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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Bill Harrison Surprise Interviews

Robert Ward

Interviewed by Scott Lunsford

June 10, 2011

Fayetteville, Arkansas

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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 https://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 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

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

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

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Robert Ward on June 10, 2011, in Fayetteville, Arkansas. This series of interviews took place during a birthday celebration for William Harrison.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Bob, first thing, can you give me your full name?

Robert Ward: Robert Mason Ward.

SL: And you go by Bob, right?

RW: Bob or Robert. I like Robert better, actually.

SL: You do?

RW: Yeah.

SL: Well, Robert—uh—uh—we're here today. This is—uh—June 10. The year is 2011. We're at Laurie—uh—how—does Laurie go by—uh—her married name?

RW: I think so. Uh—I—is she out there? No. I don't know . . .

SL: Okay.

RW: . . . to tell you the truth.

SL: We're at—we're at Laurie's house. Bill . . .

RW: I call her Laurie Harrison. [*Laughs*]

SL: We're at Laurie Harrison's house—uh—daughter of Bill and—and Merlee. And—um—we're—um—uh—the Pryor Center is—uh—here to—uh—interview folks that are attending a surprise

gathering—uh—for Bill. And folks are just gonna be kinda drifting in. Uh—we'll take these—uh—videos, and we will eventually—uh—[*camera clicks*] [*RW sniffs*] post these things on the website under Bill's—uh—project.

RW: Right.

SL: Um—so we'll preserve [*camera clicks*] these recordings forever. We'll transcribe them. Uh—we'll send you a transcription.

RW: Great.

[00:01:07] SL: We'll send you the raw footage—uh—of your section, maybe of everybody's. I think that might be more appropriate. Um—and if all that—if—if there's anything that you say or you don't like and you don't want out there, we'll redact it for you.

RW: Okay.

SL: This is pretty much your—your thing. And we want it to be the way you want it.

RW: Right.

SL: Uh—so we're pretty flexible about that. Um—and it'll—the archives will reside in the Pryor Center. Uh—and there'll be copies in the Special Collections Department in the Mullins Library at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

RW: Terrific.

SL: Um—so if all of that's okay with you, Bob . . .

RW: It is.

SL: . . . we'll keep goin'.

RW: Yeah, it's great.

[00:01:46] SL: Okay, Robert—um—oh, and my name is Scott Lunsford. [*Laughter*] I'm with the Pryor Center. Guess we need to let everybody know that.

RW: Yes.

SL: Um—so—uh—you just got in last night, Robert.

RW: I did.

SL: And you're rested? You're recovered from your travel and . . .

RW: Well, it was an easy trip, you know. The—uh—the airport down in—is it Bentonville where the airport is?

SL: Uh-huh. It—XNA [zē nă].

RW: Yeah.

SL: XNA [*X-N-A*]. Uh-huh.

RW: I was stunned at how easy it was to come here because it used to be where you had to take a trip to Tulsa and—or a trip to Dallas and then come up and—and land, you know, in the little airport south of town. And I was amazed. Like, hey, it's a real airport. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah, it is. It's a regional airport. Yeah, it's amazing.

RW: And then it only took two and a half hours. So—and the plane

was nice. The whole deal was great.

[00:02:31] SL: Well, good. Let's—um—let's talk a little bit about you, and we'll get back to Fayetteville.

RW: All right.

SL: Um—uh—where and when were you born?

RW: Uh—10/27/43. October 27, 1943. And I de—uh—grew up in Baltimore, Maryland.

SL: Uh-huh.

RW: Um—I went to public school and—uh—was not much of a student. But I always knew I was gonna be a writer from age about five. I think I read—uh—I think I read a book called *Freddy the Barnyard Detective*. It was about Freddy the pig and his—and his gang of—of animals who solved the crime. That was it. I just said, "Okay, I'm gonna write books. [*Laughter*] I shall write books."

SL: So it wasn't downhill all from there on, though?

RW: No. [*Laughter*] It was—it's been a struggle all my life, but you know, it's funny 'cause my mother—uh—asked me, "What do you want to do when you grow up, honey?" And I was about the same age. And I said, "I'm going to—I'm going to be a writer of books." And she said, "Oh, that's cute." And I got furious. I said, "Don't say it's cute. I am gonna be a writer." So you

know, I didn't know the word condescend, but I felt she was condescending to me even though I was only a kid, you know. Because I already knew. So it was a strange thing. I never had any doubt. There was a moment when I was about twelve where I wanted to be Johnny Unitas, but that went away pretty quick.

[00:03:51] SL: Yeah, most guys [*RW laughs*] go through that phase. [*Laughter*] So—uh—speaking of your mom, what was your mom's—uh—uh—maiden name and—and—uh . . .

RW: Her name was—uh—Shirley—Shirley Wier, *W-I-E-R*. And—uh—it was my granddad, Robert Wier, and his wife, ?May?. Um—and—uh—he was a—he was a carpenter. And a very working-class family. And—uh—she was their only child. She met my father—uh—whose—his—his mother was named Grace. And I wrote a book about her called *Grace*. She was the most amazing person in my family. She was wonderful. She—uh—she had a lot to do with me becomin' a writer 'cause she had me reading books. And she had me reading intelligent books—uh—really early. She was—uh—one of those women who was sort of like a churchwoman but, like, you know, tough. And—uh—they lived in a working-class neighborhood of rednecks and all. And she—so she got involved in—um—civil rights. And she would have all

the Black people come over to her house to discuss nonviolent demonstrations at department stores way before—in the [19]50s.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:05:04] RW: And—uh—when they came over—they would all come over after church. Most of these people were from Morgan College. And the president of Morgan College, which is a Black school in Baltimore, famous Black school. And we lived not too far from it. Um—they would come over dressed, you know, great, and they'd look great. And they'd come to her house to discuss things. Of course, all the white people in the neighborhood would come out on the—on the—uh—porches and just scream shit. You know. Pardon my language. They would—they would—uh—[*clears throat*] you know, yell nigger and this and that. And—and—uh—I was stunned, you know, 'cause I was—part time I would stay with my grandmother. My parents were—uh—very volatile. They had a lot of fights, and so when things got bad, I would just move to my grandmother's house. And—uh—she was fearless. She would—uh—they would call up and threaten to blow up her house. My grandfather was a ship's captain, and he was a tough guy. He looked sort of like—uh—Jimmy Cagney. He was a little short guy.

SL: Uh-huh.

RW: I went to bars with him when I got older, and he would—he and I would go to these bars, and I saw him knock out a guy once.

[00:06:02] SL: [*Laughs*] Your granddad?

RW: Yeah. He knocked a guy right on his ass because—uh—because the guy made fun of my grandmother. He said, "Ah, you gonna go back to that old bag, Grace," you know. And he said, "Well, you shouldn't talk like that about Grace." The guy said, "Ah, you know, her and her hanging out with niggers" and blah, you know. So that was it. Boom. Knocked him right out. And—uh—then he picked him up and bought him a beer. [*SL laughs*] So—uh—I have yet to write a book about him, although he's—in my book, *Grace*, he figures. But he was always away on ships, you know.

SL: Uh-huh.

RW: So she had to live—she had to raise my father and his sister, Ida Louise—uh—by herself for the most part. And she was a tough cookie. These people would call up and threaten to blow up the house, and she'd just yell at them. "You won't do it, and I know who you are, so you don't have to hide your voice." And—uh—[*clears throat*] she was—she told me that she didn't truck to fools. That was her line. So she was a—a great—she was a

great person to inspire me to—to—uh—keep on keepin' on as a writer. 'Cause if—you know, her attitude was "never quit." And—uh—I—I got a lot of that from her. [00:07:09] Anyway, I went to—uh—public schools. Then I went to Towson College, a little school. And I wasn't even gonna go to college. I was an indifferent student. Uh—the only thing I cared about was reading. I didn't—the rest of the courses, I didn't even pay much attention to. I hooked school all the time. And I'd—was pretty much the same way at Towson, except they had really good teachers, from the South, I might add. They were all s—uh—from North Carolina. Half—the whole—the whole . . .

SL: Hmm.

RW: . . . teaching staff at Towson was—were young guys from—uh—University of North Carolina. And they'd come from that program. And they were extremely serious, extremely dedicated. And they got me inspired, you know, to read books and all that. So I won a—uh—I won a short story contest my last year, even though my averages were C all the way through—the gentleman's C 'cause I hardly ever went to class. And—uh—I sent that story—it was called "The Value of Evolon." It was about a guy hitchhiking around the country, but he finds—uh—the opposite of Jack Kerouac. Instead of finding

everything great and terrific and wild and cool, he finds people small, horrible, terrible. [*Laughs*]

SL: So . . .

RW: But it's—but it's really his fault, you know, because he actually is that way himself, you know.

[00:08:19] SL: What's the—what's the year here that we're talkin' about?

RW: Nineteen sixty-five.

SL: Okay.

RW: So I sent that story—um—oh, what happened? In [19]66 I was workin' as a social worker in Baltimore down in the slums. And—uh—and—uh—I went back to school one day to see one of my old teachers, ?Ray Frankie?. He was—uh—one of the only teachers that wasn't from North Carolina. He was from the University of Wisconsin. And he was, like, a radical teacher. He was a lefty, and—uh—he was great too, you know.

SL: Uh-huh.

RW: So I was waitin' for him to come out, and I saw this—uh—flyer on the bulletin board outside of his office. Said—uh—"University of Arkansas Creative Writing Program." It had a picture of Old Main on it. And—uh—I looked at it and thought, "Wow, this is probably here for me." [*Laughs*] I did. I had this strange

feeling, like—so I took the thing. I didn't even let it stay up there. I just took it. And—uh—I went home, and—uh—at that time I was married. I was married when I was nineteen. And—uh—I said, "I'm gonna apply to this." So I sent Bill Harrison, whoever that was—uh—a—uh—that story, you know, and a letter explaining why I was—uh—such a screw-up in—uh—college. [*SL laughs*] And it was probably the most articulate letter I ever wrote 'cause I really wanted this gig, you know.

SL: Uh-huh.

RW: And—uh—about a month later, I got an acceptance, and they said they would give me a scholarship too, a teaching assistantship. I'd be teaching freshman English. I was stunned, you know, that the idea that I would be a teacher [*laughte*r] 'cause I was such a terrible student.

SL: Uh-huh.

RW: But I did know English. And—uh—then I got divorced from my wife right before we came down here.

SL: She . . .

RW: Anyway, I—so I showed up alone here. [*Takes a drink*]

[00:10:07] SL: So—uh—um—be—before we go much further, you didn't have a whole lot to say about your father. Did—was there not a—um—was . . .

RW: Good question. Um—my father was a—uh—extremely bright person and—uh—very handsome. He looked like Montgomery Clift, sensitive handsome.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:10:29] RW: Not John Wayne handsome. Um—he was very intellectual. He's from, like, of course, my—Grace's son and—he would be smart. And he—uh—he had a—a terrible case, though, of OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder. And—uh—which everybody jokes around now, you know.

SL: Yeah.

RW: They have shows like *Monk* on TV about it and all. But it's no joke. It's really terrible, especially back then, 'cause nobody knew what it was.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RW: And he had to wash himself seven or eight hours a day in the bathroom.

SL: Wow.

RW: And I mean that literally. He would—he worked as a social security administration. Uh—and he was putting in UNIVAC. It was the first big computer. And he was one of the top guys and ran this section over there of the computer stuff. And he would—he loved me and—but he was distant because all he

could do was when he—as long as he was working, he was fine.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:11:25] RW: Uh—when he came home, though, and tried to relax, he would have these obsessive thoughts of being, "I'm dirty. I got to wash myself again." So he would get up two hours before—uh—he needed to drive to work. And—uh—the drive itself took about an hour. So he had to, like, get up three hours before work. And he would spend two hours in the morning washing himself. Then he would come home, and he would just jump right in the bathroom again. Eat dinner with me and my mother. That was always tense. And then he would go back in the bathroom until he went to bed. That was pretty much his life. So most—all the important things in a kid's life were—I was like, "I hit my first home run" or "I had my first date"—was shouted through a bathroom door to him. I could hear the shower going. And—um—I didn't know what it was. I just thought my old man's crazy, you know. Um—and then—uh—around age thirteen, I got it. It hit me. I've written about this in *Men's Journal*.

