

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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Ginger Beebe

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

March 17, 2008

Little Rock, Arkansas

Objective

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Transcript Methodology

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

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

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

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
 - annotations for clarification and identification; and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.
- All geographic locations mentioned in the transcript are in the state of Arkansas unless otherwise indicated.

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Ginger Beebe on March 17, 2008, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: All right. Today's date is March the seventeenth, two thousand and eight. And . . .

Kris Katrosh: Don't lean forward.

SL: . . . my name [*laughs*] is Scott Lunsford, and we'll be talking with Ginger Beebe, the first lady of the state of Arkansas. Uh—we are at the Governor's Mansion here in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the library. And—uh—this tape will be part of the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History Collection. It will reside in the Special Collections Department in the Mullins Library at the University of Arkansas Fayetteville campus. And, Ginger, I have to ask you now if it's okay that we're videotaping this interview?

Ginger Beebe: Yes, it is okay.

SL: All right. Good answer. [*Laughter*] Well, then we're just gonna [going to] start having fun. And—uh—I guess I always like to start with the—at the beginning—the earliest memory that—that you have, and we just—we'll go all the way from there to today. So . . .

GB: My earliest memory was—uh—when I was adopted. And I was a

little over four, and I remember—uh—being taken to a room, and there was this man and woman. And there was this young girl who was twelve at the time, and she had these freckles all over her face. And I guess I'd never seen anyone with freckles, but that was to be my sister and my mother and dad. So my first memory was of—uh—being in that room seeing my family for the first time.

SL: And do you—do you remember where that was?

GB: It was in Little Rock.

SL: In Little Rock. Uh-huh.

GB: I lived in Little Rock and, of course, was adopted from here and moved—uh—to Searcy, is where . . .

SL: So the—they lived—they were from Searcy?

GB: They lived in Searcy . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . .and they had adopted twelve years earlier—uh—this baby girl—an infant girl.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:01:55] GB: And when she was twelve, they decided they wanted another child. And I always tell people how lucky I am—two reasons—number one, I was adopted and, number two, because they wanted another girl. They could've wanted a boy, but they

wanted another girl. So—um—I count my blessings everyday for that mother and father who took me into their home and raised me.

SL: And so did you—uh—uh—so you were immediately in—living in Searcy. And—you probably didn't have a whole lot of memory about Little Rock before that, so really Searcy was your home.

GB: I don't. That was—that was my—what I want to say is my beginning.

[00:02:34] SL: Mh-hmm. Uh—well let's talk about the house, and let's talk about your—uh—adoptive parents. Um . . .

GB: They were a good Christian—uh—couple—uh—very active in the First Baptist Church . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . in Searcy where I grew up. Uh—my father was a deacon and helped to build the church, and my mother was active—uh. My mother probably—uh—was the reason I have always done volunteer work—is she was always volunteering at—at church, at school.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: As I—my own children would say that every time they turned around in the hallway, I was there, you know, volunteering—well, I got that from my mother. Uh—she was a hospital

volunteer. She volunteered—uh—at elections, she was a poll worker and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm. Well—uh—what were their names?

[00:03:27] GB: My father's name was Buell Croom, and that's
C—R—double O—M.

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: And my mother's name was Virginia.

SL: And—uh—what were their occupations?

GB: My dad had the—uh—American Oil Bulk Plant there in
Searcy . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: . . . and my mother was a homemaker.

[00:03:43] SL: Homemaker. And did either of their parents live
around Searcy? Did—did you ever get to meet grandparents?

GB: I only met—uh—a grandfather . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . and that was my mother's father. And he died when I was
about seven, so I really didn't have grandparents.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: Had—uh—an aunt and uncle—um—and they were very close. It
was my—uh—mother's sister.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: And—uh—they were Wayne and Aldah Knox, and they were kind of a second family grandparents . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . to me.

[00:04:17] SL: Um—what—um—do you know how much schooling that your parents had? What level of school . . .

GB: No, I really don't. My—uh—father died—uh—the year I graduated from high school.

SL: Oh . . .

GB: So there were so many things as becoming an adult I would liked to have asked him and, you know, did not.

[00:04:37] SL: Uh-huh. Um—so what was life like in Searcy then?

GB: It was a good community. It was really a—a nice town to grow up in.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: Uh—close to Little Rock, close to Memphis [Tennessee], but yet it had its own identity. And it was a—uh—a good town to be from.

SL: Let's see now. How—how big was Searcy then?

GB: Oh. Back then? I mean I was a child. I didn't read that city limits sign. [*Laughs*]

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: I don't know, maybe ten thousand—about that.

SL: Mh-hmm. Pretty good-sized town.

GB: I remember it was wet . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . because I—I remember when it went dry. And just, you know, hearing my parents talk about [*laughter*]*—so that's about the only thing I remember.*

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: Harding College was there, which was Galloway [Women's] College—uh—years ago. And was Harding College, and now is Harding University.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: So it was a nice town—a nice town.

[00:05:33] SL: And the house that you grew up in was it—uh . . .

GB: It was a brick house on Arch Street.

SL: Mh-hmm

GB: Um—you know, it was just an average house. Had a nice backyard. Uh—I've seen picture where I was swinging, and I—I do have memory of there was a sandbox. And I loved to play in the sandbox, and I would make mud pies. And there was a little boy down the street, and I was always tryin' to get him to eat the mud pies. [*SL laughs*] And—uh—there was a cat that would

always frequent the sandbox, and I remember being warned about what cats leave in the sandbox. [*Laughs*] But good memories there.

[00:06:11] SL: Mh-hmm. What about—uh—early school years? Were you a good student?

GB: I guess I was a good student.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: Um—you know, I enjoyed school. Um—you know, there's not really anything that stands out in my mind. Uh—it—it was . . .

SL: Did . . .

GB: . . . it was good times.

[00:06:33] SL: Did you have a favorite teacher early?

GB: Oh, gosh. I think I liked all my teachers.

SL: Yeah. You never got in trouble? Didn't get . . .

GB: I don't think I ever got in trouble. [*SL laughs*] I always—well, let's see. Let's take that back. I can remember in kindergarten—and—and this—now as we talked of this, I remembered these—because of coming to a family where I didn't know anyone—uh—my mother and dad sent me to kindergarten. Now kindergarten was usually for fi—for five year olds.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: But because I was four—a little over four, they let me go. And it

just happened to be my uncle's mother. And it was Miss
[Clister] Knox's kindergarten. And so I was there
with—uh—boys and girls that were a year older than I was.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: But it helped me to make friends. And a lot of them were good,
church friends and—uh—I can remember—um—getting my hand
spanked because I wanted to eat my vanilla wafer before we
said the Pledge of Allegiance. [*Laughter*] So maybe that—that's
the only memory I have of getting in trouble.

SL: [*Laughs*] Boy! They set you straight early.

GB: Uh-huh. But it was good for me because it introduced me to
other children and—and helped me. Because I was a stranger, I
had no friends.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: So that was good.

SL: So your—your father was a deacon in the church.

GB: Yes, he was.

KK: Make a little adjustment here.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:08:03] SL: Let's talk about the—uh—church and the home . . .

GB: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and—and—um—so what church was it that your father was
deacon of?

GB: First Baptist Church in Searcy.

SL: First Baptist Church.

GB: Mh-hmm.

SL: And so—uh—did that mean that you went to church a couple of
times on Sunday and on Wednesday night?

GB: We went two times on Sunday and every Wednesday night.

SL: Uh-huh. And—uh—did you enjoy that?

GB: Oh, I did—uh—lots of activities for—uh—young people, and you
know, I think—uh—our whole life pretty much revolved around
church.

[00:08:38] SL: So there was always grace said at the meals? Is
that . . .

GB: Yes . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . pretty much.

SL: Um—and—um—hymns? Did you sing early? Did you . . .

GB: My mother was in the choir.

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: And I took piano lessons, so yes. Uh—and some of my fondest
memories now of my mother of when I hear hymns—uh—

whether at church or even on TV—I can—I—I kind of resort back to that time when I was a child, and I would be, you know, next to her, and I hear her singing those hymns.

SL: That's cool. Um—so did y'all have a piano in the house?

GB: We had a piano. Yes.

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: And—uh—my sister took piano lessons . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . and I did also from the same—uh—music teacher, Mrs. Oliver. She lived—um—when I was seven years old, we moved—uh—built a house and moved. And she was about two blocks up the street. So we walked up there to our piano lessons, and I have to say my sister was much better than I was. She could play by ear. You hum it; she could play it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: But I had to read the music. So I was a little intimidated because she was much better than I was. But I enjoyed it. And I, in junior high and high school, played—uh—on Sunday mornings we—in our Sunday school class, we had an open assembly where we would sing hymns. And—uh—my best friend and I would take turns—uh—playing those hymns for everybody in the department to sing on Sunday mornins [mornings].

[00:10:11] SL: Did y'all sing at the house, too?

GB: Eh—I think my mother sang around the house but . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . you know, I probably . . .

SL: Didn't gather around the piano and . . .

GB: No, when we gathered around the piano it was because she was standin' [standing] over me makin' [making] me practice. So I don't [*laughter*—don't know that we did that.

SL: Well, do you have—do you have a favorite hymn of your mother singing or . . .

GB: Oh, I think—uh—"What a Friend I Have in Jesus" [written in 1855].

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: I just can remember her singing that and—and probably many more if I really stopped and, you know, thought long about it.

[00:10:51] SL: Well—um—so I guess—uh—what about radio? Did y'all have a radio in the house? Did you listen to radio much?

GB: You know the house—the first house that I lived in on Arch Street—I can remember—uh—you know one of those round—it was a radio. We didn't have TV . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . back then. Uh—you know, I can remember that. I don't

re—I remember it bein' [being] on, but memories are not clear of me sitting there listening. I was probably too busy playin' [playing].

SL: Yeah.

[00:11:21] GB: And then I remember the first TV set we got. I can . . .

SL: And that was in the other house?

GB: That was in the other house that was on Spring Street. And, you know, I don't remember what year that was. Uh—I know that my aunt and uncle had the first TV in Searcy.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: And I don't know when we got ours, but I do remember the black and white and that big Indian [Head Test Pattern]—you know, that sign off. And—and I can remember watchin' [watching] TV programs with my mom and dad on Saturday night, and it was *Have Gun – Will Travel* [1957-1963] . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . and *Gunsmoke* [1955-1975], and you know, some of those. It was our ritual every Saturday night. We watched those on TV.

[00:12:02] SL: *Gunsmoke's* still the longest running series.

