Interviewee: Westley Rogers
Interviewer: Arleen Ollie
Transcriber: Dorian Meekins

AO: My name is Arleen Ollie. Today is July 2nd, 2007 and I'm going to interview Westley Rogers and the interview is taking place in the Parrott Room of the Main Library, Downtown.
WR: Good morning Ms. Ollie, how are you?
AO: Just fine. When and where were you born?
WR: I was born in Roanoke, Virginia; December 6th, 1944 at Burrell Memorial Hospital.
AO: Okay and what streets have you lived on?
WR: Oh, good question. I've lived on Loudon Ave., also known as High Street. I lived on Patton Ave, Northeast. I lived on Carver Ave, Northeast. And I presently– oh I also lived on McDowell Ave, Northwest and I presently live on Biltmore Drive, Northwest.
AO: Tell me about your parents and siblings and if you had any extended family members living nearby?
WR: During that time or now?
AO: During that time.
WR: Well my father was employed by Northwestern Railway, he was a waiter on the train. He was normally gone three to four days a week. His run was usually from Roanoke to Cincinnati and back. My mom was pretty much a housewife, but when she worked she worked with my grandmother who, during that time, ran the Northeast Nursery School, formerly known as I understand as Gilmer School– Well, I'm sorry, Gregory School.
AO: Okay.
WR: And I have three sisters. Two of whom attended Gilmer Elementary School with me. The other is 15 years younger than me so she came along a little later during different kind of times. I had a few uncles who lived near me. I think, with the exception of one on my mother and father's side, I only had one aunt that lived in Roanoke at the time; Evelyn Rogers. And on my father's side also, my uncle George Rogers lived here in Roanoke and that was it. His brother, who was my father Harry, eventually moved to Washington DC. His brother Richard moved to New York and his brother Charlie was in the service for some time, as a matter of fact he retired from the service. His sister Ruth also lived in and moved to Washington DC. On my mother's side, the only person in Roanoke was my mother Jean Dupree Rogers and her brother James Dupree; her other brothers Willie Dupree, Albert Dupree, both of whom went to Howard University and eventually settled in Washington. And another brother John Dupree who attended Johnson C. Smith University and settled in Washington. Another brother, Thomas Dupree who went to Washington for many years, left Washington, moved to Connetticut, and is now back in Roanoke. And her only sister Ruth Dupree who left A&T University along with my mother and went to Washington and resided there until she became deceased about six, seven, eight years ago.
AO: Okay, now which one of the Duprees was the internationally renowned singer?

WR: That was my uncle Willie Dupree. Actually that wasn't his given name, his given name was Hezekiah Dupree named after his father's father, but he did not like that name. So eventually he had it changed to William or Willie Dupree. William Cowell (??) Dupree is his name– was his name.
AO: But he was born Hezekiah?
WR: Yes, born Hezekiah. Raised in Roanoke, educated in the Roanoke school system, graduated from Addison– Booker T. at that time, Addison now. Went to Howard University and became known as one of the Singing Sergeants. For those of you who can remember, the Singing Sergeants, back in the days in the 50s and 60s, where the gentlemen that closed off the TV at night. When the television was going off they would sing the Lord's prayer and the Singing Sergeants would sing that.
AO: I also understand he acquired that fame by singing with the Air Force.
WR: Yes, he stayed in the Air Force for a great number of years. As a matter of fact, he would go all over the country, all over the globe singing for different people in high positions. As a matter of fact, if I'm not mistaken, he had just come back from, I wanna say; Greece, Bulgaria, one of those places. He had gone there to sing for the king and queen and on the way back, he died in the airport. He had a heart attack in the airport.
AO: What year was that?
WR: Oh. See I need to do research on that. I can tell you it was around– Had to be in the 70s, around the mid 70s. Yes, it had to be in the mid 70s because at that time my grandmother, his mother, had not moved to Washington and they had the memorial at Howard University, the Howard University Chapel. So I know it was around that time.
AO: Can place it in a frame.
WR: Yes. I know it wasn't in the 80s and I know it wasn't in the 60s so it had to be– It was around the mid 70s.
AO: Okay, that wouldn't be hard to locate.
WR: No, no. I know the– I was at the funeral, I know the graveyard where he was buried so, y'know, it would be easy to look up.
AO: Okay, describe your house for us. Did you have a garden?
WR: Yeah, my grandmother saw to it that we– We had a flower garden, not a garden.
AO: Not a vegetable garden.
WR: Not a vegetable garden. We had what I considered a flower garden and I guess with so many kids frumping in and out [of] our yard, it wouldn't have been the best thing to have.
AO: No.
WR: But my grandmother had two great big flower gardens on each side of the steps leading up to our house that she worked on almost every day.
AO: Did you help?
WR: No I did not. Actually, to be honest, being the oldest grandchild and having four, and then later on when my youngest sister was born, five women in the house I really didn't have to do anything.

AO: Shame on you.
WR: Well I'm just calling it like it is. And of course I had siblings who resented that, but–
AO: I'm sure.
WR: That's the way it was. Especially when they had make up my bed.
AO: What?
WR: Oh yeah. They had to clean my room, make up my bed.
AO: It's lucky you got this far in life. It truly is.
WR: Lucky that that's all we do is don't speak.
AO: Right. What kinds of activities did you participate in? Not house cleaning.
WR: Now when are we talking? Are we talking early on? Are we talking junior high school? Are we talking high school? How far back are we going because there are different phases.
AO: From the beginning time.
WR: From the time– Well to be honest, early on, I ran with a group of gentlemen who– We all lived on the same street in a two block radius. Robert Lee Dickerson better known as "Cap", Rufus Jackson, Luther Wilson, John Perkins better known as "Dough", and there was one other; George Boyd who lived right next door to me. George Boyd lived on the left of me facing my house, Rufus Jackson lived on the right of me facing my house, and Bryon Morris lived three doors up the street from me facing my house. But we did everything that little kids would do at the time. We shot marbles, we played tag in the alleys, we did it all, we ran around between all of the buildings. Being on High Street, there was a lot of different scenarios going on up there and we, kind of like, was around all of it. But as time grew on, they began to become more interested in cars. As a matter of fact, I'll never forget the morning they were in the alley messing with this old car, it might have been Rufus Jackson's car if I remember correctly, and that's when Cap as we know him today and back then had two of his fingers cut off from the fan in the car.
AO: Oh God.
WR: Sticking his hand down–
AO: Down in the fan belt.
WR: Yes, down in the fan belt, exactly. And, as I said, they began to have a great interest in cars and Rufus Jackson was always good with woodwork. He became a contractor, but even during those times he was always good with woodwork. He would go to Booker T. and come back home [with] things that looked like they were made in a store someplace. And at that time I became more interested in sports and in doing so I kind of branched off from them. Now, by the same token, during that time there was only one place for us to really gather and play games that the whole neighborhood would play and that's at the YMCA, the Hunting (??) Branch YMCA. During that time I became a great ping pong player. Ping pong and pool where the main two games that you could play in there and everybody who came there was either good at one or the other. I, right now, consider myself the second best that ever came out of there.
AO: Alright.

WR: Others around me, some say I was the best, but I happen to know within myself that Ted Calloway was the best ping pong player that ever came out of there. As a matter of fact, I ran into Ted a couple times since I've been back in town and he still plays today.
AO: Wow. Do you?
WR: No, I haven't played in a while, but whenever I do play, my game is there when I have played. But when I was in college, I won a lot of money playing.
AO: Really?
WR: Yes because there were a lot of exchange students. A lot of them from Thailand, Africa; and they would come back to school with money wanting to play me because they knew I was the best. So I won a lot of money during that time and I won several tournaments. When I was in– Well I was in high school when I left here in the 9th grade, but when I went to Washington, the 9th grade was in junior high. So when I got to Washington there were a couple of playgrounds within walking distance from me where I always went to play basketball which, by then, was my game so to speak, but I never lost my love for ping pong. And, long story short, I won a district tournament just by walking in. I didn't even know they were having a tournament and I asked the guy could I play. He said "Well this is a tournament, are you sure you wanna play?" I said yeah, I wanna play. I got in the tournament and I won for that playground. Then went into the next level which was several playgrounds and I won that. And then I went to went to almost what was considered the DC-wide tournament and I won that. So ping pong had been a big part of my life back then.
AO: When you said sports I automatically thought basketball. Ping pong was probably the last thing I would have thought of.
WR: Well, like I said, when you went to the Y– I mean everybody went to the Y everyday. When we left school we didn't go home; we went to the Y and stayed 'till the Y closed. Then we went home. Y'know, and when you go to the–
AO: Who ran it?
WR: Back during that time Mr. Keeling was the first one I can remember running it. Then after Mr. Keeling was Sammy Davis and then after Sammy Davis– I get them mixed up, either was Buster Keen and then Sammy Davis or it was Sammy Davis and then Buster Keen, but those were the three gentlemen who ran it during the time I was going to there.
AO: That's interesting.
WR: And it's ironic that– Not ironic, but it was great because these guys took an interest in us that– By us not spending that much time at home and a lot of us, our fathers had come and gone, they took a great deal of interest in us. I remember every year they had the father and son banquet every year and I never got to go with my father, but every year I was there. It was the thing to do back then. It was a joy to be a part of the Y back then because it was just so– They kept us going, they kept us doing something. Y'know, I played football for the Y, I played basketball on the Y's basketball team, I played– They also had what was known back then as– What did they call it? I can't remember the name of it now, but what would happen was the Ys