SL: Mh-hmm.

RW: And in my case, it was—uh—it was like—uh—words comin' in my head. And—uh—I kept hearing these words over and over and

over again. And—uh—I'd—I had—I had said somethin' about God out on the baseball field. And—uh—I was tryin' to impress some tough guys in the neighborhood to show 'em I could be tough too, which was a joke compared to these guys.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:12:46] RW: They were all—they were all guys that ended up in prison. [*Laughs*] And—uh—anyway, I don't want to go into the whole story right now, but it attacked me, like—it was like God said, "Well, you said this, so now you're gonna have to think it every second for the rest of your life." And I—for a year, it just kept goin' through my head—horrible, horrible stuff. And of course, I didn't know what it was. I actually thought God was doing this. Um—and my father thought God was doing it to him because he was impure and had impure thoughts. Here's two people in the same house with the same thoughts, but we never told each other. And—uh—so it was really rough. Years later—uh—when I was workin' on *Hill Street Blues* out in LA—uh—at lunch, I went to a Crown Books, and I saw a book called *The Boy Who Couldn't Stop Washing*. And it was a book by a woman whose name I can't think of. But it saved my life, I mean, in a—in a way. Because when I read it, I—I realized it was my father. And it was exactly like him. And then there was a section about

the boy who couldn't stop hearing things. And that was me. And she said it was this thing called obsessive-compulsive disorder and that it had nothing to do with God or anything else. So I called my father, and I said, "You know how you've been doing this all your life?" He said, "Yeah, I know. God hates me." And I said, "No. No, no. You have obsessive-compulsive disorder." It's a—it's like—uh—the synapses of your brain—um—they—a normal person washes themselves, and the brain says, "Okay, you're clean." A person with obsessive-compulsive disorder—there's like a—it's like a reel—it's like a tape rewinding, except you don't want it to. So now that—you get this thing where, "Are you really clean? You sure you're clean?" In French, they call it the doubting disease, which makes more sense. And it's exactly like that. You doubt what you think, you know. And then the obsessive-word thing is—this is the weirdest part—I don't know how much of this you want to use, but . . .

SL: No, this is fine. This is great.

RW: It's pretty interesting.

SL: Yeah.

[00:14:51] RW: Um—so after I discovered that, I—I wanted to know more about it. So I called a guy—I—I found out at UCLA there was this guy who was the head of the clinic there. And that's all

he did was OCD. So—his name's Jeffrey Katz.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:15:08] RW: And I went out to see him, and I told him my story about being on the baseball field and all that. Actually, I'll just tell you what it was. I—I was trying to show the guys I was a tough guy, so somebody said, "Well, God wouldn't like that" about somethin'. He was joking too, you know. "Oh, we can't do that. God wouldn't like it," you know, that kind of thing a . . .

SL: Yeah.

RW: . . . kid would say. So I said, "God blows."

SL: Ooh.

RW: Now, people say that kind of stuff all the time now. Everybody always talks about this blows and that blows . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

RW: . . . but back then nobody did. Certainly nobody said "God blows" in Catholic Baltimore. And these guys—even these guys were like, "Whoa, that's, like, over the line, Bob." Nineteen fifties, you know. Um—so on the way home, when it started to rain, I actually kinda heard God in my head, not out of the clou—clouds or anything, but a voice in my head saying, "Well, you think that? Then you'll have to think it for the rest of your life." So that's what went around my head for a year. And—uh—the

only way it broke off is when I went to high school. That was in ninth grade. When I went to high school, it was exciting to go to high school. So exciting that I—uh—forgot about it for a day. And at the end of the day, it came back, and I—it didn't have any power any more. And I—I remember sitting in the bathtub, and suddenly it came back, and it didn't have any power anymore. I just said to God—i.e., to myself—um—"I don't care anymore. I'm not gonna—I don't care. I'm not gonna suffer anymore with this," basically. You know. It came back a couple other times but never with that same vengeance, you know. That—that one year, I was suicidal half the year. And the only time it went away is when I played basketball or when I did somethin' to divert myself from the thought. So when I told Jeffrey—uh—it's Jeffrey Schwartz, I'm sorry. When I told Jeffrey about it, he said, "Yeah, that's how you get rid of it."

SL: You confront it and . . .

[00:16:45] RW: You confront it. He had four things you do to get rid of it, and one is you say it's verbal garbage. And you just say, "It's not God. It's verbal garbage. It's like a tape loop. It's broken. Screw it." And then you fixate on something else—just your work or something like that. And you just learn to get rid of it. And that—it helped a lot. But then he said this stunning

thing to me. He said—uh—"You had it all of a sudden like that?" I said, "Yeah, out of the blue." And he said, "Did you, by chance, have rheumatic fever any time the year previously?" I said, "Yeah, I'd just had rheumatic fever." I said, "How did you know that?" And he said, "Because people who get it all at once usually get it from having rheumatic fever six months before. And the theory is that the antibodies that attack rheumatic fever are attacking actually—they do attack rheumatic fever. But they also attack the front part of your brain. If you have a proclivity for this, it'll speed it up, and you'll suddenly get it."

SL: Man.

RW: I almost fell off the chair. I mean, how would he know that? But he said that's what's happened. And he said, "You're—you're a typical example of that." So then he—I went into a couple of—uh—I went into—not—you have to understand, this is when I was forty, so I did—I had to go through all my life [*laughs*] worried this would come back, you know, and . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:18:07] RW: . . . and—uh—so anyway, I went to a couple of—uh—sessions with other people—group sessions. And I met people there who were, like, successful people. Like one woman was afraid to delete her emails because she thought planes would fall

out of the sky. [*SL laughs*] Now, of course, she knew they wouldn't.

SL: Right.

[00:18:25] RW: She was a successful person in her life. She was a—extremely sophisticated. But she—it doesn't matter what you know consciously. You feel this—you're so sure of it. So they had her do it. And of course, no planes fell out of the sky. And she felt great. But she couldn't do that for years 'cause she was so afraid. These are the same—you know, it's people who can't walk through a door without—there are really bad versions of it. There are people who can't walk through a door without making—uh—uh—complex mathematical—uh—things in their head, you know. They go, "Three times two is six. Six times [*words unclear*]." After they do that, then they can walk through a door. If they don't do that and they walk through a door, they're struck with these horrific feelings of—of—uh—depression and—I didn't quite have that bad. [*Laughs*] But anyway, I—I dealt with all that. And—uh—so that was a tough thing to deal with. Um—on the other side, maybe that being obsessive—uh—kept me going when I—things were rough as a writer 'cause I would never give up. So . . .

SL: Well, it's almost like—uh—you had a separate voice inside you

that . . .

RW: Definitely.

SL: I mean, there was—there's you, and then there—and then there's this other you that . . .

RW: Absolutely.

SL: . . . that's talkin' to you. So—uh . . .

RW: That's true.

SL: . . . it's almost like a character—uh—a buried character that rises in . . .

RW: Yes.

SL: . . . inopportune moments.

[00:19:36] RW: Inopportune moments. [*Laughter*] Precisely. So when I came here, though—uh—in the [19]60s, none of that was bothering me at all. You know—um—it only came back—the—the—uh—the hell of it is for that disease is it usually doesn't bother you while you're working. It attacks you when you're not working. So if you're lying down trying to relax after a day's work, that's when it gets you. You know. [*SL moans*] That's when you suddenly feel, "Gee, I better wash myself" or "Gee, that—here comes those words again," you know. And it's—so it's hell. You can't stop working. Um—knowing all that, it's—it's changed everything. Also, they have a drug for it now, Paxil,

which I take. I started taking it, like, twenty-five years ago—or twenty years ago.

SL: Uh-huh.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:18] RW: Fifteen years ago. And within a week, it completely knocked out the whole thing. And when my father went for help at Phipps Clinic in—at John Hopkins Hospital at Baltimore, they told him, "There will be a drug for this someday, but we don't have it yet." Course, that made him feel really bad. [*Laughs*] He said it's a brain dysfunction and—but it had—you know, the thing about that philosophically is when you are being attacked by God, at least you feel like you're special. [*Laughs*]

SL: You made it to the head of the class.

RW: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] "God hates me so much he's attacking me personally." When I realized it was . . .

SL: So it's kind of a reverse privilege, I guess.

RW: It is. And then when you realize it's just a brain dysfunction, you go, "Gee, I'm just mentally ill. God doesn't even exist."

SL: [*Laughs*] "So now I'm ordinary."

RW: Yeah. But anyway, by that time I'd already done a lot.

SL: Okay, so you're back in—you're in New Jersey, and you . . .

RW: Baltimore.

SL: Baltimore, and you get—you steal a flyer off a bulletin board that has a picture of Old Main on it.

RW: Yeah.

SL: You write a good letter, a great letter, to Bill, and not only does he let you in the program, but he says you're [*laughs*] gonna be teaching English.

RW: Yeah.

SL: Which you couldn't believe.

RW: I couldn't. I was stunned. I'll be teaching college? Wow.

[00:21:41] SL: So how did—so did you fly into Tulsa? Did you drive to . . .

RW: I drove. I drove down from Baltimore. My wife and I had just split up. And I'd lived in San Francisco for a while at the beginning of the hippie thing. And that was so exciting I almost didn't come. I was like, "Maybe I'll just stay here," you know. But then I thought, "Well, how am I gonna live?" you know. "Plus, I don't want to blow this thing." So I drove down. I went back to Baltimore, then I drove down from Baltimore. And I showed up at Bill's house. No, I didn't. I went to the downtown hotel, and he came—and stayed there one night. And I forget the name of that hotel.

SL: Scott Hotel? Was it on Dickson?

RW: No, it was down the other way on the highway.

Trey Marley: Mountain Inn?

RW: Mountain Inn? The Sheraton? Was it . . .

SL: No, there was a Mountain Inn, but . . .

RW: Might have been the Mountain Inn.

SL: Right across from the old courthouse.

RW: Yeah.

SL: And there may have been a Holiday Inn.

RW: I think it was the Holiday Inn.

SL: Up on—yeah.

RW: Highway seventy—is it ha . . .

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

RW: Yeah, that's what it was.

SL: Yeah.

RW: Seventy-One, is that the highway?

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[00:22:42] RW: Yeah. So he came down the next day. And he said, "I chose you even though you don't have a good record because I see a lot of potential in your work." And he said, "I know you're a—I can tell you're a hell-raiser and all that. I don't care about that as long as you do the work." And we just hit it off immediately, you know. And I felt like he was the kinda guy

that understood me immediately, you know. And we laughed about stuff. He said, "Now, the only thing about you is if you're gonna put four-letter words all the way through your stories, you're never gonna get published in *Esquire*." [*Laughter*] I remember that line. And I really wanted to be published in *Esquire,* so I said, "All right, all right."

SL: [*Laughs*] So he was already shaping your skills for you.

RW: He was, before we even had breakfast.

SL: Before you put anything down.

RW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RW: So I went up then to his house on Sequoyah and met Jim Whitehead and Merlee.

[00:23:47] SL: What was your first impression of Jim?

RW: Oh my God. It was like—he said, "Hi, Bob." You know, it was like [*SL laughs*] speaking of God. I felt like, "This is the Old Testament come to life," you know. He said something to me almost immediately, like, "You look like a person with a lot of talent. But do you have any character?" [*SL laughs*] And I said, "No, I have no character. [*SL laughs*] I'm too young to have character." No, I always fenced with Jim because he was so overwhelming I had to make a joke or I would have been

destroyed, you know. But I said, "I'm gonna try to have some. I'll work on it." You know, and so they said, "Well, we need to get you a"—oh, this is a terrible story. "We need to get you a room." So they got me a room in this old man's house. Name—damn, what was his name? He wrote a—he wrote children's books just—and he lived up just a little north of Highway 71 in those old frame houses. They had a really nice, old house. He was an old guy. He had, like, two, like Hollingshade or something, or two, three syllables. I can't think of it. Ah, lord. Anyway, he wrote a book called *Snowball*. Children's book about a cat. And he had an elderly wife too. And they seemed like kind people. They gave me this room upstairs. So first night I was there, I went out, and I met some girl down in the town. I said, "Why don't you come back to my room with me?" On the way back, she started tellin' me about how she was in Bible class, Bible school, or some place. She started tellin' me that old story about how they looked at the shoes to see—if they were too shined, the girls—you know, if you could see the reflection of the girls' underpants in the shoes. You know that story?

