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Arkansas Memories Project

Interview with:

Al Witte

7 February 2008
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Interviewer: Scott Lunsford

[00:00:00.00]

Scott Lunsford: Okay. Today we are at the Al Witte residence in Fayetteville, Arkansas. It is February seventh, 2008. My name is Scott Lunsford and we'll be interviewing Al Witte. Al, I'm gonna tell you that this recording—this videotape recording is going to reside in the Special Collections Department at the University of Arkansas Mullins Library, Fayetteville campus. It is a part of the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History. And I just need to ask you if it's okay with you that we're doing this and that it live there.

Al Witte: Oh, yes, more than okay. I feel privileged.

SL: Okay. Great. Now, the next thing that we like to do is, we like for you to state your full name and just spell your full name so everybody gets that right.

AW: Yes, I—I—I—I will do that.

SL: Okay, thank you.

AW: My name started out as Albert—A-L-B-E-R-T—Matthew—M-A-T-T-H-E-W—Witte—W-I-T-T-E. I was a junior. Now, I was raised in the Catholic Church, and their tradition is that when you go through the confirmation process—usually around age twelve or so—that you adopt a name, preferably of a saint. And I adopted the name Francis—F-R-A-N-C-I-S, after St. Francis of Assisi, who is famous in—in that church. So I like to tell people my full name—Albert Matthew Francis Witte, Jr., and—but I haven't been a junior for a long time.

[00:01:46.01] SL: Well, let's talk a little bit about—first of all, where and when you were you born?

AW: I was born on October 25, 1923, in a hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I have no memory of Pittsburgh because my parents—not long after that—no more than a year or two—moved to Detroit, Michigan, where I lived until I was four years old. My parents separated when I was four and—leaving my mother to contend with me and a younger brother, who had just turned three, and a newborn daughter. So there were three children in that age group, and she—primarily for economic reasons—was forced to move to Erie, Pennsylvania, and live with her—her parents—my grandparents—there—thereafter. And she remained in Erie 'til she died. I left when I enlisted in the service.

[00:02:57.03] SL: Do you remember much about the household there—your grandparents' household?

AW: Yes, it—I do. It was—it was an interesting household. I—I—I kind of like to generalize, I guess maybe my nature, but I don't know how many other house-

holds were like it, but my feeling was that—that the whole neighborhood had similarities in terms of—especially because there were so many Irish living in my—or people of Irish descent living in my area, that it was the old-fashioned Irish matriarchy. And my grandmother was the center of power and authority. And it was an—an interesting relationship because none of her children could conceive of ever disobeying their mother. Whatever she said, however burdensome they felt it was, it never occurred to them that they could have disobeyed her. They—they did everything she ordered them to do. My grandfather, who was older and retired, was really, I think, more like a boarder. His children paid no attention to him.

SL: Hmm.

AW: He—his pension was \$15 a month, so that was barely enough for Red Man chew and a few other things. He had no job. He was probably in his sixties or seventies when I first met him. But in any event, it was run by my mother—my grandmother, I'm sorry—and in a small house—you may have a picture of it eventually—a three-bedroom house. She—she—she commanded one bedroom for herself and in another bedroom all the males lived, which at that time were my grandfather, two uncles and a brother. So there were five males in one bedroom and four females—my mother, two unmarried sisters, and my sister in the other bedroom, and my grandmother in the middle. It was a small house, but I—but like most of the houses built up there, it had a cellar for what I'll call the furnace and the—washing clothes and storing coal, which was what we'd use for fuel in the winter. And it had an attic for a storeroom, so . . .

[00:05:31.19] SL: What was your mother's maiden name?

AW: My mother's maiden name was Sarah Elizabeth Young—Y-O-U-N-G.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And my grandfather—her father—was—had—he said—from Scotland and where the Young is—is a clan, I think, is my understanding. But he also mentioned Irish—some Irish in his background. Her mother was a Sullivan, and they were passionate Irish, I would call them. And her—her ancestors immigrated here. I think it had something to do with the potato famine in the 1840s and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . they all settled in Pennsylvania.

[00:06:24.24] SL: What did your mother or father—how far did their education go?

What . . . ?

AW: Well, my mother was the oldest of seven children, and so she quit school after the sixth grade.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I might add I teased her unmercifully because for those of you old enough to remember a popular television show called *The Beverly Hillbillies* . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . that Jethro Bodine had also completed six grades, and I pointed out to her that . . .

SL: [Laughs]

AW: . . . she and Jethro had gotten—well, never mind. But that's—that was my mother. She went to work and got a job at the telephone company after six—after her

sixth year and helped support the family. And she was a—she much more cultured and, I think, intelligent than I ever was or hoped to be. She was very fond of the opera, plays, and reading. She read voraciously and—whenever she could. She was a very cultured woman and—but self-made.

[00:07:41.10] SL: And what about her mom and dad? Did they . . . ?

AW: I have no idea—no idea. My—my grandmother ran—worked—you talk about woman's day is never done—her day was never done. She—she got up at 5:00—like, say, a winter morning. She got up at 5:00 a.m. She stoked the furnace up and got it going again after it had died out during the—the night. And then she would start chores—washing clothes, preparing meals, cleaning the house, and then about 9:00 at night—then she'd go 'til 9:00 at night—just work, work, work. And she'd settle down, finally—listen to the radio and drink three bottles of Canadian ale. That was her day. And she was tough. She had to be. At the time, I thought she was mean, but I realized as I grew older, her—her—her life was extraordinarily difficult in terms of how—how much she had to do to take care of this large family. And so I—I empathize with her now.

[00:08:56.05] SL: Well, now, this was in Erie, Pennsylvania. The—was the—was it like a Brownstone or what kind of house . . . ?

AW: No, little—little frame houses. What happened was—and the reason my family moved from Butler, Pennsylvania, to Erie was two German brothers—two brothers from Germany—the Baron brothers—legends at Erie—had developed a process for making what then was called premium bond paper—the best paper for writing letters and so on and so—thought it—we all thought it was the Cadillac of

premium bond paper. And they opened a business in Erie called the Hammermill Paper Company.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And it was a very successful business and it continued—it opened in the early 1900s, as I recall. And my great-Uncle John had emigrated up to Erie and gone to work for them and was so pleased with working conditions and salaries that he wrote his sister, which was my grandmother, and said, “You all ought to come up here and go to work for the Hammermill Paper Company.” And they did. So they lived at—all the houses were of the sort that you would imagine were built around the paper company—small houses. I remember my aunt telling me that my house was built for \$3,000 back around World War I, and—and all the houses were the same—not the same shape—not clones, but pretty much the same size and square footage, and very small yards—very small.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And—and they all pretty much fit the same economic level.

SL: Single story with a basement.

AW: Yeah, exactly. No, no, there were two stories and then the attic and the basement.

SL: Oh, I see.

AW: But it was very—they were narrow houses.

[00:11:02.00] SL: Uh-huh. Was there electricity and running water?



AW: Oh, yeah, all of that. I’ve never known anything else of civilized living, but the big deal was using coal for fuel in the—because coal is so dirty and it creates such a heavy ash that had to be carried—you know, shoveled out and taken down to the

city dump. I can't tell you what a big deal it was when they finally built a pipe-line and we got heating oil in that area—especially the women went bananas, you might say. They—they were so joy—it was really, really a big time when—when they were able to shift away from coal to the . . .

[00:11:50.00] SL: Well, the coal—there'd be a coal truck that would come and it would . . .

AW: Yes, it—I . . .

SL: . . . dump coal down the chute.



AW: I—I remember. Well, we had a—we had a walled-off space down there, and each August you'd get a ton of coal and hope that it was enough for the winter. And it—it was dirty, dusty. It's hard, I guess, for younger people to realize it, and the factories, like the Hammernill Paper Company. Excuse me. [Cough] The—they had these smokestacks and they—they were using coal and—and you—you'd—you hung your clothes out to dry in the back yard and then all of a sudden you'd see that smoke coming and you'd run out and capture 'em before they got all dirty and needed to be washed again. It was a—a lot of fun in a way, but it was a different type of challenge to day-to-day living. Yeah, I—there—there were a lot of remnants of the old days. There was the ragman. I don't know if you ever heard of the ragman. He'd come down with—he'd have his horse and a wagon and I never paid—we never paid much attention to him except to harass him, you know—yell at him—try to sneak a ride or something. But the women sold him things or bought things from him. I'm not sure. But he was called the ragman.

We had the—the old tinkers. Have you ever heard of a tinker? Do you know what a tinker is?

SL: Uh-uh.

AW: They were supposed to be bad people—I think gypsies. But he'd come up—walked down the street and every house he'd stop. “Do you have any knives to sharpen?” And he clanged with all the metal stuff he had on him. He did all these chores. [Once in a while]—yeah, this was real—you might say nineteenth-century stuff that was still around in the 1930s—horse-drawn wagons. We had an iceman. You didn't—we didn't have refrigerators. “Ice today?” And, of course, when you're a kid you ran out—you wanted to get a slice of ice to eat to cool off. And the—and the women would order twenty-five or fifty pounds and he'd carry it in and put it in a refrigerator to cool the—to keep the food cool. Didn't need it in the wintertime, but summer you sure did. And we had—you had all the door-to-door people. You had a—you had your bread man, your milkman. All of that was still the common way of—of living—not having to go to the store in the morning to get milk or anything like that. Those were considered very good jobs. They paid well. But all of that's gone, of course.

[00:14:24.01] SL: Bread, milk delivered every day.

AW: Every day. The milk was delivered every. I—I would not say every day. I—I can't swear to Sunday, let's say.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I just don't remember that detail. But I think usually—I didn't pay any attention to it as—as a kid, but I think they usually had an understanding—like with the

bread man, that every two days or every three days he'd bring a loaf of bread by or whatever else they had as a standing order. And the milk was the same—quart of milk every day—maybe two when we were—when we had such a big household.

[00:15:00.17] SL: So were the women in the household—did they all work at the—at the . . . ?

AW: Yes, my mother got a job as a—as a telephone operator. Have you ever seen the old movies, you know? They had those switchboards . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . and they'd plug in the things. You know, that's what she was. That's what she was before she got married, and then when she got back—went and moved back with her parents, she worked at a—the Lawrence Hotel, which was the big, classy hotel in town, and she was a switchboard operator. I remember she made \$17 a week, and that—that was after we got a raise to \$17. I remember that. My Aunt Katherine was the success story. She was—well, as I've often used to describe her—the greatest legal secretary in the history of the world. But she—she was a secretary for a very successful lawyer and, you know, today she'd be a lawyer. But then that didn't happen, and so she was his secretary, and they were almost like partners. My friends used to tease me years later. She—he'd say, “How's the law firm of [Sylan?] and Young?” You know [laughter], she was his secretary, but that's one way to describe her. She was a very, very bright woman, and my—my Aunt Nell worked, but she got married very soon. And that was

considered a good thing because the—it took away—took away a mouth to feed, so to speak.

SL: Well, it lessened the burden.

AW: Whereas the—the sons weren't allowed to because they needed the—needed—my grandmother needed their checks to keep the household going. So, yes, my mother and my sister had actually—they bonded, let's say, and they lived together until my aunt died, and my mother went in a nursing home and so on 'til her death. But they worked. And then, of course, with men—my Uncle Dan worked at the paper company—at the Hammermill Paper Company, and Uncle John graduated from high school in 1931, which was the real depths of the [Great] Depression. FDR [President Franklin Delano Roosevelt] was elected in 1932. But the 1930s were so tough on young men trying to find a steady job that he didn't get one for—I think it was either eight or nine years, where all he had to do was face either unemployment or temporary work. And a lot—some of it was [to] make work for government programs. They had what they called the WPA [Works Progress Administration].

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:17:40.04] AW: And I remember one fall his job was to rake leaves off of city property. He—he was a bread man or a deliveryman for Jewel T for a brief spell—got laid off—that sort of thing. And he did not—and then World War II was what really changed the economy. General Electric Company was a big plant in the area at that time, and they got some contracts from Great Britain when the war started in 1939. And so they hired people. My uncle was hired and stayed

with General Electric the rest of his life. But he went from high school graduation for eight or nine years before he got what we would—and any job was considered acceptable. None of this— “Well, I’m just gonna do what—something I enjoy doing.” It was whatever you could find. And so that was his situation.

SL: So . . .

AW: But they all tried—they either worked or tried very hard to work.

[00:18:44.21] SL: Was—was he the only one that finished high school in the household?

AW: Well, let’s see. My—my mother I’ve described—sixth grade. Her—the next oldest was a—her brother, Robert, and he finished seventh grade, and then he also went to work at the Hammer[mill]—and he ended up at the Hammermill Paper Company and had a very successful career there, but he started out as the lowest form of employee they had there and rose really to the top. I think my Aunt Katherine was next, and I think she finished secretarial school. I don’t know what level that would be—high school, maybe.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And then I think thereafter they all—I’m pretty sure they all finished high school, but I don’t want to swear to it. I know John did. He was very bright. He finished high school at sixteen, I think.

[00:19:38.28] SL: So you never knew or met your father?

AW: My—I can—I—I’d just as soon go into that because it—it has a beginning and somewhat of an end, and it’s not all that long. I was four years old and I never—no—no one in my family ever mentioned him. My mother never mentioned him.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: It was like he didn't exist.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And so for a child, I guess, you—he doesn't exist. One day an old-fashioned car, like a Model A Ford or something—pulled up in front of the house and these two men got out and they looked very remarkably alike, and I thought I saw a resemblance to them. And turned out one of them was my father and the other was an uncle. I have no memory of talking to him.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:20:29.12] AW: The only memory I really have—it was a sunny day and watching him and his brother get in the car and drive away. I didn't know at the time. I had no idea what they were doing there. I found out years and years later that he meanwhile had found a woman that he wanted to marry and so he was going to—he was there to ask my mother for a divorce. And—and as you know, in those days divorce was much more difficult. My mother was a Catholic and a very devout Catholic, so that the idea of divorce was anathema to her, so she turned him down. He had no grounds against her. She could've had grounds, I guess, of desertion or something against him.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:21:11.04] AW: So she refused. And I have no memory of talking—even talking to him. And—and I was probably eight or nine at the time. Then at age twelve I was sitting and watching some men play softball one evening after dinner—dirty, grimy, after a hard day's play—and there was a tap on my shoulder and I turned and it was my father. He said, "Go on home and get cleaned up. I'm taking you

and your brother to Cleveland,” which is 100 miles west. And, again, his brother—my Uncle Ed—was with him, and so the two males—the two adults and my brother, who was—I was about twelve. He was about ten or eleven. And we went to Cleveland, which was the first time we’d ever been out of Erie. We stayed at a hotel. They had a swimming pool, which we thought was totally amazing. The Allerton Hotel—Cleveland, Ohio. We saw a baseball game and came home that—I didn’t see or hear or think of him again ‘til I was twenty-four years old, and somehow he found out that I was a student in Chicago [Illinois]—persuaded me to go visit him where he was now living, in Dayton, Ohio, and I did. I had a very uncomfortable feeling. I—I don’t know how to explain it except I just felt like I was betraying my mother somehow.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And so I was never comfortable with him. And I went to visit him, though, about two or three times because, you know, the—it is your father.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:22:45.08] AW: Then after I graduated from school and I was teaching up in Rippen, Wisconsin—Rippen College—and it was—so he called me and wanted me to visit him at Christmas. Well, I’d already made other plans, and when I told him that, he got very—I think he was drunk and he got nasty on the phone. And I said, “No, I’m not coming to see you,” and that’s the last I ever spoke to him. He died young of, I was told, high blood pressure. And so I thought that was the end of that, except he—he meanwhile had gotten a divorce, and I’m not sure if they ever married, but he was living with a woman named Alice while I was there, and

I found out later she was pregnant when he died. So I have a half-brother, Richard, who's thirty-two years younger than I am. And we've never met, but about—I'd say twelve years or fifteen years ago he called me, and we had a nice chat. And he told me a lot of things I didn't know, though none of them are important enough for me to write down or remember or do anything about. But one of the things he told me is my name may very well not be Witte, which I think is interesting. According to him—now, this is all—I just learned this as an adult and a veteran—that my paternal grandfather was from Lithuania, and when I say grandfather, it's the sort of thing—it may have been great-grandfather, but I think it was a grandfather, and he escaped from Lithuania as a draft-dodger because he was subject to being drafted into the czar's army and—for which I might add I am eternally grateful. But according to my half-brother, Richard, the family name may very well have been Ulakis—U-L-A-K-I-S. I don't really like to think too much about it, but mostly when I do I find it funny for various reasons. One is growing up, people would say, "Well, what kind of a name is Witte?" And I'd make up things—that I was—Germany was bad news, you know, under [German dictator Adolph] Hitler, so you'd say—sometimes I would say I was Dutch and then sometimes I'd say, "What the hell, I'm German, but East German," especially after I found out there was a man named Count [Serge Julievich] Witte, who was the prime minister of Russia under the last czar [Nikolas II], and I said we were—my family were serfs. I'd make up all these . . .

SL: Hmm. [Laughs]

AW: . . . background stories, because I had no idea. I didn't know my family—my father's family and it sounded plausible.

SL: [Laughs]

[00:25:40.05] AW: Then I find that there's a good chance I'm from Lithuania, which is even more delightful to me. And what can I say except that's what my half-brother said may very well be the family history. The reason I'm confused is because the world is more full of Albert M. Wittes than you would believe. There was a store in Erie that I used to gaze at the sign out in front because it said, "Albert M. Witte Grocery Store." [Laughter] And—and I—I don't know what went through my mind, but—and then I have a colleague—former colleague named Dick Richards, and he got into genealogy. And he—he did mine because I was too lazy. And there were all sorts of Albert M. Wittes—born in Chicago, 1895—could've been my grandfather, you know? So I'm confused.

SL: []

JE: We should stop so . . .

AW: What did I do?

SL: Nothing. Just a second, we're gonna let Lynn in here and . . .

[Tape Stopped]

[00:26:35.28] Trey Marley: FireStore good.

AW: [Coughs] Excuse me.

JE: Yes.

AW: So I—I've talked—he called me again years later.

SL: Your half-brother?

AW: My half-brother—I'm sorry—Richard, who seems like a very decent fellow, but I know very little about him other than we've had two phone conversations over the years, and the—the first one he was in Knoxville, Tennessee, and I think he was still going to school there or perhaps his wife was. But—and then later they moved to somewhere in New Jersey—northern New Jersey, he said, and I don't—but I don't keep up with him. It just—it just doesn't seem that important to me, apparently. Back to my father—I should've figured out something, but I was oblivious, and that is the first time I went to visit him, his—his mother was living with him, and she spoke no—not a word of English. I mean, I don't know that she could say hello. She was just a sweet-looking, sweet-acting woman. She smiled and, you know, it was her grandson and all. But—you gotta excuse me—[coughs] she—we—we could not talk. And I should've realized then that she spoke a language that was not German. And it turned it—could—probably it was Lithuanian, but I missed that opportunity. I never occurred to me to ask.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:28:11.10] AW: And my relationship—so my relationship with my father really ended unhappily because he got angry with me 'cause I wouldn't come visit him at Christmas, and I got even angrier and ice—more icy with him. I had no feeling for him, really, if the truth were known—for thinking that he was that important in my life that I would care.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:28:36.21] AW: And that I—I had my own life and he had never been a part of it. And, you know, when you think that from age twelve to twenty-four, he never

made an effort to say, “How are you?” or “How are you doing in school?” or a birthday card or—you know? Nothing.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And—and also I found him to be a little overbearing. He actually had the nerve to say, “Well, I’m your father.” And I thought, “My God, who needs you for a father?”

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And—and I guess I feel much better. I have to mention the fact that I thought, “Well, maybe I’m—maybe I just don’t have a nice nature,” which other people have speculated also. And—but my brother, it turned out, who was living in Detroit [Michigan], and later on when we got together, it turned out he and I had the same—same relationship and same feelings about it, and I was so grateful because I had loved my brother and . . .

[00:29:45.06] SL: Well, it sounds like maybe he—the uncles that you grew up with in—the house—in your grandmother’s house—were probably more father figures than . . .

AW: Yes. The one I liked the best was—I always refer to him as my drinking uncle—Uncle Dan. [Laughter] He was—he was a great uncle. Everybody—excuse me—should have an Uncle Dan.

SL: Do you want to take a minute?

AW: Yeah, I do.

SL: Okay, let’s take a minute. Let’s stop tape and take . . .

AW: I get emotional.

SL: That's all right. That's all right. You're fine. There are no mistakes here.
There's no—there's nothing wrong here.

[Tape Stopped]

TM: Clear.

[00:30:25.04] AW: Well, finishing off my father is—I was a young lawyer at Milwaukee [Wisconsin]. It was about—I would say it was about 1955 or 1956.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And I got a telegram from the woman that I think may have been his wife but may have been just a kind of live-in girlfriend and the mother of Richard . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . to say that he had died.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: He was—I don't know that he was sixty yet.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I think he was still in his fifties. He'd had high blood pressure, and I gather that was—I think that was in the telegram. But I—I—by then I had no feeling and I didn't go to the funeral or anything.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: So that really—except for the later experiences with—with Richard . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . that's the end of that saga. I'll—I must admit I have no desire to investigate the Ulakis connection. [Laughter]

[00:31:27.26] SL: Well, we'll let some other researcher do that.

AW: Yes, but there—it is kind of curious.

SL: It is kind of a—a neat name.

AW: Yeah.

SL: Funny-sounding name.

AW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

AW: But I feel very—I feel very good about Lithuanians.

SL: Uh-huh. [Laughs]

AW: Occasionally you'll find someone from Lithuania who has accomplished something good and I get a warm feeling.

SL: [Laughs] Well, that may be some kind of indication.

AW: Yeah.

[00:31:50.24] SL: There may be some truth there somewhere. Well, let's go back to Erie and—and—and growing up. You had running water. You had electricity. You talked about the coal and the amazing transformation into heating oil. And that was piped in. There wasn't a . . .

AW: Yeah, that's right. They built a pipeline, I guess, from Texas up there. And believe me, war declared was not more important [laughter] than that pipeline.

[Laughter] It really changed our lives.

SL: Uh-huh. The streets were paved.

AW: Oh, yes.

SL: It was—it was a city . . .

AW: Sidewalks.

SL: City environment.

AW: Sidewalks. It was an old-fashioned city—the sidewalks everywhere so you could walk everywhere. The downtown area was everything. All—all—the whole community lived around the downtown area. That's where the best stores were, the best restaurants, the more economical—the five- and ten-cent stores, the pool halls and movie houses. Everything was downtown. You know, every—every walk of life went downtown for some reason or other according—including business. So I'm thinking of it from the perspective of someone who left shortly after high school.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:33:02.16] AW: So the youthful days. But it was about a mile from my house to—it was an easy walk—ten blocks. And got—I really did it a lot. The library was down there. I got to be a—an inveterate reader and I would go to the library frequently. And in those days you could hitchhike easily from just within the city, you know? And—and they'd see a youngster with an armful of books and it was easy to get around. Bus fares as I recall were a dime unless it was six cents for children or something. But you could get on a—bus service was wonderful. You could get on a bus and go all around the city with transfers and that—and so if you felt like you didn't want to walk—especially in the snow—bad weather—the buses always ran. And so public transportation, as I mentioned earlier, in a house of seven adults—only one car—and—and she was the only one that drove it. She drove it to work and drove it back and it stayed there 'til she got back in it. So it was a different world in that regard from what we're used to.

[00:34:16.28] SL: Were—were the household chores divided up . . .

AW: Oh . . .

SL: . . . among everyone or . . .?

AW: Well, it was primarily my grandmother—we ate in shifts with the ten people. We had just a small kitchen table, so you ate in shifts. And the chores were done primarily by me and my brother, and we alternated. Saturdays you had the old kitchen linoleum, bathroom linoleum floors. The bathroom was smaller, so one of us did—we alternated. One did the kitchen; the other did the bathroom—switched the next week. One of my great memories with my brother is he had a red wagon . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . and when you got the coal dust—I don't what to call it—residue.

SL: Ash.

AW: Ash. Thank you. [Laughs]

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: My grandmother and I would be down there and we had a real rickety stairway and—and it was very heavy. There was a washbasin about this wide and about this deep and she'd—and she would shovel it full of the ash out of the bottom of the furnace. And then she and I would struggle up that stair with that thing and get it outside to the—and put it on the wagon and all the other trash that accumulated during the week, and then my brother and I would haul it to the city dump, which was about—oh, the better part of a mile and it was kind of tough getting

there. We were just kids, you know—seven, eight years old doing this—pulling and pushing.

SL: Hmm.

[00:35:51.00] AW: And that was our chore, and it's now—the city dump is now a beautiful landfill and green grass all around and quite scenic. But underneath—
[laughter] generations of trash.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But that was—that was the way—and we helped with the wash. We helped her hang it. You know, the washing—I forget how she washed the clothes, but I'll never forget the wringer. You know, pulling that—and the sheets going through and whatever . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . the towels.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:36:21.17] AW: And then we'd have to—and then she and I would take it out and hang it on the rope in the back yard. And then the desperate cries of “Albert” as it started to rain or the smoke . . . [laughs]

SL: Stacks . . .

AW: The—the Hammermill—when they were gonna let loose a lot of dust would—would let a horn go off—warn the neighborhood women that you—that [laughs] “We're gonna blow out a lot of coal smoke right now,” and she'd— “Albert,” and out we'd go to the back yard to—so that was fun, but it was also urgent. And the household chores—my—as I said, my grandmother just didn't know what else it

was to work. She—she would make big buckets of donuts—you can't—the first hot donut in that—when you took it—when you burn your mouth on it, was just life's pleasures. She baked bread. She made sauerkraut. She did—who knew? You know, she just worked all the time. She cooked. She did all the cooking. The meals were—I can't tell you how good they were. The Sunday meal—I wish I had one as good today as—as the—see, she had been a cook before she married. She'd been a cook in a—for a wealthy family when she was a teenager, and that's how she'd made her living. So she knew how to cook. Anyway, we never—we never ate poorly in the house.

[00:37:51.29] SL: You mentioned that you—you have since figured out that your mother was probably much more intelligent and much more cultured than—than you could really appreciate at the time.

AW: Yes.

SL: So was she—would the family ever go into the city to see opera or to see plays or . . . ?

AW: She—we had a—we had the Erie Playhouse.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I wish I could remember—the two most famous people—one of them—it's too long ago, but he—he later became a soap artist. His name was Forsythe, and he was on soap operas for, like, a hundred years. The other famous one is named Rue McLaughlan, and she was a [cast member of] *Golden Girl[s]*. Did you ever remember that show from years ago? [Editor's note: Reference to Rue McClanahan]

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

AW: She was one of the ones. She was the sexy one.

SL: And you're probably talking about John Forsythe.

AW: His father.

SL: His father. Okay.

AW: And they put on plays. They would—they had a repertory theater.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And—and she went to that. She was a member of that. She went—and then they had a—they had a—a local orchestra and she went to all of those shows. I didn't—I didn't—I wasn't interested really in either one, so I didn't—I didn't go with her. But she had her own—she had a couple of very dear friends and they would go together.

[00:39:11.18] SL: And then you probably had a radio in the house.

AW: Yes, we did.

SL: And I'm—I'm assuming that was kind of an entertainment.

AW: Radio was everything in those days, and—and there were certain nights, like Sunday night, when the shows were legendary classics—Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Edgar Bergen, who was a ventriloquist, whose daughter is Candace Bergen. And then *Amos and Andy* was 6:00 at night—fifteen minutes, and the nation shut down, really, for that fifteen minutes—they were so popular. *Lum and Abner* were popular even up north. And—and they had another great show. They had thriller show, *The Shadow* or *The Shadow Knows* or something.

SL: Yeah, he knows, *The Shadow Knows*.

AW: I used to listen to a lot of them. Then they had—then they had people who are no longer well know—a guy named Joe Penner, who was never very funny but was a star.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: Stuff like that. They had a lot of musical shows, too, you know? You got—you got to realize that you're sitting at home and, you know, at night—"And now, from the Hotel Roosevelt in downtown New Orleans—" and they'd have some band down there. And they had that 50,000-watt station at night. When all the little stations got out of the way you could hear them from all over the country, you know? I can't tell you how many times I've spent the night listening to the Hotel Roosevelt, and there was a big hotel in Chicago, and I'm trying to remember—the Hotel Sherman, I think. They—they had a lot of musical shows. That's how you—that's how you—see, today—that's how you got to know who the bands were, is they would play on radio shows—Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman—those types. That's how you got to know them. You didn't have enough money to buy a lot of records.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: You looked for inexpensive ways to be entertained, for obvious reasons.

[00:41:22.16] SL: Were there any household restrictions when the radio could not be on or was it just kind of on in the background all the time?

AW: No, I think we were pretty—pretty loose was far as that sort of—I don't remember any restrictions.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: If there were any, they obviously didn't burden me any because I have no memory of—of that.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:41:49.02] AW: But we—the family—a lot of family—and I'd say—a lot of family card games. We used to play a game called 500, which is a—a lot like Bridge. They wouldn't let my mother play. The family slogan was “Sarah has no card sets,” so nobody would play with her as a partner. I always thought that was kind of—that was my mother.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: But on the other hand, my nature was such as—I knew she didn't have any card sets [laughter], so I—I could see that there was a rational basis for excluding her. But the rest of 'em—I was playing—my grandfather taught me every card game known to man 'cause I was his companion. I was his oldest grandchild. Nobody else in the family paid any attention to him, so he and I got to be very close. And he taught me Casino. He taught me Gin Rummy, 500 Rummy—what else? Whatever other card games there were, Euchre, Pinochle. And so by the time I was seven, eight years old I was playing with adults, and they treated me as if I were an adult. There was no—no excuse for error that you're just a little kid. It was, “You dumb ass!” [Laughter] “Why'd you do that?” You know, I grew up in a tough school of card-players, and that was great—very popular and great fun. My brother and I had legendary, never-ending games of 500 Rummy. We'd go up and down and I—which I remember vividly to this day.

[00:43:31.02] SL: Well, so I'm sure Poker got mixed in there, didn't it?

AW: Well, yeah, but that was not—not within the family. Not within the family. The best game invented was—and I don't remember how to play it anymore—was called Canasta.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But that didn't come along until WWII. [Reference to World War II] And I'm thinking about the 1930s. I did start gambling when I—I got my paper route and I had—I had a cash flow. It topped out at \$3.60 a week, and I was allowed to keep that. That was my spending money until I got out of high school. But once I—I developed some bad habits once I got the—the paper route because I started buying my own cigarettes instead of stealing 'em.

[00:44:17.08] SL: [Laughs] Instead of stealing them.

AW: Twelve to fifteen cents a pack, as I remember. And I started gambling with adults. I used to gamble—I was—you know, I'm twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old—I'm gambling with guys that came out of the veteran's hospital, which was in the neighborhood. [Laughs] And you know, they were playing a game called Nickel Rummy, which you could have ten or eleven guys play at the same time and—and if you won the pot you won a nickel from everybody. If you lost it you owed them all a nickel, so . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:44:47.28] AW: . . . it was—it behooved you to know how to play. But the—the best—the best gambling game and the one I loved the most was Three-Handed Pinochle—Cut-Throat Pinochle, which is a marvelous game. It's all forgotten

now. I don't know anybody that plays Pinochle anymore. I don't think cards was ever a big thing in the South. That's my impression. Not the way it was up there.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And I made a lot of money over Three-Handed Pinochle in my youth—a lot of fun.

