

William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Interview with

MacDowell “Mac” and Mary Nell Turner
Hope, Arkansas
15 August 2002

Interviewer: Michael Pierce

Michael Pierce: This is Michael Pierce with the Clinton History Project. I'm in Hope, Arkansas. It is August 15, 2002. I'm interviewing Mac and Mary Nell Turner. I'm here as part of the Clinton History Project. I wanted to start off by asking both of you when and where you were born.

Mary Nell Turner: I'll let you start.

Mac Turner: I was born in a little community south of here called Spring Hill. That's about seven miles south.

MP: What year?

MT: 1918.

MP: What was Spring Hill like?

MT: At one time, it was a very busy little place. My grandparents lived down there, and my grandfather had a store—general merchandise—and had a cotton gin. It was a very busy little place, but in later years, Hope grew, and Spring Hill shrank.

MP: Is there anything there now?

MT: Yes, there is. It's still a nice little community, but it's not as large. It doesn't have the population now that it had at one time.

MP: In 1918, how many people lived there? Do you have any idea?

MT: I have no idea.

Mary Nell Turner: But it was mostly surrounded by small farms. I would call it an agricultural center at that time.

MT: Yes. A lot of the people—when they'd come into Spring Hill for one reason or other—there were a lot of people there, but scattered out. They lived on farms.

MP: Do you remember when the cotton gin was operating?

MT: Yes.

MP: What would a day be like when farmers would bring their cotton to the gin?

MT Well, as I remember it, it was very interesting because sometimes a farmer would bring his cotton to the gin, and his wagon that he had it loaded on would be pulled by oxen. You know, that was a long time ago. The gin, to me, was always an interesting place, but it was noisy. I was a little bit afraid of it [laughs]—to go inside. But, as I said, my grandfather owned the gin and my daddy worked in the gin for a while.

MNT: You'd go inside. Tell him about that.

MT: What?

MNT: You'd get in that cotton.

MT: Get in the cotton in the gin?

MNT: Isn't that what you did?

MT: No. Cotton came out—after the cotton ran through the gin. It would take all the seed out and [it was] just pure cotton, then, and dropped it into the wagon below. And I loved to get in the wagon with the soft cotton. I loved the smell of it.

MP: You might not know this. Did your grandfather charge a cash rate to gin, or did

he take a percentage of the cotton?

MT: I don't remember that. It could have worked both ways. But, no, I don't . . .

MNT: I think it was a percentage. I think that was the rule, but I don't know for sure.

That's an interesting point.

MP: What was sold at the general merchandise store?

MT: They had groceries and dry goods and clothing.

MP: Hardware?

MT: Hardware.

MNT: Candy.

MT: What?

MNT: Candy.

MT: Oh, yes, candy.

MP: Again, you might have been too young to remember this—did most of the people buy with cash or on credit?

MT: He did a lot of credit business. In fact, he lost a lot of money that way, but most of the people would have a charge account. Either at the end of the month or the end of the growing season when their crops were sold, they'd come in and pay it off. Most of them were good about it.

MP: The farmers in the area—did they own their own land, or did they rent? Do you know?

MT: Both. But, mostly at that time, they owned the land. Later on, you know, there was a lot of what they called sharecropping going on, but at the time we're talking about, most of the farmers owned their land.

MNT: His great-grandfather came here from north Louisiana and bought 150 acres for—
what was it? Twenty-five cents an acre? \$25 an acre? It was very [].

MP: Yes.

MNT: 1856 is when there was a great influx of farm people coming into this area.

MP: Do you know why they came?

MNT: June planting.

MP: And what about 1856?

MNT: Oh, I don't know, unless there may have been something [a recession?] about that
time. I think there was.

MP: Yes, there was.

MNT: Oh, you know that. Okay. I know that his other great-grandfather was losing
money over in Alabama. For one thing, they didn't have fertilizer, and their land
was used up. That was over in Limestone County, and they came over at about
that same time. So I think this was fresh land, partly.

MP: That makes sense.

MNT: Yes.

MP: Getting back to Spring Hill—was it a white town or a mix-raced community?

MT: There were blacks who lived out in that—I don't remember any blacks living in
Spring Hill.

MP: Yes.

MNT: And they don't to this day.

MT: But a lot lived out and worked on the farms. Some of them owned land, but not a
great number.

MP: So it was mostly a white community?

MT: Mostly white.

MNT: The trouble is—I wrote a history of Spring Hill.

MP: Oh, okay. [Laughter]

MT: You're asking the wrong person.

MP: I'm asking the wrong person.

MNT: No, he grew up there. I don't know it from that point of view.

MP: When were you born, and where did you grow up?

MNT: I grew up in Hope. I was born at 802 South Elm at about noon on August 5, 1919—at home. [Laughter]

MP: Who were your parents and what did they do?

MNT: My dad worked in the post office until his retirement when he was, what, seventy-two?

MT: Seventy. He had to retire at seventy.

MNT: Seventy. Okay. He worked in the post office, and my mother was a housewife.

MT: Oh, what was her . . . ?

MNT: Carter was her maiden name.

MP: Okay.

MNT: They were from southern Illinois—my dad was. They came from Franklin County, Indiana. My roots are all up there. Mother's family came down here in 1905 after they had been to the World's Fair in St. Louis [Missouri] in 1904 and read a brochure about Hope—that you could grow fruit trees here. So, her folks came down to grow fruit trees.

MP: Where were they from?

MNT: [Brawls?] County.

MP: What was it like growing up in Hope?

MNT: He had a lot more fun than I had, I guarantee. He needs to tell you about that.

My life was very simple. My dad was thirty-nine when he married—forty when I was born. [He was an] old bachelor, because his parents lived there. Mother was pretty much an old maid. She was about twenty-seven, so they were kind of older parents. Do you know what I mean?

MP: Yes.

MNT: More restrictive. We did go—my grandparents lived out that way, over at Rocky Mound—my mother's folks. We went out there very often. We roamed the woods, and my sister and I had a wonderful childhood going out there. We roller skated, walked to school—you know, all those things you've heard about. Let him tell you about his childhood.

MP: What about your childhood?

MT: I had a good time. [Laughter] I don't know. What would you be interested in?

MNT: You roamed the woods.

MT: I grew up in a—my mother and daddy were wonderful people. I had a brother. One brother. We moved to Hope when I was six years old. I started to school in Hope, and, really, that's the reason we moved to Hope, to get my brother and me to public school here in Hope. I grew up just like kids that age in that time period. We laugh about it a lot. I remember very well that my father—not too long before he died, all the family got together, and we were having a good time. And

he said, "We never have had much money, but we've had a good time," and that was it. I wouldn't ask for a better home life than I had.

MP: What was that? What would a typical summer day be like when you were five?

MT: What was a summer like?

MP: Well, the typical day.

MNT: That's when you were all out on the farm.

MT: Well, on the farm—I don't remember a whole lot. We moved from Spring Hill to north of Hope near a little community, [Deanne?], and my father farmed. I remember a few things about while I was living there, but . . .

MNT: Tell him about your horse.

MT: I was riding a horse almost by the time I was walking. I had a horse and my brother had a horse. We laughed about it a lot, but my father, every summer, would bale hay. He'd have a crew hired. I don't remember how many, but I remember he had a crew working. My brother and I had the job of taking water to them a couple of times during the day. We'd ride our horses and take the water in gallon buckets hung over the saddle. My father always told us when we left with the water, he'd say, Now, don't run those horses." He was afraid we'd get hurt. "Don't run those horses going home." We'd say, "Yes, sir," and when we got out on the road back home, there was undergrowth—trees and so forth—that we thought hid us from where my father was working. And we'd start out making the horses lope, and what we didn't know was—we learned later on—we both had really blonde hair then, and he'd see our heads [laughs] passing through the trees and so forth. He knew we were running the horses. One fall he hired a man to

cook it—he raised ribbon cane and made—some people call it sugar syrup. We call it ribbon-cane syrup. I remember that very well—cooking the juice—they'd run a cane through a grinding machine. A horse would circle around that thing, and that horse circling kept the machine working, and they'd run these canes through that. It would squeeze the juice out, and the juice would run down into the [fetch?], and there the juice would be cooked into molasses—syrup. Oh, it was a wonderful smell. As my father said, "We never had a lot of money, but we had a good time," and we also had plenty to eat because [laughs] we raised it. He was also a wonderful shot with either a shotgun, rifle, or a pistol. He'd go out and kill a covey of quail. Mother would make a pan of hot biscuits. We had plenty of milk and butter. We'd have a wonderful meal—all of it from right there on the farm.

