

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

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Arkansas Memories

Wesley K. Clark
Interviewed by Bill Schwab
January 24, 2022
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Objective

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

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

Transcript Methodology

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

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

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

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

Citation Information

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Bill Schwab interviewed Gen. Wesley K. Clark (ret.) on January 24, 2022, in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The second part of the interview was conducted by John C. Davis on January 25, 2022.

[00:00:00]

Bill Schwab: Well, welcome to the Pryor Center and . . .

General Wesley Clark: Thank you.

BS: . . . thank you so much, General, for agreeing to be interviewed.

Um—the mission of the Pryor Center is to document Arkansas's oral and visual history. So we'd like to focus our interview on your years in Arkansas up through your—uh—time at West Point, and then skip over a few decades, and then explore after you returned to Arkansas in 2000. And as I said before, we're gonna break it into two interviews. I'll handle the boyhood and up to West Point. And then John Davis will handle—uh—your return to Arkansas and your views on Arkansas and national politics.

[00:00:43] I saw that wonderful portrait of your mother—uh—just a few minutes ago. She was born November 11, 1906, and graduated from Monticello High School in 1923. She soon married and moved to Little Rock with her husband, where the marriage failed. She then moved to Chicago during the Great Depression, worked as a secretary in the bank, and lived with a friend in an apartment until she met and married your father in

1939, Benjamin Kanne. Am I pronouncing that correct, Kanne
[Cane-ē]?

WC: I don't know if it was [19]39 or—I thought they were married in
[19]37, but maybe it was [19]39.

BS: Okay.

WC: Did you check it?

BS: I—I went with the Felix biography. That's what it . . .

WC: I thought it was [19]37, but I don't know.

BS: Well, [19]37.

WC: Maybe she's right.

BS: Well, whatever. Your mother was a Methodist. Your father was
Jewish. And mixed marriages were quite rare back then.

[00:01:34] You were born on December 23, 1944, and were
raised in Hyde Park, a middle-class neighborhood south of the
Loop and home to the University of Chicago. Your father died of
heart failure on December 6, 1948, at fifty-one. Your mother
was a widow at forty-two. [*Sound of robotic camera adjusting*]
By all accounts—do you hear that? Oh, okay. By all accounts,
your mother was quite beautiful, and we just saw her portrait.
She was five six, which was tall for the time. I was thinking of
an adjective to describe your mother, Vaneta, and I think the
word was pluck. And now she was a single woman moving to

Chicago in the Great Depression. And you wrote in your autobiography that your mother and you were very close.

[00:02:21] So would you tell me about your mother? And what values did she give you?

[00:02:27] WC: Yeah. Well, so—um—I think, you know, she did very well in high school, but in Monticello in the early 1920s, there were lots of people who had lots of money. People forget how old and how wealthy the state is. There were always old families, good families, the kind of families [*laughs*] that David describes in his autobiography.

BS: Mm-hmm.

WC: And they were in Monticello. And—um—and the girls went to finishing schools, and the girls went to Paris in the summer in the [19]20s, and so forth. My mother wasn't from one of those families. She married a man named Bogard, and I never understood what happened. She never—I never really asked her, and she never really ever wanted to talk about it. And she went to Chicago, and she—um—got a job at a bank, and she roomed with another woman, and—um—they were in an apartment hotel. It turned out that one day, there was a handsome guy who offered to bring her grocery bags in, and it turned out his parents owned the hotel, and—uh—they got

together, and that was my father. [00:03:34] And—uh—it was—uh—they'd known each other for quite some time before they got married. Um—and—uh—when my father turned forty, according to my cousins in Chicago—uh—Grandma Kamey said, "Ben, you're the last one not married. Just marry anyone."

[*BS laughs*] And so—they—they—they had fought it because it was one of the first mixed marriages. And my mother had reservations because even though my father was prominent in the legal—uh—side of Chicago—he was a city attorney, and future mayor Dick Daley worked for him. And—um—my mother remembers going to a nightclub and Al Capone sending over a bottle of champagne at one point. And he was prominent, but there were restaurants they couldn't go to, clubs they couldn't belong to, hotels they couldn't stay at on vacation. And—um—so there was a very significant prejudice against the Jewish families in Chicago. So—um—they were married, and—um—my father was in—still in the public practice. And finally my mother persuaded him to get out. [00:04:47] His younger brother—uh—was a lawyer, and the younger brother was doing well financially. And my father wasn't. I mean, city pay was nothing. But my father liked the politics of it. And he was—at one point he'd been—uh—the head of the Fourth Ward in Chicago with the

Democratic Party according to the newspaper reports.

[00:05:06] But I remember my father. Um—he liked pinochle.

He liked horse races. And—um—and—and he [*laughs*] loved me, and he really took care of me. And—um—and so I always felt a tremendous affection for my father as a—as a young child.

And—um—and my mother, on the other hand, wasn't what you would consider the typical Southern mother. She was—uh—she'd been—uh—working as a single woman—uh—and then—uh—she always had help in the home. So she didn't change my diapers. We always had a nursemaid to change my diapers. My mother jokes she's always afraid she was gonna stick me with a diaper pin. [*BS laughs*] And—um—and so I think she always felt a little—um—she—a little cautious around me. [00:05:56]

My father was the big influence in my life as a—as a two- and three-year-old. And—um—I remember being on the sofa with him—uh—and his reading to me the night he died, and I still have that robe at home. And—um—I remember the sofa. I remember walking into the room. I was not quite four. A bunch of adults there and—uh—standing there and watching this. And they sort of told me to leave the room. He died in his sleep. It's like the—the gambler says, you know, if you're really lucky, you die in your sleep.

BS: Mh-hmm.

[00:06:30] WC: And—um—and so he did. Uh—but it was a real shock to my mother. And he left my mother—um—stranded in this—uh—basically a Jewish community in Chicago. It was a good Jewish family. And they had Friday night dinners together and so forth. But my mother, I think, never felt like she actually belonged. Um—it's—it's what one of my father's—um—sister-in-laws told me forty years later. She said, "Your mother was so beautiful we were all jealous of her." And—um—and so—this was—um—my father's younger brother's wife, the last surviving member of that generation of my family. And I got to know her when I was an Army one star, and she told me a lot about the family then. But—um—I think my mother felt like she didn't have any support up there. [00:07:19] And—um—so I was in nursery school, and I didn't do very well in nursery school. We lived in an apartment hotel. There weren't a lot of kids, there weren't playmates. Um—my mother liked to read. And she was—uh—I—I wouldn't say she was scholarly, but she was very thoughtful and, so, very well read. And so there was a—my only playmate was the little boy whose mother owned the bookstore that my mother used to go to around the corner. And—um—and then suddenly everything changed. And so after

my father died, my mother had to go back to work. My father left her—um—what he had. He left her a 1940 Buick, \$400 in the bank, and a—a diamond pinkie ring, essentially, and a violin, and some suits, and so forth. But he didn't own the hotel. That was his parents. And he didn't have any insurance, and he didn't have any cash. And so that was it. And so my mother got a job back in a bank working as a secretary and put me in nursery school. And—um—I objected. [*Laughter*] It was a huge shock to me because—um—I hadn't been around kids before. [00:08:27] And—um—I had a speech defect that I didn't know at the time, but—uh—obviously I did have a speech defect I found out later. And—and so—um—maybe—you know, it just was unpleasant. What I remember was I liked Cream of Wheat cereal in the morning with sugar and butter and milk. And they wouldn't let me have Cream of Wheat with sugar, butter, and milk. And there were a couple of other dietary things that were different in that. Um—I don't know how—I don't know what nursery school it was. All I know is that my mother said, "This is not working." [00:09:06] And so after a couple of months—uh—of that, she moved back to Little Rock to move in with her parents. And my grandparents—um—were Arkansans from the beginning. And Granddad had been—uh—

with the lumber business his entire life. Maybe I'm going too much in detail on this.

BS: Oh, no. In fact, you're—you're anticipating my next four questions. So this is great, keep go . . .

WC: Well, can I just sort of ramble on?

BS: No, please go on.

WC: I mean, or is it better to, you know, do the questions?

BS: No, no, I think this is perfect.

[00:09:35] WC: Okay. So—um—so Granddad—um—Granddad was an orphan. He was—um—his father—um—had—they had four or five children in the family. I think they were in Northeast Oklahoma, but there were four or five children in the family. And then his m—his wife died. And then he married his wife's sister, and they had a couple of more children. And—uh—so when my granddad was twelve, as the story went, he was basically told, "You're on your own, Rob. Uh—you know, we [*laughs*] can't keep you. There's not enough food. Go get a job." So he got a job in the timber business, which was the biggest timb—biggest business in America in the 1880s. And—um—and so I think he started taking—driving and taking care of horses that were pulling timber wagons. But he ended up as a sawyer, and—um—he worked his entire career as a sawyer.

They never owned a home. He never drove a car. Maybe he knew how to drive. I don't know if he did or not. He smoked Camel cigarettes. He ruined his hearing working in sawmills. And—um—so when we moved down here in 1948, he was at that point—um—born in 1878, so he would've been seventy years old. We moved in 1949. So he would've just turned—um—seventy-one, I guess. [00:10:50] And—um—and Grandmother was born in 1886. Her family was from Dardanelle, and—uh—the Reynolds family was a relatively prominent family, and he was an engineer. And—um—they built the first pontoon bridge across the river, according to the family lore. But in 1893 the depression and bank failures that swept across Arkansas and the United States, according to the story, wiped out the family. And Grandmother was pulled out of school. She was in the third grade. So Granddad had hardly any schooling. I don't think he ever finished third grade. Grandmother was pulled out in the third grade because in those days you had to pay for schooling. This was before there was public schooling paid for. They had no money for paying for schooling. So—um—so that was 1880—[18]93. She was—she would've been like seven years old at the time or eight years old. And that was the end of it for her. So she married my grandfather. It must have been nineteen—

maybe 1902, 1903, something like that. She would've been sixteen years old. Um—and that's what they did. And Granddad would've been twenty-four. [00:12:05] Granddad was—you know, he was six feet tall, good, strong man—uh—dark skinned, and maybe Indian blood, but we never found that. And it turns out in the Updegraff family tree—they had come over with William Penn. And they were one of the branches of the tree that was always adventurous. They followed the timber business all the way across America, but [*laughs*] at least on his side, they never amounted to anything. They didn't settle down. They didn't get roots. They didn't get educations. They weren't property owners, nothing. [00:12:37] So when we moved down here in nine—my—with my mother in 1949, they had a rented house over on West 13th Street in Little Rock. And—um—it was—uh—about three doors away from the—uh—from the Lee Elementary School. And we had the Nabor Theatre there. And I found a friend right away, a young guy named Wilson Dew who's about a year older than me. And—um—and I—I had a playmate. And I was pretty darn happy. And—um—so I was four and a half at that point. And—um—I was on my own the first time. Grandmother took care of me. My mother got a job. She lied about her age to get a job in the Commercial

National Bank. She was afraid that if she said she was over forty, there'd be age discrimination. So she figured she could pass for two years younger, at least. And so she claimed to be forty, and they hired her as a secretary. And—uh—she stayed there from 1949 until she retired in—uh—1974 from that bank. She was the—she became the first woman officer assistant cashier in the bank just prior to retirement. Um—and—um—so—um—that was the family. [00:13:45] And—um—my mother was a very strong person. Um—she was the second of—child. She had an older brother who died of a heart attack before we moved to Little Rock. And—um—and she was—um—she was a woman who—uh—she had a—she had a—a joy in life, but she had a purpose in life. And—uh—that purpose was me. And she was very, very protective, maybe overly protective. [Laughs] It was like, "You can't climb on the back of that chair. You might fall off." And she was that kind of a mother who was, you know, always wanting to protect her child, but she didn't push in any way. [00:14:29] And—um—and I was the kind of child that felt—um—keenly the loss of my father. So—um—I hoped my mother would remarry. And so I was lucky. She did. And—um—she married a man named Victor Clark. It was a long and difficult courtship. It started in 1950, maybe [19]52. I think I

was in the second grade. And—um—and Vic would come over to the house. He was a banker. And—um—he was a man who could tell a great story. He had a world of outdoor experience. And one of the things I missed growing up on Valentine Street, which is—I mean, almost every house had—had children. Across the street from me was the Loveless family. And—uh—so Patty Loveless was—um—the same age as me. And she had a little brother, Wally. Wally's a big real estate guy in Little Rock to this day. I'm not sure where Patty is, but Patty was my first girlfriend. We were, like, second graders. And—um—and so he was a playmate. And then next door to him was a young man named R. P. Moon who became a doctor and moved to Memphis. And next door to me, my cousins moved in, my mother's little sister. [00:15:39] We—uh—when we bought the house on Valentine street, we sold—um—we sold the lot. And my mother's sister and her husband, who was a marine who fought at Okinawa—uh—she was twenty-one years younger than my mother, but she moved in next door with their kids. And then there was another family, and another family, and another family, up the street, and across the street, in the next neighborhood, and behind me. And so it was a wonderful place to grow up in terms of—of playmate action. [00:16:09] Um—

but my mother worked. And—uh—so Grandmother took care of me. And—um—and so for the first—um—through the time of the—1954. So for—uh—over five years I was in my grandmother's care on a daily basis. Uh—Grandmother was—um—strong, Grandmother was—um—was—um—smart, but Grandmother could be fooled, and you could play tricks on Grandmother. And so with my cousin Cathy who lived next door, we often—um—played tricks. And Grandmother—um—sometimes she caught you, sometimes she didn't. When she caught you, she switched you. Said, "Go out there and bring me a piece of hedging." And then she could switch your legs, you know. And so—um—it was a great childhood. And—uh—my mother—um—made sure that there was food on the table. My mother found a man to marry. And—um—and then when they married, Grandmother and Granddad moved away and moved to Monroe, Arkansas. [00:17:11] Victor Clark had been a banker but—um—and I never wanted to go too deeply into this. But so he dated my mother while he was still married. And then his wife wouldn't give him a divorce. And then he became an alcoholic. And then he lost his reputation as a banker and lost his profession. And my mother said, "I'm not gonna marry you if you're an alcoholic." So he went into a sanatorium up in

Missouri in 1953. And he stayed there for six months and—um—to dry out. And—and then he came back and—um—to work with his mother on the homestead they had up in Berryville. And so Mom and I would drive up and visit him from time to time.