GB: I know. And I remember the night The Beatles were on *Ed Sullivan*.

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: And I remember my dad thinkin' [thinking] they were—that long hair. They were awful looking and [*laughter*] . . .

SL: And?

GB: But everyone else did too, at that time, other than young teenagers.

SL: Uh-huh. Let's see. So what did you think of them?

GB: Well, I liked 'em [them].

SL: You did?

GB: Mh-hmm and listened to 'em.

SL: But they didn't make you, like, faint and scream and . . .

GB: No. I—I've never done that. [*SL laughs*] I just have never been one of those to yell and scream.

[00:12:38] SL: I can remember—uh—Elvis Presley on—on *Ed Sullivan*.

GB: You know, I don't. My sister would . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: . . . but I don't really—um—I—I really don't. And I know I didn't watch a lot of TV—um—other than on Saturday night. And I guess it's 'cause we were all home together and—and watching *The Ed Sullivan Show* [1948-1971]. My only other memories of TV are on Sunday night. And for years I never knew

how—uh—*Alice in Wonderland* [released in 1951], [*The Wizard of Oz*] [released in 1939], or *Peter Pan* [released in 1953] ended because it would come on, and then we would go to church. And I was—I don't know how old before I ever saw the end of it because we went to church.

SL: Mh-hmm. That's good.

GB: I mean it's funny but [*laughs*] . . .

[00:13:25] SL: Well, tell me about the house on Spring Street. How was it different than the one on Arch?

GB: It was much larger. Um—the one on Arch street I shared a room with my sister—uh—for a couple of years.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: And so this was a larger—uh—you know, living room, dining room, den, kitchen. And we had a—kinda [kind of] ate in the kitchen—kinda breakfast room there. I had my own bedroom, and I shared a bathroom with my sister. And it was just a nice big house. It was in a new—newly developed neighborhood. And—uh—the man down at the end of the street, [*rumbling sound in background begins*] his whole family owned this whole—uh—addition they were developing. And—uh—his name was . . .

Dwight Chalmers: Can—can we pause for a second?

[Tape stopped]

[00:14:07] SL: We're talking' [talking] about the house on Spring Street as opposed to the one on Arch.

GB: Right.

[00:14:12] SL: And—um—you did remember when you got your TV set, and—uh—we talked about *Ed Sullivan* and—uh—Paladin with—uh—*Have Gun – Will Travel*.

GB: Yes. Yes.

SL: And—um—let's see—uh—*Gunsmoke* . . .

GB: *Gunsmoke*.

SL: . . . and *Ed Sullivan* maybe—there were a few others. Well, of course, there was—uh—*I Love Lucy* [1951-1957], I think, was in that era.

GB: Yes, that was later years—and *Andy Griffith* and . . .

SL: Oh, gosh.

GB: You know, some of those . . .

SL: Oh, those were great . . .

GB: . . . good stories.

SL: Those were great story—great—great shows. And they—um—there was always a moral.

GB: There was a moral, and—and you—you laughed, and the whole family could watch. And we don't have that now. Uh—we're—

we're missing some of that, when the family can gather around and—and enjoy something, laugh, but then there is a lesson there that we miss some of that.

[00:15:07] SL: We do. And, you know, I think it makes a difference.

GB: I think it makes a difference in parents raising their children.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: You know, maybe some of the problems we have are—well, we all know it's because we watch too much TV. And you know that young children do, and—and parents do also.

SL: Well, it is a cult—it is a cultural phenomenon that . . .

GB: Yes.

SL: . . . we saw the beginning of.

GB: [*Laughs*] Yes, we did.

SL: And in its infancy, it was great.

GB: Yes. And it was black and white.

SL: It was. [*Laughs*] It was pretty clear.

GB: Yes.

SL: It was good.

GB: I don't remember the first color program I ever saw. I do remember the first color movie—um—*South Pacific* [released in 1958]. I remember going to the movie theatre and seeing *South*

Pacific and, oh, the colors. What a wonderful one to see in color.

SL: Mh-hmm. It was—may have been *Gunsmoke* that went color first.

GB: That went color?

SL: It may have been.

GB: You know, I just don't remember that.

SL: It was—yeah. Um—so in the—um—uh—this house was in a development that . . .

[00:16:16] GB: Newly developed, there were only three houses at the end of the—kind of a dead-end street.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: It was a *T*. And there was—um—a father lived in one house. Uh—one son lived in the house on one side, and—uh—a sister lived on the other side. [*SL laughs*] And—um—Reiser Steward was his name, and it was his kind of housing development there. He owned all the land and then developed it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: He had a swing on the front porch, and I used to walk down there and—uh—or ride my bicycle down there and sit on the front porch. And uh—we would sing that song about catching moonbeams in a jar—"would you like to swing on a star." I mean, I—you know, I remember that. It was just such fun in

the evenin' [evening] to ride down there and—after dinner—and, you know, just sit and swing on the porch.

[00:17:11] SL: Those were back in the—uh—swooner days—Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra. I—I remember them singing that—that song.

GB: Well, I'm not that old.

SL: [*Laughter*] Well, that's where they came from.

GB: And you're not either but . . .

SL: I mean, that's where they came from.

GB: I know my mother and dad—my mother and daddy used to like to dance. And I can remember they would have—uh—couples over, and they would play some of that music . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . and—especially in their older years . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . or what I thought was older years. But—uh—that they would dance, and you know, I'd be in my room playing, reading, whatever, and I'd hear 'em. They had a good time.

[00:17:45] SL: Okay, now wait a minute. So they were—it was a Baptist household but . . .

GB: Well, yes it was, but . . .

SL: And . . .

GB: . . . my mother and daddy liked to dance.

SL: Okay.

GB: They did, and there was nothing wrong with that. And Eddy Arnold, I can remember some music by him. And—uh—you know, they just enjoyed—they would have dinner, and—and they would put on some of those big records—those 78 [rpm] . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: . . . kinda records and play the music, and they—they'd dance.

[00:18:18] SL: So—um—let's see now. This is in the 1950s . . .

GB: Probably.

SL: . . . that we're talkin' about now.

GB: Mh-hmm. Yes.

SL: And—uh—of course, at the time nationally there was—um—the—um—what was it—*Brown vs. Board of Education [of Topeka]* in 1954, so the—uh—desegregation movement was starting to gather steam. And—um—there were schools that were voluntarily desegregating before the—um—law came into effect and all that.

GB: Mh-hmm.

[00:18:54] SL: Do you remember anything about the black and white communities in Searcy?

GB: You know, I really don't have any memory of the [19]57 crisis

and—and what went on here in Little Rock. Um—I know that in Searcy, there was the white school, and there was what we called the "colored school."

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: There was an area of town that was called "colored town."

Uh—when I was probably junior high and high school, we had a black lady—uh—Armenta Brown who worked for my mother.

She came once a week, and she ironed, and she dusted. And I mean, she was like a member of the family.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:19:35] GB: But I remember that there was this school, that it was the Harold Wilson School. It—the—you know it was all . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . from first grade to I guess, high school there. Um—I don't remember exactly the time that the, what we called the "colored kids"—is what we called 'em, came to school. It had to have been in maybe junior high school. I don't remember it as being a bad thing. When you heard the boys talk about it, the football and the basketball team were getting some super athletes. You know, I just don't remember it being a hard time there in Searcy. I'm sure it was . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: . . . probably harder for them. But I think we were all encouraged to—you know, they have as much right to go to our school and all of us be together. They, later in years, turned what was the colored school into the middle school, and it's still a middle school today. They—it was a good school building, and they added on to it. And it's a very large school now. And it was all started with what was the colored school down in colored town, which is a good part of town.

[End of verbatim transcription].

[00:20:47] SL: So Searcy didn't really have any huge issues although . . .

GB: Not that I knew of.

SL: . . . the segregation was just the way of life.

GB: Mh-hmm. Oh, it was.

SL: What about in the movie theater? Did they have different—did—in Fayetteville . . .

GB: We did. We have Rialto Theatre, which is still operating in Searcy. It's kind of a dollar theater now. It was bought by a man who had several theatres, and he operates, and it's all family movies. But there was—the doors that you went into—well, you got your ticket outside, and then you went inside the doors. But if you were a colored person, you got your ticket,

and you went to a door that was on the outside, and you went upstairs in the balcony. You know, and I remember that and thinking, "How strange. Why did they have to sit up there?" You know, honestly, it was kind of a neat place to go sit because in later years when it was integrated, I can remember taking my children up there and sitting. And, I mean, it was a pretty good place to sit. But, you know, thinking back about what I thought, it just didn't seem right that they had to go somewhere else. But that was just I think maybe the household and the family that I grew up in, we didn't really make that big a distinction between black or white.

[00:22:14] SL: So you said that you were a pretty good student in grade school.

GB: Oh, I was average. I mean, I was probably pretty good, but I was—I think I enjoyed school as my mother would tell. I enjoyed going to school for the social part, but I passed.

SL: Okay. So let's talk about the social part then.

GB: Well, I just liked to have a good time. I mean I think I had a lotta [lot of] friends, and I think all the teachers liked me—maybe one in the fourth grade. But she was kind of tough. No, but I think I got on real—pretty good.

SL: So she just was kind of hard on grading?

GB: Yeah, she was kinda—she was—I don't know. She lived in a really old home—family home. And I can remember we all went to her house to trick-or-treat at, you know, Halloween. And we thought we were being, you know, we were all goin' trick-or-treat—and she was so nice, gave us all candy, so sorta changed our image. *[Laughter]* But, you know, I had good teachers. When I was in high school, I had a teacher that I really thought a lot of. She was a home ec teacher. I was probably the only one of all my group of friends who took home ec for two years. I just liked it. I like to cook, sew. At one time I wanted to be a home ec teacher.

SL: Probably because of her?

GB: Because of her. Mh-hmm.

[00:23:54] SL: Yeah. Well, that happens. Kids latch on to a teacher and really enjoy and think that maybe that's what they should do when they grow up. Well, di—in high school did you belong to any organizations?

GB: I was in the band in—which started in junior high. I played the flute and was a majorette through junior high. In high school I—they needed a timpani player. They needed some percussion. So during concert season I—well, I played whatever there was back there but snare. So there was music club. There was—you

know, in junior high, there's not that many groups. There was a pep club, which we were the Searcy Cubs. And, you know, I was in that. You know, high school—thespians—gosh, you're makin' me really think here—Lions—Lionettes, FHA [Future Homemakers of America]. That's all I can think of.

SL: Well, that's quite a few for a child growing up.