MP: You were six, then, when you moved to Hope?

MT: Yes.

MP: Were you happy about moving to Hope?

MT: No, I wasn't too happy. I hated it. Here I was, six years old—had always been raised, you might say, as a country boy. When we lived Spring Hill, we lived out a good piece from the main part of town. Moving to Hope [and] going to school where there were a lot of kids that I didn't know—no, I didn't like it. [Laughs] I'd rather be back on the farm.

MP: Can either of you talk about Hope? Do you remember Hope in the 1920s? What would a typical day in the 1920s be like in Hope?

MNT: Well, for one thing, the streets were not paved, and I remember, on one occasion

when I was young—must have been in the 1920s—my mother was visiting across the street. I decided I wanted to go over there, but I didn't realize they had oiled the street, and I can almost still feel my feet burning.

MT: They used the oil to keep the dust down.

MNT: But my life was dull when I look back. It really was. I played dolls . . . [Laughs]

MP: Did you go to the same elementary school?

MNT: No.

MP: Which elementary school did you go to?

MNT: I went to Garland. No, I didn't go to Garland. I went to Brentwood.

MP: What was that like?

MNT: Well, Brentwood was an old building—I've just been doing some research on it.

A Catholic group from Little Rock came down and built the building, and they used it for a day school. I heard there weren't enough people who supported the school. Eventually, they used the upper floors for a hospital. They finally quit using it, but by the time I started to school, they had sold it to the school district.

It was a two-story brick building. Boys went in on one side, and the girls used the other.

MP: Girls went in . . . ?

MNT: One door, boys went in the other. You lined up to go in.

MP: Okay.

MNT: You ever heard of that? Very strict.

MP: Were your classes co-ed[ucational]?

MNT: Oh, yes.

MP: How big was the school? Do you remember? How many people were in your class?

MNT: We had a full room. Do you remember how many were in your class?

MT: In where?

MNT: Thirty?

MT: That would be a good year.

MNT: We were all [], you know?

MT: Twenty-five to thirty.

MP: What sorts of games did you play?

MNT: Hopscotch.

MP: Hopscotch. Was that a good one?

MNT: To me, that was one of the best ones. And we played—what is it? You'd go out and [] for a house. We played house. [Laughs] That's all I think of.

MP: Which elementary school did you go to?

MT: I went to the [Oak?] school.

MP: Where was that?

MT: It was in the north part of Hope.

MNT: [Where the original?] school for Hope was, in the same block.

MT: Brentwood is in the eastern part of Hope. [Oak?] would be northern . . .

MNT: [] But you all played—what do you call it when you ride on each other's backs?

MT: Oh, we played a little of everything. We played some baseball, football . . .

MNT: Marbles.

MT: Yes, we played marbles.

MP: Movies came into their own in the 1920s.

MNT: Yes.

MP: Do you remember going to see movies?

MNT: I remember the first talking movie I went to.

MP: What was it?

MNT: I think it was—what was his name? I don't know, but I remember the first one. It was just really exciting.

MP: You must have been about ten or twelve at that time?

MNT: Along about that time because we had a kiddie club, and I could go for a nickel. I belonged to a kiddie club, so I went to a lot of movies. On Saturdays, they had [serial?] movies. []. We didn't even know each other.

MT: Well, I remember very well the first show that I went—the first movie that I had heard people talking about—moving picture shows. You know, pictures move. [Laughs] My mother took us to the theater, and I was looking all around. She said, "Sit down. The show is starting." So I started looking around for the moving pictures [laughter] and she had to turn me and say, "The picture's right here."

MP: Where was the movie theater?

MT: The one we went to, as well as I remember, was on Elm Street.

MNT: The Rialto? Queen?

MT: No, the Queen. [Laughs] That good, ol' Queen Theater. Later, we had another one over on Main Street.

MNT: Then there was one on Second—the big one.

MT: Well, that came later.

MNT: But tell him, just briefly, about your dad.

MT: [Laughs] Well, he's interested in—well, my father, when he was a youngster—a man hired him to help drive cattle from Hope, Arkansas, to Hot Springs. I don't know much about it except the man hired him to do that because he was like an Indian on a horse. He could ride, and he had to drive those cattle to Hot Springs. His older sister was married and living in Hot Springs, so, he spent two or three days with her before he made his trip back home. She sent him and her oldest child, who was a boy, to a movie there in Hot Springs. Of course, this boy was Daddy's nephew, but they were very close to the same age. They went to the movie, and it was a western movie with cowboys and Indians. You know how a horse would be running, and it looked like a—[laughs] that was the first movie my daddy had ever seen, and he yelled, "Look out!" And he ducked behind the seats. [Laughter] And his nephew fell down on the other side, and I don't think I ought to tell the rest. [Laughs]

MP: What's the rest of it?

MNT: Yes, go ahead and tell him, since you started it.

MT: Well, his nephew wet his pants. [Laughter] I shouldn't have put that on sound.

MNT: Oh, that's fine. Yes.

MP: A couple of Clinton biographies have talked about the issue of race in Hope—that Hope was [afraid of desegregation?] Can you talk about what the color line was like in the 1920s?

MNT: I'll be [writing?] more just a little bit later. I taught school when they integrated

MP: Oh!

MNT: I [] when you went to the farm with Grandpa [] But grandmother didn't like for them to even come to her house. She was a segregationist [to be sure?]. But I don't think anything else []. I really didn't realize that there was a difference until after her children were kind of small, and we had this black girl who would come on Saturdays and help me. She couldn't go to the library, and it—bang—it finally hit me. She was a really smart girl. But I'd go get her books, or she'd use some of our books. It was a revelation to me, this thing of integration. I was really not aware.

MP: Let me ask you this question. Growing up in the 1920s in Hope, you didn't notice ...?

MNT: I didn't. We had somebody who worked for us.

MP: Yes.

MNT: We loved her, and Mac [played with some of them?]. Didn't you play with black kids?

MT: Yes, when we lived on the farm, there at the end, my best friend was black. I played with him. There were no white kids anywhere near me, but it didn't make any difference. He was my friend. I remember his name. Gibson was his name. I don't remember his last name.

MP: Do you remember any [] in the 1920s or even in the 1930s—any racial incidents?

MNT: Yes, there was a hanging.

MP: Can you tell me about it?

MNT: I don't know a thing about it. I just know there was. Do you remember anything?

MT: I don't know. All I've ever heard about it and remember is that he was—I don't remember exactly whether he raped a white woman or what, but they hung him to a—I guess it was a light pole. . . .

[End Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning Tape 2 Side 1]

MP: This is Michael Pierce. I'm here in Hope, Arkansas, on August 15, 2002. I'm with Mac and Mary Nell Turner. This is tape two. We were talking about a rape in Hope in the 1920s. You said there was a hanging in Hope. Can you tell us about it?

MT: All I remember is that the hanging took place. It was near the water and light plant, wasn't it?

MNT: Near the center of the town by the depot.

MT: The man was hung from a light pole. That's the way I remember it, and I'm not sure about what he had done. It seems like he was accused of raping a white woman. Of course, we don't like to talk about it now because it was the wrong thing to do. But it did happen.

MNT: What about your dad protecting some black folks?

MP: Actually, before we get to that, do you remember what year that was?

MNT: It was in the 1920s. I found it searching through the *Star*. I know that one of my relatives' uncle had been there watching, and his mother scolded him because [he] wasn't supposed to be there. But that's all I know about it.

MP: So he was taken out of the Hempstead County jail by a mob?

MNT: We don't know. We were too young. I really don't know anything about it. I just heard about it.

MP: And you were talking about . . . ?

MNT: His dad was a policeman.

MT: Well, after we moved to Hope, the city hired my father as a policeman, and he worked for the next twenty years as a policeman. And what she's talking about is that a young black [boy] insulted a white girl, and one of the officers—and I don't know whether—anyway, this stirred up some people, and my father arrested him. He didn't really arrest him, but he took him to another jail somewhere.