[00:18:00] So my mother worked her way through this difficulty of losing her husband, not having any money, having a child, having a very unhappy child, moving back in with her parents in a—let's call it a straight-laced place in Little Rock, Arkansas. If you had been divorced in the 1940s and [19]50s, you weren't really respectable in Little Rock, Arkansas. And—and she married my father and—uh—provided me a role model and somebody I loved. And—um—and so she was a very, very wonderful, caring, loving parent. And—um—I probably never gave her the affection—I probably never returned the affection that she wanted. Um—it was just the way it was. She wasn't a hugging, holding kind of a person. And—um—I guess, you know, that either—you either are or you aren't. But boy she was loving, and she was strong, and she took care of me. And—um—I'll just tell you some stories about it.

BS: Please.

WC: Now if I'm boring you and going on too long . . .

BS: Oh, no, this is wonderful. Thank you.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:19:10] WC: So first time I met my stepfather was—he had a date with my mother. I was in the second grade and I—she went out on a date, and I was asleep. Grandmother and Granddad were in the house, of course, but I was sleeping in her bed. And she put me in her bed when she went out. I was seven years old or six years old. And I dreamed I woke up and I had a knife in my hand. And it was a beautiful knife. And when I woke up, it was really there. And [*laughs*] Victor Clark had given me a hunting knife. Of course, it was in the scabbard.

BS: That's good to hear. [*Laughs*]

WC: But he put it in my hand, you know, and I was so thrilled to have it. He would tell me these hunting and fishing stories and tell me about going down to the Cache River and show me the pictures, and he'd bring his tackle box in, and I'd take the tackle box, open it—I'd line up the lures, the River-Runts, and the Lazy Ikes, and all the different kinds of lures, and the frogs that were there with the hooks in 'em. And I'd ask him about each lure. And he'd tell me about the fishing trips. And of course, in the bottom of the box was an old rusted pistol. And that's what he used to shoot the turtles with and so forth. He was a real—he loved the outdoors. And the other kids on the block—before my

stepfather came along, they were like, you know, "My dad's playing baseball with me, and he's gonna teach me to play baseball." And, "My dad's teaching me to throw a casting lure." And you know, you'd see the fathers out with the kids, and you know, and I felt really bad because my granddad couldn't do that. [00:20:44] Granddad didn't have any hobbies. [Laughs] If he did, I didn't know 'em. I mean, he didn't fish, he didn't hunt, didn't have a gun, didn't own a car, didn't drive a car, didn't have anything. He was just a man who had survived a really difficult, impoverished upbringing, no education. And so Dad brought me these gifts of being able to learn how to hunt and fish and play sports and so forth. So it was wonderful. [00:21:1] No—but I—but you know, the early formative years were with Grandmother and Granddad. And I remember Granddad—when I first learned to read, I was in the—I was very proud of going to kindergarten. I was five years old. And I remember walking around the house and counting—proving that I could count to 100. I'm sure I drove him crazy walking through the house and saying, "Eighty-nine, ninety!" you know, and so on, and expecting to be praised. I wanted the praise. I wanted a sense of belonging to that family. I needed that family, you know. [00:21:46] And I remember learning to

read, and Mrs. Tolifero in the first grade was very strict with us. She told me one time that I had escaped something by the skin of my teeth. I remember asking Grandmother, "What is the skin of my teeth?" And she taught us to read, and she made a big point of not moving our lips. So I went home, and I saw Granddad reading the newspaper. And he would hold the newspaper up, and he would mouth the words and move his finger across it. And so I knew this was wrong, but I also needed his attention. And so I hit the newspaper as he was doing it. And he said, "Wesley don't do that." And I said—I ran away giggling. So he went back to reading. I went—hit it again. Third time I—he said, "If you do it again, I'm gonna spank you." The third time I did it just to do it. 'Cause I was that kind of a little kid. So [*laughs*] he chased me down in the house, pulled me out in front of the bed, and swatted me. But you never forget things like that. [00:22:50] But you also, as you get older, you realize what it was for him to be able to read like that. He lost his eye in a sawmill accident in 1950. He was seventy-two years old, he was still working, social se—I don't know if he got Social Security, but it wasn't enough to live on. So he needed the money. And he was working for Mr. Dierks down in Dierks lumber mill southeast of Little Rock. And he was

a sawyer. Of course, there were no safety standards, OSHA didn't work—[vocalized noise] [jabs index finger toward eye] and a splinter hit him in the eye. And I remember going to visit him in the hospital and seeing him take out a glass eye. It really kinda spooked me. And, but so that was Granddad. He'd lost his hearing and lost one eye, and he never had an education. But he was a smart, dutiful, good husband, and he wasn't exactly a role model because he wasn't—he didn't interact enough with me, but he was a strong, masculine presence in the house. He had his toolbox. He fixed things. He knew how to measure. He knew how to hammer and saw. And you know, it was that kind of an engineering instinct in him. [00:24:02] And so then when, as I said, when my mother remarried, they moved down to Monroe, Louisiana. So then it was Mom and Dad. It was a tough time for my mother because she was still the secretary in the bank. And Dad was trying to get reestablished after he'd come out of this spell of alcoholism. Before they were married, I remember he drank a lot of Jim Beam. And they would go away for a weekend to Lake Hamilton. I was in the third grade, and they'd stay at various places, and they'd put me in the other room, and he would buy me a model to build, and I'd see, you know, the half-empty

bottle of Jim Beam there. So I knew what was going on.

[00:24:49] In those days, he was entertaining for the First Bank in Dallas. I remember going to a reception at the Arlington Hotel, and I was like eight. And Dad was running the reception. Of course, he wasn't married to my mother then. But we were there, and I was floating around with these adults and talking to the bartender and stuff like this. And people would pat me on the head and say, "Isn't he a smart little boy?" and stuff like this. I remember all that. And I didn't know everything about it, but I did then understand that he was being committed up in—and then we visited him a couple of times. And then my mother decided he was okay, and she married him. But at that point he had no job. So he got a job selling or attempting to sell mutual funds. And so he knew bankers, and he would go from bank to bank. And I rode around with him for part of that summer of 1954. And we went from bank to bank and—in these little country towns in Arkansas. We'd find a variety store. I'd try to buy a model, or I'd have a book to read. And he would go in and make the pitch for the mutual funds, but it didn't work.

[00:26:02] So [19]54 or [19]55, people in Arkansas—it's a very conservative state. And Victor Clark was a known factor. And even his best friends in the banking business—he knew them all.

They either couldn't or wouldn't help him. So he went through a pretty tough time. And so he and my mother—it was difficult. He would say, "I just don't feel like eating. This is up—I'm upset." And she'd say, "Well, honey, what's the matter with the food?" He said, "Vaneta, there's nothing the matter with the food. I don't feel like eating. I can't eat." She'd say, "Well, honey, you have to eat." And this thing would—this dynamic would go on. He said, "If you don't leave me alone, I'm going to"—and he'd go sleep in the car and get away [*laughs*] from my mother because she was concerned about him. And I was like—you know, this went on when I was in the sixth grade, seventh grade, into the eighth grade. And he finally—he always liked hunting and fishing. [00:27:05] It was clear that that working for the banks, working in finance—even though he was extremely experienced. He had a master's degree in banking that he got from Rutgers even though he didn't have a college education. He had worked so much in banks that he had the master's degree. And then there—you know, run out of the profession in his early fifties. He'd had a house over in North Little Rock in Park Hill. He had a son who was about ten years older than me. He talked about the son a lot, but after the divorce, he and his son never ever once communicated the rest

of their lives. And I know it hurt him terribly but—so it was a really tough period in their marriage. And so I went through this. [00:27:50] And in 1957, he bought—using some of the money I'd inherited from my father's mother when she passed away, he bought a worm and cricket ranch down in Stuttgart, Arkansas. So this—we renamed it Clark's Worm and Cricket Ranch. So I was really proud of it. And we used to drive down there every weekend and spend the weekend with him. There was a little room where he and Mom could sleep. And then I slept on a cot out by the crickets and the worm beds in the back of the building. And so there were about, you know, twenty of these fifteen-, twenty-foot-long worm beds. You put pin oak leaves in there and some fertilizer and stuff. And we had two kinds of worms, the African night crawlers and the wrigglers. And then we would buy minnows up in Lonoke and sell the minnows. And then we had some sporting goods in there and so forth. And you know, Dad really knew hunting and fishing, and he knew that part of Arkansas really well. And so he was really in his element. He loved it. And but—and I learned a lot.

[00:28:59] One of the great experiences I had there is I worked with an African American kid named Joe. I was like twelve, and Joe was like fourteen. And so I went over to Joe's neighborhood,

and we picked up pin oak leaves and put them in tote sacks and brought them back to feed the worms. And we'd sit out back and pack worms in these. Kept twenty-five worms for a quarter in one of these little containers. And count them out and put them in there. And I had a lot of respect for Joe, and I just, you know—it was just a nice relationship. [00:29:34] There was a good hamburger place a block or two away on the main street in Stuttgart. So whenever we went down there, we'd get a great hamburger. I liked it. I enjoyed it. But what happened was, like a lot of small businesses, it was undercapitalized. So you didn't have enough stock to be able to command a loyal following. If they wanted a rifle, they weren't gonna come to Clark's Worm and Cricket Ranch. If they wanted ammunition, they could get that. And we sold a couple of pistols, but we didn't have enough, you know. And there certainly was no discount there. We had to—and then Dad had basically tried to do it all by himself. And then I was down there on the weekends, and then he'd hired a couple of local people. And then there was a guy named Jim Rice that he hired, and it turned out that Jim Rice was stealing from the cash register. And so we didn't make as much money as we should have. [00:30:27] And then in the summer of 1958 or—I think it was.

Maybe [19]59. You made all your money on three-day weekends. So it was like Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day. Those are the big earning periods. You might make a little money in duck season selling shotgun shells, but basically people down there weren't fishing much during duck season. And so if it rained—and it rained that year Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day. I mean, it just blotto the money. And so Dad realized—I think this was summer of [19]58. So Dad realized he needed to sell the store. It just—much as he loved hunting and fishing, this wasn't gonna work. [00:31:15] And Dad was—he very smart, and he was extremely well spoken. He was a handsome man. He'd been a great athlete in high school. According to him he—although he didn't finish high school. He dropped out in the twelfth grade to work for the family. But he'd grown up in Little Rock. He went to Central High. He quarterbacked the football team, pitched on the baseball team, played guard on the basketball team. He was a gymnast, a boxer, a semiprofessional basketball player. He dove in a old, white, city pool that was in West Little Rock. I mean, he was really something. And so I always admired him and liked him and so forth, but it didn't work in Stuttgart. And so he got out of that and took an exam with the State Department of Finance

and Administration and passed it with, he said, one of the highest grades anybody ever made, and he became a state civil servant. And so he started that and finished twelve years—he started in 1959, [19]60 and retired 1972, which was the minimum to get a pension. And that's the way he finished his career. And I know—and I felt bad for him all my life that a man with that much talent couldn't fully realize that talent because of his own proclivity, his mistake, and what had happened to him. So what he did to himself really. [00:32:48] But I was lucky. I was the beneficiary of all that. Because he set the standard for me to be able to be in the outdoors, to understand the masculine arts of hunting and fishing and so forth, walking in the woods without stepping on twigs, and sitting in a boat without making noise and scaring the crappie away. So I learned all that from him. And so it was a great role model. [00:33:16] My mother is the one who held it all together. She's the one who demanded that we not move—"No, we're not moving to Mountain Home. No, we're not moving to Stuttgart. My son's in a good school, and he's staying in that school. And I have a job, and that's where we are. You go make it out—and you know, and we'll do everything we can to make it work." I didn't fully appreciate at the time what was happening, but in retrospect, that's what was

happening. I just remember at one point I was told, "Hey, we might move to Mountain Home. And you know, we could get a nice piece of property. You could have a horse." And I just really wanted a horse, you know. And Mom said we weren't moving. No, we were gonna stay in Pulaski Heights so I could get a good education. And Mom was right. [00:34:02] And so you asked a half hour ago [*laughs*] about my mother's values. That was my mother's values. She wanted me to get a good education. She wanted me to have a good life, and she married a man to give me a father. I'm not saying she didn't love him. I think she loved him. But she also knew he was an imperfect man. My mother had been with my father—they'd been all through society in Chicago, at least on the Jewish side. She knew big cities. She knew, you know, what nightclubs were and so forth. Once she married my father there—they didn't go to church. They had no real adult friends. It was a solitary, difficult life. And she did it because she loved him, but she did it also because she loved me.