[00:25:09] GB: Well, in the time there weren't as many social groups or clubs as there are now. I mean there was FHA and the FFA [Future Farmers of America] and thespians because I took drama. Gosh, I can't remember.

SL: So—oh, gosh, what was I gonna ask you? I thought of something about the organization . . .

GB: I was also on the drill team. My last two years, junior high and high school, I was drill team and served on the choreography board two years, which we were—there were nine of us, and we were assigned to make up the routines—dances and marches. And we went off to SMU [Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas] during the summer. Our parents put us on an airplane and sent us to SMU to pep squad and drill team school. And that was quite an experience, you know, being away from home. I'd always attended church camp. Siloam Springs was where the Baptist kids went to church camp, and that was a lot of fun. I

mean it was a beautiful area and . . .

SL: Well, I was just gonna say even though there may not have been a lot of clubs at that time in junior high and high school, your chor—your church activities probably were the central social element.

GB: Mh-hmm. Most the things of what you did. Mh-hmm—yes.

SL: I know the Suggs [B. Alan and Jean Sugg] for instance—that's the way that they dated. Just around church activities, and they would see each other through the week and . . .

GB: I had boyfriends at church.

[00:26:48] SL: Well, maybe we should talk about your trip to SMU? That was a big deal.

GB: Oh, it was a big deal getting on a airplane.

SL: Nine oth—nine girls.

GB: Nine of us.

SL: Eight other girls.

GB: Mh-hmm, mh-hmm. And no chaperone. [*SL vocalized noise*]
No—I mean we—there wasn't one. They had counselors and all there. I mean, it was pretty well supervised. But we stayed in a dorm, you know, shared rooms, and I mean, it was great. First time, I guess, probably any of us had been on a college campus. And, I mean, it was good. It was work, but it was fun.

SL: So did y'all get in any trouble on the trip at all?

GB: No. No.

SL: Oh, come on.

GB: You couldn't get in any trouble.

SL: You couldn't? [*Laughs*]

GB: No. No.

SL: You were on time every—everywhere? You were always where you were supposed to be?

GB: Pretty much on time. Oh, yes. We had one who slept a little late, but we gathered around and made sure—because we didn't want to get in trouble. It was a good group.

SL: That's good. That's a good group. Well, so—let me think now—a majorette.

GB: Mh-hmm.

[00:27:59] SL: So that meant you were at all the football games, I guess?

GB: Yes. Yes, all the football games.

SL: And did . . .

GB: Even before—I mean, if the band didn't march, you were there because there were—was a pep club. We all sat together. Wore our black skirts, white blouses, and black vests with an *L* on it. And we learned all the cheers along with the cheerleaders, and

so we sat in one group together. You know, the little pep squad.

SL: That's—this is just—you know, it's like America. I mean, it's just like so picturesque and romantic . . .

Bruce Perry: Scott. Scott.

SL: . . . in so many ways.

BP: She has a little hair. There we go. There we go. Very good.

SL: He's good at that.

GB: ?I noticed? [*Laughs*]

[00:28:48] SL: So when—did you end up going to college?

GB: I did. When I graduated high school, I went to Beebe. There were a group of us that thought we would get ahead. So we would drive to Beebe, which was about twenty miles down the road from Searcy. And it was a little two-year college, now ASU [Arkansas State University] Beebe. And so we went down there and thought we'd take a few courses. And I mean we got up every morning on that road at seven o'clock and got to class and did that. And then I went to UCA [University of Central Arkansas], which—State Teacher's College, UCA at Conway. Did not graduate. Got married. Started a family. That was the end. That was it. [*Laughs*]

SL: Met your first husband at UCA?

GB: He was from Bald Knob, and so I was dating him before we went

off to college. Bald Knob's a little town close to Searcy.

SL: Right. Right. You had two children?

GB: Had two children.

SL: First marriage.

GB: David Powell III and Tammy Powell—boy and a girl.

SL: And did you live in UCA or . . .

GB: Lived there for several years, and then I moved to Dallas while my first husband was in mortuary school. We lived there for one year, and that's where my daughter was born. And then moved back to Judsonia, which is just right outside of Searcy, and lived for several years until moving to Searcy.

[00:30:16] SL: So Dallas—big town.

GB: Big town.

SL: Big difference.

GB: Big.

SL: Well, of course, you'd seen Dallas because you'd been at s . . .

GB: I didn't ever—I'd never seen downtown Dallas.

SL: Right.

GB: Yeah. Yeah. But that was quite an experience. You know, it was good. But there, all the wives sort of stuck together. Of course, I had a son, a year and a half—almost two—and then was having another baby, so I didn't get out a whole lot.

SL: Right. Right. So you moved back to Justonia?

GB: Judsonia. It's between Searcy and Bald Knob. [*SL laughs*]
Tornado went through there, destroyed the little town—oh, I think early [19]50s, destroyed much of the town. But lived there for a few years before. Then I moved to Searcy.

SL: So you're basically a homemaker?

GB: Yes.

SL: Now with a couple of kids?

GB: Yes.

[00:31:11] SL: Did you start getting involved with civic projects then?

GB: I did, and I really did that when I lived in Judsonia. I was active in the church, taught Sunday school and—I don't know, I think I played the piano for the little choir then. And—I don't know. I guess, maybe the church work was all other than the Jaycees [United States Junior Chamber] and the Jaycettes. Do you remember that organization?

SL: Yes. Absolutely.

GB: Then I moved to Searcy and the Searcy Junior Auxiliary, which is a civic group that really helps with needy children in the community. I worked in the schools, volunteered helping teachers prepare materials. And—but that was really my

beginning, and that's how I met Mike. When I was divorced, lived in Searcy, was still active in civic groups, and met Mike.

[00:32:19] SL: So what was your first impression?

GB: [Long pause] He had Buster Brown haircut [*SL laughs*], and if you know what that is—a Buster Brown haircut—when it's just [gestures to show straight bangs and longer sides] . . .

SL: Yeah.

GB: You remember there's a little Buster Brown shoe?

SL: Yes. Yes. Yes.

GB: And it had the little dog? Mh-hmm.

SL: And so it was real square, but it also was full in the ears . . .

GB: I just remember the first time I saw him—I don't know—there's that Buster Brown haircut. But I didn't really pay that much attention to him when I first met him. I mean, I got to know him, but it was more through the kind of civic work that we were doing.

SL: Yeah, and he was an attorney at that time.

GB: He was. Yes.

SL: And I think he was probably really enjoying that. I think . . .

GB: He did.

SL: . . . he had a good mentor in that firm.

GB: Oh, he did—Ed Lightle and Jim Hannah, Cecil Tedder. It was a

good group. You know, Mike never had a father. Growing up he had a lotta stepfathers. And so they kinda took him in. And he really looked up to Ed, who was in the [Arkansas] legislature earlier—in the Senate so—he was a good attorney.

[00:33:32] SL: So y'all just kept kind of running in to each other in Searcy?

GB: We did. [*SL laughs*] You know, it's just when you volunteer—when you do volunteer work in the community, you just meet so many people, and you're all working for the same cause, you know, to help some group, some family—you know, something. So you establish a lot of friendships.

[00:33:56] SL: Now what—when did you—let's get back to your family. When did your mom and—are your mom and dad . . .

GB: They're both deceased.

SL: They're both—they're both gone now.

GB: Yes.

SL: And when did you lose them?

GB: My father died the year I graduated high school. I was off at college.

SL: Okay.

GB: And then my mother died in 2002.

SL: And is your sister still living?

GB: Yes, my sister still lives outside of Searcy.

SL: And what does she do now?

GB: Ooh. She and her husband just retired. They had for—oh, maybe ten, fifteen years—a motor supply, hardware kind of store there in Searcy. They lived in Texarkana for years. And then bought this business in Searcy and moved there. And just in the last few months, have sold it and retired. And he likes to rebuild old cars, and she likes to dig in the yard. And she's in a garden club, and you know, active in church. So I get to see her pretty often.

[00:35:08] SL: That's good. That's really good. So I'm kinda interested a little bit in this courtship with Mike. I—it may be from my old days when I used to do wedding videos. I always used to interview the bride and groom separately and get the story. You know, see how well they matched up but—so y'all just kind of kept seeing each other through the volunteer work that you'll were doing and . . .

GB: Started dating.

SL: Started dating.

GB: And dated for a couple of years.

SL: Did you ever get him to change his haircut?

GB: Only after I married him.

SL: Is that right?

GB: And I found [*SL laughs*] a picture of him that he'd had hair kind of what I say the average way, and I said, "You should really go back to that." In fact, his first campaign when he ran for the [Arkansas] Senate, his card—his campaign card has that Buster Brown haircut on it. So it was after that. We married in [19]79, and he ran in [19]82. So it took me a few years. [*SL laughs*] But I found a picture, and I thought, "Oh, this is how he needs to"—and he did. He changed it back and . . .

[00:36:27] SL: So when—okay, now I'm tryin' to think. The—you got married, but it was about—was it after he was elected to the Senate that y'all built a house?

GB: No. Oh, built a house? Oh, yes. Well, I built the house, I say.

SL: Okay.

[00:36:43] GB: Now, yes, we built a house. But he was elected in November of [19]82, and in December, they started breaking ground for our house. So he was in the middle of his first session—January, February, March, part of April—and I built a house. He would come home on weekends and see what, you know, we [*laughter*—what I'd done or what [*laughter*]. And it was really—I mean, you know, we did it together, but he really left me in charge of everything. I worked, and I drew the plan

and then took it to a builder. And he actually put the plan into a formal plan. So he trusted me pretty much—if there were any big decisions or big expenses, I could get him on the phone. But then when he came home on the weekends—you know, it was easier for him to stay in Little Rock during the week—during the session. Because there was a lot of times they go to dinner, and they would discuss things. And plus it was his first session, and he was learning. So to save on the driving back and forth, he stayed in Little Rock. So when he'd come home on weekends, there was a lot to talk about. And it was kind of show and tell what had happened in building the house, but it was fun.

SL: Was it? I mean you—you really enj—I can't . . .

GB: It was fun. Mh-hmm.

SL: I can't imagine it not being fun to get to build your own house.

GB: Yes.

SL: So do y'all still have that?

GB: We still—that's still our home. Yes.

[00:38:08] SL: And what was your favorite element in that house?

GB: Oh, I don't know that there is one favorite. He has his library, and I have my music room.

SL: Your music room.

GB: I mean, I just had a room that's burgundy walls, white carpet,

white molding and has my piano in that room.

SL: So do you still play piano from time to time?

