Interview Transcription

Interviewee: Wilma Warren
Interviewer and Editor: Brian Clark
9/17/07
General Location: Our Lady of the Valley, 650 N. Jefferson St., Roanoke, VA 24016

Editor's Note: *Most of the repeated words, ums, you knows, and false starts have been omitted from this version of the transcription to allow for ease of reading. I ask the reader to treat this transcript as a 'summary' of sorts of the interview. For any specific questions or interests, refer back to the audio recording for a more accurate portrayal of the interview. Time stamps are given periodically in the transcript to refer back to the recording. BC*

The interview took place in the common lounge immediately adjacent to Wilma Warren's room in the Assisted Living facility.

Interview start

0:00:21.8
BC: This is Wilma Warren on September 17 (2007) interviewed by Brian Clark. Formalities out of the way.
WW: Ok.
BC: Ok. So tell me a little bit more about TAP (Total Action Against Poverty). Why were you interested?
WW: Well, I didn't know what I was doing when I was hired by Bristow Hardin because there had never been a- The community action agencies were just forming in the United States as a result of war on poverty legislation that President Johnson got the Congress to pass, but it really had come from the Kennedy people. It was part of the Kennedy and the Johnson new assault on poverty and those issues. And so they hired Bristow Hardin who was- He had worked for the public schools and with the public radio for at least fifteen years before that here in Roanoke, and he was well suited for the job because he was an actor. He had an MFA in drama. And he wanted to be in the big time and he went up there for a while and began to get some work and realized he really didn't want to do that. He wanted to come back to- Some place. He grew up in Virginia Beach but he wanted to come back to a community where he could raise his family and live a life that he thought was worth- And he could make a contribution and he certainly did. So anyway, when Cabell Brand, you know who he is-
BC: I do actually.
WW: All right. When Cabell Brand- He's the person that just- He read about this legislation. And he says, 'That's for Roanoke,' and so he got, he took I think a- I forgot how much—I think it was a year, but maybe it wadn't that long, leave of absence from his company, and he organized the community action agency at TAP. And, he was instrumental in hiring Bristow as the first director. And, as they say, that really was the beginning of TAP, and it was just a wonderful new way of looking at community life. Now it seems- You know, we're used to it, but when we first started TAP, one of the ideas that we had to say we would introduce was that the Board of Directors and all other boards and other governing groups that were organized by TAP had to have one third membership from the low income community. Well, people said, 'That won't work at all.' Said, 'They'd never done it-' Said, 'What do the poor people know about running an organization?' Well, to begin with, that was one of the best experiences I ever had-
BC: I bet.

WW: -and which I had some doubts, but I had worked with low income people enough to know that they were certainly smarter than the average bear thinks they are. And so, that was- Let me see. Cabell and Bristow went all over the Roanoke Valley, all going (??) to- Ended up with TAP having seven counties and covering Roanoke City, Roanoke County, and six other counties geographically adjacent. And then they had representatives, and they had the- I've forgotten what they called 'em, but they were like mini, you know, Boards of Directors from different, these different agencies- In other words, we tried to diffuse power rather than cen-
BC: Centralize?
WW: Centralize. And that really was interesting too because a lot of people- And you know, the people who were opposed that, didn't really, they didn't oppose it, I don't know…just because they didn't want to lose power, they opposed it because they weren't familiar with it. It was just an unheard of sort of idea. And as it turned out, I just want to quickly say that the low income people became the strongest members of our Boards, over the years. They had the most to contribute, and they could contribute, and they did contribute, and it was really wonderful.
BC: A huge vested interest.
WW: Pardon?
BC: A huge vested interest.
0:04:36.3
WW: Oh, yes! But see, before- For instance, when the first day care center was open, we had trouble filling the slots. We had, I think we had 90 slots. It was the one in the old building that burned later. It was a large day care center. It was a building, TAP building, it was on Shenandoah Ave. It was a building- Flour mill, the Lindsey Flour Mill, and it burned on Christmas Eve Eve in nineteen ninety-ninety-eight, ninety-nine. One of those years. It was a terrible thing. It was the biggest fire I ever saw in my life. It was cold, cold, cold. But anyway, uh, what was I saying, about the-
BC: Talking about the kids.
WW: Uh huh, oh yes.
BC: And that you couldn't fill the slots-
WW: Yeah, we thought, I mean, we thought people would be knocking the doors down. We thought we'd have to do- We thought our big, our first big really public relations problem would be that we wouldn't have enough room for these kids. We found out that not only were the kids not coming, the reason their parents didn't wanna put 'em in there was because one, they thought it was too good to be true. They thought there was a catch. And the other was, that they thought they'd have to disclose how much money income they had, and that somehow or another that would be used against them no matter what their income was, see. And so, they just, were so used to being untrustworthy, no-Untrusted, not untrustworthy, that they uh- And so, when we found that out then Bristow had a lot of us just go out and knock on doors in the neighborhoods and talk to the people. And so we soon got enough kids to open that day care and it was a huge success.
BC: I bet.
0:06:12.0
WW: One of the happiest, one of the best memories I have about that day care- It was in the old TAP Building. So it meant that the workers, all of us who worked in that building, and the kids and the day care center was in the building that Lindsey, uh, the Lindsey Mills people had built for their office, general office there. It was attached to the old mill part. And we all shared restrooms, so whenever you'd go to the restrooms there's be these little girls standing there talking and they were so cute and I remember one thing, I just remember so well- We had put a full length mirror up on the wall, on the wall, and this little girl, she was pudgy little, pudgy black girl with the prettiest hair- She was, she was a pretty little thing. She just- She had wrapped her arms around herself and was kissing herself in the mirror and said, 'Oh,' she said, 'Oh, you're so beautiful. You're so beautiful.' And I said to myself,

that's our job you know, is to make sure she never forgets how beautiful she is. And she didn't. She did very well we understand.
BC: That's amazing.
WW: Idn't that a great story?
0:07:13.1
BC: And what was your role there?
WW: I was- Well first I had been Bristow Hardin's secretary at Wesleyan School, so I was…(??)…a bookkeeper/secretary. Now you realize, this is a- It became a multi-million dollar outfit very quickly when we got our first big funding. I had no experience in that kind of bookkeeping, but it was so simple, you know, and a local CPA, Mr. Bowman, I believe it was, set it up for us. Showed me how to do it, but it was so simple, and then we have a- That first grant was for, I think, $90,000. That was mostly staff people to get, give us a start with. So, that's what I did, but then I quickly became also a program writer, an idea person, because you know, we had our own, I think, eight of us on the, eight or nine people on the grant. And so we put together with Cabell's help and a lot of volunteers, the getting information cause the Office of Community Services which was the organization in Washington that funded us. They had done an excellent job of telling us what they needed to know, which also, *we* needed to know too to develop programs. They helped us learn what it was we needed. I don't think they've ever gotten- You talk about the bureaucracy so much, and I agree there's a lot of it that's bad, but that was really done well. And it taught me, it taught all of us so much about what it is, and how to account for what we did, you know, and to develop numbers of people helped, and how they were helped rather than just talking about it. And we were among the first of the government agencies to really do that because they were so afraid that if anybody- If we didn't do a good job like that then we would quickly be de-funded and that'd be the end of us. And we had some, we had some bad apples, now, not in Roanoke thank god, but, you know, in the United States. There were some people who really, didn't obey the laws and they got un-funded, and that was bad-
BC: That's tough.
0:09:27.5
WW: Yeah! But boy, we- We always felt, and Bristow just pounded into our heads, he said, 'We have two equally important jobs to do. One is to-' He was talking to the staff rather, but really he meant the Board too, he said, 'One is to develop a …(?) program and keep to it and deliver. And the other is to be sure that we kept our money stuff straight and we-' He was so open with the press, you know- No secrets were hid. There were no- Nothing was hidden with Bristow. And that was important too, to learn. And so I always taught my staff that too, you know- It's not enough to have a good heart and all that, even to deliver programs withall (??) without being responsible to the money.
BC: That's true.
WW: Responsible for the money. So anyway, I don't know how I got onto that, but that's- Thinking about the early days of that program was just wonderful. TAP was also the first program of any size that I'm aware of that had an integrated, racially integrated staff. Where, where-
BC: Now that was- [interrupting]
WW: Except there was one other, I found out later, and that was the YWCA. Before us, they had racially integrated staff where- Well to me, it was the first time that I know of in Roanoke where blacks and whites worked together as peers. That was the important thing. And, it was a wonderful experience, and-
BC: I bet.
WW: Because that's what I felt so much when, you know, when our- Since 1954, you know, when they started desegregating the schools. The thing I felt was that the schools would never really be desegregated in the way I thought would be fair until whites and blacks had peer relationships. Friendships, you know. And that's what happened here. And, I know when we first started, we'd go

