years.

SL: Oh, is [*laughs*] that right?

AT: I carried mail on the route whenever the regular carrier had to be off for somethin'.

SL: Right.

AT: And they got a lot of time off. Postal Service was real . . .

SL: It was a good job, wasn't it?

AT: . . . real good for havin' vacation time, and . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . while they were on vacation, well, I'd be carryin' the mail, see. So . . .

SL: See, that—these are the reasons why people nominate folks for our interviews because you made a difference in the community. That's a big deal. And it may not have seemed like it at the time.

AT: Yeah.

SL: But you spent time and effort on their behalf, you know. That's good stuff.

AT: Well they—back then folks trusted one another individually, you know. And if they'd put their money orders in the mail box, it probably would've been all right. But they knew if they left 'em

with us, it was gonna be all right. And we did a lot of it.

SL: Well, it's the right thing to do.

AT: Yeah.

SL: You know. You stepped up.

[02:31:03] AT: Did I answer that part that you mentioned there?

SL: Well, there's a bunch of stuff here, but . . .

AT: I know, but the one that you mentioned it. Did I . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: About the mail. Did that—did I cover that pretty good?

SL: Yeah, I think so.

AT: Okay.

SL: You think he covered that pretty good, guys? I think he did.

AT: Okay.

[02:31:25] SL: What about—let's talk about running water [*laughs*]  
in the house.

AT: Well, when I was a kid, I told people we had runnin' water  
because Daddy had the pitcher pump on the back porch.

SL: Yep.

AT: And I told 'em all we had to do was work the handle and we had  
runnin' water. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's right.

AT: But then even before we got electricity, Daddy had stock. Still

had mules back in my early days. And so we had a gasoline engine to pump water.

SL: Okay.

AT: Had a water tank on a scaffolding. And we'd fire up the ol' engine and pump the tank full and then cut it off. We could use water out of the tank. And we ran water lines to the mule barn and to the cow barn and the lots and stuff like that. And course, had the yard ran out. So we had runnin' water even before we got electricity. When we got electricity, we got an electric pump and still had the same system.

SL: So that electricity really changes things pretty quick, didn't it?

AT: That what?

SL: Electricity . . .

AT: Oh, yes. Yeah.

SL: . . . having electricity really changed things quite a bit.

AT: Oh, and we had runnin' water to the old store, too, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: It was a while before I got around to puttin' in a bathroom, but we had runnin' water to wash the . . .

SL: Did . . .

AT: . . . dimes and stuff and the meat counters.

SL: Right. Right. [02:33:41] So did you have to dig the lines

yourself? I mean, did the family dig the lines, or did you have somebody . . .

AT: Oh, no. Most of it we put it in ourselves.

SL: Yeah.

AT: But I was pretty young. I knew how to thread pipe, cut pipe, extend the water lines, that sort of thing.

SL: This was probably galvanized metal?

AT: Yeah. Galvanized pipe.

SL: Yeah. Yeah. We've taken—we replaced some of that in our house. We live in a house that was built the turn of the ce—you know, nineteen—1897 I think is when it shows up, so.

AT: Well, later on, we took ours out, too.

SL: Yeah.

AT: I did.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And ran copper.

[02:34:33] SL: So what about heat?

AT: What?

SL: What about heat? Did you—I—did you have like a stove, a wood-burning stove?

AT: Early on we did.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Yeah. We'd cut up wood and stack it up in the summertime to warm us through the winter.

SL: That's right. Let it dry out just a little bit.

[02:34:58] AT: And I came up with Mama cookin' on a wood cookstove, too. So we had stove wood and heater wood. We had two different . . .

SL: Two different kinds. Two different purposes.

AT: Two different sizes, you know.

SL: Yep. The stove wood was smaller cuts?

AT: Yeah. Yeah, right. It was smaller pieces.

SL: Yeah.

AT: 'Cause the fire box on the cook stove wasn't that big.

SL: Yeah.

AT: It wasn't big like our heater would be.

[02:35:32] SL: Right. Right. So did you eventually go to propane, or did you go like—in my house there was actually a coal chute. They would bring coal and dump it down into the basement.

AT: We never did burn coal.

SL: No.

AT: 'Cause we weren't in town, you know, and it—we could have if we'd—Daddy wanted to, but we always had woods, and we could get the heater wood and firewood, so we burned that up till—I

guess when we switched over, we went to butane and later propane.

SL: Propane. Yeah.

AT: Start with it was butane. Butane had one more carbon in it than propane.

SL: So it was—was butane more volatile than propane? Or was it—why did they switch?

AT: It was a little bit hotter.

SL: Yeah.

AT: On the scale of hydrocarbons, you get methane, ethane, propane, butane, [*SL laughs*] heptane, and so forth. So the propane was one carbon less than butane, and for some reason—I guess it's because the propane would stay in a gas stage in colder weather than butane would. Butane would liquefy.

SL: Liquefy. Yep.

[02:37:16] AT: And so we went down to all propane.

SL: Right.

AT: But butane was what we started out with.

SL: Well, the gas made a big difference, too. Gas fuel for heatin' the home. Big difference. No more choppin' wood. No more . . .

AT: Right.

SL: . . . building fire in the house. It was just turn a knob, and there you had it.

AT: And you didn't have to carry that wood in.

SL: That's right.

AT: And sweep up the floor. [*Laughter*]

SL: That's right. That's right.

AT: Take the ashes out and all that stuff.

SL: That's right. I'm doin' that still out at our river house. We have a wood-burning stove out there, and I love it.

AT: Yeah.

SL: It heats the whole house. It's amazing, but you gotta chop the wood. You gotta stack it, bring it in, burn it, clean it up, do it again. Take out the ashes. I do that now. [02:38:16] All right, so what about the first telephone? Do you member gettin' the first telephone?

AT: Oh, yeah. Up the—which was a dirt road at the time, this road right here—goes straight to the—Highway 49.

SL: Kay.

AT: My dad built these old telephone lines from here to Marvell, which was six miles, which was just a single-wire . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . deal. And we had a telephone in the store, and one at the

house. And for years we were the only telephones out this side of Marvell, you know. And if people needed to make a phone call, they'd . . .