GB: From time to time, but not as much as I used to—you know, before the campaign. I would—that was sort of therapy. Just go in there, shut the doors, and just play. Up until Mike started running for governor, and I taught Sunday school, I would play for the children to sing. So, you know, that changed when he . . .

[00:39:03] SL: Well, when Mike's political career started evolving, you didn't really spend much time out on the campaign trail or any of that stuff. You pretty much . . .

GB: Well, he never had an opponent.

SL: Well, you know, that's true.

GB: I mean, so he . . .

SL: That's right. You got—you were saved from all of that.

[00:39:31] GB: You know, I can remember when we were dating he would—he talked about someday running for the [Arkansas] Senate for Bill Wamsley's seat. He was from Batesville. And it—you know, every ten years they do redistricting, and he felt like there would be some change. And I can remember him talking about that, but it didn't really mean anything to me. I just wanted to know, you know, what movie we were going to see

and where we were going to dinner. [*SL laughs*] You know, I just really didn't take it seriously. And, I mean, we were just dating. So—and I remember him talking about running, but it really didn't—I don't know. I guess I really didn't realize what it would involve or where it was going to lead. I certainly didn't. But, you know, his first campaign he had an opponent for a short time and then the incumbent from Stuttgart . . .

SL: Backed out.

GB: . . . just backed out. I think he saw how many people were supporting Mike. And, you know, Mike was young. He brought fresh ideas, and he's very personable. He spent a lot of time in the district getting to know the people, and I think that he felt maybe it was just time for a change. But because he only had an opponent for a short time, he really didn't have one until he ran for governor. [00:40:37] Even when he ran for AG [Attorney General], you know, we're—I can remember—we were at the courthouse. He was making a speech—a courthouse in Searcy, and he was making a speech. And it was around noon, and it was the day of the deadline. And I can remember somebody coming out of the courthouse and saying, "No one filed for attorney general." So he didn't have an opponent there either. You know, we campaigned for a little while anyway not

knowing that he would have one or not. So my real introduction to campaigning was when he ran for governor.

[00:41:12] SL: So did you like that?

GB: I liked it. You know, what an opportunity to travel the state and get to meet the people and all. My first introduction to politics was in 1966. My mother or dad—whichever one, I don't know—got me a summer job. And it was answering the phone for Frank Holt, who was running for governor. And there were—oh, I don't know—four or five of 'em running. And I think the primary was in July, and I think he made it to—he and Jim Johnson . . .

SL: Wow.

GB: . . . to a runoff in August. And, you know, I answered the phone, "Frank Holt for governor." And I think I got paid twenty-five dollars. And, you know, that was my first introduction. My mother was very political. Worked the polls. She was a Yellow Dog Democrat. [SL laughs] I never knew what that was. I didn't really know what that was for many years. I just thought that it was something funny that she always said. And I can remember one particular man that we knew—that we met out on the campaign had a yellow dog. And he wanted to loan it to me. And I sa—you know, I just thought

it was something that they made up, but I guess we're Yellow Dog Democrats.

[00:42:39] SL: [*Laughs*] There's a lady that was also a Yellow Dog Democrat up in Fayetteville. And tha—it's actually on her tombstone.

GB: Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah, "Billy Snyder?, Yellow Dog Democrat."

GB: Yeah. Yes. Yeah, yeah.

SL: That's all it says. [*Laughter*]

[00:42:55] GB: 'Course [of course], my dad was always telling my mother, "Now you be quiet." Because he had the bulk plant. He owned a lot of gas stations all over the county. And I can remember hearing him tell her, "Everyone that comes into that station to buy gas or into that little restaurant, you know, they're our customers. And so we want to be very careful not to take a side." Because, you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

GB: . . . you want all those customers, so like—my mother wouldn't always agree with that. [*Laughter*] She tried.

SL: So your mother—was your mother basically a Democrat or . . .

GB: She was, and my dad was, too.

SL: Yeah.

GB: But he just knew in business—especially back during that time—everyone was your customer, so you just be very careful what you, you know, say. My mother worked the polls, and so that's how I, I think, started working the polls. Kinda took up where she left off in the hospital auxiliary [Central Arkansas Hospital] and in workin' at polling places.

[00:43:57] SL: So let's talk a little bit about all the things that you do now . . .

GB: As?

SL: . . . which I think are extensive.

GB: As first lady?

SL: Yes. Well, just the civic stuff that you do now.

GB: Oh. Well, I did a lot more before Mike was elected.

SL: Yeah.

GB: You know, because I lived in Searcy, and I didn't work—I worked at ASU-Beebe when we were first married. I worked in public relations there. And then when our son was born in [19]80, I—because Mike had a really good job, I could stay home. So I—and I wanted to stay home. I enjoyed being a homemaker. So I became involved not only in the First Baptist Church in—'course, I still continued some in the Jaycees—hospital auxiliary, I became a volunteer there. Helped to form a CARTI

auxiliary with CARTI, the Central Arkansas Radiation Therapy Institute that put its first satellite branch outside of Little Rock in Searcy.

SL: Oh.

[00:45:10] GB: So I helped to form an auxiliary there. I was in a social organization, Beta Sigma Phi, which is a great social group. It's world over. It's just women coming together trying to learn about what's going on in the world, good support for families, and just good woman support. So I was involved in that. Maybe that's all—oh, at school, I was always volunteering at school. As I said earlier, my children—I can remember bein' at school, and they'd come up in the hall and say, "Mom, what are you doin' here again?" When our youngest was in [Southwest] Middle School, I was president of the PTO, which it changed from Parent Teacher Association to Parent Teacher Organization. And I was president one year of that and, I think, co-chair of the annual. They did a little middle-school annual, and I worked on that—and just different events. I was just, you know, that homeroom mother. I don't even know if they have homeroom mothers now, but you know, I was one of those. And just enjoyed being involved in the children.

[00:46:31] SL: So when did your interest in the arts take hold?

Back in the theater days in high school?

GB: I think so. Theater—'course, there was—there was band. I don't sing, but I could play the piano. Played instruments. Like to paint by number.

SL: I was gonna . . .

GB: Now I've kind of branched out a little bit from that, but I wouldn't say that anyone would buy my work. But, you know, I just enjoyed that. And I think when—well, I serve on a little dinner theater. Center on the Square is a dinner theater in Searcy. And I serve on that board there and saw all the talent come through there of just local actors coming through. So that and then travelling the state with Mike, you saw the talented people that we have in this state. And when we moved into the Mansion, there was a lot of space to do something with. And I wanted to showcase Arkansas artisans. And not necessarily what's on canvas, but we have wood, glass, pottery, bronze. So we've been able to do that.

SL: Photography.

GB: Photography. We've been able to do that, and I'm really proud. 'Course, I really didn't do it. I had maybe the idea. But everyone here at the Mansion, and the [Arkansas Governor's] Mansion Association has been really helpful in seeing that we

could get that done.

SL: And you dabble a bit yourself.



[00:48:09] GB: Well, I do, but it's more—I'm a master gardener.

And I spent several years involved in community projects in Searcy. My own yard—my—you couldn't tell. But I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the being able to go out and just dig in my yard. So, you know, I was so glad to see that what they were doing here with the landscaping at the Mansion. They say one area is a family garden. I don't know if that means I can go out and dig in it.

SL: I think you can do about anything you wanna [want to] do. [*SL laughs*]

GB: I do know that the vegetable garden out there is maintained by the Master Gardeners, and they've invited me to come up there and help. So I hope I can do that this spring. It's just good to get out and just feel the dirt in your hands.

SL: Well, why wouldn't you be able to do that? You should just do it.

GB: We—I told them two weeks ago—I went out just to visit with them, see how they were doing and, you know, how things were growing out there and ask 'em if I could come out, and they said I could. So I really do—I do plan to do that.

[00:49:18] SL: So maybe we should talk about being first lady?

GB: Okay.

SL: And how that's changed your life.



GB: It has. It has, and you know, I've known a lot of first ladies. Because Mike was in the senate, you know, for twenty years, I've gotten to know a lot of 'em. And I've been in this house. Moving here was maybe not as big a change as it has been for some others. Because I felt very comfortable here at the times I've been here. Because Mike had a meeting, I've been to events here. Hillary Clinton was wonderful with entertaining the legislators' spouses. She was wonderful during the session to entertain us all at different places around town, plus here. And there've been other meetings that I've attended here, so it was—the private quarters was, you know, something new. But the house in general has a very warm and comfortable feeling here. You know, our experience so far has been good here.

[00:50:27] SL: So do you pattern yourself after what Hillary did as first lady? Are you just kind of finding your own way, or is there anyone that you turn to for advice on . . .

GB: Well, Gay White and Betty Tucker have been wonderful. We served together as honorary chair of [Susan G. Komen] Race for the Cure this year. They like for former first ladies to do that, and we had a great time. I have asked 'em a lot of questions.



The only thing that is different is the great hall [Editor's Note: Grand Hall] was not here when they lived here. So that's a whole new experience in itself. As far as patterning after Hillary, the one thing that made such an impression on me was the first time I came and how she welcomed everyone. She stood at the door. And at times that I was here and she couldn't be here, some of her staff was there, and they welcomed us. You know, the door was open, and they welcomed us. And that made such a good impression on me, that's something that I've tried to do. I think, the first year every time there was an event that I was standing at the door shaking their hand saying, "Welcome." And I just—the house belongs to the people of Arkansas. And Mike and I just have the privilege of livin' here for the next few years. And I want everyone that comes to feel welcome and to feel like it is their house. Be proud of what's here.

[00:51:54] SL: Well, I think you guys are doin' a great job here. I love all the art that's hanging and . . .

GB: Yes.

SL: Looks like you're doing a good job keepin' it beautiful and maintained. And it is a much bigger facility than it used to be. That . . .

GB: It is. Of course, the main house was built in [19]48, [19]49, and

they moved in in [19]50. And, you know, it needs constant upkeep. We're trying to refurnish some things. Get pieces of furniture in here to try to take it back to the 18th century style that it was built in. And so far we've been able to accomplish that. We still have some more to do. But the great hall just lends itself for entertaining.

SL: Right.

GB: You know, what a great place to come and have an event here. And you know, we have a lot of, oh, nonprofits that have fund-raising events here. And, I mean, it's just wonderful to be able to come here. Now that the grounds are completed, next month we are going to have our official opening of the Mansion grounds. And it's also going to be a wonderful place to entertain—garden parties. I want to have a luncheon and maybe some evening events. It's something that Arkansas can be proud of.