[00:34:58] BS: Can we touch on religion? I mean, reading the—your biography and your autobiography, religion has been very important to you in your life. In your childhood there was the Emmanuel Baptist Church in downtown Little Rock and then the

Pulaski Heights Baptist Church. At Oxford you converted to Catholicism. So what role has religion and the church played in your life? Why had—you're Presbyterian now or—where do you go . . .

[00:35:25] WC: [*Laughs*] We go to the Presbyterian church, but here's the thing. I think—aware of the prejudice in Chicago, my mother named me after her grandfather, Thomas Wesley Reynolds. And so that Wesley name had a certain religious connotation to it. It certainly wasn't a Jewish traditional name. I wasn't named David. Grandfather was Jacob Kanne. My father was Benjamin J. Kanne. I was Wesley J. Kanne. Turns out the Kanne name wasn't even the real name. They—somehow they were Numerofskys, and they changed it to Kanne because they thought it sounded German when they came to Chicago, and they had a Kanne passport that they either bought or stole in Germany. My grandfather did. He was the first of the family to come over. But I think—you know, my mother didn't like the prejudice. My father wasn't especially religious. Now the family—this was a big Jewish family, and there were nineteen—my great-grandfather had two wives in succession, and each had a bunch of children, the first one a bunch of children before he died—she—before she died, and then he remarried. And so my

Grandfather Jacob was like the third son from the original family. He's the first one that came to the United States. Eventually they all came to the United States. I've got like 400, 500 cousins. This is the craziest family tree you'd ever see.

[00:36:55] And there—when I ran for president, I had people coming up to me at fundraisers and say, "I'm one of your cousins," and [*laughs*] say, "Well, what's your name?" They'd tell me, "Yeah, but my grandmother was—she was the sort of third cousin of your father in Chicago." And at one fundraiser in Denver, I had two cousins show up. Both lived in Denver, and they didn't know each other. [*Laughter*] And it was a huge family. And so they ran from Orthodox to Reform to no religion at all. And my father never went to the synagogue, according to my mother. And so when I was born they—it was a mixed marriage, and I think they just agreed that I'd be brought up as a Protestant. I'm sure that really upset Grandma Kanne, but we went over there every Friday night for dinner in Chicago.

[00:37:49] BS: Did your mother have contact with the Kanne family after you relocated to Little Rock?

WC: I'm gon—let me—well, I'll come to that.

BS: Oh, okay.

WC: So anyway, I think that I had gone to the Methodist Church in

Chicago as a little baby. And so we moved to Arkansas, and we lived on West 13th Street. My mother said, "Now, Wesley, you need to find a church." And I was like four and a half, five years old. And so we looked at a couple of different churches. And I picked the Emmanuel Baptist Church because I liked the stained-glass windows because they reminded me of the church I had been in in Chicago. So my mother enrolled me there in Sunday School. And I met kids there. And it was part of my association. Then when we moved to Valentine Street and then after a year or so, she said, "You need to find a—let's do a local church. It's too far to drive on Sunday morning to drop you off at Emmanuel Baptist and then pick you up again. Find a church that's close and you can walk to it." She wouldn't go. She didn't go to church. And so I was an orphan in the church. [Laughs] And so I think I started the—I moved from Pulaski—to Pulaski Baptist—I think I was in the second or third grade. [00:39:13] But during that period—you know, this was a period where my mother was dating Vic, and it was kinda confusing and so forth. I really started going seriously in 1950—spring of [19]53, [19]52, [19]53. Dad gave me a wonderful Bible. I still have it. And it was a Bible that was where Jesus' word was in red. It was a Bible I carried everywhere. I've carried it with me through my

entire Army career. I still got it in my bedside table. And so he knew about my interest in religion. And I was baptized by immersion when I was nine years old in Pulaski Heights Baptist Church. Brother John Hicks was the minister at the time.

[00:39:59] And so there were a lot of us here. I was part of Royal Ambassadors, and I did Boy Scouts there and—I'd done Cub Scouts earlier, but I dropped out after the first year. It was too hard to—I didn't have any parental support to do the kinds of things to get the merit badges. And you think, "Well, you know, kids are supposed to do it by yourself." Yeah, but there was no money, and there was no parental support. There was no mother at home to say, "Okay, well, here, I'll help you sew this," or whatever you had to do. So I dropped out of Cub Scouts after the third grade. And then I picked up RA and Webelo Boy Scouts in the fifth grade at Pulaski Heights Baptist Church. There was a Boy Scout troop there. And then there was no money. So when they wanted us to, you know, go to Camp Quapaw and you wanted to buy your uniforms and stuff like that, Dad basically said, "Kid, you're going out camping with me. I mean, you're not gonna learn anything different in the Boy Scouts than you're gonna learn from me. I'll teach you more, and you'll have more fun out here." I—you know, you're

ten years old, eleven years old, what can you say? I mean, it just wasn't in the cards to stay. I know so many people have stayed, and they've done scouting, and they became Eagle Scouts, and it was a wonderful thing, but it wasn't in the cards for us. It just—it wasn't gonna happen. [00:41:25] So what I wanted to do is I wanted to be an athlete. And I begged my stepfather to make me an athlete. He told me these stories about, well, he did s—"Well, play ball with me. Play—do this, do that." Well, there was Little League getting started but—everybody's parents were at Little League, but not mine. So and that got too hard because you had to have—somebody had to drive you to Little League, and there was nobody to drive me. And so that didn't work. And I wanted to play basketball. Dad was a semi-pro basketball player, and he could really still put that ball up and handle it and dribble. "Kid, you gotta get it low. You got to dribble it low like this." And he'd show both hands and everything. Maybe he was impatient with me. Maybe I just [laughs] didn't have the ability. I played a lot after school. I played at school. But he told me finally, he said, "Kid, you're not gonna be a basketball player." And Dad had—Dad told me one time—he was five foot nine, but he said, "I got arms like a gorilla and hands like meat hooks." And he could take a basketball and

palm it at five foot nine. And I couldn't do that. I still can't do it today. But he had these big hands. And so maybe he was right. I shouldn't have been a basketball player. [00:42:39] And so that's how I ended up—he said, "Find a sport you like. You could be a swimmer." So that's how I got interested in swimming and became a swimmer. But he was my role model. He was the guy that I looked up to on all that. He was the guy whose advice I took on sports. And he was the guy I wanted to please. I wanted a father so desperately. [00:43:01] And he was having a really hard time in life during this time. He told me one time, he said, "Kid, I always had \$300 or so in my pocket. That's the way I like to be." But he didn't have \$300 to put in his pocket. You know, when he was a banker, he liked to have that money. He liked to give people tips and show the power of that money, I guess. And he would talk about the great house he had on Park Hill and the things he did with his son and so forth and—but we didn't do those things. [Laughs] We made it somehow. And I made up my mind I had to—you know, it was up to me. My mother never said, "I want you to make good grades." She didn't have to say that. I just knew I had to do it. It's—I had to belong, I had to somehow be part of that group. [00:43:51] And so I remember Johnny Billheimer was the smartest kid in

school. And when I was in the first or second grade, I had a class with Johnny. And we went to PTA. The mothers went to PTA. And the teacher would then talk to each parent and child during the PTA meeting and stuff. And she told me—she said, "That Johnny Bilheimer—you know, his father's an engineer. And they really work with him and so forth. And he's really smart." And I guess I just made up my mind I was gonna be as smart as Johnny Bilheimer. I don't think I ever was, but [laughs] it was an inspiration. And the same thing with Elizabeth Moore, Livvy Moore. She was really smart. Her father I think was an architect. They lived on Lee Avenue not far from us. But they—these were, you know, really quality kids. And that's—that was my growing-up aim was to be part of that group, to be part of Arkansas. I should tell you this now. [00:44:53] So when I came down here, I had a Chicago accent, obviously, and I used words like guys. And nobody in Arkansas ever used the word guy when I came here. It was a, you know, it was a Yankee word. And I had not only the accent but I had a speech defect. So I couldn't say stop, spot, or I couldn't say L's, and I couldn't say R's. So there were S, T, L's and R's that I was just hopeless at. Made it through the first grade. Escaped, as Mrs. Tolifero said, by the skin of my teeth. I made all

satisfactories. And in the second grade, there was a program that taught—that corrected speech defects. And so Tommy Emmerke, who was in my class, and I and a couple of girls had various kinds of speech defects. And they took us down to what's now the MacArthur Museum down on 9th Street, the old MacArthur house. At that point, no one knew what to do with it. And they would take you down there one afternoon a week from two to three or two to four, and they would teach you how to enunciate. "Stop, Spot." And they would make your lips move. [Laughs] You know, they said, "You're saying it wrong. You know, it's—you have to"—and you played a board game. So you—instead of throwing the dice to move the piece, they would give you a little card. You had to read it correctly, and you got to move your piece on the board, things like this. And so I corrected my speech defect. But I'm sure it was, you know, part of it. [00:46:30] And I was always the kind of little kid who wanted to belong and be part of something. So it was often expressed inappropriately, let's put it that way. Annoying big kids and speaking out and spoiling a movie by saying, you know, "This is gonna happen." I always had a good way of telling people what was gonna happen before it was gonna happen. And they'd say, "Oh, be quiet. You're spoiling the movie." You

know, but I liked that. [00:47:00] I had a big sister here who was my cousin Mary. She wasn't really my sister, but she was the daughter of my mother's first cousin. And Mary was an only child, and she was four years older than me. And so Mary and her parents helped my mother a lot. And during this period where I had no father, her father, Bill Etzbach, who was a World War I veteran—he worked for the Rebsamen family. He was—I mean, Bill was—and his wife, Daisy, were up and coming. They didn't have college educations. But Bill was ambitious, he was capable, and they wanted, you know, good things for their daughter, Mary, who—and so—and then Mary liked me as a little brother 'cause she wanted a little brother. So she would come over and pick me up and—with her parents, and they would take me to the swimming pool in the summer or to eat watermelon or whatever. So you know, I was surrounded somewhat by family, but I never got enough of it. It was like an ache, you know, to have that family. And so you know, people are, you know, what they are. That's what it was growing up. And so I had to make the family as best I could through the swimming team and through the school.

[00:48:19] BS: Any teachers stick out? In . . .

WC: Every teacher.

BS: We're gonna can talk about Hall later on. But . . .

WC: Every teacher.

BS: Any teacher in particular that . . .

[00:48:28] WC: So Mrs. Tolifero was first-grade teacher, and she was strong. And her name was spelled Tolifero, but it was pronounced Tolliver, and she made sure we knew that. And she made us do our—do everything right. We were disciplined, we were straight, we were on time, we tucked our shirts in in class. And you know, Mrs. Pace in the second grade was also very capable. Mrs. Collins in the third grade, Miss Grandin in the fourth grade, Miss Simpson in the fifth grade, and Miss—I said Miss Grandin. It—Miss Gardner in the fourth grade, Miss Grandin in the sixth grade. Miss Gardner was the most humane of the teachers in the fourth grade. She was the most understanding, the most mother-like. The rest of them were hard. And Mrs. Simpson was younger. She was red-haired, and she was kind of flamboyant. And she was tough too. [00:49:27] And then there was—if you were—you know, did well in the sixth grade, you were—with Mrs. Grandin you were part of the so-called traveling group. And so you went from room to room even in the sixth grade to take math with Mrs. Rall. Mrs. Rall was tough. She wanted performance, and you did it or else. And there was

Mr. Young, the high school—the principal. Mr. Young was there, and he had a belt, and they used it. And one day I was out on the playground. I was having a pushing, chicken fight with one of the boys in the class. His name was Leslie Howett. Leslie's parents had come from Scotland. And Leslie and I were in Cub Scouts together in the third grade, and his mother was a den mother. And they were Scottish. And so she had a little bit of a brogue. And Wesley was—Leslie was, you know, naturally twinned with me 'cause we had names that rhymed, and so I sort of looked to him. [00:50:21] For some reason, we had started one of these pushing things that was gonna go like this [shoves with elbow] until somebody swung the first fist. And one of the teachers caught us and said, "If you boys don't stop this, you're going to see Mr. Young. And he's gonna paddle you and whip you with his belt." Well, I never got whipped with a belt, but I do remember it. No, the teachers were great. They were straight, they were smart. They took no nonsense. They expected quality. [00:50:54] I mean, I would go home and practice writing. You know, we learned script in the third grade. And you had to practice. And every classroom had the letters around the classroom so you could see what a proper *G* looked like in [*laughs*] script. You'd think, "I wish I could do that." Of

course, the girls were much better at it than the boys. And you'd look at the girls' script and—"I wish I could do—they got an A, and I only got a, like, a B-plus. And how do I get an A?" And you'd go home and copy these—the words and write these out. [00:51:25] And teachers were—they were an inspiration. There was never a case of indiscipline. There were cut ups. And the cut ups, I remember their names. I'm not—no point remembering and saying 'em, but sometimes they'd get in trouble. They'd get sent out of the classroom. I mean, it was [claps four times] [00:51:46] And you had your recess. When the bell rang, boom, everybody ran out. If you were first through third grade, you played on the swings and the apparatuses. If you were fourth grade, you could do that. But fifth and sixth grade had their own corner of the playground, and you did sports. So in the fifth and sixth grade, you played football in the fall. You played scrub softball in the spring. And there were basketball, but nobody had a basketball. So it went between football and scrub baseball. You brought your glove to school, and they chose you at every lunchtime. When you got a break, line up against fence, say "I'll take him for my team." "Well, I want him on my team." And that's the way you played. And then in the fifth grade, there were also organized

elementary-school sports. Football, basketball, and baseball. And that was the first time you got a jersey. [00:52:40] I played football. I played baseball on the elementary school team. And I was real proud of myself. But I wasn't the star of the team, but I was really proud. And you know, you remember those—that fly ball I caught in right field. I mean, I reached for that ball and grabbed it. It's like the time I stopped the line drive playing second base with Royal Ambassadors behind Pulaski Heights Baptist Church. I was in the fifth grade, and that guy hit that ball. He was a sixth grader playing—he hit that ball as hard as he could. It came right at me. Boom, and I caught that ball. He was out. [BS laughs] And you remember those great moments, you know, that you did these things. And they were really important to me. I wanted to be part of a community.

