

Interviewee: Walter Bryant
Interviewer: Kellie Thomas
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

KT: Mr. Bryant is going to share some of his recollections with us today. He is from the Grandin Court area. Mr. Bryant.

WB: I am Walter Melvin Bryant at 2702 Brambleton Avenue. This is a little story about my activities over my lifetime. I was born November 1, 1911, in Martinsville, Virginia. My family moved to Roanoke when I was 8 months old. My father laid track for streetcars for a while. He then worked as a carpenter on railroad boxcars for the N&W at Shaefer's Crossing. We lived close to the railroad in the area around 15th Street Northwest. We had a cow in the pasture. We had a long chain so he could tie it out during the day and bring it in in the evening then to milk it and so forth. One evening, I was watching my mother milk and picked up the iron stob they used for tying the cow and was staking it and stomping it in the ground. I missed the ground and hit my foot. It went through.

KT: Ooooh.

WB: About 1915 or '16, we moved to a home on Ogden Road where the Floyd Bank is now located. We lived there until after the war of 1918 and '19. My father had to walk to South Roanoke to catch a streetcar, ride to town, transfer to a west-end streetcar. It went to 18th Street, Patterson Avenue. He then walked to the west-end shops at 24th Street. My mother's brother-in-law owned all of what is now Tanglewood Mall.

KT: That's a lot of land.

WB: His house was on the east side of Franklin Road. I remember my father's brother coming, walking up the hill in the field. He was just getting out of the Army. We were living there during the flu epidemic which we all had. I started school at the 2-room school which was just across the railroad bridge. The 2 teachers _____ was most of the children had to walk a long way to get there. Some from even on Colonial Avenue. While living there, my mother hitched up our horse to the buggy and drove to my grandmother's house which was on the hill overlooking Horton Field - That is just on 24th Street Northwest. - where the first airplane was going to land on the field and we saw it land and take off. They roped off the area and had police out on guard there. We moved to 14th Street and Melrose Avenue about 1919. Carter Brothers had a grocery store at the corner of 14th Street and Melrose. They had a horse and wagon to deliver groceries. The man who drove the horse later was the custodian at my church. While living there, I went to Monroe School at about 17th Street and Melrose Avenue. About 1921, my father bought a farm house with about 7 acres land. It was at the intersection of what is now Weaver Road and Brambleton Avenue. It was just open land at that time. There was a section called Weaver Heights. It included Tillet Road on the North, Weaver Road and Barham connected the two roads. Access was by a narrow dirt road from Grandin Road up the hill up to Tillet and later, a 40 acre tract was bought by Mr. Weaver. It was from Grandin Road including Livingston. It was called Grandin Court. Later the area to the South, about 120 acres, was bought. It was called Grandin Court Annex and the area for the park to be called Weaver Park was laid out. Later the area was named Grandin Court. Mr. Fishburn gave land to extend the park to the creek and the name of it was changed to Fishburn Park. Finally, a dirt road was made somewhat where Brambleton Avenue is now. It started at the end of Woodlawn and went to Garst Mill Road. It would get muddy in the winter. I remember a Mr. Jiles Parker who operated at the Firsburn Fish Market at the downtown market was dating his later wife who was living with the family named Yost. He would get stuck in the muddy road. We had a horse so he would get us to pull him out. We all had to walk to ride a streetcar to town. It came to just in front of Patrick Henry High School. I walked to the Virginia Heights School. It was about 2 miles. Starting in the 6th grade, I walked to the streetcar and _____ Road and road it to town. The cost was 5 cents or 6 tokens for a quarter. The junior school was crowded that year so they put us in the old high

school that year. They decided to separate the boys and girls classes that year. One of the things that happened in the early days was a snow fence along the road. They would put them up in order to prevent snow drifts.

KT: Can I ask you something real quick? About school?

WB: Uh huh.

KT: When you went to school, it was still segregated? Is that correct?

WB: When the what?

KT: When you went to school, was it still segregated?

WB: No, no, no. There wasn't any blacks around. I don't know – it wasn't – but I guess it was. Oh yeah, it was a long time after that before they actually – see it hadn't been too many years – What year did they stop separation?

KT: I believe it was in the '60s.

WB: Yeah, somewhere in there – the '60s I think. I was out of school. I wasn't in school then. (chuckling)

KT: You were done with it.

WB: Yeah.

