

Interviewee: Rebecca H. Raper Austin

Interviewer: Arlene Ollie

Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

AO: Today is March 23, 2007, my name is Arlene Ollie and I am about to interview Rebecca H. Raper Austin. Could you tell me when and where you were born?

RA: I was born in Lexington, North Carolina, on December 16, 1928. I weighed the great sum of 2 pounds and I was very fortunate to have good care but there were no facilities for newborns in hospitals in 1928. We lived in the country with my grandparents and we had family friend and retainer who looked after me when I was so small and she kept me on warm pillows for about the first year of my life. My mother, when I was born, dislocated her shoulder and her eyesight was affected so she didn't see me really well until I was about a year old. But by 2, I was normal size and going strong. Aunt Sally Hayden kept me on pillows at 80 degrees for day and night for the first year of my life. But I was normal by the time I was 2 and I was OK since.

AO: I'm kinda curious. How did she warm the pillows?

RA: I don't know. I was a little too young to remember but I guess by the stove. It was a large old home out in the country and with no doubt a wood stove. There was heat in the house, fireplaces or whatever. I judged that she kept 'em warm somewhere around the stove and it was sort of remarkable that I survived but I did.

AO: That's so interesting. Tell me about your parents, brothers and sisters and if you had any extended family living nearby.

RA: I have extended family all over North Carolina but (laughing) many cousins and so forth. My father and mother – Mother was a school teacher and she met daddy when she came to the small community of Lynnwood, North Carolina to teach. Daddy had finished college. Well, he had been in World War I and came back and finished college and then taught in Murphy, North Carolina for a short while but his mother died in 1924 and he came back to help his father out. He had 4 brothers and 2 sisters younger than he. One sister was older but the rest were younger and he came back and lived with his parents and married my mother in 1924 not long after my grandmother died. It was an extended family living in that big house when I was born and weighed 2 pounds. Of course during the Depression, my grandfather lost his shirt. He had speculated in the stock market. He had raised many heads of hogs for market and they died of Cholera. His country store burned and it was just one misfortune after the other. So, we sold the big house and moved to a small house where he died. And then in 1936, my parents, we moved to High Point, North Carolina, to be near my mother's family. Mother was 1 of 12 children and she had 6 brothers and 5 sisters. Her brothers were all in the furniture business. So we moved to High Point and daddy went into the furniture business not with his brothers-in-law but with another furniture company there. I had 1 sister 3 years older than I, Carol. Mother tells me this tale. I don't remember it but mother would get furious with my sister because when she was 3, she would hold the doors open in that big house to let in her imaginary playmates. Mildred Opal May and – No, it was Jack Opal May and Mildred. They were her imaginary playmates and my sister would hold the doors open and cool off the house when they were trying to keep me on warm pillows. I forgave her. (laughing) We lived in High Point. That's where I went to elementary school. Then, daddy was given a store of his own in Ashboro, North Carolina, in 1941 and we moved there.

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AO: Ashboro is -

RA: Ashboro is 25 miles south of Greensboro on 220. Its right at the breaking point of Piedmont, North Carolina, and the sand hills. The north side of town is rolling hills, the south side is sand. But its in the geographical center of North Carolina. Great big zoo there now. Everybody knows about the zoo.

AO: High Point is -

RA: High Point is in Guilford County close to Greensboro. You can't tell where one starts and the other begins, stops. That High Point/Greensboro triad area is heavily populated now.

AO: Describe your home life. For instance, did you gather around the radio in the evening? Do you remember when you got a telephone?