[00:53:15] SL: Is there anything that we haven't talked about earlier? I feel like we haven't really gotten to know you quite as well as I wanted to. I'm just wondering if there's—you married early in college, so . . .

GB: Yes.

SL: . . . so you didn't have a whole lot of college years to talk about.

GB: No. No.

SL: And high school, you had the one home ec teacher that you liked a lot.

GB: I got the home ec award.

SL: And the . . .

GB: And I got a home ec award! [*Laughter*]

SL: Yeah. Well that's good. That's good. That's good. And [pause]—when did your sister move out?

GB: When she got mar—well, no, she went to college. She went to Mississippi State College [Mississippi State University for Women, Columbus, Mississippi] for women.

SL: And so she's—but she was eight [Interviewee edit: seven] years older than you? Is that . . .

GB: Well, she's seven years older than I am.

SL: Okay.

GB: Mh-hmm. She moved out, went to college, and then she got married in 1960 and moved back to Searcy. He finished—her husband finished college at Harding, and she did also.

[00:54:39] SL: Well, I mean, you talked about early how lucky you were to have a big sister . . .

GB: Yes.

SL: . . . right off the bat. So I've—I'm just going to assume that

when she went to college, you probably missed her quite a bit.

GB: I don't know. I had that bathroom to myself after she was gone.

[*Laughter*] I did, but you know, because she was older—I mean, of course, I looked up to her. And I can remember getting in her closet, and she had this poodle skirt. She had a skirt that had "Rock Around the Clock" [released in 1955]. You remember that song?

SL: Yeah.

[00:55:12] GB: You know, so—and I can remember some of the songs—well, the "Twelfth of Never " [released in 1957].

[*Laughs*] I mean, you know, I don't think I was into music very much other than played the piano and, you know, watched her. I have become friends with a lot of her friends who say, "Oh, I remember you, that little sister." [*Laughter*] You know how you think about someone. I probably always tagged along. You know, I looked up to all her friends. I can remember one of them. She had a very tall friend. And I wanted to be so tall, and of course, I'm short.

SL: Right.

GB: I can remember getting—putting my feet under the end of the bed and trying to stretch, thinking that I could stretch myself to be tall. It didn't work. It didn't work. But I can tell you being

short, you get in a lot of places that tall people can't. I'm very quick and can get through a crowd where a tall person can't.

SL: [*Laughs*] There are advantages.

GB: There are advantages . . .

SL: Yes.

GB: . . . to every size. You know, God made us all different.

[00:56:17] SL: That's right. Well, how is—tell me about how church plays in your life now. I mean it sounds like it was a main thing growing up in the house, and it was your main social avenue for the most part . . .

GB: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . all the way through high school.

BP: Need to change tape. Tape.

SL: Oh, you need more tape? Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:56:39] SL: Tell me, has that—have you maintained your interest?

GB: Oh, I have. I was a member of First Baptist Church in Searcy until my older children were old enough to drive themselves to church, and then I changed. Mike was a senior warden, which is like a deacon in the Baptist church. And he was very involved in the Episcopal Church. And he would visit with me. And I went

to church and took our son, but I really wanted to go. I wanted us to be a family and go to the same church. So when my two children were old enough to drive themselves and have their own car, then I took Kyle [Beebe] and went over to the Episcopal church. And I taught Sunday school. And they didn't have a choir, so I started children's choir there. And it was kind of a growing church with young people. The priest, Father Gary McConnell, would tease me about bringing all my little Baptist songs [*SL laughs*] and all my little Baptist books over there and teachin' those children. [00:57:48] 'Course, it's—I told him it's the same thing. We just sing it differently in the Episcopal church than the Baptist. But—so I stayed active in that role until Mike was running for governor, and then I just—I couldn't. I was out too many Saturday nights all over the state and couldn't be there. So I had to give it up. And I really—I miss those little children. I was the single teacher with a sort of babysitter person, and I had about twelve children from ages one year to ten. And as it began to grow, then I began to get help. And they have a good group now, but I miss them. I've had 'em come down to the Mansion. They came—I guess it was about the first Sunday in December after the Mansion was decorated. All my former children at the Episcopal church in my church

school came down, had lunch, and had a tour of the Mansion. It was such fun. But we attend the Episcopal church here just directly—right down the street. And then when we're home, we go to Trinity Episcopal in Searcy.

[00:59:03] SL: Well, but you watch church services on Sundays, right?

GB: Oh, who told you that?

SL: You did.

GB: Oh, did I?

SL: Mh-hmm.

GB: Okay. I do. Sometimes if we've been out really late or I haven't had a chance to catch up on laundry or things around here, I do. I have my favorite services that I watch on TV—a Baptist service and a Pulaski Heights [United] Methodist's service. So I do. I get my church on TV, and then I read. I was recently in El Dorado and spoke to Immanuel Baptist Church down there. They have, I think it's quarterly, they have speakers come in. I talked to them about prayer. Prayer's important in my life. And I don't start my day without my devotional or my prayer time. And I have several books that I read and reread. So even though I may not go to church, I may watch it on TV. I have my time—as I say—at the feet of our Lord every mornin' before I

start my day.

[01:00:16] SL: What books do you use? What books do you read?

GB: Right now I'm reading *Prayers for the Moments* [by Jim and Kaye Johns], *Women Who (May) Worry Too Much* [by Anne Wilson Schaef] [Interviewee edit: *Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much* and *Meditations for People Who (May) Worry Too Much*]. [SL laughs] A new one was just given to me by a friend in Searcy—oh, and I'm sorry. I can't remember it. There's a *Our Daily Bread* that is from the Baptist Church. There's the [Forward] *Day by Day* that is from the Episcopal Church—oh, *My Utmost for His Highest* [by Oswald Chambers] is—and I'll read those—I read Max Lucado's *Grace for the Moment* [*Inspirational Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*] for years until finally, starting over in January, I thought, "I kinda know this by heart [SL laughs], so it's time to move on."

SL: Move on.

[01:01:13] GB: But, you know, and I'll read those—other than the Baptist, *Forward Day by Day*—you know, the others are things that I will read and then put them up and get something else. I've been real fortunate that people know that I enjoy my devotional time, so they'll give me books, you know, whether it's a birthday or Christmas or—so that's how I start my day.

SL: That's really strong. That's really good.

GB: Thank you.

SL: You keep . . .

GB: But I learned that from my mother and my dad, you know. I had that good foundation. And, I mean, it's important. You know, it's important to me.

SL: It's inspiring to others to see that in you.

GB: I hope it is.

[01:01:57] SL: So what do you hope to do as first lady? I mean, it seems like this is some opportunity for you. I know that you're a great champion for Arkansas artists—and, of course, all the civic activities that you've been deeply involved with until this job came up.

GB: Right.

SL: It is a job, isn't it?



GB: Well, it's a—it is. It's a position. A job is something that you get paid for. And I don't mean that in a negative way, but you know, I don't get paid to do this. You know, I think Mike and I both have such an opportunity to do some things in this state. I didn't really look at it that way, but having been here now for a year, I think I can be a voice for some groups. Mike and I don't need anything. You know, he had a good career. We need to

give back. And I think—'course, I think I learned that maybe from my mother, but I've listened to Mike all of these years talk about how fortunate he was to be able to go to college and to get a job in this state. And that he wants to give back because the state was so good to him. Well, I think I can do that, too. The state has been good to me. And I want to be able to help groups who maybe just need that voice to raise awareness about their cause. You know, last year I did this tour on mental health, on children's mental health, as a result of the legislation that was passed, the system of care, and the governor's commission that was appointed. It was something that I really didn't know anything about. And, you know, Mike asked me if I wanted to do this. And I saw during the campaign—you know, one the things you do is you go and talk to people, but you also ask what are some of your concerns? What are things that you need? And one of them was a system that worked—a healthcare system that worked better for the children. So when this legislation was passed, it just kind of seemed something that I could really do, and I hope that I have raised awareness and that people shouldn't be afraid if they have a child with mental illness.

SL: That's right.

[01:04:35] GB: You know, one of our dearest friends and godfather to our son Kyle, Robert Elliot, who was the reason the CARTI satellite branch was first in Searcy—he was a radiologist. He was a wonderful Christian man. He grew up in the Baptist Church with me. He was quite a bit older. But then when I go over to the Episcopal Church, there he is because he has a wife who is Episcopalian.

SL: Okay.

GB: So he's very active over there. He suffered from depression, and he committed suicide. And, you know, it was a real wake up, I think, to all of us—all the people in the medical community who knew him and loved him. He loved his family, but he suffered from illness. And a wonderful foundation was started because of that—to raise that awareness. So then when this became something that I could be involved in, it just seemed like a good fit for me. So I—you know, I've done that, and I know that's made a difference—because everywhere I go, I talk about it. And people shouldn't be afraid or ashamed that they or somebody in their family suffers from mental illness. It's no different than having arthritis or cancer, you know. It needs treatment, and we, as a state, need to do a better job in helping those children and those families, and I think we're gonna do

that.

[01:06:08] SL: Well, you know, depression—you know, sometimes you don't recognize that.

GB: No, you don't . . .

SL: I mean . . .

GB: . . . only afterwards.

SL: Only afterwards. I mean in the old days, you know, if you didn't have a fever or if . . .

GB: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . you weren't bleedin' or . . .

GB: Yes.

SL: . . . hackin' or whatever, you weren't sick.

GB: Right.

SL: You were lazy.

[01:06:31] GB: Right but not so. You know, one of the things that I tell—and I don't know if this is appropriate or not. But I tell a story of a family that was asked to leave their church because their child had this behavior problem. I mean you never know what will set a child off to cause this behavior. I couldn't imagine being asked to leave a church. 'Course, one of the good things that came out of that was a woman sitting across the table said, "Come with me. They accept my child in my church."

And then knowing the next time you see a child in a grocery store, in a Walmart who's misbehaving, you don't think about—I mean, we would think, "Oh, that child needs to go home. They need to go sit in the corner, and they need a spanking." And that's not always the case.

SL: Right.

GB: That child might be acting out because of something has triggered. You know, so I try to tell everybody, you know, "Don't be so quick to judge."

SL: That's good advice.

GB: It's the truth.

SL: And I think you can make a difference. I think that's a good cause.

GB: Well, I hope I can.

[01:07:48] SL: Now let's throw back just a little bit.

GB: Okay.

SL: You and Lynn [Hodges, assistant director of the Pryor Center] were havin' a great talk about pets.

GB: Yes.

SL: This has been a little bit more fun. [*Laughter*] So you had—did you say you had a dog?