MP: Yes.

MT: Got him out of Hope. Some men came to him later and wanted to know where the man was, and they went so far as to threaten my father. They were after this young black. [Laughs] My father knew pretty well how to handle a situation like that, and he told the ring leader of it, "If you come . . ."—the man threatened him—"We won't be responsible for what might happen to *you*." And he [MT's father] said, "If you come looking for trouble, you'll be the first man that I'll shoot," and that ended it. That ended the trouble right there because the ringleader backed off. Hope was guilty of politics a lot in those days. We elected a mayor. We elected aldermen from different sections of town. I don't know—I suppose my father had worked for maybe fifteen years as a policeman. We got a new mayor elected, and he told my father, "You're going to be without a job when I take office, so you better start looking for another job." A lot of white people—

influential people—men, especially—backed him and did not intend for him to be fired. And not only that, but the blacks came with a petition. In the petition they said, "This is the only man we can call when we have trouble, and he will come and solve the problem." So, the new mayor was unable to fire him. [Laughs]

MP: Your father had his own political support?

MT: Yes. He understood blacks, and he worked well with them. Although he had—we've always—like whites, they were always mean, and he had problems with them, but he also had problems with mean whites.

MP: Getting back to the black man that your father spirited off to jail—do you remember whatever happened to this man?

MT: He was not hung.

MNT: He was freed.

MT: Yes, he was freed. There was not enough proof of what he might have done. I don't remember where this young lady was working, but it was in some kind of—he had gone in this office, and nobody really knew what was said, but he was given a warning, you know, to not do things like that and not to say whatever it was that he said to them. []

MP: I guess the next part of the question is, after he was released, did he come back to Hope, or did he have to go someplace else to live?

MT: Yes, he continued to live in Hope.

MP: Okay. [In] 1929, there was a stock market crash, and the [Great] Depression came. Did you notice a big difference in Hope, or had the depression arrived early? You were ten or eleven years old.

MNT: [Laughs] I lost my money in one of those banks.

MP: How much money did you have?

MNT: I had \$5, but I got it all back later.

MP: You did?

MNT: Yes, a dollar at a time. But you noticed the difference because your dad had problems with his job, didn't he?

MT: Well, we're going back a little now. This was before he was hired as a policeman. He was running a service station, and he had a vulcanizing business. Have you ever heard of that?

MP: A what?

MT: Tires.

MP: What is that?

MT: Well, there was a lot of trucking business here then, and people were hauling timber. Let's say [someone had] not a blown tire, but a hole knocked in it. Well, my father would trim that hole out until he got to solid rubber, then he would fill it in with rubber. He'd fill that hole completely and then put that—as he called—he cooked that tire.

MNT: That's what you call vulcanizing.

MT: Yes. He put the tire on—electrically heated. I don't what it was called, but it would just fit the tires. And he'd cook it for so long—I don't remember how long—but when it came out of there, then he'd flip it over, and you couldn't tell it wasn't a new tire, except maybe the tread line would be . . .

MP: Yes.

MT: But it was tough going. And, as Mary Nell said, my brother was old enough then to help some around the service station, and my daddy sent him to the local bank with \$100 to deposit at closing time. He got around to the bank, and they were closing. But he talked them into letting him in and making that deposit, and the bank didn't open the next day. And \$100 in those days was a lot of money, but as Mary Nell said, later he got that \$100 back.

MNT: That was Roy Anderson.

MT: What?

MNT: That was Roy Anderson, I believe, who did that. He was a local banker.

MP: So his bank shut down?

MNT: They all shut down, but he paid his money back.

MP: Out of his own pocket?

MNT: Some of it may have been. I don't know. Did Bill pay some of that out of his own pocket?

MT: I don't know, but it was paid back a little bit at a time. My daddy never got \$100 in one . . .

MP: He never got \$100 bill back?

MT: That's right. He got, maybe, \$10, \$25—a little—until he got it all back.

MNT: But that's why he went out of business.

MT: Yes, the depression forced him out. He was still in business when he applied for the job as policeman, and as soon as he was told he was hired, he closed up that service station. He [was] glad to get out of it.

MNT: My daddy worked for the post office. He had money—\$129 a month, I think. It

wasn't much, but we always had some cash. We didn't have a car.

MP: Probably one of the few federal jobs in the county during the depression.

MNT: My grandfather had a farm, and my mother, I think, would pay them money for eggs and milk and things to keep them going. We always had plenty of food. She made my clothes. I didn't hurt. I didn't realize we had a depression.

MP: One of the big changes in Hope was World War II. How did World War II change Hope?

MT: It changed in the building of the proving ground and army maneuvers through this part of the state. I'll never forget what Hope was like when all those soldiers were around and proving ground workers. And, of course, my own police force.

[Laughs] It almost drove the policemen crazy [because] so many problems came up.

MP: Like what?

MT: Well, a small town like Hope—traffic, for one thing. Soldiers would be turned lose sometimes—given a little free time—and they were hunting for a place to eat and a place to drink. It caused problems, but not bad problems. The police, for example, got along well with the soldiers—tried to help them—and the people in Hope did. This Roy Anderson that Mary Nell was talking about—I remember he used to have one or two or, I guess, sometimes as many as four in his home. He'd just bring them in and feed them a good meal.

MNT: There was just not enough housing. My mother kept two guys, and we didn't have any [] That's what people did—open their homes. They came here in hordes [laughs] because there were no jobs, and they were looking for jobs.

MT: And the proving ground opened a . . .

MNT: It was an boarding school that [].

MP: Yes. I think I've seen []. Changing subjects rather quickly, you mentioned earlier that your ice man was Eldridge Patrick.

MNT: I just remember him, and I think it was while I was still at home, so I guess that would have been in the early 1930s.

MP: Yes.

MNT: What we did—we had the back of the house. It was an old house, and what had been like a storeroom at the back where we had our refrigerator. It was the kind where you . . .

MT: Icebox.

MNT: Icebox—open the door and put the ice in. And I just remember seeing him come in with a hunk of ice. He had a leather thing that—is that what it was? Leather?

MT: Well, he had those hooks . . .

MNT: Yes, but he had a leather—

MT: Yes, he had a leather—yes.

MNT: On his back. He'd just come in and put the ice in there—about twelve or fifteen pounds at a time, I think. [The] door opened, and he brought it in.

MP: Did you ever talk to him?

MNT: No, but they lived down the street, I remember, down there up the street from me at one time. I just remember they were there.

MP: Yes.

MNT: I did not know them. I just knew they lived there.

MP: So you didn't know Virginia growing up?

MNT: No, I didn't know her. She was younger. By the time she got in high school, we were off to college. I didn't know her.

MP: Did you know Edith Patrick?

MNT: I saw her many times at the hospital because she was the favorite—I guess she wasn't even an LPN [licensed practical nurse], but she was a nurse who took care of people who stayed in the hospital a long time []. She was a private nurse for many, many people, and I heard someone say what a compassionate person she was. That was not the picture in Virginia Kelley's book, but some think that she was very, very compassionate—a good nurse. That's what I—don't remember seeing her? Kind of a big woman?

MP: A big woman?

MNT: Yes.

MP: When did you go off to college?

MNT: 1937 to 1938.

MP: Actually—let's go back. When did you meet?

MNT: Seventh grade. [Laughs] Back then we had crowds, we called them. We were both in the same crowd.

MT: She went to one school, Brentwood. I went to Oak—we got to know each other when we came out of high school. At that time, junior high and high school all met in one building. That's where we got to know each other.

MNT: A girl named Nell. [Laughs] Oh, well.

MP: Did you start dating in high school?

MT: We didn't start dating until our senior year, I guess.

MNT: [] We were dating other people.

MP: Then in 1937, 1938, you went off to Hendrix.

MNT: Henderson [State University, Arkadelphia, Arkansas].

MP: Henderson. Oh, I'm sorry. When did you return to Hope?

MNT: I didn't come until 1946, but he came back in 1941 to answer his draft call.

MP: You were drafted in 1941?

MT: Well, war—December 7 . . .

MNT: It was before that. Didn't you come back after your draft call?