SL: Came to the store.

AT: . . . come to the store and make it, you know.

SL: Yeah. So did he bury that line all that way, or was it up on a . . .

AT: Oh, he put it on poles.

SL: Put it on poles?

AT: Yeah. And we, of course, had to maintain those lines until—I can't remember. Years later when they built telephone line out here.

SL: So that was like y'all's . . .

AT: We got rid of ours 'cause we got on with . . .

SL: That's amazing. You start . . .

AT: . . . Southwest Bell.

SL: You started with your own private line, basically.

AT: Oh, yeah. We had that for years.

SL: And you shared it with the folks around.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Well, that's just amazing.

AT: If they had to—they wanted to make a long distance, they'd do that, and then we'd call the operator and find out how much it

was, and they'd pay us, you know.

SL: Yeah. Well, that . . .

[02:40:09] AT: If it was a local call, why . . .

SL: Fair is fair.

AT: . . . didn't charge 'em anything.

SL: That's good stuff. All right, now what's—got some kind of—  
mother did some kind of fix with coal oil? Treat somebody with  
coal oil?

AT: Oh. [*Laughs*] Yeah, there was a little African American kid  
wadin' in the ditch and cut his foot on some glass.

SL: Oh!

AT: And I recall it just split at that—he had a flap, you know.

SL: Oh.

AT: And . . .

SL: Ow.

AT: Course, he was cryin', and he came to the store. Well, they got  
a wash pan and put some coal oil in it, set his foot in there,  
washed it good in that coal oil. Coal oil's good for a cut. You  
know that?

SL: No. I've never heard of such a thing. [*Laughs*]

AT: Evidently it was good 'cause I had a lot of it put on me in my  
lifetime. [*SL laughs*] But she got it all cleaned up real good.

She got some gauze, and I don't know, she might have put some Mentholatum or somethin' on it.

SL: Mentholatum. Yeah.

AT: And pushed it back up and wrapped it with gauze, tight, and then put tape on it, you know. And it not only healed up, but it grew back, you know.

SL: That's a miracle.

AT: And he probably come back for to change the bandage a few times. I don't remember that part of it.

SL: Yeah.

[02:42:07] AT: But my folks was doctors, and they were whatever we needed in the country, you know. If I got hurt, they bandaged me up. We didn't go to the doctor unless it was bad chewed up or needed stitches to sew it up.

SL: Right.

AT: They didn't do stitches. [*Laughter*] But a country store was very versatile back in my day.

SL: Yeah. I can see that it was a—it wasn't a—the merchandise is—but it was also merchandise plus service.

AT: Oh.

SL: To the community and sounds like you guys stepped up. And I—in every way. It's really amazing, A.B., I—so, you know, you

mentioned one—along—somewhere along earlier that if you could just collect all the charges on the charge accounts that . . .

AT: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: . . . you'd be doing fine. [02:43:16] So really, how much of a— I mean, I know you guys carried people, and some people never paid, but . . .

AT: Most of 'em paid.

SL: Yeah.

AT: But over—well, goin' back to [19]29 when Daddy went in business down here—you know, just a little bit this year, a little next year, you—it accumulates. But like I say, most of 'em paid. He was able to stay in business. And still didn't break him from doin' the charge business.

SL: So . . .

AT: Lot of times it'd be somethin' that they really needed, and Daddy went on that a whole lot, you know. Even if he knew he probably wasn't gonna collect all of it, he'd still let 'em have it 'cause they needed it.

[02:44:25] SL: So were you aware at all growin' up, or did you ever hear your—anybody, your folks or other folks, talk about the Depression?

AT: Depression?

SL: Uh-huh.

AT: Oh, yeah. I know enough about the Depression I felt like I went through it.

SL: Well, you were [*AT laughs*] born in the middle of it, really.

AT: Yeah.

SL: So what do you remember about it, or what do you remember the talk about it, or how you . . .

AT: Oh, that a dollar was big. But people just didn't have any money. They didn't have that dollar. Now if you could get ahold of a dollar, it'd buy somethin'. But it was just tough times because nobody had the money. We was all in the same boat, more or less. And havin' the store made it a little bit more attention-getter than—and a lot of those folks that didn't pay, they didn't pay not because they didn't want to.

SL: Just didn't have . . .

AT: They just didn't have it. And if crops came in good and they made—got a little money, they'd pay you. And if they couldn't pay you, it was because they just couldn't. They didn't have—wasn't because they just wanted to beat you. And . . .

SL: Well, you know, I've heard that folks that—in the country did a little better gettin' through the Depression than anybody in the city.

[02:46:22] AT: Well, the reason for it was they could grow their own food.

SL: That's right, and knew how to do it.

AT: Everybody had gardens. They can make it, you know.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And they would cut wood and sell it to people who lived in town to get a little money, you know, just anything that's like that. That's just one example. And then, course, cotton farmers back then chopped the cotton two or three times to keep it clean before the chemicals got popular.

SL: Yeah.

AT: And that put a little money in circulation, even though the fella with the cotton was havin' to borrow the money at the bank to do it with, but it still put a little money in circulation . . .

SL: Sure.

AT: . . . in the community.

SL: Well, do you think that just being in the rural part of the country where the—every—each community—pretty much everybody knew everybody.

AT: Yeah.

SL: That the community itself helped get through the . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . Depression just supporting each other, where in the city, you know, yeah, you knew some folks in the city, but not like . . .

AT: Not like you did in the country.

SL: Not like you did here. And there were so many more folks that you didn't know . . .

AT: And . . .

SL: . . . in the cities.

[02:48:05] AT: If we lived a mile apart or somethin' in the country, we were still neighbors, you know. You had a garden, and I had a garden. And I'd run out of potatoes and you didn't, well, you'd give me potatoes. Or maybe I'd give you tomatoes or . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . beans or peas or somethin' else.

SL: So the bartering was . . .

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . was more opportunistic out here where you could have somethin'—you could grow something to barter with.

AT: Right.