from each city in Virginia and North Carolina would meet up and have a sports festival in all of the different sports. And I never got to play in basketball, I always went for ping pong.
AO: That's really interesting. So when you were at the Y, where were your sisters?
WR: I have no idea. They were probably at home.
AO: Cleaning up your room.
WR: Yeah, cleaning up– I'm sure they were home because they didn't have the latitude that I had.
AO: (hums sarcastically)
WR: Y'know and even today to be honest, they are– Especially one of them, they– She never lets me forget the fact that I was the favorite. But there's a lot of things she don't know.
AO: Well.
WR: Well she don't know how she got her prom dress, she don't know how she got her class ring. See, but my grandmother and my mother know that I was a big part of that and that's probably a lot of the reason why I was the favorite because after my grandfather died in 1960, I was the man in the house.
AO: Right. And I think, too, as a sibling who is often accused of having been the favorite, what I think gets lost in the translation is that; you nor I nor any other child that's the favorite had anything to do with that.
WR: Exactly, exactly.
AO: Y'know, if you're gonna blame somebody– I don't know who you're supposed to blame, but no the individual that it happens to because there's nothing that I could have done to change the situation in my family and I'm sure there's nothing you could have done.
WR: Nothing, nothing at all. I had that happen at a job one time. I was promoted to manager six months after getting the job and there had been a number of people there [that] had been there for years. When I got the job, I couldn't control these guys and they confronted me one day, almost to the point where they wanted to fight and I had to tell them "Look, I didn't appoint myself."
AO: Right.
WR: And today, those same guys, we're very good friends.
AO: Well good. So at least they understood it.
WR: Yes.
AO: Families can be tough.
WR: Families are tough.
AO: Excuse me. Talk about your school life. For instance, where did you attend school? Did you walk to school? Were you ever allowed to stay home from school?
WR: Oh, good question. The first school I attended was what I call Nursing School on Gregory Ave. What basically was a kindergarten for me. My grandmother ran it, my mother worked there, one of my friends Sherwood Kasey's mother worked there, Mrs. Rudd worked there, Mrs. Patterson worked there, and Mrs. Henderson worked there. Those are the ones that I can remember off the top– As well as my aunt, Aunt __ (??) worked there. Again I had the run of the

mill because a lot of the kids would get angry with me because I didn't have to take a nap when it was time to take a nap.
AO: So your power extended from home to kindergarten.
WR: All the time.
AO: Okay. I'm curious, I've got to break in and as you; were you tall as a child? Or did this happen [as a] preteen years growth spurt?
WR: It started happening when I was around 8th grade. I remember when I was in the 8th grade– Going into 8th grade I was about 5'8, 5'9. When I came out of the 9th grade I was 6'3. When I came out of the 10th grade I was 6'6 which is the height I am now.
AO: Because I'm always curious when I see tall people because I stopped growing in 6th grade. Well, that's not really true. I grew from probably 5 feet even to 5'4 and three quarter inches in the 6th grade and then three years ago I grew another inch. I'm not sure what that's all about because growth should be over by then.
WR: Well it's odd because I guess I was never considered tall during that time because when we got to Booker T. there were about five guys in my class that were taller than me.
AO: Really?
WR: Oh yeah. George Lynch was one of them, Ray Young was one of them, Stick Daniels was one, Donald Tinsley was another, and there was one more I can't think of. I couldn't even make our class basketball team.
AO: Wow. Stick Daniel? What was his first name?
WR: Frank Daniels. Now I have not heard from him. When I moved to Washington in the 9th grade and came back to Roanoke in the 11th grade, Stick Daniels was nowhere around. I don't know what happened to him. He lived in the projects. I think somebody told me he went in the service, but I have not seen him since then.
AO: That's interesting. I've never heard the name before.
WR: Yeah, he was in our class. Stick Daniels, and we called him that because he was so tall and so skinny.
AO: I didn't think anybody in Roanoke was taller than you.
WR: Oh yeah.
AO: That's interesting. How much schooling did you complete? Oh, excuse me. Were you ever allowed to stay home from school?
WR: Never. I had to get out of the house, y'know, I had to get out of the house. As a matter of fact, if I'm not mistaken, I know I did, I think my sisters also did; when we moved to Washington we got certificates for not missing a day in school.
AO: That's great.
WR: But back in those days it was fun to go to school. I never did complete the other question about all the schools I went to, I got as far as Gilmer I think. Then I went to Harrison, Booker T., Booker T– Addison. Also in Washington I went to MacFarland Junior High and Roosevelt High. But the only time I ever missed school was basically when I was really sick, not putting on. Because, normally speaking, you don't go to school because number one; you can't do the

lesson, that's number one. I could do the lesson. Number two; you don't go because you want to hang out with your friends, but all my friends were in school so there was no reason for me not to go to school. I like school, I always liked school.
AO: That's always a plus.
WR: Yeah, it is. With anything.
AO: It is.
WR: A job, anything.
AO: Did you walk to school?
WR: I walked to school everyday. I walked from High Street– talking about high school. I walked from High Street to Addison everyday, over all of those hills, going up and down those hills on 5th Street everyday. And that was– It turned out to be a negative because my senior year I failed. I failed government from Mr. Honesty and the reason I failed was because he said when he saw me coming to school everyday because he took the same route I took, he never saw any books in my hands. And I didn't tell him at the time and didn't feel the need to explain to him; I was always considered to have a photographic mind and it wasn't that I failed his tests. He told the class, he told the class, told me in front of the class, the reason he was failing me was because I was too smart to be graded on the curve like everybody else. So he kept me from graduating, [I] had to go to summer school.
AO: Are you serious?
WR: As witnessed by Ressy Clark, he reminds me of this all the time.
AO: So much for– That's one of the things I try to impress upon young parents as well as administration whenever I had the opportunity. Just because someone has a degree and is considered a teacher, doesn't make them a good human being or a fair human being. I've been to too many schools in too many states to ever forget that and that's a perfect example because I would have been outraged. That's probably why I never had him, I never had him. And see I used to teach kids for his class because I had civics in Connecticut in junior high school which was the same thing that he was teaching.
WR: Well I had civics in junior high school in Washington and I did very well with it, very well. Mr– His name started with a M. Mr. Monistat? I can't think of his name, but he was my teacher.
AO: Well that's very interesting. How much schooling did you complete?
WR: I went to– Well, let's put it this way; in order for me to graduate from college, I needed 30 hours of practice teaching.
AO: And you didn't do it?
WR: No, I didn't go back. I had my second child during that time and I dropped out of school to take care of that child and I never went back. I take that back, I went back– I transferred. I had my transcript transferred to the University of the District of Columbia about two or three years later and tore the cartilage in my knee playing basketball, league basketball, and had to drop out from there and I never went back.
AO: Do you ever plan to?