to restaurants- They, they realized they had to seat us, you know, mixed company, mixed group. But there was some that didn't like it all and I had friends who I thought were my friends who wouldn't speak to me when they'd see me at lunch with some of the black employees. But, it just, you know, it was hard for everybody. It was hard for everybody. But it was harder for the blacks than it was for the whites and that's the thing I think, we'll work on.
BC: Oh, I bet. That's one of those things-
WW: It was exciting [at the same time].
BC: It's been- A lot of that has transitioned into other issues now-
WW: Oh yeah, oh yeah.
BC: From my generation growing up, so to hear you just, to go out to eat with your coworkers to a restaurant, and that- Yeah, that's the things you don't think about.
0:12:07.9
WW: Alright. Well, for instance. I remember once…(??)…All of these are early, early, early stories. We had this big meeting one day, one Saturday I remember, and there were a lot of local people who worked in other non-profits and like. I remember one, this young man, who was an assistant minister of a local church. And he was from out of town. And we were talking about how, uh- You know, people were discriminated [jumbled pronunciation], discriminated against in getting jobs. And he was so innocent, and he sat there and I never forget it, he said, 'I don't understand what you are talking about.' He said, 'What do you mean that blacks are discriminated? How do you prove it?' I said, "Ok." I said, 'I'll give you a phone book and I'll mark places in there, businesses to go to and you go and tell me how many blacks you see working in anything but menial jobs—cleaning, or serving food, or serving the whites.' Well, he didn't say anything and he still wadn't satisfied and I said, 'I don't know of a single business in this town. The only-' No, I really don't because I remember the only one that I do remember was- It was a menial job, the man who Bristow hired as one of his assistant directors, he was a college graduate. He never had a job though, where he could really work, do what he'd taken in college. He was an orderly for Lewis Gale Hospital and he carried my children in, you know, after they had their shots to get their tonsils out. I remember him as well as anything and the next time I met him, see, he would- And he became the Director of the Community Action Agency in Warrenton, one of the best in the country. And you know, it was just that kind of thing. But anyway, that's how- I think we were just blinded to the fact at how we took so bad, took for granted the way that people lived. And the way we treated other people.
BC: It's hard looking past what's socially accepted-
WW: Oh yeah.
BC: And when everybody's looking at it, you know, you might have a few, such as yourself, where, that notice that distinction but, you know, if the larger culture isn't really-
WW: [interrupting] And the reason that I noticed it, it was two mainly. My mother and father, especially my father, he was- I grew up in Bridgewater, it was about-
BC: Up near, uh, Harrisonburg?
WW: Yeah.
BC: Oh, Ok.
WW: And in the early thirties, up through, uh, I graduated from high school in '45. I started school in thirty- thirty- thirty-two/thirty-three. And I- Anyway my dad was on the School Board there for a number of years, in Bridgewater. It was a small town, as you know, and the thing I can remember him so well saying- Every time- In Bridgewater, if there was a fire, they had a volunteer fire department so the siren went off downtown. Everybody knew there was a fire, and I know my Dad always stopped and he said his heart just kinda stopped, because he said the school that the black children went to there was so poorly- Well, they heated it with a big ole pot bellied stove that got red, burnin' red hot, and then they had to cool it off. It was terrible. And he said he felt so afraid that they'd have a

fire before the School Board could really do anything about that. And it- Just hearing him talk that, and he was very unusual. (??)…for that time and place.
BC: Sounds like it.
0:15:31.7
WW: But Bridgewater was, because Bridgewater College, see, the Brethren church were always very racially and- Well they just were always very socially aware of things, and I know they were the first school I knew of that the girls basketball team in nineteen, I'd say fifty-one or two, it was before the '54 decision, they forfeited the State Championship to Hollins College because the championship game was going to be played at Hollins and they could not provide a room for their two black basketball players on the Bridgewater team, where they could sleep the same place the others did, so they said, 'Thank you just the same, we'll forfeit that game.' You know, when you have those things happen in your life and you know, it's people that you know, then you feel, you feel- It becomes personal to you, so anyway. That's why- It's not good of me, it's just that- I had a lot of good influences.
BC: Sounds like it.
WW: I did. I did. And anyway, let's see. I was talking about TAP. TAP, it was so wonderful because Bristow was totally unorthodox. And he would not be- Cabell and I, a lot of people, tried to help him become more orthodox but he just wouldn't do it. And I'm glad he wouldn't.
BC: Sounds like it was a good thing, in the long run.
WW: Oh, it was. It was. His father was a music, famous music teacher down in Virginia Beach area, but how he got the way he got, though, something I just don't understand. Now I think some people just born with a sensitivity to other people's pain. I think Bristow was one of those people. He just, I mean, he just was so flat out, out and out, he was loud and raucous, but he made you realize, I mean just- You'd think you knew what was right, you know, what was right thing to do or something and he'd say something, you just knew immediately, he just turned you upside down and all. And it was a great, great experience for us all.
0:17:43.6
BC: You mentioned the, the different ways TAP was brought into the community and how the community had to look at itself differently, um, what other types of things were that? I'm curious by that-
WW: Well one of the things was that we had to pay the minimum wage to people, at least the minimum wage. And there were some businesses and big businesses in town who resented that because they felt that TAP was hiring up the good workers because we could pay more than they paid to say their, their garbage people and that. Now they- I'm not talking about the city, at all, ok? That was one way. Another way was people, a lot of people of- Middle class white people, friends of mine, and others, they were not at all sure that they could trust us, they weren't sure of what- Well, none of us really had lived in a desegregated world. You know? I wasn't sure either, but I knew it was right. And so that's, that's the first step. So there was that, then there was just the, the mystery of TAP too, you know, because we were not- We were- Well, oh, another thing I remember we did, we had a march once on the newspaper because some women who were black tried to get their pictures up, you know, when they were going to get married, or their pictures after they were married, or whatever, put in the, on the same page as the whites and boy the paper refused. And I remember we did that march and we marched to the blood bank and gave a pint of blood, rather than you know, spilling blood. And that was a big thing that I, I uh- It wasn't until we did it that we realized how strongly some people felt about desegregation. So it was that, to me I was sorta innocent and naïve. I thought once we had to do it, people would be so glad to do it, and a lot of people were, but a lot people weren't either. It's just, a lot of it I think came from, you know, we remember our father's and mother's tapes. I took a lot of father's tapes, especially father's, but it's a lot of mother's, were still in the heads of people, and it's just hard to give it up.

0:20:00.1

And uh, let me see. Well, the churches were, the churches were the best platforms, white and black, the white churches and the black churches, mostly white churches gave us room for our Head Start centers. We had I think nine to start with. We could never have found a place that was suitable that the Health Department would approve of that could be used except in churches. And a lot of churches were very generous. Cause it was, it was a disruption to their use of the building, but they've done it and still do. I don't know where all those are now, but I know that they did, and- And let me see. The big thing for me, just personally, was that I soon made a lot of friends, fast friends, that were friends for life of people who were black, and whose homes I visited and they've came, you know, …have been friends for years, and I tell you, it was a wonderful experience for me and I think for them too. And then there was another group of women that organized. I didn't join it cause of- By this time I was traveling out of the city a lot, but a lot of the women, I think there were about, hmmm, 30 women at least to start with, over the years, and they're still meeting and I've forgotten what they called themselves, but they're black and white. And they talk about all kinds of things that has to do with race. And it's just been a great- And that's formed a core of women in this city that has just been invaluable. Tenya Hardin (??-Teen-ya) was one of them. Even if you look at the obituaries from somebody that dies, you know, uh, it's- That, that was another thing. Let me see. Other ways. I think the most important thing in this is the fact that, that it was done without violence in this city. And-

BC: Done without violence?