GB: I really—I never had an animal, but the grandfather that I knew

for a very short time had a farm. And had, you know, chickens and horses and—that's about all that I remember. [*SL laughs*] Didn't visit there very much.

SL: You say like—you say that like you can't really . . .

GB: Well, you know, I just—we didn't go there that often. I had a bad experience there. There was a pond, and we would go fishing, and it was back when you know you had the cane pole, and you had that little, red bobber that would go up and down. And we had to cross over a fence to get there. And one time, crossing back over the fence, the area that I crossed, there was a bees—hornet's nest—wasp—whatever. And I was stung a lot and ended up in the hospital. And I really don't have a lot of memory of that. I mean, I have some but—so I didn't go as often. I guess, you know, it's that fear. But when he died, he had a German shepherd. And my aunt, my mother's sister, had a little Chihuahua—a little—oh, I can't remember now what kind of dog it was but a little dog. So they couldn't take this German shepherd, so we got the German shepherd. So it was my dog. His name was Mack, and he was a very well-trained dog. It was an outside dog. And back then, we didn't have leash laws, so Mack was free to roam the neighborhood. And there was a stray dog—kind of a mutt, kind of a big dog, maybe he a little bit of a

Lab in him—came up and just kinda latched onto Mack, so then I had two dogs.

SL: Two dogs.

GB: And I named that one Duke.

SL: Okay.

GB: And my German shepherd was run over by my boyfriend . . .

SL: Oh.

GB: . . . who was on his motorcycle. And he was coming down, and I crossed the street, so he'd see me. And my dog followed, and he hit Mack.

SL: Oh, that's tough.

[01:09:57] GB: But we have a German shepherd now. And we never had—I had a dog and a cat when my two older children were young. But not for very long because we really didn't have a good place to keep it. But—oh, gosh, almost twelve years ago our neighbors across the street, ?Reynie and Ann Rutledge?, got a dog. [*SL laughs*] They got a chocolate Lab. And, of course, we have a leash law in Searcy, and we didn't want to put a fence around our property. So they got this dog, and I couldn't imagine they got the dog. Well, there's this underground fencing where the dog wears the collar and the lines, and you train the dog. So I watched, and they did pretty good with Rex,

so I convinced Mike that we should get an animal. We had a cat, but we needed a dog.

SL: Yeah.

[01:10:53] GB: So we got our first German shepherd, and it's a German German shepherd—not an American German shepherd. And our veterinarian put us in contact with somebody who raised 'em, and she's been a wonderful dog. She was easy to train. And so now she's living at the Mansion, and she loves it down here. There are always people to, you know, entertain her. The only thing that I had to do after the first week she was here was she was not eating her dog food. And we never fed her people food because we would bring her in sometimes and let her sit in there while we would eat. We may be having our TV trays down on the floor, and so we wanted to train a dog that would not bother . . .

SL: Right.

GB: . . . with eating food, so—but the first week we're here, she's not eating, and I looked out one day, and the guys in the back were feeding her lunch. So I had to go have a little talk with 'em [*SL laughs*] She's to eat dog food, not people food.

SL: Actually, I think the first time we came here, the dog met me and hung out with me . . .

GB: Yes.

SL: . . . while we were doin' the gig.

GB: She's very gentle.

SL: Yeah.

GB: She likes people. She may look fierce, but once you get close to her, she'll roll over and want you to scratch her belly, so . . .

[01:12:07] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, that's good. Is there anything else?

Is there any story that you want to tell, want to pass on to the kids? Is there anything you want to say to the kids or anybody?

DC: [*Jet passes overhead*] Let's wait for it.

SL: We've gotta [got to] wait for the jet to go over.

GB: [*Laughs*] Yeah. Now give me a question. Don't just say that. I mean [*vocalized noise*]*—*we don't want to talk about mattress surfing or . . .

SL: Talk about what now?

GB: Mattress surfing or . . .

SL: Mattress surfing?

GB: You don't know what that is?

SL: Yeah. [*Jet noise continues*]

GB: I mean, we've done a few things with grandchildren around here that . . .

Lynn Hodges: You need to tell that.

SL: We need to hear that.

GB: Oh . . .

DC: Sounds fun.

SL: Yeah. We should have started with mattress surfing. [*Laughter*]

GB: I don't know. Is there anything else you can think that you need to know?

LH: I have a question, but what's mattress surfing first?

GB: Well, no. What's your question?

[01:13:07] LH: I'm just so curious. With this horrible haircut, there—what attracted you to your husband?

GB: Oh.

LH: And how did—did he pursue you? Or did you just hang around, and it just sort of blossomed? I mean what really happened?

GB: No. I think he sort of went after me. [*Laughter*]

SL: Now come on! You have to look at me, or Lynn you can come over here and sit.

GB: No. No. No. I mean I think he . . .

SL: Why don't the girls have a talk? Let's . . .

LH: [*Unclear words*] mattress, but I'll do whatever you want.

GB: No. No.

LH: There has to be somethin'. There's more to the story. I feel it.

[Long pause] Were you dating somebody else?

GB: Hm-hm. No.

LH: Did you wanna date?

[01:13:48] GB: You know, I [*laughs*] really got—you know, I got to know him, of course, though the civic route but then . . .

SL: Okay, you got to look over here.

GB: Oh, no. I don't want to say this.

SL: Oh. Yeah, there you go. [*Laughter*] Okay, there you go. You got to know him where now? At the . . .

GB: Yeah, but ?you?—no, I can't. I mean I can't. [*Laughs*]

SL: Oh, you can't?

GB: Well, no. I just don't . . .

LH: Then don't if you're not comfortable.

SL: No, if you're not comfortable with it.

GB: I mean, it . . .

DC: When did you know that he was . . .

SL: The guy?

DC: He was the guy?

GB: I don't know. We just dated so long and—I don't know. My kids liked him.

[01:14:30] SL: Well, you know, he told me that—I asked him if he had lost his—any of his ideals after twenty years in the senate and—or however long he was in the senate, and he said no, but

he—that he was more pragmatic. So I'm just wondering if y'all ended up getting married because it was pragmatic to do? Is that—wasn't there any—do [*claps*] you remember when he asked you to marry him? Or did you ask him? [*Laughs*]

 [01:14:59] GB: No. I can remember that we were—you know, he likes the Detroit Tigers [Major League Baseball team].

SL: Okay.

GB: And he would go over to my little radio and tune in the Tigers. Now sometimes he would go out in the car. He would sit in my car [*SL laughs*] because he drove a Corvette and didn't have the best radio. I drove a Ford, had a good radio. And he'd go out. Well, I would go out and sit with him sometimes, but I couldn't hear. It was just static to me, but he knew. I can remember sitting there, and he was tunin' in that radio. I don't really remember the conversation other than he said, "Well, you know, we just should probably get married. [*SL laughs*] What do you think about"—you know. And I said, "Okay." And we got the calendar down, and we picked out a day. We called the church the next day, and that was it. I mean it just really wasn't any . . .

SL: That is cool, though.

GB: I mean, it just—I don't know.

SL: No, that's great.

[01:15:57] GB: You know, a lot of times you talk about things, but you don't just sit down and "We're gonna talk about this." It was—I don't know just [*unclear words*]. He liked my kids. And, you know, Mike had a different kind of childhood, so I think with my children—maybe my children were a bigger attraction than I was. He played and had a good time with 'em. I remember one Christmas I lived in a nice apartment, and he came over. And the kids got one of these little pellet guns—or it was a disk gun. You put these little flat disks in there, and you load it up, and then you—it didn't hurt.

SL: Right.

GB: Well, Santa brought them one, and you know, they had a—he had a hard time sharing. They'd let him, but he didn't want to give it back. So the next day I went out and bought him one. I mean, it was war at nights [*SL laughs*] with the three of my children playin' that. And, you know, the first Easter I can remember him coming over while I was preparing the Easter basket for the children. And, you know, he just, "What're you doin'?" And I told him that I was filling it up. And he said, "You know, I never had an Easter basket." I mean, I can't imagine not—a child not having an Easter basket, so you know what I

did? [*SL laughs*] I went out, and he had the biggest basket. And he still gets an Easter basket to this day. You know, it's just—I think he missed out on a lot—you know on his childhood. But he's made up for it because he plays. And he plays with the grandkids, you know, just like they were—like he was a kid with 'em.

SL: That's good.

GB: That is good.

SL: That is good, and you're probably right. He probably missed that kind of stuff.

GB: He missed some of that.

SL: Yeah.

[01:17:46] GB: And he didn't have children. You know, he was married before, and he didn't have any children. So mine were at a good age that—you know, they just—they enjoyed him, and he enjoyed them. And so did—we all have a good relationship.

SL: Well, see that was a great story.

GB: [*Laughs*] Well, yeah.

SL: Those were a couple of great stories. Those were fun.

GB: Yeah.

[01:18:11] SL: Yeah. Well what kind of dates did you all have?



Where'd—what did you do for dates?

GB: Went to the movies and ate out. I mean, that was the big thing. You'd come to Little Rock and eat. Our favorite place was the Leather Bottle down Rebsamen [Park] Road, I think it was, in Little Rock. And I would have the rack of lamb with the mint, and he would have shrimp scampi.

SL: Yeah.

GB: And I don't think that we had anything other than that.

SL: Else ever? [*Laughs*]

GB: And we ate other places. That just—they had a lounge, and they always had someone—maybe one or two people playing guitar and singing. And, you know, we'd just go in there, and I mean, you can remember those kinda sweetheart days. And, you know, so that was—went to movies. And, you know, he would come over to the apartment and watch TV, play with the kids—you know, just really kind of plain, kind of simple. I know someone asked one time, you know, what were our hobbies? What did we do? And we're really kinda plain. [*SL laughs*] Mike liked—he liked to fish. When the kids were little, he'd take 'em fishing. He likes to play golf, and I like to just do things around the house.

[01:19:28] SL: Now did I hear you say something about playing golf?

GB: No, not me.

SL: Okay.

GB: Mike likes to play golf. And, you know, people have asked, you know, "Why don't you play?" You know. That's his time with his friends. That's his relaxing time. They don't talk about anything but how bad or how good they hit that little ball. [*SL laughs*]
And I would do things with the children. I would work in the yard. You know, so I think that he needed that time, and I needed my time.

SL: Mh-hmm. Okay. Gosh, I feel like we just need to come back and do this again.

LH: We need mattress surf.

[Tape stopped]

[01:20:08] GB: Okay.

SL: This is a great place. So have you got grandchildren already?