[02:48:39] SL: So what about the gasoline business? I see there's pumps out here. Were you the only—were you one of the few stations or one of the few stores that had gasoline?

AT: Well, we was only one this side of town when I was growin' up. And I can't remember. I really can't remember us not havin' gas. I don't know how long Daddy was in business before he got the gas pump. The ones that you pumped up . . .

SL: The glass.

AT: . . . globe up that held ten gallons. That's where you sold gas by the gallon.

SL: Yeah.

AT: You didn't get a dollar's worth or five dollar's worth or whatever. 'Cause that gas tank held ten gallons full, but it had gallon markers.

SL: That's right.

AT: And you could sell one . . .

SL: You could actually see it.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And then goin' down into the car in the tank.

AT: Yeah, you'd pump it in and watch that up there. When it got to the mark [*laughs*] . . .

SL: Right, right.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Right. [02:49:59] Well, so, did y'all do any service for cars? Did they ever . . .

AT: No.

SL: No? Just . . .

AT: No. We just sold . . .

SL: . . . the gas.

AT: . . . gas.

SL: Well, that was—it was too . . .

AT: Well, we sold motor oil, too.

SL: Yeah.

[02:50:14] AT: And we had bulk oil and had a quart prune jar with a spigot on it. And you'd pump up a quart of oil. Somebody needed a quart in the car, and they'd take it out there and pour it in, bring you . . .

SL: Back the jar.

AT: . . . jar back. [*SL laughs*] And then we—then you could get canned oil or—I still stock it. But we sold many a quart of oil just in a prune jar, a bottle at a time.

SL: [*Laughs*] I love that. That's good. So . . .

AT: Fifteen cents.

SL: Fifteen cents for a quart of oil.

AT: I can remember—[*laughs*] we called it fifteen-cent oil. [*Coughs*] But stuff had begin to go up a little bit, and I didn't know whether oil had gone up or not. I member hollerin' to ask Dad,

"Daddy, how much is this fifteen-cent oil?" [*Laughter*] And he said, "Fifteen cents." So it was still fifteen.

SL: Fifteen cents.

AT: I got kidded about that.

SL: Yeah. That's good. [02:51:34] Well, so how you doin'? You feel like takin' another break? It's been an hour. We just whipped through an hour.

AT: It is?

SL: We had a good hour, didn't we?

AT: Yeah. I'm good. Whatever you wanna do.

SL: Okay, I'm—are you good back there?

Alesandro Salemm: I'm good, yeah.

SL: Well, let's go a little longer.

AT: Okay.

SL: Okay. [02:51:57] So some of the commodities were sugar and flour, and did that—when you guys—when you bought it, did it come in barrels?

AT: Come in hundred-pound sacks.

SL: Oh, in sacks.

AT: We got it in a hundred-pound sack. Sugar.

SL: Okay.

AT: And beans. Now flour, we got that in—well, I think at that time

it was twenty-four pounds. Later they went to twenty-five-pound sacks. But we stocked twenty-five—twenty-fours and forty-eights. Two different size sack flour. We didn't sell it a pound at a time, you know, like we did beans.

SL: Yeah.

[02:52:49] AT: And maybe rice. I'm not sure about the rice. But beans and sugar is two things we got in bulk, put it in cans which—she said flour wear. Well, we had cans with tops on 'em that we—would hold a hundred-pound sack of beans or what—sugar or whatever. And we had a scoop. We'd scoop it out, put it in a sack, and weigh it. If they wanted thirty cents worth or fifty cents worth, we could do it.

SL: So did you have that stuff—did that stuff get delivered here or did . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . you have to go pick it up.

AT: No.

SL: You got it delivered here?

AT: Yeah. They brought it to us. For a long time, Robinson-Swift was a wholesaler in Marvell.

SL: Okay.

AT: And they delivered with—by wagon and team.

SL: Is that right?

AT: But they didn't come out this far. I don't remember 'em ever doin' it. But Interstate Grocery Company outta Helena, they delivered in a truck. And when I was a kid, Interstate's where we got our groceries. They brought 'em to us. And then later on, I don't know why, but we started dealin' with Helena Wholesale, and they delivered. [02:54:25] I think—yeah, I remember the situation. It was in the wintertime. And Interstate Grocery come to—I think John Moore was the head guy. He called Daddy on the phone and told him, says, "We're not puttin' our trucks off the road." We was on a dirt road back then.

SL: Yeah.

AT: Off the highway. He said, "We'll deliver your stuff tomorrow." Dad told him—says, "If you can't get out here, how do you think I'm gonna get it tomorrow? I don't believe I need anything." And he called I think John Moore. I'm not sure, but Helena Wholesale—I'm supposed to know that—who all did it. But Daddy called him and said, "If I [*laughs*] bought some groceries, could you deliver 'em to me?" He said, "Mr. Thompson, can you get to town?" He said, "Yeah." Said, "If you can get to town, I can get out there. See—if you tell me what you need," said,

"next week, Cal ?Dahl?, our salesman, will call on you." And we . . .

SL: You switched just like that.

AT: We went Helena Wholesale from then on.

SL: Yeah.

AT: 'Cause they'd bring it to us.

SL: Well, [AT laughs] that's a service. Yeah. Good move.

AT: I remember he asked him if he could get to town. He said, "Yes, I can." He said, "If you can get to town, I can get out there."

SL: There you go.

AT: Said, "Our truck'll be there Friday," or whatever day they delivered.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

AT: So that was the deal on that.

SL: That was the bad mistake by the other company, wasn't it?

AT: Yeah. They were gettin' too independent.

SL: Yeah. Okay, so now talk to me about a metal box. Is that where you kept the . . .

[02:56:47] AT: Oh. I still got one somewhere. Metal box about that long, about that wide and that deep. And the top on it had a change insert in the top. You pick it up, and the bottom was open, you know. That's what my Daddy kept his store money in.

Bills in the bottom and the change in those. And he also had his ledger book that he kept his store sales monthly. He had another book that he kept, the daily cash book. But he had two or three books. I know he had a belt he'd put around his books. And he could catch his hand in that belt, carry that change box in his other hand. Carried 'em back and forth to the house every day 'cause we didn't have a safe. Thing burned, it'd burn up, you know. *[Laughs]*

SL: Yeah.