BS: I . . .

WC: Is this okay? This what you want?

BS: This is perfect. I mean, this can't get any better. I have all these questions, and you've . . .

WC: You better start asking the questions.

BS: You're actually—you've answered them all. So you were blessed with some won . . .

WC: Well, I wanna talk about a couple of other things.

BS: Okay.

WC: Let me just say . . .

BS: Sure.

[00:53:38] WC: I never really finished the religion thing, but I . . .

BS: Okay.

WC: You know, I—the church was a really great church, and I went to Sunday school, and I went to, then, the service afterwards. Not every Sunday because when we went out fishing—sometimes Mom and Dad wanted to go out fishing on a Sunday and—or we were down in Stuttgart. So I wasn't the most regular church attendee, but you know, read the Bible, read it at night. And when I went away to military school when I was in the tenth grade, read the Bible, you know, every day and came back and went back into the church and sang in the choir, youth choir at night, went to Sunday services at night. We never did much on a Wednesday night training union. You know, if you're a Baptist, you go [*laughs*] twice on Sunday and Wednesday night, and so we didn't do all that. [00:54:28] But I could never get my parents to go. Dad wasn't—he'd been a Methodist or a Presbyterian or something, but he wasn't that religious, or he felt uncomfortable. Or he felt like maybe that he wouldn't be

acceptable because they were divorced. And so I'm—you know, it was just one of those things. Couldn't force it. So I always felt bad that they weren't—other kids' parents would be there and be leaders in the church and stuff. Mine weren't. But you know, you made the best of it. And as you got older, that seemed to be less important. But no, the church was really important to me. And I said my prayers, and I worked a lot on that. And the neighborhood was important. The kids in the neighborhood played every afternoon, and you measured yourself against them. [00:55:16] And most of the kids—several of them had maids. The maids would come in the afternoon or in the morning on the bus from downtown. And they'd be wearing their starched, white maid's outfits. And there'd be three or four of them that would walk down the street together. My mother's little sister had a maid next door, and they fired them frequently because anytime they had a party and they were missing a spoon or something, they blamed it on the maids. And then they'd fire them. I never understood that, but that's what happened. I remember Myra was the maid that my friend Libby Ann Cogdell's family had, and she was wonderful. Nobody ever fired her. And she gave us cookies whenever we'd come through there. When you were four or five

years old, Myra would have a cookie for you. So in the middle of playing, we'd run by and get a cookie from Myra. But it was an atmosphere of some people had, you know, privilege, and of course, you know, we didn't in my family. Grandmother was there, and she took care of the house, and my mother worked. But I did see that. And you know, it was one of those things that you never forget. As you get older you think back on this and what must it have been like for these women to know that they would be accused of anything that went wrong inside the home and fired, and what it must have meant to them to lose a job at that point. So that's the neighborhood. I talked about the church. I gotta talk about the Boys Club.

[00:56:55] BS: Well, that was my next question. I thought I saw a picture of Jimmy Miller at the Boys Club.

WC: Yeah.

BS: Your coach.

WC: Yeah.

BS: Swim coach. Tell us about that.

[00:57:07] WC: So—well, Dad had said, you know, "Find a sport you like." And so when I was in the seventh grade, I saw that Pulaski Heights Junior High School actually had a swimming team. When I'd been at Camp Tahkodah, I was a good

swimmer, but I came in second, not first. I never got the medal from cast—[laughs] from Camp Tahkodah. You had to win first place in the swimming in the creek. I got second so I didn't get anything. And so I thought—I knew I was a good swimmer. So I went to these guys who were junior high school and said, "How do I join the swimming team?" And he said, "Oh, it's the Boys Club." Well, I'd been to the Boys Club before. I knew they had an indoor pool. One of the neighbor's kids, Pat Gatons, took me down there when I like was ten years old, and it was the first time I'd ever heard of an indoor pool. I said, "An indoor swimming pool." And so he took me down to the Boys Club, and it cost seventy-five cents to join. And I joined that year. It was like 1954 maybe, [19]53, [19]54, [19]55. But there was no one to take me down there, so I didn't continue with it. [00:58:11] They were mean in the Boys Club, too. I mean, you swam without clothes. So when I tell this story today, the women in my office say, "Don't tell that story. That's terrible." But nobody had swimming suits in those days. The men's clubs—you know, at the New York Athletic Club, the men swam naked. And so in the Boys Club, we were considered to be, you know, poor kids. That's why we were there. So we were considered to be unclean. So we had to take a shower with soap before you

came into the pool. And then there would be a lifeguard, and he had a system for checking you. So he would take his thumb, and he would rub it on your forearm six or seven times until he could create some dirt. Then you were [*laughs*] back into the showers again. So it was tough to get in the pool during one of these forty-five-minute swim periods when I was like ten years old, so I didn't do it consistently. [00:59:06] But then when they said go to the Boys Club—I started in the eighth grade, and there were four of us, and we carpoled at night so that—the swimming workout was six thirty till eight. Six thirty till eight? What a terrible time. I know parents hated it, and it messed up dinner, but for whatever reason that's when it was. And that's how I met Jimmy Miller. He was the coach. He was a young guy in his thirties maybe, thirty-five. He'd been an Army sergeant in the Pacific in World War II. I never really found out what he did. I'm sure it was something, but he had been through Army training. And so he knew the right way to talk to young people. And so it turned out—it's my phone. You can't hear it ring. Just a second.

[Recording stopped]

[00:59:55] WC: So he knew the right way to motivate. And there was a real crowd of swimmers at the Boys Club. And it was a

crowd of roughnecks, basically, but they were swimming, and they were diving, and they were, you know, full of adventure and fun. And I just glommed onto it. And I just—you know, I wanted to be successful. There were four of us who came together from Pulaski Heights Junior High School in addition to the two or three who'd been on the team the year before.

[01:00:30] And so we started in. And the first meet was actually gonna be an away meet at Natchitoches, Louisiana, at Northwest State, and we were gonna swim against the freshman. Now [*laughs*] I was twelve years old, but you know, this was the height of hubris. Jimmy Miller was gonna bring the Boys Club swim team down to swim against the freshman. And there were some—we had some ninth graders and some high school kids there. I was in the eighth grade. And they were, you know, pretty good. And the rest of us were gonna go along. It was a big deal. You get to stay in the gym at night. And it's really fun, and we play a lot of games and stuff. You'll really like it. And so it was built as a real, you know, adventure trip. But Jimmy said, "I'm gonna give you a time, and you have to make it." So he gave my friend Mike Stewart a time on a 100-yard freestyle of 1:12.5. And he gave me a time of 1:12.4. And I knew that Mike Stewart was better at swimming than I was. We

were about the same size. He was about five or six months younger than me. And he had a really incredible kick. And I didn't know why—he beat me in every practice. Why is—why do I have to beat him by a tenth of a second? It didn't seem like it was fair. So Jimmy started us off, he blew the whistle, we dove in, and on the fourth, fifth lap, Mike just brbrbrbm and just pulled away from me. And I just felt myself just dying. And so Mike made his time on the—right on the money. He did a 1:12.5. Said, "Mike,"—Jimmy loved Mike Stewart. He was one of these kids who always a smile on his face and—you know, and he s—"Good job." He said, "You missed it by ten tenths of a second. Grab your ankles and ben—bend over and grab your ankles." He took one of these little Boys Club cheap towels that had been through the laundry about 500 times and wetted it. And he, pow, pow, pow, pow, ten times in front of everybody else on the team that was up there. And there were about twenty other kids here, and they watched me get hit.

[01:03:01] Now look, I think I was only spanked once, and that's the story I told you about Granddad. And we never—we always made fun of Grandmother when she said she's gonna switch us. [*Laughs*] She never switch you. Half the time she'd forget what you—you'd bring the switch in, and she'd forget

about it. But this was painful and a humiliation. I didn't cry, but I was mad and hurt. And I—he said, "Go on and sit down on the steps." I went over there and sat on the steps. A couple of other kids got up. I think there were only two of us out of maybe twenty that didn't make the times that were assigned. I was pretty down when I was leaving. And he said, "You know what your problem is?" I said, "No, Coach." He said, "You don't believe in yourself." So he said, "Your problem is you. You don't believe in yourself." So I walked out and thought, "Well, that's that." But there were a couple more practices before the team left. So two practices later, he said, "Okay, I'm gonna give you another chance—1:12.4. You're gonna swim by yourself." And so I got up there, and I did a 1:11.7. And it was like the whipping had freed me from myself. I can't describe it. It was humiliating [*laughs*], it was painful, but somehow it made—it jarred something loose in my head. And when I swam the next time, I didn't have any problem.

BS: He wouldn't be able to do that today.

WC: Yeah.

BS: The swatting.

WC: Really.

BS: Yeah.

[01:05:04] WC: And so you know, I stayed with the swimming team, went out to camp that summer, and Miller ran the Kiwanis Boys Camp. And so I went out there for two weeks. I'd done Camp Tahkodah a couple of times. And my mother paid the princely sum of \$175 for me to go to Camp Tahkodah each summer. And she was making—that was about what she made a month. So it was a huge sacrifice, but it was paid for out of the inheritance that we'd gotten from my father's family. And but she always told me, you know, "This is really expensive, Wesley, and blah, blah, blah." [01:05:40] So the Boys Club camp cost me, I think like six dollars or twelve dollars for two weeks. And I won a bunch of ribbons out there, and there was the swimming—the swimming team was there, and Miller was with us, and then there was a Junior Olympic meet. And I swam in a relay, and I got my first little plastic trophy. And I had finished the eighth grade, and I was thirteen years old, and I had accomplished something. And there was group that I could be part of. And there was a coach and an authority figure. And he cared enough about you to tell you something about yourself. And I was bonded. I tried to swim the rest of the summer, but I had a appendectomy. So it knocked me out, and I had to kinda start all over the next autumn. And so that year I was offered—I was

gonna be fourteen. You're old enough to be a counselor.