RA: Oh yes. I remember listening to President Roosevelt's Fireside Chats with my grandfather. He listened to the radio faithfully and I did too of course as a child. In the little house, we lived in the little house. My grandfather also had a cotton gin too and of course the bottom dropped out of the cotton market. One interesting thing my mother did that I remember well when I was 5 or so. Mother having taught school was a certified teacher and so many young men in the neighborhood had to quit school to go home and help parents with crops or work or whatever. The cotton gin office was out beside our house and it had a blackboard and my mother scrounged around and got desks and equipped a classroom in the cotton gin office and taught high school boys who had had to quit school in the evening after working hours. So, mother, was an accredited teacher so the boys got their diplomas and so forth. But mother did that for 2 or 3 years when I was 4 or 5 or in that age and I remember sitting on the steps of the cotton gin office listening to my mother teach. She was remarkable to have done that because she -

AO: _____ (??)

RA: Yeah and she was an excellent teacher. She went back to college after my sister and I finished college and got her degree and re-certified her teaching credentials and taught from the time she was about 48 until she was 60.

AO: What college?

RA: Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, WCUNC in Greensboro.

AO: Is that the same school that you and your sister attended?

RA: My sister went to WCUNC and I went to Greensboro College which is a private Methodist-affiliated girls school there in Greensboro also. I had been accepted to both colleges but when it came time to go, they didn't have room for me at WC. Of course Greensboro College was more expensive and we were concerned about that. If I remember, I never did know, but I think I got a little financial help to go to Greensboro College. I wanted to go there because 4 generations of my father's family, women, had graduated from Greensboro College. My father's great-uncle had given 'em the money to build a dormitory there which was named for him. Fitzgerald Hall was the senior dormitory and my father was Joe Fitzgerald Raper. He was named for his uncle who the family respected highly. So Greensboro College is really where I wanted to go and I was very fortunate to get to go there.

AO: That's wonderful. What career did you choose after graduating?

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RA: Well, I majored in Religious Education and my first job out of college was as a director of Religious Education at a Methodist Church in North Wilksboro, North Carolina. And I worked there for a couple of years but my sister had finished WC in Business and was in Washington and doing extremely well. She was with a large real estate firm, secretary to the president. She ended up a partner in it eventually. She knew I was unhappy in North Wilksboro. For one, I wasn't making enough money to live on and we had a minister at that time – Of course, Methodist churches trade ministers every 4 years and the man that hired me, I was very happy with but the fellow that followed him, created a lot of problems not just with me but with the church and the county because he came into Wilkes County which was sort of the bootleg capital of North Carolina as is Franklin County, Virginia. And he came in and his goal and ambition was to de-alcohol Wilkes County and he stepped on many toes. So I was unhappy. My sister called and said her office needed a cashier person, general office person and she knew I could do the work, would I like to come live with her and work with her which I did and thoroughly enjoyed working in Washington. It was a great time in the early 50s to live

and work in Washington. I met a lot of interesting people.

AO: I'm sure.

RA: Most interesting, the company we worked for managed property for out of town owners of large apartments complexes and this sort of thing. One of the – There were various multi-millionaire people whose property we managed and they were in and out of our office from time to time. One of 'em was Colonel Henry Toolman and he was from Ohio, Dayton, Ohio. He was an attorney in Dayton. We managed his property and of course everybody deferred to Colonel Toolman because he was quite a distinguished gentleman way up in his early 80s at that time and this was in the early 50s. Recently, I read a biography of the Wright Brothers and was amazed to learn that their patent attorney from the time they were young men was Colonel Henry Toolman.

AO: Wow.

RA: So, I mean, all of this hit me. Well, I knew the Wright Brothers patent attorney. I met a lot of – Also, one of the partners in the firm, Miles Montgomery was a graduate of the University of Florida and their law school. He was a fraternity brother of John Ringling North who owned Ringling Brothers Circus. So when the circus came to town, Mr. North came to see us and gave us all circus tickets. So, I also was very active in a Methodist church there and sang in their choir and sang with a group that performed in various official functions in Washington. Things like the dedication of the Carter Barron Amphitheater. President Truman was the speaker. Our group sang at that dedication. I met a lot of interesting people and loved living in Washington.

AO: How long did you live in Washington?

RA: I was there about 2 ½ years until I met my husband.