MT: We married in August of 1941, and we had been dating for five years. I felt like the war was just nearly upon us, and we'd been dating for five years. We didn't intend for the war to stop us, so we married. At that time, the army had a five year—they'd draft young men who were eligible—they'd draft them into the army. They'd spend one year in training, then be released, but it would remain on.

MNT: Reserve.

MT: Remain in reserve. We married before I was to go. I was supposed to go away [in] September for my year of training. We married in August, and, much to my surprise, the draft board called me in. When they found out we had married, they called me in and deferred me. And there I was. They really caused a problem for me because here I was without a job with a married young lady to worry about.

MNT: And we were both [] at Henderson, so I went on back to school.

MT: And I got a job at the proving ground until December 7 [the day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii], and as soon as war was declared, it was just a

matter of time until I was leaving. I believe you asked a question about when we came back to Hope?

MP: Yes.

MT: We came back, of course, after the war was over. Mary Nell stayed in Arkadelphia and worked as a secretary to the business manager at Henderson, which pleased me because I knew she was being well cared for, and she was working for some mighty good people. I was gone for four years in the service.

MNT: But came back and finished.

MP: Oh, up at Henderson State.

MNT: Yes. Because of the GI Bill [money provided by the federal government for World War II veterans to attend college], we had more money then than we've had at any time since.

MP: Because you [were] working then as well.

MNT: I was working, and they gave us free room and board. It was a good deal. No car, no kids, no nothing, no expenses.

MP: You came back to Hope in 1946?

MNT: Yes, and that's when Bill was born.

MP: That is the year Bill Clinton was born. Did you know him or his family?

MNT: Everybody knew Virginia. She was just an outgoing person. Didn't you know her? I just knew her when I saw her. I don't know if you're going to interview Joe Purvis or not. Are you?

MP: He's on our list. He's your son-in-law.

MNT: Yes. His mother rolled him in a buggy right beside Virginia. Virginia told me

that later on. She said, "We rolled our children together," so they were friends from very early childhood. They went to kindergarten—Bill and [all those?]
—and instead of that, we didn't send ours to kindergarten. I was teaching school in a country school, and Mac's mother lived behind us. She took care of our kids. We had our own private kindergarten [laughter], so we were not involved in that. They missed kindergarten.

MT: Well, she was a pretty good teacher, so they didn't really miss anything.

MNT: All the neighborhood kids were over there all the time.

MP: Your daughter—was she the same age [as Bill Clinton]?

MNT: No, she was born in 1948.

MP: She was born in 1948. Well, one of the things I'm thinking of is what was it like to be a young parent in the late 1940s?

MNT: It was pretty rough as far as finances were concerned. Didn't we say our groceries were \$40 a month?

MT: About that.

MNT: And we had them delivered. The grocery man was a really nice man.

MT: Good friend.

MNT: Good friend, and, I'd say, "[Steven?], how do I cook that?" And he would tell me. I learned to cook to from him, not from my mother. He was the cutest thing.

Well, cute is not the right word, but he was really a neat guy.

MP: Did you have any interaction with the Cassidys at the time?

MNT: No, I didn't.

MT: No. You weren't old enough.

MNT: Yes.

MP: What did a kid in the late forties [1940s] and early fifties [1950s] do? What type of games did they play?

MNT: They played []. [Laughs] [That included?] Joe. Don't know. They rode bicycles a lot.

MT: I built them a [play] house out on our back lot.

MNT: Yes, []. Our kids did.

MP: Where did you live?

MNT: On South Walnut Street, right behind the hospital where Bill was born.

MP: Okay. The [Walnut part?].

MNT: East of Main Street. We were right behind there. Susan was born there, too.

MP: Okay. [].

MNT: []. That's right. And that's what I've seen with families—I've seen this happen many times. Now, a woman, who has Alzheimer's Disease right now, was teaching fourth and fifth grade when the Cassidy family came to Hope. [She] had Virginia. She said she was a very, very bright child, but she was a country girl. She came here from [Bodco?] Have you been to [Bodco?]?

MP: [No, in fact, I drove right down Highway 32?]. How far is it?

MNT: I don't know. [Laughs]

MT: [Bodco?], about . . .

MNT: Is it twenty miles?

MT: No, it's not that far.

MNT: It's right down this road. That's where we get our water. We pay the [Bodco?]

people. But, anyway, she said she was very bright, and the other kids wouldn't accept her. She remembered on one occasion, the other kids were having something. She overheard Virginia say, "That's all right. I'll make it better," and that was her philosophy from then on. Her philosophy was just to make the best of things, and she did. She was a very, very bright child, according to her. And one more thing before I forget it, a woman named Mrs. [] has died, said that when Bill was really—I guess it was Virginia—would bring him by the nursery at First Baptist Church [] out there. And she loved him until she died. She [excused him?] for everything. []. That [] an attorney . . .

MP: Yes.

MNT: Okay. It's his mother, Tina. Once a year, I'd go to his daughter's house for Christmas, and she and I'd get in the corner and talk about Bill because she loved him, she really did, and because he was her baby. She [] take care of him when he was in the nursery.

MP: Did you know Bill Clinton when he lived here?

MNT: Not here.

MT: Not here.

MNT: No. I did later. He didn't, but I did.

MP: How did you get to know him?

MT: I got to him first because Joe Purvis worked as his deputy when Bill Clinton was attorney general of the state of Arkansas.

MP: Yes.

MT: Joe was his deputy, and in our visiting with the kids there in Little Rock, I

sometimes would go with Joe. Anyway, that's where I got to know Bill Clinton for the first time.

MP: Do you remember your first meeting with him?

MT: Probably the first meeting that I remember with him was—they were in Hope on some kind of . . .

MNT: Political meeting. Joe drove him down here and they stopped at our house.

MT: On the way back to Little Rock, they came by the house. I think I was in [the] yard when they drove up, and I went to the car. Bill Clinton was sitting there, and I met him for the first time.

MP: Do you remember your impression?

MT: I had kept up with him. Remember, he ran for Congress in 1974—ran in the third district. I got very interested in him because he was a young man, and he impressed me. I kept up with him all during that election. I felt like I knew him before I ever met him face to face.

MNT: The first time I saw him, he was here—was that in the seventies [1970s]?

MT: Yes.

MNT: Okay. I taught journalism for twenty-six years, and every year, I took my students to the state meetings—sometimes at Fayetteville, sometimes at Little Rock. I believe this one was in Hot Springs—one of those places, anyway. It was either Hot Springs or Little Rock, and he was one of our guest speakers. I was really impressed with his speech—very much impressed. I can't tell you what he said, I was just impressed. But the hair on him was [a gift?]. I also was the PR [public relations] person for Arkansas Girls State for eleven years, and

during that time he was governor, and I conversed with him many times during that.

MP: Did he show a lot of interest in Girls State?

MNT: Yes, he did [] the process. It was very interesting at that time. I don't know what it's like now.

MT: He spoke to them nearly every year, didn't he?

MNT: He did because he would inaugurate the governor. [I made his picture ?].

MP: [Laughs] Getting back to—he had dropped by your house.

MNT: Joe drove him because he didn't trust him to drive.

MP: He's not the only one to say that.

MNT: Is that right? He doesn't pay attention to what he's doing, I think.

MP: Did you have much other contact with him?

MT: Well, the next contact I had with him was—I ran for delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1979, and I won the election by a few votes. I don't [know] whether I should tell this or not. It's probably not for publication, but Joe called me from Little Rock. He said, "The governor asked me who in Hempstead County could run for delegate for the Constitutional Convention." Joe very quickly said, "My father-in-law." Joe was always getting me in trouble. So Bill Clinton called me, and I said, "Well, Governor, I don't know anything about the Constitution. I don't [know] if I have any business running for something like that or not." He said, "You can study it. You can learn a lot about it before you ever have to come to the convention."

MNT: And he did.

MT: And I did. I ordered a copy of the Constitution of the state of Arkansas. Anyway, I ran and was elected. I got to know him better because—well, for example, he and Hillary [Rodham Clinton] had a group of us every morning out to the governor's mansion during the convention. Of course, there were a hundred delegates, and they didn't have us all at one time. They would have, say, twenty-five for breakfast one day and then the next day. I got to know him even better that way, and I met him several times. And since our convention was meeting in the state capitol, I'd run into him in the . . .