AT: So he carried that change box with the store money in it and the books with a strap around 'em back and forth to the house until, years later, he bought a secondhand safe, put in the store, and then we didn't have to carry it back and forth.

[02:58:35] SL: So did y'all ever have any trouble with people robbin' you or . . .

AT: I—two or three times in my lifetime I can remember 'em breakin' in the store.

SL: While—when you weren't here.

AT: Yeah. At night usually.

SL: At night. Yeah.

AT: But really, over a period of [19]29 to—1929 to [20]22, that's not bad. A couple three times.

SL: No, that ain't.

AT: And most of the time they wouldn't get a whole lot. They'd break in and get tobacco or cigarettes or . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Really?

AT: . . . somethin' like that, you know. And the reason they broke in is they just didn't have that fifty cents or whatever it took to get their tobacco, you know. But we never lost very much.

[02:59:44] SL: Well, it'd almost have to be someone that—well, I don't know. Sometimes they say if someone's broken into your house, it's somebody you know. Which really is hard to . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . accept.

AT: But that's the reason I got these shutters on the windows.

SL: I saw that.

AT: We had wood shutters on the old store.

SL: Right.

AT: And when I built this one, I just made metal shutters.

SL: Those are nice, by the way.

AT: Yeah.

SL: I took stock of that. That's good work. Is that—you didn't do that work yourself, though. Someone else . . .

AT: Do what?

SL: . . . manufactured—did the metal work, right? You had 'em measured and—I mean they're te . . .

[03:00:27] AT: I made 'em myself over out here.

SL: You did? I tell you what, they're great.

AT: I didn't make the metal buildin', but I made the metal shutters to put on the buildin'. Yeah.

SL: You're a handy guy. [*Laughs*] That's pretty do—pretty good [*unclear words*].

AT: Well, I was brought up to do what you had to do, you know.

SL: That's right.

AT: If you needed somethin' that you could make it, you made it.

[Recording paused]

[03:00:56] SL: All right. We've had another break. I've gotten some more marching orders . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . here on our interview. [*AT laughs*] We just went outside and took pictures of you in front of the old store and in front of this store. I really appreciate you doin' that with us.

AT: Yeah, you can probably take a couple of dollars and that picture and get a Coca-Cola somewhere.

SL: Do what now?

AT: You probably take that picture and get a Coke—and a couple of

dollars and get a Coke somewhere.

SL: [*Laughs*] Maybe so. Maybe so. Okay, so we were talkin' about some of the businesses that your dad had going besides the store. And one of 'em was a wood shop. Is that right?

[03:01:41] AT: Well, he built a wood shop for me.

SL: Okay.

AT: That was just—I've always been interested in wood work. And he built the shop in the back yard . . .

SL: So the . . .

AT: . . . for me to encourage me to do somethin' worthwhile.

[*Laughter*] I have enlarged it a little bit since then, but he built the . . .

SL: The original.

AT: . . . first part of the buildin'. And I've accumulated a few saws and . . .

SL: Of course.

AT: . . . tools over the years. And I just don't have time to get around to doin' anything out there.

SL: Yeah, but you worked it for a while, though. You were in there for a while, weren't you?

AT: Yeah, I was—I've done a lot of stuff.

[03:02:39] SL: So what kind of—did you make a table or chair or—

what kind of carpentry did you do in there? Or my brother would call it wood butchery, but s . . .

PT: Shelves.

AT: I don't remember.

PT: Your shelves.

AT: Peg?

PT: Your shelves.

AT: Huh?

PT: Your shelves.

SL: Oh, these things.

PT: You built—your . . .

SL: What about these?

PT: Your mother's . . .

AT: I probably made that.

PT: Your mother's kitchen cabinets. How old were you then, fourteen or fifteen?

AT: I don't know. I think I tore down the first ones and rebuilt 'em.

SL: Well . . .

AT: Since then, but I—yeah, I did build the cabinets in the house.

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

[03:03:27] AT: I just . . .

SL: Go ahead.

AT: Just odds and ends I'd make that out of. I can't remember anything . . .

SL: Well . . .

AT: . . . I was thinkin' I did.

SL: I admire these, these shelves.

AT: Yeah, they've served the purpose pretty good.

SL: Well, they've held up all these years. [03:04:00] So then there's the—your dad had a sawmill, though, didn't he?

AT: Yeah. I call it a groundhog sawmill. That's one that—the type that they used to move around from one tract of timber to the next.

SL: Yep.

AT: But he just put it in a permanent location out here behind, you know, this bunch of trees out here. He ran it for years. He got rid of it a good while back. But he would—course, he had a man that ran the sawmill, did the sawin', and pretty well took care of that. But he had—Daddy had to oversee that, of course. And then he had a grist mill, which is a hammer mill that would make corn meal or corn chops for chickens or whatever. And he just tried that sporadic when he had—somebody wanted some, you know. And, oh, he had a sorghum mill to grind the—pulverize the sorghum stalks, squeeze the juice out of 'em, and then cook

the molasses. Of course, that was seasonal. If you didn't have sorghum growin', you didn't need [*laughs*] the sorghum mill.

[03:05:57] SL: Well, so, is sorghum—how big is the sorghum plant?

I mean, is it . . .

AT: Like a corn stalk.

SL: Okay.

AT: That's the best description I can give you.

SL: Well.

AT: It just doesn't have ears on it. You have to squeeze it to get the juice out of it.

SL: Okay. Now goin' back to the sawmill, how was it—when was that? When did he build that?

AT: Oh, gosh, I—been a lot of years. I can't remember what year he built it.

SL: So what drove it? I mean, was there a—what engine drove the blade?

AT: He had a John Deere Model D power unit.

SL: Kay. So that was gasoline.

AT: Huh?

SL: It was gasoline powered.

AT: Diesel fuel.

SL: Diesel fuel. Okay.

AT: I think that old engine run on tractor fuel, which was some—in between gasoline and diesel.

SL: Okay. All right. So was that like a six cylinder or three cylinder. I mean, how d . . .