[00:45:18.02] SL: Okay, so we got radio, we got cards—avid card-players in the house.

What about music? Was there—music play a role in the Witte household?

AW: No, not—not . . .

SL: Not in the household?

AW: I would say no in the household. I would say that I—I was typical of my peer group, and that is we—we didn't really follow any music at all until the so-called Big Band Era started in about 1937, which is the year I entered high school.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:45:56.23] AW: And the first big band that got to be—national attention was a guy named Tommy Dorsey—was a great trombone player. And—and then shortly thereafter there were the usual suspects—Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman—Tommy's younger brother, Jimmy Dorsey, Artie Shaw and the others. And—but you would listen to them on the radio, and then as far as the other music—and—and in those days the only reason, really, we got interested in music was to dance, because social dancing was so—again, you notice how this would be inexpensive entertainment. There was this show, *Happy Days*, back about thirty years ago.

You may remember it.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: They'd hang around the soda fountain. Well, that's what we actually did, is—is there was a place called Harbor Creek Inn, and as I recall, we'd find somebody that had a quarter and you'd play the jukebox and you got six records for a quarter. So that meant six dances. And it was—it was—it was not a date thing. It was—although dating patterns then were so different—but it was just a bunch of boys and a bunch of girls would show up and—and you'd nurse a Coke as long as you could—a couple hours, maybe—and—and dance. That's why we were interested in music, was social dancing. None of us that—except for a guy named George—were very good dancers. It wasn't that, you know, we were future Fred Astaires or anything. It's just we liked to dance with girls and they liked to dance, and that was fun. Most of the guys were not good at what they called fast dancing—the jitterbug stuff. [Laughter] We got—"Do you mind if we sit this one out?" you know, was the popular refrain when something real jumpy came along. But, yeah, up until I went in the service, that was—that was the biggest entertainment you could have with a—with another person—a female—was social dancing. And I can't tell you how big that was. It—all of our social activities revolved around the Friday and Saturday night weekend dancing. And, again, all you needed to do was expend a little money, which was all you had anyway. I remember—I remember when I was in—when I was out after high school working, you could see—you could go to see Glenn Miller for \$2.50 a ticket. So if you were flush enough, you'd spend \$5 and take a girl. And that was—and then when you got there they'd have some drinks, but drinks were cheap. Double shot—I remember at my favorite bar a double shot was thirty-five cents. There were no

restrictions on drinking. If—the story was that if you were old enough—if you were tall enough to put your money on the bar you could buy a drink. [Laughter] So—and—we—it never occurred to me. I was—I mean, I—I went to my first bar when I was fifteen and it never occurred to me that anybody would care. So drinking was different, too, than it is today. And they drank whiskey. Even the girls drank whiskey. Nobody knew there was things like white wine and all that stuff—it was whiskey. How the hell we survived is—is another—how the heck we survived is another question.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: But that was—that was also fairly cheap entertainment, if you—if you drank that cheap whiskey—thirty-five cents for a double shot's a lot.

[00:49:54.18] SL: So there wasn't—there weren't any musical instruments in the house.

AW: No, not—no, no.

SL: Nobody took up . . .

AW: That would've—no, there were no—I—I—I don't think my family—as I look back, the Irish—I'm generalizing, 'cause I like to think that my family was typical of—the Irish are a different breed or they were then. They had this enormous, vast superiority complex. I mean, the Irish were—the Irish were obviously the superior race in the world.

SL: [Laughs]

[00:50:33.19] AW: Secondly, they had this religious complex—that if you weren't Roman Catholic you were obviously going to hell or—or if there was someplace worse. I mean, it was—it was a narrow world. It—it—and some of its premises

were, as you—even I at about age twelve began to realize there was some farce involved in these assumptions, you know? But that—they really—maybe it was in order to survive the English. They developed some—some strong beliefs about themselves that fascinated me . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . but repelled me, too, a little bit. And . . .

SL: Like . . .?

AW: Like being religiously superior—culturally superior. They obviously weren't.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: It just—it was—when you'd check it out against reality, I realized that my across-the-street neighbor, who was “a Protestant”—Bob [Schutz?] was every bit as nice and smart and decent. And his daddy'd been gassed during World War I and had a tough life thereafter—you know, stuff like that—that there was no difference. There was no difference between me and Bob, and—despite the family assumptions.

[00:51:55.24] SL: So within your all's house, what was the . . .?

TM: Scott, I need to change tapes.

SL: Oh, okay. Good. We're gonna change tapes.

AW: Family was everything, though, really, Scott.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I'm sure it's like that down South, too.

SL: Uh-huh. It is.

AW: Everywhere. Family is everything.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Still is up there.

JE: [Sneeze]

SL: Let's get this tape in. You all right?

JE: Pardon me.

Lynn Hodges: Bless you. You've been holding on to that so long.

JE: Pardon?

LH: I said you've been holding on to that for a while, huh?

JE: [Laughs]

AW: The one thing I've noticed—the one thing I've noticed—maybe talking about—the one thing is if you live in a Catholic community, families stick together over the religious issues of divorce and [].

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: You don't—they might have miserable family lives, but they . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . stay together.

[Tape Stopped]

[00:52:32.02] AW: You were asking—you were asking about music within the family's . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . customs, and I—I—my instinct is to say hardly at all. And also that seems to have been a cultural thing because I don't know anybody who even tried to learn to play the piano or some of the conventional things or took singing lessons.

Those—and I don't know if I've mentioned 'em, but two of my friends in high school—women classmates—took dancing lessons. Tap-dancing was very popular, and they became very accomplished tap-dancers—in fact, put on shows at, like, the Elks Club or on weekends—that sort of thing. But they—they were an anomaly, I mean, that they actually could do something [laughter] of a musical nature. I don't—I—none of us—I have no off-the-cuff recollection of anybody in my family or friends—acquaintances—having an interest—a personal interest in music, though I may be oblivious to some of it.

[00:53:45.02] SL: So let's talk a little bit about church and religion in . . .

AW: Oh, yeah, that's a big . . .

SL: . . . in you all's house.

AW: That's a big thing. Erie—it was interesting in terms of the religious make-up. I don't know what the population was, but I—I remember when I learned that in what we would call elementary school—now, that's a little confusing because the Catholic schools—the parochial schools were all grades one through eight. And I think they usually considered elementary about one through six.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And then junior high and then high school. But that—of the student population in what we would call elementary schools, there were more students in Catholic parochial schools than there were in the public schools—fifty-five percent to forty-five percent. So that's—that's how much parochial schools played a part in the community. And that led to all sorts of—let's say, unintended consequences. You—you grow up in a Catholic—all your—all—all your friends, boys and girls,

were Catholic. It was kind of—it wasn't hateful or anything. There was nothing hateful about it, but your enemies were the public school students, and that's who you had snowball fights with. That was basically how [laughter] the violence worked out. One group would be on one side of the street throwing snowballs at the group on the other. That's all I remember. But the—you didn't play with them. You didn't play with kids from public school very often because you had—you had your classmates from school. So that was—that was somewhat different. The school—parochial schools were all taught by nuns. And as you look back, they had to be a dedicated group. But nuns, like any other group, are different, and, you know, each nun is a different person. I have a cousin I'm very close to who's what I would call a wild and crazy nun, but—[laughter] the—I remember—I mean, I—I have blocked out her name, but it—but I could have—I have had fantasies of doing terrible things to my third grade nun, who beat me unmercifully one time over an alleged offense which I was—of which I was not guilty, which I—I still to this day think that's the worst thing to happen to a person is to be convicted of something when you're innocent. How do you combat that feeling? And she did. She beat me up terribly in front of my mother, and my mother let her do it. And I—it took—I don't know if I'm over it yet, to be honest with you. And I had a hard time thinking about my mother's role in all that. But they—you know, that's the way they were. They obeyed authority. It was never—there was no question about like there was an alternative way. The fifth grade teacher I worshiped. She was the one who got me reading. She was a clever nun who decided that the way to get people to read was she—she made every

student bring a book from home and we started our own library. And she showed us how to, you know, keep records of the books and check them in and check them out. And I—next thing you know, I'm reading all the time. I'm eternally grateful to her. The sixth—the sixth grade nun, Maria [Willia?] was—was helpless. She didn't know how—she had no more business trying to control sixth-graders. You know what animals they are.

SL: Yeah. [Laughs]

[00:57:38.00] AW: And—and they just—they did terrible things to her. You know how the—you know how nuns dress—those habits?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Remember the—remember the old newsreel camera in the old shows where the newsreel guy would come on . . .

SL: Sure.

AW: . . . and he had that black thing over his head and he'd be doing this?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Well, one of my buddies would get—she'd walk down the aisle—she knew something bad was going on. So she was trying to find it out. She never did. And he'd sneak up behind her and get underneath her—the back of her habit and give it a—[laughter] and—and then he'd get back in his chair and all the class was aroar. And she's—you know—I remember her, but it was like—it was like a continual circus. The seventh grade teacher was great—smart, hard—make you work hard—no fooling around, but she was not mean. You just—she had that aura. You wanted to do what she'd told you to do.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:58:35.11] AW: And she was all business. I—I—I really give her a lot of credit for—for my development at that age. And then the eighth grade teacher was a marvel, but she and I had a lovely relationship, and—but I liked her because she was smart and—but I did some dirty tricks on her.

[00:59:00.15] SL: Do you want to talk about any of those? [Laughs]

AW: Well, now, you gotta remember that in those days we didn't have very many presidents, okay—not like today. Right above my—I sat in the far row on the right, and right above it was a picture of all the presidents of the United States. So I had nothing—you know, I'm daydreaming and I'm looking at that picture, and it occurred to me that if you counted them up it was, like, thirty-one—but that was misleading because Grover Cleveland was here, then he was defeated, and then four years later he ran and was re-elected. So his picture's up there twice. So one day she says—and—but she didn't know that. So she had counted the number and so—she was gonna fool the class. Well, now, how—"Class, how many—how many presidents have we had?" And they were stumbling around and—"No, you're wrong. You're wrong. You're wrong. We've had thirty-one." "Nun, you're wrong." [Laughter] You got—Grover's up there twice because I'd counted. I'd spent all my life counting 'em. And, well, that's a dirty trick.

SL: I don't know. It's sort of smart.

AW: And then—and then—well, I did it out of malice.

SL: Oh, okay.

[01:00:10.19] AW: And then the worst thing I ever did was she got angry one day in class and she said, “There’s—there’s rumors going around that I have teacher pets. Now, I’d like to know who believes that I have teacher pets.” And I raised my hand because I knew I was her teacher pet. [Laughter] And she knew I knew [laughs] that. And she did. She just looked at me like, “I—if I had the power, you would drop dead on the spot, young—young Albert.”

SL: [Laughs]

[01:00:46.12] AW: But I liked her. She was—I mean—so we had a love/hate [relationship]. I’m in the eighth grade and smart aleck, you know? What are you gonna do? But so that—yeah, the Catholic school—now, it—the education was interesting. They had no money, so teaching science courses—you have to have—you have to have equipment.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:01:08.12] AW: And you gotta have a Bunsen burner or something. They had none, okay? So we had [laughs] no science courses. I’m to this day—it’s kind of pathetic. But, man, the reading, the writing and the arithmetic. And if you did—if you fooled around with them, they would beat you up. You, by God, worked. I think my proudest moment was I wrote all the book reports for me and my three best friends. And I—the challenge was—I shouldn’t probably—I don’t know if this . . .

SL: Oh, this is totally incriminating. Keep going. [Laughs]

[01:01:47.14] AW: It was in the eighth grade and they—you had to write—you had to write a book report on *Oliver Twist* . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . and—well, I forget the other one. I want to say it was either *Silas Marner* or *The Last of the Mohicans*. And I had to write eight book reports, all of them different. That's a challenge. Got away with it. Felt real proud. Well, I ran around with these guys who were too lazy to pick up a book, let alone read it. So anyway, that was my great academic coup in the eighth grade.

[01:02:26.24] SL: Well, you know, you probably didn't realize it at the time. You know, those guys probably thought—you—probably thought you were helping them, but actually, what was going on—you were . . .

AW: Yeah.

SL: . . . you were becoming a monster reader and composer.

AW: Yeah, and I was helping myself, if only learning how to con teachers [laughter], you know?

[01:02:46.04] SL: Well [laughs], I—I still want to go back to the house. You know, when you—you were talking about how you all ate in—in shifts.

AW: Yeah.

SL: When each shift sat down at the table, was grace said?

AW: No, it was elbow-to-elbow fight for the food. No, we were—you know, the Irish used to—we—the Irish used to divide themselves into shanty Irish and the lace curtain Irish.

SL: Okay, I gotta know the difference. What's . . . ?

AW: Well, the lace curtain is you—you had little lace—lace things on you chair and all that. You were trying—striving to be middle class and—and so on. And I'm—

I'm not sure about my grandmother. She might [], but nobody else in the house did. They were really—whatever they called themselves, they were shanty Irish and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And they didn't—they didn't go in for grace or—Catholics don't—back in those days, at least—I know I shouldn't be the—I'm not the authority on Catholics, but I don't think they cared for that same sort of thing as grace. That—that—I never remembered too much grace 'til I moved south.

SL: Yeah.

[01:04:06.13] AW: And I mean, you have these strong customs down here that took me a while to get used to, 'cause I don't remember them . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . up north.

[01:04:14.17] SL: What about—did you go to mass on . . . ?

AW: Sunday.

SL: Just Sunday.

AW: That's it. I was an altar boy.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Now, back in those days, the masses were in Latin, and they really were—the altar boy was a symbol of the church—of the parishioners. And—but he also—excuse me—almost had a job, like you had to prepare the challis and the—the wafers—make sure everything was organized like that. But—and then occasionally you had to go up and help the priest hold his clothes or do something of that na-

ture. The—you had to—it was a—the—the mass is kind of a dialog thing. You're the priest. You say something in Latin and I had to respond in Latin. And—but what we had to do was we had to memorize our lines, and I still remember the English translation of the first line that I would say as an altar boy. The priest would say something and then I would say, ["A dieum qui la tificat u ven tumayum." ?] And that's something about, "To God all praise and all power," something like that. I forget now what—I said I didn't remember and I don't. But that's the line that—and we went through the mass and it's a dialog. So I did that for quite a few years, and then I was also a member of the choir. And that was more because they couldn't get boys in the choir, and I don't know why. But I was pretty good at—I mean, I was devout about that sort of thing. I—I went to—I went to church all the time. I would—I did my altar boy duties and I did my choir duties. And I think it was not until I was—went to high school that I got away from all that. But that was the normal pattern is to—once you got out of parochial school, they took another generation, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Yeah, I did all that. My brother did. My brother was the folk hero in the family. The so-called Erie diocese—which has a bishop over it or an archbishop—was thirteen counties in northwest Pennsylvania. That was a pretty good-size territory. And one year they had this contest we all had to prepare for, and I don't know how many thousands of altar boys entered this thing, but it was a test. And my brother came in second out of all these thousands, and so he—he was the folk hero forever. It was like he joined the priesthood. I mean, you know—next best

thing. He was a—and I loved my brother and never had a thing—but I used to get mad at the family because they always thought he was an angel. When he—when he won this prize—honest to God—and they took a picture of him, and he’s like this. And he’s got this altar boy surplice on and he’s praying like this—like—and you’d say, “This is an angel.” He was a good-looking kid. “This is an angel,” and he wasn’t. I was the angel. I never did anything wrong in my life. I never got in trouble from anything I ever did in school—grades one through twelve. The only thing I ever did was use—misuse a ruler and that’s why I got beat up. And I did that for other reasons, but anyway—my mother told me that during the war she had to go down—he was suspended from high school four different times—this angel . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[01:07:53.24] AW: . . . for misconduct: wine in his locker, urinating in front of the girls’ . . .

SL: [Laughs]

AW: . . . home—what do they call that? That—home ec[onomics].

SL: Home Ec.

AW: Yeah.

SL: Uh-huh. [Laughs]

AW: Did things like—this angel! [Sighs]

SL: [Laughs]

[01:08:13.24] AW: You—I felt abused. [Laughs] I felt abused. Still do. Anyway, so—but I don’t know what else to say except going—going to school in the Cath-

olic church was very interesting because they did make you work very hard. And anybody who's been through a parochial school education—it's the same throughout the nation, and it's kind of like you went through, you know, like basic training in the Marine Corps or something . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:08:44.10] AW: . . . together. Everybody's experiences were the same. The nuns were tough. Some of them were sadistic. And—and, anyway, you lived in a—you lived in a terror-filled atmosphere, but then you worked hard and—and you got a great grounding. Believe me, I was two years ahead when I went to high school of the kids out of public school. I was two years ahead in English than they were. I had read books two years earlier than they—than they had read. I had—you know, it was all that—but not in the sciences . . .

SL: [Laughs]

AW: . . . where it was zero.

[01:09:27.05] SL: So did you—did you kind of slack off when you got to high school, then?

AW: Oh, no, I had a great high—I can't tell you how—this—you know, trying to look for something good to say about the Depression. I can think of one thing. The best teachers you could think of were looking for work, and so they worked in high schools. I—my—my favorite teacher in high school, Ralph [Harmull?], had a PhD in political science from Harvard University. He's teaching in a working-class area where there's heavy unemployment during the Depression—civics and related subjects. I mean, you—find one today that's got a . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . PhD from Harvard somewhere in Fayetteville or Springdale. Highly unlikely, right?

SL: Right.

AW: Excuse me. [Drinks water] I had several—I had Miss Carlson, I remember—Miss Anderson. Miss Anderson was—was great for encouraging me to read. Very—she was very supportive. Miss Carlson taught history—very—she—she was the same. I had great teachers in high school. I wrote a—years later after I began to teach English in college, my mother sent me things I'd written in high school. In the eleventh grade I'd written an analysis of *Hamlet*. It was like reading the works of a—of a stranger. You know, back then what was I—fifteen, sixteen years old? Now I'm in my twenties—a different person. I'd have given me a B at the college level. [Laughter] Not an A, but pretty good.

[01:11:17.17] SL: When did—when did your grandfather pass? How old were you when—when he passed?

AW: He died in 1940. I would've been—depending on the time of year; I'd have been either sixteen or seventeen. I think I was sixteen. My grandmother died in 1947, which means I was about twenty-three.

[01:11:44.21] SL: You—you said or you mentioned earlier that you became great buds [buddies] with your—with your granddad and he . . .

AW: Yeah, he—I—we had a—a—movies were shown differently in those days. It was kind of—very different from what we're used to now, and that is downtown you had the first-run movie houses. There were four and they were all connected with

a—the Shay Theater was MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios]. The other theater was Warner Brothers [Studios]. Well, we can figure that one out. The Colonial had Twentieth-Century Fox [Studios], and the Strand had kind of like the Republic [Studios] and these others that are small-time, minor league.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:12:26.03] AW: So they've—that would be the first run. Then you go down about a half a mile. There were theaters around town and that would be the second run there. Then just on the corner, where a half a block away was the third and final run. [Laughs] And that—it ended at East Avenue Theater—just walk up there—so I—Friday nights—I can still remember my—holding my grandfather's hand. We'd walk up to the East Avenue Theater and we'd go to movie, and did that for years and years and years. So we had that kind of relationship. He used to hang out at the park where I played cards, and he kind of—he didn't say anything, you know, I wasn't supposed to be doing this. But he was very tolerant about it. His big trick was he could put a Red Man . . .

SL: Uh-huh. Chewing tobacco.

AW: . . . chewing tobacco. He put that in there and he'd never move it for, like, twelve hours or however long he stayed up, you know? Never moved it. Never spit. They made 'em differently in those days. [Laughs] Uh-huh.

SL: Huh.

[01:13:32.10] AW: He would sit in front of the firehouse with his buddies, and I'm sure they were commenting on the girls walking by and stuff like that, you know? But—but I'd walk—every time I'd walk up East Avenue, there was my granddad

over there sitting in front of the firehouse just whiling away the time. He was a very quiet man. The only thing he ever told me once is he was from Nova Scotia, and that's all I ever—that's all he ever said about his background. Zero. I didn't—my mother told me later that he was the youngest of twelve and had all immigrated to the [United] States, and I think all eleven of them stayed up in the Boston [Massachusetts] area, and he decided he didn't want to do that. And he wandered just kind of south and settled in Pennsylvania. He was a—he was a combined fire chief and police chief in Butler, Pennsylvania, when he met my [grand]mother, who was a cook in a diner. And my next-door neighbor knew them then—the [Settlemeier?] family—Mrs. [Settlemeier?] told me that they were the handsomest couple in town. He was a handsome guy and she had bright red hair and had that Irish “Colleen” look.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:14:42.01] AW: And she said they—when he put his uniform on—I never asked her which uniform he wore. [Laughter] Maybe he had a uni—unisex or whatever. But a police chief and fire chief. I find that to be fascinating.

SL: It is.

[01:14:57.28] AW: And then he moved up to Erie to be—to work for the Hammermill [Company], but he was older than my—than my grandmother, and they laid him off. You know, they just—they didn't keep you on. There was no Social Security. There was no workman's comp[ensation] or anything like that—couldn't get—and they—they were just—out of kindness, gave them \$15 a month and a little plot of ground to grow vegetables on in the summer. And I would go down

and—and help him with his garden work and he'd give me a dime. And we'd walk back together.

[01:15:34.08] SL: So the—the paper mill had some acreage where . . .

AW: Yeah, right—right alongside . . .

SL: And some of the workers were given plots of . . .

AW: Yeah, the ones that were retired.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: A little plot to grow vegetables, and I worked with him. And sometimes I'd resent it because I was missing some big softball game or something, you know, but . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:15:52.29] AW: But he and I—he didn't talk much. I think he'd been beaten down by life. That's my current pop-psych analysis.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I mean, he—he just didn't talk much. And I don't know—and for some reason, I don't think his sons treated him right. I'm not sure his daughters did, either, but I'm thinking the sons had more responsibility for their father. And that's why he hung out with me.

[01:16:22.19] SL: So you can't recall any poignant conversation or . . .

AW: I wish I could.

SL: . . . exchange with him?

AW: I wish I could, 'cause I—I suspect he had a much more interesting life than—than I was ever led to believe.

SL: Yeah.

AW: But I've—that was the one thing about my family that I—it really irked me—is they would not talk about family incidents—even if they were—well, I shouldn't say even if they were scandalous, but the ones—I'll show you—I'll give you an example of—of how irk—irksome they could be on this score. My Uncle Dan—the drinking uncle—wanted to marry a wonderful woman, and Mother—and Grandma said no 'cause she needed his paycheck to help support the family, and it frustrated him—frustrated. He didn't know how to deal with it. So he ran away from home. That's basically what he—that's the way that he—he went to Cleveland [Ohio] and he just disappeared. As far as we know, he just disappeared. But it turned out he went to Cleveland, and somehow they found him. I don't know. They'd never tell me. They found out and a couple of weeks later they brought him back and the family—as family used to do, they came up with the theory that he had amnesia. That was the rationale for why Uncle Dan disappeared. And then shortly thereafter he was permitted to marry. So there was—there was obviously a connection. But they never talked to the children. Now, this happened in—I was probably ten to twelve years old, so I was smart enough to know something was going on. Years go by. He gets married. He has three daughters. The daughters are now all grown women. Two are married and one's a nun, and they're all together one time, and I'm with them, and they say, “My Uncle Al.” They—I was cousins, but they called me Uncle Al because of the age they—“Uncle Al, why did our dad go to Cleveland?” They had no idea. And I said, “Well,” I gave them the story that I just gave you. I said, “But I'm gonna go talk

to my mother and find out,” you know? So I went to her and I said, “Mother, Judy and—and—and Margie and Brenda want to know why Dan ran away from home.” And she said, “Why do they want to know?” And I—all I could say was, “Mother, it’s their father, you know? They want to know what their—” she—it couldn’t—she had this blind spot. “Why would they want to know?” So how do you deal with a family like that in terms of family history and—and so on? They wouldn’t tell you anything, you know? And it turned out; I finally persuaded her that she had an obligation to tell his children why he ran away from home shortly before marrying their mother. And so anyway, whatever I’m trying to say at this point, I think I’ve said it—that is, it was a very frustrating family in terms of learning history because they obviously had something in their background.

[01:19:38.00] SL: What—what about sports, growing up? Did—were you active at all in . . . ?

AW: Well, in what we’d call the pick-up sandlot. Yeah, we—actually, I’m real proud of—we started out just a bunch of guys—and when I say a bunch—four, five, six. The youngest was my brother, who’s like, fifteen, sixteen months younger than me.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And he was the youngest, so he was the right fielder and all that. And—and then there were about four other guys, and I was in the mix, but I wasn’t the oldest. And we started out pretty good, and then we—we developed what we called the Eighth—the East Eighth Street Club. Softball. We played softball. And we would go play the Ninth Streeters or the Seventh Streeters or the Twelfth Streeters

or whatever. And we had a great recruiting technique. It's like when we played the Ninth Streeters. They had a great pitcher. So we said, "Why don't you join our team?" [Laughs] So picked up some super studs along the way, and we got to be real good. And there was a local supermarket that sponsored us, but all that meant was that if we won a game he gave us a couple of watermelons to . . .

SL: [Laughs]

AW: . . . enjoy.

[01:20:53.20] SL: No uniforms then?

AW: Oh, no. Mothers—we—we went out and stole some apples one summer to—we were gonna sell them and then buy jerseys. Well, we sold them to our mothers, you know? [Laughs] And we had the—East Avenue Grocery. That's what we were, East Avenue Grocery. And, believe it or not, we got pretty good, finally. And so now I'm, like, sixteen or seventeen—senior in high school—and we're playing for the semifinals in the city championship. We—if we won we'd play in the stadium . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . before a big crowd. And—guy, I know how Tom Brady feels. I'm—I was the clean-up hitter, and the first inning the First Street guys get on and I come up—bases loaded, nobody out. And I hit the hardest ball I ever hit in my life. I mean—and it sailed forever, and the question was—was it fair or foul? And the ump[ire] called it foul. Instead of a four-run lead in the first inning, I then struck out. And that was bad enough, but then in the last inning the score is tied—they

got a man on third, two out, and the batter hits an easy ground ball to the short-stop, Joe [Robie?].

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:22:30.17] AW: And he threw it to me, and as I looked it was sailing somewhere between ten and twelve feet over my head at first—I was first baseman, I should've mentioned. And that's how the game ended. We didn't go to the finals. Now, to show you how the attitude towards—to me, this is a male—is the secret to the male nature. Joe [Robie?]
—he's the same age as me—maybe a year younger. So if I'm seventeen, he's sixteen. I'm not sure I ever saw him again. He—his—he was a great athlete. He was a great—great football player. But his family moved to another district, so he played football for our enemy high school. Then he went to Penn State [Pennsylvania State University] and played football down there. Then he married the best-looking girl in the neighborhood and—Shirley Adams. Oh, God! Whew. And . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[01:23:33.03] AW: And then life went on. I'm—I've gone. You know, I've won a war. I don't know what the hell he's been up to. So nineteen—I'd say this was 1940. Now it's 1995 or 2000. So it's fifty-plus—close to sixty years—we have not talked. My friend that I've mentioned before, Bud [Elwell?], from Erie, knows Joe. And he said, “Your old—your old teammate, Joe [Robie?]'s having some real bad health.” He said, “He's almost blind. He's gotten in terrible health.” He said, “Why don't you call him and say hello.” So I did. He gets on

the phone, and my first words to him were, “You should’ve thrown that guy out.”

And he said, “You should’ve caught the ball.”

SL: [Laughs]

[01:24:43.09] AW: Now, that’s—to me, that says something about men.

SL: Yeah. [Laughter]

AW: Fifty, sixty years go by—we’re still playing that damn game. [Laughter] Well, enough of that, but that’s Joe [Robie?]. He was a great guy. He was one we picked up off another team. He was—he was the shortstop. I was the first—I was—I was the first base because I couldn’t run—take me about an hour to get to the—to the corner down there, and that’s what they did with guys who couldn’t run, is they put them on first.

[01:25:14.08] SL: [Laughs] Well, you mentioned—I mean, I just assumed back then the big sport was baseball and . . .

AW: Well, yeah, but we didn’t have any equipment.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: We—what do you mean? You needed a glove and a bat and a ball. We didn’t—I would’ve loved to have played hardball. I did play it a little bit using borrowed equipment. But we didn’t have any money for those luxuries.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: That’s why we played . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:25:37.16] AW: . . . you could play softball without a glove. The first baseman was well advised to have a glove because of the nature of the job there.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But you're out in the outfield. You're catching the ball barehanded. We used to have to put all our money together to buy a ball. The—listen, in those days the guy that owned the bat and the ball really could blackmail you— “Do what I say or I'm taking the bat and the ball home.” We didn't have the equipment to—to play American Legion ball. I would've loved to have played baseball. But that's why softball was so popular up north in those days—fast-pitch softball—'cause it was cheap—well, compared to baseball. I did play a little baseball, but not enough to—but I'll tell you how things have not changed. They talk about, you know, how they treat youngsters now and recruiting 'em for colleges and all the hoopla and all that. I've mentioned my Uncle Bob. Now, this is a family legend I got from him, not my mother.

SL: Okay.

[01:26:45.27] AW: I'd heard the stories and I—so I asked him one time, “Tell me what really happened.” He's finished seventh grade. He's now twelve or thirteen years old. He goes to work in a bicycle shop. I think he helps fix them. But he said, “The Hammermill Paper Company—” their—their hiring practice in those days was you—you showed up at 7:00 in the morning in a room. And then a guy that hired came in and he looked around the room, and he knew ahead of time he needed one or two or three, and he'd look around the room, and he'd say, “You and you. You're hired for the day,” or however long. He said he did that every day for years and then he had to show up for work at 8:00. So he'd—7:00 at Hammermill and then he'd be turned down. Okay, now he's sixteen years old or

fifteen—something like that. The hiring guy walks in one day. He looks around the room and he spies my uncle and he said, “Did I see you playing baseball out at Glenwood Park last Sunday?” And my uncle said, “Yeah. Yes, you did.” He didn’t say anything else. He pointed at my uncle and said, “You’re hired.” He was a hell of a baseball player, and in those days all of the industries in town had baseball teams. They had an industrial league. So that’s how he got hired at Hammermill [laughs] was because he was baseball player.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: And nothing has changed in athletics.

SL: Yes, I see.

AW: You know?

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

AW: See what I mean? [Laughs]

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

AW: Nothing has changed. They’re still recruiting.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: Back in the olden days—but that—and he ended up as president of the company.