[01:06:31] So Jimmy Miller ran a counselor school. And you came in for—on Saturday morning, once a week for, I don't know, six or eight weeks. And he taught you leadership. He taught you first aid. He taught you counseling. You got your junior lifesaver badge out of it. He taught you how to deal with people. He gave you what [*laughs*] I guess he learned as the Army system from the 1940s, but whatever it was, it was about leadership. And so I stayed with that program. I was gonna be a counselor. And in April of that nine—that year—it was 1959. I was in the ninth grade, and we had to go out—he said, "Okay, if you're gonna be counselors, you're gonna come out here. We gotta get the camp ready for the campers." And so in the autumn every year, they would take the bunk—the mattresses and the bunks and everything, put 'em in a big locked storage area. And then they had to break them out to the different cabins and set it up. [01:07:29] So it was probably the end of April of 1959. And so it was gonna be a weekend at the Kiwanis Camp. And there were about twelve of us out there, maybe. And somehow we were gonna get fed. I don't know how that was gonna happen, but we were gonna, you know, set up the bunks and then sleep there. And then he was gonna get us back

in. Our parents didn't drive us. Somehow we got all driven out there. And I took—I always built models, airplanes and boats and stuff like this. And so I took these—had a couple of model—plastic model boats with electric motors in them. And so on Sunday morning of that weekend, we had nothing to do. Sun was up, day was warm. One of those gorgeous Arkansas spring mornings. So we went down—and I was like—I got everybody together and said, "Let's go down, and we can, you know, we can play little battleship. We can sail these electric boats. We can throw rocks at them and everything and make it like there's explosions. And it'll be a lot of fun." So everybody came down to the wide spot in the creek where the road crossed the creek. So we left the camp itself. We walked out the gate of the camp, and then we walked down maybe a quarter of a mile to this big old iron bridge and scrambled down the bank and got in the water. [01:08:48] And we were wading around. The water was maybe—you know, it wasn't even knee deep—running the boats, throwing rocks. All of a sudden Jimmy Miller comes in his pickup truck headed to Ferncliff, I guess to buy cigarettes or something before breakfast. It was about eight o'clock in the morning, eight fifteen. And he says, "You boys are off limits. You get on back on to camp." Jimmy wasn't sleeping with us in the same

cabin. He--there was a, like, a staff member's house there on the compound. So I guess that's where he was. So we probably surprised him, you know. So we didn't mean to disobey, but he was back in no time, like seven or eight minutes he came back. He said, "You're still here. You disobeyed me." He said, "So I'll tell you what's gonna happen." He said, "If you wanna come out here as counselors, you're gonna get up and go off Red Bridge. Otherwise just go on back to camp now, and you'll come out as campers." [01:10:00] Well, Red Bridge was famous in the lore of the Boys Club swimming team because the rumor was that guys would get up on top of this at night. And after a couple of beers, they would do back flips and stuff from this—this girder was about maybe a twelve-inch-wide girder forty-two feet above the creek. The creek might have seven feet of water at the deep hole, but if you slipped off that girder [*laughs*] you might hit in three feet of water. You had to sort of reach out for it. And guys would do standing gainers, they said, and I mean, you know, it was awesome. And he was gonna ask us to do that? To become members of the Red Bridge Club? Well, I didn't think he meant it. So eight people went on back to camp. Four of us who were on the swim team figured we'd call his bluff. So kind of in order of age, we scaled up, we went and climbed back up to

the road bed, got on the bridge, climbed up the girder, and arrayed ourselves on the top. The lead guy was a guy named Ranny Treese. Ranny was a—he was a ninth grader like the rest of us, but he was a year older, and he was also a junior high school pole vaulter. And he'd been on the swimming team since he was in the fifth grade, and so he knew Miller better, and he was older, and he was, like, the leader. So he stood up there. Of course, none of us had any clothes on 'cause we didn't have any bathing suits 'cause we didn't expect to go swimming. So he's standin' up there, and Miller says, "Okay, you're gonna jump. Now I'm gonna count to three, and you're gonna jump." And he's, "One, two, three." Said, "Coach, I'm not jumpin'. I'm not jumpin'." This went back and forth, and we're like—we're laying there, laid out [*laughs*] head to foot, three of us behind Ranny, and we're hoping that he won't jump, that after he stands up there and argues with Miller, Miller's gonna say, "Okay, okay, you proved it, you got up there. Now get on down and get back to camp." But Miller didn't say that. Miller said, "You're gonna jump." He said, "Coach, I'm not jumpin'. I'm not jumpin'." He said, "You're gonna jump. One, two, three." "Coach, I'm not jumpin'." This went on three or four times.

[01:12:11] And then I heard this popping of this gravel, and

here came a truck. And it was Sunday morning, and the truck looked like it had a couple of women in it, and they were dressed for church, and they were comin' from Ferncliff toward Highway 10. And they were comin' down toward that bridge. And Ranny looked at those women. He's up there stark naked. And they were about the same elevation as he was on top of that bridge. He was about twenty feet above the roadbed. And he jumped. [01:12:44] Next guy got up, a guy named Larry Busby, and said, "Coach I'm not jumpin', I'm gonna hurt myself." He says, "This is gonna—you know I don't have a"—said, "It's gonna bottom out"—he said, "I'm gonna count three. You're gonna jump." "Coach, I'm worried." So for him it only took twice. [Laughs] He jumped. Okay. He sort of got up holding his crotch, but he was okay. [01:13:06] So I got—I stood up. Coach said, "I'm gonna count three. You're gonna jump." He counted one, two, three. I jumped. And I hit a little bit off balance. I felt a little bit of twinge in my shoulder. And I came up out of the water, and it was the most magical feeling I ever had. I was on cloud nine that day. And the next day in the ninth grade, I knew I could do anything. What Jimmy Miller told me about not believing in myself the year before—now I believed in myself. He'd made it possible. That's what the Boys Club was

for me. Now of course, when I told my mother this—"He, you know, he could have seriously injured you all." And you know, one thing and another, and she just let him have it. She never liked Miller, and she never respected him. And so I was in this odd [*laughs*] position of this guy was like a father figure to me the same as, you know, Victor Clark was. In some ways more so. And he had brought this quality out in me. It was an amazing thing.

[01:14:23] BS: Can we change gears a little bit and maybe talk about some national events? We're roughly the same age. I'm a little younger. From the [19]50s what I remember most on the national stage was Sputnik on October 4, 1957, I think it was.

WC: The what?

BS: Sputnik.

WC: Oh yeah.

BS: And I remember watching a satellite go overhead with my dad in the backyard. Do you remember—I mean, you mention that in your book, the national trauma that—because . . .

[01:14:52] WC: We were always excited about space travel. When I first moved to Little Rock, we went to the Nabor Theatre, and we watched *Commando Cody*. Do you remember *Commando Cody*?

BS: No.

WC: He was a serial. And so whatever you saw on Saturday afternoon you get the—in addition to the main feature, you get the serial. Commando Cody would go [claps hand over heart and raises both arms above head] and he had . . .

BS: Oh yeah. Remember that. Yeah.

WC: . . . a jumpsuit and [*vocalized noise*] you know . . .

BS: I remember now.

[01:15:14] WC: And we moved to Valentine Street, summer of 1951.

There was a big meteor. We were all playing in R. P. Moon's backyard. There was a big meteor that came across the sky. You could see the red streak. It was sunset. And we all said, "It's a spaceship. It's a spaceship." We were ready for it. I was in the eighth grade when Sputnik was launched. And I talked to the other guys on the swimming team, and we were all concerned. And one of the guys I swam with was a guy named Steve Hodges. He was a ninth grader. And so he knew more than I did about things. And he said, "You can build a rocket ship. You know, you can do this yourself. You just go to the drug store, and you can get what you need, and you know, we can launch these rockets." And so he said, "I'm gonna do this." So I, "Well, I'm gonna do it." So I'd go down to either Stiff

Station or up to Churchman Rhea Drug at Hillcrest. And I'd buy a pound of sulfur, a pound of potassium nitrite. Mix that stuff up, grind up the charcoal in the backyard, make rocket fuel, gunpowder. And so we really got into this, and we really were. [01:16:31] And then Steve said, "The Russians are way ahead of us. You need to learn Russian." So I went over to the med school library that summer. It was the only place in town where you could find anything in Russian. So I found a couple of textbooks and tried to teach myself Russian. And then, you know, of course you had to learn calculus. So by the time I was finished with the—you know, even—you know, finished with the eighth grade and into the ninth grade, I knew I had to have calculus. And so that was a big moment. [01:17:02] In the ninth grade we pa—they passed the National Defense Education Act. And I was one of the lucky beneficiaries. They picked five or six of us from Pulaski Heights, five or six from Forest Heights. And we went to see Mr. Barry, who was a high school biology teacher in the tenth grade. And but we went to Forest Heights to do this, and we did the federal radiation project. So we took *Drosophila melanogaster*, the common fruit fly. Has yellow eyes or red eyes. The question is, how does it—why do some have red, and if they're x-rayed, would you get different eye colors?

And how do you—how does genetics work? Now why this followed Sputnik is a little confusing, but it was the kind of science that was available for the Little Rock school system. There was a grant for this. And so we packed these little tubes with banana paste, and put fruit fly larvae, and took them to the med school, and irradiated them. And then we watched as they hatched, and we tried to count, and we learned the difference between genetics from Mendeleev and genetics from the Russians. The Russians believed that if you cut off a puppy dog's tail, its babies wouldn't have tails. Mendeleev knew that there were dominant and recessive genes. And so we saw the—did the crosses, you know, red eyes—which one's dominant, red or yellow eyes? And so you know, we looked at that on the chromosomes, and we learned all that in the afternoon.

[01:18:38] Sputnik did all that. Sputnik was a huge injection of—for those of us interested in science, into this. And of that group in the federal radiation project, more than half later went into scientific careers or engineering careers. I still see them.

BS: Do you? You don't have a hobby in the back room at home, do you, where you raise 'em?

[01:19:01] WC: No, but there's—one of the young men who was there was a young man named David Patterson. David is—went

on to California and had a very distinguished career in engineering and science technology. He was an executive at Microsoft for a while. He was tangentially connected to the space program. And John Wilkes went to Rice, and he was—last he talked to me, he was doing stuff on nanotechnology. I mean, it was a signal moment in American education. It was important. And the Little Rock school system was there at the forefront.

[01:19:40] BS: As a teenager, you lived through some of the most turbulent years in Arkansas history, and specifically I wanted to kinda explore the desegregation of Central High School in 1959 and the decision of the school board to close high schools rather than integrate. And it had particular impact upon your life. Could you talk about that time and what it was like, the racial climate, and your parents' decision to send you to Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon, Tennessee?

[01:20:07] WC: Well, most of us didn't understand what was happening. I was in the eighth grade when it happened. And we were [*laughs*] going down to Stuttgart, and I was working with Joe packing worms. I didn't know anything about racial prejudice and stuff. We liked Myra the maid. She was—I mean, we didn't know any of her kids. We didn't understand that—you

know, what it was like for her to be a maid for white families. We didn't. My grandmother did say one time to my mother when I was like six or seven years old—and we would play in the summer without shirts. She said, to my mother, said, "If that boy gets any darker, he's gonna sit on the back of the bus, and I'm not sitting with him." And they—people used to tease Grandmother because she was very, very fair. And I remember my cousin Mary's husband teasing her—he said, "Elsie, I think you got some Indian blood." "I do not have Indian blood!" I mean, she was, you know, that kind of self-righteous. But you know, you remember those things, and maybe there was a lot of prejudice, but you know, for those of us who were kids, we didn't understand what was going on.

[01:21:17] BS: I was kind of shocked. I didn't know that the school board had shut down the high schools so they wouldn't have to segregate it. I mean, what did families do?

WC: So what happened was all that commotion in the eighth grade. I mean, I never saw any of it personally. You know, where I was in Pulaski Heights Junior High, there wasn't any problem. Of course, it was totally segregated school. And in the ninth grade then, the school never started. So—for the tenth graders and up. In the eighth grade, I'd been on the high s—on the

swimming team, and I'll show you pictures of guys from the swimming team there who were, you know, in high school. They had no high school. They—it was the end of it. It really shattered the Boys Club swimming team and—because everybody above the ninth grade was thrown out. [01:22:04] I was a ninth grader that year, and we didn't know what was gonna happen in the tenth grade. And my mother said, "Well, you know, maybe you should go away." She heard that Johnny Bilheimer was going away, and Johnny was gonna go to Andover. And he took the ex—entrance test, and so he had to repeat the ninth grade. And Jerry Bass, and Lamar McMillan were gonna go away to school. And they both went away to Castle Heights with me. And I said, "I wanna go—if I'm gonna go away, I wanna go to a school with a swimming team." And I had always liked playing army stuff and everything. So he said, "Well, maybe you wanna go to this—to a military school." I mean, my mother didn't know. I mean, she didn't know that you're supposed to go to Andover and Exeter or the Hill School or something like this, or Warrensville. She just—you know, she didn't know. So there were some various military schools. We looked at 'em. And at Kemper, Columbia, Castle Heights. Castle Heights seemed to have the best swimming team, and it was in

Lebanon, Tennessee. And so I wanted to go there.

BS: What kind of experience was it?

[01:23:17] WC: Well, you know, it was interesting in several respects. The first thing was that when I went there the first day, you had to meet the dean, and the dean told you—Colonel Bradley, he told you what your courses were. And I was taking geometry, and I said, "Well, I'd like to take calculus in the twelfth grade, and I need to take intermediate algebra at the same time." He said, "Well, that's not for you." He said, "You're gonna have to stick with just algebra." Okay. Well, he's, you know, he's the dean. So I ran into Jerry Bass and his parents, and we'd been in junior high school together. And in fact I should point out his picture over there. And I said, "Jerry, I—you know, I talked to the dean, and he says I can't take intermediate algebra the same year." And he says, "Well, he's letting me take intermediate algebra and geometry." Huh. Well, I mean, Jerry and I were both in the National Junior Honor Society. So I went back in to see the dean. I said, "You're letting my, you know, friend Jerry Bass—you've let him do it. I'd like to do it." So he was kind of surprised, and [*laughs*] so he let me do it. So that made an incredible difference in the rest of my life. Because that let me take calculus as a senior. It raised all

my board scores. It let me get a National Honor Society Scholarship, a National Merit Scholarship, and other things. Had I just, you know, not said anything, probably wouldn't have been there. Life would've been different.

BS: Yeah.