AO: What kind of activities did you participate in as a child? Did you participate in any particular activities, things that you enjoyed?

RA: The thing I did most was sing. From the time I was in elementary, not elementary school, but junior high level. I was active in a children's choir and then I studied voice with our choir director and the thing I did most that I enjoyed was studying music and singing. I took some piano from my aunt who taught piano but I was never – I wasn't happy doing the scales. (laughing) I wanted to play songs. I didn't want to do scales. But the thing I enjoyed most was the music and singing.

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AO: Did you and your family sit on the porch in the evenings?

RA: Yes, in a way. We didn't really have a porch on all of our houses but my grandparents, my mother's family, had a large front porch and we would sit on that porch on weekends and Sunday afternoons and make ice cream and eat watermelons and cantaloupes and various family members would come by and did a lot of that.

AO: Because of the genealogist in me, what was your mother's family name?

RA: Holton. My mother was Esther Ruth Holton. Her father was James Edgar Holton. Incidentally, I've been into the genealogy thing too. My husband was from Botetourt County and he and I put together a genealogy or history of 45 Botetourt County families which has been published in 1977 and is now in its 2nd printing. We also researched several other Botetourt County and area families which are available from me. Yes, I've been – My husband was a genealogy buff and he grew up in Botetourt County. His father was the County Treasurer and his grandfather was County Treasurer and his Uncle was County Treasurer.

AO: A family of County Treasurers.

RA: He grew up in the courthouse in Botetourt and of course knew everybody down there and was keenly interested in people and their histories and he did a lot of the research and I did most of the grunt work, typed it and put it together.

AO: Right. That is truly wonderful.

RA: Oh, incidentally, you asked about my mother's family. My grandfather's aunt was the first woman

lawyer in the South, Tobiatha Holton and she's been fairly heavily documented.

AO: That's wonderful.

RA: She lived in Jamestown and rode horseback to Greensboro to study Law in the 1960s.

AO: That's fantastic. What family stories were passed down from one generation to another? For instance, did your family have stories or memories about the Civil War? Did they have a family recipe that's been passed down through the generations?

RA: Yep. Some of both.

AO: Great.

RA: My father's family recipe that's been passed down from generation to generation is for persimmon pudding. I don't know the recipe by heart but its a mixture of persimmon pudding and sugar and butter and eggs and various spices and my mother made it at every family reunion and everybody expected that. And I think she learned it from the Raper family. On my father's side of the family, my great-grandfather – Both of my great-grandfathers were in the Civil War. My father's grandfather, Elisha Raper fought in the Civil War and was a prisoner at a Northern prison camp near Norfolk and he was released and walked from Norfolk back to North Carolina to his home between Winston-Salem and Lexington carrying his rifle and carrying a little chest with his – He had been secretary of his college society before he went in the war and he came back carrying his little chest and his rifle. His rifle I have now. My father being the oldest son, it had passed from one oldest son to the other and daddy had no sons so he gave it to me for my oldest son. So, I have it. And then my grandmother's father on my father's side was Captain John Miller who fought, who was the commander of the 22nd North Carolina infantry. I guess it was foot soldiers and he surrendered with Lee at Appomattox. Yeah, I've got all that documented. I understand – I was told that my grandfather Raper was treated fairly well in the Northern Prison in Norfolk because one of the guards there had been a drummer that had sold things to his father at their store. So he knew him.

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AO: OK.

RA: He had some history with this particular guard in the Confederate prison so he seemed to fair better than many of 'em.

AO: It always pays to know somebody.

RA: It always helps to know somebody. Absolutely.

AO: What is your fondest childhood memory? For example, a favorite holiday event, a favorite family vacation or a favorite gift that you received?

RA: Hmmm. I don't know.

AO: Whatever pops in your head about having a really great time that you enjoyed.