MNT: Well, you also sponsored a controversial bill.

MT: What she's talking about—we were fighting a battle down here in Hempstead County. We found out an outfit had come in and bought some land here, not too far from the Nevada County line. They bought this land, and their plans were to put a hazardous waste dump on that land. The people in Hempstead County were stirred up about it. So, while I was a delegate in the Constitutional Convention, I introduced a proposal to go not in the Constitution, but in the schedule of the Constitution, which would allow it to be changed by the legislature if a change needed to be made. Much to my surprise, it passed when I introduced it.

MP: What did the language say?

MT: The language?

MP: Yes. What did the resolution say?

MT: Well, my proposal read something like this—that the people were given a—I was working on it from the citizens' standpoint, and in writing it up, I said the people would have the right to determine whether or not a hazardous waste landfill

would be accepted in Hempstead County *or* in Nevada County. I included Nevada County because it was close enough to their [county's border] line. The delegate from Nevada County was backing me all the way. I thought that would help pass it, and it was passed. But due to the rules of the Constitution, that thing was voted on three times. It passed the first time, it passed the second time, and I got the word from some of my friends that I had made that they were trying to beat me on the third vote. I had one delegate come to me, and he said, "I have voted with you on this proposal all the way, but I'm having too much pressure put on me."

MP: Where did the pressure come from?

MT: These big outfits that—oh, I forget [], but they felt if it were passed, it would affect them and whatever it was they were doing in the county. I appreciated, of course, the man coming and telling me that. He said, "I'm going to have to vote against you on the final vote," and they beat me by a few votes.

MNT: Bill Clinton tried to get you to remove it, too.

MT: Well, I'd rather not . . .

MP: Why?

MT: Pressure was being put on him.

MP: To get to a larger point is how much—how [] was Bill Clinton involved in the 1979-1980 Constitutional Convention?

MT: He was fair. He wasn't trying to tell us what to do.

MP: Did he have suggestions?

MT: When we had the breakfast at the governor's mansion, he did make some

suggestions. He made it very plain that he was not trying to put pressure on us, but he said maybe one particular thing that came up in the Constitution—[and he would say], "Have a close look at this before you vote again."

MP: Do you remember what were some of the things he was interested in?

MT: No.

MNT: He did question him on the [].

MT: Well, as I say, I'd rather not—I have never said anything about this because I didn't want the possibility of it hurting him. But when we started to leave that morning after breakfast, I started to—he and Hillary were standing at the door as we left, and he said, "I want to talk to you." After that he said, "I'd like for you to drop your proposal on hazardous waste." I said, "Sorry, I can't do that." He said, "It would be [poor?] politics, wouldn't it?" I said, "No. I'm not playing politics with this." I said, "If you knew how the people in Hempstead County felt about it, you'd understand." I said, "I can't drop it now." The next morning, as I went in one door of the state capitol, and he came in another, and we met in the hall, he walked over and put his arm around my shoulder, like that, and he said—the first thing I said to him was, "Are you mad at me?" He said, "No, I'm not mad at you," and laughed. That's why I like Bill Clinton as much as I do. My association with him has been very pleasant, very—I understood him.

MP: Getting back to the 1979-1980 Constitutional Convention—do you remember what the major controversies were during the convention?

MT: Well, we had big fight over . . .

[Tape Stopped]

MP: It is working, but just not very well. Let me see. Now, try.

MT: Property tax was one issue that caused quite a bit of discussion. We went so far as one delegate introduced a proposal to completely drop the property tax and raise that money from sales tax, for example—taxes like that. Of course, it was soundly defeated.

MP: Was there an effort to change the tax code to make it easier to have income taxes?

MT: Yes, as far as I can remember, there was an effort made. But I don't know. I'd have to go back—this has been quite long ago. Twenty-four years ago now. I have a copy somewhere of what we came up with, and every now and then I go and look through it and refresh my memory.

MP: I was just trying to get an idea of where Bill Clinton came down on tax reform during the convention.

MT: One delegate wanted to drop the property tax and increase the sales tax. Another delegate wanted to drop the sales tax and, you know, like what's going on now—try to get that on the ballot, but I don't think it ever made it because of the lack of signatures. I would rather not—I had hoped Mary Nell wouldn't mention this, but I would rather not mention that Bill Clinton asked me to drop that proposal.

MP: When you get the transcript, if you want to just delete that part, that's fine.

MT: Will you include this in a book?

MP: It will be in the library—at the Clinton [Presidential] Library. We'll have a transcript of this made, and anything you decide you do not want to have included, you can just draw a circle around it and say "Delete." We'll take it out of the transcript, and that way, you have final control over what you say.

MT: I never mentioned that except to my wife because I felt like it might hurt him. One of the things that he asked me that morning was, "Why am I not getting a better vote in Hempstead County than I'm getting?" My only remark to that was that he had the wrong people working for him in the county, and it wasn't long after that he changed it.

MNT: It was when we met with Virginia.

MT: You talked with her about it.

MNT: Yes.

MP: Who did he have working for him?

MNT: A young woman, and she just didn't have the respect of the community, and they needed a person with more respect, and they did get somebody.

MT: And who would that be?

MNT: Mel [Flush/Price?]

MP: You said that you talked to Virginia?

MNT: Well, they were first cousins. They were great. [] come out there that day. He and Virginia talked nearly everyday. They just really—both of them had had four marriages. They both had the same kind of problems, I think. But, anyway, she had us out there, and we were discussing it. That's when we [repeated?] that they had the wrong person. "Well, who do you suggest?" and so we did suggest Mel. He went on as representative of the county and was awarded—did you say that? He was made the . . .

MT: Well, Mel helped him out.

MNT: He really did help him. Then he went on and became head of the National Guard

in Little Rock.

MP: So, there was this change in Clinton's Hempstead County coordinator. What did Mel [Flush/Price?] do differently than the previous one?

MNT: Well, he just had a sense of community. I don't know what he did. I actually don't know what he did, but he was very well respected by the black families, the staunch Baptists and the business people. This young girl was okay, but she just . . .

MT: Well, a good example was when I was running for delegate. I ran into her one day, and she said, "How are you doing?" I said, "I can't tell." Not being a politician, I just really didn't know what was happening. She told me that day, "Don't worry about the black vote. I've got them all lined up for you." I said, "Well, thank you." When the votes came in, I lost every black precinct in the city. Lost every one of them—not by a great number, but they didn't vote for me like I understood they were going to. Therefore, I didn't work too much with them, you know.

MNT: You didn't work, period.

MT: I didn't work, period, Mary Nell says.

MNT: He was a little letter carrier—he was a black carrier down in Spring Hill.

MT: People down there . . .

MNT: They didn't know what they were voting for, I don't think. They voted for him. That's what I told him.

MP: Virginia and Bill Drake would talk every day.

MNT: That's what Bill [provide last name] has told me. Dill was my really good friend,

and so she just said, "Virginia and I talk every day."

MT: Well, they were cousins.

MP: Did you have much contact with Virginia during those years, in the late 1970s or early 1980s?

MNT: Well, during the campaign was the only time I was around. I went to everything they had. That one time, you know, I think she said that she and Joe's mother, rolled them as children together. Bill wasn't [] at some event [] Purvis. I guess I wasn't around it that much, but [].

MP: Yes. Did you participate in the campaign?

MNT: No, I guess I did. Were you still working at the post office during the campaign—1992?

MT: I had to—I didn't have to retire, I had planned to retire. I'd had open-heart surgery. We had our meetings in Little Rock for the Constitutional Convention, then we took a break and came home. During that time, we were supposed to circulate amongst the different organizations and speak to them.

MP: Yes.

MNT: And this county won.

MT: I was very proud of that. Hempstead was one of the few counties that voted for it. What was it I started to . . .?

MNT: That you had your heart surgery.

MT: Yes. In-between our meeting time—in the break, I had—they rushed me to Houston, and I had open-heart surgery. I recovered enough to go back to Little Rock when the convention met again. But I retired. I had already talked to the

postmaster and people who might have been concerned. When you're working for the federal government, you don't fool around with politics. I made it plain that this was not a political race, it was more of a service project. Anyway, I retired while this was going on.