0:21:55.3

WW: Yeah, without violence. And that was partly because of Bristow and Cabell and the … (??). And then we also had, TAP had, we had some great, some of the best leaders in the city on our first Board of Directors. I wrote the first legal aid grant application. It was funded, and it was passed by the, it had to be passed by the local Bar Association before they'd put the money in the community. And it was, and so the leaders of the law community- There were a lot of people who didn't think it was going to be a good idea, a good thing, but they passed it and that was good. You know we've always managed- Well, I think- I said we didn't do it. It's because there are in any community I believe, a number, a large number of people who believe that they should do what's right. A lot of people do what's right no matter what, and a lot of people just sort of, you know, they're scared to. And in Roanoke in this valley, Bristow was determined that we would not gonna resort to, 'or else's,' you know. We really tried not to blame anybody, but what was, we were just, involved in what is now and what we can change. And I think that helped us from getting so self righteous too, because, you know you didn't have to look very far till you could see that you had been just as involved in this subtle racism as anybody else, so- And a lot of blacks were too, you know, so there you go. It's just, nobody is free of it, and so-

BC: And we're still working through it.

WW: Oh, I know.

BC: Luckily for different reasons now, but still-

WW: Oh, but I think it's always the basic reasons. It's to allow as much freedom of choice as people want. Not as is possible, but freedom as people want. And I think that a lot of our problems now, you know, it's not because the barriers are there, it's because people just haven't really wakened to the fact that they need to want that too, to make it go. It's a- Well, it's just, you know, there's so many facets to it.

BC: So, it's huge.

WW: It is. It is.

0:24:10.4

BC: Now, did you live in a desegregated neighborhood?

WW: Uh, yes I did, but not at first.

BC: And where was that?
WW: It was in, up in Grandin Court, near the Grandin Court school. I didn't know it, I wasn't aware of it-
BC: Was that the Virginia Heights?
WW: No, no. It's a-
BC: Grandin Court Elementary?
WW: Yeah, Grandin Court, that area—Coffee Pot and all are in there. Uh, yes. Our neighbors sold their house to a black couple who were friends of mine. He worked at TAP. And he didn't have any intention of trying to break into a neighborhood, he was looking for a house that he could afford, at a price he could afford, and with people…(??) So he bought the house next door to us, and our neighbor that had lived there before, let me see, no, I don't know. Let me see, I'm trying to- Oh, that's right, the neighbor of the house that they'd bought, he lived in between us, and I understood, he didn't tell us but he said that he told some of the people in the neighborhood that if those people moved into his neighborhood he's going to take his gun out and shoot 'em. Now you can imagine I was terrified, when I heard that because I couldn't imagine him doing it, but you never know. And so what we did, was I called Bristow and I said, 'What can we do?' because I didn't want Billy to know but I thought it'd be terrible for him to know that somebody- You know, cause I thought the man was not going to do anything, but I wadn't sure. But anyways, so we just had people, all friends of ours at TAP, everywhere we knew bring him food and come help him move in and everything. Do you know that within a year and half, that man and his wife gave their key to Billy, not to me, to keep for them and to watch over their house while they were gone on their vacation. Now, how's that for a story?
BC: That's a story.
WW: And then-
BC: That's pretty remarkable.
WW: It is, and you know why he did it? It's because Billy loved his car. He got out their every Saturday and washed his car. I mean, it's just, just things like that that make people do such weird things, but idn't that a wonderful story? But it's true, and they were wonderful. They weren't goodie-goodie goodie or anything, they really- They just learned by the fact that they knew them that they were good people, and that they'd rather have them watch their house than me. (chuckling)
BC: Um hmm. Hey, they're the neighbor, right? (chuckling)
WW: I loved it.
0:26:36.6
BC: That's great! Now, have you lived in Roanoke all your life?
WW: No, I was uh, let me see, I think I was twenty six years old when I, no I wadn't, I was older than that. I was twenty seven. Twenty seven I think. Twenty nine, I don't know. I was just under thirty years old when we moved here. I lived in Bridgewater til I was nineteen, then we lived in Staunton for two years, then we lived in Richmond for seven years.
BC: So you've been around the state a little bit.
WW: A little bit.
BC: A little bit.
WW: They say, those- You know, you feel like you have different lives. I've changed so much, but I love Rich- Roanoke is the best, I think. I love it here.
BC: That's good, cause that's where you are! (chuckling)
WW: That's right. It's been great for my children and I know, you know, you want to talk about our neighborhoods-
BC: Children are part of neighborhoods.
WW: That's right, and also not just my personal memories of neighborhoods, but also TAP. That's really what we were about, was helping the, helping the low income people improving their

neighborhoods. Cause we had the, our motto was 'hands up, instead of a- A hand up instead of a hand out.'
BC: We use that at Habitat too.
WW: Yeah I know.
BC: Yep. It's a very good one.
0:27:46.6
WW: It's true. It is. It is. Cabell, I don't know if he made it up, but it came to us from Cabell. I was thinking about that this morning, I thought, well in some neighborhoods there- You just wouldn't have known 'em, really, but there's still others that need a lot of help. And uh-
BC: Have you seen some that have improved?
WW: Oh, yes.
BC: Like which ones in particular?
WW: Well, I think some of those in southeast now are really improved. And uh-
BC: Like as you're going towards Vinton, and-
WW: Yeah. Right, right, right. Oh yeah. Well, I think that, hmm- I can't even remember how it was, a lot of them, because they've changed so much. Well the (??), the Grandin Road area, down in there, I think around- Some of the places that seemed to be intractable, I don't know why, unless, like Mrs.- Was it- Who was the lady that did the housing here in northwest?
BC: I'm not sure.
WW: Was it Mrs. Thompson? Anyway, she started this wonderful housing group here. She was a member, a elderly woman who started this program of helping people get loans for their houses and also got rehab loans- This whole area, of course Gainsboro, that's one thing, but even beyond here, you know, where the housing is really improved a great deal- There is some, some deseg- [cuts off], some integration of neighborhoods, but not- You know, it seemed interesting to me that there hasn't been as much as I thought it would be, and I think that's ok as long as it's what people want. And we still have a problem in our schools, you know. And I think that it is- A lot of it is- I don't know what a lot of it is, but I think that if you look at where the schools have had problems meeting the state standards, I think part of that is the fact that there are so many children in those schools who, who really come from families that they are of so little income, that they don't have books, they don't have many enrichment things, and I think that's important. I think it's important that parents participate in the schools and they're not doing that in a lot of those schools to the degree that they need to do it. Why they're not, that's a whole different thing. I think- I've said for years that if you look through the school system and you were made to feel less worthy (??), you one of the outs people (??), and then when you got- When you just quit school and you got a job you ain't goin' to go back to that building for any reason, and I think that's part of it. But I think that uh- I know that from a lot of my black friends who went to school when I was going to school, or you know, who were my contemporaries, and they succeeded because they said there was a grandmother or mother. There was a father. There was somebody, a mother and father, who said, 'Now listen here, you are going to go to school and you are going to do well and you are going to go to college, if we can, you know, figure out a way.' I think there's not enough, of that. But there are also some wonderful clubs, that, help in you know, like uh, the program that helps kids go to college. What is it called?
BC: There's probably more than one out there now. There's a lot.
0:31:24.0
WW: Anyway, there were just a lot of things- When I was at TAP all those years, and then I became the Director of the Virginia Water Project, which is a program that helps families in rural areas obtain safe water and indoor plumbing. That project was a little runner (??). It's all over the country. In fact it's just a lot of places now. But, I think that, uh, can you stop it a minute? I'm tired.
BC: That's ok. We can take our time.