[01:24:54] WC: And so you know, there's—that's the first thing about Castle Heights. Second thing was, made a lot of good friends on the swimming team. I told myself every morning, "I'm not gonna be homesick." And I built little ship models, and I went to the Baptist church in town. I walked in for Sunday services. Big thing was to go back and forth I took the bus. And so get on the bus in Lebanon, change in Nashville, ride the bus to Memphis, change in Memphis, and get into the Greyhound or Trailways bus station in Little Rock. It was about a twelve- or fourteen-hour bus trip. You were just some little kid, and your mom and dad let you do it all by yourself. And nobody said, "Oh, he's gonna get kidnapped. And what about those bad"—you know, none of that. There was no helicopter parenting. And you know, you learn to stay away from people that look like *[laughs]* they don't mean well for you. And there were always some people that, you know, were ne'er-do-wells that you would see, and you just stay away from them. So that was the second big part of it.

[01:25:54] And then the third part was just being on your own, making up your mind, setting up a schedule, living without, you know, your parents. And so it was a tremendous growth experience for me, building on what I'd done the previous year in the ninth grade and being a camp counselor for Jimmy Miller out there in the summer of [19]59 at the Boys Club camp. So I finished at the top of the class and had my letter in swimming and a lot of friends and traveled with them over that summer. And then I made up—I didn't—I went back to camp. Miller had had a fight with the Boys Club director, Mr. Billy Mitchell. And so he didn't come back out as a camp director in the summer of 1960, but I went back, and so I had one more summer with the camp. [01:26:57] And then I had to figure out was I gonna—well, what was I gonna do? Was I gonna go to Castle Heights and finish? Or was I—well, Castle Heights was expensive. And we were using my inheritance for that. And I knew if I stayed at Castle Heights, I could take calculus 'cause they were teaching calculus. So I went to Hall High School on the day registration began, and I asked, "Can I take calculus if I stay here?" And Miss Minnie Lee Mayhan, who was the guidance counselor said, "Yes, we're gonna be offering calculus for your year if you've had intermediate algebra and plane geometry." And so I came right

home. I told Mom and Dad, "I think I'm gonna go back to Hall High School." And so that's what it was.

[01:27:45] BS: Yeah. Seems like Hall was an incredible high school when you were there. There were about 300 students, but it was third in the nation on a per capita basis in the number of National Merit Scholarship semifinalists.

WC: That's what they told us.

BS: Yeah. Why was it such . . .

WC: Well, they said we had [*laughs*] an exceptional class.

BS: Oh, okay. [*Laughs*]

WC: And maybe so because usually it's girls that are the, you know, the bright kids and everything. I can't explain it. Maybe it was the National Defense Education Act. Maybe it was—you know, they got us together. Maybe it was Sputnik or whatever, but there was a group of us that we were all interested in calculus, and we worked really hard. In the eleventh grade we were in analytic geometry and trigonometry. And it was a mixed group of twelfth graders and eleventh graders. And then the twelfth graders graduated without ever doing much calculus.

[01:28:38] And so the next year, we were there as twelfth graders in our calculus class. And Mrs. White was our—Estelle White was our calculus teacher, but she hadn't really

remembered that much [*laughs*] calculus from college. So some—there were some things she couldn't do. And so we had to discover them ourselves. And it was discovery learning. We would go over to each other's houses, and we would talk about these things at night. We'd listen to records. We'd talk about the future. We—it was also the year of the Berlin Crisis, and there was Khrushchev and the Soviet Union again as a problem. [01:29:13] And I'd been to Boys State after the eleventh grade, and there was a guy from West Point there who said, "You should come to West Point." He told a thousand people out there. "It's like Harvard in the social sciences, and MIT in the sciences, and you get leadership, and it's outdoors." And when I was in the eleventh grade in Little Rock, Steve Hodges, who was on the swimming team with me, said, "You know, you can go down and work for Mr. Maddy. He's got a, you know, brokerage firm down there by the state capitol. And he'll let you work for an hour or two in the afternoons just—you become a chart boy, basically. You're reading *Barron's Financial Weekly*, take a number three pencil, you put it on graph paper, and you mark—for the stocks he's interested in, each stock has its own page and—each week, and you mark it's high and low and close with a little tick mark. And it's number three pencil, but you get a

dollar an hour." I'm like, that's pretty good. I mean, you know, if you work there like three afternoons a week, that's like six dollars a week. And then Saturdays you could work, also if you wanted to. And my mother only made like forty or fifty dollars a week, and you know, I could really—this is good. So I started doing that, and what happened to me was when school was out, Mr. Maddy said, "Well, yeah, you can work. If you wanna work here forty hours a week, I'm happy to have you." Well, I couldn't do it. I would look at that *Barron's Financial Weekly*, those numbers, they didn't mean anything to me. I'm putting 'em down, my eyes are waterin', I'm drowsy. And I'd go down to the Shack Bar-B-Q. I knew I was making a dollar an hour, but a Shack Bar-B-Q by that time was like sixty cents. And I wanted two of them for lunch. [Laughter] And I was working for lunch. It didn't make sense. And I was sleepy, and I did this for one week, and then there was Boys State. So when I went to Boys State, I was primed to understand I didn't wanna be in an office position. I wanted an active life. And so that's the way it worked out. [01:31:18] We took our merit scholarship exams at the end of our junior year, but we didn't get the results for six months. And so we were all in the calculus class when it came out, and you know, we all did really well. I was really proud. I

had the second highest score in the school. Bill Thomas was the—had the highest score. And there was a kid in Fayetteville that had the same score as Bill Thomas. But I was right up there in the top scores in the state. I wanted to go to West Point. And so after Boys State, what I did is I wrote to Senator Fulbright, who was our most famous senator, and everybody knew him. And my mother admired him, you know, because he was a Rhodes Scholar, and everything. [01:31:58] She'd given me—I have to tell a story. So in 1959 on the way to a swimming meet in Memphis, there was an article in *Reader's Digest* about this young man who was a first classman at West Point. His name was Peter Dawkins. And Peter Dawkins was—he was an All-American football player and won the Heisman Trophy. But he also played hockey and lettered in hockey. He also played lacrosse, and he was a letterman in lacrosse. And he was also the cadet first captain, and he stood seventh in the class academically, and he was the class president, and he was the vice chairman of the honor committee. And he was six foot three and blond-haired and blue-eyed. And he was, you know, the perfect young man. And there was a whole spread on him in *Reader's Digest*. And my mother had given this to me in the ninth grade as I was going to the swimming meet in Memphis

and said, "Look at this young man and what wonderful things he's done." And so that was kind of my model. Like could I do this, you know? Could I—could you—could this be possible? So you know, I didn't directly connect it to West Point, but then I began—when began to apply, then I—of course I remembered that. So I called Fulbright. My mother knew that he was a Rhodes Scholar. She remembered the Rhodes Scholar thing from Pete Dawkins, I guess. Anyway, she encouraged me to write Fulbright. I got a card back that said, essentially, thank you for your interest in national defense, but there are no openings. [01:33:35] So I wrote next to Senator McClellan, and I got an interview with McClellan, and it was in early September of 1961. And it was—I'd been at swimming the night before at the Boys Club, and I stepped on the scales in the locker room. I—five foot eight, 137 1/2 pounds. And just checking, you know, just for the hell of it to see how much I weighed. So I went in to see Senator McClellan. He was on the—I think on one of the top floors of the Donaghey Building, which was fourteen stories and the biggest—he had an office. McClellan was a very famous senator. He'd been the head of the rackets investigation. And this was the first televised Senate hearings. And he was tough, and he would ask those union

leaders, "You tell me the truth. Are you"—and he would point his finger. And he was a real interrogator. So everybody knew him and, you know, respected him. So I knocked on the door and went in, and there was this huge desk, and here's this guy like this [slides down in chair and indicates top of desk even with his chin] behind the desk. And he says to me—he says, "You're the young man that wanna go West Point?" He had a little bit of a lisp or an accent or something. I said, "Yes, sir." I knew how to speak because I'd been at Castle Heights. I said—I was standing up straight. I said, "Yes sir." He said—he looked at me, said, "Boy, how old are you?" I said, "Sir, I'm sixteen years old." He said, "How much do you weigh?" Said, "Sir, 137 1/2 pounds." He said, "And I guess you're real smart, huh?" I said, "Yes, sir." [01:35:17] Well, I'd graduated—I mean, it was at the top of the class at Castle Heights, and I was making A's at Hall High School, and I was in the honors math class, and I'd scored pretty well on my first SATs. And I maxed the PSAT math part. So yeah, I was, you know, I was authorized to say that. I don't think I said it in any boastful way, but I admitted—I didn't do like, "Oh, sir, I don't know." But no, I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "How smart? You make all A's?" Had that interrogation at me. I said, "Yes, sir." And then I remembered,

no, I didn't actually make all A's, because in the first semester, back at Hall High School in the first grading period in honors math with Miss White, I made a B. It counted as an A, but it was actually a B. I said, "Oh, no, sir. I mean, I made a B, but it counts as an A, and because it blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

[Laughs] He watched me up there. He's like, "Boy, you not old enough, you not big enough, you're not smart enough to go to West Point." He said, "You wanna do this next year, you come back and see me again. That's all." So.

BS: Now, explain to the people watching this how you have to be nominated by a senator or a congressman.

[01:36:42] WC: Oh, you had to be nom—yeah. You had to get—to get in you had to have your congressman or senator give you a nomination. Each senator had one, and then he had three alternate positions. So with Senator Fulbright, they were all filled. Normally these things went to people who knew the senator, who were political contributors, who were, you know, important families, farm families, people who, you know, had prestige in their community. My family had nothing. But . . .

BS: Is it different now?

WC: Yes it is. Because in most cases, in at least half the cases, they leave it up to the Academy to pick. The Academy has a ranking

system called—used to be called the whole man's corps. Now, because there are women there, they don't call it the whole man's corps, but it was a formula. It was like 40 percent of it is your high school standing in class, and 20 percent is your test scores, and 30 percent is your sports and whether you're a captain or not or a letter person, and 10 percent's other activities, leadership and stuff. And anyway, so yeah, you had to get someone's approval or appointment. So Fulbright obviously had parceled all his out. So McClellan may have had something, but you know, maybe he didn't, I don't know.

[01:38:01] So my dad knew someone who knew Dale Alford, who was the new congressman from Little Rock. Well, it so happened that Dale Alford's son had gone to Pulaski Heights, was a year ahead of me. So I knew who Dale Alford was because he had the same name as his father, and his father was an eye doctor. And he had been elected as a segregationist after the 1957 school crisis. He said, "I'm not agreeing with Brooks Hayes," who was a liberal from Little Rock. "No way." He said, "Keep 'em out." You know, no—you know, "They don't belong," whatever, whatever. He was a segregationist. I mean, so we wrote to—I wrote to Dale Alford, and Dale Alford, through this man that my dad knew—I think his name was Hagel Boyd,

but I can't remember for sure. But anyway, he came back and told my dad, "Congressman's got so many people interested in this, he doesn't know what to do, and so he's just gonna let everybody take a civil service exam, and whoever gets the highest score gets the appointment." [01:39:09] So in December I went down to the Federal office building down there on Capitol Street, and sat down and took a three- or four-hour civil service exam. And I made the fourth-highest score in the nation, they told me, and the highest score in that group in Arkansas. I got my appointment that way.

BS: Would you like to take a break for a bit and come back?

WC: Sorry.

BS: Would you like to take a break?

WC: Yeah, let's take a break.

BS: Okay. Let's take a break.