MNT: We didn't participate in politics because . . .

MT: [Because I had been elected?].

MNT: I did some on the side because and he [], our neighbor. But we didn't actively participate until Clinton.

MP: What have you done since then?

MNT: [], my choice. But I don't know. We haven't done a whole lot. It just depends—[], like when Mike Ross was here, we attended his rallies.

MP: Is there anything about Bill Clinton that I haven't asked you about that you want to share?

MNT: No.

MP: I want to get back to Hope, in general.

MNT: This is from the campaign when he had his picture made at Peekskill [New York] which he had worried [] . . .

MT: []

MP: Is that 1992?

MNT: That's 1992. We should put a date on here. He'd had prostate surgery—not surgery, but cancer—and he knew it because Dale had told. When he saw Mac, he went over there to see him.

MP: That's wonderful.

MNT: Susan and Joe found the [Arkansas] *Democrat* photographer who made the picture. They didn't use the picture, and so they gave him the negative.

MT: The *Democrat* didn't use the picture because the next day he announced he was running, but it was 1994.

MP: So you were bumped off?

MT: Yes. Right.

MNT: And the photographer said, "Oh, I shouldn't have had that in there." [Laughs]

MP: One of the things you mentioned earlier that I want to get back to was the integration of Hope's schools. You were teaching at the time?

MNT: Yes. I was teaching right in the middle of it. I have a philosophy that helped me, I guess, with the black students in black schools and white students in white [].

MT: She did a wonderful job with handling the integration problem.

MP: What school were you teaching at?

MNT: High school.

MP: At Hope High School?

MNT: Yes. We had an experience just before integration. Do you remember the black boy who came back to this area, and he'd been in the Peace Corp? He was dying to tell his story.

MP: What was his name?

MNT: I can look it up, but it was in the early 1970s. He had been in the Philippines. Oh, he'd had a wonderful experience. We opened our home one night to [a pastor and some friends?] and we listened to them how long?

MT: Too long. [Laughs]

MNT: About three hours. He was just so full of what had happened, and I just really had a feeling for black people. I think that kind of set me up.

MP: Yes.

MNT: I know that was part of it. Then, before we integrated, we had people who came here—we studied the differences in our cultures and mostly people [] sociology. I don't know. Some of the black people talked and some of the white people talked. We had committees that worked together. They prepared us. Of course, we were paid to do this, but it was after school hours. It was most enlightening. Then we also a black man, Will Rutherford, who was a principal of that public black school, and he was very much wanting this to take place peacefully.

MP: Yes.

MNT: We had a black counselor that I owe [laughs] everything to because he had grown up near Nashville [Tennessee?] and played with white kids. He had no problem with whites. Then, we had a principal that I did [] with. We had no problems in Hope. They had problems around in schools. There was one day—when they threatened a boycott or something—one of the black kids came to my class and said, "I can't do that. I can't get involved in that." I let her stay there, and our counselors worked with those kids []. But it didn't get to that [] they were going to, and we just—I was talking to that principal not long ago, and he was fair with everybody. Anyway, we had a very pleasant—probably more pleasant [than in other places?].

MP: So it was an uneventful integration?

MNT: Not eventful.

MP: Do you remember what year it was?

MNT: I want to say 1972 or 1973. I've got my yearbooks in here. I could tell you. It was in the early seventies. We had school choice before that.

MP: Could you explain that?

MNT: If a black child wanted to come to our school, they could. We had a few that did that.

MP: How many?

MNT: Not many.

MP: Did those students face any problems?

MNT: Not that I know of. One of them is teaching here right now. I saw him the other day at Wal-Mart. Some of my favorite students were my blacks. I really had some good students. For one thing, journalism was a new subject.

MP: They didn't have journalism at the black schools?

MNT: I should have had one class, but I had three. [] all lose track. That didn't last but for about a year, maybe two years.

MP: That was also the [Bob] Woodward and [Carl] Bernstein years, when everyone wanted to be a journalist. [Editor's note: Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein were the *Washington Post* reporters who covered the Watergate scandal that led to President Richard M. Nixon's resignation on August 9, 1974.]

MNT: Well, yes, that's true. Yes, that's true. I allowed such things as panel discussions in the rooms—blacks and whites discussing integration. Can you believe I dared

to do that? But I did. [Laughter] And one of those that was in on that panel went on into the navy, I believe—a girl. But she's into journalism. She developed a mental condition so that she [], but she was really one of my fans. She wrote me that she was using her journalism. I had a problem child who tried with the yearbooks to help equal representation throughout the [] so everybody felt part of it.

MP: Included.

MNT: Included. We worked very hard at that. This one girl went out of the room one day and said something ugly to me. I don't know what it was. She was just upset. So I called the black counselor, and he came over and practically held my hand for an hour as I teared up. I said, "I don't know what to do with her." And he said, "She doesn't know what to do with you. She doesn't know what to do with white kids. She's never been around them." He said then, "It'll be a hundred years before []." I think he's right. People in town wanted things to happen, I think. They just knew it wouldn't work. They just didn't think integration would work.

MP: What do you mean?

MNT: Well, they [] at the school, you know.

MP: Like what?

MNT: Well, like uprisings and fights between blacks and whites, and I guess there were some. There were also some between others, too. They wouldn't let us have any off-campus events, and, finally, one of my students noted that the student council met off campus to have their banquet, so he wrote an editorial saying, "Why do

they allow that?" And that principal called us both in. [Laughter] He got me in trouble. He's now the editor of a paper in Florida. [Laughter] I just think those years went fine. I had a black boy who was a photographer, and I always went along when they went to make pictures, for his protection.

MP: Yes.

MNT: I did, because he went to make white kids—you know, he could be—well, I remember one time, someone hollered at him something like "whitey." You were careful, but the kids I got mostly were kids who really wanted to try journalism. One of them is the sports writer for an Oklahoma paper.

MP: Oh.

MNT: Yes. Wes Brown. But I didn't teach him anything. He was already a natural writer. They usually are. You just give them an opportunity. That's what I would do.

MP: Yes.

MNT: We should get on with what you want.

MP: Actually, this is exactly what we want.

MNT: Is it?

MP: Yes. One of the things is [that] people in fifty or a hundred years from now—when we're all long dead—are going to try to understand what Hope was like when Bill Clinton was here, and what Hope was like while he was president because this is where he's from. These things will help explain later on how to understand Hope.

MNT: You know that Vince Foster, who died—because the young man who was editor

of the paper didn't know anything about the background of Hope, he depended on me during those years [] reporters to my house. And I did that—my feeling was, "I'll give them a positive report."

MP: Yes.

MNT: "It won't be negative," because there were some negative reports going out of here. Because of that, I got involved with [his?] genealogy, and that was fun. One man came to see us one day from *U.S. News and World Report*. He interviewed us, you know, and all of that. The only thing he said was something Mac said. He said, "You keep saying that nobody comes out of this town with a good education. We've had many people leave here and get doctorates and so forth—professional degrees. That's an insult to our town," or something like that. And that's the only thing he quoted in the paper.

MP: How do think having Bill Clinton win the presidency and serving eight years—how has that changed Hope?

MNT: I don't think it has.

MP: You don't think it has?

MNT: No. I wish it had.

MP: How so?

MNT: I don't think—you know, what is it? There's a saying—you can't go back home. There's an element in Hope that was either jealous of him, misunderstood him, or wanted to believe the scandals. Some people think he's [right nice?].

MT: Yes. It's hard to understand. Joe Purvis was talking about it. Joe just gets steamed up sometimes about the people in Hope have not shown enough interest

in the fact that one of our sons has been president of the United States, and that we should take advantage of that. For example, our home over there that's vacant—his birthplace—we haven't had the support in that we should have had.

MNT: He was chairman of the board for that, and I'm on the board. We have supported that all along, but not everybody has.

MT: Joe was chairman of the board, I think.

MNT: Joe was.

MP: Has there been any overt opposition?

MNT: No.

MP: It's just that people are not interested?

MNT: Yes. Not interested. That's right. This town is full of apathy. It really is. It progresses more every year.