WW: I had a thought, important thought about, wait a minute.
BC: No rush at all.
WW: Wait a minute.
BC: I'll get some too. [water break] Where did I put mine? [pause] Would you like these closed? Or is this too bright? [referring to the blinds behind us]
WW: I think so.
BC: Ok.
WW: I'm …(??). I've never had to wear sunglasses.
BC: Reach over you here. [closes blinds] Sittin' here beside you I realized how bright it was comin' in that window.
WW: Much better. Much better
BC: Ok.
WW: Thank you.
BC: That was worth stopping for.
WW: It was. I didn't realize it.
BC: Yeah, me neither. (chuckles)
WW: Anyway, what was I talking about, something I said about, before I got into-
BC: You were talking about the water project, and working with the-
WW: Right before that.
BC: We were-
WW: It was something important about TAP and the neighborhoods.
BC: We might have to come back to that.
WW: Yeah, I think so. I've just about shot what I know (??) about TAP, I think. What is missing? Should I talk more about what- I know what's going on now, but not like I …(??).
BC: Well, I'm curious about a couple of things too, one, what was it like coming to Roanoke for the first time? I mean obviously you became very invested here and moved on to these great things –
WW: Let me tell you. [at same time]
0:33:56.9
BC: What, what was it like coming in, at you know, not quite thirty to the Roanoke Valley and living here?
WW: It was terrible!
BC: (laughing)
WW: Because, from Richmond see- Now, in Bridgewater in Harrisonburg- Well Harrisonburg had some nice places to shop and we'd go to Richmond to shop. Didn't ever come to Roanoke to shop then. So when I came here, I was used to Miller and Rhoads and Thalhimers, you know, and beer (??) grocery stores and- When we came to Roanoke, after a couple of weeks I said to my husband, I said, 'You know, I really need to go downtown and buy a few things,' I said. We had two children then, and I said- No, we had three I guess. No, we had two. Anyway, anyway, I said, 'I need to just go down to Heironimus.' We went in the car. He sat outside with the kids parked somewhere. Well I went in, and shopped for a few things. I came back to the car just bawling. I got in the car and I bawled. He said, 'What happened?' Said, 'Did somebody upset you?' I said, 'No.' I said, 'It's awful.' I said, 'There's no place to shop in Roanoke. It's awful.' Cause Heironimus was the biggest store. As I recall, I'd not swear to it, but in my mind the floors had those oily black floors. It was right down town, it was just really no place good to shop. There was only two restaurants. I remember one was that wonderful seafood place out on Williamson Road and then the other one was The New Yorker.
BC: Which is still here.

WW: Yes. And I tell you, there was really no place else you wanted to go out to at night, for a nice dinner. And let me see, it was just terrible. They had good movies. They had a great theater, American Theater.
BC: Is that the one you went to?
WW: Yeah. And it was torn down. Oh, it was a great theater. But let me see. Course, we didn't have the Civic Center. It was just really- And the town see- Oh, railroad. The dust. Every morning I had to wipe the window sills out because they black, the dust from the coal.
BC: Now where- Did you live close? Not just the-
WW: Yeah. Well, I lived out there- I lived at Virginia Heights. Course that road does go by there. Let me see. No, I lived in southwest Roanoke, but it wasn't till they got diesel that that stopped.
BC: And that's because it was the old coal, steam?
WW: Yeah, yeah. And so it was just- I mean that's the way it was. To me Roanoke was- I didn't want to leave because in Richmond I had missed the mountains so much that I swore I'd never live again where they didn't have the mountains.
BC: I had that experience in Richmond too.
WW: Did you?
BC: I lived there for about a year and half, and when I came back, I thought, 'How did I, how did I not realize this?
WW: I know. Oh I did. I used to lie- I used to get in, I used to stand at my kitchen window mornings after my husband would go to work, and I'd cry because I couldn't see the mountains. It was just terrible. I thought. But, now I go to Richmond and I don't miss the mountains because I'm used to them, you know, I know they're here. But, uh, let me see.
0:36:50.7
What else was Roanoke like? Roanoke, oh, Roanoke. Oh my gosh, the City Hall- If you would just look back at the newspapers in those days, there were two factions I don't even remember their names. I do but I won't remember. They fought all the time, sometimes those meetings'd go past midnight and- Yeah, it's amazing to me that- And my sister lived here, so she lived here quite long time, ten years I guess before I came here. So she knew the territory and she was involved with Association of University Women, AAUW. Anyway, they really looked at the legislation that was needed in this city and they did a good job over the years, they really did, and the city sort of took into modern- Well, the- I've forgotten. When the City of Roanoke got the form of government we have, there's a City Manager, and that was a big improvement. I think it-
BC: Ok. Cause before it was just a council?
WW: Yeah, and the mayor had a lot more-
BC: Ok, there was more than one person directing as opposed to-
WW: Well, yeah. And also, see, the mayor- That was a full time- It became a full time job, it just was much better the way it is. And I think it may have changed before, right before we came here or right after. I know they had put the Mill Mountain Star up, oh, the Mill Mountain Star, I love it so now, but at first I thought it was the hokiest thing I ever saw. And at one time, they were gonna get rid of it. That's when those of us who had made fun of it decided we wanted to keep it, so-
BC: Kinda liked it that way.
WW: Um hmm.
0:38:24.6
BC: Now that was here when you got here?
WW: Yes, it just was.
BC: So, when did you come in? Sometime in the late 50's, early 60's?
WW: Fifty- No, let me see. No, let me see. It was fifty-four.
BC: So that was really- You came right as the star was being built.

WW: Yeah. Right, right, right. Uh huh. Oh yeah. It was wonderful. But Roanoke was really a sort of one horse railroad town, you know. And I'm not knocking the fact that it was a railroad town. I think the railroad's been very good for the city in a lot of ways, and I think that uh, as the health professionals are good for the city now, but- It was a pretty hokey town compared to Richmond. Now, I love it better by far than Richmond because for instance- Well, in the neighborhood, we lived in a good neighborhood in Richmond, and we had a lot of friends because there were a lot of young people there in those days. Our children were the boom, baby boomers. There was something about Roanoke that I think is just essential to raising children, and I'm not sure what it is, but for me it was. It's large enough so that you can have things, good libraries, good schools, that sort of thing, but also, it's small enough so that you can know all of your city people, all the elected officials. You can know your preachers, you are known and you know a lot of the people that are important in the city to making change and to decidin' who does what. So I think that's important to put, you know, what the city has become.

0:40:09.4

I think it's just miraculous. I think it's miraculous that here I am 81 years old and when I came here, I used to sit at St. John's at a certain place in the church, I still do. But I sat there, I was a young mother with these little children. Now I'm one of the oldest members and I'm still sittin' in the same area of the church, and I've watched this whole group of people age, and die, and new leaders come up- Little kids, that were little kids are now the movers and shakers. And it's nice, it's a nice feeling to have experienced that. And-

BC: And played quite a part yourself.

WW: That's right. That's right. And I was glad I could. Well, you see, I didn't want to go to work at all because I just, I thought being at, being at home with the kids- My mother had been a great mother, you know. She provided a lot of happiness in our family because she was home, she could- We had a lot of company for dinner, and had a lot of parties, and that sort of thing. You know, and our mothers, in bourgeois (??) were the ones that made the world go round for us. They took us swimming, in the summer time, you know-

BC: And they were mostly, mostly stay at home, work with the family?

WW: Yeah, oh yeah. And so when I was- Let me see, I was- I just had my youngest child was three years old when I went to work, but, it just become clear to us that, you know, we're gonna have to have two wage earners in the family, so that's why I went to work, and I didn't even know Bristow needed anybody. They were friends of ours, and- So I was looking for jobs and somebody told him, and he called up, he said, 'Why didn't you tell me you were going to go to work?' So I went to there, to work. But I never thought of having a career, you know. It just sort of grew into it. The water project really became my signature I guess, and uh, I-

[Interruption—someone stopping in to check on us in the common area]

0:42:29.4

WW: But, talking about neighborhoods- I think that Roanoke still has a ways to go with neighborhoods. I'm not sure- I think Grandin Road is just a super neighborhood. If every neighborhood could be like Grandin Road, I think we'd have the prettiest town in America, in the world, because it's just got everything that you need, and uh-

BC: Are you talking like where the theater is, and the little Grandin Village?