SL: No, I don't, but [*laughs*] . . .

[00:25:52] RW: Well, it was one of those, like, Siloam Springs or some—one of those places like that she went to school when she

told me that's how religious they were. They—you couldn't have your shoes too shiny 'cause it might reflect your underpants. I'd never heard anything like that. I thought, "Where have I come?" Because I'd just come from San Francisco, which it's free love and wild, you know.

SL: Yeah.

RW: LSD and all that. All of which I'd done, so I was like, "Man, I've stepped back in time. This is like *The Twilight Zone*, you know." So she comes up to the room, and she said, "Do you want to marry me?" I said, "No, man, I just want to have sex." [*Laughter*] She said, "Well, that's not gonna happen." So I said, "All right." So she left. Nothing happened.

[00:26:36] SL: Yeah. So now, what year is it that you get here?

RW: [Nineteen] sixty-six.

SL: Okay. All right.

RW: Late [19]66, I think it was. It might have been [19]67. It was like they had one year—the program had been—existed one year. And Barry Hannah was in that group.

SL: Okay.

RW: And I was in the second group. Anyway, so now she leaves, and as she leaves, Heerwagen—his name was Mr. Heerwagen.

SL: Heerwagen, sure.

RW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[00:27:04] RW: So Mr. Heerwagen was hiding behind a door. And he comes peeking out like this. And he says, "Bob, it ain't fair to you or the girl. It just isn't fair to you or the girl." I said, "What isn't fair?" You know, he said, "You don't—she's not your girlfriend. You were having—trying to have sex with her." I said, "You were listening?" She said, "I don't think"—he said, "I don't think this is gonna work out in my house." I said, "Me either." So I was thrown out at my [*SL laughs*] first domicile in one night. [*Laughter*] And so, you know, these guys are like—I'm like—I guess Bill and Jim were like, "Oh my God. You know, this guy is really gonna be trouble." So [*SL laughs*] I didn't know where to stay the next night. So Jim said, "I know a guy you can live with. It's gonna be great. You guys are gonna really hit it off." So he introduces me to John Little. John Little was a pharmacist from Mississippi who had deep, deep Southern drawl accent. So much so that I had no idea what he was talkin' about [*SL laughs*] half the time. So he'd say things to me to like—so he took me up to his cabin on Mount Sequoyah, which I loved. And Little comes out. He's got on these Bermuda shorts and this terrible-looking yellow shirt and this little cap. And he

was quite a funky-looking character with a little beard. And he said, "Ah, Bob, it's John Little." I said, "What?" He said, "You like Hank Williams?" I said, "Yeah, he's all right, Hank Williams." I said, "You like the Rolling Stones?" Said, "They're all right." [*SL laughs*] And I said, "How bout Mose Allison? You like Mose Allison?" And he said, "Yeah, we can really agree on Mose Al—I like Mose Al." I said, "That's great." Said, "You play snooker?" I said, "No, I play pool, though." He said, "Well, I'll teach you how to play snooker." So I moved in, and then we hit it off immediately. And all we did was, you know, have girls come up there. [*Laughter*] We had contests to see who could have sex with as many girls as humanly possible, which he won by two. It really annoyed me.

SL: [*Laughs*] Won by two?

[00:29:11] RW: Yeah. We had—it was—there was very little studying time, but we had a hell of a good time. But I did manage to write this one short story, which was about a guy on the road, and he sees a Black woman who's been hit. And he stops to help her. And the story becomes sort of surreal and wild. And it's really a good story. It really worked and musically and all, you know. And everybody loved the story when I took it into class. And then I just said, "Look, I gotta quit school. I don't

know enough. I wanna go back to the Haight." So Bill and I had kind of a falling out. He said, "You're making a huge mistake. Blah, blah, blah." And I said, "I don't care. I gotta do this," you know. "What's happening to my generation—if I don't go out there and see this, I'll go nuts." So my girlfriend, Lake, and I, and Dave Orman and his girlfriend, Julie, and Clyde Randall came out a little later. And we all lived in a commune in Haight-Ashbury for about a year. And that's where I got all my stuff for *Shedding Skin*. [00:30:14] And that story became part of *Shedding Skin*, you know. And then I came back the year after that. And when I came back, I had all this three hundred pages of stuff piled up. And they were good scenes. I mean, I knew they were good. They were the best things I'd ever written. And I knew they were sharp. But I couldn't think of how to—a plot should work. I didn't know how to plot worth a damn. So I came in to—back to Bill, and I said, "Okay, here." I just gave [*laughs*] this pile of paper. [*SL laughs*] And he said, "What's this?" I said, "It's my novel, if there is a novel in it. Would you read it?" He said, "Yeah." So I thought, "He'll get back to me in a week or two." And I rented a place down on Hickory Street. And—a little cabin. And he called me the very next day. He said, "This is fantastic stuff, and yes, you do have a plot here.

I'll show it to you." So he said, "Come up to the house." So we—I came up to his house again, and he had it all laid out on the floor. And we started takin' the—we started layin' it out. I mean, it was a pile on the floor. And he—and then he started layin' it out. He said, "Now, look. Here's the first scenes, here's the second. What you have here is a traditional, really, growing up novel, coming-of-age story, but just done in a kind of surrealistic way," you know. And soon as he said it, I saw it, you know. It was like, "Of course." And so then I knew I needed to have connective tissue between these things, you know. Although I didn't want to have a lot of it 'cause I was heavily influenced by *Naked Lunch* and stuff like that at the time, you know.

SL: Right.

[00:31:46] RW: So I spent the next year writing it while I was—and then I got married again to ?Bobbie Hoff?, a local beauty. And her two kids became my kids, and we—I finished the book and got straight As in school and—for the first time in my whole life. Got a job teaching at Miami of Ohio and left the program. But that was my two-year experience here was—took about two and a half years 'cause of my trip to California.

SL: So the creative writing program [*RW takes a drink*] then at the

University of Arkansas was pretty pivotal in your . . .

RW: Totally pivotal. If Bill hadn't been in my life, I don't know what would have happened, you know. I mean, you know, I was pretty determined. But it would certainly not have been the way it was. And he was like a sort of a second dad to me, you know. He was somebody that would deal with me. You know, my father was a—I didn't tell you this part—my father—beyond his OCD stuff, he was very bitter because he was a failed artist. He was a painter. And he—so when I started writing, I think out of trying to protect me 'cause he didn't want to see me become a failed artist, he just wanted me to stop right then, you know. So he would, like, mock me. He would sort of say, "Oh, Mr. Hemingway. Mr. Hemingway's writing today." [*SL groans*] So that . . .

SL: That's hard.

[00:33:14] RW: . . . because I'm very determined, that would—it made me hate him, you know. So I would say, "I am gonna do it now. I'll never quit." [*Laughs*] You know, it didn't do what he wanted it to do at all. And so Bill was a guy who was sympathetic, you know. It was like, "Yeah, you can do it." I'd never had that, except for a couple of teachers, you know. And—but here was this sustained teacher who was really—

"You're gonna do it." Even when I left, he gave me a chance to come back, you know. So—and I left. I was self-righteous and acting like an asshole. So yeah, he really, really changed my life, you know, tremendously. Eventually I gave up teachin' to be a reporter in New York 'cause I wanted to go out and get into the world again. And that helped me, but I taught for six years. I taught at Miami of Ohio, and I taught for a number of years at William—Hobart and William Smith, upstate New York. I just didn't want to be in that small town up there anymore. I had to get to New York. And so I quit and became a reporter in New York. And then from there I went to Hollywood to work on *Hill Street Blues* and *Miami Vice*. But I always kept my novel writing up too, so . . .

[00:34:21] SL: So do you think the stuff you were given here in Fayetteville, Arkansas, set you on the right—by the time you got to Hollywood, were you drawing mostly from the stuff that—out of here, or was it your composite New York news reporter experience or . . .

RW: All of it. You know, all of it. Oh yeah. You know, I think first of all, the lessons Bill taught me here were always useful. You know, we disagreed on certain things. That's funny 'cause I was just reading his twenty-one rules that somebody had put down.

Some of the rules [*laughs*] I don't even agree with now, but—'cause he didn't like gothic literature, he didn't like this kinda thing. But that was his thing, you know. And that the was prejudices of the day too. Nobody thought that kind of literature was cool anymore. Everybody wanted to be John Cheever, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[00:35:15] RW: Or Saul Bellow, you know. And that sort of high-lit ideal, you know. Nobody thought—for example, Bill and I had arguments when I was here about Raymond Chandler. I would show him Raymond Chandler's books. He'd say, "That's just junk." I said, "But you haven't read it, so"—because when I read Raymond Chandler, that had a huge influence on me. I was, like, stunned how good it was. And I thought, "Well, if this isn't literature, I don't know what is," 'cause it had metaphors, lines in it that I'd—like nobody else could write. Like, "She had red hair and a face like a collapsed lung." [*SL laughs*] That's a line from Raymond Chandler. And I remember arguing with Bill, like, if—"Look at this." I said, "Now, if that's not a damn metaphor, I don't know what is." And he would sort of, you know—so we did have our fights. But those fights are all important. You know, you're not supposed to agree with

everything your teacher tells you. You know, you need to become yourself, you know. So if you, like, tried to do everything the teacher said and tried to be that kind of guy, you'd end up trying to be the teacher, you know.

SL: Right.

[00:36:17] RW: And his writi—and his kind of writing, so—and we disagreed on plot, too, because in those days, character was supposed to be everything, you know. Plots didn't matter any more. That was the prejudices of the [19]50s, you know. Well, Tom Wolfe once wrote an essay saying that if you had a great big Cadillac with every bell and whistle on it, and fins, and beautiful radio, et cetera, et cetera, but it didn't have an engine, it ain't goin' anywhere. And that's what the plot is, is an engine. So I—when I taught, I started to really emphasize, you know, the story and the plot. And the plot shouldn't overwhelm the characters, true. But there has to be a plot [*laughs*], you know. And I think the nineteenth-century writers, like Dickens and all—they are the ones—like Balzac, and Balzac wasn't even taught in school when I went to school, anywhere. I read—it's one of my favorite books of all time, is *Lost Illusions*. And it's—do you know that book?

SL: Hm-mm.

RW: Yeah, see, very few people do.

SL: Yeah.

RW: If you started reading that book tonight, you wouldn't even want to come in to work tomorrow, it's so great. 'Cause it's so terrific, and the plot's so good. It's about a poet who comes from the countryside and moves to Paris with all these high ideals about art. He's gonna be a great poet. And then he gets there, and he has this rich patron, this woman who's—he's having sex with in the country. And she moves in with him, but when she gets there, her relatives tell her, "Well, who's this crummy poet you're with? Get rid of him. You're not gonna make a splash in Paris society with that jerk around." So she just ditches him. So now he's in Paris with no money and no way to make any money. So that's when he learns how to become a critic. [*Laughter*] And it's . . .

SL: Gets back.

[00:37:58] RW: Oh, he does. And there's great scene after scene in it where he becomes the lowest scumbag imaginable, you know. [*SL laughs*] It's—and it—he stops wanting to be a poet, and he wants to be a theater critic and wants have—he wants to date models, and he wants to date beautiful ballerinas, and he could care less about poetry anymore, you know. But there's—it's a

stunning—it's Balzac's own story.

SL: Yeah.

RW: How he lived. And awesome, awesome book. Should be required reading. I don't know why it wasn't. It's just a—the prejudices of the day wouldn't allow that, you know.

SL: So when you were here, you were—really, you had—you made your mark with your short stories, I guess.

RW: No, mainly I just wrote *Shedding Skin*. I didn't even write any short stories.

SL: You didn't?

RW: No, I just started writing *Shedding Skin* when I came back from—the first year I wrote a short story. By this—when I came back, I was writing a novel. And I'd already written—out there in San Francisco I'd already written about two hundred pages of it.

[00:38:58] SL: So how do you take that structure and integrate it into screenplay stuff? I mean, you're writing—you get to Hollywood, and you're doing scripts for . . .