So he went from the lowest form of humanity, which was what they called a “broke hustler.” Now, the word broke means broken paper. And a paper machine is longer than a football field, okay? They liquefy the timber out of Canada. They put acid and all that and make it a liquid canal. And it goes in one end—liquid—it goes one end into the machine and at the other end comes out beautiful bond paper. And—but occasionally there’s a foul-up in the machine. About

halfway through there's busted paper. There's broke all over the room. The guy that picks it up [laughs] is the lowest guy in the—and that's how he started out, is he would—and they called him a broke hustler. So he started as a broke hustler and he went to the top. And he was only seventh grade. So I can remember—my earliest memory is watching him in the kitchen—in his kitchen while all the rest of us are having fun and he's slaving away getting his high school diploma and then his college diploma. And he ended up in business school at Harvard before he was all through. So, you know, the world was different.

SL: Hmm.

[01:29:39.01] AW: When are we gonna get to those dating patterns?

TM: What about now?

AW: No, he might have some questions.

TM: [Laughs]

AW: Did you hear what I said?

SL: No.

TM: The dating patterns.

SL: Oh. Well, I want to . . .

AW: It was . . .

SL: I was thinking—I'm still thinking about sports.

AW: Oh, yeah. Well, there's other sports—were—were pick-up football.

SL: Okay.

AW: My—my—one of my biggest embarrassments was when I was—when I was in grades five, six, seven, eight, I was considered one of the three biggest kids in the

class of sixteen boys. And so everybody assumed I'd go out for football, and I wanted to go out for football. So now it's summer after eighth grade and I'm gonna enter the ninth grade of high school—public high school. And during that summer—not—not a whole lot before the season was to start—practice was to start, I had—what do they take out of your throat?

SL: Tonsillectomy.

[01:30:41.05] AW: I had a tonsillectomy and I lost some weight and I was kind of peaked—puny for a little while.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: So I go down there, and the way they—the thing is you—you lined up. Now, in those days they had six teams. They—they suited up six teams. Now, you—you only played if you were on the first or second team, but the other four were out there belting each other around. So I was thinking, “I'd at least make the sixth team.” And you lined up and went into the equipment room. But standing at the doorway of the equipment room was the head coach, James “Foggy” Hyde.

SL: [Laughs]

[01:31:17.01] AW: And this is the physical they gave you. Now, listen to this. [AW stamps his feet several times] Finally, I get up there. I get to him—he reaches over and he goes like this. “No, I don't think so.” [Laughter] I didn't have any muscle. See, my father was a big, powerful raw-bone man. My mother had no upper body strength whatever. I unfortunately—fortunately, I got her brain—unfortunately, I got her upper body. I had no—I've never had any strength there. So I—he [Coach Hyde] wouldn't give me a suit. So that was football. So we

played pick-up, and I—I was a slow-footed tight—tight end/linebacker, but you had to play both ways [offense and defense]. And that’s—and we played—we played on the high school football field—practice field—and had bloody games. But I enjoyed that and—but it was pick-up stuff. The only thing I did organized—I played tennis in high school and golf, but that’s because no boys would go out for those sports. They had a spot to fill. “Al . . .”

SL: Right.

AW: “. . . do you want to join the tennis team?” [Laughs] “Yeah, why not?” Get your picture in the yearbook [laughs], you know?

SL: It’s still a great sport, though.

AW: Yeah, the—one of the greatest—both of ’em.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But I’m saying this—I wasn’t—I wasn’t really a player, but I liked it. I played at them, but I wasn’t any good.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:32:50.09] AW: I was a good softball player. I was a good first—fielding first baseman and I could hit the ball. But that’s the only sport I ever would feel proud about, unless you want to call the volleyball game at the bookstore picnic at the University of Chicago years later, when eight girls and I stood nine guys and beat ’em.

SL: Yeah, let’s count that.

AW: I count that.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: And, don't think I didn't work.

SL: Yeah.

AW: But I joined with the girls. They [] even it off. "I'll be with them." That's—it was fun. [Laughter] It was fun. That's my big major tri[umph]—and I took Frank Broyles to the last hole in a [golf] club championship here, and it—and—and guys would still be buying me drinks if I'd beat him.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: But that's a different story. I didn't.

[01:33:40.28] SL: Okay, let's talk about the dating stuff.

AW: Well, dating was—first of all; through the eighth grade we didn't know what dating was. We knew who had a crush on whom. It was very easy in my class because Kay [Steimer?], as she was then known—there were sixteen boys in class and Kay was the only one who got sixteen Valentines. And all the boys had a crush on her. I never did because I figured I wouldn't have made the top three anyway, so why waste my time? I had a crush on Florence Williams because Florence—for twelve years—from grades one through twelve, I was known as the smartest boy in the class. Florence was known as the smartest student in the class, which does have a real gender tweak to it.

SL: Yes.

[01:34:36.01] AW: Florence beat me twelve out of twelve. Well, how could I not like Florence 'cause she didn't—she didn't make a big fuss about it? I told my mother that story years later 'cause I hadn't seen Florence since graduation, and she was coming to our—I think it was our forty-fifth high school reunion, and I was really

excited to see her again. So I was visiting with my mother and I said, “Guess what? Florence Williams is coming to the reunion,” and first one, and I told her about her beating me for twelve years. And my mother, who was all crippled, leaned over and poked me in the chest. She said, “Yes, and don’t think her mother ever let me forget it.” [Laughs] Which was the first—I realized parents paid attention. It stunned me. [Laughter] “Don’t think her mother ever let me forget it.” [Laughter] So there you are.

SL: There you are.

[01:35:28.25] AW: I didn’t know they were that competitive. But—but Florence was not a real so—so I flew—I fell in with a gang of guys, and in high school everybody knew who had a crush on whom. And sometimes those reciprocated and sometimes it wasn’t. And if it wasn’t, then everybody knew that you had to at least pay attention to other girls, whether your heart was it in or not. I fell in that category. I fell in love ninth grade with a woman named Audrey and—and I’m still in love with her today. But she liked Jack, who was two years older and had a car.

SL: Tough.

[01:36:15.03] AW: Which I—is also known as unfair competition. But dating patterns were—were weird. Even though she—even though I liked her and she liked Jack, we would date if Jack wasn’t available or if she was mad at him, and—or just date. Because dating then meant just going—just being with somebody at some place. It meant nothing else. It didn’t mean kissing. It didn’t mean whatever. It just meant you were with somebody. And so—now, take my word for this ’cause

it's gonna strike you as bizarre—but we would date for reasons. For example, on Wednesday night and on Friday night we went to this Harbor Creek Inn for—play the jukebox, drink a Coke, and dance. You could date a girl and go steady for Wednesday night. That meant you knew that on Wednesday night you were gonna be with Doris. On Friday you could date another girl for the same purpose—maybe Doris's sister, Dorothy. There was a lot of that going on. [Laughter] I was part of that crowd for a while. Saturday night was the big band. You dated a girl to go to Glenn Miller or whatever Saturday night. You went steady is my point. You didn't have to call or anything. It was understood. And Sunday night was go to the movie. So you'd go—go to the Warner Brothers and see Ronald Reagan in something—you know, something like that. You dated for a reason that had something to do with the event, but you didn't date for what—now, there was dating for romantic purposes, but that was relatively rare in high school. I can't think of anybody at my high school with—with one exception who dated the same girl for everything. It was all mixed up.

[01:38:21.03] SL: Was there a hierarchy? Was the Wednesday night date less than a . . .

AW: Yes.

SL: . . . Sunday night date?

AW: Yes. Oh, yes. The—the—the—the big date was Saturday and the second biggest was Sunday. Yeah, you're right. And the—the going to dance at the—at the—and the Inn—at the jukebox, those were almost fungible. I mean [laughs], you know, you could [pass?] them around. But nothing was—nothing was really serious. Although inwardly you might be in love with a girl, you didn't outwardly

demonstrate that. You didn't do anything about it. It was—it was very bizarre—a very bizarre—a—I don't know what else to say except the—things didn't get serious 'til after high school. And then—then—then people started getting married and going steady and nobody else and that's a more serious thing. But it was a—the growing-up period was—was different, and it—and it had some blessings in that you didn't feel committed. You could—and you didn't get emotionally scarred and things like that.

[01:39:35.03] SL: Jealousy was never a big . . .

AW: No, I don't remember any of that. My best friend—I've told you before—this fellow, Bill—Bill [Catribone?]
—he had a car and I didn't, and so we would double date. We double-dated a thousand times. And at times we'd take sisters out alternately. One night—one night he'd be with Doris and I'd be with Dorothy and the next night we'd—next week we'd switch and go dancing. There was nothing romantic. It wasn't you wanted to get sexual in any—in any way. I mean, I—I—I was never interested in trying to fight the battle of kissing 'em goodnight at the door—you know, that sort of thing. It was just—that was all kid stuff.

[01:40:19.26] SL: I guess the fathers—that kind of gave the fathers a break. They didn't . . .

AW: Yeah, they didn't have to worry about that stuff. I don't remember any girls getting pregnant. It's just—it just didn't happen. I don't even—I don't even—to be honest with you, I don't know of any of my buddies or boys or girls that had sexual relations with anybody. There were still brothels around for—for guys to go

to, but far as I know everybody was virginal until fairly advanced ages. The war changed it. The war changes those—those attitudes because now you don't have to—it's not something that's talked about, but there's a—now there's a—turns into and atmosphere of, “Well, we've got today. We don't know about tomorrow,” and so . . .

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

[01:41:15.20] AW: . . . attitudes loosen up, but that's—I mean, wartime stuff. [Of] course, the great fear among girls—whatever their natural urges were—was pregnancy, because I don't know—the only contraceptive I'd ever heard of was the condom.

SL: Or abstinence. [Laughs]

AW: Well, yeah, but, I mean, if you had sex and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . and—and you feared pregnancy, the only way to avoid it condom-wise was the condom. You didn't have any—anything else, and then it was the attitude towards pregnancy. I mean, you know, the way in which any—I—I—worst story I ever heard involved a branch of my family. My—my grandmother had a brother who—who settled in Philadelphia and raised a big family there, and one of them was a daughter—I found out years later—was a daughter named Frances. And apparently during the war, Frances had had an affair with a married man and got pregnant and had the baby and all that, and it wasn't just that her parents kicked her out of the house—their attitude was she was dead. They refused to

acknowledge her existence. That's—I mean, that's about as extreme, I guess, as you can go unless you want to kill her.

[01:42:33.09] SL: So it was really a shame and . . .

AW: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . very heavy guilt.

AW: It was—yeah, yeah. So the—everybody understood that—even the guy—even the guys, whatever they might feel. They understood that with women it was different. And consequently, whatever went on—I know from my own experience and the—and my real close buddies—is that wasn't—that wasn't really what I would call a big issue—not—not with the mores that have come and gone in the years since. It was a real—and I think the Catholic—that's what I keep coming back to—the Catholic attitudes. That's also involved because once you got married, the attitude was you're gonna stay married forever whether you like each other or not, 'cause so many people did. And we didn't recognize divorce. So that was a situation, too. But anyway, enough of that. But I didn't—I didn't start really what I would call dating seriously until late in the war when Audrey and I got together. And by then I was an officer in the Air Force, you know, so you're . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:43:56.22] AW: . . . you're—if you're not an adult by then, when—when will you be, you know?

SL: Well, that—that kind of stuff certainly changed.

AW: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[01:44:04.29] SL: The culture is totally different now. Well, okay, so you go to Catholic schools until you get to high school. And now you're in a parochial school in—or in a public school and you feel like you're a couple years ahead of everybody. You're . . .

AW: Certainly, in the—in the languages. Yes.

SL: You run into science for the first time. Do you want to talk about science in—in high school?

AW: Well, I—I—I skipped biology. Don't ask me why. I think it was a big mistake, but I just didn't want to learn about that stuff. So I took—I took the years out of—instead—you were supposed to take biology—I think it was the tenth grade and then you took physics in the eleventh and chemistry in the twelfth or some . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . routine like that. The point is I only took two of them and I took them out of order. I loved both subjects and I don't think I ever became an aficionado, but I—I got good grades in them.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:45:01.25] AW: And we had a great, great chemistry teacher and also a—a—a very good physics teacher. But he was—he was a young man. He was in his late twenties and this was 1939, and the war in Europe was about to break out and did break out, and he wanted to talk to about the war a lot. I mean, you know, he . . .

SL: So physics was not . . .

AW: Yeah, we didn't talk physics twenty-four/seven [twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week] because I guess he felt he was gonna go to war or—or, anyway, the

significance of it. But the chemistry guy was great—very interesting man—later became mayor, which is—I'd always thought was—you know, Erie's a pretty good-size city and—and for a chemistry teacher who was not—who was from Iowa to come in and run for mayor and get elected and re-elected I thought was kind of—ran into him years later when I was at the University of Chicago. He was getting his—see, I told you that he was getting his doctor's degree in chemistry from the University of Chicago to go back and teach high school chemistry in Erie, PA. So, you know, it was—there was a difference in—that—let's say that's the bright side of the Depression.

[01:46:16.29] SL: So you graduated high school pretty high up in your class.

AW: Yeah, I think so. I remember there were—to be honest with you, I can't remember all the girls who were ahead of me.

SL: But it was girls. [Laughs]

AW: That's right. The only guy that was a competitor was a guy named Don [Falhaber?], who's still around. But [Falhaber?] didn't take the—all the tough courses I did.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: That's why—that's why I don't pay attention to him, although he's a pretty good guy and very good-looking.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But he's still considered the handsomest guy in class. But I don't pay any attention to him. I was narrow even in high school. It was the group that came out of St. Anne's, see, that—the parochial school and then we got to high school and we

still stuck together and, you know, we added a few acceptable Protestants, but we had to vet them first. It was like, you know—and . . .

[01:47:13.24] SL: Well, by the time you get out of high school, is the Catholic thing still really—you're really participating or are you starting to . . . ?

AW: No, I had pretty much—by then I had pretty much decided I was gonna be what they call—there's a name for it—but anyway . . .

SL: Non-practicing or . . .

AW: Elapsed or something like that.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Lapsed Catholic.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I don't—I have—I haven't really participated in the process in decades and decades. I—I stayed with it primarily for my mother, who was very devout, and I had no desire to hurt her feelings. So—and it was no big deal to me to go to church with her and stuff like that.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: So I always did, but personally, if she wasn't around, I wasn't around either. So I'm not very—I'm not an organized religious-type person. Now, you did say something else, but I've forgotten already—besides the church or did you—did you mention another issue besides the church? The church pretty much left my life during high school.

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:48:29.29] AW: So I'm always interested in it, you know, because they have such a great cultural tradition.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: They have great writers.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: You can't help but be influenced by that. It's been fascinating to read about a lot of their history and the significant individuals. You've got all that Renaissance, if nothing else, you know? I got turned on when I went to Florence [Italy] and found out that Leonardo [da Vinci] and Michelangelo [Buonarroti] and [Niccolò] Machiavelli are all buried in the same churchyard. [Reference to Basilica di Santa Croce di Firenze] That's not a bad threesome.

SL: It's not.

AW: And it's just a neighborhood church.

SL: I know. My son did a semester abroad there.

[01:49:12.16] AW: Yeah. And you think, "My goodness gracious, they must've had something going for them in those days."

SL: [Laughs] Well, they paid well. [Laughter]

AW: Yeah, I guess. I guess. [Laughter] No, they—I—my mother stayed very devout towards—'til the end of her life, and so I respected that.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: That's about it. I don't think my brother paid much attention, either—or my sister.

[01:49:34.29] SL: Did your brother do as well in school as you did?

AW: Uh . . .

SL: Probably not. He—he . . .

AW: No, I don't think so.

SL: He . . .

AW: He had some tough times, 'cause I was a controversial student. It's hard for me—you know, "It's hard for you to see yourself as others see you," I think the poet said. But I—I—I think—see, like, there was—it was—they almost had a little mutiny on their hands. The—the faculty used to vote in some honorary organization. I want to say it's [high alli?] or High—High-Low or—what the hell was it? Anyway, it was a student organization. They wouldn't vote me—you were supposed to be voted in if you were, like, in the top ten percent automatic, and they didn't vote me in. It was their way of getting a little revenge. I didn't care. I—inside I didn't care. My best buddy, Bob Carlson—he wanted to lead a student revolt [laughs] march—you know, all that stuff. So I apparently, I had a bad relationship with some of the teachers because my brother suffered from that. "Oh, you're that guy's brother, huh?" You know, that kind of thing. People were funny, but one of my—one of my friends from those days who's still around is a guy named Pat Hart. Pat and I were classmates at St. Anne's. But he disappeared from our lives at about the fifth grade. So now I haven't seen Pat in fifty years, and this fellow that I've mentioned before got us together for lunch one day. And I—my first question was, "Pat, what happened to you at St. Anne's?" And he started laughing. He said, "Do you remember my brother, Hank?" I said, "Sure." Hank was his older brother. He said, "Hank was always in trouble. I was never

in trouble. Hank was always in trouble.” And finally, the nuns had for the umpteenth time filed a complaint with the monsignor, Mickey McBride, and—to—to get rid of Hank. And he listened to their complaint and he said, “Kick his butt out. And by the way, take his brother with him.” [Laughs] So that’s how—I mean, that’s the way they are. Due process? No! Fundamental fairness? No! [Laughter] It was not a part of the world in those days. Take—that’s how Pat got kicked out of school. [Laughs]

[01:51:49.16] SL: Well, what was it that made you so controversial? What . . . ?

AW: I don’t know. I think I had a smart-aleck attitude.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I think I was a smart aleck. That’s all I can think of. I wasn’t—I mean, and I was a smart aleck, but I don’t remember me as such.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: I mean, I—that part of my personality didn’t mean much to me. I guess I’m trying to say—I don’t know how to—except they took it more importantly [laughter] than I did. And—and I was shocked. I was shocked when I—I found out. I was supposed to be automatic, you know?

SL: [Laughs]

[01:52:26.12] AW: So you—that means you have to go through the trouble of hating a person to vote against ’em . . .

SL: Yeah.

AW: . . . when they’re automatic otherwise. So that means a lot of teachers didn’t like me. That’s why I didn’t get hired at the law school of my—of my alma mater,

Wisconsin, I got told that by the dean. I had made some enemies, and I came up one vote short.

SL: Uh-huh. Well, you graduate from high school.

TM: I need to change tapes here.

SL: Oh, gonna change tapes? Okay. So we're . . .

[Tape Stopped] [01:52:56.00]

JE: It's gonna take a little while for the water chamber to refill.

SL: Yeah. Okay.

AW: High school days—no need to mention this. You're not taping or anything . . .

TM: Umm . . .

AW: I—I—I was bragging earlier about my academic rank. You know what my scholarship offer was? I got a half-semester's tuition. No, I got a semester's half tuition at a teacher's college in Edinburg, Pennsylvania. Now, since I couldn't have raised the other half, it was like saying, "Nothing."

SL: Right.

[01:53:30.00] AW: That's what was available to go to college. It never occurred to me I'd go to college. Never.

SL: What did you think—you were just gonna do whatever you could find?

AW: I was—my aunt—my aunt got me a job at a bank and she—she hoped that someday I'd be a teller.

Peggy Williams: What about your sister?

AW: Would you believe that? Could you see me as a teller in the Erie Bank and Trust in Erie, Pennsylvania?

SL: [Laughs]

AW: No. That was—but, see, that was a big job back then. Guys who had that job were making \$180 to \$220 a month—raising families, buying houses.

SL: We haven't really . . .

AW: You gotta understand. Things were different.

SL: Also . . .

AW: I—I got a couple more stories.

SL: Okay. And P. J. [Peggy Williams] just reminded me—we haven't really talked about any of your sisters yet and . . .

AW: I had one sister.

SL: Or your sister. Whatever.

AW: Well, there's a reason for that—smart aleck.

SL: [Laughter]

AW: We—she and I never got along.

SL: [Laughs] Well . . .

AW: I'll mention my sister.

SL: Okay. All right.

JE: All right. We've got another . . .

SL: A few minutes?

JE: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

[01:54:33.13] AW: Actually, she didn't play much a part of my life, and I—don't ask me why. But neither my brother nor I really liked her because—I mean, not—she was my sister, but she—she whined all the time.

SL: [Laughs] Well . . .

PW: Yeah, girls can do that.

AW: Huh?

PW: I said girls do that.

AW: She whined all the time. Now, who would want to hang out with her? [Laughter]

SL: Not me. [Laughs]

[01:54:59.00] AW: I was not a good brother—I—and she—she—she told me I wasn't a good brother and I couldn't deny it. But I wasn't interested in her because she whined all the time. And she didn't play cards.

SL: She got that from her mom.

AW: Yeah.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: And no card sense.

SL: [Laughs] Oh, I think Lynn's back. Is the water done?

JE: Yes.

SL: You—are we . . .?

TM: We're rolling.

SL: We got speed?

JE: Speed.

[01:55:30.28] SL: Okay. You've got a couple more stories we haven't . . .

AW: Well, I—just one thing—just one thing is that I—I—I’ve mentioned that was in effect voted out of an honorary society that I was supposed to be automatically admitted to and the trauma that occurred. But I—I always—I have reason to believe that whatever the teachers thought, that I always got along well with my classmates, including people who weren’t, you know, social friends of mine. And I’ll give—for example, the two classes voted, starting in the junior year and then again in the senior year, for class officers. And a man named Walter Lundstrom, known by his Scandinavian nickname of [Vaud?—[Vaud?] Lundstrom, who may be the single-greatest all-American boy I’ve ever known, was naturally voted president. But for the four semesters I was voted vice-president of the class. So that would mean that I—the voters didn’t hate me or dislike me. Secondly, I’ve never recovered entirely from my twenty-fifth anniversary [class reunion]. I went to the tenth and then I—for family reasons—I was living down here at the time and all—I never got back until the twenty-fifth. And I was sitting with my old friends from high school—this group—and all these guys started to come up to the table and they’d sit like you are now, near me, and they’d—they’d want to tell me two things. They’d want to show me their twenty-five-year pin. They’d gone to work right out of high school for the Metric Metal or the GE [General Electric Company] or the Hammermill or one of the factories, and they had just gotten their twenty-fifth-year pin from the company—their employer—very proud of that—and secondly, their kid was in college. They—and they wanted—and I figured out they wanted to tell me ’cause I was the only professor that ever came out of this group, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And it was delightful, you know?

SL: Yeah.

[01:57:40.16] AW: So that was—I mean, so my point is I think I got along well with my classmates. It was those damned teachers that apparently I offended and I don't know why. I was a rotten student in math. I should've flunked. I think I should tell you how I got a B in algebra.

SL: Okay.

AW: Now, I came from—this family of mine is if you did not get an A or a B, you—your life was at risk.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: So I was taking algebra, about which I knew nothing and had no head for, and it was the day before final grades were to come out. And so I had to hand in my assign—last assignment, and I'm the last—Witte's the last name in the alphabet in the class. And as I got up to the desk of Miss Walsh, an old maid—scared the heck out of everybody—I looked down at her desk and it was upside down, but I looked at the last letter. I could see it was W-I—so and so on—D for dog. I had fifty minutes to ski my way out of imminent death. So I sat there, stunned. I'd never got a D in my life. And afterwards I went up to her—when class was over I went up to her and she's gathering her paper—I said, “Miss—Miss Walsh, would—is it all right if I erased your blackboard for you?” “Sure, go right ahead, Albert.” So I'm erasing the board and—and about halfway through I said, “Well, Miss Walsh, I think you know my grandmother.” And she said, “Who is that?” I

said, “Mrs. Katherine Young.” “You’re—you’re Kate’s grandson?” I said, “Yes, ma’am.” She— “Does that mean you’re Sarah’s boy?” “Yes, ma’am.” Next day I got a B. I—right then and there I should’ve realized I—I had the lawyer in me [laughter] ’cause if I didn’t—but that’s how I escaped. Now, I hate math. As far as I’m concerned it should not be required anywhere . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[02:00:04.22] AW: . . . for any reason. But I did escape that. So I think those—those are memories of—of high school. But the fact that I seem to have been friendly with my—is important to me, especially after the teachers did that to me. I did recognize—one thing is—see, so many of us were immigrants at that time. Now, the Irish came in earlier than the eastern Europeans, and a lot of these people were—we called them all Pollocks back then.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:00:36.10] AW: We didn’t—we didn’t make these distinctions between Czechs and Slovaks, you know, and Russians and—they were all Pollocks. That’s what we—that’s the way we were. And a lot of ’em came from families where their parents never spoke English. There was a—the nearest church to the one I went to conducted its school classes in Polish.

SL: Hmm.



[02:01:03.08] AW: They had not yet gotten that acclimated. The neighborhoods were funny. I lived from—I lived from—on Tenth—on Eighth Street, one block from Pennsylvania Avenue to East Avenue. On that block the family was Shannon, basically the Sullivans, the O’Donnells, the McCartys, the Daughertys. Across the

street were the O'Brians, the Harts. Down the line—you know? Next block I never went through in my life. I never walked onto it in my life. In my life I never walked one block away 'cause they were all Polish, Russian, Slovak. I was scared to death to go down there. I didn't know what I would find, you know? The neighborhood thing was—was so different than it is now. I had friends from their families who were in my class in high school, but I never went down that street and walked. I never walked it from beginning to end—one block away. And my—and nobody else I knew did from my street. They were two separate worlds, one block apart. So that's . . .

[02:02:15.21] SL: And they probably didn't walk down your block.

AW: Yeah. Exactly. And that's—and to me that's another difference with—with the South is where it's more—where it's not as diverse in terms of ethnic backgrounds, you know, where you have—we had—we had German Town, Italian Town, Irish Town. We had Russian Town. Russians owned the docks—did all the jobs down there, you know? Polish—the—the—the—the neighborhood Polish [Falcon?] Club, the Greek Slovak Club—those were all within two blocks of my house. And so you had this kind of diverse cultural thing. So that was different, too. But I guess I've—I've kind of—I've kind of worn out the high school—grade school.

[02:02:57.14] SL: You know, well, there's—there's two other things before we go on. What about the—the—you talked about a—a nun just beating you up one side and the other. What about corporal punishment in . . .

AW: Oh . . .

SL: . . . when you were growing up? I mean, was that just the routine thing—if you messed up you got whacked or . . . ?

[02:03:16.29] AW: Yes, you did. The—not only did you get whacked, but this was the way they did it. They had—it looked like a—what she hit me with was it looked like a—a conductor's baton. That is, it was thin and maybe a little heavier at this—this end, and it kind of thinned out—very solid wood. I don't remember what they did with it—maybe pointed at the blackboard or something. But, that you would—it wasn't just hand your hands out and get hit upon [your hands]. You had to go like this. You got hit on your knuckles, which is kind of like water boarding. I mean, it's a—it's a step above the rest of []. And they'd crack you across your knuckles, and it was extraordinarily painful. Now, that was in—that was in parochial school. Now, in public school—I—I can't swear because I wasn't there, but I heard that they also used corporal punishment in high school. When I went to—I mean, in public school. When I went to high school it was kind of unusual. The—all of the neighborhood elementary schools ended at the sixth grade, so you'd have this big, giant high school building, and the basement would have seventh, eighth and ninth—seventh and eighth grades. I'm sorry. The high school was nine, ten, eleven, twelve. But down in the basement they had the seventh and eighth graders, and we never saw them. I mean, it's like they didn't exist. But I heard stories that before I got there some teachers had—or some teacher had tried to apply corporal punishment to somebody and the seventh and eighth grade boys had rebelled and—and—and caused a lot of violent trouble.

They kind of beat up teachers and so on, so I think maybe they stopped. But that was because of a counter-attack.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:05:14.02] AW: Now, that was the story. I don't know if there's any truth to it.

But I—no, by the time you got to high school corporal punishment was long since gone.

[02:05:21.07] SL: Well, what—what about in the house—at home?

AW: I think I got spanked. I'm pretty sure I did. I remember carrying on one time, crawling under the bed to hide out. And I was whining about some—they'd—they had deprived me of something that I—they shouldn't have and I—I went hysterical, and I think I got beat up then. But I was—I was—basically, I was a good boy. I did everything I was told. It was my nature. It's always been my nature. And so I didn't get in that kind of family trouble.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I think maybe one time when I was acting up I got spanked.

[02:06:06.13] SL: You haven't said much about your sister.

AW: Yeah, my sister, Anne Marie. There—it's the old thing you hear so much about in family life is one of the siblings—in this case, my brother—could not pronounce Anne Marie. All he could come out with as a young fellow was “Amer,” and so that's what she was known as her whole life, was Amer Witte, not Anne Marie. But that was—Anne Marie's a much prettier name than Amer. She was a pretty girl. She—she did not go to high—public high school. She—to be honest with you, I—I don't remember much about her schooling through the—I assume

she went to St. Anne's. I don't know where else she would've gone. But there was a Catholic school called Villa Marie, and it was called a high school. But—but it was my impression that what it really was was a training school for nurses and secretaries. That's where my Aunt Katherine—but it was a Catholic school and nuns all over the place.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:07:17.28] AW: And that's where my Aunt Katherine had gone to school, and so I think Anne—my recollection is Anne Marie went to the Villa Marie and did the secretarial course. Now, growing up—let's see, I enlisted in 1942. I'd just turned nineteen, I think. I was eighteen or nineteen. I can't remember, to be honest. So she would've been, like, fourteen. So she would still have been at St. Anne's.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:07:59.02] AW: And our lives had—you know, we didn't—I mean, we didn't see each other much except for around the house, and I think she—she had girlfriends who were in different—like, different neighborhoods and she'd—she hung out with her girlfriends at—at their houses a lot, because I don't remember seeing her around the house a lot. I didn't have—and she didn't play cards, so when I was home, if I wasn't playing cards I was either—I was reading something or engaging in an activity that did not—did not really require or even permit general socialization. I was usually focusing on something.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:08:43.11] AW: So I didn't—and then I went away. And by the time I came back I was a much different person, and—and she—she—we had—we had a talk one

time and she told me how—first of all, she complained about some of my friends who had by then were starting to date her and she didn't think much of 'em. She had a—she had a—and—and—it was hard for me to argue. [Laughter] And a lot of 'em weren't very bright. And she was very bright. But she was a frustrated person, and I take it it was—I'll use contemporary language—I think that she'd been a much happier person if she'd been born when feminism was all the rage, because to me that's one of the most fascinating things as I look back was how smart and talented the women were I knew, and all they could think of was to get married. I mean, it—it—you know, they—none of them except for Florence Williams, who got a PhD in physics and is a nuclear scientist at—in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, as you can imagine, and bred nothing but PhDs or that ilk.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:09:51.18] AW: I think she told me one time at that reunion that she had—one child was a doctor, one child was a lawyer, one child was a psych[iatrist]—and I thought, “To hell with this.”