WR: At this point, I don't see where it would do me any good. The only way it would do me good now is because it would be self serving more so than anything else. Y'know when I go to my college homecoming every year, it's kind of tough sitting listening to the guys who got degrees saying that they graduated and I didn't and I got almost as much time in as they did. But when I thought about it, when I first left college, the teachers in Washington, if I'm not mistaken, were making something like $5,000 a year. The job I had was making more than that so I didn't feel a need to go back and get it at that time. Now I kinda feel it a little bit, but other than that it doesn't bother me. I wish I had done for my mother and grandmother, but other than that it doesn't bother me.
AO: That's good. Okay, the next one says "Describe your life at home." Well we know you didn't do anything. Did you gather around the radio in the evenings?
WR: In the evenings and in the morning. My grandmother was an early riser. I lived in a house, like I said, with four women and my grandfather until my grandfather died and we had this radio, it was a floor standing radio and you could get stations from overseas and everywhere and my grandmother would have that on when I woke up in the morning and we would gather around it sometimes and listen to the news while we were back and forth getting breakfast and putting on our clothes, whatever. And that's basically when we would have our family meetings, was during the mornings and on Saturday because in the late evenings I didn't come home. Y'know, I very seldom–
AO: You was at the Y.
WR: Yeah I was at the Y or other places. We got in a lot of trouble during that time. We got in a lot– And I have to give it to people like Paul Adams and Mr. Fields and Mr. Taylor the truancy officer. They kept us out of jail.
AO: Really?
WR: Yeah, they kept us out. I remember one year, I was in the 6th grade and what we would do on Tuesdays nights after we left the Y, we would go down to the American Legion Auditorium where they had the wrestling matches. They used to have them every Tuesday night.
AO: Where was that down at?
WR: Right behind– At the end of Wells Ave, right behind Hotel Roanoke.
AO: Okay.
WR: As soon as you pass Hotel Roanoke going down Well, the end of the street on the next corner was American Legion Auditorium and the back of it faced the Viaduct was [what] we called it back then. What is it? It's Williamson Road now I guess, or Commonwealth.
AO: It's not Commonwealth now.
WR: Okay. Well the back of it– Remember when we was coming up, they built that street, we called it the Viaduct back then.
AO: Yeah, it goes across Downtown.
WR: Right, exactly. Well the back of the American Legion Auditorium faced that because there were years when they had the circus there and they'd have the elephants out back and we'd be

throwing rocks at the elephants and the guys would be saying "Don't be throwing rocks at the elephants because the elephants can remember from one year to the next."
AO: Yes, yes. It would get you.
WR: But anyway, we would go down to the American Legion Auditorium and climb up the wall and sneak into the wrestling matches. And then we got to the point where we would leave there and go to the Clover Creamery Downtown. It was right next to Elmwood Park and we would stand in each other's hands and lift each other over the wall and this is dead winter. Dead winter and we're stealing ice cream.
AO: Because you had to have it.
WR: Had to have it. It was too hot not to have it. But anyway, we got in a lot of trouble for that. We had to go to court for that. As a matter of fact, there was about ten of us and I think seven of us got put on probation. All of the people that I mentioned earlier; Donald Waller, Joe Boyd, and somebody else; they actually got time. They went to the Boy's Reformatory and had it not been for Mr. Taylor and Mr. Adams–
AO: Was it Luval or Duval?
WR: Luval, some kind of– It started with an L.
AO: Oh, Luvelle?
WR: Something like that, yes. Him and Paul Adams and Mr. Fields. I would have been in that group, as well as– My grandfather who, to my estimation, now I don't know, to my estimation or to my recollection, was the only African American during that time who had his own business Downtown, if I'm not mistaken. He was a barber, but yeah, he had his own business.
AO: Okay, out of curiosity, did he inherit it from–?
WR: Yes, Watts Barber Shop.
AO: Okay.
WR: Yes, exactly.
AO: Where was it located?
WR: Right behind the 'ol Heironimus, right next door– On Kirk Ave, right next door to Fox Hunt and Loyd.
AO: I don't remember that name.
WR: Well, it used to be a men's clothes store, right on the corner of Kirk Ave and First Street called Fox Hunt and Loyd. It was there for years. If you go down Kird, there was a cab stand right there and then in front of the cab stand was the Watts Barber Shop. If you went in Heironimus– Well, you probably came to know it as Miller and Rhoads and Belk because that's what the name changed to.
AO: Oh, Heironimus, that's right. It used to be–
WR: On Jefferson Street.
AO: Jefferson, yeah.
WR: Not Jefferson, Campbell Ave.
AO: Yeah, Campbell. It's on Jefferson now.
WR: It used to be on Campbell Ave.

AO: It had the back and side doors.
WR: Exactly. You could come out the back door– when you come out the back door, Watts Barber Shop was straight in front of you, as well as– There was a cab stand right there.
AO: Now I don't remember the cab stand.
WR: Yeah, it was a cab stand. You could go there and catch a cab. It's gon' be a cab parked there any time of the day. Just the cab's parked there, wasn't no building there or nothing.
AO: Right, they just stood there for business purposes.
WR: Yeah, but my grandfather, the point I was alluding to earlier, cut Judge Beverly Fitzpatrick's hair. And, y'know, my grandmother put a bug in my grandfather's ear and my grandfather put a bug in Judge Fitzpatrick's ear and that's probably what kept me from, as we called it at the time, going down the road.
AO: Where was it? Was it still down 460 like it is today, the Reformatory?
WR: Oh no, this was further away. This was called Hanover.
AO: Hanover County.
WR: Hanover County.
AO: Oh, okay.
WR: That was a boys reformatory back then, it was in Hanover. As a matter of fact, I have a picture at home of my grandfather cutting Beverly Fitzpatrick today's hair, when he was a kid and his father standing next to him and it's inscribed on the picture that my grandfather is cutting the third generation of hair of Fitzpatricks.
AO: That's fantastic.
WR: Now he probably, he may not even– Mr. Fitzpatrick probably doesn't even know that, doesn't even know about this picture.
AO: You may have to let me have a shot of that for my book. Because I'm real curious about your grandparents because I'm truly fascinated by your great grandparents. Lucinda Jay Curle because she was a barber, as was her husband.
WR: Okay. See, you know more about them than I do and that's one of the things that I really regret; that I didn't get as much information about them as I could have and should have because my mother could tell you everything and it would only come out if something came up. If we would say "so and so and so and so" she would say "oh yeah well so and so and so and so did that", but it was never a sit down, this is what happened, y'know.
AO: Right.
WR: And I regret that because now everybody's gone. The one person that could probably tell me anything doesn't know. He can't tell me anything because he doesn't seem to have the knowledge that my mother had.
AO: Who is that?
WR: My uncle Tommy, my mother's youngest brother.
AO: I think I knew him, I think.
WR: You probably knew [him]. He has throat cancer and he has a little– he talks through a little box.

AO: Like I used to do.
WR: Oh I didn't know. Okay, yeah.
AO: Well, I didn't know that. No, that's not why I think I know him. I think I know him from Northeast.
WR: I doubt it because by the time you was coming up, he was gone. He stayed gone many years. He was in Washington first and then he went to– he moved to Connecticut.
AO: What part?
WR: Newhaven. One of my best friends lives in Newhaven and I went there two, three times–
AO: Marcelis?
WR: No, he knows Marcelis. Actually he knows their sisters.
AO: Sharon and Carolyn.
WR: Because they're all in the school system. Matter of a fact, Carolyn, one night I walked in the club– first time I went up there. I walked in the club and somebody said "That's old Westley Rogers!"
AO: You thought "I can't get away."
WR: Exactly and it was– I didn't even know her name then, but it was– Was it Carolyn? It was Carolyn and we talked for a long time.
AO: That's interesting because Linda Daniel and I– That's why I was curious about Stick Daniel because, see–
WR: I don't know if they're related.
AO: Daniels are my relatives and I'm not familiar with a Frank, but I'll find out who he is. But we were talking about Sharon and neither one of us could think of her name.
WR: Sharon Edwards? Okay, yeah.
AO: But we finally– I finally figured it out because I was determined. But it is sad how we lose our history. I don't think our parents thought of it as being important.
WR: No.
AO: I think probably, you mentioned your grandchildren, you probably don't tell them a lot about yourself.
WR: No, I don't, I have now, as well as my kids. My kids don't know a lot about me, y'know. They know basics, but they don't know my history, so to speak. And it's funny that you mention that because in recent years I have been saying, I need to put this on paper and just let them know who and what I am and where I came from and how they evolved, y'know, so.
AO: Well I'm glad you're thinking about it because that's one of the things that we really need to do because for me trying to reconstruct the black past in this town is almost impossible. I had run into a lot of roadblocks, some of them worse than others, but I feel like it's important. Especially today. When we came up, even though we weren't taught our own history, we were aware of our position in this country and why it was what it was. Kids coming up today don't know anything except Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks–
WR: Some of them don't know that.