RW: Yeah, you have to learn how to write scripts. I'll tell you, there's all these—when I was teaching at Hobart and William Smith, I'd written another book, which came out of Fayetteville. It came out of Brooklyn and Fayetteville. It's called *Cattle Annie and*

Little Britches. It's about two cowgirls in the Old West, and they were from Tulsa, Oklahoma. [*SL laughs*] And Sol Yurick, who wrote *The Bag*, is—he was a Jewish radical, lefty writer friend of mine from Brooklyn. He and I became great friends. And he was like another mentor to me. And I went to him, and I was over at his house one night. We're drinkin' coffee and talking, and Sol's one of the great talkers of all time. And he knows everything about politics. He told—he was the guy who told me in 1968 eventually everybody in America is gonna have their own personal computer. And I just laughed. I said, "Why would they want that?" He said, "You'll see." [*SL laughs*] [00:40:04] And you know, he knew all this stuff. He was an amazing guy. He's still alive. He's, like, eighty. And Sol and I were talking, and he had a book there of the Old West. And pictures of, you know, Billy the Kid and Jessie James, and then I came to this one picture of these two girls, Cattle Annie and Little Britches. And they were these little girls with these giant guns. They had these rifles that were taller than they were, and they were in that classic, you know, nineteenth-century look. Stern, you know, *American Gothic* look, you know. And so I went back to teach at Hobart. That was in the summer. I went back to teach. But I kept thinking about those girls. So the next summer I

went down to Fayetteville and stayed with Miller Williams, who I'd become friends with [*telephone rings*]—and Lucinda and Miller and Karyn, Becky/Jordan. The—and I looked up, in the University of Arkansas western library, Cattle Annie and Little Britches. And I found all this stuff about them, you know. About they had been orphans and how they joined the—how they joined the Doolin-Dalton gang. And how they were sort of smarter than anybody in the gang, and they sort of ended up running the gang. [00:41:18] And I thought, "This is sitting here, and no one's used it." And I'd had a really hard time comin' up with a second novel. And man, there it was. So I went back to Geneva and started writing both a novel, and then I was about halfway through the novel, and I thought, "You know what? This would make a great script, but I don't know how to write a script." So I got—I had never had a course in it or anything. I just picked up the *Citizen Kane* book, Pauline Kael's oversized coffee set—table book of *Citizen Kane*, her introduction and the script. And I read the script a couple of times, and I thought, "This is easy, you know." Ha ha. It's much harder than I thought. [*Laughter*] But you know, the confidence of the ignorant can't be overestimated. And so I just started writing it as a script. So I finished both of 'em the same

time, the novel and the script. And I sent in the script to a guy, and he bought the script, like, instantly. They paid me $25,000 option on it. And then I sold the novel instantly, too, to Jim Landis at William Morrow. And in about a year and a half, we had a movie together with Burt Lancaster, Rod Steiger, and Amanda Plummer played Cattle Annie, and Diane Lane played Little Britches. But the movie—they changed my script all around.

SL: Yeah.

RW: Because they had all these big male stars. They had Rod Steiger, like I say, Lancaster, John Savage, Scott Glenn . . .

[00:42:44] SL: So they diminished the women?

RW: Yeah, they diminished the women. They became nothing, you know. It was just about like a gang of guys who happen to have these two chicks hangin' around, you know.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And that pissed me off so much. Plus, they changed the tone of the story. I wanted this to be harder-edged. I wanted the girls to be, like, playing with dolls at some point, you know, and talking like kids, and then at the next point shooting people, you know.

SL: I see.

RW: But they didn't want that because they said, "That's too weird." I said, "Well, that's how they are, though. These people are in—they're not full people. They're in between," you know what I mean? They're—well, they said it would be too tough. I wanted it to be more like Terrence Malick's movie *Badlands*, you know, with Sissy Spacek, you know what I mean?

SL: Yep.

[00:43:25] RW: They said, "Naw, God no. Nothing like that." So they wanted it to be a family-oriented movie, and as a result, it came out to—in my mind, it came out to being sort of flat. But it did get great reviews. And—but the studio dumped it, so nothing ever happened with it much. But that—but it helped me 'cause I made a lot of money off of it. [*Laughs*] So that was how I learned to write scripts on my own, you know. And from there, I'd be on rolling—I was on *Rolling Stone*, and I started doing stuff for magazines. And I went—and to be honest, that was looked down upon by M.F.A. people. They didn't think that you should do magazine work. You were a literature guy. You were a high artist. But I didn't buy that anymore. I was readin' Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson and those guys, and they were much . . .

SL: Yeah.

RW: . . . more exciting to me . . .

SL: Yeah.

RW: . . . than most of the novels that were coming out.

SL: Absolutely.

[00:44:13] RW: And I was good at that kind of stuff. I could get people to talk, and I liked to listen to people. And so Tom Wolfe came up to Hobart to read and talk, and I had him come out to the house, and I threw a giant party out there with a rock-and-roll band. And he and I were hanging out, and he said, "You're really"—he read *Shedding Skin*, and he said, "You're really a good writer. What are you doin' here, man? You should be in New York writin' journalism. We can write anything we want now." And I said, "You're right." So I wrote a little piece on the cops of the town.

SL: Ah.

RW: I hung out with the cops, and I framed it as a story about, you know, like, tough cops, brave, breaking into—you know, breaking up killers, blah, blah, blah, that's how you see it in New York. But what is it like in a small town? And basically these guys were running around with the same attitude as *Dirty Harry*, but they were gettin' cats out of trees. [*Laughter*] And they, you know, and they would talk all this tough stuff. So it was

hysterical. And it was called "The Yawn Patrol." [*SL laughs*] Remember *The Dawn Patrol*, the old movie?

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RW: This was "The Yawn Patrol."

SL: "Yawn Patrol." Uh-huh.

RW: Frank Rich ga—he was one of my editors, and he gave it that title. Well, I thought, 'cause it was in a new magazine, *New Times*, that nobody would ever see it. And boy, was I wrong. The minute it came out, these guys saw it. And I don't know how they got it so fast. 'Cause it wasn't even on the stands yet, hardly, that magazine. And—but they got it immediately. And then they really hated my guts, you know. [*SL laughs*] And it was sorta scary. I was livin' out in the—on the lake, Lake Seneca, all by myself having been divorced again. And they would sort of call me up late at night and hang up. And they would do weird stuff to me. And I thought, "Man, they could just kill me out here and nobody would ever know it, you know." And I'd be comin' out of my little driveway to go up the highway to go down to the school, and they'd be sittin' there, you know. It was . . .

SL: Now, that's weird.

[00:46:16] RW: Oh yeah, it was scary. So I didn't really think they

were gonna hurt me, but I thought, you know, they could do somethin', like they could come—because I smoked pot, and I thought, "They could come bust me, and then I'd really be in trouble."

SL: Right.

RW: They never did any of that, but what they did do was actually funnier and terr—more terrible in a weird way. There was a bar there where I drank all the time. And I was in there—called Cosie's. It was downtown in Geneva. Geneva was like a burned out, second-rate town where half the stores were Black. And I liked a lot of the people there, but it was a really depressing place.

[00:46:52] SL: Now, this is in Ohio?

RW: No, this is in New York.

SL: In New York.

RW: Geneva, New York.

SL: Okay. All right.

RW: It's in between Rochester and Syracuse.

SL: Okay.

RW: Directly in between.

SL: All right.

RW: Cold as hell, snows five thousand feet a year.

SL: Okay.

RW: So I get down to Cosie's one night. I was drinkin' whiskey, and I was pretty loaded. From the back door of this place, which I never even noticed before, comes Jimmy Trickler, who was one of the cops I wrote about. And I didn't say anything mean about him. I just sort of playfully kidded around about them. But they didn't take it too well. So he says—he comes up behind me, and this other guy named Ed McGuigan—he—they come up from behind me, and they say, "You're comin' with us." I said, "Oh no." [*SL laughs*] And they said, "You're comin' with us." And I said, "Where?" They said, "Back here." And I thought, "Here it comes. This is where I get the shit stomped out of me."

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

RW: "Right here." So what could I do? I went with them, and I thought, "Oh well. Hopefully it won't be too bad."

SL: [*Laughs*] Get it over with.

[00:47:47] RW: So they get me there, and they shut the door. And they throw me into this circle of people. And I'm like this [looks in various directions]. I'm terrified. I'm lookin' around expecting it to be six or seven cops in black jackets ready to pounce on me and pummel me with nightsticks and stuff. Instead, it's six women. And it was all their wives. [*Laughs*]

And they had the wives just scream at me. "You son of a bitch. You hurt my husband. You ruined him. You bastard, you." And they just screamed at me for about ten minutes. And then they let me go. [*Laughs*]

SL: What a great scene. [*Laughs*]

RW: Yeah. It's all in my new novel—I mean, a new book. I'm doin' a book, and it's comin' out this year. It's called *Reggie Jackson Wants to Kill Me*, 'cause I did a famous piece about Reggie Jackson, so—but that story is in there with that story I just told you.

SL: That's great.

[00:48:39] RW: And they're doing a collection of all my old pieces this year with—Roy Blount's doin' the introduction to it.

SL: Cool.

RW: So here I am thrown out on the street, you know, snowing. I'm totally drunk. And I'd just been attacked by all these women. [*Laughter*] So that was my life after that. I went to New York and became a New Journalist, and it was a total blast. I had the most fun I ever had in my life there. I lived in the Village. I went to party after party. And I got to interview everybody in the world I wanted to interview, and I learned a tremendous amount about how to live in the world. You know, it was great.

So that—after that, I got—moved to DC and—because my wife had moved there. Well, she wasn't my wife yet. Celeste Wesson. She was a girl I met there. She went down to be the producer of *All Things Considered.*

SL: Oh, cool.

RW: Yeah. So I finally moved down there, although I didn't really wanna move back to that area 'cause I'd grown up in Baltimore. But DC was much nicer. And I mean, I love Baltimore more. I can't say that. But DC was just—it was just good to have a home with somebody 'cause I'd lived alone for quite a while. I'm probably my own worst enemy when I live alone, you know.

SL: Yeah. [*RW laughs*] Who isn't?

RW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[00:49:48] RW: So I moved there, and I was writing this book, *Red Baker*, about steel workers. And that's another loss. I don't know how much of this you want. But . . .

SL: Well, this is all great. I do—I am interested—you mention Hunter Thompson—that—did you ever get to meet . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . Hunter Thompson?

RW: Oh yeah, we had dinner several times. And he was not always

like "Hunter Thompson" quote, unquote. When he wasn't on, he was like a very dapper and extremely civil Southern-type gentleman.

SL: That's interesting.

RW: And it was only after he got coked up or something that he became Hunter.

SL: Addled.

RW: And—yeah.

SL: Yes.

[00:50:33] RW: If you got him around guns, booze, and cocaine, that was really a—[*laughter*] that was a big mistake. But I've seen him both ways. I saw him when he was whacked out of his skull, and I've seen him when he was just completely different, you know. "Hi, how are you? I'm working on my new book," et cetera, et cetera. Yeah, we would hang out. I knew everybody at *Rolling Stone* 'cause it was a blast. It was really fun to be a New Journalist in those days. 'Cause they—magazines didn't really have any rules. You could write anything you wanted about anybody as long as it was true. You didn't have to make everybody sound like a hero. You know, if a guy you interviewed turned out to be a jerk, you could just write that—you could write about that aspect of him as well as the good

stuff, you know.

SL: Right.

RW: That's no longer the case because what happened is publicity people in Hollywood began to acquire more and more power. And so if they had, like, six guys—like, say they had like Kurt Russell, Clint Eastwood, you know, two or three other guys. If you wrote a bad thing about one of them, they would just say, "Okay, you can't interview any of the rest of 'em." And they ended up basically having more power than the magazines.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And they'd do that to the TV guys too, like *Entertainment Tonight*. That's why all that stuff is just so frothy and, you know, jive.

SL: Right.

[00:51:49] RW: So I hit there at the right time and had a blast doing it, but it's—it was tough. It was a tough after a while. I mean, I had—every month I would have to get a story, and if I didn't get one—I had no guarantee because I was a freelance writer, so I couldn't pay the rent. So I worked hard. And then at night, I wrote this novel. I wrote this novel called "Baltimore." It was going to be this giant novel that had every conceivable kind of literary trick in it. Except I was stoned most of the time, and

most of it was just palaver. [*SL laughs*] And—but it was five hundred pages of palaver.