[Recording stopped]

[01:39:34] WC: You know, my uncle who lived next door to me was in the marines at Okinawa. And when I was six years old, there was a young man who lived on the other side of them. And he came home from the Korean War. And my grandmother said, "You can't talk to him. He just keeps talking about, 'They just keep coming over the hill, they just keep coming over the hill,

they just keep coming over the hill.' And he's got some kind of a mental problem." And up the street beyond him, there was the Mayar's family, and Mayar had some great model tanks, but his father was in the military, and he was in Korea or somewhere in the Far East. And everywhere you turned, people had fathers who'd served in World War II, and it was a time of tremendous interest in national security. [01:40:21] On television Walter Cronkite's series *Air Power* was there, and we watched it every week when it came on. It was a highlight. Thirty minutes on American air power in 1954. Joe's Hobby Shop had model airplanes, and you drooled over those model airplanes. There were Strombecker's wooden airplanes, and you sanded 'em and polished 'em. And there was a MiG, and there was a F-86. And in the neighborhood we played guns, and we played army, and we played little army. [01:40:59] My first purchase—I took a nickel, and I walked a mile from my house up to the variety store on a street—ran away from home to buy a rubber, plastic army man. And I remember looking in—they had 'em in a bin, and these little—all these army men about this big. And it cost a nickel. And this guy was a prone machine gunner. And I picked that machine gunner out. He's prone, he had his feet spread. So he laid flat. He had a gun. And I put that thing up on the

counter at the Hillcrest Variety Store. And I put my nickel up there. And that woman—[laughs] she took the nickel, and she gave me—and I walked a mile back home. I was gone maybe an hour. And Grandmother had lost track of me. Says, "Where have you been?" I said, "You know, I got my—that's my first army man." And you know, we dug 'em in in the yard, and we played. And we played Civil War. I was usually the Yankees, and we usually lost because the Confederates—there were more Confederates than there were—I was the one with the Yankee accent and—Chicago accent and so forth. And then we—you know, sometimes we played World War II. And it was an atmosphere in which kids were really sensitive to the country. And it was a patriotic time. You know, if you went back and looked at the data, 50 percent of the Princeton class of 1954 went into the military. [Laughs] That would never happen today. The military's the furthest thing from most young people's minds, but for us, it was present. [01:42:35] And by the way, you know what? During the 1950s every freshman at the University of Arkansas—every fresh man—was in ROTC. For two years. It was a land-grant college. Absolute compulsory program. Got a uniform, did marksmanship training, learned how to march, salute. You didn't have to stay in it past the two

years, but you had two years that was mandatory. And so you knew there was a draft, and people would get drafted. And there were civil defense drills, and you knew the Russians had an A-bomb. Then they had—then we had an H-bomb, and then the Russians got an H-bomb. There was talk of preemptive war. And there was, of course, the Korean war. My first memory of the Korean war was when they talked about MiG Alley. And I couldn't understand what a—I knew a MiG. I said it was a NiG, but they said, "No, no, it's a MiG." So I guess I had a hearing defect even then. And why is an airplane in an alley? I knew what an alley was, but I didn't understand the concept of MiG Alley. And that was the Korean war. [01:43:47] So all through the 1950s—it wasn't just Sputnik, it was the whole time. National security then was to—at least to me and those of us on the street. I had a picture of my father in uniform also, as a naval officer. And my mother gave me a book on Annapolis because I kept drooling over my father's picture in a naval uniform. And all through that period, it was maybe the way it is today with Star Wars or the Kardashians or something. It was about the country. And I think that's important that people understand that about this state and its history. We contribute far more than our per capita to the military.

BS: Always have. Yeah.

WC: Yep.

[01:44:43] BS: I'm reading Rick Atkinson's *The Long Gray Line: The American Journey*, and you were part of the 1966 class . . .

WC: Yeah.

BS: . . .which was probably one of the most distinguished class . . .

WC: Well, I ducked Rick Atkinson's book.

BS: Did you?

[01:44:58] WC: He came to interview me, and I just didn't wanna talk to him . . .

BS: Oh.

WC: . . . because—I think I showed you out there this article that was about me the year before in the *Washington Post Magazine*. That article came out—I didn't know any better. A guy named Jim Woolsey, who later became CIA director, was a Rhodes Scholar three years ahead of me, called me in the fall of 1980. I was a battalion commander at Fort Carson. And times were grim. I mean, the budget was cut, we were having trouble, and I'd been a battalion commander for about eight months at that point. And the battalion was doing well, I thought. But it was clear, you know, the—things were—there was trouble. And we'd had the failed Iran hostage rescue effort. Jim Woolsey called me

and said, "Reagan's gonna come in, and he's gonna fix things," he said. "But meanwhile, I've got this guy—the *Washington Post* wants to do an article on six battalion commanders and show the talent that's in the armed forces today ten years after Vietnam," or eight years after Vietnam. "And you know, who do you think we should pick?" And I gave him the names of the people I knew, guys like Barry McCaffrey and others. And so he said fine.

[01:46:13] A couple of months later they said, "Well, they decided to start with you, and this guy's gonna be out to see you." It was January of 1981. And temperature was like this. It was like thirty-five degrees in the day, ten degrees at night. At Fort Carson we were [*laughs*] running out of fuel because of the budget cut. Nobody was reenlisting because we had misnormed the re-enlistments. It was a real stressful time. And I had created for the battalion an exercise called Black Hawk Blizzard that would teach us to fight cold weather. I thought that it might be the case that the Army would have to fight again heavy forces in Europe in the wintertime, like what's about to happen in Ukraine. So I took us out for two weeks in January, and [*laughs*] this reporter came along, and he writes up the story. And so I didn't think anything of it. He wasn't a—he didn't stay with me. Basically, he was there for a day, and it

was too cold, and he was too miserable. And he went out to Colorado Springs. He came back for a few hours to finish up the interview, and you know, six weeks later he says, "I've got enough. You know, I think I got enough to do a whole—I don't have to do anybody else." It was too unpleasant. And so—he said, "Is it okay? I said, "Yeah, it's okay." I mean, you know, I wasn't unhappy that I was gonna be in the *Washington Post*. I didn't know any better. No one told me that you should remain anonymous. I mean, after all, General George Patton was a famous Army captain, and he developed the Army saber, and he fought in the—he did horse drills and saber drill in the Olympics in 1912, George Patton. And Douglas MacArthur's mother went to West Point with him and lived there [*BS laughs*] and made sure—and you know, these guys had li—nobody told me, "Be anonymous." Should've. [01:48:13] So anyway, this article came out, and I got a call. I didn't know where it was coming—I got a call one Sunday morning in May, I think it was. And guy said, "Well, it could've been worse. It's not too bad. It could've been worse." Like, what? I mean, you know, it was like they called to pay respects as the body was being lowered into the grave. [*BS laughs*] And for years afterwards and throughout the rest of my Army career, there were people who had read

that article who were jealous. [*Laughs*] I mean, it's—you read the article, you'd be jealous. And the Army's that kind of a place. There's a lot of envy. It's—you know, people look at the Army from the outside. They don't know it as an institution. It's—anytime you have an institution like that, there's people struggling to climb over you. That's what it is.

BS: I read someplace—I don't know if it was in Europe . . .

WC: So when Rick Atkins . . .

BS: Yeah.

[01:49:12] WC: Anyway, when Rick Atkinson came and wanted war stories, I'm like, God. I mean, [*laughs*] practically—I mean the division commander, who was my senior raider, already didn't like it 'cause I gave a speech in downtown Colorado Springs on foreign policy, and I was a lieutenant colonel. Well, I'd worked for Al Haig in Europe. I knew NATO. This guy didn't know anything about that. But it made him jealous. They said, "Don't be doing that anymore, General Hudachek doesn't like it." "Okay, okay, you know, I'm not gonna do anything to offend him." I didn't—I thought you were supposed to be all you could be. I thought it was the Pete Dawkins model. I thought you were supposed to be the all-around person. I thought you were supposed to—the ideal American was supposed to accept

opportunity. I didn't realize you were supposed to put a bushel basket over your head and pretend to be just a good ol' boy.

"No, I don't know too much. I'm from Arkansas. I just, you know, I pick my teeth and, you know, scratch my toes. And you know, no, I don't—we usually wear shoes down here."

[*BS laughs*] You know, they—I wasn't brought up that way. I went with a great group of people that I grew up with in Arkansas, the kids in the neighborhood, the people on the swimming team, Jimmy Miller, my coach, Hall High School. I mean, no, you were supposed to be what you could be. And suddenly the profession turned on me. Wham. [01:50:34] And so I spent the next nineteen years in the profession. Guys would come up to me and say—at first, you know, they'd say, "Haven't I—haven't—haven't I seen you before?" Say, "No." [*Laughs*] They'd read about me and seen my picture. And then a guy would say, "I heard about you." Or a guy would say, "I was on the promotion board. I've never heard anybody talked about so much as you have—as they talked about you." And I kept getting great, great ratings from my bosses. But it's what Eisenhower said—he's quoted in the book *The Nightingale's Song*. He gives a diploma to the guy who graduated top in the class of [19]58, a man named John Pointdexter, and said, "I

hope this won't hurt you too much." [BS laughs] Ike knew. Ike was smart. Ike grew up with brothers. Ike knew. Be a good ol' boy. Play cards. Even Ike got in trouble. At one point they told Ike, "You gotta quit taking money from everybody. You've taken money from every officer on this post playing poker. Stop it." And but Ike knew that—he was smart, but he somehow, maybe because he didn't go to World War I, avoided all that jealousy until Marshall took him and moved him up. But anyway, there's a lot of jealousy in the institution, and I was one of the stars. So I'm not in that book very much for, you know, good reason. But my classmate from Arkansas, George Crocker, is in it. And George should be interviewed by you.

BS: Okay.

[01:52:22] WC: George is a wonderful man. He had an incredible Army career. He went to West Point with me. He saw more action—he was in—he was at death's door more time than anybody else I know of and somehow survived. And great guy. He needs to tell his story.

BS: Let me get his name and contact information before you leave.

WC: Yeah.

[01:52:42] BS: Well, let's change gears and talk about Gertrude Kingston.

WC: Talk about what?

BS: Your wife. Gert.

WC: Oh, my wife.

BS: You married in June of 1967 in your second year at Oxford. I understand you met at a USO dance in 1964 when you made a trip to New York City. She was from a large Irish Catholic family living in Brooklyn, and you were an only child and a Southern Baptist living in Little Rock, Arkansas. Tell me a little about the courtship. And I'd like to know what it was like to meet her father for the first time, her mother for the first time.

[01:53:23] WC: They just knew I was from Arkansas, and they're like, "Arkansas? Where's Arkansas?" There's—at the time, there was a wonderful cartoon in the *New Yorker*. It said, "The New Yorker's view of the world." Shows Manhattan, shows Jersey, then down here is Florida, and then over there is California, that's it. The rest of it matters not. [01:53:44] And so my wife had—she graduated from St. Michael's Academy in 1961, and she played on the basketball team. And she went to night school at Brooklyn College. She had to work. There wasn't any money in that family to put her to school. Her father worked for Catholic Relief Services. And he had—and there were six of them. She was the second child. And so they paid for her

sister's nursing school, and that was it. After that, they had to pay a little money for parochial school, and she commuted to St. Michael's on the subway back and forth to Manhattan. And she was a, you know, fun-loving, bright, sparkly date. And when I first met her at the dance—she walked in, and I saw her, and she had the same hair coloring as my cousin Mary. And I thought, "Ah, I'll go right up, and I'll meet her." [01:54:39]

And so my roommate was a guy named John McNight at West Point. And John was on the swimming team with me. He was a diver. But John was also perpetually in academic troubles. So I—they put me to room with John because I was first in the class, and he was next to last in the class in math and science and stuff. And he came from a military family. I think he was a year or two older than me. And John was about, you know, six, six one, and he weighed maybe 185. And he was on the—he fought also on the brigade boxing championship. And so he was an athlete and came from a good family, strong family. And James Bond movies had just come out. *From Russia with Love*. And John—one morning in the room, he's looking at himself in the mirror, and he's putting on his Aqua Velva [*slaps face*]. And he's saying, "Don't you think I look like James Bond, like Sean Connery? Don't you think I look like that?" I said, "Yeah, John,

you look exactly like Sean Connery." And so John was the man of the world. I was just a kid from Arkansas who didn't drink or anything, you know. And so he figured out for Armed Forces Day weekend we could go to this dance in New York City. And so we did our march down Fifth Avenue, we got to the buses down on, I don't know, 20th Street or something like that. Big circle of buses over on the west side. You had your bag that had your civilian clothes in it, take off your uniform, turn in your rifle, get your bag, change into civilian clothes and head off for seven hours in New York City. [01:56:20] So we hit the Commodore Hotel. And so we're at this dance. It's really hot. The air conditioning wasn't working. It's ninety-five degrees that day in New York City. And people are having these tall drinks. And I asked John—I said, "John, I want one of those drinks. It's like lemonade, and it's got like a cherry and a lemon or orange or something in it." I said, "How do I get that?" Ice and everything. He said, "Oh, just ask for a Manhattan." So I go over and said, "I'd like a Manhattan." Bartender gives me this little short glass, dark liquor, no ice. And about that time, I see this beautiful young woman walk in. I go over to her and put on my best West Point smile. And I say, "Well, hey, it's very nice to see you, and I'm Wes Clark, and hey, can I buy you a drink?"

She said, "Well, yeah, but what's the matter with your drink?"
Said—'cause it was filled up to the brim, you know. I said,
"Well, I asked for Manhattan, and they gave me this." She said,
"That is a Manhattan." [BS laughs] So I made a bad start. And
I asked her—we talked for a while, and we danced a couple of
dances. And then she said she was leaving. I said, "Well, come
up next weekend, and we've got the swimming team picnic at
West Point, and come up and, you know, be my date." She said,
"I'll think about it." And so she gave me her number, and I
called her. And so she came up. [01:57:51] And so then I had
to go to Europe, and I was gone all summer. And when I came
back, I took her—I met her a couple of times. We went to a
couple of football games. I broke my ankle running—stepping
on a rock that twisted my ankle. I was in a cast up to here. She
probably thought I was a complete doofus, clumsy, Arkansas—
I'd been over to the house. I'd met the father and the family.
And they're like, "Oh, he talks funny, and you know, everything
about him—he's not like—you know, her sister married this great
Irish Catholic guy who was from—went to Fordham and ran on
the track team. And here's this weird guy from Arkansas, and
what does she see in him?" So the relationship foundered a little
bit. We dated throughout the spring. But then there was some

British cadets who were exchange students. And somehow she wound up—someone at West Point connected her to these British cadets. And you know, if you're Irish and you've got somebody with the right British accent, man, that's pretty appealing. So I didn't see her for a while. [01:58:59] And then that fall, my senior year, I won a Rhodes Scholarship, and my name came out in the *New York Times*. And she called me. She congratulated me. I guess her father said, "Well, that dumb guy [*BS laughs*] from Arkansas is not that dumb. He won a Rhodes Scholarship." So then we began to date again. And then I came back after the first six months at Oxford. Bought an engagement ring. We became engaged and got married after our first year. I couldn't marry the first year. Fifty percent of my West Point class married within sixty days after graduation. [*Phone notification*] That's exactly how it was done.