AO: Right. They don't understand what racism was, is, and I think we owe them. We owe them that knowledge because when you have information, you know who you are, you know where you came from. So when you get into a situation that's knew, while you may feel ill at ease, you're comfortable within yourself and I think we robbed our children of that because we were so eager to believe that the Civil Rights Acts ended all of the stress and everything was gonna be fine.
WR: Merely started. Might have started it.
AO: Yes. Who was I talking to? What was that girl's name? She told me yesterday morning about 9 o'clock, she didn't go to church, she said– I don't know how we got to integration. She said "That's what caused black people's problems. We didn't do all these crazy things until we got integrated and then we learned how to be a fool." And it does seem that way and it's unfortunate so–
WR: Because we saw how other people were getting away with it.
AO: And we thought we could.
WR: Yeah, we thought we could do it too.
AO: And much to our chagrin, it doesn't work out like that. So I think we have an obligation for the future to share as much as we can and your family is really, really interesting and like I said, I kind of stumbled on it. Like in a recent interview I found out– And I'm curious because you were in DC for a couple of years.
WR: Yes.
AO: Did you know your grandmother built a kindergarten facing Addison?
WR: I was at Addison when they built it.
AO: Did you know it blew up?
WR: It did– yeah. Yeah I knew it blew up, I was there when it blew up.
AO: Oh excuse me.
WR: Sitting next to the window watching the fumes come out of the ground. They put it on top of the dumb and, y'know, they would burn the dump. Well, up under all of that debris, stuff was still burning.
AO: The gas.
WR: Gasses was still burning. Exactly. I was at Addison when they put it there.
AO: Y'know I never heard that.
WR: Oh yeah.
AO: I never knew that until a couple weeks ago.
WR: Oh yeah. You were there.
AO: I had no idea.
WR: You were there. Because it happened my junior, senior year and you came back during that time.
AO: How could I not know about it. Well I was probably home because I didn't go to school much.
WR: Plus it was on the other side of the school. You left and went the other way.

AO: Right. That's true, that's true. But I did not spend a lot of time at Addison, I stayed at home a lot. Whenever I ask people this question "Were you ever allowed to stay home from school?", the first time– The first couple of times that people said no, I was like "wow" because I told my daddy I didn't want to go to school he said okay.
WR: Well my grandfather was like that. My grandfather made my father Harry Rogers Sr. and my uncle George Rogers who lives in Roanoke now, he made them drop out of school in the 6th grade and go to work for him laying bricks. My father's a great bricklayer. Although he worked for the railroad most of his life, he was a– Matter of fact, my grandfather on my fathers side and my father and maybe my uncle George too, they built the– What do you call it, the Parish Hall to the First Baptist Church that burned down. That was our church, that was their church. My grandmother on my mother's side, her parents were sort of like charter members in building or help building 5th Ave Presbyterian Church. But my father's people belonged to First Baptist Church and my grandfather and my father built the Parish Hall that still stands there today.
AO: That's amazing. See what I mean about little things we don't think about and it's really significant. I think, like I told you, I really want to write about Lucinda Curle because it's just fascinating to think– Well, first of all, she was not a slave. She and her husband came from affluent families in Lynchburg, freed blacks, and came here and established this barber shop.
WR: Watts Barber Shop.
AO: And she was a barber and then she became a school teacher. In fact, I've got a letter in my pocketbook that I was looking at yesterday from Roanoke City Schools. The annual report for 1934 and 5, and if I remember correctly she was teaching at Harrison.
WR: Probably, I know my grandmother taught over there for a minute.
AO: Really?
WR: Matter of fact, the land right behind Harrison where they had– and they may still keep a lot of the Harrison Museum documents.
AO: Where they got that little out building?
WR: Right. My grandmother donated that land to them.
AO: Really?
WR: That was our land. Yes.
AO: Wow. I wish they'd let some of the stuff out of the building, but be that as it may. Let's see. Oh. Did you have any family stories that were passed down from one generation to another?
WR: I'm sure there were, but I can't remember them. My mother used to tell me stories all the time about our family, but I can't– to be honest I can't remember any of them.
AO: I'm gonna try to jog your memory. Okay. Did you go– Were you in the military?
WR: No.
AO: Okay. What businesses and shops did your family frequent?
WR: Oh I can tell you now the two that I remember most was Heironimus and Bush Flora Shoes. We always got our shoes from Bush Flora. As a matter of fact, I had the opportunity to go to Bush Flora recently and get some shoes for the first time since then.
AO: Wow.

WR: I remember we used to– I can't remember what that machine was for, but you would stand up on the machine and stick your feet in there and I don't know if that told you– I don't know what that machine did.
AO: Y'know, I never thought about that, but I kind of remember that machine.
WR: Yeah, stand up on that machine and you look down in there and you could see your feet.
AO: It's kind of like a– almost like a x-ray machine.
WR: Yeah, exactly. It seemed like it was some kind of– Maybe it was to see whether your toes was up, supposed to be–
Both: Up against your shoes or not.
WR: But I can't remember what it was for, but I remember I used to always like to go and get shoes because I was gonna look down in that machine. I don't know why that was such a big deal, but those were the stores that we– And Pews (??), we visited– We shopped in Pews quite a bit. Bush Flora, Heironimus, and of course Kress' and Woolworths. Those are the ones that I can remember as a family we shopped in. A little later on it was Bernard's clothing store where all the African American young men shopped. Hanover Shoes on the corner right there where Corned Beef and Company is located now. Oak Hall which was right across the street on Jefferson Street where Milan Brothers is now. Well next door to– It's a parking lot now, but Milan Brothers would have been next to it. Oak Hall. What else? There was Leggett's of course. Leggett's was a store that we would go steal from because it was so easy to do. They had shoes in the wall next to the door that you could– You could go in Leggett's both ways off of Campbell Ave and off of First Street. They had the shoes in the wall going all the way up and down the wall right next to the door on the First Street side. All you had to do was open the door, reach in, grab the shoes, and walk down the street. So we took advantage of that.
AO: I see.
WR: As kids, young kids.
AO: Your mind tells you terrible things as a kid. And I think that's the link that we missed with this generation is owning up to the fact that I remember when I was crazy too.
WR: Well, I tell you what, that used to be one of my– The group that I ran around with, that was our forte, we would steal real good and the thing that broke me from it– I'll never forget this in my life. I would go down [to] Jennings and Shepherd. Remember Jennings and Shepherd? It was a sporting goods store. That's where we would go get our–
AO: Was it on Franklin?
WR: No. It was on– Right next to where AEP is now. Right in there. On that street right there, right in there. Jennings and Shepherd Sporting Goods, they had every kind of– Anything you could need.
AO: Appalachian?
WR: Yeah.
AO: That's Franklin.
WR: Is that Franklin?
AO: Yeah.

WR: Okay. I see, don't ask me.
AO: Don't confuse me.
WR: Well don't confuse me. I don't know no streets.
AO: Got me thinking "AEP… AEP".
WR: Well, we would go in there and get everything we wanted to get. One time I went in there– Now I have come home with watches, rings, shoes, ping pong balls, boxes of ping pong balls, ping pong paddles, baseball gloves, professional type gloves. Everything you could name. Skates, anything I needed, my group could get it. I got caught stealing a skate key and they called the detectives on me. Took me in this back room. I forget who I was with, it was just me and one guy this time, normally it's about five or six or us. I forget who I was with, might have been Rufus Jackson. They took me in the back room and called the detectives. The detectives came down, started asking me all these questions "oh what skate key?", and finally they asked me who was my parents so I knew to tell them C.C. Dupree was my grandfather because I knew he knew everybody on that side of town. So this one detective said "You mean to tell me C.C. Dupree is your grandfather?" I said "Yes, sir." He said "Well I'm gon' tell you what. I'm gon' give you a choice. You want me to call him or you want me to lock you up for a couple days?" I said lock me up. He said "If I ever catch you back Downtown again, I'm taking you straight to your grandfather. He cuts my hair." I said you ain't got to worry about me coming down here no more.
AO: So that ended that huh? Well that's good.
WR: But he told him anyway.
AO: Did he?
WR: Yes. He told him. I got the worst beating of my life and then I started liking sports.
AO: Found something else to occupy your time.
WR: And another thing– Another incident that happened to me when I was young that, as I think back on it, I must have been crazy. If you go down my street, Loudon Ave, towards the end as you get towards Henry Street on the right hand side was a big fence with barbed wire all around the top. If you go over the fence and look down, at the bottom of this big steep cliff was Automobile Exchange. You remember Automobile Exchange?
AO: Yeah, yeah. That big building.
WR: You remember in the back it had that big 'ol tall hill or cliff in the back of it. Well at the top was High Street. You couldn't get up there unless you go all the way around the Dumas and come down High Street. And me, Andrew Webb, might have been John __(??) Appleseed. Yeah John __(??) Appleseed. I know you know him. You know him.
AO: I know better (??).
WR: We was throwing rocks down on the cars. They got scared and left, I kept throwing them. I must have broke out every car window down there.
AO: Oh you were doing damage?
WR: Oh damage? Damage wasn't the word. I was throwing big 'ol rocks, just throwing them, just for meanness, not, y'know, not for no reason. And they couldn't get us because they couldn't