SL: [*Laughs*] That's a lotta inches.

RW: That's what I was gonna call it in a minute, "Five Hundred Pages of Palaver." [*SL laughs*] And so—this is a true story. I was out one night, New York, and I was totally depressed. I was, like, thirty-seven, thirty-eight, and I was like, "Shit, you know, my career is over. I can never finish this book." And I knew it was a pile of crap. But I didn't know how to fix it, you know. And of course, bein' stoned all the time didn't help. So I went out with Jay McInerney and a couple of other guys who were friends with me, and we were all drinking and cavorting. And I just was so depressed, I said, "I'm goin' home." So I walked up Hudson Street to my—from down in SoHo to my apartment. And I got in my apartment, and I was lyin' in bed, and I was that clammy feeling, and you're too screwed up, and . . .

SL: Yeah.

[00:53:20] RW: . . . I thought, "Man, I might as well just kill myself. I've given up. I can't take anymore." And it was sort of like I gave up. You know, I really gave up mentally. And when I gave up, I heard this voice in my head sayin', "My name is Red Baker, and the story I'm about to tell you is about how I almost lost my

wife and kids and my job but managed to get 'em all back again—managed through an act of ingenuity to get them all back again." And I ran into the—my little next-door room there and started typing on the old typewriter. It was precomputer. And I wrote, like, thirty-five pages. This had nothing to do with the other book. This character was not in that book. But it was real, you know. So I started writing. I called up my friend Bob Asahina around five in the morning. He said, "What are you calling me for?" I said, "Listen to this. I have to read you this." [*Laughs*] He said, "Not again." 'Cause he had read the whole five hundred pages of the palaver. [*SL laughs*] And . . .

SL: Like a true friend.

[00:54:17] RW: Yeah, and I—he's one of my dearest, dearest friends, probably the most. So when I read it, he said, "God, that is good." He said, "I don't know if you can sustain it, but if you can, that's gonna be a great novel." And it just wrote itself. I didn't even have to think about—it was almost like, you know, you hear the old thing about a sculpture. You're chippin' it away till you find the right form, you know.

SL: Yeah.

RW: It's already there, but you don't know it. That's how this was. All these palaver was just stuff I was chippin' away, although I

had no idea.

SL: Right.

RW: And then in the middle was this totally different thing. The characters all came to life. I didn't have to make any list of characters. I didn't have to think about the scenes. It just wrote itself. It was an amazing experience. And then the book got done, and Morgan Entrekin, who's the top guy at Atlantic Grove—he's publishing my new book now. He read it and said, "This is awesome." But he—at that point, he couldn't buy it 'cause he was just a junior editor. But he said, "This is awesome, but it needs this, this, and this." He gave me a really great reading on it, you know. And gave me like ten single-space pages of stuff I needed to do on it, which I did. [00:55:22] And so now the book's done, and my agent, Jack, says, "This is one of the best literary novels ever. It's gonna kill." He said, "I'm gonna send it out for an auction." So he sent it out to thirty-two publishers on one day. And he said, "They're gonna bid. We're gonna make a killing." At the end of the day, no one had called. Now, here I had finally done the thing I tried to do. It took me six years, and no one wanted it. I was—I can't tell you how sad I was. [*Laughs*] I was, like, beyond belief. I was in—still livin' in New York. I flew down to my

girlfriend's place in DC and just lay there in bed for two days. And I was like, "This is the end, man. I can't—you know, I can't do any better than this if they don't want this." And a guy called me up, who was a big editor. And he said, "Bob, your book made me cry, it's so moving, blah, blah, blah." And I said, "Well, are you going to buy it?" He said, "No, I can't buy it, man." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, you have a working-class guy here, and he cheats on his wife and takes drugs and all this." I said, "Well, he's lost his job. He's totally depressed. Yeah, that's how those guys live." I'd hung out with all those guys trying to write the other book, which wasn't about those guys. But by accident, I had hung out with those guys, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[00:56:35] RW: And they turned out to be the true subject of the book. Anyway, so now he said, "See, like a working-class hero has to be held to higher standards than a middle-class hero." He said—I said, "Yeah, all middle-class heroes cheat on their wives with their [*unclear words*] and all that stuff, you know." He said, "Yeah, but they're middle class. They get to do that. Working-class people have to be heroic." I said, "So if I had written this like the Waltons, you would have published it?" He said, "Well,

it's horrible to say, but yeah, probably." [*SL laughs*] So that's when I really thought I should take a gun and blow my head off. But two weeks later, Joyce Johnson at Dial Press bought it. And when the book came out—she was Jack Kerouac's old girlfriend—and she said, "Jack would have loved this book," which made up for everything. 'Cause . . .

SL: There you go.

RW: . . . he was one of my, of course, heroes. So when the book came out a year later, it got rave reviews from Jonathan Yardley, Michiko Kakutani. Every single review looked like I wrote it myself, they were so good. And now the book has been rediscovered again. If you look on Amazon, there's a guy named Keir Graff who's just wrote a—he's a young critic, and he said, "Where's this book been all my life?" And he called me a genius, and he compared the book to [*SL laughs*] *A Fan's Notes*, Frederick Exley's book, who's one of my favorite books of all time. And he said—and then he also compared it favorably to *Mean Streets* by Martin Scorsese. So I thought, "You can't do much better than that, you know."

SL: Yeah.

[00:57:58] RW: So twenty-eight years later, it's still out there. It's coming back out again this year. It's been republished three

times. And you just have to be tough. I mean, that was the worst, toughest experience ever.

SL: Yeah, you know, it sounds like to me you had the work ethic before you ever got to Fayetteville, but you know, you crank out this stuff, and it sounds like you're cranking out this stuff, but it is hard work. And there is discipline involved. And there are doing it wrong till you get it right.

RW: Oh yeah.

[00:58:33] SL: All the way through. Is—did any of that—what—did you—what kind of work ethic did you gain when you got to Fayetteville and you got associated with . . .

RW: Well, 'cause I watched Bill and Jim, and those guys did it every day. That was hugely important to me. You know, I grew up in Baltimore—nobody was a writer and nobody was ever gonna be an artist. You just went to work at the mill, or you know, if you went to college, maybe you were a teacher or somethin' in high school. But [*clears throat*] nobody was gonna—you know, if you even said, "I want to be a novelist," people would just laugh at you. You know, it's a working-class town. They didn't even know what you were talkin' about. People didn't read books there. So when I got here, here was an environment where everybody read books, and everybody cared about books more

than anything, and everybody wrote. And then I had Barry Hannah in my class. I mean, that was, like, a huge—I didn't talk about it to anybody. I've never talked about it, but when he wrote his story called "Mother Rooney Unscrolls the Hurt," which was part of his first book, *Geronimo Rex*. He brought this story in, and up till then, I was thinkin', "I'm better than all the rest of these guys." And by the way, without having done anything, I thought that. You know, so . . .

SL: Yeah, of course.

[00:59:49] RW: That's when you're really good is you don't have to do anything. But when he wrote that story and brought it in, it was, like, "Holy shit," you know. This was not some student's story. This was, like, a guy who has already totally evolved as a writer. The lines in it, the stunning, brilliant lines in it, the amazing descriptions of stuff, the ironies and tricks and—I mean, everything about it was fresh and new. This was not some guy tryin' to be William Faulkner like half the other guys in the class. This was a total different way of doin' the South. And I realized, "Here's a real writer. If I'm gonna be a real writer, I better just starting gettin' my ass back there and doing it [*laughter*] every day," you know. So this environment definitely gave me that. If I hadn't had that, you know, here, I probably wouldn't have

done it, you know. Well, maybe I would have in some other form, but this is what I got. And this is—and it really helped me tremendously. And I'd see Bill, you know, goin' off to write. Jim—"I'm goin' off to write." Well, I better go off to write, you know. I just can't sit around in the student union saying, "You know, I" . . .

SL: Yeah.

RW: . . . "I'm gonna be Hemingway" . . .

SL: Right.

RW: . . . without writing. So—and also I got to be taken seriously. No one took anything seriously in Baltimore. All my friends were like, you know, terminal ironists. Life meant nothing. We weren't goin' anywhere. That's how Baltimore is. That's the difference between Baltimore and New York. When you go to New York and you tell somebody, "I want to be a writer," they go, "Great. What are you workin' on? I'm workin' on somethin', too." Like when I had that script for *Cattle Annie*, I met a guy, and I told him about it, he said, "Oh, I know an agent." He got me the agent. That would have never happened in Baltimore in ten million years.

SL: Right.

[01:01:36] RW: You could have had a script for ten million years, and

nobody would have ever given it to anybody 'cause nobody knew anybody to give it to, you know. It was just a total different attitude in New York and LA. When you get there, people just say, yeah—you might get screwed occasionally, but at least things do happen, you know. So—and then Fayetteville, you know, I got—that's where I first got that. It was like, "Yeah, we're all serious about this." That was stunning to me, you know. And then I had a rock-and-roll band here, and we played two or three nights a week down at George's Majestic Lounge.

SL: Oh, what was the name?

RW: It was called Bridge.

SL: Bridge.

RW: Clyde Randall and I were in it together. Mike Caudle.

SL: Mike Caudle.

RW: Remember Mike?

SL: Yeah, I do.

TM: Two minutes on this tape.

SL: Two minutes on this tape, so . . .

RW: I'll probably run out all your tape for . . .

SL: Oh, no, no, no

TM: We got plenty of tape.

SL: No, we got plenty of tape. We can go . . .

RW: All right. I'm sorry.

SL: . . . for days.

TM: No, it's great stories.

RW: Yeah, I have many good stories.

SL: Yeah, I do—why don't we go ahead and get outta this tape. I do wanna talk a little bit about Fayetteville.

RW: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[01:02:30] SL: Okay, Robert, we just started our second tape here today. And we were just really—you'd just mentioned that you had a little band. You played at George's Majestic Lounge a nd . . .

RW: Yeah, we played all over.

SL: . . . Dickson Street. Name of the band was Bridge. You mentioned Mike Caudle.

RW: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

SL: I remember Mike Caudle. Talk a little bit about Fayetteville and Dickson Street and . . .

[01:02:58] RW: Well see, I think that's one of the most important things about me comin' down here, beyond the fact of the writing. And like I said, seeing other guys do it all the time and realize it was serious. It was also a place where I could be sort

of—stand out with people. You know, I could have my own band and play and all that. I'd never done that in Baltimore. I'd known other people that did it. And suddenly I thought, "Hey, I could do this." And pretty soon I was doing it down there, and people really liked it, you know. And that was so important. It was like it gave me a sense of—that I could be somebody, you know what I mean? Because like I said, I was indifferent student. But I wasn't just indifferent. I was sort of beat down from my family and from that OCD stuff. So I didn't—I actually was smart all along. But I never could rise to the occasion 'cause I felt always like, you know, "When was this thing gonna come back again?" and also my old man would laugh at me when I was—you know, and it was just too much.

SL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

RW: And I came here and people took me seriously in one way, then I suddenly could blossom in another way as a musician and all, you know. And I started singin' with the Cate Brothers. I couldn't believe I was playin' with those guys, you know. I only did it a couple of times, but it was—and they were like—accepted me as a musician, you know. I was a joke compared to them. Those guys are awesome players, but I did get up and sing with 'em and all, and they were just so great to me. And people here

generally were so great to me. People from Arkansas were so bloody friendly. That was the other thing about it. People in Baltimore are curt, sort of like, you know, "Yeah, who do you think you are, asshole?" You know, and you talk like that in Baltimore. [*SL laughs*] That's the way they talk. Here's the way they talk. You know. "Going down to the ocean this summer?" "Yeah, maybe." You know, there's always a kind of negativity to everything. "Think the Orioles will win?" "Probably not. They always fuckin' lose, you know." [*SL laughs*] And you got here . . .

SL: Yeah.

[01:04:47] RW: . . . and people were like, "Hi." And when I went to the store for the first time, they said, "Y'all come back." I had—I know it was just somethin' they do. But I was stunned by it. I was, like, "Y'all come back? Okay, I will."

SL: Piggly Wiggly?

RW: Yeah. And any place else you went, people were like, "Hi, Bob." They all knew my name pretty quickly. And you could say they just did it 'cause they wanted to make money and all that. But that wasn't really true. They were really nice. I mean, the—Mary, who ran George's.