MT: And another thing—Hope, Hempstead County, and the state of Arkansas, for that matter, until just a few years ago was solid Democrat. Republicans didn't have a chance. Now, we've got more Republicans in our county, our city, and our state, and the Republicans hate Bill Clinton for some reason. I say the reason they dislike him so is because he beat them in every corner. He whooped them, and it's hard for them to take.

MNT: And he's a country boy, and I think that is []. He grew up in a farm family that just came to Hope [], and he emerged from that. A lot of our presidents have had silver spoons in their mouths when they were born.

MT: I don't how you feel about it, but, to me, there's no comparison—when this man gets up and makes a talk, there's no comparison to what we've got today as

president. [Reference to President George W. Bush.] He's so much more intelligent and has this wonderful ability to make public talks and to put his thoughts and everything across so well. I don't think "W" has got it.

MP: You mentioned the rising tide of Republicanism in Hempstead County and Arkansas. Do you think part of that is Bill Clinton becoming president?

MNT: No. I think it has to do with integration.

MP: How so?

MNT: I just think that most Republicans are dead-set against integration. They don't want the mixing of the races.

MT: They have labeled him as a . . .

MNT: Well, that's part of it. I think this fundamentalist movement in the churches—whatever it is—this fundamentalist thing goes to the Republicans—the far Right.

MP: Yes.

MNT: I'm not [], but, anyway, that's the way I feel.

MT: The blacks are getting ready now to honor [Tennessee Yerger?], who was a black man who did a wonderful job with the schools here.

MNT: He started the black schools.

MT: Well, they're getting ready for a reunion in honor of [Yerger?], and they're going to invite Bill Clinton to come. I'll bet you right now that he'll be here, and a lot of people have criticized him for his close work with the blacks—the fact that he has an apartment in the black section of . . .

MP: In Harlem.

MT: Yes, in Harlem.

MNT: These are just our ideas. They made not be good ideas. I don't know. We're just really opinionated.

MP: So am I, but I can't express my opinions. Do you mind if we go back and fill in what was on the tape that—Mr. Turner, could you tell us when and where you were born?

MT: I was born in Spring Hill, Arkansas, which is seven miles south of Hope. I was born in 1918.

MP: Who were your parents?

MT: John Turner was my father, and Evelyn Moses Turner was my mother.

MP: What did your family do at the time you were born?

MT: The first I remember my father doing was working timber. He was good at it. As Mary Nell has said, he could look at a tree and tell you how many feet of lumber.

MNT: But he quit school in the fourth grade.

MT: Yes, but he could work my math problems in his head when I was trying to work them on paper. Anyway, that was my mother and that was my father. My mother would have been an excellent school teacher, but she stayed home and took care of the family. She provided a good home for us. There were times when you're in the depression, and people were really a little bit short on food sometimes. But she always managed, and my daddy, bless his heart, was never out of a job. He had some kind of a job as far back as I can remember. And between the two of them, they provided us with a good home and good food.

MP: Your grandfather ran the cotton gin and the store. What was his name?

MT: James Washington Moses. We called him Jim. Everybody called him Jim—Jim

Moses. He was a man who, at one time—I don't know how much he was worth, but he was well-to-do. And when he died—I'll never forget that short time before he died—he had owned a lot of land in Hempstead County, and when he died, he said, "I own one piece of property, and that's where I'm going to be buried." It was sad, really. Changing times. Spring Hill more or less dried up.

MNT: Tell about the gin.

MT: What about it?

MP: He ran a cotton gin.

MT: He owned a cotton gin.

MP: How big was it?

MT: How big was the building?

MP: Yes, how big was the gin? Yes.

MT: To me, at that time, it was huge, but I couldn't tell you exactly how big it was. It had to be a big building because of the machinery in it. I don't understand a lot about a gin, but I do remember the farmers bringing their cotton in. Their wagons would have sideboards on them, and they would be full of cotton. They would pull those wagons in, and the gin would suck that cotton out. Later, they would get cotton back in the form of a bale. I don't know what those things weighed—five hundred pounds or something like that. But, anyway, it had baled cotton, and it had seed from the cotton.

MNT: You said they used oxen?

MT: Yes. That was always an interesting thing to me to watch those farmers who had oxen. They never used any kind of reigns. They used a whip, and they would

pop that whip beside those oxen. That's the way they guided them.

MP: I never knew that.

MNT: I didn't, either. I've learned a lot today. [Laughs]

MP: But your grandfather—did he charge a rate to gin the cotton, or did he take a percentage of the crop?

MT: My thinking is that he did both. He would gin a person's cotton for him for a part of it, or cash payment. That's what my memory tells me, but I'm not sure of that.

MP: One of the things I was wondering—were the farmers in the area tenant farmers, sharecroppers, or independent farmers?

MT: They were both. Some had farms, rather large farms, and they raised cotton, corn, potatoes, and on and on. Then there were others who sharecropped. Maybe somebody here in Hope would own the land, but the farmer would work it, and they shared the profits.

MNT: There was a lot of timber being cut in that area, too, along about that time. You mentioned your dad working timber because of a lumber mill.

MT: Yes. Saw mill.

MNT: Saw mill.

MP: What was in the store?

MT: My grandfather operated a general merchandise store, and he had everything from groceries to dried goods. He even sold candy because I remember my brother—he was older. I wasn't old enough to—I don't remember anything about the store, but he would go there. He'd slip away from home and go there, and my grandpa would give him candy. He loved it.

MP: How old were you when you moved away from Spring Hill?

MT: I'm not sure. We lived—I say I was born in Spring Hill—I was born near Spring Hill in what was called Battlefield Loop.

MP: Why was it called Battlefield Loop?

MT: Civil War days.

MNT: No, Mr. Battle owned the land.

MT: I always thought it was due to the . . .

MNT: Well, they expected the Union forces to come up the river.

MT: And they were out there. Anyway, where was I? You interrupted my train of thought.

MP: I was asking when you . . .

MNT: How old were you when you moved to . . .

MP: How old were you when you moved to—what was it—Diane?

MNT: Deanne.

MT: Deanne. Oh, I must have been about three years old. I don't remember a lot about it. One thing that happened to us that I think I remember—we had been up to my grandmother and grandfather's house and started home around dark, and we were in a buggy. Have you ever heard of a team running away with a wagon or a buggy?

MP: Yes. What was it like?

MT: It was horrible. Of course, I was too young to remember a whole lot. I think I remember something about it. But, anyway, he explained to me later that he had two big mules pulling the buggy.

MNT: Was it a buggy or a wagon?

MNT: I believe it was a buggy. One mule was mean, and the other one was gentle. And the mean one—something had spooked him, and started running away. My daddy tried to hold him back with the reins, and the gentle mule would respond. He tried to stop, and the other mule dragged the buggy up on its legs, and then he'd be forced to run. But anyway, they ran away with us and got down the road a good piece, and my father told my mother, "I can't stop them, and I'm afraid we're going to flip this buggy over," because it was light-weight. He said, "You'll have to jump," and he helped her. She stepped out on the outside step, and he helped her get to that. She was holding me, and she jumped. I don't know how she managed, but she protected me. She got bruised up and [had] a badly-sprained ankle. My daddy took my brother and held him over the other side as near the ground as he could and dropped him. Immediately after that, one wheel came off the buggy, and the buggy flipped. He was tangled in the reins, and it drug him for a little piece. He was bruised all over. But that's one thing I remember him talking about. The family was really concerned about it. I know my grandfather and my grandmother—all of them rushed down here to see if any of us were killed.

MP: What did your dad do to the mule?

MT: To the mule?

MP: Yes.

MT: [Laughs] Well, he said the next day—his mules were named Box and Ben. Box was the mean one. He said that as soon as he got able—of course he was bruised

from falling—he said he took that mule out and hooked him up to a middle-buster plow and made him plow. He said, "I worked him down. Every time he acted like he wanted to run, I put that plow in the ground so deep that he would just fall."

MNT: He was kind of like Huck Finn growing up. You and your friend went mulberry picking.

MT: We went swimming.

MNT: And there was a mulberry tree near your house.

MT: We climbed up in a mulberry tree, and there was poison ivy. We were in our birthday suits [meaning, naked], and we had the worst case of poison ivy you ever saw.