AT: Six cylinder.

SL: Six cylinder. So it's kinda like a tractor engine, in a way.

AT: Yeah, but the old two-cylinder engine was flat. Cylinders ran this way. And this engine John Deere made, it . . .

SL: Up and down.

AT: . . . was—pistons vertical. And I think it was a six cylinder.

[03:07:44] SL: And was there a long belt?

AT: Yeah.

SL: That . . .

AT: Long belt runnin' from the engine to the mill.

SL: Right. Right. And would the—they'd lay the log on a track, and would it . . .

AT: On the carriage.

SL: Carriage?

AT: Rolled up there, and it had two blocks on it. Go up against, and then thing could slide down and stick in the log and hold it while you sawed off the side of it. When you got some off that side, and then you released the log, turned it over a half turn, put the

cut side against the block, locked it down, got the slab off the other side.

[03:08:40] SL: So did the saw move, or did the log move?

AT: The carriage moved the log . . .

SL: Log. Okay.

AT: . . . by the saw.

SL: All right. I would've liked to have seen that workin'.

AT: The sawyer pulled a lever, and the carriage run by the saw. It was a lot of work compared to the modern sawmills.

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*] Yeah.

AT: It'd get the job done.

SL: Yeah. Dangerous, too, I would guess.

AT: Well, about everything you do on the farm is dangerous.

SL: That's true. [*Laughs*] All right, so now how many mules did your dad have?

AT: I don't know exactly, but until we got the first tractor, he had a lot of [*laughs*] pullin' mules. I'm gonna guess maybe eight or ten.

SL: Eight or ten?

AT: That's a guesstimation. I was pretty small when he got that first tractor.

SL: Yeah.

AT: He started gettin' rid of mules. The tractor took over a big part of the work. But he still cultivated with the mules for a few more years before he decided that that cultivator on the tractor would work. And then he got rid of all the mules and . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . got another tractor and become a true tractor farmer.

SL: Well, that's where the industrial side of things . . .

AT: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: . . . started comin' in. You know. Who ever knew it'd be such a big scale later on, but you know, saved time.

AT: Yep.

SL: And money, I'm guessin'. [03:10:48] So now you said that you started—you were driving a tractor when you were ten years old.

AT: Yeah. Maybe earlier than that, but I was pretty small.

SL: That's a—that can be a dangerous machine, too. Wha . . .

AT: Yeah. But you know, all the country boys did that. I wasn't unique by any means. We just would start drivin' when we was eight or ten, and . . .

[03:11:30] SL: So there's a couple of questions I wanna ask you. In one of my interviews, someone talks about goin' on a date and going parking at the turn road or turnrow. Is that . . .

AT: Do what now?

SL: Turn road? Is there . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . a turn road?

AT: Oh, you got turnrows on every field. That's where the rows come out and end, and you gotta stop short at the end of the field . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . to have a place to turn around and get to go back.

SL: Okay.

AT: So that's the turnrow.

SL: That's the turnrow. Okay.

AT: And a lot of people plant across the end, plant the turnrow. And of course, you turn on it, and it gets messed up pretty good, but it'll make a little somethin'.

SL: Yeah. But you had a, really, a near-death experience drivin' a tractor.

[03:12:33] AT: Well, this was—first two or three tractors my dad had were lug-wheel tractors because he always had some new ground that had stumps in it, you know. And he didn't think—he thought that'd tear up a rubber tire. So he s—it was lug wheels.

SL: So lug-wheel means that it's made out of steel, and it had lug bolt . . .

AT: Lug nuts.

SL: . . . for the tread?

AT: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

AT: Well, those lugs were kinda sharp, maybe from wear, I don't know. But there was a post layin' in the field that was covered up with dirt. And one of those lugs—I was pullin' a section harrow. Just a harrow. Movin' along pretty good for an ol' lug-wheel tractor. Probably had it in high gear, which was still not all that fast, but—and one of those lugs stuck in that—I ran over that post. Stuck in that post, which was just under the dirt, and picked it up. Well, I had a—the back end of a cultivator on the tractor. It was kinda hard—took two or three people to pick one up and get it on there. And you just take the foot off of it, the plow foot, and leave that on there until you—if you's gonna go back and cultivate. But anyway, that was a iron bar about yay big. It's fastened to the back axle. And it curved and come back in, turned behind the wheel.

SL: Kay.

AT: Where the plow fit on it.

SL: Yeah.

[03:14:48] AT: Well, that part of the frame was on the tractor.

When it picked up this post, why, it caught that arm and brought it over with it. Well, that made it flip the post. So the post went over my head and landed out on the other side of the tractor.

Course, if I'd've got hit by that post, well, that'd been . . .

SL: Would've been it.

AT: . . . Katy, bar the door, probably. But it missed me, so I survived.

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah. Thank God.

AT: The Lord takes care of a lot of kids.

SL: That's right. That's right. Especially the kids. That's good.

Well, so did you—I mean, did you stop the tractor and mess with the post and get it out of the field, or did you just keep goin'?

AT: I don't know. I probably kept goin'. [*Laughter*]

SL: Didn't phase you.

AT: I might've moved—if that—if I'd already harrowed over there, I didn't have to move it.

SL: That's right.

AT: I just kept goin'.

[03:16:01] SL: [*Laughs*] Okay, so now I wanna—I think we oughta talk about Peggy a little bit.

AT: Talk about what?

SL: Peggy, your current—your wife.

AT: Oh, I couldn't print that.

SL: You couldn't print that? [*Laughter*] Well, just—I mean, so y'all met when you were like children, right?

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: Eight or nine years old or ten or somethin'.

AT: Which—see, I had a hus—aunt, my mother's sister, and her husband, Uncle Bill, lived in Elaine.

SL: Kay.

AT: And they had a son that was much older than me. And he got killed in service. But they had a daughter that was about my age. So we went back and forth to Elaine visitin' him, and him comin' up here. And Peg is—her sister's just a year older, Pat, and their parents moved on Deluce, to Elaine when we were both ten years old, I guess. That's when I first met her because she and Pat, her sister . . .