WW: Yeah, I'm thinking going into- And all the people live around us [at same time as BC], you know, are drawn to that. See, we lived there right after we sold our house. We lived at the apartments right there, on Grandin Road, across the road from the Post Office.

BC: Um hum. I know exactly where you are talking about.

WW: And my bedroom just stares, faces right onto Grandin Road. And early in the mornings, I'd watch the mothers and the fathers go out with the little babies- There was one woman that had twins and two dogs, on leashes, and how she did it I don't know. Those were big dogs too.
BC: (laughing) That's quite an accomplishment!
WW: Yeah it was. It was great. I think that good neighborhoods, good solid neighborhoods where people- I think people need to accept each other more easily. Even as I say that, I say, 'You dummy, you can't make people do anything,' and you can't, but that I think makes- More tolerant attitudes certain does bring more uh, an easier place to live for people. Expecting the best instead of expecting the worst, I think, is really important, and uh,
0:44:15.2
being and feeling safe. See I always felt safe in Roanoke. Until, I didn't feel so safe. We went through a period here, where people were having break-ins in their houses, and I tell you, I- We got this beautiful silver service from my husband's family when we got married. I was so proud of it, I would hide it in the garbage can under the garbage, wrap it up and everything, I'd put it under the garbage when I'd go out of town because I'd just afraid somebody would break in there, cause we had it in our neighborhood, we had a number of break-ins like that. Cars would come at night, you know, after dark, and they'd just have a good entrance to the back of a house and they'd just go ahead into the house.
BC: Oh my gosh.
WW: It was terrible. And that really- It's, it's scary. Cause I- And I didn't like feeling that way. In Bridgewater we had one policeman over the years.
BC: (chuckling) That's a little different experience.
WW: Well, and we used to, as teenagers, you know, we would, on Sunday afternoons, when after where we could ride in cars, we'd ride, we'd ride down to see Mr.- Can't remember his name. We'd see the policeman and then we'd take off and then we'd go faster and he would try to, he would chase us. I think he probably had as much fun as we did.
BC: (laughs)
WW: So that was my idea of a police, you know. So, I didn't like living where I felt that you needed a policeman. But of course you do. When I moved to Roanoke, my sister and her husband were very good friends of MacDash/MacNash (??) and his wife and he was one of the policemen on the force then. So, that helped me with the policemen.
BC: You get to know 'em, a little personal face-
WW: Um hmm. I think neighborhoods, good neighborhoods, though, are the key to sanity in the world. I really do.
0:46:12.3
BC: What were the best parts about yours?
WW: Oh my.
BC: I mean-
WW: After you've grown up, my- Well, I've written about a hundred pages of my memories.
BC: Oh wow.
WW: Because I just think that my children, my grand children, need to know- It's like Camelot, it really is.
BC: Now you mean, kind of then and now? Is that what you mean 'It's like Camelot'?
WW: Well, yeah. I mean- Camelot was supposed to be perfect, the ideal place and I swear to you, where it only rained at midnight, you know, and that sort of stuff. I think that Bridgewater was that way and when I, when I'd written [clears throat] I deliberately left out [clears throat] the fact that I could, you know, when some of the fathers were alcoholics. I didn't put that in because this- I wrote it from the standpoint of a child, whatever age I was, whatever I knew. Now, when I finish it, I will

know those things, see, but that's later on, but- The best parts to me were my friends, the families, my neighborhood, and Bridgewater was a wonderful town because, the- You know, during the Depression there were a lot of people who had, didn't have work. My daddy was a US Forest Service. He was a ranger. And he was a wonderful man. And he and my mother were very good influences in the town but they were one of about, I'd say, at least 20 families that I can think of who were- You know, some of those families that had a really hard time financially, see at least my daddy got a paycheck every week, or every month or whatever it was. [clears throat] And he wasn't afraid of being fired, losin' his job. That made a big difference, but uh, mother and daddy, and I'd say at least eight women. My mother and about eight other women- Now I'm not sure who they all were, during those years, like I had two friends from families that, well the one family had six children and the father was a college graduate and he made $12 a week in the, as a parts manager of the local car dealership. [clears throat] So my mother sewed, she'd go to Harrisonburg to get material for me for a skirt or dress or whatever. She'd get similar material, but never the same, for one of my friends in that family and she'd make us both- I remember, I think, we had these pleated skirts. And mother would make 'em, and then we, what we did was, we'd share 'em, you know- Some days, some nights, Francis would- She'd have some and I'd have the others. So they did that. They just made sure that- And it was always very quiet, see, and I wouldn't, I didn't even, wadn't even aware of it until after I was grown, you know, what they were doing. [coughs]

0:49:12.3

WW: One of the women, Mrs. Allen (??), whose husband was from a wealthy Boston family, she'd take the kids up there- Well her children would go up there in the summer and they'd go to camp and things like that. Then she'd go up the last two weeks of August, and she would go shopping. She'd shop for their winter clothes, and I didn't know it until one time I just happened to be at the people's house, you know, the man I was telling you about. She gave us all these boxes from Filene's in Boston. She'd bought winter coats for all of us kids. She bought one nice dress, you know.

BC: Wow, so just everybody taking care of their neighbors and friends.

WW: Um hum, um hum. It really- And that- She- I never- She never said that. Mother may have known, I don't know if she ever did. I didn't tell anybody. I just- I wasn't told not to, I just thought, you know, I knew I shouldn't, and- I mean it really- I tell you, people made fun of Hilary Clinton's, you know, 'it takes a village,' but it's the truth. That's what it took. Oh, like- Mrs.- oh. She was the darlingest little woman. Mrs.- Mrs. Mattie Loudon (??) She lived on Main Street of Bridgewater and she did these little pen and inks. She did calling cards and wedding invitations and that sort of thing. And she also did some trays for wedding presents and she'd sit there and do it and we would go call on her. I was a little girl, you know, there in Bridgewater- And in a lot of small town America- They [the women] might work like dogs in the morning, but in the afternoons they'd take a bath and they'd get changed and they'd go put their hats and gloves on, and they'd go calling. And so mother would take me because I was the youngest and that she couldn't leave me at home by myself. And she'd put this, this colored, big, big, big ribbon in my hair right here. And do it like this. Uh, I hated that, but I loved to go calling, though, cause I could just sit quietly and just listen. It was wonderful. I know when she took me to Mrs. Mattie's, Mrs. Mattie was the sweetest woman and she really was, I mean she was so sweet and quiet, God you can't imagine woman being like that anymore. And- Anyway, there were a number of people who lived on Main St in Bridgewater. Well anytime any of us did anything that happened on Main Street where most of our interaction did, our mothers got a phone call from one of these women. They'd say, 'Mrs. Casey (??), I just saw Wilma Jean do something I never thought I'd see her do,' you know. That's- See, they were always nice about it.