SL: [Laughs]

AW: But—but the rest of 'em—these women—they just wanted to get married, and a—a lot of them were so bright, you know? And my sister was one of 'em, and I think—I think she dimly realized that what she wanted was not what everybody told her she wanted, which was to get married. And that's what she did. And she—meanwhile, she had the knack of offending the family, and—and it wasn't me, really—she complained about me, but it was the family that did her in. It's 'cause she—she went around telling 'em that she no longer believed—and these

were all these devout, unthinking Catholics, and she's telling 'em how they're all foolish and Catholicism and religion is all a lot of hogwash and was surprised when they got mad at her.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:10:52.15] AW: So she was an unhappy—I think she was an unhappy woman and it just kind of surfaced early in her life, and probably for reasons she didn't understand if—whereas if she'd been born in a more recent [generation], she'd be a lawyer or something similar.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And probably a lot happier. She had a bad marriage. She—she did a—she was cruel to my mother. My mother used to cry at—at her cruelty—not physical but mental.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Mental. And so I—anyway, I never had much to do with it. It ended—we ended very badly. She—she was a strange—to me she was a strange woman and it was impossible for me to have any warm feeling for her.

[02:11:53.17] SL: Well, it sounds like there was enough age difference where that . . .

AW: Yeah, that was a . . .

SL: . . . was playing against you all.

AW: Yeah, that was a good part of it.

SL: And it's certainly a cultural difference that placed her in different circumstances.

[02:12:03.11] AW: But when I was in high school I can't tell you how happy I was.

We all were. We—the ones of us who are—still survive, that's all we do. We sit

around and say, “Wasn’t it great? Wasn’t it great?” And we did it then. “Isn’t life great?” You know, and it was kind of odd. But we knew it. We knew when we were in high school we were having a great time. And so I wasn’t paying any attention. I wasn’t paying attention to my brother. I wasn’t paying attention to her, except when I came home my brother and I would sit down and play cards and she’d whine. [Laughter] Never mind. I’m being unkind to her I’m sure, but that’s the way I’m bein’.

[02:12:42.10] SL: Well, so you—you graduated high school. You make mostly A’s?

AW: I did what?

SL: Make mostly A’s in high school and B’s?

AW: Well, I made a lot of A’s. I did—I—I will tell you my four semesters of—of Latin, the grades went A, B, C, D. [Laughter] So I didn’t take the . . .

SL: You continued to lose interest.

AW: . . . I didn’t take the fifth semester

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I have no—I have no facility with languages. I—I got an A in geometry because it turns out that’s not really math. That’s just logic.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And I got an A in Algebra III because we had a crazy teacher, and I mean crazy—Joe [Christoff?], who scored the winning touchdown when Carnegie Tech beat Pitt [University of Pittsburgh] six-nothing. And—and don’t think we ever were allowed to forget it.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:13:39.28] AW: This—this—I could still tell you the final question in Algebra III.

Now, listen to this. This was the whole final exam, and I could—I could quote it pretty much verbatim.

SL: Okay.

AW: “Why does an animal, when trying to fall asleep in cold weather, cuddle closest—to get—make the smallest ball as he can of his body?” And it seemed to me—I just thought, “Well, the smaller the body the better it is for circulating the heat in the body to keep warm,” and I got an A. That’s how I got an A in there. Can you—can you believe that?

SL: [Laughs]

[02:14:24.22] AW: That was the final exam. So it—thank God for Joe [Christoff?].

But I was good in things like civics and we had a course called “Problems in Democracy”—speech. Do you realize that in the state tournament for poetry reading when I was—I’m still in high school? Frances [Kochinese?], who was only twenty-one years old and pretty nifty looking—enough that I began to realize older women had their charms.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: I was seventeen, after all. Frances persuaded me to go to the state tournament poetry reading—five girls and me, and the girls cheated, as you would have expected, because it was supposed to be extemporaneous reading. You weren’t—rule one was no memorization. You read. You hold the book and read. One person followed the rule. And, of course, you know who that was. The others—five—all emoted ’cause they’d memorized and they’re all . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: “Mr. Cory went to town—” and all that stuff. [Reference to “Richard Cory,” a poem by Edwin Arlington Robinson.]

SL: Right.

[02:25:05.04] AW: So enough of that. I—I got cheated out of my rightful award at the state poetry reading contest in Pennsylvania. So—I’d forgotten about that, but I sure had—I sure wished I’d remember what happened to Frances. She was fresh out of Michigan, and the reason she got the job was Michigan hired our speech teacher, Charles McCulskey.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And he—she replaced Charles, and I fell for her pretty good. She’s a great woman. So enough of that. But . . .

[02:16:13.16] SL: Okay, you get out of high school. Where do you go? What do you do?

AW: Well, I got a job. I had to go to a job. Now, I’ll tell you my first job . . .

SL: Yeah.

AW: . . . interview was my friend, Bob Carlson. Bob Carlson was the guy who got me reading what I would call quality literature of the time. You have to remember in the 1930s Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner were publishing their novels. I mean, they []. Now, one of the popular features of that day which no longer exists was like—a store like Dillard’s [department store] would’ve had a reading library. They not only would’ve sold books, but they would’ve had a department where you could rent books to take home. The Boston Store [department store] at

Erie had such a reading [library?]. And if it was a new release—Hastings—if it was a new release, two cents a day, if it was an old release, one cent a day. So, naturally, you learned to read fast. And he would come to me up in class. He said, “Have you ever heard of Ernest Hemingway?” “No, I don’t know.” “Hey, he’s got this great book out, *The Sun Also Rises* or *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. You gotta go down and get it.” And I would. “Ever heard of William Faulkner?” “No.” “Oh, he’s got this great—” so that’s—that’s how I learned a lot about reading, and I did a lot of that, especially after I got out of high school. Now, Bob and I heard that the local bottling plant had a job for somebody to help the driver of the truck unload the cases of [soda] pop. Okay. So Bob and I walked down the headquarters—June 1941—and we both interviewed for the same job. He got the job because he was already eighteen and I was still seventeen. Now, you know what that job would’ve entailed—sitting on the top of all these cases of pop, going around town loading and unloading. Would I have been happy to get that job? Yes. So you weren’t looking for classy work that would be self-fulfilling. My first job was at a gas station, about which I knew nothing. I went to work. My hours were—don’t tell me—I’m going to tell you—11:00 in the evening ‘til 9:00 in the morning, which is ten hours—seven days a week, which is a work week of seventy hours, for which I was being paid thirty cents an hour—good wages—\$21 a week—the highest-paid man in my group, working the night shift. For some reason—and I think it had something to do with football rivalry—the guy that owned the gas station had gone to East High’s big rival, which was called The Academy. And they always looked at me funny because of this rivalry thing, but

he'd never say anything. So my first Fourth of July weekend—that's a busy—in those days there was no other way to get around but cars. So that was a big, heavy work week, and we worked our butts off. So the day after that weekend, Blue Baron—God, what a name—Blue Baron was coming to town with his band, and I hadn't been out in three weeks, working from 11:00 'til 9:00.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:19:42.06] AW: So I said to him, "Would you mind if I stayed out and didn't come to work 'til 1:00—take two hours off—and so I can go to this dance." And he couldn't—he kind of grudgingly said, "Okay." So I—I did that, and my friend, Bill, brought me to work at 1:00 in the morning. And then when he showed up at 9:00 in the morning to replace me, he said, "You're fired." And I said, "Why?" He said, "I don't like your attitude."

SL: [Laughs]

[02:20:18.20] AW: So I got fired from my first real job at working at a gas station after three weeks. Then the Mack Truck Company was moving from point A to point B, so what they had to do was go back and where they kept all their inventory—you know, they have screws, let's say . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:20:34.23] AW: . . . of a certain size, and I'd have to mark down what they were and what their serial number was and all—and what their place was on the thing. And they told me—they said it's a two-week job. So they paid really well and they treated me well. So I had a two-week job at Mack helping them move their store to a new place. And then my aunt came along with a job known as messen-

ger boy for the bank and trust of Erie. Erie Bank and Trust. Turned out the trust part was more important than the bank because it owned by—it was used for the convenience of two wealthy Erie families. And the trust department was bigger than the bank part, which is, I think, unusual.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:21:16.21] AW: But it was a bank, and messenger boys—they basically were go-fers. My best job—’cause I could get out of the office—was, “Albert, go down to the First National Bank and get \$50 worth of pennies.” And they’d get—that’s a pretty heavy sack and I’d very proudly march two blocks down the highway and pick—pick it up and march back carrying those pennies. And my friend, Bill, who I’ve mentioned many times, got a job working for his father—for his brother at the Ford Motor Company, and he got a—he had a motorcycle with a sidecar.

SL: Oh. [Laughs]

[02:21:57.29] AW: And whenever we [ran against each other?] he side-carred me. That was a thrill. But I just did things—I just— “Al, go get us some paper. Go do—” you know, whatever. I just ran errands.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And that was supposed to be my start to the top. I went to night school and took accounting because that seemed to have something to do with banks, and I hated it so much I quit. I do not have that kind of mind—that accounting mind. I just quit. I couldn’t debit or credit worth a darn. So I worked at the bank. I was paid \$60 a month. Now, you can work that out as to how much per week. It ain’t a whole lot.

SL: Right.

[02:22:45.08] AW: It wasn't as much as that \$21, but I used banking hours, which is a different matter. And I could go down to the pool hall and get a cutthroat Pinochle game and make some real dough. But be that as it may, at the end of six months I got a \$5-a-month raise. So I—I stayed at \$65 a month 'til I went in the service. I got along well with everybody. I liked 'em. And the—to show you the money difference—the president of the bank was Archie G. [Postalweight?].

SL: [Laughs]

[02:23:24.01] AW: I love that name. Archie G.—he was a giant—like, six-seven [six feet, seven inches], six-eight [six feet, eight inches]. Very imposing man and an imposing name—Archie G. [Postalweight?]. He made \$600 a month. Now, think about that—\$7,200 a year. He lived like a king. Best house I ever went into in my life before the war. It was—it was kind of like a fantasy it was so beautiful—just cost him \$10,000 to build. Things were different. Anyway, so I worked in the bank, and except for the fact that the money was kind of puny, you know, and I—and I didn't want to be a messenger boy and I didn't want to be a teller. I knew all that. But by the time—let's see—yeah, by the time I got finished—I was out—it was six months after I got out of high school is when [the Japanese attack on] Pearl Harbor occurred, so we all knew we were gonna go in the service—just a question of when. When—when—when Pearl Harbor occurred, they were still only drafting down to age twenty. So those of us just fresh out of high school at the average age of eighteen were still not subject to the draft. Things changed in a

relative hurry, but we still had a chance to think about some things and even enjoy life a little bit . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:24:43.08] AW: . . . meanwhile. So that was a—that was my main job, but I knew—I knew in my mind it was temporary, whatever my aunt thought. And that's about it, job-wise.

JE: What did you from 11:00 [p.m.] to 9:00 in the morning at the gas station?

AW: Well, I—the number one, of course, would be to fill gas tanks when they'd—you know, the—although in those days somebody saying, “Fill 'er up” was rare. It was usually, “Give me a dollar's worth.” Gas was probably fifteen, eighteen, twenty cents a gallon, you know, and . . .

JE: The gas station was open all night?

[02:25:24.10] AW: Oh, yeah. Twenty-four [hours]. And then I had to learn how to grease cars. You put 'em over the—that thing and you crawled down under them and . . .

SL: The grease pit.

AW: . . . you have a grease gun and you greased the car and I washed cars. And those were the three main duties—greasing cars, washing cars, and pumping gas. And—and just sitting there. I don't remember the details of it but, you know, in those days I didn't have a car—didn't have any money to waste. And I used to walk to work, which was, like, eighteen from eight—twenty-six blocks—so it was probably two and a half miles. So I'd walk back and forth. Maybe I'd take a bus

for a dime. The—the owner just didn't like me. I could tell the day he hired me he didn't like me.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: And I—you know, I hadn't had a chance to say anything nasty to him yet.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:26:16.03] AW: So I was—I was very—I was very curious about it, and—and, of course, it was my hard—I just felt I was being unfairly treated when he said, “You're fired. I don't like your attitude.” It just hurt my feelings to be treated like that. He had no—he didn't have much humanitarian impulse in him. Two hours off to go to a dance for a guy that works ten—seventy hours a week.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:26:40.17] AW: I mean, pull that today and see what happens to you.

SL: Right. Right.

AW: You know? But that's the way life was then.

[02:26:48.02] SL: So how—how long was it before the draft caught up with you, then?

AW: Well, that's a good question. It dropped from twenty to . . .

TM: Excuse me. Wipe your mouth just a little. You've got a little bit of—there you go. You've about got it. There you go.

AW: Thanks.

TM: Actually, go ahead and get the corner. You've got it right there in the corner. That's it. That's it.

AW: That do it?

TM: Yeah.

[02:27:17.10] AW: I can't remember the timing. This is—this is some of the peculiarities of the time, though, in terms of military service. They—they lowered it to eighteen, which meant we were now subject to the draft. But they did it in a way that—I'm not sure what I'm trying to say right now, but I don't—I do know my friend, Bill—Bill [Catribone?]
—Bill—Bill was fifteen months older than me, and he was the first one—I don't think he was the “twenty rule,” but I may be wrong on that. But in any event, he was the first one to get drafted. And then it was later in 1942. It was not yet a year since Pearl Harbor, but now we knew we had to make decisions, and I—this is a very vivid memory. We went to the big dance Saturday night. There was a place there called [Walamere?] Park. They had a beautiful ballroom. I mean, it was beautiful—right out of the movie set. And that's where all the really good bands would come—the Glenn Millers and so on.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:28:32.01] AW: And so there were—there was a table full—I would say there were maybe six couples—maybe eight couples. But there was a big, round table, and as, you know, the pattern is all the women went to the bathroom together. So the guys are just there by themselves and now that was the general issue to be discussed was, “Well, what are you gonna do?” And, “Well, I hear if you go in the—if you wait and get drafted and they send you down here, you might get in the Quartermaster Corps and you may not ever, you know, get in trouble.” And, “Oh, my cousin went down there and he got—he was in the Infantry and he—six weeks later he's in Europe,” you know? It was, “What do you do? What do you

do?” This fellow that I’ve mentioned before so many times—the one that kind of guided me into reading . . .

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

[02:29:20.07] AW: . . . modern literature—Bob Carlson—still living out in California.

One of the—one of the dearest friends I’ve ever had. He and I got to talking—just the two of us. “What do you want to do, Al? What do you want to—?” And one of us said—doesn’t make any difference who it was— “Let’s join the Air Force.” “Okay.” So Monday morning we went—the two of us. I didn’t tell my mother. I didn’t tell anybody. Bob and I got together, walked downtown—joined the Air Force. Now, that was kind of peculiar for this reason. And I—I’m speculating now, but it’s such common sense speculation, I—I’m not embarrassed by it, and that is when we went to war, we were the most unprepared big nation for war. We had nothing.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:30:05.25] AW: We were, like, the thirteenth best-armed country in the world . . .

SL: Right.

AW: . . . in those days. And one way in which we were not prepared was in the Air Force. They had—didn’t have Air Force bases. They didn’t have training planes. They didn’t have trained—they didn’t have instructors to train you. They had nothing. So it took ’em a while to get started building the Air Force bases, getting—they’d take all these guys—the dust—what did they used to call them, the—the pilots that used to dust the fields?

SL: Crop doctors. Crop dusters. Crop dusters.

AW: Yeah, crop-dusters.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:30:38.10] AW: Every guy that could manipulate a plane they made a captain [laughs] and brought him in and he's an instructor. And meanwhile, though, they have to—they have to do something with us. They used—for a while there they—they—they—we stayed at home, at which point mothers would get agitated walking down the street and seeing a healthy guy like me walking around. “What are you doing, you slacker, when my son is already over in England waiting to invade?” You know? And they—mothers would get hostile, you know? “Why aren't you in the service, you—?” “Well, they haven't called me in yet,” you know? That wasn't a—that's a highly weak reason, but, though true. So this is what I think they did. In order to get us off the street and making all those mothers mad whose sons . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[02:31:29.20] AW: . . . were in the infantry, or wherever—in harm's way—they gather us together, gave us basic training, and then sent us out to colleges around the country. And so finally they—and that was to get us—part—I—I always thought it was two purposes: one was morale—to keep us away from civilians; and B, welfare for school—for colleges and universities who had already been denuded of all their male students.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:32:03.13] AW: So—excuse me—[coughs] so you can imagine—when Bob and I enlisted, they didn't call us up right away, but finally they did. So we get on a

train in Erie and we head to Miami Beach, Florida, for training. Got there—did a little basic training—and then they put us on a train. And they said, “Well, you’re going off to do something training-wise,” and we’re just fresh recruits—don’t know what they’re gonna do with us. We get on the train and off we go up Florida heading west, and we knew we were going west because we stopped in New Orleans [Louisiana]. And got back on the train—off we went, and we’re all saying, “We’re going to Texas,” because Texas was the center for Air Force training. They had, you know, flat land and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:33:04.09] AW: . . . Air Force bases in every community. Excuse me. [Coughs] So you could imagine our amazement when the next morning they—the sergeant—[coughs] excuse me—the sergeant came through the train saying, “Wake up,” and they—you know, they used vulgar words to describe you and things like that, which I think I’ll omit—and “Get off” and—“Get off the train. We’re here.” “Where? Where are we?” “We’re [in] Fayetteville, Arkansas.” And there were 175 of us. That I remember clearly. And my—the less clear is the majority of us were from western Pennsylvania—Erie/Pittsburgh area. And I’d say there were maybe 100 to 125 of us were from that area. The smaller contingent was from Michigan. Well, the point is you had a lot of northern boys, and I’m—I’d like to think I was the only one who knew exactly where I was, because they were all ignorant of Arkansas in general and Fayetteville in particular. The reason I knew where we was—we were was because as an inveterate reader of the sport pages on Sunday when they gave the games from around the country—of course, they

didn't pay much attention to Arkansas, but they'd always have a little, you know, a little column like this, "Yesterday the Arkansas Razorbacks beat Tennessee twelve to ten," byline—Fayetteville, Arkansas. So I knew there was a Fayetteville, I knew there was an Arkansas, and I knew they were—their teams were called Razorbacks. These guys didn't know anything.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:34:47.10] AW: They—I have a pet painting over here of the first thing I ever saw was the Santa Fe depot down on Dickson Street—still there—snow on the ground. It was February. And, they marched us across campus to the place that was then known as the men's gym, where they put out 175 cots on the basketball floor, and that's—each of us was assigned a cot, and that's where I lived while we were in Fayetteville. To me it's a remarkable serendipity-type experience, although I can't find—I have trouble finding people who care.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:35:38.00] AW: But where the law school now sits and where I've been employed for over fifty years was an open field. That's where we drilled. Nobody even knows about drilling anymore—about "Hup, two, three, four and to the rear march." And oblique march was a toughie because you had to go, like, a ninety-degree angle. That's where we drilled—right where the law school now is. It was open space from the men's gym over to what was then called Vol Walker Library.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:36:09.26] AW: It's now the architecture school. That was—that was the center of campus right across the street from Old Main. They used to march us to Old Main 'cause they—we'd take classes there. And—and then when we weren't in class we would drill a little bit and then we would just do whatever free time they gave us. They tried to keep you busy 'cause they knew there would be trouble if you let 'em loose—let those animals loose. There were a few—few old buildings. There was one called Hill Hall that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:36:42.01] AW: . . . many years housed journalism and at an earlier—at an earlier stage was the law school also. The law school, in fact, at that time, I think, was in the bottom of Old Main. The—so I always thought they sent us here as a way to get some—funnel some money from the Air Force to the University of Arkansas to keep the—the place going—you know, basic maintenance. There—there weren't any boys around to see. There were enough that they had a football team practicing and we used to—they—they had locker rooms down in the basement of the men's gym and we'd hear them—clonk, clonk, clonk of their cleats coming and going, but we never had any contact. It was an interesting time to be in Fayetteville, for various reasons. One was—the main one was, I think, cultural differences. It's hard for, I think, current generations to realize that before television, regions were different—really different. The Chi Omega sorority and another sorority put on a dance where all the girls came and then they—the cadets we were called, Air Force cadets. And I'll never forget. I was with—I was dancing with this lovely young lady from Tulsa [Oklahoma], and we were exchanging



casual conversation, and I said, “Well, now, who’s your favorite band? Is it Glenn Miller?” And she says, “I don’t know who that is.” And I thought, “My God!” And I—she said, “Well, my favorite band is Bob Wills.” [Reference to Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, a Western Swing band.]

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:38:20.02] AW: And I thought, “Who the hell is him?” Country swing, as it turned out. But, I mean, you could have that kind of cultural difference in the country then. Whereas, now, you know, Britney Spears snorts something and they know it in Maine. I mean . . .

[02:38:33.19] SL: So what year was it when you got here?

AW: It was early [19]43.

SL: Yeah.

AW: And I remember some of the courses we took. We took math. [Laughter] My bugaboo. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard, Scott, of a great man in—in the history of this school named Guerdon Nichols.

SL: Huh-uh.

AW: I don’t suppose he was around for your project. Guerdon Nichols was a genuine, great man. He was dean of the school of arts and sciences. He and Dr. [Robert] Leflar were very, very close friends. He taught math. Now, I’d forgotten that entirely. So when I finally came here years later as a teacher—as a professor, Dr. Leflar and I would frequently go up to the old Student Union for lunch. And if Guerdon came in, he always spotted Bob and sat down with us. So one day, apropos of nothing at all, I started reminiscing the way I am now with you and tell-

ing him how I'd been there fourteen years before as an Air Force cadet. He—
Dean Nichols didn't say a word. A couple months later we get together—he
spots—he sits down. And as he's sitting down he says, "Ninety-five, eighty-nine,
seventy-four, sixty-two, fifty-five."

SL: [Laughs]

[02:39:58.13] AW: And I'm looking— "What the hell has happened to this man?"
Those were my grades. [Laughter] He—he had kept—and the fifty-five is—is
true. He had kept his grade books from all those years, and he'd looked up Mr.
Witte, and that's—and I've made up all the numbers except the last one—
because, you know, talking about humiliation—I'd started when it was—when it
was, you know, four and four is eight. Twelve times twelve is 144. When it
stopped at that level, it was ninety-five.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:40:35.25] AW: But when we got into trig[onometry] and whatever those other
words are—calculus—it was much lower. [Laughs] But anyway, that—that was
an experience. I'll tell you about Guerdon Nichols later. But, yeah, I had him and
I had—I remember the best course I took was in weather. I knew nothing about
cloud patterns and all. But, you know, for fliers that's very . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . important.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:41:02.07] AW: And it was a great class. I forget who taught it. I really enjoyed
that class. I also enjoyed a class on ballistics because if you're gonna be in heavy

bombers and you're dropping bombs—that's where I ended up being, so I remembered it, you know, afterwards how good a course it was—the way that the air affects falling objects and how you're supposed to gauge and all that. That was a good course. I—I can't say the math was a good course other than the fact that the teacher was a great man. And I don't remember what else. We—I'm sure we did, like, first aid. I think we had first aid classes. But that's what we did on campus. And I remember that the big social place downtown was the American Legion hut. You might remember that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:41:50.21] AW: . . . although we were warned about that. A lot of—a lot of red-neck, violent types liked to spend their Saturday nights there and who knew what would happen. So I don't remember. I think I went down and kind of looked in and then left.

[02:42:09.03] SL: Was George's around then? [Reference to George's Majestic Lounge on Dickson Street]

AW: I don't know, to be honest with you. It probably was. I'm sure it was 'cause, yeah, I've talked to Leflar—the fellow—the Greek guy that started it was—I think came here in the late 1920s or early 1930s.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:42:26.26] AW: What I remember about the city was—first of all, I do remember Dickson Street because I haven't checked lately and I don't know why I'd forget—keep forgetting—but the curbs in front of the—what used to be the Palace Theater . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . you know, the—the curbs were, like, this high. I'd never seen curbs like that. You know, my curbs were, like, this high. And that—that's how I wrote my mother. I said, "It's for the horses." I don't know what the hell—but the building across the street, the [W. F.] Sonneman Building, was known as the New Sonneman Building—brand new. I remembered—I remembered Block Street. For some reason I remembered Block Street better than I did the—the [Fayetteville] Square. Don't ask me why. I remembered the corner of the campus that [Arkansas architect] Edward [Durell] Stone is supposed to have designed that entrance—the brick entrance.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: What is it? That's Dickson Street and Arkansas Avenue.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:43:23.14] AW: That corner. I remembered that. I remembered that we had a company commander—a student—he was no better than us, but they voted him company commander, and he started dating a—a girl who lived down in that area. And one time we went down and serenaded 'em like they used to do, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.



[02:43:40.02] AW: Sing romantic songs. And I remember the—you knew the family that—who am I talking about? They're still prominent, the Woodruff family.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Did you know Preston and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . his wife, Mary?

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:43:54.09] AW: Well, Mary—the way we got our laundry cleaned was Mondays you'd take your duffel bag of—with dirty clothes and—and you'd go downstairs and hand it over to this pretty woman and then on Thursdays she'd bring it back. Well, that was Mary Woodruff. And later on she—when we became friends she told me that it was the Air Force contract that kept their business going. They had moved up here from the Arkansas River Valley area somewhere and were having a tough go of it in the laundry business 'til that contract came along and kinda made them a little financially secure. But I remembered her and I remembered a man named Wallace who was the second in command of the library, and that was kind of a peculiar reason because as I was getting called into the service, I was halfway through James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which had been banned primarily because of the last chapter. And so I'm halfway through the book and I get called in and I don't have a chance—now I get here and I say, “Well, hey, it's a university.” So I go over to the library and I say, “Do you have a copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses*?” And I was looked at with suspicious, because they thought maybe I had a prurient interest in the book—an unhealthy interest. “You've have to speak to Mr. Wallace about that.” So I go in and I persuade him that I had a literary interest, not an unhealthy one. And so he took a bunch of keys out of his pocket and we went down to the library and they had a steel cage like this. And he unlocks it. We go in, and that's where they had all the—the questionable books so that you and I couldn't just walk down the hall and pick up a copy of *Ulysses* or whatever. And

he brought it out and he said, “Okay,” and I—I finished the book while I was here. I—that was very memorable. I remembered him. He was a good guy. Mary Woodruff and Mary—and I remembered Wallace. That was—they were the only two people. I didn’t know about Guerdon until years later.

[02:45:59.26] SL: Now, the—was the Uark Theater there on Dickson Street at that time?

AW: I think the Palace . . .

SL: No, that’s a Sonneman [building]—that’s a Sonneman . . .

AW: No, I—I mislabeled it. It was the Uark.

SL: Yeah.

AW: Where was the Palace? Was that the . . .?

SL: The Palace was on the Square.

AW: Yeah, and I’ve confused the two. Thank you. No, the Uark.

[02:46:16.09] SL: And—and had they put in the bowling alley across the street yet?

Maybe not?

AW: I don’t want to swear to it.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: It was there when I came back years later.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But I don’t want to swear to what—I don’t think I ever went in either one. I don’t know why, but I have no memory of it.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I don’t remember any of our free time except that dance that the Chi-O’s and another sorority put on for us, and going to the American Legion. They must have

kept—kept us pretty constrained, because you can see if you were in charge of 175 crazies—you know, wild and crazy eighteen-, nineteen-, twenty-year-old boys, you'd want to keep them under lock and key. I would.

[02:46:56.15] SL: How long were you here?

AW: There were some intermarriages, by the way. They go on everywhere. Some—some of the guys who were there met—met and married some of the . . .

SL: Local . . .

AW: . . . girls on campus. How long? Not long. I'd say two and a half months.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Then they sent us off to training . . .

SL: []

AW: . . . and I took a test that found out I was suited to be a bombardier. And so I did my bombardier—first—first of all, they sent you to gunnery school, so I went through gunnery school in Panama City, Florida. And then—then they sent you to bombardier school—San Angelo, Texas. And . . .

[02:47:38.01] SL: Were you and Bill still—did—was it Bill that you signed up with or did you . . .?

AW: No, Bob Carlson.

SL: Oh, Bob. Were you all still together or . . .?

AW: No.

SL: When did you split?

AW: What happened was he'd—he'd gotten sick, and I can't remember the nature of the ailment, but it was—it was serious enough that they sent him to a hospital in

Omaha, Nebraska. And the reason that's important was that put him in a different command. That put him in the West Coast.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:48:05.21] AW: And so his training was all out west.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And I—we—we—we just kind of separated through that incident.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Then—yeah, he was a—he had some traits that I liked about him—different. One was that no matter where I was, he somehow would get me a birthday greeting.

I—there were—I bet you there were damn few guys who were serving during the war in Italy who got a telegram congratulating me on my twentieth birthday, you know? And he's sending it from Australia or something. I don't know. How the heck he could work that out, I had no idea. But he had that trait in him. He knew how to keep in touch. He was one of the ones that he met a girl and they'd want to marry—get married by midnight, you know, it was that—and they did. And they're still married. But his—his life carried him far away and I didn't see him for—but he's—he was a great friend and I have nothing but pleasant memories of the times we've been together. I have visited him out there—oh, six, seven years ago.

[02:49:28.07] SL: He's where now?

AW: He was in Santa Barbara.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: He outsmarted his employer. They said, “Well, we want you to start up this program.” He worked for a company called American Sterilizer, which is a big hospital supply company in Erie. And they said, “You can put it—you can have your headquarters wherever you want,” so he ends up in Santa Barbara, California.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:49:49.28] AW: Probably the best space in the country. And then after he retired one of his oldest [sons] moved thirty miles north of Santa Barbara to a town called Lompoc.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And so his son and grandchildren were in Lompoc, so he and his wife sold their house in Santa Barbara and moved to Lompoc. So he’s still in the same area, but . . .

[02:50:19.09] SL: So you get to Panama City. You learn to become a bombardier. What happens next?

AW: Well, it—it was interesting. The—I take—I get a ten-day trip home. They called it—it wasn’t a furlough. They called it a delay en route. I was told, “You will report to report to Colorado Springs, Colorado, ten days from this minute.” And I’m in San Angelo, Texas, and there’s no transportation. A couple officers used to moonlight with their car. They would get a—when—when—when a class like mine came along that wanted to go east, they would pile—they would fill the car and charge you so much money. It wasn’t a rip-off thing. They just made some money out of it. And they’d drive you at unlimited speeds to Fort Worth [Texas] . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[02:51:08.18] AW: . . . where you could get a train. There was no civilian air service that I was aware of. And you'd get a train. And I got a train in Fort Worth and off—went to Erie, PA. We got in a flood in Kansas City [Missouri] that scared me that I wouldn't—it would delay me quite a bit. But finally got to Erie and spent five days there and then got on a train heading west to Colorado Springs. And—and as we went along, picked up guys I knew from my class who were in Chicago [Illinois] or Cleveland [Ohio] and Chicago or whatever. Got to Colorado Springs and then we were all bombardiers, and then what they did is just kind of basically—“Okay, all you pilots, there. All you copilots, there. All you navigators, there. All you bombardiers, here.” And then they—you had six enlisted men on a four-engine bomber. Mine was called the B-24 Liberator. And six enlisted men: one was the radioman, one was the armament man in charge of all the weaponry, one was the—they didn't call him this, but he was the mechanic. He made sure the plane could fly. And who was the fourth guy? Well, there were four guys who were enlisted men, but they were very important ones. Radio, armament—God, am I embarrassed. Then they had—then they—no, I guess there was just—that's right, there were just three. And then you had three guys that were just kind of bodies: one was the tail gunner, one was the nose gunner, and one was the underneath ball-turret gunner. So there were ten guys—four officers, six enlisted men. Three of the enlisted men had specialized jobs as part of their duties. The other three just looked to see if they could—if there was anybody they should shoot at. And—and then they—then they just—by the numbers—you

just kind of came down with nine guys, you know, out of the—out of ten shoots, so to speak. And I got lucky and got Clare Claxton from Ames, Iowa, who—greatest man that ever lived—was my pilot. And . . .