KT: Do you remember when segregation - ?

WB: Well, yeah, I just know that it happened. I wasn't involved in anything. I'm not sure. I guess maybe there was some integration as far as the children going to school there but no problem really.

KT: Alrighty, continue.

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WB: I remember trains running out of steam along the grade under the Ogden Bridge. That's over where we lived when we lived on Starkey. They had to wait for steam to build up before they could go on. See the train goes right behind the Tanglewood Mall.

KT: Yep.

WB: I remember baby chicks being ordered. They were shipped by parcel post and delivered with the mail.

KT: Now did you guys get baby chicks ordered?

WB: Yeah, people would buy baby chicks and they'd ship 'em by mail. Had little holes in the box that they was in so they'd get air. It was delivered pretty fast. I remember the first Advance Auto Store located on Jefferson Street. Can you imagine how many stores they have today?

KT: They've got a few more than that, huh?

WB: It was along about just above Franklin Road. I remember having an appendicitis operation. This is what I was telling you about – about 1933. The total cost was \$150 and where I met my wife. I remember when Luck Avenue from 2nd Street to 6th Street, it was all homes. I remember when Roanoke Hardware was on Salem Avenue. Nelson Hardware was on Campbell Avenue and Graves Humphrey Hardware was on Church Avenue. I remember Ford Motor Company being on Salem Avenue. Chevrolet Motor was on Campbell Avenue. I remember Jefferson Hospital being on Jefferson Street. I remember several meat-packing houses being on the lower part of Campbell Avenue. I remember Garst Brothers Dairy being on Westover Avenue. The school would send 2 children for milk for the children for lunch.

KT: Fresh milk, that's nice.

WB: I remember streetcars going to Vinton and Salem. I remember the Viscose having a building on 9th Street to house women workers. I remember the boys having soap box races on Crystal Avenue. I remember going to Rock Ledge Inn – that's the building up on the mountain – the old Center in the Square Building.

KT: Now, is that Mill Mountain?

WB: Up on Mill Mountain.

KT: OK.

WB: In 1936, my wife and I built our home and we only hired a brick mason and a plasterer. I remember that H&C Coffee Company was born on Elberber (??) Avenue. That's an interesting story by itself. Do you want me to fill it in now or what?

KT: Sure, let's fill it in.

WB: Harold Woods and his brother Clarence were working for a coffee company in Richmond. And Harold's home here on Lofton Avenue on Alberta Avenue and he decided he was going to sell coffee. So, he worked, and go busy and got some raw coffee and heated it on his stove at the house and ground it. At that time, we had a little grocery store down here on the corner and he brought that pound of coffee over there and we sold it. And it went from there. And H&C Coffee sign that they've been dealing now come out of that operation on Alberta.

KT: So you got a pound of their coffee and people liked it so much -

WB: Yeah. See, way back there, you have to remember that things like that – like people bought lard. We had a big 50-gallon maybe can of lard. You dipped out a pound and weighed it up and they got it. For breakfast bacon, you had a slab of bacon and we had a slicer that it sliced off however much they wanted and the same thing for coffee or anything else. That was the way it was handled.

KT: So no prepackaged?

WB: Well there was a little bit but not very much.

KT: What was the name of the grocery store?

WB: Grandin Court Grocery.

KT: And you said you owned it?

WB: My dad owned it and the building is still there. Clay Cottage was the last use but I noticed the other day, its been vacant for a long time, but I noticed that they're working on it now so evidently, somebody else is coming in there.

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KT: How long did your family own that?

WB: About 15 years or so.

KT: What other stuff can you remember them selling?

WB: I remember watching a log house being built up on Weaver Road, that's the – I know you've seen that haven't you?

KT: Is it a really big one?

WB: Yeah. The big log house right here on top of the hill. That was built by Mr. Weaver, the developer of the land. It was – the thing that was unusual was it was vertical logs instead of them putting them around the thing. I remember ice wagons going up and down the street.

KT: Oh, my goodness.

WB: And you had a card that you hung on your front porch that said whether you wanted 25 pounds, 50 pounds or what you wanted and he'd have a protection over his shoulder and he'd hang that ice over his shoulder and walk on in and put it in your refrigerator.

KT: Wow.