SL: Yeah.

RW: She was—she'd like—was just like a mother. You'd come in and—"Hi, Bobby. When are y'all gonna set up?" and blah, blah, blah, and, you know, and she'd talk to me, and it was just such a—I really was able to come to this place and blossom as a person, you know. And I think that had a huge—I mean, after all, I was only twenty-three, and I really had never done anything where I was sort of a stand out at anything. And suddenly, man, that gave me confidence to go on to New York and stuff like that.

[01:05:43] SL: So bandwise, you were lead singer or . . .

RW: Nah.

SL: Did you play an instrument as well?

RW: No, I played the harmonica, and sometimes I played rhythm guitar. But we would play—we played some of the weirdest places, too. We played out in—what was it? Oh, it was a military installation. Out . . .

SL: The Armory?

RW: Yeah.

SL: Out by the airport.

RW: Yes.

SL: Sure. Absolutely.

[01:06:08] RW: We played out there one night, and they didn't have

any—they didn't have any lights.

SL: That's right.

RW: So they had to turn Jeeps on. [*SL laughs*] They put twenty or thirty Jeeps beyond the dance floor. We were up on a stage. Here's the dance floor, and these Jeeps are shootin' light up on the stage.

SL: How great is that?

RW: And we were playin' Jimi Hendrix and all that stuff. And the kids there hadn't yet heard it. You know, it was all new. So this—these kids came up to me afterwards, and you know, I was singin' "Purple Haze" and stuff like that, you know. And these kids said, "Did you write that?" [*SL laughs*] And it was so sweet, I said, "I wish, you know. There's this guy out in San Francisco I'd just seen, Jimi Hendrix. And I only wish I could play like Jimi Hendrix or sing like him." Anyway, the kids were great, and we played all over these high school places and all kinds of weird venues. And then I had all these friends down in the—was it called Tin Cup?

SL: Yes.

RW: Bobby Morgan and all those guys. Did . . .

SL: Sherman. Mh-hmm.

RW: . . . you know those guys? Sherman.

SL: Sherman's. Mh-hmm.

[01:07:12] RW: Those guys were really—I was tight with all those guys. And I'd go down there twice a week and hang out, and whites and Blacks were dancing together. And that was so hip. I loved it, and I loved all those guys. And that jukebox. That was awesome, you know. So Sherman and those guys were—I was tight with all them, and then we had a—and I would play sometimes, and we played at some of the Black places, you know. And it was just a blast. And we always rehearsed right behind George's. Not George's. Rogers.

SL: Yeah.

RW: There's Rogers, and there was the alley, and then there was this little place. This guy named Al Niblack.

SL: Niblock.

RW: Yeah, Niblock.

SL: Yeah.

RW: Niblock.

SL: Well, he's—there's a Niblock attorney family here.

RW: Yeah, that's who it was.

SL: Yeah.

[01:07:59] RW: Al and his wife. They had this place, which sort of became, like, a happening place. They would put on all kinds of

crazy stuff, and they let us use it to practice. So here we are practicin' all this psychedelic rock and stuff right across the alley—the back alley from Rogers. So these drunks would come wandering in. And these guys were like, you know, good ol' boys. They'd say, "Y'all play Hank Williams?" [*SL laughs*] And we, of course, we were too good for that, so . . .

SL: Right.

RW: "Hank, no. We're playing, you know"—they said, "Well, Hank Williams is good." And I started thinkin', "You know, Hank Williams really is good. Why aren't we playing Hank Williams? Are we such assholes we don't like Hank Williams?" [*Laughs*] So we started playing Hank Williams too, you know. Then these guys loved us. It was like . . .

SL: Well, of course.

RW: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And . . .

[01:08:51] SL: So was the Rockwood Club around when you were here?

RW: No, that was gone already.

SL: It was already gone.

RW: 'Cause I know Levon played there and Ronnie Hawkins.

SL: Ronnie Hawkins and . . .

RW: I got to be friends with Ronnie from here, too. And I even went to visit him in Toronto. And what a trip that guy was.

SL: Yeah.

RW: He was fun.

SL: Yeah.

RW: I remember he'd say thi . . .

SL: He still is.

RW: Is he still around?

SL: He's still in Toronto. Still—what's the manor he calls the—it's, I don't know, Poor Folk Manor or somethin' like that up there. [*Laughter*] I forget what he calls it. But yeah, we've interviewed him twice. We had a Hawkins family reunion out in Madison County, and we got Dale Hawkins, who's his cousin.

RW: Dale Hawkins, my hero.

SL: Dale Hawkins.

RW: He just died, right?

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm. Yeah, we've got—I'll give you a—I'll give you that interview.

[01:09:37] RW: Oh, Dale Hawkins. I loved that song. What was it?

SL: "Susie Q."

RW: "Susie Q." That was—I loved his version way more than . . .

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RW: Buf—what's the name of the other guys?

TM: CCR.

RW: Yeah, I never liked them that much. But I thought he was—when I was a kid, I played that record eight thousand times, you know. Had a 45 of it. And then Roger, is he still around?

SL: Kitter? Roger Kitter from Rogers Rec?

RW: No, Roger Hawkins, the drummer.

SL: Oh, Roger. No, I don't know that.

RW: He was his cousin.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And he played on a lot of gigs. He played with the Cates too. He was their drummer for a while. So that was a blast, and then one night we were in Rogers, and Caudle—well, here's two stories about Rogers. One night we were in Rogers, and Caudle was fairly loaded, and some guy said somethin' about us being hippies 'cause we had really long—we were, like, probably the only people in town with really long hair at that point. There wasn't anybody else that I know. It was just startin' to happen, you know.

SL: Yeah.

[01:10:38] RW: And somebody says, "Ah, dang hippies and hair."

And so Caudle said, "Oh, screw you." And the guy hit him with a pool cue.

SL: Uh-oh.

RW: And Mike picked up a pool ball and hit him right in the head with it. And then it was on. People were fightin' and scramblin'. And I grabbed Caudle, and I said, "Let's get out of here before we get killed, man." And we got out [*laughs*] and got in our car and split, you know. But that was wild. And then another time when I first got here, the first week I was here after I'd been thrown out of the Heerwagens', [*SL laughs*] I went to Rogers to meet Jim and Bill to go to an Arkansas Razorback game. And all these guys were dressed in pajamas with that Arkansas pigs on them. It was like sort of white pajama things with Arkansas with the old big hats and . . .

SL: Yeah?

RW: . . . and I had never seen anything like it.

SL: Yeah.

[01:11:30] RW: To me it was like bein' in hell or somethin'. I thought, "My God, they're gonna kill me." [*SL laughs*] And they were all real rednecks. And they had this race record—they had a little record player, and they had this race record by Brother Dave Gardner.

SL: Uh-oh.

RW: Called "Pilot to Copilot."

SL: Yeah.

RW: And it was about a guy who's a—he's basically—a Black guy's flying a plane, and the guy on the ground, the—what's it called? The guy . . .

SL: The air traffic controller?

RW: Yeah, the air traffic controller basically makes him crash and die. And that's the funny part. So these guys are goin', "Oh God, ain't that funny, you know?" So I couldn't keep my mouth shut.

SL: Uh-oh.

RW: So I said, "Yeah, that's really fuckin' funny that the guy's dead. You guys are a million laughs." And they looked at me with this long hair, and they were like, "What'd you say?" And I thought, "Oh God, what did I say? [*SL laughs*] That's really not too smart." So they said, "We ought to take—look at that girl. We ought to take him out and give him a haircut." And I was like, "Oh shit." I've read about Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman. This could be my chance to join the martyrs.

SL: Yeah.

[01:12:31] RW: And so I said, "Hey, boys, take it easy, you know." So at that point Whitehead came booming through the [*SL*

exhales] crowd. And he towered over everybody. He said, "What's the trouble here?" They said, "He's making comments about us." And I said, "All in fun, boys. All in fun," you know. And he said, "He don't know nothin'. He just came down here from Baltimore." And they said, "Well, he better shut up." So he pulls me out. [*SL laughs*] As they're all ready to take me out in their truck and probably kill me. So we get outside, and I said, "Thanks." And he said, "This is a good town, but you really can't make comments like that in Rogers. That's a really bad idea." And I said, "Yeah, I got that idea." [*SL laughs*] So—and then we went up to the ball game, and I had this demure little coed sittin' in front of me. She had, like, a little A-line dress on and a little, like, you know, sport-coat-type look, preppy look. Hair tied back.

SL: Yeah.

RW: Little bow, lots of makeup.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And just looked completely demure and cute and all that. And then this giant pig runs out, and this guy is pulling—this pig is pulling this guy along. I could not believe it. I had never seen anything like it. [*SL laughs*] And I just thought, "I am definitely in *The Twilight Zone*." And then this demure co-ed just jumped

up, had her legs open like this [uses hands to indicate width], and went, "Wooooooooo. Pig. Sooie!" And like—and so did the other fifty thousand people. And my mouth just dropped open. I said, "What in God's name was that?" [*SL laughs*] And Jim and Bill said, "That's callin' the hogs. You just have to get into it." I said, "Callin' the hogs?" You know, I just—the idea of a hog as your mascot was so crazy. The whole thing [*SL laughs*] and people dressed in pajamas with giant hog hats. It's—it seemed like something out of Terry Southern to me, you know what I mean?

SL: Yeah.

[01:14:29] RW: It was like I thought, "I am in another world," and I'd just come from San Francisco, you know, where everything was new and exciting, and now—and playing at the drive-in was *Thunder Road*, which was fifteen years old, you know.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And I thought, "God, I am back in the [19]50s here, you know. The early [19]50s." [*Laughs*] But I got used to it. It was fun. I had a great time, you know. So it was—but it was a real adjustment. It was, like, stunning, you know. It was amazing. On the other hand, the—like I say, the classes and all were really smart. And the guys who taught the classes were smart.

And then I met my own circle of friends here, and we had our own scene. It was really nice. It was great.

[01:15:11] TM: Is there a Hawkins story? Did you have a Ronnie Hawkins story?

SL: Yeah, tell us . . .

RW: Oh, I went up to Toronto to see him after I met him here. I was up there doing somethin', interviewing somebody or somethin'. I forget what it was. And I called him—I said, "Yeah, I'm comin' up there." And he said, "Ah, come on over, boy." So I went over to his place, and he gave me a beer, but he didn't drink a beer. He said, "Naw, I've quit alcohol." And I said, "You have quit alcohol?" He said, "But I'm doubling up on the dope." [*Laughter*] I still remember that. And then he told me how he got his picture on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. Off of *The Last Waltz*. He said, "I knew they were taking pictures of Robbie. So wherever he went, I stood next to him." [*Laughter*] He was quite open about it.

SL: Yeah, that's interesting.

RW: He was quite open about it. And he was a wonderful guy. I really dug him. And he was so friendly to me. And we had a great visit, you know.

SL: Yeah. He's quite the story. I get Hawkins stories all the time.

RW: Yeah.

[01:16:25] SL: Even—we were interviewing Hayden McIlroy . . .

RW: Well, I'm sure.

SL: . . . the other day, and you know, they went to the same grade school together, and it's just really fascinating. You know, my sister talks about his time at the City Park swimmin' pool and what an Adonis he was and how athletically—how he and Doug Douglas . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . did a diving show together and took it to Florida for a summer.

RW: Is that right?

SL: *Mutt and Jeff* kind of thing. Yeah, it was really . . .

RW: Well, I remember when he made his first record. He was a very handsome—he was like the new Elvis.

SL: Yeah.

RW: That's what everyone wanted him to be. And by the time I saw him, he was quite older, and he had the whole hippie look and . . .

SL: Yeah.

[01:17:14] RW: But he was a great—I loved him. And Levon and the Cate Brothers and I are still close friends. I haven't—although I

haven't seen Levon for a while. But the Cate Brothers and I were always buddies. When they came to New York, I took 'em out to dinner. And I went to see 'em at the—that Texas club that's now gone. I can't think of it.

SL: The Long Star? Lone Star Cafe?

RW: The Lone Star. The Lone Star.

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

RW: Yeah. And I came in, and they hadn't seen me yet. And I thought, "Maybe they won't even remember me," you know. 'Cause I—you know, it had been a long time. They looked out—Earl looked out in the audience and said, "Now we got one for the old Razorback boy Bobby Ward." And they played "Willie and the Hand Jive," you know . . .