[02:53:09.20] SL: So why do you say Clare Claxton was the greatest man that ever lived?

AW: 'Cause he was the greatest pilot that ever lived. And if you're—if you're flying around the hostile skies you want—what you want is the greatest pilot that—he was just Charles Lindbergh, I mean . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:53:25.07] AW: . . . 'cause there were a lot that weren't . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . very good. And he was—he was just wonderful, so I was lucky. I got a good pilot, and he saved our butts several times 'cause of his skill.

[02:53:39.13] SL: So you got deployed to Italy?

AW: Well, after we took training there, which went on quite a while and—then we—then we—I had a nice experience going east. What happened was that they had forty-five crews show up in Omaha, Nebraska. Omaha was the—once you graduated from—as a crew qualified for overseas duty, they sent you to Omaha, which was your last official jumping-off spot. And that's where they withdrew all the formalities—make out a will, life insurance policy—all the paperwork—the bureaucracy—was fulfilled there. And then they just waited there for your next opportunity. So what happened was to our forty-five crews who went there the same time is thirty-six of 'em were told they were gonna go to England in the 8th Air Force. And the way they would get there—they were gonna go in the Queen

Mary. And so they were taking a boat over there. The other nine, of which my guy was one, they had nine airplanes freshly minted that they wanted to take to Italy as replacement airplanes—airplanes for ones that had been lost or damaged. And so nine of us went to the 15th Air Force in Italy, and because my guy was so good—what they did was they promoted my guy to captain before we ever left Omaha—I mean, that was very rare.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:55:14.26] AW: Mostly they stayed at first lieutenant for a long time, but he was promoted to captain early he was so—that good. So we flew from Omaha heading for New Hampshire—Manchester, New Hampshire, which was where we were supposed to be before we took off for overseas. And as daylight broke I'm—I'm up there talking to the pilot and he said, "Aren't you from Erie?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, it's coming right up." He said, "Let's fly over your house." So we did. And I'm thinking, "There's my mommy down there, but she doesn't know that her little boy is up above heading east." So we went to New—New Hampshire and then we took a—everything was circuitous, but it was great. We flew from Manchester to—there's two places, and I can't remember—one is Goose Bay and one is Gander. I want to say it's Goose Bay. Up in—where the hell is all that stuff? Is that Nova Scotia or . . .

SL: Canada. Nova Scotia.

TM: We need a break. I've only got about thirty seconds left.

SL: Okay. All right.

[Tape Stopped]

[02:56:20.27] AW: . . . unless you saw him. And I did see . . .

JE: I know.

AW: . . . him every day. And he never—he never complained—never waived—never said anything bad about anybody—just did his job. He was the epitome of the really good guy, Middle Westerner—farm boy type.

PW: Sounds like you all made a really good crew—working together.

AW: Well, I didn't like the navigator. The navigator could get you lost going from here to the city park.

PW: [Laughter] Never good to have someone directionally challenged who's a navigator.

JE: From here to the city park? [Laughs]

[02:56:52.15] AW: Well, I'll tell you a story. I don't mind telling it, but we're in Colorado Springs. Do you know where that is exactly?

SL: It's on the Arkansas River.

AW: Have you ever heard of—have you ever heard of Pueblo?

JE: Uh-huh.

AW: It's just fifty-five miles south.

JE: Yeah.

AW: There's two Air Force bases: one's in Colorado Springs and one's in Pueblo. So what they're doing as navigators—this is a navigational test, and they put everything up and the navigator's supposed to keep track of it. And this is what we were supposed to do. We were supposed to fly directly above Colorado Springs

Airport and circle it. You would think that it's kind of like a basic maneuver, right?

JE: Yeah, yeah.

[02:57:34.20] AW: So when we did that and came down—can you imagine our shock that when we came down we were in Pueblo, [laughs] fifty-five miles away? It made headlines in the Air Force newspaper. [Laughter]

JE: 'Cause he got so lost. [Laughs]

[02:57:49.06] AW: My job—I volunteered for this 'cause it was such—it was such fun. In those airplanes they had a top turret that—that when you hit the—when you landed like this, you could then push it open and stand up and be master of all you're surveying. [Laughter]

JE: Yeah.

[02:58:04.18] AW: Going down the runway.

JE: Yeah.

AW: You know, it was a great feeling. Great feeling. So I volunteered for that. And I didn't know we were in the wrong place. I had nothing to do. I was just kind of, you know, half sleeping through the night. And—but the pilot knew immediately because we were—the difference in—in altitude, you know?

JE: Uh-huh.

AW: Colorado Springs says one number.

JE: Uh-huh.

AW: We're in a different [now?]. We're below where [laughs] Colorado Springs is.

JE: Right.

[02:58:30.02] AW: So he knows immediately we've screwed up. You know, we hit that runway and I popped it open—I got it open—he went down that runway and when he got to the end of it there was a plane parked like this, and going down he went like this, he—he [laughs] turned the—the—the wing down like this on the ground and we circled back up. He was so damned mad.

JE: [Laughs] Right back up?

[02:58:55.10] AW: No.

JE: Oh. [Laughs]

AW: The Air Force rules say—is you only had a flight of fifteen miles, you had to have a full tank of gas.

JE: Oh.

AW: That's how—see, that's an Army [regulation]. [Laughs] Great rules. [Laughter] So to get—we had to wait two hours while they [laughs] filled the tanked. And he seethed [laughter] for two hours. But I'll never forget him going down and missing a plane and going like this. Oh, what a great feeling. [Laughter] We were all too dumb to know what was going on. That was—see, that's the thing. When you're a young male you're . . .

JE: [Laughs]

AW: . . . too stupid to be aware of anything. And I'm—and I'm not exaggerating.

[02:59:37.05] PW: That's why they had to send young males to war, huh?

AW: That's right.

PW: Couldn't get girls to go fight it.

AW: I mean, it is because women are too smart. Hell, you know, “Go do something vulgar to yourself. I ain’t going.” [Laughter] Men—men are weird. [Laughter]

JE: I’ll have to agree with you on that one. [Laughs] No contest.

PW: Do you want anything Al? Do you want something to drink?

AW: No, I’m fine.

PW: Sip of water?

AW: I’m fine.

SL: Okay.

JE: All right. We’re waiting on Miss Lynn to depart . . .

SL: Okay.

JE: . . . and rejoin her room of solitude. [Laughs]

PW: [Laughs] Poor thing. She’s a prisoner up there.

JE: She is. Sometimes she’s in a room where she can hear what’s going on, but this one’s a little quiet.

[Tape Stopped]

[03:00:30.04] AW: This is neat. David and Barbara Pryor.

JE: Do you know those people? [Laughs]

AW: I bought David his first drink.

SL: You bought his first drink?

AW: First drink of alcohol.

SL: Is that right?

AW: Yep. I was asking I think last night we were talking—have you ever seen a movie called *Tom Jones*?

SL: Yeah.

[03:00:48.25] AW: It's a great movie starring a young Albert Finney.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And so I was married then. My—my wife was named Sue and she and I and Barbara and David—he was a student—went to see . . .

SL: *Tom Jones*.

AW: . . . *Tom Jones* at the Uark Theater.

SL: Yeah.

AW: And so . . .

SL: That was kind of risqué at the time, too, wasn't it?

AW: Yes, it was.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:01:11.29] AW: And afterwards it was still early, and so we went to the Elks Club.

Well, I didn't know that there were people that didn't drink. [Laughter] Where'd this come from? [Laughter] So we go to the Elks Club. He said—I'm being the big shot and I say, "Well, what's everybody want to drink?" And David looked kind of funny and so Barbara leaned over and whispered in his ear. And he said, "Gin and tonic."

SL: [Laughs]

[03:01:40.24] AW: And so when I ordered our drinks and Barbara ordered whatever she wanted and the rest is, and later on she said, "That's the first time he's ever . . ."

SL: Had any . . .

AW: “. . . had anything to drink.” So that’s how I know it was his first drink.

SL: Wow.

AW: But that was funny. She was whispering in his ear.

SL: You know . . .

AW: “Gin and tonic.”

[03:01:58.11] SL: When—it was a big deal at our household when David Pryor asked Barbara Lunsford out to eat. [Editor’s note: Barbara Lunsford is Scott Lunsford’s sister]

AW: Oh, I’ll bet. Yeah.

SL: Or out for a date. But it was a huge deal when he asked her for the second date . . .

AW: Oh.

SL: . . . ’cause the word was he never . . .

AW: Oh, really?

SL: . . . asked a girl more than twice—or more than once—second date.

[03:02:17.03] AW: Well, he—he and I bonded at the first . . .

SL: We can’t—we can’t get started on David Pryor just yet. [Laughs]

AW: But we—we—we—we bonded on—on Sonny Liston—no, Sonny Liston and Muhammad Ali—Cassius Clay, as he was then. We went to Tulsa for the big screen showing—David and I did. I didn’t know he was a boxing aficionado and I was, too, in those days. And we went over—we saw Muhammad beating—beating up Sonny Liston. So that’s how we—that’s social . . .

[03:02:44.12] SL: Great story. That’ll be a great story. Okay. So we’re talking . . .

AW: Where were we?

SL: We're talking—are we—are we rolling?

AW: Have I—am I—am I winning the war yet or not?

JE: Not yet.

SL: Not yet. Are we rolling?

JE: Yes, sir, we're rolling.

SL: Got speed?

[03:02:55.29] AW: Oh, yeah, we were in Omaha and we were . . .

SL: You flew over your house.

AW: . . . traveling east. We left Manchester, New Hampshire, for—to end up in Italy with a replacement airplane.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:03:09.12] AW: My—first place we landed was—I want to say Goose Bay Labrador—could that be it? Anyway, it's part of the northern route to Europe that commercial planes take, and there's a base that's been there for many years, but then I think it was primitive. It was mostly a wartime thing. From there we flew to the Canary Islands, and I'd have to look them up in the—on a map, but I think they're down near Portugal somewhere or Portugal used to own them or something. But we—I remember we stopped and spent the night in the Canary Islands 'cause it was my first opportunity to drink five-star Hennessy brandy, it was called. It was very good. From there we went to Algiers, and what I remember about Algiers was it's—it has very steep hills. Everybody rides bike—bikes—

which means that their leg muscles are extraordinary, and I had never seen women with calves that big.

SL: [Laughs]

[03:04:17.12] AW: That's what I remember about Algiers. From there we went to Tunis, which is a lovely city with boulevards and appropriate trees—palm trees . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . down the boulevards and all. It was very lovely—Tunis. I think we had enough time in Tunis that we—we got in a Jeep and tried to find Carthage, and I don't think we were successful 'cause we just—it was the blind leading the blind. “Wasn't Carthage around here?” you know—[laughter] that kind of attitude. And then from there we flew and—and none of us knew where we were going except the pilot. And we ended up at some obscure part of southern Italy at an Air Force base, and the reason we had been sent there was they were running out of airplanes and they—they wanted the airplane, and they were also running out of crews, and they needed the crews. So that's why went to Italy—replacement crew and airplane. And I wish I could remember after all these years my—my group number and my squadron number, but I—I've forgotten 'em. But that's where we were. The first thing I—I learned was that the squadron that we had moved into—the group—had formed originally at the beginning of the war in this country when we went to war. They had trained together and had flown to Italy together, and they were a full complement. Now, let me just elaborate. A full complement in those days meant that a group consisted of four squadrons, and each squadron was supposed to have eighteen crews and nine airplanes. And the

theory was that if you were on the Monday-Wednesday-Friday nine crews—that's your days to fly. And I'd be out Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday. I don't know what they did about Sunday, but Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday—that's the alternate. So you could alternate. The crews wouldn't have to fly every day 'cause it was considered strenuous—stressful.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:06:48.01] AW: And it would just alternate. So eighteen crews—nine airplanes. Well, when we got there they only had nine airplanes—no, they had eight airplanes. Ours was the ninth. But they only had nine crews. They were at fifty-percent strength. So we became crew number ten. And within a month we were number one. So it was—it was interesting how fast things changed. I mean, and we were the veterans of the outfit thirty days later. Just to jump ahead to the end of the war, 'cause this—these numbers fascinate me—we had more airplanes than they had room for and we had twenty-four crews. That's how powerful we had become by the end of the war. We had more crews and more airplanes than we knew what to do with . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:07:40.15] AW: . . . you know? And they had plenty more back here ready to go over there, like my brother. He never went overseas. He never—he was a bombardier also, but they never had any need for him, you know? But that's how powerful we became by the end of the war.

[03:07:55.20] SL: So you—you—you all became the number one crew because of attrition?

AW: Yeah, various kinds of—there were essentially two ways—three ways—two ways. [Coughs] Let me think. I'm—I'm coughing here. The—the easiest way was you had to fly a certain number of missions. Thirty-five was the basic number. Once you flew thirty-five missions you had finished what was called your tour of duty and you were eligible to be sent back to the States for reassignment. That was—that was, let's say, the preferred method of getting out of there.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:08:35.10] AW: The other was, of course, being shot down somewhere. There was a third method which was kind of suspect, and that was—we—we—there were stories from the guys who were veterans when we got there about one particular crew that they—they were convinced were—that they were flying a mission up into central Europe. Austria was a favorite area to go to, and in so doing, it went near Switzerland. Switzerland was neutral territory and they were very strict about that, so that if you flew into their airspace they would send up fighters and force you to land. And if you landed you were interned for the rest of the war. Well, if you think about it—say you want—say you want to leave combat and you haven't finished your mission—your tour yet. It's not too bad to fly over Switzerland, be forced to land, and be interned 'til the end of the war and live in one of their nice hotels while—while waiting.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:09:44.15] AW: So that—they were convinced that that crew had done that. I guess maybe they had talked too much beforehand or something.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

AW: So that was a—that was what I called the shameful way to get out.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:09:55.24] AW: But the others were obvious. You get—get shot down or sent back. I'm—I'm—having finished your tour. So that's what happened in thirty days. I don't remember how many of each. They used to shoot 'em down, you know, or they'd have to crash or some reason.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Malfunction.

[03:10:20.22] SL: So what was your first mission like?

AW: Well, I want to think—as I remember, my first mission was over a town called Friedrichshafen, which was famous because that's where the Germans built their Graf Zeppelins and they'd been turned into an airplane factory, and we bombed the factory. Now, I only remember the details on a couple of the missions. I—I didn't pay attention. Let me give you the format for it.

SL: Okay.

[03:11:00.13] AW: It'll help explain what—the way it went—is you were—you were told the day before, “You're gonna fly tomorrow,” which meant you were gonna get awakened by about 3:00 in the morning. And then—and then you'd have what they called breakfast, which was usually powdered eggs or something worse. Then you would be sent to—then you would take a truck up to the headquarters, which was—we were living in an olive grove belonging to some duke who was hiding out in Rome at the time. And they'd taken over his house and his stable and a barn and they were being used for military purposes. So you'd meet

in one of the rooms where you got your briefing session, and there would be the officers up in front and a big, giant screen. And they'd say, "Okay, today your target is Friedrichsburgen. However, that's target number one. If for some reason you can't see the target—cloud cover or something—you're number one alternate is Linz, Germany, and bomb some factory there. If in case you can't see them, then there would be a third," so you'd have three targets, one, two, three, depending on the weather. And they'd give you the briefing and—which meant you—once you circled and met as a—as a formation, you would head for what they called the initial point. I've always tried to explain it down here by saying—say we were—say the North was fighting the South with airplanes, and the Northern Air Force was up around Chicago—they would form their formation and they were gonna—they wanted to bomb the University of Arkansas campus for some reason . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:12:58.06] AW: . . . they—but they didn't want people here to know that, so the initial point would be Joplin [Missouri] or Lake of the Ozarks [Missouri] or maybe now Beaver Lake or something—something that you could see easily from the air.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:13:19.11] AW: And where, let's say you're over Joplin, where they don't know you're going to Fayetteville. You could be going to Tulsa. You could be going to Wichita [Kansas]. You know, you could be going back up to Kansas City. Ambiguity was an issue. So now you got the initial point and now you know that

you're gonna go to Fayetteville. And at that point the bombardier took over the control of the airplane because he was gonna drop the bombs on—on the campus.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:13:47.00] AW: And, now, the way they did it is there were nine planes in a formation— in a squadron formation, and there were four of them, so there'd be thirty-six in the squadron. The—everybody—all the bombardiers dropped when the number one guy dropped, so you would be waiting for—see him drop and then you would drop the bombs immediately and hope for the best. And then you'd try to get your butt out of there 'cause they were usually gonna shoot at you, and so you would wheel out of there as fast you could and head home for safety. So that's the way the formation ran. Well, meanwhile, when you took off—plane after plane, as you circled the air 'til you all got in formation, then you headed wherever you were going. So you bombed your target. Let's say that was the number one target and you bombed it, and there would be in the airplane—in the back airplanes there would be cameramen—Clark Gable did this in five missions—is you'd have a camera in a hole in the—in the airplane on the—in the floor and you'd have a camera there and you'd film where the bombs had hit and what—and so you could then go home and look at whatever damage you had accomplished and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:15:02.14] AW: . . . and so—so you'd go to debriefing, and at debriefing you would say, "Well, what happened to you?" And you would give 'em your experiences and relate to it and—and by then you'd been up since 3:00—you were now—it's

probably fourteen, fifteen hours later, and that you've had a hard day. Sometimes the—sometimes fighter planes had attacked you and you'd—your guys had shot back and with what results. Sometimes you'd see buddies shot down and what—you were always asked if you saw any parachutes. You were questioned about the thing—whatever happened, and you'd answer 'em and—and then go back and relax. So that was the typical format . . .

SL: Okay.

[03:15:50.15] AW: . . . of one's day if you flew. I don't know what else to—oh—oh, yeah, and then the Red Cross women would—would have a little caravan there with coffee and donuts as you—before you went back to your . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: That was nice, too. But the reason we didn't like the Red Cross women was because they would only date majors and up.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: There was a class distinction.

SL: They wouldn't have anything to do with a lowly bombardier.

AW: No, no.

[03:16:17.09] SL: Well, so—so, were you shot at your first mission? What . . .?

AW: Well, I—I can't remember, to be truth—but, the answer I'm sure is yes.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: What the—what the Germans shot at you it was—was called flak. These are exploding bombs in the air, and this—the way you could be shot at is twofold. It's from cannon on the ground . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:16:44.03] AW: . . . and other airplanes. Now, the—the permanent one that lasted until the war was over were these cannons. They had 88 millimeter and 105 millimeter, which the difference was, of course, size and how high they could go. We were jealous of the B-17s because they could fly much higher than us. If we flew at 30,000 feet, which was about as high as we could go, they might be flying at 36,000 or 40,000. So, naturally, the Germans are gonna focus on the nearer. And that—that's the grounds for some jealousy, I think.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:17:26.02] AW: In fact, we were once bombed by B-17s that were flying above us. They dropped their bombs and—thinking there was nothing underneath them, not knowing that good ol' Al and his buddies were underneath them. We—bombs were going right [laughs]—it was kinda funny. It had a happy ending. Nobody got hurt. But anyway, when you looked at a target ahead you would see a dark cloud right over the target. And that was the anti-aircraft stuff. It was called flak. F-L-A-K. And what happened was is this shell would come up to the required height and then it would explode into fragments. And so the fragments were called flak, and they would be pieces of metal of different sizes from little to larger, you know? And they would cut through the plane. Now, they could hurt people and did—killed people—wound them. And they could damage your airplane, especially the engines if they were lucky. Or shoot the damn plane down—“Ba-boom,” right there—right in the gas tank. So depending on how heavily defended the target was, was how much you feared the flak. You always feared it, but

some targets were very heavily defended, and you really feared that 'cause you—because you had no—you had no alternative that you had to fly through it to drop the bombs. And, so you knew that you were gonna fly through it and you just had—get a little lucky, as you did. So, now, our airplanes were routinely hit. I was never hit. Some of my crewmen were wounded. I was never wounded. I was lucky then. Closest I ever came was I was looking out the window and there was they called a Pitot tube [pronounced: PEE-toh]—a little, thin tube and it measured air speed or something. And as I'm looking out, the Pitot tube's like this and a piece of flak sheared it off. So it was, like, that far from my nose. That's as close as I ever got to being hurt, that I knew of, and that's not much of a story considering what happened to other guys. Like, for example, a guy got the Silver Star, which is a very high award in our gang—not—not my crew. But he was the copilot and they were flying along and a piece of flak came in and almost took the pilot's arm off. I mean, it's hanging there bleeding—he's bleeding to death, and this guy's the copilot, and he's gotta fly the airplane with one hand, he's gotta put a tourniquet around it with the other and save the arm, which he did, and drop the bombs. And he did all—this one copilot did all—you know, paper-hanger stuff, all around—saved the guy's arm, saved the plane, saved the crew, dropped the bombs, got home. It was considered a pretty nifty day for him.

SL: Yeah.

[03:20:32.12] AW: And he was honored for that. But there were all sorts of—the flak was, you know, something very dangerous, but it—if it didn't hit you, why, you didn't worry about it.

[03:20:47.19] SL: What about the airplanes . . .

AW: The airplanes . . .

SL: . . . the fighter pilots?

AW: As the war went on—at one time—’course, the German Air Force was terrific. They had two famous airplanes, the Messerschmitt 190, I think it was, and the Faulk Wolf. I forget them—the numbers. I should try to remember. And they were two great fighter planes. They—of course, they had great pilots. You know, the number two man in Germany was [first name?] Gehring, and he was—that’s how he got famous was an Air Force ace in World War I. So he—he worshiped his people and took care of them.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:21:37.11] AW: So they had a great Air Force and they had great fighter planes and great pilots. But as the war went on, attrition took place. Now, I’m confused because of a recent article I read. All these years I thought that what happened was that they—they lost pilots, so they—the pilots—they couldn’t—it’s harder to replace pilots than airplanes.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:22:06.04] AW: But recently I read—no, I’m wrong, it was the other way around. So I can’t swear to you, but what—what I do know is there were fewer airplanes. So that when—if—if you—if you were at the back of—of a group—it was a very impressive sight, Scott—is we had twenty-four groups of heavy bombers in Italy. That meant that when each group went off, there were thirty-six planes. So whatever twenty-four times thirty-six is, that’s a lot of airplanes. [864 airplanes]

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Big bombers.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:22:36.23] AW: They don't look so big anymore, but they were—they were then.

Eight of 'em were B-17s and sixteen were B-24s. Now, they were staggered in the sky, 500—you know, number one is at 27,000 feet behind 26,500—27,500—and then another 27,000—you know, staggered . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . so that they wouldn't hurt each other.

SL: Right.

[03:23:01.04] AW: When you're going and you—say, you just happen to be in the

back one, just looking ahead at this stream—very powerful image, very powerful. When I first—when we first got over there, the German airplanes were just hitting everybody. Just coming out of the sky, you know, shooting—boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. As the war went on—as time went on, they would pick on one group. They didn't have that many planes to—so they're down. So now they would just pick a group arbitrarily and then they'd—they'd—those guys were really in hell, but everybody else was just kinda smoking a cigar and having a beer . . .

SL: [Laughs]

AW: . . . because there was—you know, they weren't being shot at.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:23:40.18] AW: And that was because they had—there was attrition, but I'm now confused as to whether they were short of planes or pilots.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Because I've read a conflicting article. I do know from a experience I had later on in a different context, that they took a lot of the youthful pilots—kids who were fifteen, sixteen years old—and put 'em in the infantry. I do know that happened. And they were supposed to be the fiercest fighters of 'em all—fifteen-, sixteen-year-old boys.

[03:24:13.05] SL: Were—was your base ever threatened at all? Did they ever . . . ?

AW: No. When we—when I first got there it was a joint base with the English. The English had a bomber squadron on the same base.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And the reason is the English flew at night. We believed in daytime bombing—precision bombing is—use the Norton bomb sight and you could—and the idea was, “Oh, you could put a bomb in a pickle barrel from 30,000 feet,” you know, that or stuff. The British didn't believe that. They believed in pattern bombing, and so they flew at night. And they'd—the first plane over the target would throw down flares and they would fly real low at it and they would try to pattern bomb. So we—it was—the base really worked twenty-four/seven, you know?

SL: Yeah.

[03:24:59.00] AW: We were—the—the USA was daytime. They were nighttime. After a month or two they left. I don't know why, but they just—one day they disappeared and then it was just us. So we weren't—they didn't have the ability

to—to attack us. The most interesting thing that happened on our—my—two things happened—one—one semi-funny. The non-funny one was a lot of our guys when they were flying eastern Europe got shot down and the state—the nation you wanted to get shot down over was Romania because they're decent people and they treated our prisoners well, whereas they could be—they were routinely killed in other places or threatened with death. So with—there's a—there was a group of several hundred American—US air—airmen they're prisoners in Romania, and by now the Russians were getting close enough that the Germans were not paying as much attention to everything. So this US officer negotiated with a Romanian colonel that they would sneak all the American guys out and fly 'em back to Italy under the Germans' noses. The Romanians weren't—did not—were not a warlike tribe at that time. So the colonel—they had to make arrangements, so what they did was the colonel got in his airplane and he hid the American colonel behind him—like, under the seat. And they landed there at our base and conducted the [negotiations]. And that was fun—seeing—seeing a German airplane land [laughs], you know? And—and some—some Romanian getting out. But he was, you know, white-flagging it and all that. And—and all of a sudden this US guy—USA guy got out. And they had got the release of these several hundred airmen through that negotiation, which I thought was kind of nice.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:26:56.22] AW: The other one was when you've took off and you're a tail-gunner—and all the gunners did this, is you want to make sure your—your weap-

ons are—are functioning. So you'd put some—the bullets—what are they—you know . . . ?

SL: The belts.

[03:27:15.29] AW: The belts. Thank you. Put a belt of bullets in there and you'd fire it up and then you'd shoot some rounds just to make it was okay. Okay, fine—just—and now—so on this one particular mission our guy—one of our guys on our—in our group [] was back there and he did all that not knowing—not what—paying attention, and what he did when he cleared the gun was he fired right at one of our other crews and damn near shot 'em down from accident. So [laughter] it really was—they were—now, this other crew was from a different base and it was really funny is our guy—the—the idiot crew lands, and right behind 'em is this crew from another group. We knew that because they had tail markings, you know?

SL: Right.

[03:28:04.15] AW: Like racing stripes, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And this other guy's coming right behind him and they—they taxi over and a couple of guys jump out of the [laughs] second plane and run over and they—they finally—and they beat the stuffing out of that—[laughter] and they got back in their plane and took off. [Laughter] But they were really mad. That was the only funny thing I could recall of that nature.

[03:28:27.05] SL: Well, so how—how long were you based—? Is that where you stayed the whole war?

AW: Oh, yeah. It's a . . .

SL: And . . .

AW: If you ever look at a map of Italy—I really—I have maps around here. I should get it—is, you know, the famous—shaped like a boot—a boot.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:28:41.12] AW: And the area around the boot—there—the main city—the variation city is called Foggia, and in those days it was, like, 100,000 population, which was pretty good size for that area.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And the land was about twenty miles inland from the Adriatic Sea. The land was very flat. It was almost like beach land. And they grew a lot of olives in that area. And all the bases were along there. Eleven miles south of Foggia was our olive grove where we lived. And then—but the closer sit is much smaller called Cerignola—C-E-R-I-G—whatever—nola. And we were six miles from that, so that—that stretch of road—eleven miles to Foggia, six miles to Cerignola. We were in a—now, there's a book out that was written by the guy that writes all the books—what's his name? I forget. Very famous contemporary historian.

TM: [Stephen E.] Ambrose.

AW: Huh?

TM: Ambrose.

[03:39:16.06] AW: Thank you. Very good. That's it. Stephen. He wrote a book about the 15th Air Force, and it turns out—I've read the book—I think I've even got it back there—is—is—it's really about McGovern—George McGovern's

crew. That's as far as I could figure out from the description. McGovern was right across the road from us in his group. [Editor's note: Reference to Ambrose's book, *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s Over Germany 1944-1945.*]

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:30:03.02] AW: So the experiences that are . . .

SL: Very similar.

AW: . . . from that book are identical to my experiences. McGovern was a pilot of a B-24, I think, during the same time. So we were over there at the same time. Did you ever hear of an actor—anybody remember an actress named Madeline Carroll?

SL: Huh-uh.

[03:30:20.11] AW: She was an English actress primarily in the 1930s and 1940s—so beautiful it hurts to think about. I had heard that she was a nurse for the British hospital in Foggia, so I do remember one Sunday going to the British hospital wandering up and down the halls [laughs] seeing if she was at work. Madeline Carroll. If you ever see an old movie with—I've got it upstairs—Robert Donat in *Thirty-Nine Steps*.

SL: *Thirty-Nine Steps*.

AW: Alfred Hitchcock's claim to fame.

SL: Yeah.

AW: This was the one made in 1930-something. [Editor's note: 1935]

SL: Yeah.

AW: She's the female star, see?

SL: Okay.

AW: You can [remember]—see what she looks like.

SL: So I have heard of her.

AW: Madeline Carroll.

SL: I've seen her. Yeah.

AW: Beautiful.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

AW: But I never was—it was to no avail.

[03:31:04.24] SL: [Laughs] Well, how was the social life?

AW: There was no social life.

SL: Well, you got to go into a hospital to look for a movie star, I mean . . .

AW: Well, that's the—I wouldn't—vaguely look for a movie star.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: I think that destroys the word social.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: The—no, I mean, what did we do? It's too pathetic to . . .

SL: [Laughs]

AW: . . . to think about. There was no social life. It was just a bunch of guys living in these semi-primitive circumstances and we—all the officers had a tent with—for the four officers. The enlisted men's tents were for six enlisted men. We had a—we had a kerosene barrel in the middle of the tent for heating, which stunk and gave off no heat.

SL: [Laughs]

[03:31:57.04] AW: So we stole from the airplane fuel supply, which gave off tremendous heat and which was hidden up in the woods and when the—when the war ended or when we were left there, they found out that \$75,000 worth of gasoline had been . . .

SL: Pilfered.

AW: . . . used up—pilfered for heating purposes, and they were holding the colonel in—personally liable, and we were so happy . . .

SL: [Laughs]

AW: . . . 'cause we didn't like him.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: And . . .

SL: So you all didn't . . .

AW: The food—I can't tell you how bad the food—why—why—why—it's hard to believe. Do you realize that we got a—? We got a box of goodies once a week—a carton of cigarettes—whatever the hell they could put in there—nothing—nothing to interest—the only thing of value besides the cigarettes—there were two things of value—carton of cigarettes and a bag of Newton—some—somebody's Fig Newtons. Do you know what a Fig Newton is?