WB: I remember seeing a lime kiln on the corner of Ogden and Franklin Road. A lime kiln is a rock that they put in the streets and they came up on that hill there – If you notice there's a filling station there as Ogden goes into Franklin Road – Its a high hill on the back of it. They built up on top of it but they had this kiln built down on the ground. They come up there to dump the rock on the side of the thing and it would fall down into the thing they had built. They built a fire under that and heat that rock and then when it gets cold and they put water on it, it'll slack and that's where the – lime, that makes lime.

KT: OK. I've never seen one of those.

WB: At school we did that. You'd take one of the stones and put it on there and get it red hot and let it

get cold and it'll slack into lime, white lime. I remember the old gas pumps where gas was pumped into a glass container up at the top and, if you wanted 5 gallons, you pumped up 5 gallons in that tank and then you let it out into your car.

KT: Do you remember how much gas used to cost?

WB: I have no idea but it wasn't probably 15 or 20 cents a gallon. I remember seeing the old steam engine that pumped water to homes over – Its still there. They redid it. They don't use it but the steam engine is in the old thing here at the, uh, coming down the mountain there. I remember seeing the construction of Mill Mountain Star. I worked at Hotel Roanoke, which I mention later on in here. Kensey's Sign Company was right at my back door at the hotel. So, I could walk over there and watch 'em making the frames and so forth there and get it ready to put it up. I remember all the old movie houses, American, Roanoke, Jefferson Park and Rialto. Also the Academy of Music and I played – I was in a play one time when I was going to the school up there in the old Academy of Music.

KT: What'd you play?

WB: Some of the parts. I don't remember what it was but it was just a play that the schools would come in there and put it on. You could go to the movie for 10 or 15 cents. Rialto was down on Campbell Avenue and the American was on the corner there where the bank used to be. I don't think its a bank there even anymore. But the corner of Jefferson and Campbell. The old auditorium first owned by the N&W and later they gave it to the American Legion. I remember seeing that, of course, being involved with the railroad. See, the hotel was owned by the N&W at that time. From the hotel, we had to do some maintenance on the auditorium and that was the case there. I watched the auditorium burn. They called me at 2:00 in the morning and it was on fire and so I went over and watched it burn.

Disappointing.

KT: Yeah.

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WB: I remember the park that was in front of it. They used to have a park in front of the station at the back of this auditorium and it was live animals in cages over there. I remember the old freight station which is now a museum. They brought all of their damaged freight and stuff. They unloaded the good freight and they also had a room at the damaged stuff – They brought it in and sold it for the best price they could get for it. I saw the old hand pump carts used by the N&W for track maintenance. I don't know whether you ever saw one or not. But, you had a handle up and down on either side and a person would get on either side of that and pump it and the cart would run down the railroad track to go to where they wanted to work on the track.

KT: OK. I've seen that in movies.

WB: I saw freight engines being built. In fact, I worked for the N&W a while and we built engines there. I saw old steam shovels moving dirt. Way back when they developed Grandin Court, they didn't have bulldozers like they have today. You had a steam engine with a big dipper out on the end of it and they fired that thing up and steam and it would run the hand up and down. I saw horse wagons that had hinged bottoms so they dumped the dirt, then would wind the bottoms back up. They'd load this dirt into a wagon and they had a hinged gate underneath it. It parted in the middle and they'd get to where they wanted to do it and they'd throw the latch and that would loosen it up and dump the dirt down. They had a crank that they wound the chain back up and went and got another load of dirt.

KT: So, like a dump truck with horses?

WB: Yeah. I saw the old-style Victrola. One of the first ones, it had a great big horn is where the sound came out. Instead of having a disc like they have now, it was a spool. It looked like cardboard probably that slid over the thing that turned and it played up and down that thing there. But it was an antique. It really was. I saw and used a horse drag pan. Used to doing and I dug a foundation with one. They had a pan, scoop-like that had two handles on it. The horse had it. It was on a – handle out on the front that was hinged to the pan and you'd go along and hold the handle up a little bit and the

horse would pull it through and scoop up dirt and you got to where you wanted it. To leave the dirt, you just lifted the handle up and it'd catch and dump it over and then you'd go back and get some more.

KT: What was that used for?

WB: Well, it was moving dirt. Like I say, I drug my foundation out with it.

KT: So it wasn't farming, it was more like for building a home.