MNT: Did you go on a camping trip that day?

MT: No.

MP: How about you? When and where were you born?

MNT: I was born at noon on August 5, 1919, at 802 South Elm Street in Hope, Arkansas. My mother was Mary Briggs, and my dad was Walter Carter. My grandparents lived in the house with us. They were older parents, so I feel like I didn't have as much fun growing up as Mac did.

MP: Tell us about growing up in Hope. What was Hope like?

MNT: It was a small town—a very safe place. We never locked the doors.

MP: Yes.

MNT: And we walked to school. It was about mile to school, and I carried a lunch that would be that big. I was a little fat girl. My mother just fixed kinds of good stuff

for my lunch. My teacher told me one time I was going to die from eating all those pickles. Can you believe that?

MP: Streets weren't paved?

MNT: No, the streets weren't paved. I think I said sometime when I was ten or twelve, maybe younger than that, my mother went visiting across the street, and I wanted to go over there, too, to follow her. So, I ran across the street, which had hot oil on it, and I still remember how my feet felt—barefoot.

MP: When did they pave the main streets in Hope?

MNT: It must have been in the late 1920s, early 1930s. Must have been early 1930s. If you wanted anything, you walked.

MP: How far was it . . . ?

MNT: To town?

MP: Well, I'm trying to think—geographically, how big was the town? Was it a mile's walk from one end to the other?

MNT: Yes, maybe two miles. I would say at least two miles across, wouldn't you—or more?

MT: Oh, yes.

MNT: It was kind of spread out down the railroad tracks.

MT: From, say, the depot in town to the high school, it was just about a mile.

MNT: About sixteen, seventeen blocks.

MP: What sorts of things did you do outside, growing up in Hope? What sorts of games or activities?

MNT: My sister and I played golf. We []. When we went to school, we learned

about hopscotch, and we played hopscotch by the hour. We loved that game, and jacks, and marbles, and sometimes softball. We loved to climb trees. When we visited my grandparents—they lived on about a 160-acre farm—when we'd get there, we'd leave when mother would come. We didn't have a car. Grandpa came in his Model-T [Ford] to get us. We couldn't wear pants until we got there. We could put on our overalls when we got there. He was so old-fashioned. We went in every direction. Climbed trees. Rode down saplings. Just walked all over. Stole watermelons. Break [].

MP: Okay. Did the depression have much of an effect on your life in Hope?

MNT: We didn't mind very much because my daddy was fortunate he worked for the post office. He had a steady income, and we had plenty of food from my grandparents. We didn't do anything exciting.

MP: Yes.

MNT: We existed. I never knew we had a depression, but Mac's family had some problems.

MT: Well, as I said, my father was never without a job to make a living. Sometimes the living was a little bit scarce. The pay wasn't much, but he always managed to have a job. We survived, and, as I said, I have always given him credit for working, and sometimes that work wasn't very easy. For example, when he was with the police department, he worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week. That's eighty-four hours a week. People can hardly believe that nowadays, but that's . . .

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 2]

MT: . . . the way he worked. My mother was a good enough manager to where we had no problems as far as nourishing food and all that was concerned. I had a good home life.

MP: What was high school like? How many students were in your class?

MP: The 1920s movies—you told me about the first time you . . .

MNT: I remember the first—[].

MP: []

MNT: . . . that I saw where there was sound. I think it was [] because he was one of the early ones.

MP: I think the movie was probably "The []."

MNT: I don't remember.

MP: He played a Jewish boy who grew up to be a [cantor?] and a rabbi.

MNT: I remember the sound.

MP: Do you remember your first movie?

MT: I liked the westerns. I remember Tom Mix and Hoot Gibson and some actors from around that time. The first movie that I went to was when I expected it to be a moving-picture show, because that's what I had heard we were going to see—a moving-picture show. I expected pictures to be moving around the walls of the theater, and my mother had to correct me and point me in the right direction to watch the film on the movie screen.

MP: You were telling us on the tape that didn't work about your father's first movie. Can you tell that story again?

MT: [Laughs] Should I tell that again?

MP: Yes.

MT: Well, it's interesting because he helped drive cattle from Spring Hill, Arkansas, over to Hot Springs, which kind of brings you back to the Old West.

MNT: Didn't he have a little pony that he rode?

MT: He had a horse. His older sister lived in Hot Springs, and when he got to Hot Springs, the man paid him off for helping him drive the cattle. He went to his sister's home to stay stayed two or three days. While he was there, he and his nephew went to a movie, the first one he'd ever seen. It was a western, and Indians or cowboys were on their horses and running. It looked like they were coming out of the screen, and my father scared him, and he yelled, "Look out!" and ducked down behind the seats. [Laughs] When he did, his nephew ducked down on his side, and it scared his nephew, who was quite a bit younger. It scared him so bad, he wet his pants. [Laughter]

MNT: []

MT: Yes, [].

MNT: Did []?

MT: I don't know where he bought it.

MNT: [] money [].

MP: That had to be around 1910?

MT: Well, let's see.

MNT: They married in 1912.

MT: Yes, they married in 1912, I guess. Well, it was before then, I guess.

MP: Is there anything about life in Hope or about Bill Clinton that you think researchers in fifty or a hundred years should know that we haven't talked about?

MNT: Well, I think it's been mentioned in his book [*My Life*] that his [Bill Clinton's] granddaddy bought a store over in black town when you first come to it. I don't know if it was on the left side of the road or the right, but it [] both ways. But he was familiar with black children who came to his grandpa's store. He visited here a lot in the summers, and I know one of his cousins [] he was always []. He was just one of them. [sounds like: Dorothy Roberts?] Are you going to interview him?

MP: Yes, eventually [].

MNT: Okay. Well, his family had a place up on the lake, and Bill Clinton was up there with them a lot in the summer.

MP: Up on Lake Catherine or Lake Hamilton?

MNT: Yes. They lived in Hot Springs.

MP: Yes.

MNT: []. They've known each other since kindergarten. That whole bunch [] have stuck together. It's so interesting. At the first inauguration, a girl who lives in California came to [Washington] DC. They must have really had a great time at the inauguration.

MP: Mack McLarty and . . .

MNT: Mack was younger, though.

MP: He was? I thought he was [].

MNT: []

MP: []

MT: []

MNT: []

MP: Are his parents still alive?

MNT: No, they're deceased. One of the tales his mother told me not long before she died—Mack's mother, who was Mrs. Lily Perkins—[] called and said the little boys had been using the yard to, you know . . .

MT: Urinate.

MNT: Urinate. Yes, that's right. She just was letting her know about it. I don't know what else she said. And [] name was []. [Stella?] said, "God love 'em." She said, "I said to Mack, 'Have you done it?' 'Sure have.'" And she just []. Every time I think about it—Miss Mary and how prim and proper she was—and [] her being upset over that, [] just would laugh about it. It's not funny to tell, but it was []. He did all the things little boys do.

MP: Like what?

MNT: Well, whatever they do. [Laughter] I don't know. []

MT: Well, I've [] the picture that Mack's in and Bill's in and Joe.

MNT: The birthday party?

MP: In fact, I've seen a picture of it. [Lily Platt?] was of the []. His mother had the picture.

MNT: []

MP: Oh, she is?

MNT: [] But this is not the one I was thinking of. It's another one.

MP: Yes, I've seen this one, too.

MNT: Here's Joe and here's Bill and here's [Missy Wright?] and []. But I can't tell you who this is. I think this is []. They know [].

MP: Wow.

MNT: []

MP: []

MNT: [] He was a big man. But she had a []

MP: Yes. I don't think I've seen this photograph before.

MNT: I don't know who [] this. I was just looking. I don't really know where it came from.

MT: It could be from the [].

MNT: Yes, somebody had it. I don't know where he is now. []

MT: []

MNT: But anyway, they would take him—they would visit him [].

MP: Yes.

MNT: And I think they carpoled. []. So they all knew each other really well.

MP: It was a typical small town.

MNT: It was a typical small town. Nothing exciting happened. In fact, I think it was Roy Anderson who said nothing very exciting ever happened in Hope, except maybe with the proving ground when a lot of people lived here. [] for a while.

MP: Is there anything else I can ask you about?

MNT: No. []

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

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