SL: Okay.

AT: . . . run around with Mary Louise, my cousin, all the time. And if they came up here to visit, they—a lot of times they would come with 'em. And if I went down there, of course, I would see 'em. And that's—I had—that's how I met 'em when she was nine, I was ten when we met for the first time. [03:18:10] Well, then it was somewhere, I think, during high school period of time,

and I had a few dates with her, but didn't progress very much. And I got married. She got married later on, and when—I was married to my first wife thirty years before she died. She was married about the same length of time to, I guess it was, her first husband, and he died. And we got back together, and went ahead and got married.

[03:19:12] SL: So that's so neat that y'all knew each other at such a young age.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And going through life . . .

AT: Nine and ten years old. I'm a year older than she is.

SL: Yeah. And then goin' through all the life and the challenges and the losses in life, and you come out and get back together. I think that's kinda neat.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And by all appearances just from what I've seen, you guys are doin' great.

AT: Well, so far it's worked out pretty good. [*SL laughs*] Maybe I got used to the punishments bein' married the first time, so . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: No.

[03:20:07] SL: What about the Woodruff Electric Co-op? Tell me—

you've been a member—you've been on the board or somethin'  
for that for a [*AB coughs*] long time or . . .

AT: Can't remember how long.

PT: Thirty-eight years.

AT: So years ago, when Franklin D. Roosevelt was president . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . he formed the REA, Rural Electric Administration.

SL: Yep.

AT: One purpose: bringing power to rural America. Because of  
[*unclear words*], they couldn't afford to build lines with the—a  
few takers on 'em, you know. They would get the small towns  
and the main highways, get to 'em—they had their average up,  
you know, ten, twelve customers to the mile. Well, the electric  
co-ops, they got a lot of lines that don't have but two or three  
customers to the mile.

SL: Right.

AT: Not a real quick profit, there. So rural co-ops sprung up all over  
the United States and built lines and brought power to the  
country. And she said it was thirty-eight years ago I got on the  
board, the board of governors—the governors of the co-op are  
elected from the membership.

SL: Okay.

AT: If you got a meter, you're a member. And of course, all my stuff's on REA lines, so I was a member, and somehow somebody nominated me and I got elected as—I been gettin' reelected ever since. [*SL laughs*]

[03:22:23] SL: So what—is it a challenge to keep the thing goin' or—I mean, does it still get government money to . . .

AT: No.

SL: No?

AT: We're . . .

SL: Just got it built.

AT: We're on our own now.

SL: You're on your own.

AT: We paid the government back everything years ago, and we're a self-sustained operation. Got our own generating plants and the whole works.

SL: I lease my hot water heater from an electric co-op in Cotter.

AT: You did what?

SL: I lease my wat—my hot water heater . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . from a co-op.

AT: Oh, you leased it. Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Northwest—North—I forget.

AT: North Arkansas?

SL: North Arkansas Electric Co-op. Yeah. NAEC. And I also get my fiber from them, my fiber for the internet.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[03:23:24] AT: We're doin' fiber now.

SL: Well, it makes a difference.

AT: Yeah.

SL: In fact, my son says, when he comes to visit and goes out to our house out in Cotter, that fiber is faster out there than it is in Fayetteville. So that's a good thing to provide that fiber connection.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

PT: He does that.

AT: Well, we're pickin' it up because it's just another service to the rural area that wouldn't have it otherwise.

SL: That's right. [03:24:02] Well, so let's talk . . .

AT: But we don't have any government money now.

SL: Right.

AT: Over the years we've paid off all the government put in to start it, see, which a lot of cooperative businesses are that way. The

government funded 'em, paid out, you know. So we're just another electric company is what it amounts to.

SL: It's a little bit different, though, because there's membership involved, and there's voting involved.

AT: Yeah, we're not in the business to make money.

SL: Right.

AT: We're owned by the people we serve, and that's the ones that's got a meter. And we've got enough people on our land now that we're a profitable organization, and we paid ourselves off. And I don't know, there might be some newer electric co-ops that are still not paid out, but . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . most of us are.

[03:25:17] SL: So let's talk about how long have you run this store that we're in now?

AT: Well, I was born into it. [*Laughs*]

SL: So you've worked it . . .

AT: So I guess since I got outta school, [19]55, probably is about when I started to take the credit for runnin' it.

SL: So but you made—you had to make a decision about whether to keep it open or to close it.

AT: Yeah.

SL: And it just looked like—how long ago did you close it?

AT: How what?

SL: How long ago did you close it? When did you close the . . .

AT: Oh, I guess it's been a couple of years.

SL: Just a couple of years?

AT: Peg.

PT: Yeah.

AT: How long has it been closed?

PT: Well, COVID came in in March of 2020, and the girl that was workin' here fell and hurt her knee, not here, but she fell and hurt her knee. And she was a very large girl, and so her doctor suggested that she retire on disability, which she did, and A.B. has never employed anyone else. So it officially closed in like November of [20]20. But you know, he didn't have an employee, and he didn't have any sales tax to pay because he had the store closed, you know, so records started reducing down, so his CPA suggested that he just declare it closed. So the final report, you know, the final sales report and that sort of thing. So.

[03:27:08] SL: Well, so how've you been the past couple of years not having the store open? Is it—has it been hard not to . . .

AT: Well, after you do it all your life, you know, you can't say you

don't miss it, but I got my office down here. I'm down here in and out all the time.

SL: Okay. So it's not like you've turned your back on it or anything.

AT: No.

SL: And left. You're still here.

AT: If anybody knocks on the door and I've got it, I still sell it.

[Laughs]

SL: There you go. Well, it's a wonderful space. We've had a really good time in here talkin' with you. Is there anything else that we should be talkin' about before we close this up? Is there anything that you would like to say about your life or any—just anything you wanna talk about, anything you wanna say?

AT: I don't know of anything. Peg, you know anything we missed?

PT: I've given him a couple of ideas there.

SL: Oh, now wait a minute. What's this business about you breeding quarter horses? We hadn't talked anything about horses.