come up that hill. Every time they started around, I would run. Then when they'd seen me run they'd come back. Well when they'd come back, I'd come back. But anyway, long story short; I got home, just knew I had it made. They found out somehow or another that it was me and my father, y'know, at the time worked on– I was real young then. My father worked on the railroad and he had been out for three or four days and when he came back in, somebody told him the story. I got the worst beating of my– I think he must have beat me for about a week. I think he took of from work to beat me.
AO: A week.
WR: I mean, every time I saw him coming I started trembling from that point. Not long after that I think him and my mother broke up. I was glad. I was glad.
AO: Ain't gotta worry about him no more.
WR: Yeah, thank God. He almost killed– Well because he had to pay for all that, he had to pay a lot of money.
AO: I bet he did.
WR: My grandfather helped and they didn't even like each other and he had him helping pay the money.
AO: Because you decided to break car windows.
WR: For no reason, just walking down the street and said "I think I'm gonna throw some rocks down there."
AO: Now I was a great rock thrower. I still like to do it now. I like to throw it in the river or across the river, whichever one happens.
WR: Right. Now I used to like to make them skip across the river.
AO: I never did that.
WR: Yeah.
AO: But I never– I guess because Steve Ollie would– Well I was his girl. Had I got in trouble for things that you've mentioned, I can't even imagine that we would be having this conversation today because he would have killed me.
WR: Well, some things that I can't mention that were worse than that.
AO: Wow.
WR: Yeah.
AO: Y'know, it just seems so– Y'know I'm not being judgemental, it's just interesting to me when we talk about being children, the kinds of things that we did. Now I got in trouble for– Y'know, I had a boundary, y'know, I was supposed to stay within and I mean that was like waving a flag, the boundary. I had to go to the other side. And Mr. Dan, Mrs. Johnny Cooper, your grandmother's sister's– I don't know who he was. I always thought he worked for them, but I really don't know and I have yet to find anybody who knew that man's name. I'm not giving up.
WR: Ask– I bet Ms. whats-you-called-them knows.
AO: Who?
WR: Mrs. Cooper.

AO: Okay, I was thinking Liz Hale should know too because they live next door.
WR: I bet you Mrs. Cooper knows.
AO: I'm determined to find out because he told everything I did. I mean, when I tore up my bike and sneaked it home, put it beside daddy's car because I was gonna lie and say somebody must have stolen it.
WR: You need to talk to George Elick.
AO: I remember him too. He lived up the street.
WR: Right.
AO: But my knees were bloody–
WR: Billy Elick, I mean to say. That was his son.
AO: I didn't know the son.
WR: Yeah Billy Elick–
AO: But I knew the daddy.
WR: George Elick, with that old car.
AO: Yeah, bunch of old cars.
WR: Bunch of old cars.
AO: But, y'know, I was pretty much safe, I thought. Until Mr. Dan came out and said "Mr. Ollie, Arleen brought that bike over here all banged up." The one time I hid from momma. She was gonna beat me right? And I ran, the only time I ever did that. It's because of him. I ran and see I could run so fast. It's not like her, she can't catch me. So I sat down behind the flower bush and she's just running around the house "Arleen Francis! Arleen Francis!" And I'm sitting behind the bush just dying laughing. So when she got next to the bush on I think it was the third or fourth time she'd been around the house while I was sitting, Mr. Dan said "Mrs. Ollie, she's sitting right there." See that's why I wanna know who he was. He was like my guardian angel, but I wasn't loving him because every wrong thing I did, somehow he knew and he did not mind telling and thinking back on it, all kids needed a Mr. Dan and they do now more than ever. Because I know I get angry with kids nowadays–
WR: That's true. More now than ever.
QO: And I don't tell on them. I don't care, go in the house and shut the door because they act so ugly. Okay. Did you shop any– I don't wanna skew this. Let's say this: where'd you grocery shop?
WR: Oh, two places that I can recall; at the corner store which every neighborhood had one at the time, but mainly at A&P on Saturday mornings and across the street at the– I guess you called that the marketplace?
AO: The meat market.
WR: The meat market, the meat market, that's what it was called. We would get– Sometimes we would get vegetables from the farmers who backed their carts up to the edge of the sidewalk and then we'd go inside and get whatever meats we'd need.
AO: And then go across to A&P and get the canned goods.
WR: That's right.

AO: What is your fondest childhood memory?
WR: Fondest? Well I remember there were times when– Y'know I'm speaking early on now. My father used to take us out on Williamson Road and they had pony rides out there and we used to go out there and ride the ponies and I used to love to do that. Aside from that, as I said before, I enjoyed going to school, especially after I got to Harrison School because when I went to Harrison, I got a whole new group of friends because now you not only know the kids that you went to school with at Gilmer, you know all the kids that went to all the schools because in the 6th grade, that's where they ended up going. See, back during that time, none of the schools except for Harrison had the 6th grade.
AO: I did not know that.
WR: Oh yeah. None of the schools at that time had 6th grade, so when you got ready to go to the 6th grade, everybody had to go to Harrison. Well, lo and behold, the same year that it was time for me to go to the 6th grade or for Gilmer to go to the 6th grade, they put a 6th grade in Gilmer which meant the kids at Gilmer stayed there. But they didn't tell me, so I transferred to– They wanted me to go to Harrison. My mother was kind of burnt up behind that, but they said burnt up she must be. Because it was easy for me to go from Gilmer to Gregory School to eat lunch every day and then catch a ride with my grandmother home in the evening if that's what I wanted to do, but normally I would walk with Willie Albert and George Boyd. Willie Albert half way and George Body all the way because George Boyd and neither one of us were supposed to go to Gilmer.
AO: Okay.
WR: We were out of that district.
AO: Oh.
WR: But because my grandmother had some influence on the school system, I was able to go there. And then George Boyd's mother had some influence on the system, he was able to go there and she wanted him to go there because she worked for Dr. Downing and we would walk from Gilmer School up to the yard on Henry Street and he would meet his mother there and then I would go on to High Street if I'm going home. But no, the 6th grade was only at Harrison so you got to meet people from Gainsboro, Harrison–
AO: Gilmer. What about Loudon?
WR: Loudon, those were the other three. What you call them? Lincoln Terrace wasn't around at the time.
AO: Right.
WR: But you got to meet all the kids at that time.
AO: And they tricked you.
WR: Big time. I went on– Well see, first of all, my birthday is in December and they had let me in Gilmer when– If your birthday comes after October you gotta–
Both: Wait 'till the next year.
WR: Well, they let me in and Mrs– Well I won't call any names, but one of my neighbors [her] son tried to do the same thing. His birthday was the 3rd of December, mine was the 6th. They

wouldn't let her do it and she told on me "Well if you let him do it, why can't my son do it?" So they made me come out of Gilmer and wait until the next year.
AO: There's a lot of that going on. Did you know Anne Finney? I'm sure she won't mind me telling you, but her mother changed her birth certificate. Anne is– her birthday is January the 1st.
WR: Anne is Jemis' (??) wife? Okay. Ex-wife?
AO: Mine is January 20th of another year.
WR: Yeah that's right, y'all live on the same street.
AO: And she was school with us because her momma changed her birth certificate. I'm technically a year behind because of that October thing. She's a whole year ahead because–
WR: For the same reason.
AO: Right, but it never bothered me one way or another.
WR: Me either, it didn't bother me. Actually I'm kinda glad because the guys that I learned– got to be friends with, y'know, I wouldn't have it any other way.
AO: Right.
WR: Y'know, some of the guys I made friends with during that time, like Willie Albert. I've been knowing Willie Albert Edmonds since I was in the first grade. Sherwood Kasey since I was in nursery school. I mean I could go on and on with people that I met during that time that I know that I'm still friends with. Pat Wallow was down there, Brad Bethel was down there, William Laprade was down there, Francis Brown. I could go on and on y'know.
AO: It really makes a difference and I'm learning more and more, I might even do an interview myself, how different my life was from people my age and it's kinda interesting and it's kinda sad, but– I guess I really am glad it happened that way because I don't know who else I would have turned out to be. I learned to be a lot more independent and I'm constantly told, [more] than perhaps I should be, living in the South. But things happen.
WR: Things do happen. Things do happen and not only that, if it turns out right, then it's good that it happened anyway.
AO: Right, that's the way to look at it because you can't change it anyway. So you make the best of a bad situation. Okay. Did you have a favorite family vacation or a favorite gift that you received?
WR: I enjoyed, as a vacation, there were times when my family went to Washington to visit my relatives and I enjoyed that. That was my vacation. I think one summer, when I was a kid, I spent the whole summer with my aunt Ruth, my mom's only sister, and I really enjoyed that. Although the kids up there was beating me up for some reason, I don't know, I can't remember what I was doing to make them beat me up every day. They was beating me up everyday.
AO: You were new.
WR: Well I was new and, y'know, [had] a runny mouth too at the time.
AO: I'm sure.
WR: I don't know. Vacation and what was the other thing you said?
AO: Did you have a favorite gift.