RA: I don't know. We used to hike over to High Point City Lake and go swimming with 10 or 15 buddies and we lived about 2 miles from the lake and we'd hike over to the swimming pool. This is when I was in the 7th, 8th grades, 6th, and swim all afternoon. Then come home. For a while, we lived in a log house that my uncles had built as a hunting lodge on my grandfather's property and it overlooked Deep River in Guilford County. This was after we moved from Lynnwood. Deep River was at the bottom of our hill so there was a swimming hole right near there and so we would play in the swimming hole. I remember – climb trees. I was a tomboy.

AO: I understand that.

RA: Played a lot of Monopoly. Rode a lot of bicycles. Fell off a few ponies. (laughing) You know.

AO: What chores did you have to do around the house or the neighborhood?

RA: My sister and I ended up doing a little bit of everything. Mother began working when I was in the 4th or 5th grade. My sister of course being older – We frequently came home from school and fixed the evening meal, learned to cook doing it. Did X amount of housework. We just grew up. Mother taught us to do those things. When we lived in Ashboro, we lived near the peach orchards and daddy would

take his furniture company truck down to the peach orchards and bring back a truck full of bushels of peaches which was for us and the neighbors. We didn't use 'em all of course. Peeled many peaches to get ready to can peaches. I remember peeling and peeling peaches. Had a close friend that lived next door, Peggy Mitchell, who is still a good friend by the way some 60 years later. She was exactly my age. When we moved there, I was really fortunate to have such a nice friend right next door and we did all kinds of things from sneaking cigarettes to (laughing) you name it.

AO: Growing up things. Now you've told me you've had several houses and moved to several different places. Did you ever have a garden?

RA: Oh yeah. We had a garden. I lived in Lynnwood first and then High Point area and we had gardens at both places. That's where I lived with my family and then after that, after I went to college, I lived in Washington and then here. So as we were growing up, we always had gardens, daddy had gardens.

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AO: We've already talked about your school life and that you completed college. And your mother and father were both college graduates. Your mother taught school. Your father worked for a furniture company.

RA: My father worked for Rose Furniture Company which was a large retail chain similar to Grand Piano here. It was Rose Furniture Company out of High Point. It was owned by men, brothers, the Kester brothers and it was Kester Brothers Corporation acting as Rose Furniture Company. When daddy had been with 'em a couple of years, they opened a store. Their home base was High Point and they opened a store in Ashboro and just turned it over to daddy to run which he operated – did his own buying, did everything. So daddy was in the retail furniture business but my mother had 5 brothers who also had 5 furniture stores between 'em and another of my mother's brothers had a carpet and flooring company and they installed carpet and flooring. I sort of grew up in and around the retail furniture trade.

AO: So when you married, what year was that?

RA: I married in 1953.

AO: Did you marry in Washington or in North Carolina?

RA: Neither place. (laughing) That's an interesting story. (laughing) I lived with my sister in Washington and we had a cousin who taught school in Charlottesville and she invited us to Charlottesville for a football game. So, we drove down to Charlottesville and she got us dates with her friends and we all went to the football game and had a good time and went back home. But, my cousin was dating a fellow named Bill Austin and I was dating a fellow named Al Baxter. My sister dated a fellow named Charlie Fox Graham from Wytheville. We went back to Washington and that was the end of that. We had had a good time. Al Baxter who I dated, finished UVA and came to Washington, went into the Army and was stationed at the Pentagon. I lived not far from the Pentagon. From time to time, he'd call and we'd go out to dinner or do something but we were just friends. Then in 195? - That was '51 and then a year or so later, I got a call from Bill Austin. He was in Washington. He had brought his mother up there. She had cancer and was coming up for some cancer treatment and he was staying with Al and asked Al what had happened to me. Al said, "Well, she's still here. I see her from time to time.". Bill called me and wanted my sister and me to come over to Georgetown to a party some of them were having and of course, you went to parties if you were invited. So we went and a day or so – the next day, I presumed I was with Al and then the next day Bill called and said, no, he wanted to go with me, date me. So he came over and had dinner with us or something and I saw him a couple of times on weekends while he was in Washington with his mother. And then he went on back to Natural Bridge. His mother owned a motor court at Natural Bridge which he wasn't able to operate it and he was operating it for her during the summers, you know, spring and summer. It was a seasonal thing. It wasn't open in the winter. So, he was going to school in the winter and operating that for his mother in