AT: Well, that's been quite a few years ago, but I did have quarter horses for a while. I had a man that worked for me that really loved to mess with horses, liked to ride horses. And I kinda got into it because I had him. And it's not a money-makin' enterprise. Or it wasn't for me, but I kept 'em several years, and I don't care anything about ridin' horses.

SL: Yeah.

AT: So there wasn't any need to be stayin' with it. And he retired, so I didn't have anybody to really look after 'em. So I got out of the business.

[03:29:31] SL: So would people buy them to enter races in or . . .

AT: Well, quarter horses, they do have races, but they—a lot of people buy 'em if they got cattle to work cattle with.

SL: I see.

AT: And a lot of 'em just like to ride a pleasure horse.

SL: Just to have a horse to ride.

AT: But . . .

PT: Tell him about the one that Alex has. The one . . .

AT: The one that who?

PT: The one that Alex Palmer has. He's twenty-one years old, and he's still riding it.

SL: Huh.

PT: It's one of A.B.'s breeds.

AT: Who had it?

PT: Alex Palmer over in Mississippi.

AT: Oh, yeah.

SL: So what about Allie Palmer's horse? What . . .

AT: Well, he's one that I sold that I raised. And did you say he still

had it, Peg?

PT: He's out in his backyard, he said. Feeds him every day twice a day.

AT: Twenty-one years old.

PT: Twenty-one years old.

[03:30:37] SL: So what's the life expectancy of a horse?

AT: I guess in the twenties, wouldn't you say, Peg?

PT: Oh, yes, or in the thirties.

SL: Really.

PT: [*Unclear words*]

AT: Really?

SL: Wow.

AT: I didn't know they lived that long. [*SL laughs*] She's got racehorses.

PT: I'm Thoroughbred, now, not quarter.

AT: Peggy does. So she raises Thoroughbreds. Not here. She's got 'em farmed out different places but her other husband was in that business, and when he died, well, she stay—she kept the horses, and when I married her, she had the horses, and she's still got 'em. But she races 'em and wins a little every once in a while.

SL: She could loan us some money, then.

AT: Huh?

SL: She could loan us money, then?

AT: Yeah, [*SL laughs*] she could. But she would go . . .

[03:31:39] PT: And they go to oh—they'll go down to Oaklawn. I had some at Oaklawn last year. They'll go back this year. They won a race.

AT: She had one, the latest ones raced placed second in a \$130,000 race.

SL: Oh.

AT: So that'd give her a little money to buy feed for another month or two.

SL: [*Laughs*] Really, it takes—I guess it matters how the . . .

AT: She's got—she has a lot of expense 'cause she's got several horses. And they're all farmed out, and she's payin' a trainer to train 'em and . . .

SL: Right.

AT: . . . all that kind of stuff.

SL: Yeah.

AT: So you have to hit pay dirt every once in a while to stay in the business.

SL: Support the brand.

AT: Huh?

SL: Support the brand, you know . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . the enterprise. All right, so now . . .

AT: But she's got some pretty good horses. Any time you can do well at Oaklawn, you got pretty good quality 'cause Oaklawn don't run a bunch of junk.

SL: Right. I've gone there a couple of times.

AT: Yeah.

SL: It's fun.

PT: It's fun.

[03:33:01] SL: Yeah. All right, now I've got this note in front of me about buying the first mechanical cotton picker. Is that—did you do that, or did your dad do that?

AT: I did it. It was the first one for us, but . . .

SL: Oh.

AT: . . . it wasn't the first one . . .

SL: Made.

AT: . . . come into the area. Yeah, I had—before I quit raisin' cotton, I had, I don't know, one or two one rows, and then I traded up and had a two row when I decided to get outta cotton. You can't find enough folks with a nine-foot cotton sack to pick it if you—any more. You gotta have a mechanical pickers.

SL: So I guess a one row means it picks cotton off one row at a time.

[03:34:16] AT: It mounted on a tractor.

SL: Right.

AT: And picked one row. And the two-row machine was a self-contained machine. Picked two rows at a time. Now they got six rows.

SL: Golly.

AT: Pick six at a time.

PT: The point is he had the first one in this whole area. So he was the Mr. Genius that started the . . .

SL: The Mr. Genius. [*Laughs*]

PT: . . . investment.

AT: Peg, I don't think I had the first one in the area.

PT: You said—you told me that.

AT: Huh?

PT: You told me that.

AT: Well, if I told you that, I guess it was right. I can't remember. But I knew I had to go that route, not do the hand pickin' anymore. When I got around the cotton pickers is when I decided I was gonna raise cotton.

SL: Well.

AT: My cotton wasn't bringin' enough to make much money at that time. Now I kinda think it's gonna come back. I see more cotton this year than I have in several years.

SL: We saw a lot. We went across the river, and we saw—I saw one field that you could see cotton as far as you could see. I mean, I hadn't seen that big a field in a while. [03:35:44] So what about soy beans?

AT: That's what we would grow, mostly.

SL: Yeah?

AT: Have to have a combine to get them.

SL: Hmm?

AT: Have to have a combine to get them. You . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: Cotton picker don't do you any good.

SL: Right. [*Laughs*] Right. So I was talkin'—I'd heard that the Mississippi River was so low that the barges couldn't be pushed up. Then I talked to somebody that lived in Helena, and he said, "No, they're still runnin' barges." He thought that you only need—they only need about nine feet of water to go up and down. Is that what you understand?

AT: That's probably about right. They have to be careful where they run 'cause they can't just run anywhere in the river when it's

down like it is now.

SL: Yeah.

AT: But they are still runnin'. But I—Big Creek. It runs about a mile and a half west-east to here . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . runs into the Mississippi. And I kinda tell by it, and it's just dang near dry. So I knew it had to be gettin' low, the river, that is. And but this—it's kind of a common practice for it to be low this time of year. And they can't have as long of barge tows.

[03:37:28] SL: Right.

AT: Because they have to maneuver and stay with the deep water. They can't . . .

SL: You can't have many.

AT: . . . don't have as—or can't have as much length.

SL: Right.

AT: The barge tows. But they are still runnin'. But it is low. And I'm sure they're runnin' aground in places.