WR: Gift. Um, yeah. My favorite gift, probably, well I might have had two of them. My favorite gift probably was my bicycle because it allowed me to not have any boundaries as you so alluded to earlier.
AO: Get in more trouble.
WR: Yes, more trouble. Well I could go– Y'know, we used to play basketball in Rufus Jackson's backyard, I put up a goal there. Well, as I said, later on my friends branched off into other things. Cars and girls and this and that. My love and passion at the time was basketball. So now I don't have anybody to play with. So I could go to Eureka Park, I could go to Gilmer Schoolyard, they even had a basket in Gregory Schoolyard that was very popular where a lot of the good players could play. [I] used to go to that little small park down on 460 right before you get to Campbell Ave, y'know, right there. It only had one basket, wasn't even a park, it just had a basket sitting there and the rest of it was this big cliff.
AO: On 460.
WR: Yeah, right after you pass Williamson Road and it was a corner store right there. It was a junkyard, it was this little park. There was a junkyard, there was a corner store, the corner store was right on the corner of Kimbell.
AO: Okay, I kinda vaguely got that. That was down there where Carolyn's son was–
WR: Right, that was a popular little park. Well with my bicycle, I could go to all these places, y'know, with no problem and it didn't take a whole lot of time. And my other prised possession during that time was– My father– No my father wasn't here then, he sent the money for me to get a movie camera when I was in the 6th grade. And I got the camera, the projector, and the screen.
AO: Alright.
WR: And I had fun with that and that's probably why I like cameras today. I still take a lot of pictures today. But I had some great pictures back then. I don't know what happened– Not pictures, but movie clips. I don't know what happened to them. I used to take it to school every day. I got it when I was at Harrison and I had pictures of me, Reggie Clark, Davison Harrison, Harold Hunt, Big Dog Thornhill, Stick Daniels. All of us were in the same homeroom; Ronald Law, Earl Pullens. Five of us, might have been six; Earl, Harold Hunt, Regie, Ronald Law, myself, and David; we all played drums and we were all in the same homeroom and we all went from Harrison through Addison in the band together.
AO: That's great.
WR: Now some of them, David– When we got to Addison, David switched over to horn because they had enough drummers. Dickie Locket was another guy who, coming through school, he played drums, but when he got to Addison he had to play bass tuba because we had enough drummers, y'know.
AO: Right.
WR: And there were a lot of guys who had to do that.
AO: Change instruments.
WR: Yeah they had to because we just had to have a drum and bugle corps.
AO: Not just drums.

WR: Right.
AO: Okay, did you go to Gainsboro Library?
WR: No, no. Not on a regular basis. I've been in there and have done a few things in there, but not to say I went on a regular basis, no.
AO: Okay.
WR: I played, now– That property of Gainsboro Library was also used for the practice football field of the Y. Y'know we played in that field everyday. Everyday.
AO: Wow okay. Describe cultural events that happened in Gainsboro. For example, do you remember entertainers that came to the Dumas? Do you remember performances, how many people attended, what time of year it was, or where they were held? If there were entertainers where did they stay?
WR: Of course, I can tell you that very easily because I lived two blocks from Henry Street which is where they stayed at the time. I saw them all. I played pool with the Issac Brothers, I played pool with some of James Brown's members. I've talked to Solomon Burke, I've talked to– Who else? I think Wilson Pickett. I've talked to everybody that I– Oh what's the girl's name? "At last–"
AO: Etta James.
WR: Etta James, I've talked to her. By me living two blocks from Henry Street, I basically lived on Henry Street. There wasn't a rock that I didn't know where it was, or a hole.
AO: Do you know the pie man's name?
WR: I don't know his name. All I know is he's the pie man. Mr– What did my grandmother call him? I called him Mr. Pie Man, but my grandmother called him by his name whenever he would walk by the house. You see, a lot of people don't know, before he got that shop on Henry Street, he would walk up and down the streets selling pies. He didn't have that shop on Henry Street all the time.
AO: Right because didn't he have a wagon?
WR: No, he had a basket that he put over his back and he had– "Mr. Pie Man, you got any pies?" "Yes sir, here's a pie." Put that basket on the back, keep walking on down the street.
AO: Someone said they thought he was Native American.
WR: If I had to guess, I would guess that because he had all the features. He had all the features. Yeah.
AO: Did he have a family?
WR: I never saw a family. I never ever saw him with a family.
AO: You know where he lived?
WR: I never knew where he lived. I only saw him when he came around.
AO: Came to sell those pies.
WR: And then later on he opened up the shop right next to Brooks Pharmacy and I would go in there and buy pies, but y'know now that you mentioned it, yeah he was a mystery man because I never saw a family, I don't know his name. He was very sociable, but he wasn't– he was kinda like to himself.

AO: Very private.
WR: Yeah, very private. So he only–
AO: That's so interesting.
WR: Would give you information when you asked him for it. He didn't normally volunteer it and he would never ever give you the recipe to those pies.
AO: What about Jerry the popsicle man?
WR: Jerry the– I don't know his name. I forgot about Jerry the popsicle man until you mentioned it. I forgot all about Jerry until you mentioned it. Whoa. No, I don't know his name. But yes, I knew all of the– I came in contact with most of the entertainers that came to the Star City Auditorium.
AO: Right because they stayed at the Dumas.
WR: All of them stayed at the Dumas, all of them.
AO: Okay did you have any role models?
WR: Back during that time, probably when I got to the point where I wanted to look at somebody as a role model, probably were my coaches. Y'know, early on maybe, like I said, Mr. Keeling, Sam Davis, Buster Keen. Those people, but by the time I got to Addison it was my coaches; Coach Brown, Coach Cannaday, and then I have to include Coach Mormon in there even though he was never my coach. He was a person probably instrumental in me being what I am today without having any contact with me at all and I say that because he got me my scholarship to West Virginia State.
AO: Really?
WR: Oh yeah, he was working at West Virginia State. He had attended Bluefield State and Coach Cannaday attended West Virginia State. Coach Brown attended Bluefield State. They were all in school at the same time. I just found this out [the] year before last at homecoming. Coach Cannaday, the coach that I last played for at West Virginia State, Coach Enty, and the coach that recruited me to West Virginia State. Coach Enty and Coach Cannaday played for Coach Caldwell who recruited me. Coach Enty and Coach Cannaday were roommates.
AO: Wow.
WR: And they played on the team that won three straight CIAA championships, which has never been done since then.
AO: That's fantastic.
WR: And I didn't know this until I saw Coach Enty a couple years ago, we were talking and he said yeah and he told me a lot of other things, but getting back to the story I was telling you about: Coach Mormon was either going to West Virginia State or working at West Virginia State that summer that I came out of high school and when he came home he was asking around if there was anybody who wanted a scholarship and somebody evidently gave him my name and he– I don't know if we ran across each other, he looked me up, or what happened. And he said "They need a big man up there at West Virginia State if you wanna go." Well I had two other scholarships that I had [that] basically I hadn't even acknowledged and one was to Kittrell College and one was too– And my folks on my father's side, my grandmother and grandfather on