SL: Oh, wow.

RW: . . . with Levon on the drums.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And it was just—it was so sweet. It was like, man, you know. They don't forget you.

SL: They don't.

RW: And then I went out with them and bought 'em dinner, and they were, like, just so nice. They're the nicest [*laughs*] guys in the world.

SL: They are.

[01:18:08] RW: When I was down here, Caudle and I were playin', and Ten Years After had just come out, you know. And they were playing all that boogie stuff real fast, you know. And I thought, "Wow, nobody could play faster than that." So I took the record out to Ben Jack's Guitar Studio, where Earl was teaching.

SL: Sure.

RW: I mean, where Earl. Yeah, Earl.

SL: Yeah, Earl ran the shop out there.

RW: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

RW: And Mike was teaching there too.

SL: Yeah. Yes.

RW: So I took the—that's how I met him, through Mike. So I took the 33 out there, and I said, "Listen to this, man. This is the fastest guy I ever heard." So I put it on. He listened to it for about two seconds. He said, "Yeah, well, that's pretty good." Said, "Hand me that old Telecaster over there." So I said, "Okay." I gave it to him. He turned it up. Within seconds, he was playing circles around Alvin Lee. Circles. He was playing stuff in between his licks. [*SL laughs*] And I just—my mouth

just dropped open, and I said, "Good God." That's the first time I'd ever heard him play. I didn't know who he was. I just thought he was some redneck that owned a guitar studio, you know. And he said, "Oh, them Johnny Smith licks, you know, I just speed it up, you know." [*Mimics sound of guitar*] [*Laughs*] And that song, "I'm Going Home," you know, [*mimics sound of guitar*] he just ripped through that. And I just—I said, "What are you doing here at the guitar studio? You should be playing for the greatest bands in the world." He said, "Oh, they always say that to me. They always want me to come to Nashville or come to Austin or come to New York. But I'd have to leave home."

SL: That's right.

RW: And he said, "I don't wanna leave my kids and all that. That's travel." [*Laughs*]

SL: I know. They'd just as soon go fishin'.

[01:19:54] RW: Yeah. And I just looked at him, and I said, "Well, you are one of a kind."

SL: Yeah.

RW: Here was a true musician, and he didn't give a damn about the fame or any of that. And then I started going to that—what is it, the Starlight Club out there on the highway they used to play at someplace? The Star somethin'.

SL: I don't remember star . . .

RW: It was right out on the highway. It was on the right-hand side, a little ways out. You went up to Dickson Street, took a left, and you—towards Rogers, and it was out there on the right somewhere. The Starlight Club, I thought it was called.

SL: Okay, well . . .

RW: Anyway, they used to play there, and I used to go out there with Mike. And they would let me sing sometimes up there with 'em. And holy cow, I mean, those guys and then Ernie on the organ and singing like Ray Charles. They were truly awesome. And the sweetest guys I ever met, the nicest guys.

[01:20:42] SL: Yeah, yeah. We just recently interviewed both those guys.

RW: Did you?

SL: Yeah. You know, our interviews typically run five to six hours. I mean, we . . .

RW: Oh, they do?

SL: Yeah. They go—we cover everything.

RW: [*Laughter*] You didn't—Laurie didn't tell me that.

SL: No, no, no. Well, we're not gonna do that with this, but . . .

RW: Man drops dead in interview.

SL: Well, the thing is, that's another piece that I probably oughta get

to you 'cause I think you'd really, really get off on the—those interviews.

RW: Oh, absolutely.

SL: Earl's—it's just remarkable.

RW: Oh, I'd love to see those.

SL: Their whole story.

[01:21:19] RW: And the whole er—you have Ronnie Hawkins too?

SL: I do. I've got two interviews with Ronnie Hawkins.

RW: I'd love to see that. I bet he has some great tales.

SL: And Dale. You'll—I'll—I can give you the Dale thing before you leave.

RW: Now, Dale and Ronnie are related how?

SL: Cousins. Didn't know.

RW: I didn't know that.

SL: Didn't know they were cousins. In fact, Ronnie's story is, is that when he saw Dale's 45 of "Susie Q," he thought Dale was a Black guy because he was playing at the—[*snaps fingers*] what's the place in New York?

TM: The Apollo?

SL: The Apollo.

RW: Oh, he played at the Apollo?

SL: And he was like—he really was the first white guy to play at the

Apollo.

RW: Oh my God.

SL: Predates Buddy Holly. So . . .

RW: Wow.

SL: . . . so you know, it's like . . .

RW: I didn't know that.

SL: . . . so he knew that this guy was playing at the Apollo. He thought he was Black.

RW: Wow. That's mind-boggling.

SL: And he . . .

RW: And he didn't even know they were cousins?

[01:22:16] SL: Didn't know they were cousins. But we do have—we got an interview with both of them side by side under a tent out in Madison County talkin' about their stuff.

RW: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: It's really good. It's really good stuff.

RW: Well, that's amazing.

SL: Well, I wonder if you knew my—you may have known my brother Porter. He used to bounce for Hawkins out at the . . .

RW: Porter what?

SL: Lunsford.

RW: Yes.

SL: He used to hang out at Sherman's quite a bit.

RW: Of course. I know Porter. I'll be damned.

SL: Yeah.

[01:22:43] RW: Wow. That's amazing. Is Bobby still alive, or any of those guys?

SL: No. Hm-mm.

RW: That's a shame. There was another guy I used to hang out with a lot here was Dave Orman. I don't know whatever happened to him. Did you know him?

SL: No, I did not know him. But I know that name.

RW: He was a good guitar player. And he came to Haight-Ashbury, stayed with us in this commune. And one day [*laughs*] we were sittin' in the park, and Lake and I were standin' in the park. And Jimi Hendrix came up and started playin'. Nobody'd ever heard of him. And we listened to him, and we just went, "Oh my God." Dave came down and heard it. And after that gig, we went back to our little place, and Dave broke up his guitar. [*Laughter*] He said, "Well there ain't no point in doin' that anymore."

SL: Yeah.

RW: "That's over."

SL: There is that. [*RW laughs*] Yeah. Yeah. That is humbling.

[01:23:39] RW: It was humbling indeed, you know. And that was

pretty—that was a lot of fun. Dave was a great guy, and we hung out a lot together. But I've lost touch with him. He became kind of a mystic. He moved out to this place outside of town called The Land. I don't know if you ever heard about that. These people . . .

SL: Out here . . . .

RW: Outside of Fayetteville, south of Fayettville.

SL: Huh. Weedy Rough? Did that become Weedy Rough?

RW: It might have. It was up on the left after the airport, and there were, like, these huts and stuff. And hippies lived there, and Dave lived there for a long time. And I lost touch with him. I don't even know if he's alive anymore.

SL: Yeah.

RW: But he was an early friend when I came here. And I knew Hayden and his first wife, Melanie.

SL: Yeah.

RW: The Southern belle. She would say things like, "Now, Bob, why don't you come sit next to me?" [*SL laughs*] And I would almost pass out. [*Laughter*]

SL: Yeah, she was gorgeous.

RW: I'd never met anybody that talked like that.

SL: Yeah.

RW: I thought only people talked like in, like, you know, *Gone with the Wind*, you know.

[01:24:40] SL: Mh-hmm. [*Laughter*] Well, what about Miller Williams?

RW: Oh, well, that's another tale. Miller was not working here when I was here, but he came to visit and read poetry. And the last summer I was here, the two guys that came for the next year were James Crumley, the great detective writer, and Miller Williams. Do you know who Crumley is?

SL: Hm-mm.

RW: Oh, he's—you got to read his book . . .

SL: Okay.

RW: . . . *The Last Good Kiss*.

SL: Okay.

RW: He's one of the great characters of all time. And he taught here for a while. Jim was about five eight this way [uses hands to indicate width] and about five eight that way [uses hands to indicate height]. It was a big mustache. He looked like a sheriff, you know. [*SL laughs*] And he was one of the greatest guys ever. He had been taught by Bill. At—when Bill—before he got here, Bill had taught at—was it A&M or some place like that?

SL: That kind of sounds right. I can't remember.

RW: Would—I think it was Texas A&M, and I think Jim had come there on the GI Bill.

SL: Yeah.

RW: You know, he'd been in the service. And he was—his family was oil roustabouts and stuff in Texas.

SL: Yeah.

[01:26:01] RW: And he was a real rough character. He was a linebacker in school. He was in the Hells Angels. But he had gone to Iowa. Bill had, I think, helped him go to Iowa out of Texas A&M. So when he came back here, he was teaching. And I was leaving, but we had the summer together, and we became best friends. And he just died last year, and we've been friends all our lives. We had done—we did everything together. We went to Mexico, and I can't even tell those stories. But [*SL laughs*] they were—he was a wonderful guy. And then Miller was there that summer, and we became buddies. And then Lucinda—we would all go to Miller's house and play guitars, and Lucinda was about twelve or thirteen. And she would—she was just called Cindy then. Cindy would be downstairs. All of us lived downstairs. I—the next—couple years later, I ended up moving in for the summer down there after my marriage went kaput. I came down from Hobart and stayed here. That's when

I was doin' the research on the Cattle Annie stuff.

SL: Okay.

RW: I was livin' with Miller, and downstairs was Lucinda and Karyn and me. [*Laughs*] I was like their other child. [*SL laughs*] And so we'd all be playin' guitars upstairs, you know. And she'd be downstairs, and then finally she would come up really shyly and, "Can I sing a song?" And we'd say, "Sure." So then she would get up and sing "Stand by Your Man."

SL: Wow.

[01:27:21] RW: And it would be so unbelievably good that nobody could even believe it. It would be total silence. Nobody could even play. [*SL laughs*] She was singin' a capella. And then people didn't clap or anything 'cause they were so stunned how good it was. So she thought everybody hated her.

SL: Oh.

RW: So she'd say, "Y'all don't like me," and start to cry and go downstairs. And I'd say, "No, no." I went down to get her. I was sort of like her big brother. And I'd say, "No, no, everybody [*laughs*] was so amazed they didn't know what to do." She said, "Oh, cut it out." I said, "No, seriously. Go back up there and sing another song." "Oh, I'm not gonna make everybody laugh at me." And she had zero confidence. But you know, she

started getting confidence, and needless to say . . .

SL: Needless to say.

RW: . . . she turned out to be one of the greatest singer-songwriters of all time, I think. And we're still friends, and I've talked—been talkin' to her on Facebook recently. She lives about ten blocks away from me in Hollywood now. So we're gonna get together and have dinner soon. But she said she's really happy now. She married her agent. She's really a totally different person. And she went through a lot of emotional turmoil.

SL: Sure. Absolutely.

[01:28:29] RW: And like any real artist, she's a delicate person, I think. You know. But she's—what an amazing talent. I love her work so much. And Miller and I—that was a wild summer. We had a—over there that summer. It was really wild and crazy. We had party after party and, well, anyway. [*Laughter*] I'm not sure you want this on historical record.

[01:28:57] SL: Well, we don't have to have it, but [*RW laughs*] the main thing is, is that—what's interesting to me is that you came here to—you ran into the cowgirl story potential, and you came here and you put it together, you know. I guess it's . . .

RW: Yes.

SL: . . . the material was here is what makes sense, but you were

comfortable with coming back and . . .

RW: Oh yeah, I always felt . . .

SL: . . . and doing that.

RW: . . . I was—well, I had an agent named George Bouchardt. He was really a brilliant guy. He'd say, "Bob, you're just looking for a father." Said, "First you had Harrison, and then you had Sol Yurick, and now you're going back, and Miller Williams is becoming your [*laughs*] father." And that infuriated me so much because it was totally right, obviously.

SL: Yeah.