0:51:35.6

BC: That's a big family watching over you. [chuckling]

WW: It was! It was. I played hooky one day in my whole life, cause I just- I liked school so much, and then finally my friend said you've gotta play hooky. So we decided we would stay out one day and we'd go stay at this girl's house who lived on Main Street. Now wadn't that a dumb thing for us to do? We couldn't-
BC: [interrupting] It was smart at the time, right? (laughing)
WW: It was dumb! We couldn't get out! We had to stay in that house cause somebody'd see us, till 3 'o clock in the afternoon. It was the dumbest thing I ever did. And then my sister who taught in school, she taught in the high school, she said to me, she said, 'Wilma Jean,' said, 'Where were you today?' at dinner. We were all at the table. I said, 'I was at school.' She said, 'No you weren't.' That was it, see, so I got caught. I thought I had not gotten caught, but I got caught.
BC: (chuckles)
WW: I think feeling that- I don't know how other people feel, all I know is my own experience . Now in Bridgewater, we used to say if you didn't grow up in Bridgewater, you didn't grow up, that's what we'd tell other people. But I think that there was a protection and a pride- See all these people, they were proud, proud of all us, too, and it wasn't just their child, you know, they didn't pit us against each other like I see a lot of parents do.
BC: I was gonna ask if you had, if you felt a competition, sort of, um, which is what I've experienced some in a lot of ways.
WW: [at same time] uh uh, uh uh. No. Nuh uh. And I don't think my mother and daddy were any different. I think the Brethren Church had a influence. All the churches that- We used to say that there more churches than people in Bridgewater. And there were. I think the churches had a big influence, but I also think- See, during the war years, there, we had conscientious objectors at the college. We had just a little bit of everything, and one of the guys that was a conscientious [stumbles on word] objector, he was one of the greatest guys- He was the most popular kid ever to grow up in Bridgewater, and when he was in college, you know, he just- I remember, he really worried about it. He sweat over it. He just felt his conscious- He had to do it, but he had people who just really refused to wait on him in stores and things like that.
BC: And this was in World War II, right?
0:53:52.7
WW: Yeah, um hum. And my daddy was so mad when he heard that, he said, 'What do these people think they're fighting a war for?' and you know, he says, 'To stop that kind of stuff.' He said, "If Myron (??)-', you know, he said- We knew him well enough to know. He would of, he would much prefer not to have been a conscientious objector, but he was. And he was, and he was. And so, those are the things I think about Bridgewater being so good for me. Experiences that I had, that lot of my contemporaries really didn't have. So-
BC: Now is this a lot of the, the memories that you've written down about?
WW: Oh yeah, oh yeah.
BC: How- What's um- What's your, your motivation? I'm just curious. You mentioned something about you think it's important for your-
WW: Yeah, I think my- Well-
BC: -your children.
WW: I just- My daddy was a great storyteller. He was from Arkansas. So I remember as a child hearing him tell all the stories about his growing up in the Ozarks. Funny, you know, also wonderful stories and, and wonderful people. And cause the pictures of there looked awful, you know, they were- Well, they looked like pioneers and that's what they were, but- And other people like some of my friends in Bridgewater, you know, had very patrician looking families. Well mine weren't like that, they were Irish and they were good pioneers. But, uh, anyway, I think that uh, [pause] What was I talking about? See, I'm-

055:29.0

BC: I'd asked you why you feel it's important to kind of preserve these memories.

WW: It is. Because like- I was not in it. My daddy and his brother wrote a family history over the years. And I thought it was kind of cute you know, nice, and I read it as a progressive- It wasn't till I was about 30 I guess before I really appreciated it, and I think that my children are that way, and see my grandchildren, they are coming along. I think the day'll come when they'll sit with us- But I've written- Every one of them won't, probably, but some of 'em will. And they'll be preserved and they'll say, 'Listen, I remember-' You know, like- Every time a airplane went over Bridgewater, everybody in town looked but us, had to see the airplane.

BC: Really?

WW: Oh yeah.

BC: Because it was so infrequent?

WW: Yeah. And-

BC: Huh. And now it's everyday.

WW: Yeah. And see my dad, he- God, and then-(??) They had barnstormers that came around, and I remember once I was 5 years old and Daddy- It was after church, after we'd eaten lunch on Sunday, and Daddy said, 'Wilma Jean, how would you like to go see the barnstormers?' I didn't know what they were, but I said, 'I'd like to go,' so he and Mother and I went out to the country, outside- It's right outside of Bridgewater, till we were on a farm, a farmer's big field, and there were lots of cars around and there was a airplane, one airplane. And the man was dressed just like Charles Lindberg's pictures. I thought it was Lindberg, I really did. And so we went out there and he- The plane came down about the time we got out of the car, and he got out- I don't remember what he looked like, but I thought he was handsome, you know…you know, in the chopper (??) pants and the leather and the leather cap. And so we watched him two or three times, they came and went, and came and went and Daddy looked down at me once and he put his hat on my head and he said, 'Wilma Jean,' he said, 'How would you like to ride in that airplane?' I said- I had never dreamed- $5 was a lot of money. Was then. And so I said, 'I'd like it.' I thought I would, of course I was scared to death, but I did it. (laughing) I didn't ride in an airplane again for a long time!

BC: But you did there, huh?

WW: Oh, I did there. And I loved- I just thought it was the most exciting thing in the world because Charles Lindberg was taking me up in the airplane (shared laughter). I went to school the next day and told my friend, you know, I was in kindergarten, and I told- I said, 'I went riding in an airplane with Charles Lindberg.' I don't know if they believed me or not. I never even thought to ask them after I realized what I'd done. But anyway, you know, that was the kind of thing that just, that's- It's hard for kids now, and for you, to probably imagine a world like that.

BC: It is.

057:56.2

WW: And yet, it was so interesting, like we had a, we had a Victrola. We danced to a Victrola. Oh God it was terrible, but you know (imitates the sound of the Victrola)…

BC: Was that the one with the big, um- [referring to a horn]

WW: No, ours didn't. It was just one generation ahead of that-

BC: Ok.

WW: -after that. Yeah, it was, but it was square, oak, ugly- We thought it looked beautiful and you know, we thought it was. And people would- Yeah, my brothers and sisters, they'd holler around to people's houses, see, cause we had dances in our home.

BC: Oh, ok.

WW: Yeah. And that was fun. When we'd have a dance, I could invite my friends to come and we'd dance and then the older boys would dance with the girls and we'd wear little evening dresses, so-

See, see that's the kind of thing our mothers did, they made life wonderful for us, in this little town. Oh, they thought when we started dancing we needed a teacher. Well they didn't know that we could already do the dances, you know. And so they hired this man from Harrisonburg, I'll never forget him, he was a- Nobody wanted to go to his dancing lessons and that didn't last long. I was happy for that. But I took art lessons from a woman whose, who uh, later taught, she was the art professor at Madison College. Her husband was the Postmaster in Bridgewater and she- You know, just things like that that I had, I had so many advantages that you just can't imagine a kid in a little town like Bridgewater having all the advantage. Oh, at Bridgewater, at Bridgewater College, see, they had Cole Hall and they had all kinds of wonderful programs there. For instance, did you ever hear of, the uh, wait a minute, the Fitz- (trying to remember by trying different pronunciations) The Black school in Tennessee, they had these wonderful, they had singers, what is it? What is it called? Anyway, well they were famous, all over the world. They became this wonderful Black chorus that sang
0:59:53
all over the world and to raise money for their college. And they got too uppity apparently, because some of the locals, at one time, they burned down their, one of their building. Terrible. But anyway, I remember going to that, my mother was President of the Woman's Club. See they had a Woman's Club and the Woman's Club, they just did everything. And that's the way they raised money for the cafeteria at our school. And uh, …, Julie- FitzJulie/Fitztruly (??) Singers. You can look 'em up in the-
BC: FitzJulie (??) Singers.
WW: Um, yeah. They're on the-
BC: Are they still around?
WW: No, no. Yeah, but they're on, they're on the internet. I've had- Oh- The CCC! See, my daddy was with the Forest Service which was in charge of the CCC camps in our area. It was CCC- Some areas the Forest Service was in charge of it, and some areas the State Forest Service was, and other people, but in the George Washington [National Forest] my daddy was in charge of all the CCC camps, and that was a wonderful experience, because- I mean for me, for a kid- Well the man who was in charge of it in the summer time was Mr. Hopper (??) who was my Dad's Assistant Ranger. And he, they had some nights where they invited me up there for two weeks to stay, well you know, that's a really- Because those men were wonderful, they just couldn't find work. And they were so nice to us, and, and let- They pitched horseshoes at night, I remember, it was just wonderful. But I would never have appreciated it. I think one of the reasons I really remember the Depression so well was because of that, and the other thing was that the men there would call Daddy on Friday nights and Saturdays and Sundays they'd get so homesick. And they'd call Daddy and they'd cry on the phone, you know, they'd say, 'Oh Mr. Casey (??) I'm so, so homesick.' And Daddy never once, I never heard him say, 'I wish they'd leave me alone.' And he'd sit for hours and talk to 'em on the phone. And they built, though. They built Home Quarry (??), they built Skyline Drive, they built all, they-
BC: Blue Ridge Parkway
WW: Did you- Yeah. Did you, uh, ever go to the one that, to that huge snow thing in Washington State? It's a snow, you know, it's a big snow lodge.
BC: Ok.
1:02:18.7
WW: It's four stories and I was there once, I was an adult then, but it's on that loop, you know, that goes around, uh-
BC: Is it Mt. Rainier?
WW: Oregon. Oregon. Mt., Mt. Rainier is Oregon- Seattle- It's Mt. Hood.
BC: Oh, oh. Ok.