the summer. So, he asked us down to – He kept calling and writing and we kept in touch and then he asked my sister and me when we went on vacation to come back to Natural Bridge and visit. Well, I had never been through this area so we wanted to come so we did. And spent 4 days with him and his mother and his sister at the motor court and that was in August and then in – He kept writing and calling and then in September, he called. My sister and I had been to the beach visiting friends and came back late on Sunday night and he called me at 1:00 in the morning and wanted me immediately to come to Charlottesville. He had to see me. And I said, “No, I can't. I've got to go to work in the morning” and so forth. So anyway, I told him I would come down in 2 weeks. I'd come the weekend of the 12th of October and I'd just come to take the bus down to Natural Bridge. The motel was on old 11 and the bus went right by it which I did. And we got to Natural Bridge and there were no lights on at the Motor Court. The bus driver didn't know whether to let me off or not and I was hesitant. But he tooted his horn and finally Bill came out and Bill's car was there. So, I got off the bus. I said, “Bill, what's happened to the lights?”. Well I found out then he was mortally afeared of electricity and he said, “I think we've blown a fuse. I'm gonna have to call an electrician.”. And I said, “Well do you have a fuse?”. He said, “Well, I think I've got some fuses here.”. I said, “Well, give me a fuse.”. He held the flashlight and I changed the fuse and lights came on and he asked me to marry him that night. (both laughing heartily) That was on Friday night and I told him I would because I realized in August when my sister and I were there that he was more than a passing fancy. I hadn't told her. Anyway, that was Friday night. Saturday we discussed – Saturday, I've forgotten what we did but we stayed up 2 nights in a row talking, getting acquainted, you know, finally. And then on Sunday, I said, Bill said, “Well, I'll take you back to Charlottesville and you can just catch the train from Charlottesville back to Washington and save you some time and give us a little more time together.”. So we had discussed when we would get married and we had probably settled on Thanksgiving or Christmas or something like that. A small wedding somewhere because his mother was terminally ill by that time. So, anyway, on Sunday, he took me back to Charlottesville and took me to see his landlady, Miss Everett Rinker who was a good friend and we told her we were planning to get married. “Oh, well you can get married in Charlottesville tomorrow.”. She got on the phone and she called the judge and she called the minister and she made arrangements for us to get blood tests at the hospital and we got married the next day in Charlottesville.

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AO: That was quick.

RA: And I called and invited my parents and my sister who hit the ceiling, swore I had lost my mind. Anyway, my mother, I had – She knew. I had told mother that he was just a passing fancy. Anyway, my parents came and we called various friends in Charlottesville, Bill's uncle and aunt in Springfield and we had a nice small church wedding in Charlottesville that Monday afternoon.

AO: That's wonderful.

RA: But the worst thing was after our wedding, everybody said, “Well we're going over to the Thomas Jefferson Inn for dinner.”. We thought, how nice, they're going to dinner together. So we got in the car and left and they had arranged this lovely cake and the whole thing for us to surprise us.

AO: And you didn't show up.

RA: And we didn't know it. So they had the after-party, after-wedding reception with no bride and groom. And I'm still embarrassed about that but they should've told us.

AO: That's what happens when you have a surprise.

RA: Absolutely. It worked out well. We were married 37 ½ years.

AO: That was wonderful. That was absolutely wonderful. So, how did you get from Washington with him in Buena Vista to Botetourt?