RW: But I had to deny it immediately. I said, "You don't have any idea what you're talking about, George. You're fired." [*SL laughs*] And you can't tell me the truth. [*Laughs*] It was probably true.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And because people need fathers. You know, it's a—guys need fathers. And my father was extremely weak. He was a wonderful guy. And then, you know, my father had such low opinions of himself that—here's a story that blows my mind, and it's true. When he was, like, seventy-one, we were driving across Baltimore. I'd come back from California. And I was takin' him to some place to buy some crutches 'cause he had

fallen from a stroke. He could still drive and all, but—so I said, "So what did you do in World War II?" I said, "I know you were at Pearl Harbor after it was bombed. And—but what were you doin' there?" He said, "Well, I guess I can tell you now." I said, "Yeah, I don't think there's gonna be imminent Japanese invasion anytime soon. It's 1972, so you could probably tell me, you know." I was teasin' him a little bit. [01:30:45] And he said, "Well, I was in this group of guys who worked on the Japanese code." And I said, "You mean the guys that broke the Japanese code?" He said, "Yeah, we did, but I was a low man on the totem poll. I was only eighteen." And I said, "But you were in that group? That seven guys?" He said, "Yeah, I was the youngest guy." And I said, "You were in that group, [*SL laughs*] and now you're telling me this at age seventy-fucking-two? How could you not tell me this?" And I was tearing up. I was overwhelmed, you know, because he's always like, "I'm nobody, ah, you know. I've failed." And I said, "How could you not tell me this?" And he said, "Well, we weren't supposed to talk about it." You know, and that's how those guys were in World War II. They didn't sit around bragging all the time. But I said, "Yeah, but that's overwhelming." And he—and then I realized that he—you know, we always had thousands of books around the house,

or hundreds. But he had one big shelf of all code books. And I had just thought he was interested in codes. I didn't know why he had them. [01:31:48] He had *Code in the Pacific* and the such-and-such code and the blah-blah code. Well, it was because he was in that group. And so we get the crutches, we go back to his little apartment, and he takes out—he opens his desk, and there in his desk, under this erasers and crap, you know, is this thing. And he pulls it out, and it's this special accommodation from FDR for bein' in this group. He didn't even have it on the wall or anything. Just sittin' there. I said, "You've had this [*SL laughs*] all your life, and you didn't tell me about it? You're not proud of it?" "Well, I didn't do that much, you know." I said, "Geez, dad, you know, it's one thing to be modest. It's another thing to be completely—look at this. This is amazing." He said, "Yeah, well, those guys were all my bosses," and he shows the books that he had there were all written by the guys in the group. And I still have that thing, and it was one of those deals where, you know, that tells you how little self-regard he had, or self-confidence.

SL: Yeah.

RW: It was like, he had been in this amazing thing. And . . .

SL: Wow.

RW: Yeah, mind-boggling. So that's one reason I was always looking, I think, for a father 'cause . . .

[01:33:00] SL: Let me ask you this. Did your grandmother ever get to read any of your stuff?

RW: No. Unfortunately, the only book she ever read was *Shedding Skin*, my first book, which was so filled with anger and insanity that . . .

SL: Yeah.

RW: . . . nobody liked it in my family, you know.

SL: Right.

RW: And she didn't live long enough to read the book I wrote about her.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And—but she was 100 percent behind me. She would just say, "You can do it. Don't listen to anybody else." She would never say, "Don't listen to your father or mother" [*laughs*] because that would be—but she—I—she knew what was goin' on.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

RW: You know. And you know, they just—they couldn't deal with it, you know. It was too much. When I got the book published, they were like, "You did?" I said, "Yeah, I did. There it is." And then—since then, my mother still can't believe all I've done. You

know, I ran *Hill Street Blues*, and I was—and then I ran *Miami Vice* and *New York Undercover.* I've run all the top TV shows in the [19]80s. And she still says, "Well, you were never an actor."

SL: [*Laughter*] Oh man.

[01:34:09] RW: She can't deal with it. She can't deal with my wife's success, either. She'll say—you know, my wife had her own show on the radio for quite a while called *The United States of Los Angeles*. And my mother could get it in Baltimore. She wouldn't ever listen to it. She'd say, "I tried to find it. I just couldn't get it." But she's a piece of work. That's just the way they are out there. You know, they don't particularly like it when you're successful. They want—really, that's all she wanted me to do was stay in the neighborhood.

SL: Yeah.

RW: That's how people are in Baltimore. They don't like you to leave the neighborhood, much less the city. I had people that wouldn't talk to me when I moved from one neighborhood to the other, and they were only three blocks away. I'd go back to the old neighborhood, and guys would say, "You left the neighborhood, oh no." [*Laughs*]

SL: It's like you left the team.

RW: Yeah, you left the team.

SL: Yeah.

[01:34:59] RW: I said, "I live on the same street, three blocks away." It real—literally, it was the same street. "Yeah, but it's over there where Communists live."

SL: [*Laughs*] Geez.

RW: "Communists and homosexuals live over there." I said, "Yeah, that's probably true, you know." [*SL laughs*] They're all Communists and homosexuals. So when I got to Fayetteville, it was like everybody was friendly and open, and they wanted you to succeed. Man, that was like a breath of fresh air. Here, you want to be in a rock band? Great. You can play these gigs. Want to play with the Cate Brothers? Great. I was stunned by it. After I heard him play and he would allow me to sing, I was like, "Holy crap." You know, I didn't act like it. I acted like, "Sure, I'm gonna go sing with the Cate Brothers." I'd go home at night and go, "Oh my God." [*Laughter*] It was really a place where I could really just open up, you know, and become—and reach potential that I had, you know. That was a huge deal for me. And make friends that have lasted—that's the other thing, make friends that have lasted all my life, you know.

[01:36:01] SL: You know, you were talkin' about how Bill—you gave Bill your . . .

RW: Hey!

SL: . . . your stuff. Hey, come on in. No? Okay. How he helped put together your novel by spreadin' it out on the floor of the house and . . .

RW: You remember that?

Merlee Harrison: I do.

SL: What—is there—was there any other moment you had with Bill where a big light came on for you?

RW: Well, Claude Faulkner was gonna throw me out of the program after the first year for some reason. I can't remember. I think because I didn't do well in his grammar course.

SL: Of course.

RW: But frankly, I think there was another reason. [*Laughter*] You know what I'm talkin' about, right? There was this girl, Jane Manfull. [*Laughter*] Should I tell this story?

SL: You can tell any story that you want to tell.

RW: I'm not sure this should be, you know . . .

SL: Well, we—you don't have to tell it, but you're welcome to tell it.

RW: Well anyway, there was this girl, and she and I were seeing each other. Claude had a huge crush on her.

SL: Ah.

RW: And she was, as we used to say, a divorcee, like, you know, that

was some kind of—back in the [19]50s, that was like . . .

SL: Different class.

RW: . . . weird. Yeah. Now everybody's a divorcee. But anyway, she had a kid. She was great. But she was a little too much for me. She wanted to get married and all that. I'd just gotten divorced, so you know, the last thing I wanted to do was get married.

SL: Right.

[01:37:41] RW: But anyway, I have a feeling Claude hated me because he knew she and I were—that's my—that was my theory 'cause I really wasn't doin' that bad. Anyway, Bill stood up for me and made sure I got back in the class. I remember comin' over to Bill's house one night. I was probably sobbing 'cause they had thrown me out. I couldn't believe it. And he got—he made sure I got back in. So that was really a big deal to me, you know.

SL: No kidding.

RW: Yeah, yeah. And then I got—then I really took off, you know, with the book gettin' done and everything else, so—that second year, I really took off. But that was a big deal, somebody standin' up for me, you know, like that. Yeah.

[01:38:24] SL: Is there a—you know, you've traveled all the way

out here to gather for this surprise gathering for Bill. I'm assuming he still doesn't know anything about it. But there's got to be something about Bill and Fayetteville and the program that would allow you to just drop whatever you're doing and get yourself out here.

RW: Well, you know, we're just great friends. We've been friends all our—since then, you know. We went to England together. When he was making *Rollerball*, Gordon Lish sent me over from *Esquire* to do a piece on the making of the movie. The piece never got published for some reason, but I ended up going over there with Bill, and we had a blast over there on the set of the movie. And when he came to New York—he and Merlee came to New York, we would always hang out together, both in New York, out in the Hamptons. And we'd always have a great time together, you know. So of course I would come, you know.

SL: Is there anything you wanna say to Bill?

RW: Well, I love him, and I—he's certainly made a huge difference in my life, you know. And yeah, that's—I love the whole group. I love the whole family. They've been a wonderful family. Almost like a second family to me. So that was great.

[01:39:51] SL: Okay. Anything else?

RW: I don't think so. I think we covered it all.

SL: Man, you've been very, very generous. I really, really appreciate it.

TM: Hey, Scott, I've got a—maybe one. You were talkin' about Sherman's and the jukebox at Sherman's. Can you tell a little bit about that scene there 'cause you hung out there a little bit?

RW: Oh. Well, when I went down there—I think Clyde took me down there. And I was, you know, used to hearing, "Well, in the South, whites and Blacks don't hang out together and all that," which was generally true, I thought. But when I went down there, it was like, you know, whites and Blacks were hangin' out. And I thought—and it was just a great scene, and the jukebox was filled with all this rhythm and blues and stuff, and it was like people were jitterbugging and dancing and drinking beer, and it was a real feeling of the [19]60s there, you know, of Black and white together. Which was not true, at that time, in the rest of Fayetteville, you know. And I made some Black friends here. A guy named—I think it was Frank Pearson or Pierce. And he was—a bad thing, you know, that happened was after one of the games like Arkansas-Texas, he was walking back home and some fraternity boys just came by and shot him in the leg.

SL: Oh.

RW: Do you remember that?

SL: Well, that's back before the shootout, isn't it? That's, like, [19]64, maybe?

RW: Yeah. No, no, this was when I was here.

SL: Oh, it was?

RW: Yeah.

SL: Okay. Yeah, actually, I do have some of that in some other interviews.

RW: Yeah, and he was a buddy of mine. And it was like, "Wow." But that was not—that kind of stuff was not true down at—it was like an oasis of, like, sort of—I felt like it was an oasis of Black and white people hangin' out and havin' a great time together.

[01:41:37] SL: So what about Buddy Hayes? Do you member him?

RW: Yeah, yeah. There's some peop . . .

SL: He had a band, and he was the shoeshine guy at the barbershop on Dickson Street . . .

RW: Oh.

SL: . . . UA . . .

RW: Right. The old guy.

SL: Uh-huh.

RW: No, there was a guy named Jim. Do you remember that guy Jim? Jim was a shoeshine guy.

SL: Yeah.

RW: And everybody knew Jim. And he was good friends with Meredith—what's her name?

SL: Boswell?

RW: Meredith Boswell and Frank, the poet who killed himself.

SL: Yeah.

RW: Who's that? The great poet, Frank, the wrestler.

SL: I can't think of his name right now for some reason.

MH: Stanford.

SL: But I know exactly . . .

RW: Huh?

MH: Stanford.

SL: Stanford, Stanford.

RW: Frank Stanford. The producer's telling us what's goin' on here.

SL: Yeah, yeah. [*Laughs*]

[01:42:34] RW: The—yeah, Frank Stanford. 'Cause when I met Meredith out in—I didn't know Meredith here, but when I met her out in California, we started talking about old Jim, the shoeshine guy. And she said, "Oh yeah, he lived with Frank and I." And I said, "You're kidding." She said, "Yeah, and he was gettin' old, and he was always worried about dying. He'd wake up in the middle of the night and say, 'I'm gonna die tonight.' We'd all have to calm him down," you know. [*SL laughs*] But

that sort of was continuation, I thought, of our—the stuff we were doin', you know.

SL: Yeah.

RW: Stanford was a great guy. I liked him. I met him a few times. Wild character. Tremendous writer. Some unbelievable writers came out of here.

SL: That's another phenomenon, isn't it?

RW: Yeah.

SL: Everything that was spawned from here.

[01:43:23] RW: Oh, unbelievable, you know. So many good writers came out of here it's unbelievable. And Barry Hannah and I were friends our whole life comin' out of here. He—we would talk on the phone all the time, and he was a character, Barry. You could do a whole tape on just bad Barry stories. But that's another story. [*Laughter*] I'm not gettin' into that.

SL: Well, okay. I think . . .

RW: I think we've done it.

SL: . . . I think you've given us a bunch of good stuff, man.

RW: Well, thank you.

SL: I really appreciate your time, and you'll be hearing from us. We've got your info.

RW: Great.

SL: And we'll keep you in the loop.

RW: Just don't let the cops read it, and we'll be all right. [*Laughter*] [*Unclear words*].

SL: Okay. Well, thank you.

RW: Thanks a lot.

SL: Thank you.

RW: Yeah.

[01:44:06 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]