[Recording stopped]

[01:59:39] BS: Hearing aids must be . . .

WC: Oh, it's so wonderful.

BS: Well, I have a pair, and it does that, I just don't wear them very often.

WC: Oh. Are you not wearing your hearing aids?

BS: Well, I forgot.

WC: Well, you're in good shape. [*BS laughs*] I would forget mine too, if I could.

BS: We're almost done. I just have a couple more questions.

WC: Did I answer it?

BS: Oh, yes, you did. Well, did you ask for her hand?

WC: Oh yeah.

BS: Officially?

[02:00:07] WC: Yeah. I went to her father—that Christmas I came back from Oxford and was actually staying at her house, and they put me up. And I think that's where I was staying. I can't remember for sure. But anyway, I said, "Well, sir, I'd like to marry your daughter." He said, "Huh. Can you handle her?" [*BS laughs*] I said, "Yes, sir."

BS: That was it.

WC: That was it.

BS: Yeah, well . . .

WC: But he knew how tough she is.

BS: Yeah.

WC: Boy, she's strong. She's smart. She's been . . .

BS: Well, I've seen her in Arkansas Values, yeah.

WC: . . . such a great partner for me in life.

BS: Yeah. Yeah.

WC: She has kept me out of so much trouble.

BS: You are—we're both very—we're both blessed with wonderful spouses.

WC: Yeah.

[02:00:57] BS: Just one or two more questions. I know you didn't learn that you—your father was Jewish until you were twenty-three, second year at Oxford. Can you talk about that and the motivations that your mom had?

[02:01:08] WC: Yeah, I often—when we came down to Arkansas, I would often ask—I'd see the picture of my father—weren't many pictures. There was a picture of him in uniform. And so I'd ask, "What about my father?" And she would say, "Well, I don't know much," she said, "I think they came from Austria or something." Once a year she would—when I was six, after the first grade, the summer of 1951, we had a—we bought a car and—so she could drive back to Chicago. So we drove to Chicago. We saw Grandma Kanne. And so I remembered the apartment and everything from the two years before. It'd been—we'd been gone two years. And Grandma Kanne had a piano, and she had a candy dish, and she had big salamis hanging in a closet. And the backyard was concrete in this two-story apartment. And there was an 'L' out there that made a lot of noise. And we went

to Marshall Field's department store, and I got a cowboy set. And one of my aunts, Aunt Cille, gave us a box of fruit for the drive back. And we drove back. Took two days. Stayed in St. Louis overnight. I never knew they were Jewish. No one ever said it. And my mother refused to sort of talk about it. Once a year, she wrote one of my father's sisters and gave her an update on me. And she asked the family not to contact me. And so when I got to Oxford—and of course they knew. She told them I was at Oxford and I'd done well. And my father was the sort of leader of that family. He was a very smart guy, apparently, and graduated top of the class in his law school. [02:03:13] And so they wanted to meet me. And so that was 1967, 1968. Israel had conquered Jerusalem, so they had access to the Wailing Wall. And so I had two sets of cousins who did around-the-world tours and came through England on the way back from Jerusalem. And so they contacted me with my mother's permission. That's when I learned I was Jewish. I went back and asked my mother that summer. I said, "Mom, you didn't tell me." I'd been married a year by that time. I said, "You never told me." She started crying. She said, "Well," she said, "you came down here, you were a little boy, you didn't have a father, you had a speech defect and a bad accent. You

just didn't need one more problem." That's the way she saw it.
She did it for love.

[02:04:11] BS: Yep. Last question or maybe second-to-last question. In 2000 you retired from the Army after thirty-four years, a distinguished career. And you returned to Little Rock. And in your autobiography, you wrote that family and friends helped you reconnect to Arkansas. So you mentioned the Steenburgens, Mary and Nancy, and their late mother, Nellie May. Can you tell us about that process? I mean, you originally moved to Arlington, Virginia, and you eventually opened your own consulting business. Arlington, Virginia, would've been closer to the center of power.

WC: So what happened was—so when I was told I was gonna retire, I had no idea what to do. So Richard Holbrooke came by, and he said, "Well, now I'm UN ambassador, you have to give me a dinner party." [*Phone rings*] Oh. Just—I got to take this.

[Recording stopped]

[02:05:11] WC: So anyway, I had met—went to the White House for a White House Fellows Commission meeting in the fall of [19]93. And then Bill Clinton said, "Come upstairs and have dinner with me." And at the dinner was Mary Steenburgen and her mother. Her mother worked side by side with my mother in the

Commercial National Bank. Mary's nine years younger than me, but her mother had heard my mother brag about me all that time. And so it was like amazing. [*Laughs*] There we were with the Clintons at the dining table, and there's this woman who worked with my mother, and of course my mother was deceased by that time for almost for seven years, and I missed her and everything. And it was like, boom, a connection with home.

[02:06:09] And then when I became NATO commander, I thought—I looked at the City of Mons, Belgium, and I remembered—Little Rock, Arkansas—I mean, we used to have an Arkansas Industrial Development Commission. Rockefeller put that together. And I hadn't been back to Arkansas much, but I thought, "I wonder—you know, maybe there's something here you people in Mons can learn from our efforts in Arkansas." So I connected on the city—Sister Cities program. So there was a delegation that went back and forth. I came back to Little Rock and became acquainted with the city and made a speech. Then when I got out—also when I was in Belgium, there was a man named Vernon Weaver who had worked for Jack Stephens. And Vernon said, "Well, you gotta come back and work for"—Vernon and Jack were both classmates of Jimmy Carter. They were big Democrats and—at least Vernon was. And he said,

"You gotta come back and work for Jack in Little Rock. They need someone your age. And work on the twenty-fifth floor and learn private equity." [02:07:08] So when I got told that I was gonna retire, I didn't know what to do. Holbrooke came by and said, "You gotta give me a dinner party, and anyway, what are you gonna do?" I said, "Well, I don't know. I just"—you know, Omar Bradley became the chairman of Bulova Watch Corporation. I didn't—I never thought about what I'd do. He said, "Well," he said, "where are you gonna live?" I—he said, "You got relatives in Miami, Denver, Los Angeles. You could go back to Arkansas, you could live in DC, you could go to New York. What do you think?" I knew Richard Holbrooke. And just to get his goat, I said, "Why, I think I'm gonna do New York." He said—course, that's where he lived.

BS: Yeah.

[02:07:57] WC: He said, "New York?" He said, "You can't. You can't do that." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because it takes money, and you don't have any." We'd done a lot of teasing of Richard Holbrooke because he'd made money as an investment banker. And his wife had said, when they got married and he went back to the Bosnia talks, she said, "Richard's worth—he sho—he's worth like \$10,000 a day," or something like that—\$30,000 a

day. And Holbrooke tried to laugh it off. Said, "Well, if I ever make that much, I'll give you some of it, blah, blah, blah." So I—he said, "Well, what would you do in New York?" I said, "I guess I'd be an investment banker," knowing that he was an investment banker. So he said, "Well, that's not what you're gonna do." He said, "You're gonna give speeches and write a book, and I'm gonna give you my speaking agent and my book agent, the best book agent in New York." [02:08:52] So meanwhile, I talked to Dick Cheney. I talked to Pete Dawkins. And Pete said, "Oh, you gotta see my friends at Heidrick & Struggles or so and so." And Dick Cheney said, "Just get out of Washington." So I did interviews. And a guy who was another head hunter said, "You should be an investment banker. You like technology, you like moving things, you got a quick mind. It'd be good for you." So he got me interviews at Merrill and Goldman. Goldman said, "Come work with us," but they wanted me in London. So I couldn't do it. It was too hard. And so Vernon Weaver said, "No, you're going to Arkansas." So I met Doug Martin. I came down for an interview and—or went up there for an interview. And so it was arranged that I was gonna be given a year or so in DC to finish a book and then come to Arkansas. And I was pretty excited about it because when I was

a White House fellow, I worked for a guy named James T. Lynn, who was a former housing secretary, and then he became the director of OMB. He's a big Republican from Ohio. And after the Coatesville campaign, Lynn called me. He said, "You got a 4 percent chance of getting the top job." I said, "The top job. What are you talking about, sir?" He said, "I'm talking about the White House." Like, what? And so he sort of put the bug in me that I possibly could run for office. [02:10:41] When I got out of the military, I wanted to see Bill Clinton. And so I went to see him, and he said, "Well, you're young enough, you could go into politics. You've got plenty of time." So I immediately was given an opportunity to run against Hillary in New York. I went to see Dick Parsons, who was a chairman of AOL at the time or Time Warner. And I was sent to see him to see if he—to get a board position or do something. And he said, "Well, do you know my friend, Steve Friedman?" I said, "No, I don't know him." He says, "Have lunch with Steve." Steve said, "Would you ever consider politics?" I said, "Well, I mean, yeah, I'd consider." He says, "How about mayor?" I said, "No, not mayor." "Congress?" I said, "Maybe." "Senate?" I said, "Senator sounds really wonderful." He said, "Well, how do you feel about abortion?" I said, "Well, I'm against it. But"—"Stop, stop." He said, "I'll

clear it with Pataki's people, and you know, you'll be able to run against Hillary. We'll get you the endorsement of the conservative group here in Republican—in the Republicans. We're looking for a candidate." I called Gert, and I said, "They want me to run against Hillary." And I said to Steve, I said, "Look, she's my friend. I've known her for like twenty years. I'm not—I can't run against"—he says, "Come on now, General." He says, "Politics—you always run against your friends. How do you think Pataki became governor?" I call Gert, and [*laughs*] she said, "Are you crazy?" I said, "Yeah, I know it is crazy." Said, "Don't even consider." I said, "You're right, I'm not considering it, but I just thought it was so crazy I would tell you." [02:12:27] I came down to Arkansas and immediately, you know, I was given opportunities. People would say, "You must be going to run." Tim Hutchinson said, "You're running against me?" I said, "No. I hadn't even thought about it. [*Laughs*] Why would I? No, I haven't thought about it." I'm still in uniform. I mean, I guess that's the way it is in politics. They, you know, they wanna put you on the spot. "Hey, you gonna run against me?" I got into Stephens, and Mike Huckabee called Stephens and said, "How many people you got over there running against me for governor?" There was Steve Stephens

who'd said he was gonna run, and there was me. "Me, run for governor? I—what?" But I said I would—you know, "Okay." I said, "I'll do a fundraiser." I did a fundraiser for the Republicans. So then I called the Democrats. I said, "I did a fundraiser for the Republicans. Would you want me to do a fundraiser for you?" Said, "No, no, we don't need any money. We're fine. We don't need you." I said, "Okay, that's fine." And then 9/11 happened, and I was on TV every day. And so people had a lot of confidence in what I said, and they wanted me to run. [02:13:41] So the Democrats came back and said, "You can have the governor's nomination to run against Huckabee." I said, "They wanna give me the governor's nomination." My wife said, "Okay. That's really good, you know. But, well," said, "who's gonna pay for the house? Governor makes \$60,000 a year. Who's gonna do these house payments?" Huh. I said, "You're right. There's no money. I can't—I mean, I just—I can't do it." I talked to Mark Warner, the senator. I said, "How should I think about politics?" He said, "Think about it like this." He said, "First of all, it's not for everybody." He said, "Yeah, there—sometimes there's family consideration, sometimes there's business considerations, sometimes you just can't afford to do it, so not everybody can do it," he said. And then he said,

"And think about it this way, if you're the kind of person that can't stand to lose, don't do it, because the odds are you go into politics, you're gonna lose." He said, "Normally the incumbent wins. And normally there's multiple challenges." He said, "And finally," he said, "think about politics this way. If you get into it, you can—the downside losses are unlimited. You lose your—the race, your friends, your money, your reputation, your business. It's unlimited downsides." He said, "My recommendation to you is if you can avoid it, don't do it." [02:15:15] Like every politician, there was a little bit of self-serving comment in there. Because Mark Warner knew what I was. He knew, you know, what I could do. And so it was a way of sort of giving me an honest answer, but also, you know, keeping the field open for himself. But I took the answer, and I thought about it a lot. And so I made the decision then after a lot of prayer and a lot of consideration, a lot of counseling at home, to go into that race in 2003.

BS: Yeah. And we're gonna explore that tomorrow.

WC: It was an amazing experience.

BS: Yeah.

WC: I loved it.

BS: Yeah. Well, John is gonna be the interviewer tomorrow. He's

the political scientist and . . .

WC: Okay, now, Bill, we need to stop here.

BS: I know. That's why I closed my folder.

[End of interview 02:16:05]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]