SL: Yeah. Absolutely.

AW: They still have them?

SL: Yeah.

AW: Somebody's—somebody's famous for 'em.

SL: Well, Nabisco makes them.

AW: That's it. Maybe that's—Nabisco. That was the most valuable item in there because you could use them for barter because what are you gonna have for breakfast? You're gonna have powered eggs that make you vomit or are you gonna have two Fig Newton bars? There's no question.

SL: [Laughs]

[03:33:26.28] AW: Now, that was our gourmet breakfast, all right?

SL: Okay.

AW: Now when you flew they gave you a little can. There were three things in the cans. One was ham. One was—I think maybe it was Spam.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I don't want to bet on that. One was frozen cheese and the other was chocolate. It came in a round circle about this thick. That was lunch. You didn't know which one you were gonna get. It was a surprise. That was lunch. Dinner is—would be—do you know what homemade hash is—I mean, scraps of onion and potato and . . .

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

AW: . . . a little meat and all that.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:34:15.11] AW: And let's say you've got a four-year-old boy, and what portion would you give that four-year-old boy? That would be your portion. And that would be dinner. And that would be each day of the week, every week. So you look for things to barter with. In other—the thing that was most valuable to barter

with were cigarettes 'cause the natives had no cigarettes. And—but what they had that you wanted more than anything else were eggs, 'cause you could—you could—and so you would negotiate illegally for—let's say some native that's working around the camp would come in with two eggs and you'd give him a pack of cigarettes. And you'd take it in to the cook and say, "Fix me these eggs up, would ya?" And that would be the best meal you could dream of that was available. Take my word. The food—I was talking to an old buddy out at the Elks Club just last week. He joined the Navy, and to this day I'm pissed off—I'm sorry.

SL: That's all right. You can say that.

TM: Yeah, you can say whatever.

SL: [Laughs]

[03:35:18.21] AW: I got—I got a chance to go to Naples [Italy]. It wasn't all that far away, and you could hitchhike easy to Naples. Somebody was always going to Naples for supplies. So you'd just say, "Can I go along?" "Okay." You'd jump in back and off you go to Naples. One time I was in Naples on a Sunday and they—there was all these—and a big naval vessel had come in. I don't know if it was a battleship or what—it was a big boat. And they said, "You're all invited to come and have Sunday dinner with us." Now, I've told you what we are eating. We go down there—this is what they had—baked chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, green beans, ice cream. Ice cream!

SL: [Laughs]

[03:35:56.26] AW: Rolls. Butter. And I still talk to this guy. I said to him the other day—I said how mad I was, “I’m jealous.” And they ate like that all the time, as the Navy took care of them. The Air Force were pathetic. I think people stole it all if you want to know.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: The black market was real fierce. And . . .

[03:36:18.13] SL: So how long were you stationed there?

AW: It was not too long. I was—this was how it gets ambiguous is how you finished your of duty. They—this is how they—they messed it up right from the beginning. They took your pilot and they made him fly copilot for three or four missions with other planes. Basically, to break him in.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:36:45.21] AW: Our guy didn’t need any breaking in, but it—but the point is that he would finish up, and when—and—and as it happened in my case, when my guy finished up, that I obviously worship, I still had four missions to go. And—and now you had to beg your way onto a plane. “Hey, would you mind?” ’Cause you—four more missions and you’re home. And that’s why I said I had this experience with an incompetent crew, where I lived in terror ‘til we got home ’cause I thought they were just—they were gonna—they were gonna crash themselves. There wasn’t—they didn’t need Germans. And—but I finally got through those four. But—but it took me—my last flight took me thirteen days of going down and getting ready, and then they’d cancelled the mission on account of weather. So it—it took me a couple of months to get four—four missions in. So I was

through with the heavy lifting in October, but I didn't finish up until—
October/November. I didn't finish up until February.

SL: Of . . . ?

[03:37:48.21] AW: [19]45.

SL: [19]45.

AW: And by then it was pretty clear, 'cause we didn't know too much that was going on, like the Battle of the Bulge. We didn't know how bad that was, but we also knew that the war was coming to an end by then. And I stayed an extra week because as a flyer you got a fifty-percent bonus for flying, so my salary was \$160 a month, but I was paid \$240 because I was a flyer. So I stayed an extra week to qualify in March . . .

SL: [Laughs]

AW: . . . to get that extra \$80 and then I came home.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:38:37.06] AW: The—the last flight I took was a training flight and was maybe a wildest, bizarre flight in the history of aviation. I went off with this—people I didn't know. They said, “Well, we're breaking in this airplane,” and so off we went. Did you ever heard of Mount Casino? No reason why you should. It was a famous casino—it was a famous—I said casino, didn't I?

SL: Yeah.

AW: I think that's what it's called.

TM: Can you—there you go. []

[03:39:11.28] AW: Caserta.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Mount Caserta. Well, it goes all the way back to St. Thomas Aquinas.

SL: Okay.

AW: It was a famous historical seminary or retreat for monks . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . that had been—was over 1,000 years old. It was on the crest of this hill that looked down into a valley.

SL: Over Florence?

AW: No, it was south of Florence.

SL: Okay.

AW: South—in fact, it was south of Rome.

SL: Okay.

[03:39:46.03] AW: And it was old enough that St. Thomas Aquinas spent his adult life there.

SL: Okay.

AW: But the point is it was all stone buildings and—and if you were the enemy and you had control of this spot, your weapons would look down on—you controlled all of south Italy. So we're—now we're trying to drive the Germans out, and that was the toughest—I—I won't go into the details except that was the bloodiest waste—most wasteful, trying to cap[ture]—trying to drive the Germans out of this natural fort. And so we bombed it. We destroyed it through the air and all that. Then they used the rubble. I mean, they still fought out of the rubble. Well, anyway, by then the—by then the Germans had been pushed back north of Florence.

So we started out—we said, “Well, let’s go see the range.” So we—we flew kind of like—what do they call that? Loop-the-loop. We kind of flew around and looked at the rubble of this once-famous place. Then we went to the beach at Anzio. Have you ever heard of that?

SL: Yeah.

[03:40:53.14] AW: That was interesting. It was like going flying down Miami Beach [Florida] with all the hotels—none of them with roofs, they had been so bombed.

SL: Yeah.

AW: It was just empty. It was just shells there for miles—just shells. And then—then we got to Rome. There’s a cloud over Rome. Now, this is exciting. This is—your heart could pound. There’s this cloud over Rome. All the rest of Italy’s clear, blue skies. So we go through the cloud and we get as far as we—we don’t know where we are. We get [], and we get underneath the cloud as we’re turning back to go south again. And guess what’s on my left? The Vatican. I mean, we’re flying lower than St. Peter’s Cathedral. How do you like them apples? Now, first of all, that was illegal. You could go to—because this was a separate nation. It’s a sovereign nation. And, scared to death if they were gonna—if they were gonna find out who done it and put us all in prison for the rest of our lives.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: But we got—made it home. But that was exciting.

SL: Yeah.

AW: Flying over the Vatican . . .

SL: Vatican.

[03:41:58.16] AW: . . . at low—at low altitude. And you got a great view of the Vatican, I might add. But anyway, that was my last flight, and then I came home that circuitous route. I don't know—I've mentioned it already, haven't I? I flew home through Casablanca [Morocco].

SL: No.

AW: That was—'cause by then the movie was out, I think. But anyway, we flew home through—spent a week in Casablanca. And then the big part of the—the trip—this was so—so fortuitous is—first of all, we're flying in these airplanes that don't have seats. You'd sitting on the floor up against the wall. It's not comfortable. And one of the guys—and you didn't see a whole lot—one of the guys and it was a captain in the Air Force, and he was a black male—and you didn't see too many of them, either. Now, we had been protected by the famous Tuskegee [Oklahoma] Airmen. We knew that because of the markings on their planes.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:43:03.13] AW: And that—they were pretty good. They were very good. But I don't know who this fellow was. We didn't know—nobody knew anybody else.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: It was just like an airline.

SL: Right.

[03:43:12.13] AW: Total strangers. So we're flying from Casablanca to Dakar from where we're gonna fly over to Brazil and head north. This was to stay away from any Germans. And on—halfway down to Dakar, over the Sahara Desert, one of our engines goes out. It's a two-engine airplane—one goes out. As luck would

have it, they've got a little emergency landing strip right nearby where they've got two US mechanics to fix planes. And we are within about a quarter of a mile of a French Foreign Legion post. So we land. We have to spend overnight because they gotta fix the plane, so the first thing is we got a Jeep, and this—this part—now, you're not gonna believe some of this.

SL: [Laughs]

[03:44:02.27] AW: There was a—there was a hood ornament—a woman who was about this tall and beautiful—young black woman—and—and she—we were told later she had spent her adult life as a big attraction in a French circus and—and now had retired back to her native town, and she took us on a tour around the French Foreign Legion post and then she took through her village, which, you know, it was right out of a *Tarzan* movie. It was—it was straw thatch huts and half-naked children. You know, all that stuff running around. Don't know how they lived or what they did for a living. And—and I kept thinking, “What a—the contrast between this handsome black USA captain,” you know, and this was so dramatic that I often wondered how he felt about . . .

SL: Yeah.

[03:45:01.03] AW: . . . about the—the contrast 'cause he—he obviously—he obviously—if he made a captain in the Air Force, you know—you know he had a lot of ability.

SL: Right.

AW: So anyway, it was very interesting. And, of course, this woman—I can't believe her. And the French Foreign Legion post—I—it obviously made a big impact on

me. And then we flew to—then we flew on to Dakar and then we went to Brazil and from Brazil we went to Miami Beach, where I saw Joe E. Lewis—did you ever hear of Joe E. Lewis?

SL: Yeah, yeah.

AW: In a night club in Miami Beach. So there. So . . .

[03:45:43.08] SL: You know, one—one thing that you didn't really elaborate on—on this—the pilot that you had that was so fantastic.

AW: Yeah.

SL: You said that he kind of saved you all a couple of times out there in . . .

AW: Well, here's—here's—here's—first of all, here's what he did. I don't know—I don't know how to make it meaningful to other people, but when you fly in formation—first of all, the airplane he flew—this B-24, was an extraordinarily cumbersome airplane. You may recognize it in your memory book because it had two giant rudders.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:46:23.03] AW: So that meant that he had to control the rudders 'cause they control flight, and I—his legs—I would stand—I would stand in my little compartment where the bombardier was—I would stand about this far from his feet, and I could see his feet going, pushing these damn pedals for ten hours, okay?

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:46:46.10] AW: Secondly, when you flew formation, the closer you were the more protected you were because each airplane had—don't tell me, I'm gonna tell you—two, four, six, eight—had ten fifty-caliber machine guns on it. So that's a

pretty heavy-armed plane. When you put nine of those planes together, then you had ninety fifty-caliber machine guns. So the closer you were the better protected you were. Now, here's the pilot over here. Here's the lead pilot. We're flying number two, let's say. He would stick that wing in three feet from the copilot's nose, and he'd keep it there for ten hours, okay?

SL: Yeah.

[03:47:33.22] AW: Now, once you've dropped a bomb, so it was gangbusters 'cause all these guys let their inner fighter pilot out of them—out of these big, heavy things, and he—and you would go like this. Now, I don't the—what G-forces mean to you, but if you're in the nose, you're far away from the balance point and you can't move. The blood drains out of your face. You're—you're like this until they level out. But their idea was they wanted to get away from that flak as fast as they could and they—they went just like that, and—and as they're doing, they're turning 180 [degrees] and heading home, okay? He could do that—he could do that so fast and so well, and now you're—you're feeling secure, okay? However, suppose on the way you picked up some flak. Now, what happened was your engines would go out a lot. But the airplane could fly—actually, the—I've seen 'em—our plane flew on two engines. It was nice if they were one on each side, and I don't want to swear to too much that. I don't really remember. But one time we're flying home and we—and we're either gonna crash in the Adriatic [Sea] or we're gonna barely make it. And we're in—we're in panic mode and I'm ready to parachute, 'cause the planes don't stay on the water. They go under right away.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:48:58.22] AW: He got us across that Adriatic, and as we hit the runway and went down the runway, as we went to turn off—the last drop of gas out of that airplane. Now, that’s piloting. You see what I mean?

SL: Yes.

AW: And now you say—no wonder I have this admiration for him.

SL: Yeah.

[03:49:17.26] AW: Now, there were lots of other things. I mean, the way he got us out of trouble and the way he conducted himself—then he would get back and he’d lay in bed, and the strain on his legs was such that I would see him—for the longest time his legs would be like this—the—the physical stress on ’em—that he put himself through. Now, you say, “Why didn’t the copilot do it?” I don’t know. Maybe he had ego, but—but that’s what he did. Great, great pilot. We never had any trouble except what happened because of some external force like being shot at.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But we—you mentioned earlier—you know, like one time they counted—we had over 200 holes in the airplane from flak, so that’s—you know? And—but nobody got hurt, so we were lucky—very lucky.

TM: I’m just curious on those flak holes. I mean, would they just repair those and tape ’em up or . . .?

[03:50:17.21] AW: Yeah. Yeah, they just—I don’t know—I want to be honest with you, I didn’t pay much attention to anything that I wasn’t required to pay attention

to. Life was a lot easier that way, I always thought. Some of the guys went a little bonkers over there, you know? The worst was a guy from Brookline, Massachusetts, who—God love him—he had married before he went overseas and—and had had a baby daughter he’d never seen. And, God, he just lived for the day he was getting home.

SL: Right.

[03:50:52.11] AW: He lived for it. And he was one of these guys I was talking about—he’s—he’s in limbo. He’s trying to finish his mission so he can go home, and he didn’t have a place to stay anymore, so we let him go in our tent. And his—his cot was right by mine, and—and this—I’m trying to go to sleep because we were gonna fly the next day. “Al, have you looked at the stars tonight?”

“Yeah.”

SL: [Laughs]

AW: “Did you ever stop and think this may be the last night you ever see the stars?”
Who needs that, you know?

SL: [Laughs] Right.

AW: That’s what I mean. I didn’t like him as a roommate.

SL: Right.

AW: Not one bit.

SL: Yeah.

[03:51:25.29] AW: But he was—it was under this mental stress. He wanted . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: All he wanted to do was go home and see his family and never bother anybody again.

SL: Right.

AW: He was kind of a peaceful guy anyway. But man, he drove me crazy. Then my favorite was a guy who took off five straight missions and never landed. He parachuted five times. His plane got shot down. He had to parachute. He said, "I will no longer fly," and they didn't do anything to him. [Laughs] He said, "The hell with this. I'm not gonna fly anymore." [Laughs]

SL: Well, five times. Yeah.

[03:51:58.10] AW: Five straight—five straight take-offs, no landings. And he said that—I think the Lord's trying to tell him something. But anyway . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I thought—I thought—he was kind of our hero 'cause he said, "I'm not gonna fly anymore," and they—they let him get away with it.

[03:52:16.00] SL: Did you ever get to go to town and eat . . .

AW: Oh, God.

SL: . . . at a restaurant or . . . ?

AW: No, not where—not down in—you understand, south Italy's very poor.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I don't know if they have restaurants there.

SL: [Laughs]

[03:52:30.07] AW: My best time was in Rome and—and the Isle of Capri. I got a ten-day trip to Rome. I got another ten-day trip to Capri. The Air Force was smart

enough—they aren't—they aren't totally retarded. They took over the Isle of Capri as a R and R [rest and relaxation] place for us, and I had a wonderful time. It was so beautiful.

SL: Good food, good drink, good women.

AW: Good food. There's a famous hotel there. It's kind of like the Arlington in Hot Springs.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:52:59.15] AW: You know, it's in the old—in fact, it begins with the letter A. And the old silent [movie actor]—Rudolph Valentino had been a bellhop there in his youth.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: They were still talking about that. And it was a strolling—you know, all that old-fashioned stuff that you see in old movies—you know, the strolling violinist coming up and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . asking if, you know—I—I requested some popular Italian tune of the time. I was—you know, I was nineteen, twenty years old—big shot, drinking wine, smoking a cigar. [Laughter] And so I—I did like that, and I—this woman—Englishwoman—Lady somebody had been interned in Switzerland and she let the Air Force know that they could use her villa.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:53:48.13] AW: A very beautiful villa that looked out over the Mediterranean [Sea], and she had a wonderful library. I spent a lot of time down there just read-

ing in her library. It was a beautiful place. It was out of—you know, out of a Hollywood movie. So I enjoyed that. In Rome I did have one experience. I had two experiences there that . . .

JE: Can we stop before you get there? I need to change cards.

SL: Okay.

AW: I . . .

TM: []

SL: You gonna go ahead and change tapes, too?

TM: Yeah.

SL: Okay.

JE: Okay.

[03:54:21.28] AW: I did—I did have enough experiences that I fell in love with Italy.

I just think that they've got the secret of life over there.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I—I—again, this is all—older generation would fall over in admiration if they—if they heard this, because I'm gonna tell you another story.

[03:54:49.27] SL: Okay. Well, you know, there's a—there's actually a current effort—

Library of Congress interviewing World War II veterans.

AW: No kidding.

SL: Oh, yeah. They're . . .

AW: Well, there's not many of us left.

SL: There's only—and they're going to . . .

AW: Gone today.

SL: . . . they're going away, like . . .

AW: Scares the hell out of me.

SL: . . . 1,500 a week or something. It's—it's . . .

AW: Well, are we back in business?

SL: Another second.

JE: Umm . . .

AW: Oh.

JE: No, I'm not quite . . .

AW: I think I'll have a drink of water.

SL: I think you should. Anything I can do for you, Joy?

JE: Umm, no.

[03:55:19.21] AW: Southern—southern Italy—you know, when they talk about the
Depression Era in the south, you know, the . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . Oklahoma—what happened over there. The . . .

SL: Dust Bowl.

AW: . . . Dust Bowl and all that.

SL: That's what sent them . . .

AW: Well, they're not that bad, but they are extraordinarily poor and primitive in those
days. Now, maybe . . .

SL: Yeah.

AW: . . . they've changed, as everything else has.

SL: It's probably a tourist Mecca now.

AW: But—but northern Italy despised southern Italians.

PW: Hmm. Yeah.

AW: It was a real culture . . .

PW: My family's from Sicily.

AW: Do you know about it?

PW: Yes. [Laughs]

[Cheri's note: there are two separate conversations going on at the same time, one between Scott and Joy and the other between PW and Witte. I have only transcribed the latter, as it continues in the flow of the interview, despite the fact that there are technical issues being resolved by the crew as they speak]

[03:55:47.09] AW: Yeah. I mean, they—the northern Italians just looked down on them like they were, you know, dogs.

SL: Uh-huh. You need help?

JE: It says there's only twenty-two minutes, but it should be empty.

AW: I may be exaggerating, but I don't think I am.

PW: No, I don't think so. My—my—my great-grandparents, I believe, immigrated from Sicily, and there was the—the cultural difference between the north—north and the south is really great.

AW: Yeah. Northern Italians are very proud.

PW: Yes.

[03:56:11.15] AW: And you know, they—they still remember their ancestors that ruled Rome and . . .

PW: They're still descendents of the Caesars.

AW: Yeah, exactly.

PW: Yes, sir.

AW: I remember a trip I took to Italy in 1989, and I met this Italian fellow that I really bonded with. I had just admired the hell out of him, and—and I said something to him about, “Boy, I bet you enjoy being Italian,” and he said, “I’m not Italian, I am Roman.”

PW: Uh-huh. [Laughter]

AW: And I—there were—you know, “I am Roman.” He ain’t no Italian. [Laughter]

PW: They make the distinction for ya.

AW: It does, you know?

PW: [Laughs]

[03:56:54.04] TM: You know, you think about that, you know [] like that.

AW: Oh, yeah—quite dramatic.

TM: Uh-huh.

SL: Well, I thought I brought another card with me, but I didn't.

JE: I'm just trying to figure out how to make it play what's on there so I know—I've [laughs] never done that before. I—I think I'll just erase it and go ahead.

TM: It's on.

[03:57:39.10] AW: Boy, these stories are coming back to me. I'm sorry to tell you this, but they're coming back.

SL: That's great. We do it. We do it. This is a huge gold mine for us.

TM: Do you need any crackers or food or any—you good on everything?

AW: No, I'm—I'm fine, yeah.

TM: The [University of Arkansas, Fayetteville] Sociology Department's doing a—a veterans' piece.

AW: Really?

TM: And they're—they're kind of concentrating a lot on—on kind of current veterans.

AW: Oh, yeah.

TM: You know, [] wars and stuff like that. But their stuff's going to the Library of Congress.

[03:58:21.05] AW: Well, it's—it's gone on too long now to make these comparisons, but I knew up through Vietnam that I had fought in the last decent war, 'cause Korea was hell and, certainly, Vietnam.

PW: Yeah.

AW: And that, you know, like—I mean, I knew guys that I ran into after I got back to the States that—well, I ran into one guy that said that he and his crew were forced to bail out and they came down in the midst of a lot of angry civilians who didn't like people who bombed them. And he said he watched nine of his guys get lynched on—off of streetlights. And a—and a German Air Force guy came along and saved 'em, you know? That was also the only way you could be sure—in safe in Germany if you bailed out was if you got into the hands of the German Air Force. And they would take care—they would protect you—that sort of thing, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Umm . . .

SL: Are we good?

JE: Yeah.

SL: Firestore's good?

JE: Yes, sir.

SL: Okay.

AW: I forgot where we were.

[03:59:33.05] SL: Well, we were—we were—actually, we were talking about some of the—you were going to Rome.

AW: Yeah.

SL: You were talking about—you had a couple of stories on Rome.

AW: Thank you. Yes. Let me tell you about Rome. I had a couple of experiences there. The—the—the—again, the Air Force had taken over a big hotel, and it was kind of like you went up there and you registered as if you were going to a hotel anywhere on a vacation trip, and you registered and then you went out around the town and you were on your own. It was like a—it really was like a vacation. So my first story is one that I treasure the memory of in a way, as right across the street from the hotel was a famous bar called Broadway Bill's, and it was a basement bar and the Air Force had taken it over. And, so that's where I would hang out. And I have a picture of me there with two other guys and a woman that I think is being scanned as we speak. But I'm down there one night and in walk four infantrymen. I'm there see, and nothing to do with the Air Force. One of them is a giant—like six—by the standards of today, six-six, six-seven and all muscle. His buddy—he's a captain. His buddy's a captain and he's not much smaller. And then there's two smaller guys behind 'em, and they're privates, but

all four are together. And I could tell they were infantry and there they are in this nest of Air Force people, so I'm—I really do have the—did have this problem—I hope I don't have it anymore. I'm a big shot. I'm gonna say—I go up to them and I say, “May I help you out here?” you know, with this—a condescending tone of, “You poor infantrymen.” And this—the giant—I'll never forget this—he picked me up by the collar and he lifted me off the ground. [Laughter] I did only weight 138 [pounds] at the time, but nevertheless, it was a funny feeling. He lifted me off the ground and his first words to me— “Sonny,” [laughter] he said, “I have spent twenty-two months in hospitals with wounds for four different wounds, twice for you sons of bitches bombing me.” [Laughter] So—also known as friendly fire. He didn't want anything free from one of them Air Force guys that might've bombed him into the hospital. Well, he calmed down. I said, “Oh, gee, I'm sorry,” and yah, yah, yah. So I abased myself totally and we ended up pretty good—we had some drinks and had—and a nice conversation. But these four guys—and it must've been typical of their generation or group—they had enlisted before we got in the war. They enlisted, like, 1940—1939 or 1940. They had—they had been the—among the first group to hit North Africa. They'd fought all over North Africa. They'd fought up through Sicily and Sardinia and all them. They'd fought through northern Italy and now they were in France fighting their way up the mountains north of a place called Nancy—where—where the—it was all mountainous and terrible-going. They had fought, fought, fought the whole war. They didn't need me [laughter] to buy 'em a drink. And we—but we had—they had great stories of their experiences, and one of which

was they said they were—now they were fighting fifteen- and sixteen-year-old German boys who were—had been Air Force cadets, but they no longer had any use for 'em, so they put them in the [infantry]. And he said, “And they were the worst fighters of them all because they—none of them thought they'd be killed. They had that ‘I'm immortal’ attitude.”

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:03:24.15] AW: And he said they were really tough, but they'd fight—but anyway, I—I—that experience is a memorable one. But now there is a—[Italian Prime Minister Benito] Mussolini—I'm not sure, but he may still have been alive. I can't remember exactly when he was hung. [Editor's note: He was killed on April 28, 1945]

[Crew stops to fix AW's hair]

[04:04:12.07] AW: What happened was that towards the end of the war, Charlie Chaplin had made a movie in which he mocked [German dictator Adolph] Hitler. Has anybody ever seen this movie?

SL: Yes. The—what was it called?

PW: *The Dictator?*

AW: No, what was it called? It'll come to us in a minute.

SL: Was it *The Great Dictator*? I thought it was something else.

AW: *The Great Dictator*.

SL: Okay.

AW: You got it.

SL: Well, she got it.

AW: You got it.

SL: Yeah.

[04:04:35.23] AW: *The Great Dictator*, and starring the great Jack Okie as Mussolini.

I don't know if you ever remember him, but he was one of the best of the so-called second bananas . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . of his time. And I think he was from Muskogee [Oklahoma], and when I say Muskogee I'm pretty—pretty sure that's where I mean. I believe he was next-door neighbor to Don Trumbo, Sr.

SL: Okay.

[04:04:57.18] AW: Which is where the Okie comes from. Jack Okie. He played Mussolini. Now, if Mussolini was alive it would be much more emotional if he were just recently dead. It would be less emotional, but still—the world premiere in Rome. I got to go to the first evening, and the audience was, like, ninety-eight percent Italian. And you ought to have seen the reaction. They could not deal with the idea that somebody was mocking these two people who had dominated their lives—you know, Hitler and Mussolini.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:05:34.00] AW: That was a great experience, was looking around the audience and—for crowd reaction to Jack Okie [laughter] as Mussolini—as the leader, Mussolini. Anyway, that was an interesting experience. But I—another one that came out of those times and I was mentioning earlier—the way in which you

could be attritioned by enemy action. And towards the end of my tour there, we had what they called a milk run.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:06:07.16] AW: A milk run was the name—it was an easy mission—as easy as just delivering milk to somebody. And what happened was the Germans were fleeing from Greece and Albania area and they were trying to head north to get back to Germany, going through what was then called Yugoslavia, and they were in retreat, in other words. We were told to go over and bomb some area that would interfere with their retreat so that the partisans might catch up and do bad things to 'em. That's as best I remember. My best friend in the group was a guy from Baltimore, Maryland, named Ed Griffith, whose picture is with me in this Broadway Bill photo I've mentioned, and Ed was the kind of guy you really liked. He was a lot of fun and great sense of humor and easy to be with and I liked him a lot. And so we go off on this milk run, and they have one cannon. Now, Ploesti Air Field [Romania]—but I'm gonna mention it later—had 585, so that would be not a milk run, but that—that was the most heavily defended target in Europe. But they had one gun. So we're all laughing and joking. We go off on a mission and my plane is here and his plane is over in this direction, and as we're flying along, all of a sudden his plane blew up into an orange ball. It was just like—it looked like an orange in the sky, but it was all flame. And so we finished our part and got back, and so they're debriefing and we say, "This crew was killed simultaneously—the air—orange ball." And life goes on. So now I'm back home. I'm going to college in Chicago, and I go home for Christmas vacation. And I team up with my

buddy, Bill [Catribone?], and we do a little barhop-ping. And at one point in comes a guy—I forget his last name—his first name’s Ed—and—Meade. Ed Meade. And he was well known because his family owned the—the local newspaper and very wealthy and powerful family, and he was our age.

SL: Okay.

[04:08:41.12] AW: So he [introduced]—Bill knew him and introduced me to him, and he said, “You’re Al Witte?” I—he said, “Yeah.” He said, “Yeah.” He said, “Oh,” he said, “I know all about you.” He said, “My roommate at Princeton knew you in the service.” I said, “Well, what was his name?” He said, “Ed Griffith.” I said, “He’s dead! He’s dead! We reported him dead.” [Laughs] You know? He said, “No, somehow,” he said, “they all got out.” I never got—and anyway, that—that to me is the serendipity of war is, you know—I—I went home a couple years—thought, “Poor old Ed’s dead.” No, he’s at Princeton [University]. [Laughs] So that—that—those are some of the experiences of that time that I remember clearly after all these years. And the—the—the big mission that we flew, there was a—it’s a famous raid. The target was called Ploesti. I think the spelling was—it was either P-L or P-O-L. I want to say it was P-L-O-E-S-T-I, and it—it was either in Hungary or Romania. I can’t remember. I want to say Romania. [Editor’s note: Ploesti is in Romania] And it was where the—it was the center for the Germans’ oil processing. I mean, they turned oil into gasoline and all that . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:09:52.03] AW: . . . in Europe. So it was the biggest military target in Europe and the most heavily defended. The first time it was attacked was one of the great

tragedies in the history of the United States Air Force, a mission led by a guy named [John Riley] “Killer” Kane from Hot Springs, Arkansas—Colonel Kane. And that—it was—they were flying out of north Africa—flew something like 1,000 airplanes, I guess, or 500 or some large number. And they all flew at low level. I mean, you know, treetop height. They tried to surprise ’em. Turned out they didn’t. And they bombed the old—they bombed Ploesti, but they didn’t do very much damage for various reasons, and they lost fifty-five percent of the airplanes. Now, if you think about that, that’s—if there’s 1,000 involved, that’s 550. You can’t keep up very long at that rate. It was a big, big blow to the Air Force, so now they’re in—I think half the reason why they took—went into southern Italy was to get to those targets like Ploesti, because a lot of the planes that never came back ran out of fuel because it was so long to get there from north Africa. So I—when you flew the Ploesti, you were going into the big leagues. It was kind of like a Super Bowl mission, and I flew, like, three of ’em . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:11:19.06] AW: . . . and I’m very proud to have flown on three and very proud to have survived three, ’cause I was telling you earlier about the flak. The cloud over Ploesti was the blackest, deepest cloud of flak that you could imagine. It was like this back of this thing here. And it was really scary to do it. So I’m glad I did it, but I’m, of course, more happy that I got back. But that—that was the big military target. The other one of interest was we flew a mission to Poland, which was way out of our range, and I’m not sure why we went there, but it had some-

thing to do with the factory that was next door [Auschwitz-Birkenau?], the famous concentration camp where they killed, like, a million and a half people.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:12:07.11] AW: And we knew at the time that that—what was going on in those camps, although people say, “Well, we didn’t really know in this country.” That’s—we knew.

SL: Yeah.