GB: Oh, yes, I have grandchildren.

SL: How many you got?

GB: My son has two boys, and my daughter has two girls.

SL: Oh. And are you busily spoiling those grandchildren?

GB: Oh, not as much as I'd like to. But they like to come to visit. In fact the day—well, it was the night before inauguration. It was our first time here with all the family to come to the Mansion.



My granddaughter, who was nine at the time, got to the top of the stairs at the Grand Hall—and, you know, it's a big staircase—and she leaned over to me and said, "Grandma, you know that movie we watched? That—*The Princess Diaries*?" And I don't know if you're familiar with that, but I said, "Yes." And she said, "Remember what they did?" And I said, "Yes, they mattress surfed." She said, "Can we do that?" And I said, "Sure we can." [SL laughs] So spring break my two granddaughters brought a lot of their friends down, and we had a big bunkin' party, and we mattress surfed. Now we have one of those big blow up mattresses that you get in case you didn't have a bed for your friends to come, and we mattress surfed. Now one little girl said to me, "I'm not goin' unless you go." [Laughter] She was afraid, so I did. Now we couldn't get the governor to.

[01:21:32] You know, there's a security camera that watches. And I had told them the night before that about ten o'clock, we were going to turn the lights down real low, so they might want to turn the other way. Of course, you know, they didn't, [SL laughs] but Mike was afraid that they would be watching, and then that would appear somewhere at sometime. But I did and it was fun. Now my grandsons, they've mattress surfed, but the fun they have is to get out around the grounds. But then it's to

go down to the governor's security house and to watch the cameras and see the guns and—but they all like to come. I mean, it's just such a great opportunity for them to—in fact, I heard my little granddaughter last weekend, she brought a friend down who hadn't been here. Well, she was giving a tour. She had heard me talk so much about it. She was talking about the silver and about the grandfather clock. [Laughter] And so I mean, you know, children are very smart, and they pick up on things and remember, so—but they've had a good time here and hope to continue.

SL: That's so great.

[01:22:37] GB: Well, it is, and what an experience to be able to come here.

SL: They'll have that with them the rest of their lives.

GB: They will.

SL: So good. Okay. Well, that was good.

GB: Okay.

SL: We'll just keep kind of doing a shotgun pattern here of, you know . . .

GB: Thinking of things.

[01:22:55] BP: As you go down stairs on the mattress, how do you ac—where—how do you actually surf? I mean, what does that

involve?

GB: Well, you get the mattress up at the top.

BP: Yeah.

GB: And you get on it, and someone pushes you.

BP: Go down the stairs.

GB: Mh-hmm. Go down the stairs.

SL: Then what happens at the bottom? Do you crash or . . .

[01:23:09] GB: Well—oh, no. You know, our vision was you would go down the stairs and you'd go sliding out, but because of the angle of the steps being a little too steep, you just sorta get at the bottom and stop. [*Laughter*] You do get out onto the floor, but you just stop. But, you know, our vision was to get down and just slide out. [*SL laughs*] But it was fun, and they love to do it.

BP: It sounds like [*unclear word*].

GB: And, you know, it's—that's good.

SL: Gosh, in the spring and summer, you can do the big slip and slide outside.

GB: Oh, we could.

SL: Mh-hmm. Could probably do that with tarps—get big double-wide stuff.

GB: Mh-hmm. Don't mention double-wide.

SL: Oh, okay. [*Laughter*]

GB: I lived in one of those—not double-wide. No. [*Laughs*] You know, we have a mini mansion here?

SL: No.

[01:23:56] GB: Have you seen the little mini mansion? You know, when Mike and I first came—of course, surveyin' the grounds they were just beginning to start the landscape project here—and there was a mini mansion that was something that was built as a part of the cozy cottages. It used to be the Lung Association. Now it's the American—oh, I'm sorry I just went blank on—oh, it's Arkansas Respiratory Association.

SL: Okay.

GB: It used to be the Arkansas Lung Association. They had a fund-raiser every year where they built—had different groups build these playhouses. They were little playhouses, and they auctioned 'em off. And the first year they did it, someone built one—a little mini mansion, and it was up there on the corner. So, you know, we're all looking around the grounds, and the children and grandchildren are here, and we can't get in it. The doors had been painted shut. So security saw me, and they came up. And they finally pried them open. And it's such a wonderful, little—you know, inside where you can get in there.

So we had 'em to move it. I wanted it to be in an area by the vegetable garden because we hoped to do tours—especially with children, but adults also—to go through the vegetable garden to understand how you can have your own little vegetable garden. Even if you have a big flowerpot on your back patio, you can grow onions or carrots or, you know, anything. You can grow vegetables. So I wanted it up there, so when children come through they can open it up, and they can get in.

SL: Yeah.

GB: They can actually go inside of it and have their picture made in there. One of the biggest obstacles was making it where it's handicap accessible because I've seen too many children who couldn't do things because of their disability.

SL: Right.

[01:25:49] GB: And, you know, the week after the election in November, I broke my foot. I was at the [Arkansas State] Capitol. Salvation Army had their kick off, and I was showing my assistant around and just missed a step. And, I mean, I'd been going there twenty something years . . .

SL: Yeah.

GB: . . . and just, you know, broke my foot. So I spent quite a bit of time in a cast. It was around the holidays, and so I was in a

wheelchair. And I saw firsthand how difficult it was for someone in a wheelchair or on crutches to shop.

SL: Yeah.

GB: Doors didn't always open easily. I wiped out a few tables of things at stores because they're so close with merchandise. So that I haven't forgotten. That, you know, we need to be more cognizant of those with disability and how hard they have to get around. So we moved the mansion. We made it handicap accessible, so that regardless of what a child or an adult is, they can get in and see the mansion. As we've done with all of the grounds. It is all ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act]. Right now, I'm working on a map that will be for hearing or sight impaired. So if you cannot see it, someone can direct you to it. You can touch it. You can smell it. You know, I—that's just so important, and also that's another thing that I'm kinda working on—so everyone that comes here can enjoy. Okay?

[01:27:30] SL: You're doing very, very well. I love all of this stuff that you've got goin'. It's good stuff.

GB: Okay. I can't think of anything else I'm doing. I just can't . . .

SL: [Pause] Well, I know that everyone loves it when you welcome people in the Grand Hall.

GB: Hmm. Well, that's one of the things that I started doing—as I

said—with opening the door and greeting people. It's to go down to the microphone—now you have to understand that I never spoke in public other than my volunteer work. You know, I might speak to a group, but it was people that I knew. And so this is really new for me, and I'm very nervous. I think I probably always will be. I just never did public speaking. You know, on the campaign trail, it was easy because I believed in the candidate. You know, I believed in Mike and what he was saying. So—and everybody was friendly.

SL: Right.

[01:28:37] GB: So it's hard for me. You know, my stomach is twitching, and I'm—but I do it, because I need to. So I do. I go down, and I just say, "Welcome to the Governor's Mansion. Welcome to your house." This house belongs to the people of Arkansas. And, you know, Mike and I just have the privilege of living here, and I want everyone to enjoy their time here. I just hope that—you know you have the, I guess, regular groups that come through here. We have tours that come through and those that book events. But I really want those people that don't normally come. I want them to feel welcome. I want them to bring their group or their friends to come and see this and be proud and be a part of the Mansion in Arkansas. Okay, now.

[Laughs]

SL: That's good. That's good. Well, what else? Anything else?

GB: See, I'm pretty short. I knew I didn't—I just don't have so—a lot of history.

SL: Well, actually we've been going what? Two and a half hours?

GB: Oh, not that long.

SL: Two hours?

LH: Almost two hours.

GB: Maybe. Maybe. So what else do you wanna ask?

SL: Well . . .

[01:30:01] GB: You know, it's not that Mike and I, either one, have boring lives but—I don't know, we were just maybe down-to-earth simple. You know staying home and watching a good movie. He'd read a book. I'd read. I like to sew. I'm always working on some project, I think. You know, and with the computer you can do a lot more.

SL: So you're computer literate?

GB: Well . . .

SL: Kinda, sorta.

GB: . . . as much as a fifty something can be, I think. I've taught myself . . .

SL: Yeah. Do you shop online?

GB: Oh, I have, but I'm still just not real—feel very comfortable with that.

SL: So email and word processing?

GB: Oh, email. You know, you can type what you—report some things and email to someone. You know, it saved a lot of paper, I think.

SL: Oh, yeah. It's a very green thing.

GB: Because you can read so much. But just a lot of the groups that I've been involved in, it really allowed me to do that. I was in the hospital auxiliary, and it was a privilege to serve as district chair. Auxiliary—the state group is divided up into districts. And I was chair over seven hospital auxiliaries in my district. And I also served on—well, Legislative Day. I was in charge of Legislative Day for two years in a row. I guess they thought I knew something about the [Arkansas state] legislature. Then some other positions on the state board of the auxiliary, which is a great group of people serving in the hospitals.

[01:31:36] SL: I know what I can ask you about.

GB: Okay.

SL: Ron Robinson.

GB: Oh, Ron. Yes.

SL: What a great guy.

GB: Oh, he is. Oh, and such wonderful times to go to his house and see all of his collections of things.

SL: All that stuff.

GB: He is such a great support. What made you think of that?

SL: Well—let's see—we were doing a video about Bob Lamb, and one of the persons that were given to us to call, and he was actually on our list to interview anyway, was Jerry Maulden.

GB: Yes.

SL: And Jerry—I guess Ron called me. Somehow or another, Ron got into the Jerry Maulden mix.

GB: Uh-huh.

SL: And Ron and I split that interview in half.

GB: Oh.

SL: I did all of the early years and all that stuff, and then Jerry—or Ron took over in the afternoon and did that.

GB: Oh, I mean, he's wonderful. Mh-hmm.

SL: And the reason I knew that you all knew each other was that when we were [*claps hands*]*—*the day before we did the Jerry Maulden thing, I went and visited Ron. And we went over some things about Jerry, and he said that you all were coming over for dinner that night.

[01:32:47] GB: Oh. Oh, that was probably the night that he had the

Patton [released in 1970] poster.

SL: Yes. That is correct.

GB: That—I mean, we watched *Patton*—I mean, there's certain—well, with TV came the History Channels . . .

SL: Yes.

GB: . . . and A&E. I mean we know . . .

SL: There are some good things that happen. Yeah.

GB: Oh, one—yeah that—if that's all there was on TV for children—and I think as our young son—he watches History and A&E. And there are so many things he knows by watching that. Now I—you know, he studied some of it in school, but you know, you learn a lot from there. And that's one of Mike's favorite—A&E and History.