RA: Well, his mother had sold their home in Botetourt County and moved and bought a home on Grandin Road in Roanoke to be near her doctors when she was so ill. Bill had a sister who was 14 at

that time, a younger sister, and she was here with her mother living in Roanoke. After we were married, we came back to Natural Bridge and closed up the motor court that fall and came to Roanoke and lived with her and looked after her until she died the following February. At that point, we were in Roanoke, and had not much choice but to stay in Roanoke. First, Bill really wanted to go live in Charlottesville but it was not practical at that point because his sister lived with us and we were her responsible parties and that sort of thing.

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AO: So you lived on Grandin Court.

RA: Well, we lived on Grandin Road. We lived in a house that they tore down to make the parking lot for Christ Lutheran Church. We lived right next to the Greenstone Church on Grandin Road and the church bought that house. We sold it to someone else to settle Bill's mother's estate and then whoever bought it from us sold it to the church and they made a parking lot out of it.

AO: So where did you move to from Grandin Road?

RA: We bought a home on Yellow Mountain Road just – Actually its the first house that faces Yellow Mountain Road after you turned left off of Jefferson Street. Its just up the hill from Jefferson Street and we lived there 33 years until my husband's health began to go bad and our children were grown and educated and we no longer needed 9 rooms and 3 lots on the side of Mill Mountain so we sold it and bought a condominium where I live now.

AO: That sounds like a very interesting life.

RA: It has been.

AO: And very fulfilling, that's the word I'm looking for.

RA: Mm mm. I'd like to talk a little bit about our business.

AO: Sure.

RA: Is that a question?

AO: No.

RA: OK. (laughing)

AO: But that's OK.

RA: When we came to Roanoke after Bill's mother died, we began looking for work and, of course, Bill had enough hours for a Master's but no degree and my degree was in Religion which is sort of nebulous but we were both very people-oriented people and we began looking for work. In 1952 or 3, I had been making far more in Washington than anybody was paying a woman in Roanoke and I was told that there was no point in applying for the Norfolk Western because they don't hire married women at that point and did not. It was several years before they got over that. My husband – I went to work for what was the Mountain Trust Bank and discovered 3 weeks after I went there that I was pregnant and didn't know it. At that point, pregnant women weren't kept in the job work market anyway. But I kept that hidden until September. We had such a difficult, had a hard time finding work that we were satisfied with. So, we had thought about the possibility of opening a private employment agency to help people find jobs, to act as a go-between. There was one employment agency here then, a one-man operation and he did very well but he didn't tell you any – Bill was working through him to get a job and he would say, "Well, go and see John Doe at such and such a company. He's looking for a salesman.". That's all he would tell him. He knew nothing about the company. He knew nothing about what was required. This mad just didn't take time to tell you anything. He'd just send you in some direction, helter skelter. So that was something that we had thought we could do. So, I signed a teaching contract in Roanoke County to begin teaching because the county was in dire need of teachers right after – during the early 50s. I signed the contract in May and in June, Bill went – Another fellow had opened up an employment agency and Bill decided he would go see him. Well he went to see him and talk to him and found his name was George Strump (??) and he had a child who was deaf and needed to go to a school for the deaf. His wife's uncle was Richard Poff, you know?

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AO: Mm mm.

RA: And Poff was trying to get him hooked up with Colonial Williamsburg somewhere because there was a school for the deaf there. So we bought his agency and took it over in that summer. But, I had already signed a contract to teach. So, I went to Dr. Horn, who was superintendent of the county schools and told him that we had bought a business that I was interested in but that I didn't know whether I would need to teach to survive or what. But I would begin the school year or not, up to him, but I wanted to warn him that if the business developed more than I needed teaching, then I might resign in the middle of the year and I didn't want to – I wanted to warn him of that possibility, which I did. He said, "Well, start the year." Thank heavens we had had that conversation because I had 42 7th graders all day, every subject in one of the county schools and it was the most horrific experience. I realized I can deal with children 1 or 2 at a time but en mass – and all of these children had gone to school together for 6 years and each knew what made the other giggle. They constantly – It was a constant gang war, not war literally, you know, but it was very, very difficult. I think I had -

AO: 42 students, that's a lot.