SL: Yeah. Well, someone said they just saw a bunch of trucks just backed up, a lot of 'em, just backed up waiting.

AT: Yeah.

SL: To get the stuff out there.

AT: I know just lookin' out across it that it's gettin' pretty—the

river's pretty low.

SL: Yeah. Well, we crossed it yesterday, and I'd never seen that much sand on both sides, on the bank.

PT: Sand bars.

SL: It was really . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: . . . out there pretty far. [03:38:19] So do you wanna talk about your kids or your grandkids? You get to see 'em much anymore or . . .

AT: Well, I don't see 'em as much as I'd like to, but we saw 'em last weekend, wasn't it, Peg?

PT: Yeah.

AT: We went to Fayetteville, and they came over.

PT: And this weekend.

AT: Her—my daughter lives in Little Rock, and we see her more regular then we do my son, Art.

SL: So your son is up in Fayetteville.

AT: No, he's in Tulsa now.

SL: Oh, he's in Tulsa now.

AT: He came over . . .

SL: He came over to Fayetteville.

AT: . . . to Fayetteville last weekend, and we were up there. We got

to see him. We're supposed to see him this weekend, too, aren't we, Peg?

PT: Yes. His birthday weekend is coming up.

AT: Yeah.

SL: Well, that sounds good.

AT: I got a birthday, and my grandson's got a birthday. And who else has got a birthday?

PT: ?Kent Henry?.

AT: Oh, Peg's got a birthday.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's a good one to remember.

AT: Yeah. And so we're gonna get together this weekend in Little Rock.

[03:39:45] SL: Well, that's good. It sounds like the family's still holdin' together and . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: That sounds good.

PT: Tell him what you're gonna do Saturday evening for the first time.

AT: For the first time.

PT: Yeah. Aunt Bonnie.

AT: What?

PT: Aunt Bonnie.

SL: Hand Bonnie.

PT: What?

SL: Hand Bonnie.

PT: Aunt Bonnie.

SL: Aunt Bonnie.

AT: Oh! Is it that quick?

PT: That's next Saturday.

[03:40:24] AT: My first cousin was married to this lady, and he died several years ago.

SL: Okay.

AT: And she died here just last week. And they had one son. And he called me and asked me to do the funeral.

SL: Wow.

AT: So I gotta do a funeral for my first cousin's wife.

PT: He is ninety-eight.

AT: It'll be a first.

SL: Yeah. Yeah. That's hard. Kay, well, before we end, I do wanna talk to you about something that I found out about you, and that's your dancing.

AT: My what?

SL: Dancing. How you dance. How you can dance.

AT: Oh, I just—it's just regular ballroom dancing's all I do.

SL: Yeah? Well, it's my understanding you must do it pretty well.

AT: Well, my wife's been nice enough to make me think I did.

SL: Ah.

AT: I don't think I'm any better than anybody else, but I guess you'd say a foxtrot . . .

SL: Yeah.

AT: . . . is what I'm . . .

PT: And a jitterbug.

SL: Ooo. Jitterbug, too.

PT: Oh, yeah.

AT: Well, I did do that.

PT: That was our—mm-hmm.

[03:42:04] AT: But I started dancin' pretty young 'cause most of the boys wouldn't dance. And all them girls were just anxious to get on the floor, you know. I kinda liked that, so I started gettin' out there. And it helps you get in with the girls.

SL: I think the lyric to the song is, "It's plowin' time again in the field of opportunity." [*Laughter*]

AT: I don't do a whole lot of it anymore, but . . .

SL: But back in the day, you saw an opportunity there.

AT: Boy, I made 'em all—[*coughs*] because a girl, even if she won't go out with you, she'll most of the time dance with you if she—

[*laughs*] if you're both at the same dance.

SL: Right. Well . . .

[03:43:15] AT: I didn't know that helped me get Peg, but I guess it did.

SL: Well, it's the little things. [*Laughs*]

AT: Peg.

PT: Yeah.

AT: Is there anything I wanna tell him about the kids? I'm crazy about both of 'em, and I think they're top notch individuals, but I can't think of anything particular to talk about.

PT: Well, you might mention that Art was up at the university and became a Sigma Nu, and has achieved quite a record in his employment. We should mention that he's a mechanical engineer.

AT: He's what?

PT: A mechanical . . .

SL: He's a mechanical engineer. We've . . .

AT: Yeah.

SL: You told me he was a mechanical engineer, but—and I'm—you may have said that he also became a Sigma Nu. But sounds like he had a really strong legacy, you know, opportunity there.

PT: They didn't know their grandparents, A.B.'s mother and daddy.

So—unfortunately.

SL: Yeah.

AT: What'd you say, Peg?

PT: They did not know your grandpar—your parents.

AT: Oh. No. That's right.

[03:44:52] SL: Well, is there anything else you wanna say before we wrap up? I think we've done pretty good here.

AT: I think I've told you more than I know already. [*SL laughs*] Do you know of anything, Peg?

PT: Not really, except how very successful he is because what he inherited, he has multiplied many times. And he would never tell anyone this, you know. But . . .

AT: I've done what?

SL: Oh, she's just saying that you were . . .

PT: What you inherited . . .

SL: . . . what your folks gave you, you've taken and multiplied many times, that you've been a great steward of what was given you and . . .

AT: Well, I managed to hang onto it. Hang onto to what they left me, you know. And it's helped me make a pretty decent livin'. I just—I don't know of anything that I done except tried to take care of business.

SL: Well, it sounds like you've done a very good job of taking care of business. But I sense that were values that you got when you were young that helped you get through everything you've gone through and have made things better.

AT: Yeah.

SL: You had an opportunity to make things better, and you've done just that, so . . .

AT: Well, the main thing—the Lord's been good to me. I just—I think I've outlived all my folks except one aunt that lived to be ninety-eight, I think. So he's left me here for some reason. I hope I find out what it is. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, I'm sure you will. You know, it's good. You know, this—I think he just—your work is not done yet, you know. You've got more to do.

AT: Well, I hope so. And I hope I get it done.

SL: I'm confident that you will.

[End of interview 03:47:53]