WW: Mt. Hood. Mt. Hood. Anyway, the CCC built that. And, so in my writing I had to do research. Well, for instance, I remember for sure that my Daddy- I knew Daddy was at the dedication, see, Camp Shenandoah which was the one up near Shenandoah Virginia. That was the, number one, the first CCC camp to be opened. And Franklin Roosevelt came and he made the speech and Daddy was there. Well, when I started writing it, I thought, you know, I don't want to write this without making sure it really happened. So I got in touch with the librarian at the Library of Congress and I told 'em, I emailed, I told 'em what I was looking for, she emailed me the nicest email back, she gave me all kinds of websites, and she said, 'Indeed you, you're right. And your Daddy was there, probably no doubt because-' But she gave me some of the stuff that he said that day, according, including, he said to the men, he always said that, 'The CCC was the best program he ever started.' She said that day, when he spoke to them, he speaks, says he starts out by saying, 'My boys.' …So anyway, that was wonderful. So I researched a lot of this stuff, because I didn't want- I thought, 'God, I'd-' You know, in the first place you can't trust your memory.
BC: It does funny things. (chuckles)
WW: I swear. Don't tell me, I know, I was-
BC: (chuckling) I'm learning.
WW: I said, 'I swear I remember so and so.' I might remember but it wadn't that the way it was, but most of these stories I was able to track back, and have- The other thing I've got in here, though, like for instance, the- Well, we had an- Our gang, in our neighborhood, on our street, Broad Street Gang. And every other kid in town wanted to be a part of that gang, and so they'd gradually let some of them in, you know, but- The boys were pretty much the ring leaders and my brother Harry, he was wonderful. Harry was five years older than I. He was the youngest, next-youngest though, to me. And he was such a popular kid. He was so popular. Because he just liked everybody, you know, he didn't- I don't know what his secret was, but I can remember that I'd follow along Harry and his gang, and sometimes that, you know, I'd get up close to them, and one of his friends would say, 'Harry, send Cas- Send Angel home.' That's what they called me. And he said, 'Send Angel home,' because I was such a little devil. And Harry said, 'She stays.' And I stayed, you know. So there were those kind of things that I remember that I've written about, and uh-
1:05:07.9
WW: Anyway, every year they had a great apple battle, and it was right in the lot between our house and the village, like three lots, it was a big field and uh- For months, not months, but weeks ahead of time- They'd have it about the first of, oh, second weekend in August. Then the apples'd begin to be on the ground and, cause this was formally an apple orchard, so there was still a lot of trees there. It wadn't an orchard, but there was a lot of apple trees, so they'd choose sides by, you know, with a baseball bat, and you know how they used to, and who's on who's team, and so then they'd spend weeks collecting apples off the ground and makin' sling shots out of branches and limbs out of a rubber, inner rubber tubes. That's what they'd do, and then the day of the great battle was wonderful.
BC: (chuckles)
WW: I tell you, when you read about battles of war, you know, that's- I always think about it. Cause that's the way it was, and we were so little they wouldn't let us play, but- We'd have one of the, one of the outhouses in our yard, we could see- We could go in there and look out the window and watch the teams. And of course we'd always be for the team, whoever it was that was on our side of the house, and uh- Anyway, it was so wonderful. Nobody ever got hurt, nobody ever got hit with an apple that I remember, and yet, I mean, it was an all day ordeal. Hot. It'd be hot, I remember that. And do you know, I said, and the one thing I wrote at the end of that, I said, 'You know, wouldn't it be wonderful if humans could settle their differences with apple battles rather than bombs.' I swear. It just seems so simple to me, and have a lot more fun.
BC: Oh, much.

WW: It was wonderful.
BC: Much. (chuckles)
1:06:53.6
WW: But, see, there was so much of that kind of stuff goin'. It was a very creative kind of a community, and the one reason I know, I mean I know it was but, I've been amazed at how well some of the kids have done, you know, like one of them was a- Well, one was the president of a phone company up in New England, one of them was the Dean of the School of Architecture at University of Virginia. Um, one was a, oh, a lot of doctors, a lot of teachers, a lot of- I'm just trying to think of- You wouldn't think a little town like that would produce this many leader, leaders. There were a lot of leaders. And uh, I…I just know it was really a special environment. Maybe it wasn't. Maybe a lot of people could write the same stories-
BC: But it was for you.
WW: For me it was.
BC: And that's important.
WW: It really was.
BC: What kind of um- Did you write about anything from your time here in Roanoke, or was it mostly about your childhood?
WW: I haven't gotten to that, see, I- Actually I planned a …(??) to quit these stories at the end of World War II, the night the war was over, I remember that so well. Oh lord. Everybody I knew went to Harrisonburg and we all rode in cars round and around and around. Tootin', hootin'. It was really something. Umm. Umm. I also remember VE day. It was terrible.
BC: VE day?
1:08:22.4
WW: It's the, VJ day, V- V- No. VE was the invasion of Europe.
BC: Ok.
WW: That was, that was VE day. Yeah. Oh yeah, that morning see, we didn't know it when we left the house, but by the time we got to Harrisonburg that morning, it was out that, you know, that we had invaded Europe. France. And all the churches in town had, you know, had their uh, bells ringing. It was very somber, it was terrible.
BC: Do you mean for the big amphibious invasion?
WW: Yeah.
BC: D Day?
WW: Oh yeah, D day. D day. Um hmm. V day, VE day was the day the war was over, that's it.
BC: Ok.
WW: In Europe. D day. And see those guys in Harrisonburg were in the same big unit that those Bedford guys were.
BC: Oh wow.
WW: Yeah, but it was- I always forget it.
BC: I don't remember which one, but it was something unbelievable. Twenty-some folks died from Bedford.
WW: That was just from Bedford
BC: Yeah. That was- Yeah.
WW: Harrisonburg had some, but nothing like- I mean everybody knew that Bedford had the worst, and uh, I never did understand why. I'm sure there's a reason why so many of them were concentrated. Although those boys were the main, I mean, with those from that group of 'em from Harrisonburg, New Market, up that way, not to Richmond- This side of the mountain I bet, east of the, west of the Blue Ridge. That's where it was. The big division. That was a hard time. But you know, the war itself was not really that- That sounds so trite, but it's true. It wasn't really that hard on us at