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WB: Dragging – That's the way they got the dirt out of the foundations or building roads. When I had – I helped drag that dirt out to build Brambleton Avenue. And Brambleton Avenue was not there when we built here even. It was finally a little dirt road that I mentioned a while ago was finally got that in and went on out to Garst Mill Road. If you wanted to move some dirt, you – like I say, you couldn't get a tractor with the blade on the front of it. You had to do it with a scoop and so forth. I saw railway express cars. They used to haul express with a special car that attached to a passenger train. It would handle freight. They'd come to the station over there and unload it on 4 wheel carts to take it down. A lot of times they had to change it from one train to another or you picked it up over there. I saw railway mail cars. They had a car that hauled mail around in. They didn't have airplanes to haul it around. I remember a small water pump called the “ram”. That was down at the park down there. If you've ever been down there, you go down over the hill back on the back and there was a drinking fountain down there and a spring. And they closed that up. But there had a thing they called a “ram” which would pump water from the water source itself, where the water was running down would operate a pump and they had it – pumped it all the way up the hill and they had a spring house they called it, up on – right there at the far end of the house that's there now. See, that's the way you had to keep your – anything you wanted cool, your milk and so forth, was the spring house and it kept the cold water running through it so it didn't get hot and spoil.

KT: So it kept it cool?

WB: I saw Halloween fill downtown. You can't believe what an event Halloween was in those days. The streets were just full of people walking. You go down the park on your sides but you couldn't hardly drive through the streets. They were just full of people down there ripping around and carrying on. They pulled the trolley. The trolleys were operated electrically with a live wire overhead. And they had a trolley wire that reached up and would roll on it. Guys would get out there and pull that thing off the track. Stop a train at the track.

KT: Did people dress up?

WB: Yeah. There is a solid tire truck on display in the Transportation Museum over there now and it was owned by D.V. Ferguson out there. There was a rock quarry where the road, Garst Mill Road and Brambleton come together. So, he had – His truck is on display over there. Its a solid tire, rubber tire. Not a pumped up tire but just solid rubber. For chicken feed, we would put a bag of corn on a horse and take it to a local mill for grinding. I saw sand gotten from the creek out here that they used for pouring your foundation or doing your plastering, laying your brick and so forth. I had a hand-held walkie-talkie when I was at the hotel in those days. I retired in '76, so that was prior to that. They had an antenna up on the roof of the hotel and they could call me all the way from there here and, in other words, they used it to keep up with what we were doing, where we were and when they wanted something done. I was at South Roanoke Park several times. There used to be a park up on the side of Mill Mountain there where South Roanoke is now. They tore it down. The old thriller that was at – You didn't know about that ever being at Lakeside – I guess they had torn that down. Anyway, they had a roller coaster, thriller, at Lakeside and that came from the park up there in South Roanoke.

KT: Did you ride it?

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WB: No, I never did ride it. I saw the incline car go up Mill Mountain. I know you've heard about it. I saw it go up. I never did ride it but they had it on a cable and two cars and it went up and around the

pulley on the top of the mountain and one went up and the other one came down, back and forth. You can see it if you know where you're looking. You can see the difference in the trees. They never have really filled in completely. But you can see where the track was and so forth.

KT: OK. I've heard about that.

WB: I saw tall gates across the road at Franklin Road. That was down there where you come into – out of Franklin Road and the interstate across where they tore the whole mountainside of there down there. That was a grocery store there that operated that one – particular one. And he had a peg leg. His name was Lockett and they always just called him Mr. Peg Leg Lockett. (chuckling) And there was one at over here as you go out Brandon where you turn off Brandon going out to Woodrow Wilson School. There was one there and there was another one on Boxley Hill down. Do you know where Boxley Hill is? Its the hill that kinda comes – You know there's kinda a little ball thing down there – golf thing down there at the foot of that hill. And that's Boxley Hill coming up that steep grade there. I saw a streetcar that had running boards on the sides. It was an open streetcar that they ran around in the summertime up to this park up on Mill Mountain and so forth there. You could sit there and you wasn't fenced in. It was just open and see what was going on. I saw VMI and VPI fill this city. See they used to play games here. The city just turned over to that crowd that came here.

KT: Now let's – VPI and -

WB: VMI

KT: and VMI.

WB: They played together at the stadium.