AW: Soldiers knew that there was a—’cause all we did was look down at that place. “That’s a concentration camp down there, right next to our target.” And for whatever that’s worth, I mean, just—we were aware and flew over, but—well, you couldn’t very well bomb it. You’d kill all the people you didn’t want to kill. But those were some of the interesting raids. The one I—the one I was given a distinguished flying cross for was an interesting mission ’cause it was different. Again, it was part of the Germans retreating from Greece, and they had put forty-six transport planes on the airfield at Athens—lined ’em up. And we were supposed to go down and destroy as many as we could. And in those days, I mentioned earlier that the lead plane was the key plane. Everybody dropped but him. But my pilot was so good that very early on we became the lead plane.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:13:23.17] AW: So that—I was tagging onto his tail, and it wasn’t because of me, it was because of him. But as a result, I was the lead bombardier on a lot of these missions, including this one. And what was difficult was you—you could not drop heavy bombs on it ’cause it—you can’t—you couldn’t really pinpoint ’em

well enough. Plus, which there's something about the way they exploded wasn't—what they wanted to do was drop incendiary bombs which, if it hits something, you know, flame shoots out and it could burn stuff around.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:14:01.19] AW: And—but the trouble with them is incendiary bombs only weighed twenty pounds apiece and the wind blew 'em all over.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: So I—I—this is the first time I've ever told this story in my life. I—I guessed when to drop. I said, "The wind is blowing, like, forty-five miles an hour in this direction. No, in this direction. So I'm gonna drop 'em here because by the time they get there, they'll be over the target." And they were, and we destroyed forty-five of forty-six. So I got the Distinguished Flying Cross. So that's my big claim to military fame—my little couple of missions and that one in particular. And the rest of it was just routine, you know?

SL: Hmm.

[04:14:48.07] AW: Fly another day and hope that your—you know, come back, except that guy from Brookline, Massachusetts—you know, "Did you ever stop and think this might be the last time you see the stars?"

SL: Well, you know . . .

AW: I still—I still think about that from time to time, like this.

[04:15:04.06] SL: But, you know, it's—it's probably—you can say it so off the cuff that it was just routine—these missions—all these little missions were just routine. But, you know, for people . . .

AW: Well, it's—it's . . .

SL: . . . who were getting the experience, there was nothing routine about what . . .

[04:15:19.16] AW: But—but, see, your attitude is—is this is what you gotta do.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I mean, you have—you have no realistic choice. I mean, if you want to be in-subordinate or a traitor or hide off to Switzerland or something. But—but you mind set as a man is you don't—you know, ninety-nine percent aren't gonna do that. They're not even gonna think about doing it. You've got—you've got a job. You've gotta do it. So you didn't really think much about it unless there were high emotions—high moments, I should—trying to say—high moments of terror.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:15:54.08] AW: Like—you know, like a German plane that's coming at you like this—and you thought, “Oh, my God.” And you're—you know, you're just standing there. So for the—while that's going on . . .

[Telephone Rings]

AW: Excuse me.

SL: Wow, that's the first time that's happened.

[Telephone Rings]

AW: I know—I think I know who it is.

[Telephone Rings] [Tape Stopped]

[04:16:14.15] AW: . . . say about it. You know, for many years you never thought about it. When you got home you're—this is the experience everybody had—is

nobody really understood or cared, so you never talked about it. I've—I've talked more about it today than I have in my whole life.

[04:16:29.02] SL: Well, that's—and that's not uncommon—uncommon among the veterans.

AW: Uh-huh.

SL: They don't typically—they haven't talked about it.

[04:16:36.14] AW: And—well, whatever that's worth. The one thing I will say is I'm glad I was never in the infantry. What—and the reason I base that on is we—we always had a—a doctor in our group for obvious reasons, and one time they sent us a doctor who had spent the first forty-five days of the Anzio beachhead invasion, on the beachhead. And the man was a nervous wreck. He still shook. Forty-five days of continuous bombing, shooting, with no relief in sight. If you just kind of dug in and hoped, they didn't hit you. He did that for forty-seven days—or forty-five days. And I don't think—I wonder if he ever got over it. Those—no, they're the ones that—that's what I mean—ours were routine compared—they were under constant terror. Ours was momentary, and that makes a big difference, you know? And then we came home and relaxed. I could still gripe after all these years—there's a guy who owed me \$150 out of a Gin Rummy game. A lot of money in 1944 and [194]5, and he owed me \$150 and then proceeded to get shot down somewhere, you know, and he still owes me.

[04:17:55.18] SL: [Laughs] Okay. So let's get you back to the United States.

AW: Well, what happened was that someone in the military—and—and—and I can't explain this or I would, but I developed terrible migraine headaches, although

Cosmopolitan [magazine] wrote an article one time saying only women could have migraine headaches.

SL: Hmm.

[04:18:21.04] AW: And men, I guess, didn't have headaches. But they—they were crippling. I had terrible—I mean, I had a terrible time, really, for a number of years. They—they dominated my life. I still get a pension for 'em. The—so I was sent to a hospital in Florida near St. Petersburg, and other guys were sent there who—they had two psychiatrists and about 5,000 guys at the hotel, you know, so I saw him once. I was there from April to early September, and I saw him either once, maybe twice. I think one time they just say, "Well, good luck to ya." [Laughs]

SL: Right.

[04:19:12.28] AW: So it was a waste of time, but it was a lot better than fighting a war 'cause we were right on the beach and played golf every day and, you know, stuff like that. So I'm—so I was sent there and . . .

[04:19:27.26] SL: So how old are you now? You're . . .

AW: Well, let me tell you. I'm—choo, choo, choo, choo—I am . . .

TM: Twenty-two.

AW: I'm gonna be twenty-two the—my next birthday. I'm still twenty-one, and I—I ruined my physique. I weighed a hundred—I weighed 138 pounds the year I entered high school. I weighed 138 the day I graduated. I weighed 138 when I enlisted. And I weighed 138 when I was discharged. Seven years of 138. In three months it was 178 and it ain't stopped.

SL: Hmm.

[04:20:08.03] AW: Once I got hold of, you know, good old nourishing American food in unlimited supplies. But be that as it may, while I was at this hospital-type—it was a hotel, really—it was—it was just a—I don't know what to say—the migraines developed that would last a week, and they would go across my forehead, and I really wasn't good for much of anything during that week. Then it would go away for a week, then come back, and my—and my pattern was basically every other week. And I didn't really get rid of 'em. They—they eased off as time went on, and then finally I haven't had one since about 1970. But they affected—they affected my career and what I did and didn't do for years.

[04:21:12.23] SL: And you have to stay in the dark and . . .

AW: Well, I—when I say I couldn't function, I couldn't—I couldn't do anything, really.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:21:23.01] AW: The biggest impact that it had was I was told one day that I had to choose—did I want to—did I want to go to law school or get a master's degree, and—and I had nobody—I had—I had to figure it out. I had one day to make up my mind—Veterans Administration and—and I thought, “Well, if you're a—if you're majoring in English you're gonna be a teacher or a professor. And nobody cares what you do as long as you be at your class. Once you're out of class, who knows, who cares? Nobody. I'm exaggerating, but only mildly.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:22:06.28] AW: And so you can function if you guts it out for an hour, let's say—hour in the morning, hour in the afternoon—that's about it. Then you can just take care of yourself. Lawyers are—they can't do that. They're at the beck and call of the people. They're servants, really. You know, judge says this, client says that. And I thought, "I don't know if I could function."

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:22:29.24] AW: So I went ahead and started out to be an English professor, and it wasn't until four years later that I decided I'd made a mistake and went the other way. But that—that was—that four years was, I won't say wasted, but it was four years I could've spent as a lawyer.

SL: Yeah.

[04:22:47.18] AW: So that was a big impact, and the other was just in terms of my lifestyle—my day-to-day activities. I—I didn't want to—I didn't want to—all I could do really comfortably when I had one was lay in bed, have about three pillows and a towel wrapped around my neck like this and read.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:23:09.10] AW: That's all I wanted to do half the time. And then the other half of the time I would be, "Party, party. Let's do this. Let's do that." It was a weird life 'til I went away. So that was one out—consequence of the war. They didn't have some of the medicines that they have now. I remember when Codeine Three came in. That was like a miracle drug. Before then there was something called Phenobarbital, which really just spaced you out.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Didn't do anything do anything to me.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:23:42.08] AW: I may—I slept, which was important. But—but it wasn't until Codeine Three was invented that it—that I ever got any relief—real relief.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And then a friend of mine put me onto something called Pheorenol, and that was even better. And then—then it all went away. So anyway, but that's enough of that early stuff. I—I don't like to think about it much. Anyway, so what else is new? Where am I now?

[04:24:13.16] SL: So you're in Miami. You're . . .

AW: Well, right now I'm in St. Petersburg.

SL: Oh, St. Petersburg. You're in a hotel—hospital kind of facility.

AW: Yeah.

SL: Five thousand guys, two psychiatrists.

AW: Well, I've exaggerated. Probably 500 to 800 . . .

SL: Yeah.

AW: . . . guys, you know?

SL: See the guy once or twice. So how do you—what happens next? Do you get . . .?

AW: Well . . .

[04:24:32.28] SL: First of all, how—how long—much longer do you have to be in the service?

AW: Well, see, the war was still on in . . .

SL: Yeah.

AW: . . . in Europe. I mean, in the Pacific [Theater].

SL: Yeah.

[04:24:45.05] AW: And so nobody was being discharged. And I got a—in August I got a furlough, and it was automatic. You got ten—this was really nice. It was known that if you got a ten-day furlough and then called back and said, “Could I have a ten-day extension?” they’d say yes. They had nothing else to do with you. What did they care? And so I went home and then I went to New York City [New York] for the second ten days. That was my first trip to there, and I had some, you know, pleasurable experiences there. I hung out at a jazz club on 52nd Street. That was very big time in those days—couple years—52nd Street was the home of jazz bands, and a great singer named Billie Holiday was in one of ’em . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:25:42.12] AW: And I—I went to her place—I went to her Club Ninth Street nights, and she was just something to behold. So—but one night I went—one day I went to a matinee at the Broadway Theater, and as I walked out, you know, and the sun’s shining and it’s August and I’m rubbing my eyes trying to see and—and they had newsboys—old-fashioned newsboys yelling, selling their— “Extra! Extra! Extra! U.S. drops atom bomb!” And that was how I found—we—I think it was August 6th [1945]. We’d bombed—we’d dropped the first bomb on Hiroshima [Japan]. And, of course, that was big news. And we’re all—everybody was sitting around— “What the hell’s an A-bomb?” you know? I mean—all news to us. And not long after that, I’m on my way home, and somewhere along

the line they dropped the second one [on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945], and that—see, after the first one—who was the—what’s the name of the . . .?

SL: Manhattan Project?

AW: No, the—the king or whatever—the emperor.

PW: Hirohito.

[04:26:51.29] AW: Huh? Hirohito? Is that what they called him? Okay. Hirohito had six advisers, and the first bomb is dropped, and he says to his advisers, “What should we do? Should we surrender and that?” And the vote was three to three. Three of ’em wanted to keep on going. That’s why they dropped the second one. You know, “We really mean it.” And this time I think it was still three to three, but he said, “I’m breaking the tie this time.” First time he didn’t. So they surrendered or they—they quit, and then the formal surrender was, like, September second or something, on a battleship out there. That started the process of discharging. Now the war’s over, so they can start—and, of course, we had 15,000,000 men in—in uniform by then, so it was a big deal. So what they did was they used the point system. You got extra points—you got a lot of points if you were overseas in combat. So, I mean, people in my position—we were—we—we scored high from day one, and we were among the first to get home. In fact, when I got home as a discharged guy, only one other guy beat me that I—of the group I knew, and he had gotten there, like, the day before, you know?

SL: Yeah.

[04:28:03.00] AW: It was that close. He was also Air Force. And so they started the process of getting through the discharge, and—and I went home. But when I was

in Italy, you never—you—you never had stateside magazines or newspapers to read except by accident. And one day somebody had found an old *Collier's* [*The National Weekly*] magazine, and so I can still remember sitting in a chair under an olive tree reading this magazine, and the last big article in—in *Collier's* was “The Great Books Program” at two universities. One was the University of Chicago and the other was [Johns] Hopkins University, and they explained how it worked. And I thought, “Gee, this sounds great.” So when I got home—and then they—I found out they—I read another magazine and it said—I said, “This—this G.I. Bill they’re talking about—I think I can go to college.” And when—when I found out that it was true—I could go to college—I went crazy. I was no more gonna stay in Erie than I was gonna reenlist. It was just—I can’t tell you what a—how I felt. “I can really go to college.” So I picked two—actually, picked three, but one folded early—that was Princeton [University]. The other was—’cause I went through a conniption fit of, “Am I an Easterner or am I a Middle Westerner?” Being from Erie, you’re 440 miles from New York City and you’re 440 miles from Chicago. In other words, which are you?

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:29:55.06] AW: And I thought I was more Middle Westerner, so I went to Chicago.

SL: Chicago.

AW: And it—it was an interesting place—a very interesting place. I had great professors. I had professors you can’t believe—I can’t believe, anyway. I—I was not very—I don’t know how I got in, really. [It would] be like a walk-on on a foot-

ball team. All those other guys are so big and strong and faster, and the kids there were smart. God, they were smart. Excuse me.

SL: That's all right.

[04:30:38.03] AW: But anyway, that's how I got to Chicago. But I—I couldn't—I got out too late to enroll in the fall, so I had to work. And I didn't mine 'cause I didn't have any money, so I worked at the Hammermill Paper Company and—and worked a lot of overtime to save my—I saved as much money as I could and that's why I went off with \$500 in my pocket and a new life. So that's how I got out of Erie, PA—G.I. Bill. Boy, I betcha there's a lot of guys like me.

[04:31:10.26] SL: And you decided to do English—get a degree in English?

AW: Well, yeah, I read all the time. I though—well, you know, you read, but it—of course, it's not like that. But I had great—I had great professors at Chicago in English—in the English Department. I can't help—I—I can't exaggerate how good some of 'em were. Do you know the—? My hero was Norman Maclean, and it—maybe you saw a movie made of one of his famous stories, but it was *A River Runs Through It*.

SL: Okay.

[04:31:44.15] AW: Well, he—he wrote that. He's in the movie. He's the good brother that goes to the University of Chicago. Brad Pitt's the wild and crazy guy who finally gets killed.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

AW: And that was about his—his family. But that was my hero, Norman Maclean, in years later. and he was very nice to me. And he encouraged—and he—and I—I

guess I do have—too much smart aleck. I said to him one time—I said—he said, “What do you want to be?” I said, “I want your job.” [Laughter] That was kind of smart aleck for a young punk in school. “I want your job.” But it—that’s what I wanted, and he was a—he was a really great guy and a great teacher. You ought to read a book he wrote about firefighters where these guys were sent out to fight a fire and they all die within a minute and a half . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:32:36.04] AW: . . . of parachuting out. Very moving book. But then I had others who I’ve been very fond of and—had a guy who had been—did you ever hear of a guy named MacKenzie who was prime minister of Canada? He was like FDR. He was prime minister of Canada for decades, just like FDR was president.

SL: Right.

AW: About the same time, too. This guy had been his personal secretary as a young man. Now he became an English professor. He taught a course called, “How to Read a Novel.” I still remember it. We read five novels, and he just taught us how to read them. And, God, he was magnificent. I remember him. I can’t remember his name anymore. I keep thinking of him as MacKenzie. I know that’s wrong.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:33:25.06] AW: And I had a man named Wallace [Fowley?], who taught French—not that I could ever learn French, but he was a great friend to students. Morton [Dahlwen Zabul?—most brilliant man I’ve ever had as a teacher. He—he taught a seminar in [Charles] Dickens. Ever read Dickens much?

SL: No.

AW: Anybody here?

SL: No, not much, but . . .

AW: You? I know you haven't.

SL: . . . what was required I read.

[04:33:54.05] AW: Well, he taught a seminar in Dickens, which meant that everything that Dickens ever wrote, okay?

SL: Okay.

AW: And he taught it and lectured for two hours at a lick and never used a note. He remembered every name of all of those damn names from Dickens and who they were and what they did and what—what was on page 560, and—and you'd sit there and you'd think, "What am I watching here?" [Laughter] You know, "What am I doing? This is—this is a wild experience." Never had a note. He was a—he was an interesting man, but Wallace [Fowley?], who was a professor—assistant professor—was a good friend—told me one time that [Zabul?] bragged—I shouldn't say bragged, but commented that in seventeen years of teaching he had never had a personal conversation with a student. And I thought that was neat. How could you manage seventeen years and never have a personal—not even a "Go to hell." [Laughter] That—that—obviously, that made a big impact on me. And then also I liked it that whenever he—whenever something came out that he liked—a record, a book, whatever—he always bought two in case he lost or broke one of 'em. [Laughter] That—I guess he was a little funny, but . . .

SL: No, that's—it's probably smart.

[04:35:19.29] AW: Man. God, was he a—was he a professor. Well, enough of that except I've left Erie to—I left Erie knowing I'd never come back, which is a big thing when you cut off your roots. Now, you never did, did you?

[04:35:39.26] SL: No. Born and raised here.

AW: Any of you people ever cut off your roots forever? I did, and that's a big move.

JE: Kind of.

[04:35:45.25] AW: I think in this country it's a big move 'cause it happens so much and you don't realize—you think it's kinda natural, and then years later you wonder, you know, what life would've been like. Not that you can do anything, but it's something that crosses your mind. Did mine anyway. I know it's all foolishness, but I do know I—I cut off everything—all of the parochial school, all of the Catholic stuff, all of the family—and friends, really. When I went home on vacation I only looked up one guy—this fellow, Bill [Catribone?] I keep mentioning. He's the only guy ever looked up, and I—he ran a gas station and I was kind of like Goober or Gomer if you remember them [Editors note: reference to characters in the television show, *The Andy Griffith Show*]. I just hung out at the gas station. I'd sit there all day—eight hours, ten hours a day. Then we'd go out at night and have a few drinks. And the rest of it was just talk, and I just hung out with him. So the whole—my whole history, you might say, was just pushed into a closet somewhere. And then I've been kind of a transient ever since.

[04:36:54.04] SL: So four years in Chicago?

AW: Well, January 1946 to June 1950—1947, 1948, 1949—four plus, four and a half.

SL: Four and a half.

AW: And I got a master's degree. They—their—their way of teaching or way it works—Robert Maynard Hutchins, who was their great chancellor, became president of the university when he was twenty-nine . . .

SL: Wow.

[04:37:24.19] AW: . . . having been dean of the Yale Law School at twenty-six and pointed out in his autobiography he'd already spent two years in the service, so he was a slow developer. [Laughter] He was—he was—about as handsome a man as I've ever seen face to face—six-two and so handsome it hurt. Talk about smart-ass—oh, goodness gracious, he was. He had the knack of antagonizing everybody. He eliminated athletics from the University of Chicago, which was a charter member of the Big 10 [Conference]—got rid of it. And that takes some doing in this day and age. His philosophy was that—he said, “The bachelor degree is meaningless—doesn't mean you know anything.” He—it was—his recommendation was that we give every American a birth certificate and a bachelor's degree, and then get all that nonsense and then start learn—process of learning, which he felt was graduate school stuff. So he—he—the way he organized Chicago was every student there—whether you were gonna be a lawyer, a—a professor of some other subject, a scientist, a doctor, a high school pro[fessor]—everybody took the same two years—first two years—freshman, sophomore year. Everybody, no matter what their future held, would have the same two years of fundamental thing, and it was done with a survey course of method, and the survey courses were the physical sciences, the biological sciences, Western Civiliza-

tion, and the humanities. And so his philosophy was that when people grow and go off into different functions, that if a graduate of this program who was a doctor met one who was a lawyer, they had something in common intellectually, and also that you knew the fundamental principles of every field of learning, which incidentally is true. Of course, [I have] trouble keeping up with them, but when I graduated there, I could—I could talk to somebody who knew about ecology. I—I mean, I could carry on a conversation on any subject—psychology. They taught the fundamental principles of those. The people who taught them—if they—if you weren't a Nobel Prize winner you were nothing. I mean, the guy that had discovered the last six elements on the Valences Table in chemistry was—he lectured to us in chemistry. What—what was the fellow's name from Italy who developed the atom bomb? He lectured to us on physics.

SL: Oppenheimer?

AW: No, he was American. This guy was from Italy.

PW: Fermi? Enrico Fermi?

AW: That's it, Fermi. Yeah, he's—Fermi. You're helping me a lot.

SL: Yeah, this is good. [Laughs]

[04:40:38.21] AW: Fermi. Yeah. He—he—he was the one who lectured to us, and some guy who had started out—it was remarkable—he started out as a janitor at the university and self-taught himself 'til he got formal with a PhD and a Nobel Prize winner, and he's the guy that invented—I don't know why the hell they invented it, but it seemed like—they told us it was a big deal, so I believe 'em. But he—if somebody had—he had a glass stomach. You could look in and see the

human body functioning inside through a looking glass. Never mind. I—I didn't believe it either.

SL: [Laughter]

TM: No, they used to have cows like that, I know.

[04:41:21.26] AW: But he—he was a Scandinavian. His name was, like, Johnson or something.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: He had started out as a janitor and then got risen up to this level. It's—it was a remarkable place, a remarkable place. And—but the first two years were just wonderful. Oh, also English. I should've mentioned English was in there. And—and then you went off and—and earned a master's degree and you spent three years in your specialty—English, history, political science, economics, whatever. You know, that's what—three—but now you learned—now you could say you knew something about the subject. Three years—you got a master's. And then you had—you had a major and then you had to take nine hours of a minor. I—I don't know why, but I took nine hours of ancient history. At one time I could've told you who the three guys were that inherited from Alexander the Great, but that's—I've forgotten that a long time ago.

SL: [Laughs]

[04:42:14.26] AW: But I had a great professor. I remember that. He made it fascinating. And—and then I majored in English. But the way they operated there. I mean, if I did it here I'd be—I'd be—I would be lynched within six hours. I took a course—I took a course called "Stuart Dramatists." The idea was these were all

of the famous playwrights at [William] Shakespeare's time, except Shakespeare. You took a separate course in Shakespeare. Then if you wanted Christopher Marlow and all these other guys—Ben Johnson and some of that—now, in that course I had to read thirty-six or thirty-seven plays in nine weeks, okay? One course. You say, "Well, that's a lot." And then I had this other course—five novels. That's not much.

SL: [Laughs]

[04:43:15.03] AW: And then I had a couple—whatever other courses there were—I had to learn all about Alexander the Great, and whatever. But you say, "Well, now, that's a fairly good course load for that quarter." But what you don't know is they had given me a reading list at the beginning of the quarter. They said, "Incidentally, next May you're gonna be examined on these ninety works, and you're gonna—and here's a novel by [Benjamin] Disraeli." Did you know who Disraeli was?

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

AW: Did you know he wrote novels?

SL: No.

AW: Well, okay.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: I did 'cause I had to read one.

SL: [Laughs]

[04:43:46.08] AW: Actually, I read all of 'em. *Coningsby*, I think it was called. And they would—and—and that was—you weren't just gonna be examined in this

crap thirty-seven plays, you had a reading list this long, okay? Final exams were six hours. They really tested you there. So, as I say, academically I'm glad I went there, 'cause between having a great high school faculty and those folks there, I think—I—I—I would've been a teller in a bank. So I'm very grateful for the place, although I hated the city at that time. It was crime-ridden. It was corrupt. The police were corrupt and vicious. I like it a lot better now, but back then it was not a nice place, a lot of shootings.

[04:44:44.28] SL: It sounds like to me the load was enough to keep you pretty busy.

AW: Oh, yeah. And I worked in the bookstore, 'cause I didn't—you know, I had—all I had was the G.I. Bill, and so I worked in the bookstore. But they were nice to me. They'd let you—like, if I had a—if I got out of class at 9:00 and didn't have to go back 'til 11:00, I could work two hours in between if I wanted to, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:45:08.18] AW: They paid me ninety-five cents an hour, which was big wages back then. And . . .

SL: Oops.

AW: And I could work long hours in the beginning of the quarter, and less and less as time went on, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:45:21.11] AW: So I had it—I—I—I worked hard, though I don't remember resenting it. And I had friends and dear friends.

[04:45:31.14] SL: So there wasn't probably much of a dating pattern there. I mean, last time we were talking about dating patterns you were in high school and . . .

AW: Well, the dating patterns there—no, I—I—I fell—I fell in love with a woman and, once again, she was smarter than I was, so it's . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[04:45:48.05] AW: Nancy from St. Louis. She—she entered when she was sixteen out of there. And so we—we ended on bad terms. I mean, we weren't—it was not a friendly parting, and about thirty years later she found out I was—what had happened to me. I was here and she wrote me a very nice letter and I wrote back and I finally had a chance—I said—I told her—I said, “I wasn't—I didn't resent the fact that you were smarter than I was. I resented the fact that you—you weren't impressed by the fact that you were smarter.” [Laughter] And that summed it up more accurately as, God, she was so smart. She died of cigarettes . . .

SL: Yeah.

[04:46:37.12] AW: . . . a few years ago, and I remain very fond of her. She was a great woman—great woman. She at age thirty-six—a high school teacher of English in St. Louis, married to a no good drunk . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:46:59.25] AW: . . . kicked him out of the house, divorced him, went back to college, got a PhD in psychology, became a child psychologist at age forty, and eventually remarried, but worked for twenty years []. She did that on her own. I've got a great deal of admiration—admiration for somebody that can . . .

SL: That's strong.

[04:47:24.28] AW: . . . kick off a new life at that age and make a success out of it—very impressive to me. But I knew a guy—my favorite—my closest friend there

was of all things named John Hancock. Fortunately, he went by Jack. And he may be—I don't know—he was so brilliant it hurt. He was from Saint—he was from California, and he was 4F [unsuitable for military service]. And you got to believe when I say this, but guys who were 4F during World War II felt humiliated and embarrassed—like they were half a man.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:48:13.15] AW: One of my best friends growing up—he [laughs] talked his buddy into going down and enlisting. When they got down there his buddy got taken in and he got—he was declared 4F 'cause he had a punctured eardrum.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: We laughed about that for a while. Anyway, Jack and I became very close, but mine was out of admiration for him, plus liking him. He was a very likeable guy. But he was—brilliant, brilliant student. Did you ever—did anybody here ever read philosophers like Wittgenstein and those people?

SL: Uh-uh.

AW: I can't even—I can't get through the paragraph or a sentence, really.

SL: Hmm.

AW: I'm bragging when I use paragraph. And he—he understood all that stuff. But enough of that. Another best friend died—another real good friend died young of high blood pressure. He was probably the most cultured man I ever knew. William Alexander Payne of Minnesota. And then the worst male I ever met was Joe [Shak? Shack?] of Cleveland, Ohio . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[04:49:23.28] AW: . . . whose wife—he insisted his wife get an abortion, and then he got angry at her because she wouldn't go back to work that afternoon. How do you like that for class?

SL: Man!

AW: That was Joe.

SL: Hmm.

[04:49:37.27] AW: He was a charmer. And then a guy—these names keep popping—another guy named Peter Wolf. Can you believe I knew guys named Peter Wolf and John Hancock?

SL: [Laughs]

[04:49:50.02] AW: Peter Wolf was a—one of them German immigrants from Hitler—escaped Hitler—his family. And you talk about lucky G.I. Bill—now, this—this is why I envied Peter. He was a wonderful guy and family. He knew Thomas Mann. Anybody remember Thomas Mann, the German novelist?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: Do you know what I'm talking about? Do you know . . . ?

JE: I've heard about him.

[04:50:12.25] AW: He—he—he's like the best-known writer in—in Germany for 150 years, that's all. He's escaped, too, and his family were friends. Anyway, Peter came from quite a background. Now, listen to this. In order to qualify for the G.I. Bill, you had to serve ninety days in the service. On the ninety-first day he got an ulcer—was discharged and told, "What is it you want to do, did you say?" "I want to go through medical school." "Okay." [Laughter]

SL: He got an ulcer.

AW: He got an ulcer. [Laughter] Ninety-one days. [Laughter] You think I wasn't mad about that?

SL: [Laughs]

[04:51:04.10] AW: Anyway, luck of the draw, right?

SL: Luck of the draw.

AW: Luck of the draw. I don't know, I—I can't—I can't get into all the college days.

I mean, I don't know where—whatever—so stopped—I don't think I can, anyway. I—I realized I was—I was forced to go the basic route, which was to become an English instructor and then go back to work on a doctor's degree, and I did that. I went to Rippen College. I was very lucky to get a job, 'cause jobs were getting very scarce in those days, and I was lucky to get a job. I think—I think there were only three or four of us had jobs when we—when our class graduated, and it was a good size class, probably.

SL: Well, I mean, there was how many G.I.'s taking advantage of the G.I. Bill?

[04:51:46.19] AW: Yeah, yeah, and they're all—and now everything's filled. And this is before Sputnik and the expansion of . . .

SL: Hmm.

AW: . . . education. In fact, when I went down years later—to jump ahead, when I went down to Wisconsin to apply for their doctoral program, my adviser, who was a very fine guy—name was Quintana—he was an expert on Jonathan Swift—and he said to me, “I don't think you should do this.” I—he said—I said, “Why

not?” He said, “There aren’t gonna be any jobs for ya.” That’s, you know, kind of discouraging.

SL: Yeah.

[04:52:19.25] AW: Late—your late twenties now. But—but I—but I started out and I taught two years at Rippen College—freshman/sophomore English, and enjoyed that. And then when I got—then when I did get admitted to the Wisconsin program, I stayed a summer and a semester, and I realized then I didn’t want to do this anymore, and I made the greatest decision of my life, which I’ve never regretted for a second. I went to law school.

SL: At . . . ?

[04:52:48.20] AW: University of Wisconsin. I walked down the hill from Bascom Hall to that place that’s on the hallway downstairs—Bartlett Hall it was called—and enrolled in law school, and from day one I knew that’s where I belonged. I loved it. I loved the first—students don’t believe me. I tell ’em the first year of law school was the happiest year of my life. “What? You’re crazy!” But it was. That’s the happiest year of my life, was the first year of law school. And I did nothing but work. I had saved some money, so I didn’t have to take a job. And so I knew first year I’d get to school at 7:00 in the morning—work ‘til 10:00 at night—sleep—back to work. That first year was a—I still remember it with pleasure. What an exciting time. So here I am. Now, where are we?

[04:53:43.25] SL: Well, you graduate from law school. You apply for a job and . . .

TM: Let me change tapes here real quick.

SL: Well, do you want to stop?

AW: I don't know what I want to do right now. No, I don't want to stop. I just feel maybe my mind is weakening. Do you think so?

SL: Well . . .

JE: I'm starting to hear tummies grumble.

AW: Huh?

JE: I'm starting to hear tummies grumble.

SL: Yeah. She can hear—she can hear the—the stomachs growling.

AW: Am I—is my mind working?

JE: Your mind's fine.

AW: Well, see, that's what I feel.

TM: You're recalling that stuff. I mean, it seems like it's coming. I mean, it's great.

SL: Well, I—I don't want to—if you feel like you're getting worn out . . .

AW: No, I'll talk—I'll talk—I'll—I'll keep on. Just tell me when you think I'm . . .

[04:54:24.25] PW: But you seem like if you want to, it's probably a spot because of the Scott work is getting [].

SL: This is—this kind of where . . .

PW: This is probably . . .