my father's side are from Kittrell, North Carolina. I don't think that school is in existence anymore. But I think I had another scholarship to Bluefield, but I never even wrote them back. But at the same time, the war in Vietnam was getting bad and they were drafting everybody. I remember Sherwood Kasey went down to take his physical because you're supposed to go and take it within five days after you're 18, but we were playing basketball during–
AO: You didn't go.
WR: During December. I didn't go. So I didn't go until after the season so they assumed I was trying to duck. So even though I had gotten into college, I was the only son and my grades were good, were great as a matter of fact at that time, and they called for me to come anyway. But anyrate, I failed because of my knees. But Coach Mormon told me about this opening and I called the coach, the coach said okay he would call Coach Cannaday and get a reference from Coach Cannaday and it's a crazy story because both of them told me thing about the coach that recruited me and Coach Cannaday. When he called Coach Cannaday, he was looking for somebody who could rebound, a person who could leap real good and grab rebounds and he asked Coach Cannaday "Well can he jump?" Coach Cannaday said "He can shoot." He said asked Coach Cannaday again, the conversation went on, he asked him again "Well, y'know, how well can he jump?" And Coach Cannaday'd say "Well he's a great shooter." So he said he asked him three times and he kept saying that you could shoot. So he said "I went on and recruited you anyway." He says "Now I know what he meant. You're not a great jumper, but you can shoot."
AO: That's really sad.
WR: Yeah. So when I went to West Virginia State, I think that turned my whole life in a different direction because at that time I was ready to hang out on the yard and hang with some of my buddies back during that time; George P__(??), James Clabert, Simon Calbert. I was ready to just hang out back during that time and I don't know what I might be doing.
AO: Be in trouble, sounds like.
WR: If I hadn't gone to West Virginia–
AO: Simon and James did okay, George didn't fare too well.
WR: No, George didn't do well. I understand George is a little sick now.
AO: Really?
WR: Yeah, __(??) was telling me when they went to Simon's funeral; they came back and they stopped at Sheetz gas station and George just, his legs just collapsed from under him. He's not doing well health wise and he don't remember nothing.
AO: Not good health.
WR: No, that's what I'm saying.
AO: That's scary.
WR: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. But yeah, Coach Mormon is my story. Whenever I see him, I tell him "Whatever it is [that] I am, it's because of you."
AO: I don't really know him. I met him– I remember talking to him at Walmart, but I never knew him during school. I don't know–

WR: Well he didn't– Because he didn't teach at Addison. I think he taught at Booker T. for a minute, but he taught at Lylburn Downing in Lexington and he taught someplace else. He didn't teach there, he just came over to help the coaches out with the football team.
AO: Oh, okay.
WR: He didn't teach over there.
AO: Okay, that's a good reason for me not to know him.
WR: Yeah, no, you wouldn't know him from Addison. He would only come over there when he got off from wherever he was teaching. I can't remember where he was teaching. I'm pretty sure it wasn't in town, it was close around here, but it wasn't here. He would come over and you would see him on the sidelines at all the football games, you would see him at every football practice, but he didn't teach at Addison.
AO: That struck a nerve, but I don't remember. Yeah, I do remember he taught somewhere in this vicinity, but not here. But I don't remember the school. Okay. How has Gainsboro changed over the years and was your life– How was your life affected by segregation and the Civil Rights Movement?
WR: Well let me answer the first question first. Comparing Gainsboro today [to] back then, there's really no comparison because it's lifeless, today it's lifeless. Back then it was full of as the old adage goes; vim, vigor, and vitality.
AO: Yeah.
WR: You would see people– It's almost like it was a metropolitan city; see people on the streets and on the sidewalks all the time. Just hustling and bustling, going about working or at play or whatever, but now when you go to that neighborhood, it's almost like a ghost town. Y'know it kinda brings tears to my eyes because that was home for me, right in the middle of Gainsboro was home for me. I could just walk out the house knowing something was gonna be going on, y'know. Every now and then now, I'll drive down through there just to re-acquaint myself. I remember about a month ago, I remember Ted Calloway whose house faced Patton Ave, probably the 300th block of Patten Ave and in his backyard he had a garage that had been torn down, but the foundation was still there and that thing couldn't be no more than 10, 12 feet wide and maybe 10, 12 feet long, maybe 15 feet long. And we had a basketball basket right there where we– I don't know how. When I went up there and looked at it, I was trying for my doggonest to figure out how did we have four and five man teams playing in that circumference. Y'know and the walls came up this high because, y'know, the garage had a wooden thing on top and they tore that part down. The walls came up to about here on me and we never got hurt. I mean you'd run into the wall, you'd be playing ball, you'd run it and it ain't but this wide and that deep. How did we do that? Y'know, I just– I went up there and I just parked my car. Was so much bush a debris in the alley, I couldn't hardly get up in there and those kind of things kinda brought tears to my eyes because I could remember when.
AO: Yeah, it's one of the things I think about when my parents used to tell me about what they remembered, oh Lord.
WR: Yeah.

AO: But those days started for me when I was probably 30 when I began to realize what we were losing and what we had lost.
WR: Well see, for a long time– From the time I got out of West Virginia State in 1967 to about probably the early 80s. I think for about 10 years, close to about 10 years, I didn't come back to Roanoke. So when I did come back, I could see the change.
AO: A big shot.
WR: Yeah, I could see the change coming then, y'know, and it wasn't a pleasant sight to see and to see it evolve into what it is today, it's really not a pleasant sight to see. Sometimes I wish I had not come back to Roanoke because what I see now is not what I'm used to seeing. Y'know, and I know– I don't care what you do or where you go, there's always gonna be change, but even if there's gotta be change, it doesn't gotta be so drastic.
AO: Are you talking about just the physical or the physical and the spiritual, mental?
WR: Well, physical, yeah. Mental, to me, Roanoke's overall mentality hasn't changed. For all ethnic groups that are involved. My ethnic group seems to have the same mentality and when I say that, I say it seems to be one of content. Y'know that's the first thing that I said to myself when I came back here, we are content, y'know. Because if we were not content, a lot of these things wouldn't be happening.
AO: True.
WR: And then I said, the other mentality seems to be the same because it seems like they love to suppress and we are content being suppressed so everybody's happy.
AO: There's a couple of us.
WR: Well, I mean as a whole. As a whole.
AO: Yeah, as a whole, I understand exactly.
WR: Y'know I understand, I understand– Yeah, well, a couple of us. Like the other day, I just read in the paper the other day when the NAACP had the meeting over there, there were 25 people there. When they had the neighborhood meeting.
AO: Did you know about the meeting?
WR: I didn't know about it.
AO: Me neither.
WR: I had not heard about it.
AO: Until I saw it on TV.
WR: I didn't know about it. I didn't even see it on TV. I missed that. I just saw it when I picked the paper up. So, I don't know.
AO: I think you kinda said that– You said suppressed. I think of it as we're oppressed. Both ethnicities, major ethnicities, and I don't think we're aware of it.
WR: Well, you're probably right because it is my observation that it's been that way so long [that] a lot of us are at the point where we think that's the way it should be. So if you think that's the way it should be, how would you know that it's supposed to be something else?
AO: My point exactly.
WR: Yeah, I agree with you.

AO: Yes.
WR: How much further we got to go? Oh!
AO: We're almost there. I can't believe you talked this long. Talk about your memories of urban renewal and what kind of effect did it have on your life.
WR: Well– You mean urban renewal right here in Roanoke?
AO: Mhmm.
WR: Well when they started urban renewal, I really wasn't here.
AO: In your neighborhood. You were here when it started because that's when we left in '56.
WR: Uh, I didn't see no renewal. If you say– I lived on High Street remember?
AO: Right.
WR: The only renewal they had up there was when they tore it down.
AO: That it. When you talk about urban renewal in Roanoke, that's kinda what it means; when they tear down your neighborhood. What do you think about it?
WR: Well, see, I wasn't here.
AO: Right, that's right.
WR: I was– That was in the late 70s, early 80s when that happened. I was living in Washington at the time. As a matter of fact, I was getting ready to get married and I brought my wife home, my then wife home, to meet my family and by this time my family had moved from High Street to McDowell Ave and when I went by the old house on High Street, I was just flabbergasted because it was a freeway for people to come in and out, y'know. My grandmother and mother were scared to go over there.
AO: Really?
WR: Because the street had gotten so bad.
AO: Wow.
WR: And, matter of fact, to this day I really get disturbed every time I think about it. We had antiques in there that, y'know, there wasn't no storage places at the time and if there were, they couldn't afford to put them in there. My grandmother had an over 100 year old bed that was taken out of there. She had a piano that was basically almost 100 years old, the kind with the petals, you could put the paper on it and it would play it so you could see the keys working. We had one of those. We had the radio I was telling you about. We had a lot of antiques in that house that went out of there and you could see where people had been coming in taking the spokes from the banisters and taking it out for firewood. Y'know, that kind of stuff. So by the time I came back and saw what was going on before I left and where I was brought up, I didn't really want to see no more. I really didn't want to see no more, but that's right around the time they were talking about getting rid of High Street and by the time I came back again, High Street was gone.
AO: Can barely tell where it was.
WR: Say it again?
AO: Can barely tell where it was.