KT: Virginia Tech, Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

WB: Yeah. And we took all the furniture out of the lobby at the hotel to have room for them to gather around in there. They sold lunch boxes there for people going to the ball game and the players. Well, not only the players but they had a music team, you know, with the schools that came and they'd march from town out to the park, out to the Victory Stadium Park. I spent 40 years at Hotel Roanoke and saw all of it built but one little east wing. I was in charge of maintenance at the building and I had about 15 people working for me.

KT: And you said 40 years?

WB: And I spent 40 years there.

KT: Wow.

WB: I saw a cattle show with judging done at Hotel Roanoke Ballroom and we cleaned it out that day. That happened at noon the thing and I got the tarpaulin from out at the stadium and covered the ballroom floor. I got shavings and put on top of that and then we cleaned that out and got the ballroom set back up for dinner that night. So you can imagine what went on at the Hotel in those days. They don't do it today.

KT: That's a lot of work.

WB: I saw the farmers come to the market to sell their vegetables and things. I mean they'd come in – they'd drive a horse and wagon down this evening and sleep on the wagon and be there ready for purveyors buying on the next morning. And grocery stores then, you see, there wasn't no big grocery stores like we have today. They were all little ones like the one we had down there. And they went to the market every morning and bought fresh vegetables to sell during the day in the stores.

KT: Would you say the market was bigger back then? More people?

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WB: Well, it wasn't no larger area but it was a lot more going on. They'd bring trucks of watermelons and cantaloupes and you buy these great big long watermelons, \$1 apiece. And so forth went on. We had a haystack. You didn't have the rolled hay like you have today. You put a pole up and put your hay on it and let it slope over and the cattle then could come in and eat the hay off around the pole and thing. You've heard about the "Little boy blue, come blow your horn. Sheeps in the meadow and the

cows in the corn. Where's the little boy, he's under the haystack fast asleep.” We had a haystack in our field right here where there used to be a stable right where my house is and we had a haystack in that thing with a pole and the hay sloped down like that you see and the water would run off. It wouldn't soak into the hay. I've had an interesting life.

KT: Sounds like it. And let me ask you a couple of questions, a couple more questions, about your family. You said your father worked for the railroad?

WB: Yes, right.

KT: Did your mother work?

WB: No, she didn't work anywhere. She was a housewife.

KT: Did you have brothers and sisters?

WB: Yeah.

KT: How many did you have?

WB: Actually, it was 4 altogether but 1 was a baby and it died at 2 months old and the other was 4 months and he had cancer and a growth came out of his ear. So I had one and they lived right next door to me.

KT: Your parents lived next door?

WB: No, the parents were across the street then. They had passed away. See, that's where the old house was across the street here. There again, we had – when we came out there, it was 2 rooms down and 2 rooms up. You had an outdoor john and a well pump was on the back porch.

KT: Was that for the kitchen, the pump was for the kitchen?

WB: It was a pump for anything you got there. In those days, you had your kitchen stove and you could pour water in the container in the stove and it'd get hot there and you could draw it off that way. But, like I say, there was just 4 rooms, 2 rooms down and 2 up.

KT: Do you remember how you took a bath?

WB: Well you got a tub and heated the water and got in the tub then, the wash tub. And I've got one of the old hand wash, scrub board where the – downstairs – its kinda like a corrugated type thing and I don't know if you've ever seen one or not. Have you seen one?

KT: Yes, I have.

WB: When my dad worked at the railroad, his overalls were all greasy and dirty and filthy and my mother had to scrub and scrub 'em. They had what they called a double boiler that – If you ever watched Andy Griffith, they sold one as an antique to some one on their show – it was a thing about so long and about so wide and curved around the end and you put it on the stove and put your things in there and heated water and boiled 'em and it would kinda dissolve the grease out of 'em to get 'em halfway clean.

KT: I bet that was hard.

WB: Yeah.

KT: Do you remember any technology that really kinda changed your life like a telephone or, I know you mentioned the Victrola, what do you remember as being really - ?

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WB: See, my early days when we lived out there on Starkey Road out there, we didn't have a telephone, didn't know what it was. I've got a – It never has worked but I've got one of the old telephones downstairs that everybody used. My wife's father, they lived in Fincastle and over here I've got – He kept a diary from the time he was 21 up for about 40 years what he did every day. And one of 'em describes planting poles and getting telephone up to their house down there. They didn't have one to start with.

WB: Wow. So -

KT: You rang the number you wanted to call, you went around once, twice, 2 times or 3 times to get certain – 3 rings was for so-and-so and 4 rings for another person and so forth. That's the way they

worked.