RA: See all these kids were war babies. When the first half of the year ended, I resigned and went into our business full time which was very interesting which we thoroughly enjoyed. It was sort of Russian Roulette every day. We managed to survive for 33 years and ended up – We made a lot of contacts, placed a lot of people in jobs. Some succeeded very well and it was always gratifying to see them succeed and do well.

AO: What was the name of your business?

RA: It was Services Unlimited Employment Agency.

AO: Where were you located?

RA: We were located over Paul's Restaurant on Franklin Road. If you know where Paul's is.

AO: Yes.

RA: We were upstairs, directly over Paul's. Right across from the National Business College. Of course, we were in that business through the years when the American Viscos closed there were a lot of people looking for work. We ended up getting a lot of people that were laid off from the American Viscos jobs, doing whatever. That was a difficult.

AO: It was a loss.

RA: That's right and a lot of those people had no skills that were adaptable to anything else. Of course we were also in that business during the integration period and it was very gratifying to us to work with black applicants who had improved/gotten skills that they needed and wanted to use. It was very gratifying to help them get into good jobs and we did a lot of that.

AO: Right.

RA: And so we thoroughly enjoyed it and did well with it for a number of years but it was – By the time we had been in it 33 years, my husband's health was not good and I was pretty much operating it by myself and he was doing the genealogical research he did. And then so many agencies went into temporary placements which was not interesting to us. We just did not want the liability that you get into with a temporary agency because a temporary agency has to handle the payroll for these people they place in jobs to be reimbursed later. They have to carry heavy liability insurance and that sort of thing. At that point, our children were educated. The house was paid for. Bill was not well and I figured I could find something else to do. So we closed it up in 1989. But it was a very interesting career and it was very rewarding in a lot of ways.

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AO: I'm sure it was. The number of people with various educational levels, skill levels. That would've been very rewarding.

RA: It was very interesting. I think about a lot of the people and I sort of followed their careers. The

president of a local bank down the road a ways. We got into banking when he first got out of college. This sort of thing and that's very gratifying.

AO: That's great. I never thought about anything like that. You brought up the – After Civil Rights and the effect it had on your business. Do you feel that it had any effect on your personal life?

RA: The Civil Rights thing?

AO: Mm mm.

RA: Um, no, because my family – Now Aunt Sally Hayden that kept me alive when I was so young, we've always had black friends and good friends and I had people that kept my children that I'm very close to even yet. So I've always had a lot of black friends. The Civil Rights thing, I think they were due everything plus. You know?

AO: Mm mm.

RA: I never had any – My husband was a little bit – My family was very broad-minded along those lines. My husband wasn't until he got to know me and I fixed him. (laughing) I changed his attitudes fast because we were dealing with – He was old Harry Byrd Virginia politics kind of people originally but I got him out of that. I was a little more broad minded from North Carolina.

AO: Alright. There was a difference. You made a difference. Did your husband serve in the military?

RA: No. He was called up to service during World War II but didn't pass the physical every time. He did not pass the physical. He had a congenital heart defect that could not be corrected and he lived a perfectly normal life until he developed heart problems when he was about 60 and he lived 5 years after that.

AO: Is there anything else that we did not cover that you would like to share with us?

RA: I think I pretty much covered it all. (laughing) I can't think of anything. Oh, interestingly, after we closed our business, I worked for a temporary agency, just part-time some because I really needed to work. About the time my husband died, my mother had moved here and I was looking after her. She was in Friendship Manor. She lived in Roanoke for 17 years and was in Friendship Manor for 8 of those. So I had her and my husband ill at the same time. Anyway, I did some temporary assignments for various companies and ended up with Carilion working in their physicians billing division doing insurance research. I worked for them 12 years from the time I was 60 until I was 72 or 73. I thoroughly enjoyed working for Carilion and it was a most interesting job. It wasn't all interesting but what I did was interesting to me because, for instance, if a patient was transported by Lifeguard 10 from an auto accident to Roanoke Memorial, I would get the charge and would have to figure out and research who should be billed. Find out who the patient was, trace 'em down, get insurance coverage and this sort of thing. I did that type of insurance research for the physicians billing division for Carilion and thoroughly enjoyed it. They were very good to me. I was very thankful to have the job because I needed the money.