SL: Oh, yeah. Mine, too.

GB: I mean, you know we go to bed sometimes watching the . . .

SL: Biography.

GB: Oh, the biographies, and you know, right now we're into the planets and the sun.

SL: Yes. Absolutely.

GB: But it's fascinating, and you know, there's an education there.

[01:33:43] SL: Well, anyway, back to Ron.

GB: Oh, okay.

SL: Ron—so he—of course, he gave me a tour of his apartment.

GB: Oh.

SL: All the stuff and the Arkansas bedroom thing.

GB: Oh, it is.

SL: And I also talked with him about Harry Ward. He was close with Harry.

GB: Yes.

SL: And, you know, I keep thinking, you know, we really ought to just sit down and interview Ron.

GB: Yes.

SL: 'Cause he knows—he's known everybody.

GB: Oh, yes. Yes, he has.

SL: Everybody.

GB: 'Course, Mike knew him a lot longer than I did. My—I think—first introduction to Ron was he played golf at Red Apple Inn. Mike has played for twenty years in a golf tournament up there. It's kinda the end of the season. Ron, years ago, played. And oh, such a nice man, but yeah, if there's anything about a movie—any kind of theater . . .

[01:34:38] SL: Well, and also Arkansas history.

GB: Yes. Very much so. Mh-hmm.

SL: I mean, he's very, very involved with that. So he's great—he's a

great ally. [*Claps hands*] He's a great partner with us. We call him—we keep in . . .

GB: You know, we're putting together a history book here at the Mansion.

SL: He is?

GB: We are.

SL: Oh, you are? Well, that's good.

GB: I think I am. [*Laughs*] I don't know, am I?

SL: Really?

[01:34:57] GB: Well, there's—when we moved into the Mansion, there were not a lot of records kept. And—you know [Governor] Sid McMath? I served on the Committee of 100. I still do with—that promotes Ozark Folk Center. And I got to know Sid McMath because his second wife, Betty, is a member of that committee. And he would travel with her when we would go on—with events and functions that we would have. And I don't know, just moving in here and realizing that a lot of the people that have lived here are no longer here, and we don't know much about 'em other than maybe what is written in the history book. We need to know about their life here. So Mike and I talked about it, and we decided to do a history book.

SL: Excellent.

[01:35:57] GB: And we have contacted as many family members or people that worked here and asked them to do as you're doing—to tell us about their time here. You know, a lot of them are children, they're grandchildren, cousins and—you know just a month ago the Old State House Museum opened a "First Families [Mingling of Politics and Culture]" exhibit. Now they've always had the first ladies' gowns.

SL: Yes.

GB: But now they have first families' exhibit from the very first one, from [Governor James Sevier] Conway. They have items—you know, whether it's clothing or documents. So I mean it's something that we need to do and we need to have. And it's not a book to sell even though we probably will sell it. It's more of a history book of the life and times in the Governor's Mansion.

SL: Well, it's seen a lot.

GB: Well, it has. It has. You know, I think back and the day they were celebrating the Central High Crisis. That Sunday's paper had a picture from the living room, and it was [Governor Orval E.] Faubus with his desk over in that corner. And I immediately recognized the furniture because some of the furniture . . .

SL: Is still here.

GB: . . . that was original to the house is still here.

SL: Yeah.

[01:37:17] GB: And then later on during that week with the celebration, we had the Little Rock Nine for a private reception before the event in the great hall. And we were in the living room, and we had all the doors shut. It was just Mike and I in there. And I just, you know, visited with them, and then I don't know. I just realized where we were, and I wondered did they realize that when he made his address on TV, he was right there in the corner. And they—I mean, you know, it's just, you know, that for me to realize that but how it affected, you know, their lives during that time.

SL: That kind of stuff gives me chills.

GB: Well, it does.

SL: [*Laughs*] You know, just thinking of—yeah.

GB: You know, it does for a lot that went on here. And then, you know, [actor] Gregory Peck slept in one of the bedrooms.

[*Laughs*] I mean, one of the . . .

SL: Yes. Yes. Out there.

GB: [*Laughs*] I mean, we still have those beds.

SL: I used to sleep out there.

GB: So—oh, you did?

SL: Uh-huh.

GB: And who were you a guest of?

SL: The Pryors.

[01:38:16] GB: Oh, okay. Well, sure. [*SL laughs*] Sure. But, yeah, there's a lot here. You know, so we're doing that book, and hopefully it'll be something of interest. But what I was saying—back to the first families exhibit—made me think that there were a lot of relatives there when we sort of have a reception before they open the exhibit. And I asked Mike, I said, "Ask each family member or some relative to identify themselves." So we did that, and it was amazing. You know, way back even to those who didn't live in this house but prior to that. And so it's just—we need to keep all that history, so you know . . .

[01:39:02] SL: That's a great project.

GB: Oh, it is. It is. We have [Little Rock attorney] John Gill, who is wonderful. And he's going to write it, and he is so excited about it. And everybody that we've contacted have been so excited about being part of it.

[01:39:16] SL: So is that who came . . .

LH: Yeah, that's who came. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and watched us interview the governor the first time?

GB: Probably, yes. Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah, we took him up.

GB: Yeah. He's good. He's written a few books. He's really good. So he is. And then we just recently had Dr. [Charles] Curb, who is really an expert in silver. We lucked onto him through a friendship with someone else. And he studied the USS *Arkansas* silver. And he put together a three-ring binder of so much history about that silver—as well as other states that have silver that was put on board their ships also. And so we have some wonderful information about the silver and how valuable it is.

SL: I remember hearing something about that.

GB: Oh, it's magnificent, and we have it. I think there are only two pieces that we're lacking, and they must have been lost over the years.

SL: Yeah.

GB: But we have it all in there.

SL: Well, I don't know how we can be of any help but—of course, we love comin' down here and . . .

GB: Well, you're welcome anytime.

[01:40:24] SL: Well, I mean, you know, we're kind of hooked up with Steve Ronnel and the Political Animals [Club] . . .

GB: Yes. Oh.

SL: And I guess Mike's gonna talk next month . . .

GB: Okay.

SL: . . . there, so we'll—I'm sure we'll be back down for that.

GB: You'll be back.

SL: Yeah.

[01:40:36] GB: Yeah. That's a great group. That they can come here—you know one of the things that—you know, talkin' about me opening the door—it was—you know, the house is to be used by everyone. It doesn't matter what party you are.

SL: Right.

GB: You're all Arkansans, and it is your home. But I enjoy those from other parties who come in. And they enjoy bein' here, and I think that they feel welcomed here.

SL: Well, yeah.

GB: You know, and it hasn't maybe always been the case, but it—but it should be. I mean, it should be a place for everyone regardless of what our differences are, and we're all going to have 'em. But aren't we all also trying to do what's right for all the people of the state?

SL: I think nine times out of ten, yes. [*Laughs*]

GB: We are. You know, we got different ways of going about it. But I know Mike is. I mean, he is so committed to—as he always says, "Leaving this place better than what he found it." And,

you know, so far he's doing really well, and I think he will continue because he works with everyone. I mean, it doesn't matter what party you are. Or—if your idea is better and it helps everybody, why not?

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

GB: Okay. Any other questions? [*Laughs*]

SL: No. This is fun.

GB: Will you vote for him? [*Laughs*]

SL: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

GB: Believe in Arkansas.

[01:42:02] SL: Well, you know, what's his approval rating now? Eighty-two percent?

GB: Oh, you know, he had a wonderful approving rate right now, but when he comes home here, he's just Mike.

SL: Yeah.

GB: And, you know, I think I'm the one—my responsibility is to bring him down to earth. You know you're just plain, old Mike here. You may have a great approval rating but not here. You know.

SL: [*Laughs*] You've got some chores.

GB: I mean, you have a good—I mean that probably didn't sound very good. But, you know, you're just Mike. You know, so just check that ego at the door. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, that's part of what makes him so good, too.

GB: Well . . .

SL: That he still gets that.

GB: Yeah, that I have to bring him down, you know.

SL: Yes, that's right.

GB: Because people really, you know, tease him about that, you know. And I s—you know, somebody's gotta keep you [*SL laughs*] down to earth. That's my job.

[01:43:01] SL: Okay. Now I'm tryin' to think. Is there any—what about—have you got any stories about other political figures that you've worked with or met with? Any . . .

GB: Any political? Well, Arnold Schwarzenegger is—that it?

SL: You got one on him?

GB: No. He's so short. I mean he's . . .

SL: Yeah, he is short. Have you met him?

GB: Mh-hmm.

SL: Oh, you have? How did that come about?

GB: Well, at the [National] Governor's [Association Annual Meeting] conference, you know.

SL: I see. Yeah. Okay.

GB: And he is short, but he had . . .

SL: So you've been in a room full of governors.

[01:43:43] GB: He had been here back when Mike was in the senate, he came. I think it was something to do with his health initiative and something he was doing, and I remember seeing a picture, and he was—Mike's taller than he is.

SL: Yeah.

GB: You know, and I didn't want to show that to our son because I mean Arnold was the hero, you know. And he—you know, sometimes movies are deceiving as to how they make you look. You know, I've met a lot of people. I don't know. I'm not very impressed by celebrities . . .

SL: Yeah.

GB: . . . or famous people. I mean you like to go hear Barry Manilow or Neil Diamond sing. You know, I had dinner with Barbara Streisand and Robin Williams. And it was interesting to hear 'em, but they're no different from you and I. I mean, their job.

SL: And even Robin Williams? I mean . . .

GB: I mean, he is so funny.

SL: [*Laughs*] He can't turn it off.

GB: I mean, he—yeah, he's very funny. But he was so personable. He got out into that room and visited with everyone. And, you know, he was very likable. He was not, you know, a snob. He wasn't arrogant.

SL: Right.

[01:45:03] GB: He was—he enjoyed people. You know, everyone has their differences. And I enjoyed that, and it was—I had a nice conversation with Norman Lear. And, you know, they're smart. They have good jobs. They're in great positions, but in God's eyes they're all the same, you know. I just have to—I don't know. Maybe that was just my upbringing. They're all the same. At the end of the day, we're all the same. So it's fun to, you know, go places, and see people, and meet them. But we're all the same.

SL: Okay.

GB: [*Laughs*] Okay.

SL: Okay. I think we're done.

GB: All right.

SL: I think we're good.

LH: That was great.

GB: [*Laughs*] Okay.

SL: Yep.

[End of interview] [01:45:49]

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