WB: So, not a long number.

KT: Yeah.

WB: Do you remember your first television?

KT: The first time I saw a TV was at - This man that arranged to get this done, George Dooley (??) lived on the hill up here on Woodlawn. Before that, before we even had television, we'd go downtown to hear the ball games and sit where the courthouse is now was just a small building there and we sit on the front slope there, just on the ground and listened to - I believe Griffin was his name, Sab Griffin or something is his name, not positive if that's right. He would get these reports over what the game was doing and announce it out so we could hear what was going on. But the first TV I ever saw was up here on the hill and when this guy got one in his house.

KT: What did you do in the evenings then? Did you listen to radio or did you sit on the front porch?

WB: The first radio I had was a Crystal radio. When I was going to Lee Junior, and you buy a little crystal about the size of a nickel and about ½ inch thick and you had a little wire spring that you could move around over a space on that thing and had a wire coil ahead of it and you hooked it up to the bed springs on your bed and you could get a station out in Nashville and they had earphones that you could hear the sound coming over 'em.

KT: Wow. And how old were you when you had that?

WB: Well, I was - I guess I was in about the 5th grade, 6th grade or 7th grade because it was when I was going to Lee Junior and I went down there. See, that would make me about 12 years old. But you built it in a little cigar box you see. Cigars used to come in a little wooden box. Use thin nice metal. You'd take that box and build your works in there.

KT: Do you remember when you got your first car?

WB: Yes, I guess so. Way back there when my dad first got a car, he got an old Chevrolet and he kept it up here in the barn here. The back end went bad so he had - he got a Ford piece and put it in the back of it. He got stuck on the road coming up the hill over here after we had moved out here. We didn't have any car until we was living out here. He was coming back home with my brother in the car with him. And in those days, the cars didn't have a gas tank on the back. It was up in the front, right where the windshield comes down. There was a tank there and you had a cap up there. It didn't have a pump to pump the gas back, you just had the flow-back into your car. Coming up that hill, it was low on gas and ran out of gas. There he was. He couldn't turn. There wasn't room to turn around on the road. Like I said, it was a dirt road. He sent my brother and I on home to tell my mother where he was. And he backed down, just drifted backwards and back down and got turned around and backed up the hill then. And he got home and got gas later on.

KT: Went home backwards.

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WB: Yeah. And we'd come up the road up here and at that time, there was a cemetery up here on the hill. I don't know what ever happened to it. They didn't move graves but the guy, the man that bought it, he said that it didn't bother him. He just put a rose garden back there. I think those people are still buried there.

KT: Are there houses there now?

WB: Yeah. Anyway, we heard those hound dogs. There was a pack at 2 or 3 places around town around the area that people had dogs that they didn't want and they'd take 'em and dump 'em off somewhere. They were up there and they dug holes in the graveyard and they were howling. And you talk about somebody coming up the road, we came up the road.

KT: Got scary I bet.

WB: Yeah.

KT: You said you worked for Hotel Roanoke for 40 years. Did you do anything else as well? What

were your occupations?

WB: The only thing else I did was I did my work on the house. I didn't actually do the entire building, would look after it and so forth. But the one across the street over here, I looked at and got 50 cents an hour for looking after it. I did most of the work on it. My daughter's house, I did the same thing there. When the daughter was born in '38, I was working at Cold Springs Creamery. It was kinda a farmer's market that came in. It was over on Loudon Avenue. In other words, these people had cows and they just kinda farmed a little dairy of their own. I had been at work and had left the filling station. I worked at the filling station 3 years and I got one \$5 raise. I was making \$60 when I went there and I got one \$5 raise in 3 years. So I got a job at the N&W. I had worked a few times down there in the summertime. They had what they called summer jobs. You'd go down there – you used to sand for foundries. They'd come in on the cars, big hopper, open cars, kinda like a coal car. You got over there and sold that sand out of the thing. I remember one time, it was so hot and I got a headache and they had the place, shops where you'd go get a headache tablet or something, aspirin or something. I went over and got it and I couldn't find a sink or fountain, so I just eat 'em like they were. That's how bad it was hurting. (chuckling) That went on. Therefore, the railroad, and I expect its pretty much the same way. They used to – if they were busy, they'd hire you and the next month, they'd cut you off. So, I got laid off at the railroad after being there about a year and a half. Fortunately, I had worked – Gone upstairs at lunchtime, they had kinda a class that they told you you could come in and listen to the instruction and things like that. It might help you get a little better job at the railroad. I got that. As a result of that, after I got cut off, the man who taught that wrote me a nice letter as a recommendation to the Hotel Roanoke. So they were building the one that the lobby is in now, just had started that. He wrote up there and they hired me for that. So I went up there, 7 days a week at \$80 a month.