WR: No, no, you're right, you can't. When I have company and I try to show them where I used to live, they say "You used to live over there at the Coca Cola?" I said no. It's hard telling.
AO: Well see I lived in– I can't figure out whether it's the Civics Center parking lot or the ramp to the interstate, but in that vicinity.
WR: You were– Oh good question. You– Good question.
AO: See Raley (??) was such a long street.
WR: Yeah, it was.
AO: And we were–
WR: That's a good question. I would put you in the Civics Center parking lot.
AO: That's what I've always said, but in my mind's eye I keep saying nah we were up a little further than that. But see they changed the land, the whole makeup.
WR: Yeah, oh yeah. The whole landscape.
AO: So that you really–
WR: Yeah, it's hard to tell.
AO: Yeah it's– And sometimes I wonder if was done deliberately.
WR: Because you go by– You couldn't tell nobody Diamond Hill used to be there.
AO: Right. I tried to describe that to the kids at Addison. I guess it's been about six weeks ago and the teacher was just amazed. She said "Did you hear that?" She said "Where the Civics Center parking lot [is], there was this gigantic hill!" And I thought, y'know, I had a wonderful– The first eight years of my life I lived in Northeast and I have nothing negative to say about it, nothing.
WR: No, it was good times. I remember Diamond Hill well. Matter of a fact, I saw Jack Thomson three weeks ago when I was in Washington.
AO: I haven't seen him in years. Y'know our backyards met.
WR: Right, right.
AO: I haven't seen him–
WR: No.
AO: I don't think I've seen him since the 70s maybe.
WR: I saw him at a funeral.
AO: I saw him at a dance. It was either in DC at the Roanoker's Ball or here for something.
WR: Anything that's gotta do with Roanoke that's a dance, he gon' be there.
AO: That's probably so. Because before his mother died, I know he came down in this really ritzy Cadillac.
WR: That's him. Well one time he had a Rolls-Royce.
AO: Get out.
WR: Yeah. I used to play ball with him up in DC. There's a playground called Candy Cane that's in Rock Creek Park and that cat rolled up in that Rolls-Royce and I heard somebody say "Hey JJ!" The dude said he ain't– I didn't see it myself. Dude said he ain't seen no– Somebody evidently told this guy that JJ had a Rolls-Royce parked right on the parking lot. Guy said "JJ",

dude said he ain't seen no Rolls-Royce out there. Jack said "Well there ain't but one thing I can tell him; either he's blind like Stevie Wonder or he don't know what one look like!"
AO: Can't recognize it when you see it. In other words, it's in the parking lot–
WR: Yeah, it's over there.
AO: If you want to see it.
WR: Yeah, if you wanna familiarize yourself. And then at one point he had a big wreath on the front of it.
AO: Yeah I think he had one on the Cadillac the last time I saw him.
WR: That's him, JJ, he's–
AO: I was trying to think, what's that about, how old is he? If I"m 60.
WR: He gotta be about ten years older than us at least.
AO: At least because–
WR: He come out of Addison about '55, '56. Somewhere in there.
AO: Because I remember Margaret– Margaret Thomson, Brenda Manns–
WR: Brenda Manns.
AO: Laverne Hale. I'm leaving out somebody.
WR: Did Laverne Hale live up on that Hill?
AO: Oh, Barbara Jean Edmonds.
WR: Living up on that hill?
AO: They were the big girls. No. Barbara Jean, Brenda, Laverne–
WR: Where is Brenda Manns?
AO: She's dead.
WR: Now was that Spencer's sister?
AO: No. Henry and Donalds Manns because, believe it or not, Sunny is what everybody calls Henry, he's the only one living of the three.
WR: I can't remember them two. I remember Brenda, Brenda must've been the baby.
AO: Yeah, she was the only girl.
WR: Yeah and she's the only I remember. But didn't she live on Raley?
AO: Yeah, right across the street.
WR: Yeah. Pretty girl.
AO: The Coopers lived directly across from me. At the end of their property, Laverne Hale lived there.
WR: Right, where is she?
AO: Maryland.
WR: Okay, I ain't seen her in a million years.
AO: And then there was Barbara Jean Edmonds, she just died.
WR: Now what she was to Normand?
AO: Sister, she was the baby girl. In fact, the only sister they have left is Marie out of all of them, I think it was like ten or more.
WR: I only remembered Normand. Maybe it was because he played basketball.

AO: Wow.
WR: I only remember Normand.
AO: Well.
WR: I know he was with Howard's cousin.
AO: Like I said, there was about 10 to 13 of them.
WR: Jesus.
AO: And Marie's the only one left and she oughta be– It's so bizarre when you think about it, Marie's probably in her 90s.
WR: That's probably why then because they're so much older.
AO: Who?
WR: The Edmonds.
AO: Well they ranged from–
WR: Because Normand had to be one of the youngest.
AO: Normand was older than my brother and he's four years older than me so he was probably six years older than me which would make him about 66 and Barbara Jean– Well I can say this; Barbara Jean was 70 when she died last month.
WR: Okay.
AO: And I can't remember whether she was older than Normand– They were the two youngest. Whether she was older than Normand or Normand was older than her. Because he's been dead for– good Lord.
WR: Yeah he's been dead for a long time. Well if she was 70, Normand– The way you putting it now, Normand was six years older than you, Normand would have been four years older than me. Which makes it about right. He was in– Him and James and Jerry __(??)'s brothers used to hang around together. Y'know that would have made me about 66, 67, somewhere in there.
AO: And he's been dead a good 30 years.
WR: A long time. What was it? A motorcycle accident? That was Buck.
AO: Yeah that was Buck. A truck ran a stop sign and had a pipe on it, a copper pipe, and it didn't have any kind of– No, didn't run a stop sign, stopped at a stop sign, didn't have any kind of thing of thing on it for you to see this little pipe and it went through his throat.
WR: Where was that?
AO: DC.
WR: I thought it was in DC.
AO: Yep. But those were the big girls. I used to run, I could be, y'know, swinging from one of the trees, y'know, playing cowboys and Indians. When it was time for them to get out of Addison and I'd run because our yard was up and I'd run and sit down like I was the sweetest thing in the universe just so I could see the big girls. Come home from school and I used to say "I'm gonna have some skirts." I'd never forget, they had those poodle skirts, y'know, with the dog and the chain on it. I can remember that and the bobby socks. Man I wanted one of those skirts and the kremlin slips, they were just gorgeous, I thought they were the prettiest things in the universe.
WR: Oh man.

AO: My how times change.
WR: Yes indeed.
AO: Well, is there anything that we didn't cover that you'd like to share with us.
WR: I can't think of anything that you didn't cover.
AO: Believe it or not, I missed a bunch of questions.
WR: You covered some stuff that I had forgotten about. Oh let me see. No, I just– I think the one thing that I do miss more than anything is Henry Street. Just the comradery, y'know just the comradery.
AO: We don't have a meeting place anymore.
WR: No and you took the words right out of my mouth, I was just getting ready to say that. I can remember when I would come home from college or I can remember when I was in high school and the guys who had gone on to college, the first thing they would do was they'd come by Henry Street when they came home because you knew you were gonna see the rest of the guys up there and they would, y'know, exchange stories and, y'know, just so much that I got from just being around there. I miss that, y'know. If nothing else, you got to meet people. If somebody was new in town, that's the first play they gon' come. If somebody's new in town now, you have no idea. Y'know, I have met people and I have said "Well are you from Roanoke?" "No." "How long you been here?" "I've been here and such and such since then." I said "You been here a long time." "Yeah with no place to go." "Well who you work for?" "I work for such and such and company." Y'know these things are important to know. So, that is the only thing that we didn't– I don't think we touched too much on Henry Street other than Dumas, but that is the one thing that I miss from this town and it's probably the reason why I'm on the committee now not to have the social security building put on Henry Street. I'd like to see it close to what it was before, if not– Y'know it'll never be what it was, but at least have some thriving businesses there. Something that we, as a race, can relate to.
AO: And be proud of.
WR: And proud of, exactly. And I think the way it's headed now, it's not going in that direction.
AO: Really?
WR: I don't think so. Although they shot it, shot that down, y'know.
AO: Yeah.
WR: But they'll find a way to come back I'm sure.
AO: They always do.
WR: They always do, that's my words exactly. Is that it?
AO: That's a sad way to end it, but thank you for your time and your participation. I truly appreciate it.
WR: Oh anytime. Anytime.