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AO: Oh yeah.

RA: It was a very interesting job. I worked for them until I was 72. My sister died in 2002 and she had a considerable estate and she had never married and had no children or anything and I was her sole beneficiary. I could afford to quit finally at 72, I can afford to quit working. (laughing)

AO: Anytime you have that kind of gift, that's perfect.

RA: But then she had developed an early senile dementia and I had looked after her for 5 years so I felt like I had earned it. I had to move her from her beach place in Delaware to a condo in Greensboro and she wanted to be there and near others in our family. I had taken over her care and responsibility for her for 5 years. And, of course, she would've had to have paid through the nose for nursing homes and so forth. So there wasn't all that much left.

AO: Any is a blessing.

RA: But it did enable me to retire and not be -

AO: Have more freedom.

RA: Have more freedom. Mm mm.

AO: That's a wonderful life story. That really is. And you did a lot of nursing.

RA: Yeah, I did a lot of care-taking of people. A lot of care-taking.

AO: Its interesting that you never drifted toward that career.

RA: (laughing) Ha! That's a funny tale. I was a rather rambunctious teenager kind of child and my mother and father when I was getting ready to finish high school. They said, "Well, what do you think Becky should do?". Mother said, "Well she could be a nurse.". And daddy said, "Oh no!! She couldn't be a nurse. She'd jerk those patients. She'd kill 'em before it's over with.". (laughing heartily)

AO: You proved 'em wrong.

RA: Well, I didn't actually have the nursing to do, I had the looking after their affairs to do -

AO: Oh OK. You didn't do hands on. You were the administrator.

RA: I was the administrator. I wasn't the hands on nurse. I am not a good hands on nurse. (both laughing) My children managed to survive me but mostly because they were strong boys. (laughing)

AO: That's wonderful. Are they here?

RA: Well, one of my sons is here, the youngest. He's married and has 2 little children and he's in human resource development for Carilion. He's in the corporate offices of Carilion as a human resources person. My middle son is currently, his family is living in Florida but he has been the – Both of those boys went to VPI and got their Master's at Tech. My middle son has been the primary city planner for the toll road system for the state of Florida but he has left them and has taken a job with a large engineering firm out of New Haven Connecticut as their senior project manager for toll road systems. But he works out of Fairfax but he covers the Eastern Seaboard. He's in the process of moving from Florida to Fairfax but he's got to sell the house in Florida first.

AO: He'll be closer to you.

RA: My oldest son is in Winston-Salem. His wife teaches school and he is a commercial sales rep for Atlas Van Lines. He sells large, commercial moves. He went to William and Mary and VCU. But my other 2 boys went to Tech.

AO: That's wonderful.

RA: We got 'em educated.

AO: Mm mm. I'm jealous. I have 2 daughters and I've got them both in college but I couldn't get either one of them to graduate. But I have not given up.

RA: Oh dear. Don't give up. Don't give up. Its never too late.

AO: That's right. I didn't graduate until I was 48 so we're just late bloomers I've decided.

RA: Well that's good. Maybe they took after their mother.

AO: I hope so.

RA: I hope so.

AO: I want to thank you so much for participating.

RA: Well, I was glad to.

AO: And it was a wonderful life story that you've given us. It will be great on the shelves for the children and whoever chooses to listen.

RA: Well, how will this be used?

AO: It will be – I'm gonna turn this off now. Thank you again for participating.

RA: I enjoyed it.