KT: Wow.

WB: Anyway, I worked up there then. But between the time I was cut off from the railroad and before I got that was about a year so I went around and did cabinet work. I built everything in this room, everything. I didn't do that. I bought that and this table here but all the cabinets and everything. Since that time, I've learned to do the basket weaving. I've got 13 different baskets that I've made, different styles.

KT: Those are impressive.

WB: These over on the wall. I made the picture frames that those frames are in.

KT: Where did you learn to work with wood?

WB: Huh?

KT: Where did you learn to work with wood?

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WB: I guess my dad was a carpenter you see, and he give us instructions. So working with him got that straightened away. That's where I learned so I could build the house. When we bought over there, later on, he built a house out here on the front of this highway, close to Woodlawn. I helped on that of course. I remember later on, we tore the old house down and built a garage behind out of it. Poured the foundation, you pour the cement slab around the thing to put your framing up off the ground a little bit. I was driving nails and bang, bang, bang and hit my thumb. From then on, I had to hold my nails with these 2 fingers.

KT: Did it break it?

WB: Yeah.

KT: Oh goodness.

WB: But I did chair weaving.

KT: Let me see.

WB: And I've got something in the other room. I'll take you in there to show you if you want to see it.

KT: So, is that your hobby?

WB: I just picked that up. I found out they did a class over in the old Ogden School I was telling you about, where I started school. I learned to do some of the baskets. I got a book with some in it – I had the ability to take it out of the book and put it together to do something with it. Most of these. I made me a template to make 'em by. When Ed (??) did one, he just had the big wide spaces and put 'em in – ribs they call 'em going around. They were just loose so I learned to take me cardboard and make my template to shape I wanted it to be and strapped it in there and I used these little wire ties that you get off of milk, bread and stuff and tied 'em in there. So, it held 'em in place.

KT: So you came up with your own system.

WB: I have that ability just like my walker there. If you notice the ledge laying on top. If you go to the refrigerator, you can't carry anything and use the walker. So, I made that top there and its got two screws and two rubber bands there. You see the green on the front?

KT: Mm mm.

WB: All I did to hold it in place is put two screws in that thing. I'll show it to you when you get a little closer – And wrapped it around there and I can take it off and fold that walker up then and take it anywhere I want to.

KT: But it won't move.

WB: So I have that ability to see possibilities of things you can do.

KT: That's a good idea.

WB: Its just doing things that you want to do and so forth.

KT: So let me ask, since we're talking about your ability, can we talk a little bit about the house?

When did you say you built the house?

WB: I told you I built the main house in '36 and then the addition in '52.

KT: I don't think we said it on tape but how much did it cost for you to build?

WB: I owed \$2,000 on it when I got through. That included everything I spent. And, of course, things were much cheaper then than what they are today.

KT: And we have a newspaper clipping.

WB: Do what?

KT: You have a newspaper article that talks about the house.

WB: That's what this was here. Is that it? I believe it was it. Yeah, that's it, yeah.

KT: OK. And we'll have that included.

WB: Yeah, that's it.

KT: So is there anything you can think about that maybe we have forgotten to talk about or that comes to mind?

WB: Well, I don't know. Like I said, so much has happened in my lifetime. Just like this road out here that we got opened and I was telling you about the guy would get stuck in the mud. Feguson who had that big truck as I told you is over at the museum. He'd get mad at the people down the road so he'd go over there and drag it a tree or something across the road and stock it up. So they finally got a mail route out of it and then, of course, he couldn't do it because the federal government would be on him.

KT: That was nasty tricks. I know its hard to fit everything into like an hour.

WB: Something is always going on in my days.

KT: For now, we're gonna stop the interview but this has been -

WB: Is this kinda what you was really wanting?

KT: Yeah, absolutely. And this was Mr. Walter Melvin Bryant at 2702 Brambleton Avenue.

WB: What will they do? You wanna cut it loose?

KT: Yeah, I'll stop it.