SL: . . . I would let her talk about your . . .

AW: Oh, yeah, law school.

[Tape Stopped]

[04:54:36.26] AW: . . . to my—on my own.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: I never—I mean, since coming to Arkansas I never went out and hustled clients or anything like that.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:54:44.15] AW: My job—outside of teaching law classes, my job was primarily two. One is I worked—I was assigned by the president of the university to be the athletic representative, and therefore, work with the athletic—with the Athletic Department, which I did for twenty-six years.

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:55:05.25] AW: That was part of my job order. If—if—if universities were run with even a modest amount of efficiency, which is too much to hope for, I would've been fifty/fifty percent. And I'd been fifty percent law school and fifty percent Athletic Department. But they weren't. I was 100 percent law school in terms of being paid and spent half my time down there for various reasons. Then in—then in free moments—principally, summers—I was a deputy attorney general of the state of Arkansas off and on from the early 1970s 'til Steve Clark went out of office, and I worked on many, many projects. Now, that's all law—law-related work that law professors do so . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . far as I'm concerned, unless you want to get into social things . . .

SL: Well, I do want to get into social things, but . . .

[04:55:58.13] AW: We can—we can work around them somehow, but—I mean, cover 'em, but not—no way they would interfere greatly with her interests.

SL: Well, maybe what we'll do—we'll get you heading for Fayetteville out of Milwaukee. We'll finish in Milwaukee. We'll stop. And then the next time we get together we'll start with your days . . .

AW: Sure.

[04:56:20.19] SL: . . . here at the university. And if something comes up that crosses over into life in Fayetteville and the social stuff and . . .

AW: Sure.

SL: . . . and all that. Well, we'll just kind of tag-team you a little bit.

PW: Most—yeah, most of the information that I need is mostly contained in your impressions of the law school, your relationship with your fellow faculty members, like Fred [last name?], and—and your relationship under the various deans that you served under. So, I mean, mine's pretty concentrated, where I think Scott's obviously sweeping a much broader path. And you're welcome—you can sweep as broad a path as you want with me.

AW: Well, we'll—we'll work it out, I—I'm confident.

PW: Okay.

AW: Well, back to . . .

SL: Are we rolling?

TM: Yes.

SL: Good. Okay.

[04:57:04.28] AW: I want to go back to the University of Chicago briefly.

SL: Okay.

AW: I—I had an experience when I was a junior that had one of these epiphany-type moments to—to it, and that is I took a course called “Expository Writing”—very good professor. And part of our assignment was to choose something that had to do with writing and lecture to the class as if we were a teacher. And, again, the—the letter W in front of my last name put me towards the back. I think I was the last one to be called on, and I—I chose outlining for all—of all silly things. And at one time I knew when Roman numerals were appropriate and when they weren’t and stuff like that. So I chose outlining. I’m sitting in the back of the room—small classroom. He said, “Okay, Mr. Witte, it’s your turn,” and I got up and I walked up the aisle about five . . .

SL: Rows.

AW: . . . chair lengths . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[04:58:24.07] AW: . . . turned—and then turned and got behind the desk and the lectern. And when I looked out at this group of faces, I realized this is where I wanted to be. I wanted to be in front of a class. Honest to God, it was like the Lord said, “Al, you want to—this is where you ought to be.” It was a strong, totally unexpected thought that this hit me. And I knew then and there, I wanted to be—you know, the idea of being a professor made me feel good. So I—I blame a lot of stuff on that moment. Then I went on and talked about outlining. Fortunately, I remember none of it.

SL: [Laughs]

[04:59:16.18] AW: And then eventually when I did graduate from Chicago, I did have the chance to teach, and I liked teaching at—at Rippen. So that all later on had an impact on why I decided to leave the law firm and come here, was I knew the way of life and I knew I enjoyed it, and as far as I could tell it was one of the few things I might be good at or acceptable I should say at—that's, I think, more precise, except for being up there in front of—but there's a power thing in there. There's an ego/power thing in there. You have command of the lectern is the way I think of it. You command the lectern. That means you command those people. And that gives you sort of an ego God-like attitude towards the situation. "I am in control. I am in charge." And I suspect there's a lot of that in me.

SL: You know . . .

AW: I know it's hard to pinpoint.

[05:00:17.05] SL: That's so different than the culture that you grew up in in Erie.

AW: Yeah.

SL: Because there the thought of having a job that you wanted or wanted to do . . .

AW: Yeah.

SL: . . . was not ever considered.

[05:10:02.05] AW: No, it was . . .

SL: Any job.

AW: It didn't exist.

SL: Yeah.

AW: Any job was fine.

SL: Right.

[05:00:34.00] AW: Now—and, of course, some were better than others. We knew that. But—but if—well, like my brother. Now, he was brought up the same time. He’s just a little bit younger than me. My uncle—my uncle by marriage, Ray [Cain? Cane?]
—he went to work for General Electric, had a good job, and he loved them, as a result. I mean, General Electric could do no wrong. It was heaven. They had a program called the apprentice program. It lasted four years, and you were an apprentice, like the old days, you know . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:01:06.21] AW: . . . centuries ago. And it was—what I always understood was that the object after four years was to be what they called a journeyman machinist. And it’s my belief that a journeyman machinist was like a journeyman plumber and all that—you couldn’t go any higher. I mean, that was the ultimate label to—that you could earn and to demonstrate the skill level at which you were. He begged me to become an apprentice, and I knew that I had no—not only no interest, but no ability . . .

SL: Hmm.

[05:01:45.08] AW: . . . hand-wise or anything to run machinery—to do things that required skill. And then—but he persuaded my brother, and my brother spent four years as a journeyman machinist in this program. At the end of the four years he realized, “Hey, I want to go to college, too.” So he left GE and went to the University of Detroit and—and the rest is—is happiness. But that was our idea of—of something high up in the world that I could search for or reach, you know? Be a machinist.

SL: [Laughs]

[05:02:27.04] AW: I just—you know, if you—if you know anything about my life here, how incredible a contrast that is. But that was my family's idea of the best I could ever hope for was to be a journeyman machinist and make a lot of money. I must admit they make a lot of money when I was teaching at Rippen. My brother was working in—in Detroit after he graduated and I went over to visit him on a Thanksgiving weekend. I was making \$300 a month teaching at Rippen. Four into 300 is seven, but you got up to it—it's more like four and a half into 300 to get your so much a week. Anyway, it worked out to about \$65 a week. No—yeah, that's right. My first salary was \$270. I got the wrong number. I got a raise to \$300.

SL: That's—that's—that's . . .

[05:03:29.24] AW: Yeah, that's more like \$65. Four in there is sixty—so I'm making \$65 a week teaching after many years of graduate work—teaching at Rippen College. My brother gets called into the shop on—on Thanksgiving Day. He's making \$2.10 an hour, triple time for holidays. So now he's up to \$6.30 an hour. He works ten hours—what is that, \$60-some dollars a day? [Laughs] He made as much that day as I made that week. [Laughter] So there was some benefit . . .

SL: Yeah.

AW: . . . to being a journeyman machinist.

SL: Yeah.

AW: I never got over that. God almighty.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: Where did I go wrong?

SL: Well . . .

AW: But anyway, I—I . . .

SL: So you had an—an epiphany in your . . .

AW: Yeah, I did. And—and it had a big impact. So now where are we? Back in . . .

SL: Well, we're—you're teaching and enjoying your . . .

AW: I haven't gone over Rippen days, have I?

SL: No. But you're—your there in Rippen. You get—you get a job in Rippen and—
and . . .

[05:04:36.08] AW: Well, now, Rippen is—I'm sorry to tell some of you people—the
birthplace of the Republican Party. Four or five farmers got together just before
the Civil War and they didn't like slavery or something, and—and the rest is his-
tory.

[05:04:50.08] SL: Well, the Republican Party at that moment is something much differ-
ent . . .

AW: Yeah. We know.

SL: . . . [laughs] than it is now.

AW: We do know that.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: But they make a big—I shouldn't say they make a fuss, but they've got a log cab-
in they claim is where they met. Rippen College was a—see, this was—I went
there—the war in Korea broke out in June of 1950. I start to work there in Sep-
tember. But by then—see, that—it's hard for I guess the current generation—

when we went to war in Korea, young men by the thousands rushed down to enlist. They—in colleges they did things like—the basketball team would go down and enlist. A fraternity would go down and enlist. It was [a different world]. The point is Rippen had 800 students in June of 1950 and 600 in September. The—which is, you know, what—twenty-five percent? That’s—big drop-offs around. So they were faced—private school—all you got was that money coming in, so they were facing a [crisis]. So they were having tough times, but it was a—that was a—a—a point of concern. And then inflation hit real big in these salaries that were being paid to teachers at that level of schooling was—were bad. So, again, that was a concern. But they worked you—they worked you pretty good. I taught fifteen hours a week. I taught what they called “dummy English” or triple-X English. What do they call it now?

SL: Remedial.

[05:06:32.07] AW: Remedial. That’s it. There is a nicer word, isn’t there?

SL: [Laughs]

AW: I prefer dummy. [Laughter] What is a noun? A noun is the name of a person, place or thing. That was the first day’s start. And I taught a section or two of that and then I taught composition. And then I taught the second year. They had a required second year, which was kind of a literary survey thing.

SL: Okay.

[05:06:56.28] AW: Fifteen hours is a lot of hours to . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: . . . teach and grade. So I was—in addition to my \$270 a month, I had to run what they called a fraternity. Now, what they—what they meant by fraternity there was a bunch of guys live in a house—and old frame house and make up a Greek name and the next day, “We’re a fraternity.” “What fraternity?” “What—what—what’d you say that word was?” You know, that’s—it was local. So I had to run this “Animal House” [Reference to the movie of the same name] for part of my—that was part of my duties. But it was—they—they were great people up there. I’m just fonder than heck of ’em. I got to be friends—I wasn’t all that much older by then as—as some—some of the guys had been latecomers to World War II and all that and were still—now they were finally getting around to going to school or they were seniors or juniors. So I got—I made some friends that are still friends today. And life in a small town in Wisconsin was new to me. All you can do is drink and what I would call bedroom activities.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: There’s hardly—nothing else to do, really, especially in the winter—150, 200 inches of snow.

[05:08:23.09] SL: Well, were there Wednesday activities and Friday and Saturday and then . . .

AW: No, none of that.

SL: Okay.

AW: Well, I—I don’t want to make too much of that sort of thing.

SL: Okay.

AW: I stayed away from students. Nothing but trouble there.

SL: Right.

AW: But it was a small town—small school. Everybody knew everybody. And I kind of wished I'd gone to one of them, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:08:52.18] AW: It's—it's something to being even a small frog in a small pond. And if you're a big frog in a small pond, you're really big. So—but I—I enjoyed those two years as—I can't tell you how—how—how pleasant they were and how much—and how much I remember them with pleasure. And I met my—my friend in northern Wisconsin, Blanche. She was my student, and I like to think of dating a student at my age, although it was fifty-seven years ago—fifty-eight years ago that she was my student. And we—and —and through her and—I've become friends again with some of the other people that were in school back then. So the—the two years at Rippen were very nice, but I went down to Wisconsin. I knew I would never get a doctor's degree 'cause German was a requirement.

SL: [Laughs]

AW: And I would never—I would never—I'd still be there trying to pass the German exam.

SL: Right.

[05:09:59.10] AW: See, I'll tell you how smart the University of Chicago is compared to these—and—and how these stereotype rules about what an education person should know. How they—how they can cut through that stuff and get to the heart of things. At Chicago you had to learn a foreign language, so I picked French. But they said, "Now, look, you—maybe you'll be a scholar and maybe you'll

want to read a book in French—a novel—a—a critical essay. But you'll just want to read it. So why are we gonna bother you with learning how to speak it? You don't have to worry about that. Just learn how to read French." You see how smart that is?

SL: Yes.

[05:10:46.29] AW: You don't have to—you don't have to go through all of that—"Is it Mishur, Mashur—Monsewer—Monsieur?" [Laughs] You know, I mean, you know, you don't have to go through all that stuff. Just learn how to read it, because that's the only need a scholar has is reading it. You see why I like that place?

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:11:08.22] AW: I mean, they're probably the most prestigious school in the country and they could care less about these so-called rules. Now you go to Wisconsin with the inferiority complex state university. "Oh, you gotta learn how to speak German." I can't speak German. I can't read German. I'll never do it. I'll never do it. So I became a lawyer. [Laughter] And—but anyway . . .

SL: Good decision. [Laughter]

[05:11:34.14] AW: That was—that was one of the—that was one of the traps I saw ahead of me and the other was the job trap. And the other was—you can't believe what English departments are like. You talk about sucking up to people. If you're a young professor—they got, like—they got, like, six of 'em and—and one spot for tenure, okay?

SL: Yeah.

[05:11:56.10] AW: So who's gonna get that spot? And believe me, what I saw at Wisconsin was much—I have to believe was true all over the country. You had to—you had to suck up to somebody whose goodwill you thought you needed to get—to get—to ultimately get the job after five years of working on your PhD. Oh, who needed that? Lawyers—law schools and lawyers are so much more sensible. Well, you—you know that. Is there any other lawyers in here? That's a kind of a small . . .

SL: Except the experience—my son's . . .

[05:12:34.09] AW: Just only forty percent. That's hard to—[laughter] Anyway—so my Rippen years were very—I'm very fond of. I—I go back for the—I get the alumni magazine. I—I give 'em money—not much, but enough to get the magazine.

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:12:55.02] AW: And I still have friendly relations with some students from that time—a guy named Bob [Stefus?—very good friend from Milwaukee. And—and then law school. Now, are we gonna stop there?

SL: No, no.

AW: Or we're gonna . . .

SL: . . . we're gonna get you to . . .

[05:13:14.19] AW: Well, I—what happened was that I realized I—see, this was a big decision. I was now—I was now twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old, and I'm still going through all these identity crises, and I—I was sick of it.

SL: [Laughs]

[05:13:29.13] AW: Believe me, I was sick of it. But I had to do something. My—
this—this guy I met—good fellow, but I don't remember much about him, but
I'm going—he doesn't know it, but I'm going through this identity crisis. And I
said something about, "Well, I don't know if I really want to become a professor,"
and he said, "Hey," he said, "That's great." He says, "Come work with me." I
said, "What do you do?" He said, "I—" he said, "I sell stuff to drugstores." He
said, "Have you ever heard of Dove soap?" I said, "No." He said, "It's the new-
est thing on the market." He said, "There's no soap in it." And [laughter]—he
said, "They're buying it by the ton! They're buying—" he said, "I'm getting so
rich. I'm selling Dove soap." And I thought to myself, "My God, I've gone
through all this agony to end up selling Dove soap?" I . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[05:14:34.17] AW: . . . you know, just the thought of it was so depressing that I said,
"No, I'm gonna have to bite the bullet and go to law school," and, God, what a
lucky day that was. It was a rainy day I remember when I walked in, and I was
gloomy and scared. And I thought, "Well, God, if I bomb out here it's—it's all
over." And—but it didn't. But anyway, so that's when I went to law school, and
I met a dear friend, Bernard [Escubali?], from Reedsville, Wisconsin—
population—I think it was 696. As he said, "Every time somebody's born some-
body leaves town."

SL: [Laughs]

[05:15:09.15] AW: And he claims he once went to a wedding reception in Reedsville
where the reception was interrupted when the bride went into labor. [Laughter]

Which you gotta—you gotta treasure that moment. [Laughter] So anyway [laughs], Bernard and I got to be good buddies. We were competitors in law school for honors and it didn't—I don't think it affected our friendship. And we just—he was—he was more—he was smarter than I was, but I worked harder than he did, or vice versa. I forget. But I had to work—he was under the G.I.—he was ten years younger than me. He was under the G.I. Bill. I have to work. I had four jobs when I was in law school. I ran a fraternity—a real fraternity—right out of *Animal House*. They made *Animal House* look tame. I hate to get vulgar in front of women, but I'm telling you they made—they did things that should not have been done.

SL: [Laughs]

[05:16:17.28] AW: And I ran the fraternity house and I worked—I wrote briefs for the attorney general and workman's compensation case—a dollar an hour, twenty hours a week. I worked—I had two jobs at the library—I mean, at the law school—one in the library and one—I was a roll-taker. I took roll in class—classes. So that's how I got—paid my way through school was all those—and a—and a—and running the fraternity. I got room and board out of that. So the first year of law school, as I mentioned, I—I had enough money saved that I didn't have to work, and that helped me and I got off to a good start and I loved every-thing. Then I had to go to work to pay my way through. They didn't have scholarships. I think I got a one-semester tuition once. And I—so I got all the—the second year they—they worked me pretty much to death out there and the

third year I hated law school. I wanted to—I—I—I used to get a little nauseous walking in the building.

SL: Hmm.

[05:17:26.12] AW: I just wanted to get out. I wanted to get off campus. I wanted to go out and have a real job, so I went up to Milwaukee and I turned down a couple of jobs. I turned down one with Ford Motor Company in their—their legal department. And I accepted one in—I turned down one with a lawyer in—in Rippen and—though I wished I'd worked that out. And I went with a firm in Milwaukee, and so'd my friend, Bernie.

[05:17:55.23] SL: Same firm?

AW: No, he went with what was the biggest firm in the state at that time. He was lawyer number thirty-six. I went with what was called a medium-sized law firm. I was lawyer number twelve, and of the twelve, one was real old. He'd graduated from law school in 1895 and didn't do much work anymore. And one was real sick—had heart trouble and he died not long afterward, so I inherited his work, so there were really just ten of us. And now there's—now Bernie's law firm has 900 lawyers.

[05:18:31.25] SL: Is he still there?

AW: He's in the process of—he was managing partner and he—he phased himself out of that. And I think now he just works with a few old clients that trust him and he likes, you know?

[05:18:47.14] SL: Well, did you—did you enjoy the work in Milwaukee?

AW: Well, I loved being a lawyer. I loved being a lawyer. I had—I had—my—my—my big, bad luck—and it was just bad luck. It was nothing—and you—that I could do about it that—which I’m aware. People with more aggressiveness might have thought of something, but I was not capable of it. And that is the guy I went—went to work for was dishonest. I mean, and—and the way he was dishonest was that he didn’t steal money, but he had—he—he was unethical and—and overcharged clients.

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:19:27.09] AW: Things like that. Now, that’s the—you don’t go to—you don’t go to prison for that, but it’s not right.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And I despised him. He also was ignorant, and he was a graduate of one of the most famous classes in the history of law schools—the class of 1940 at Yale, which included [former president] Gerald Ford, Potter Stewart, later a member of the Supreme Court.

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:29:22.19] AW: [Byron Raymond] “Whizzer” White, later a member of the Supreme Court, and some guy [Editor's note: William Rogers] whose name I forget, but he used to be Secretary of State under [President Richard] Nixon, I think—a class of great over—you know, great achievers, and him. And he—I mean, I—I swear he couldn’t have passed a Bar exam in any state in the country. Nobody knows how he became a lawyer.

SL: [Laughs]

[05:20:12.10] AW: He married a wealthy woman and—and later was disbarred, I'm kind of happy to say in a way. But that's who my boss was, and he—I didn't know how to deal with it and I was unhappy with him. When I didn't have to deal with him I loved doing what lawyers do—loved it. Do you understand? I mean, I don't know about your jobs, but when you're busy as a lawyer—they were—it was a—it was kind of a laid-back law firm. You had to get—they liked you to be in the office between 8:30 and 8:45, and they usually had coffee and a roll and a morning paper [on your desk]. And you could fool around with that for a while and then you'd get to work. And I'm kind of losing my train of thought, but they were nice people. They were all nice people. But I didn't know—when I—when I went off and did things for other lawyers or did things on my own, 5:00 happened—it seemed— “What do you mean, it's 5:00? What do you mean, it's 5:00? It's more like—I thought it was 2:30,” you know?

SL: Right.

AW: The day just zooms by. Now . . .

SL: That happens with us. Yeah.

AW: That's what I was thinking. Maybe it did.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

AW: It—it's a wonderful feeling and it's hard to—to know why it happens except it must be something about the nature of the work. And so that's the way I felt. But I could not believe how fast time went.

[05:21:40.25] SL: Was there a particular avenue of law that you specialized in or . . . ?

AW: Well, it—that’s kind of ironic ’cause the—I spent most of my time in two subjects I never studied. One was bankruptcy and the other was what they call municipal corporations, which is local government—cities.

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:21:57.19] AW: Villages, towns. They have all them up there in those parts. And the day I joined the law firm I was told, “You are the assistant city attorney in Brookfield, Wisconsin.” “No kidding?” I was told that. And what that meant was that a bunch of farmers west of Milwaukee had taken their farms and subdivided ’em into what was called a bedroom community—first one I’d—time I’d ever heard that phrase. Now, listen to this. The population of the city was 18,500 people. This was the downtown urban area. An intersection. On one corner is a general store. On another corner is a gas station. And on the third corner is the post office and city hall. And on the fourth corner is vacant. That was it. City of 18,500. And i.e., overnight that bedroom community stuff. That’s what I was city attorney of—assistant city attorney of and—[laughs] so I did that kind of work. And, you know, what did I know? It—it’s so phony. Well, they’d call me— “Mr. Witte, we got this culvert problem out here. Can we—can we close that culvert down?” “I’ll get right back to ya.” [Laughter] Get the statutes out—culverts—[laughs] you know, and then you read the—call ’em back and say, “Yeah, I think you can. This one—this one statute says—” I mean, that’s how you practice. I mean, that’s how I did it. Who else would I—how else could I do it? I didn’t know anything about culverts or cities or—God almighty. And bankruptcy—all I know is in bankruptcy, is if you’re not—to be a secured creditor, and

if you're not a secured creditor, be a lawyer because they get paid first. They make damn sure they get paid first, 'cause there's only pennies left over for them unsecured creditors. Be a secured creditor. Don't lend anybody a dime without having security, 'cause it—and once you're in bankruptcy you get nothing to speak of. That's what I learned in bankruptcy. I wasn't a—I didn't do very much. I used to give a speech where I said my primary duty was to—to go to court with senior lawyers and make sure their pencils were sharpened and things like that. [Laughs]

[05:24:25.17] SL: So how long were you there?

AW: Two years. Then I got a—then I got a—an inquiry from the University of Montana, and I don't know how they—I know how they heard of me. I shouldn't say that. That was the old buddy system in operation, is what you would do is if you were a dean at a small school you would call the schools that had graduate departments. Wisconsin had a famous graduate department. Michigan had one. Then, of course, the Harvards, Yales, and Columbias. And you would call one of those schools and you would say, "You got anybody you'll recommend?" So whoever the dean was had recommended me to Montana. But I didn't know where Montana was. I didn't know if I wanted to go there. I was—I'm an Eastern boy, essentially, and—and when they said the town was Missoula—there's just something about that name I didn't like. Now I've since found out it's a wonderful place.

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:25:23.16] AW: But I turned 'em down. Then the next one I was tempted. It was University of New Mexico, and it was—it was—had only been open one year, and the guy that opened it was their first dean, was a professor at Wisconsin. I didn't know him, but all my professors did and liked him. And I think that would've given me a leg up with him that I had come out of his school, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But I kept thinking, "Gee, if I go to Albuquerque I'll never see my mother again." So far away, you know?

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: And that's the way I felt, and so I turned them down. And then one April I—I got a letter on a Monday from—this is a good story—from the dean here—Joe Covington his name was.

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:26:11.11] AW: From Ashdown, Arkansas. I was telling, I think, Peggy that life was so different for guys in those days. He—he wanted to be a lawyer but he had no money, and he worked nine years saving his money so he could go to law school, and then Harvard after that. So in other words he—you know, that's—that's what you had to do in things like that. Anyway, he was a damn good dean. He only—and he was only my dean for one year because he went—well, I'm getting into law school here—he went to University of Missouri and spent the rest of his life there. Back to Milwaukee, I get this offer—get this letter on Monday from Joe Covington, and he said, "We've had an unexpected vacancy, and you've

been recommended.” But he said, “This is rather late in the year,” and it was. It was late April, and that’s pretty late for the hiring process. He said, “So we don’t want to—” he said, “If—if this doesn’t work out,” or whatever—however he phrased it, it—the idea was that if this didn’t work out and they wanted to go find somebody else, time wasn’t wasted and don’t make it any worse. So by coincidence, I had a meeting in Madison [Wisconsin] on Thursday, and it was a business meeting, but I said, “Well, I’ll call my dean there and get his opinion about Arkansas,” and my dean was a wonderful man. He had spent most of his life in Virginia. He had that Virginia soft accent, you know? Cavalier [attitude?]
—he was a wonderful, wonderful, courtly gentleman-type guy—John Ritchie. And he hadn’t been dean very long, but he’d made a big impact. Everybody liked him. So I went down there—down there and I—I talked to him and he was very gracious, and on the down side—I forget how he brought this up, but as I looked back, I know it was to tell me that, “Don’t have any dreams of getting hired here because we’ve already considered you.” And this all came as a surprise to me as well as a disappointment. I didn’t know any of it had gone on, but there were twenty faculty people there, and you needed two-thirds of twenty to be hired. You had to have a super majority. And I got thirteen votes, so I needed fourteen and that odd number—twenty, twenty-one. So he said, “You’ve—you came a vote short.” And—and he mentioned something about it. He said, “I didn’t know.” He said, “You had some—” he—I think he used the word enemies, and I knew who some of ’em were, but that’s neither here nor there. But the point is—

not knowing that I'd even been considered—it didn't hurt as much as if I'd applied, you know, and . . .

SL: Right.

[05:29:12.09] AW: . . . “Oh, go to hell” time. So I—I thought more about— “Well, what about Arkansas? That's why I'm here, you know?” And he was very complimentary in his own way. I mean, people might not realize that from what he said, but this is—but I took it as complimentary. And he said this. He said—his first words were, “Oh, I think the world of Dr. [Robert] Leflar.” Well, of course, Leflar, by then, was a national legend. I mean, let me just interrupt myself by saying that back around 1991 I'm in London, England, doing work at the Institute for the Advanced Legal Studies, and I accidentally ran in to a—a fortyish-aged American woman married to an Englishman, and she's going to law school over there. So she said why didn't I go to class with her and see how they do it over there. Well, the first class I went to, the guy was so bad—I can't believe we've ever had a professor in this country quite as bad as him. It'd be hard to find one. But the second guy was great—name was Robert Morris. And so—and he taught “Conflicts of Law,” which is what made Leflar famous. So I go up to him afterwards—introduce myself, and I say, “Have you ever heard of Dr. Leflar?” Well, his eyes went like this. “Yeah,” you know? “Yeah.” I said, “Well, he's my colleague back in—” “No? Oh, God, you know Dr. Leflar? Oh!” And he was going all over himself. So that was Leflar's reputation, even over in England.

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:30:45.03] AW: Big time. So that explained his words, “I think the world of Dr. Leflar.” Then he said, “I don’t know your dean as well as I’d like to, but he seems to me to be a very good man.” That—that was Joe Covington. Then he said, “It’s a small school, but very good quality.” And then he said, “It’s a very good stepping-stone school.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, if you go down there—” [of] course, I was single at the time. He said, “If you go down there—make a little bit of a reputation, you can use it as a place to go to a bigger school, but not Wisconsin.”

SL: [Laughs]

[05:31:18.11] AW: I was thinking of trying out for Michigan, to be honest with you.

SL: Uh-huh.

AW: But I liked it here so much that I—I gave up those [thoughts]. I did go down there with the idea of being here two, three, four years and then taking off, but I didn’t. But that was what he said about the [law school]—well, that made me feel good. Plus, I knew where Fayetteville was. I had been there, you know? So that’s what I mean about the serendipity. I wasn’t worried about never seeing my mother again and stuff like that. I knew I would. And so the rest is history. But I don’t know if I’ve covered everything up until this magic moment . . .

SL: You’ve done really well and . . .

[05:31:56.17] AW: . . . when I’ve loaded up my [19]56 Chevy [Chevrolet] with everything I owned and I—I should mention that the night before I did take off for here was when the headline in the newspaper said, “Governor Faubus Calls Out The

National Guard,” and my friends said, “Don’t go. They’ll kill ya.” It was an exciting time to be moving down here.

SL: 1957.

[05:32:22.21] AW: And then once I start—after being here, then the stories’ll start. I have a feeling I’ve omitted a lot. [Laughs]

SL: Well, here’s—here’s the thing.

AW: []

SL: We’re gonna get back with you. We’re not gonna be able to do it next week, but maybe week after next we can get back. And in the meantime, you can be thinking about some stuff that you . . .

[05:32:43.17] AW: Well, how did this one go? Give me a grade.

SL: This one went A—solid A. Number one, you lasted much longer than I thought you would.

AW: What time is it?

SL: It is 7:25 [p.m.].

AW: Seven?

SL: 7:25.

TM: We’re coming up on six hours.

AW: Are you serious?

TM: Yeah.

PW: You did awesome.

AW: Huh?

PW: You were awesome. [Laughs]

AW: I thought it was, like, 3:30. [Laughter]

SL: Well, you know, a lot of people think that because we're in Arkansas and we're talking about Arkansas history and Arkansas-based, that that's all we want to hear about is Arkansas stuff. But when you—when you go back over all the things that we've covered here, you've painted a great portrait.

[05:33:26.09] AW: You see, I didn't tell you about standing in line with my mother when the first talkie movie came out, *The Jazz Singer*, with Al Jolson, my early—one of my earliest memories is—was standing in a light rain in a line outside the Warner Theater. I'm holding her hand and we're going in to see the first talkie movie. You—I didn't get to tell you about that.

SL: Uh-huh.

[05:33:48.10] AW: I didn't tell you about when—I'll tell you about cards—how competitive [we] were. My brother and I were so young that we didn't know which card was higher than the other card. Like, we had trouble telling the difference between and eight and a seven, you know? And I can still remember my mother—my mother ironing, and I'm poking—and I'm reaching up to poke on her skirt. “Mama? Which one of these—?” [Laughs] You know, he's holding up his card and I'm holding up mine. “Which is the higher?”

SL: Which one's the highest? [Laughter]

[05:34:15.23] AW: You know, 'cause we're playing higher—higher—highest card takes. Well, I mean, the—oh, God, the memories surge back. [Laughs] But that Al Jolson—I think it was nice of her to take me to see the first talkie, don't you?

SL: Yeah.

PW: That's wonderful.

[05:34:36.26] AW: That was when—see, that's another thing my sister—boy, did I get a lot better—she used to whine, “My mother thinks—likes you better, and I don't know why.” Well, I did, but—[laughter] but I didn't whine.

SL: [Laughs] That's right.

[05:35:06.02] AW: But anyway, my mother took me to see Al Jolson.

SL: In . . . ?

AW: She had a tough life. My mother had a tough life. I . . .

TM: If we could continue, you're hair's kind of popped up again just a little bit.

AW: Well, why did I do that?

TM: [Laughs] I don't know.

AW: Well, are we gonna—do you want to quit?

SL: I don't care. I can go as long as you wanna go. How are you doing?

AW: Well, what about—? I mean, take a vote.

[05:35:43:00]

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Cheri Pearce Riggs]