home because I realize now we were really shielded. We were shielded by where the battles were but we were shielded by- Like when the guys came back, I don't remember any of them telling us about it. They would- Now, we'd go to parties or they'd get together and if I say they didn't (??), they'd get sort of in a little group and they'd tell each other war stories. They never did tell us. And I didn't even think to ask 'em, you know, I just thought- I thought about it, but I thought, well, you know, if they want to tell it, they will. It was really, uh, but there's some really brave guys out from there. Leon Garver (??) was a, he was a captain in the Marines and he was a detonator. In the Pacific. He got a silver- No, what's the one bigger than a Silver Star? The next level?
BC: Was it the Medal of Honor?
WW: No, no, he didn't get that, but the one right below that.
BC: I don't know what the levels are on that.
WW: I don't either, but I- Anyway, he was- Now there were a right many of 'em- I knew a guy here in Roanoke who got a Silver Star. He, he was dropped behind the lines in Germany. He got caught- He and just about five other guys, they were in a barn for I don't know how many days before they could get away and get back to their unit, but- It wadn't any Sunday School picnic, but you see, we didn't see it on the television.
BC: Not every day.
1:11:27.3
WW: But I tell you what we did do, though, we used to sit at night and listen to the radio. I can remember so well, Daddy and Mother had, you know one of these stand up ones, but I don't know why, I think it didn't have as good a reception as one of the later little, littler radio, because I can remember that little radio in that living room. We'd all sit around sometimes in the dark listening to the news. I can remember my Daddy just- Sometimes he'd be just- Oh, during the Battle of the Bulge, just grave. And one of the boys in my book died in the Battle of the Bulge. He was- He had all kinds of promise. He was one of the most promising kids that ever grew up there.
BC: Oh man.
WW: He, he went into a building filled with armaments and blew it up and blew himself up too. Saved God knows how many others' lives, but, you just can't think about somebody you knew so well. He was my brother's best friend. I remember when his letter came back. Things like that, you know, that- It's not bragging, you just remember and you just realize, that's a world so foreign to what my children knew, and what, what my grandchildren know. We didn't have any of the electronic stuff. We had radio, of course.
BC: Speaking of electronics, like the recorder and…
WW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. But oh lord, but they had these awful- What was it? Tape, it wasn't tapes. What was it? What was the first recorder?
BC: Was it like an 8 track?
WW: Uh?
BC: 8 track? Or-
WW: No, I'm just thinking about what was the first thing that was used to- Uh, it was film, wadn't it? It was like on film, used to record people's voices.
BC: I think it was a- Was it a small little cassette recorder?
WW: I guess it was, yeah.
BC: maybe.
WW: I don't know. It was terrible. (laughs) You would never get it to work.
BC: Yeah.
1:13:24.6
WW: I don't know if I've told you a single (??) thing that you really needed, but I don't know, but it's fun.

BC: It is fun. (laughs) And you have told me a lot. And who knows, we might have to do it again sometime?
WW: I'd like it.
BC: Yeah. Cause we're probably at about that wrap up time-
WW: yeah, I think so.
BC: -I mean I don't want to get you to the point that you're so tired you don't want to talk to us anymore. (laughs)
WW: No, not that. It's just uh, I think it's just sort of, you know, I talked out.
BC: Uh huh. I understand. Well I thank you very much for your time today Wilma-
WW: Oh I really love it-
BC: This has been great.
WW: But you know, anybody likes to talk about their childhood.
BC: It's fun too, listening to you, because, growing up in Bridgewater, and living in Richmond, and then living here, I mean you really got the rural, the urban, and the kind of in between, and now it's more of the urban, but then, from what you're saying it was more the rural.
WW: Oh, but Roanoke?
BC: Yeah.
WW: Roanoke is like a big town, it's just, out grown, you know, not outgrown, but just grew and grew and grew. Roanoke has never had the feel of a city, to me. Even Richmond, even Richmond wasn't really a city like, like Washington and New York, but still and all, but- See Richmond just went bad. Well, it just allowed the downtown to just become all Black, and all, and stayed sort of like, 'Just get there behind that line, kids, and shut up.' And of course they didn't, they just acted out all the time. And so. Roanoke- The policemen here were different. I can remember Mac Nash (??), and this was a white friend of ours, who was, he just had a terrible drinking problem. It used to just kind of, I don't know if he was spoiled or what, but he was a real cute kid, you know. He was always into trouble. And I remember Mac (??), uh- I've forgotten where they were, cause this kid was, let me see, he was- He was younger than my husband, but he was you know, of that generation, and he was someplace and Mac, someplace in this area, and Mac told him, 'You go home.' And the kid said, 'I can't walk.' And so Mac put him in his car, police car, took him home, took him in to his mother and told her, you know, he was drunk and said he's afraid he'd get hurt. Instead of just 'clap', putting him in the slammer, you know. That kid, though, that kid, he died anyway. And he was- He went into the Navy and he- I mean, this- You just can't imagine what he- This was the kind of kid he was, he was on one of the boats, you know, one of the boats that you get on to get into a big boat and his boat was leaving. He was going to miss his boat, you know, he had went AWOL. And so he was in such a rush that he tried to jump from one boat to the other and he didn't, and he missed it, and he went down, and the boats….[crushed him??]
BC: Oh man.
1:16:21.6
WW: Yeah, I mean, he just- I hate to laugh, but you know you could've just seen his future. Like Leonard Keaton (??), there's just some people, some kids you know are just never going to do it. It's, it's so hard.
BC: But, as your life demonstrates, you keep trying, and-
WW: That's right.
BC: -hopefully there's a lot of 'em-
WW: That's all there is to do-
BC: that still make it.
WW: Nothing else to do. You can either do it or turn your back, and-
BC: That's a lot harder.

WW: It's awful. I just can't. I don't know, I try not to judge anything or anybody, cause you know, you can't compare lives, but I just cain't imagine living a life here if I wasn't engaged. You know, I just think it's- That's what life is to me, is to be engaged.
BC: And that, um, very adequately describes why you're so interested in neighborhoods. (chuckles)
WW: Uh huh. I am, I am, I am. I'm interested in, I'm really interested in Roanoke. I really hope and pray that Roanoke's school systems will end up, the parents and everybody, I really feel that that's where the big undone work is still to be done, and I don't know how to, you know, it's just such a big job because I know from experience the only way change brings, comes about, is from person to person. I don't know of anybody in this world whose overcome anything that didn't, couldn't say it was because of Mr. So-and-o and Mrs. So-and-so, and my Daddy or my Mother. You know, and I just think-
1:18:04.8
[interruption by someone coming into room asking for her cigarettes]
1:18:20.0
WW: You know what I'm talking about? I'm just- And sometimes I get into trouble at TAP with the Blacks, you know, because I'd say that. I'd say, 'Look. Look. The system can only do so much and-' I used to say, 'You've got to-' I said, 'Not just Blacks', but I said 'All poor people have got to learn they've got it within themselves to really, if they get together, to just, to get what they needed.' I mean I really think that's true.
BC: And then they gave you a hard time for that every once in a while?
WW: Oh, yeah, sometimes, yeah. They'd say, 'You don't know what it's like.' And I'd say, 'No I don't, but I also know, I know what it takes.' I know what, I know what my parents meant to me and I can't imagine you know, being anything, feeling like I could do anything if it hadn't been for them. See that's the other thing is, people just, all you need to do is just know that you are as important as anybody else. And you just have to speak up and you have to say what you think is right. I don't know. Anyway.
BC: All those life, life lessons, right. (chuckles)
WW: Right, right.
BC: Well, Wilma, thank you very much.
WW: You're welcome. I'm very, so glad to get to know you.
BC: It's been a pleasure.
WW: And you are a- What year are- You're doing graduate work, you said.
BC: I am. I'm, it's-
WW: Where'd you grow up?
BC: I grew up in Bedford.
WW: Did ya? Oh Bedford's a good place.
BC: And lived there, I was born in Baltimore, but then pretty quick after that moved to Bedford, my folks did, and then I lived there through high school, then left for a year, came back and went to Roanoke College for, so I lived in Salem-
WW: It's a good school.
BC: Um hmm, very good school. And then I lived in Covington for a year with a job-
WW: Did you?
BC: and then I moved to Richmond for about a year and a half, and-
WW: What'd you do in Covington?
BC: I worked for the Health Department.
WW: Cause my, brother, my brother Harry that I loved so much, he died when he was 27 (??), he lived in Covington. He had four children, had a one time only heart attack, and died when he was 37

(??), but he, now, he really made a mark though. The ball- The athletic field in Covington is named after him, Casey Field.
BC: Oh yeah.
WW: Um hmm. Now I remember that, when we went over there for that dedication, and- yeah, we could not understand how Harry could live in Covington and like it after he'd lived in Bridgewater, but he did, he loved it, he loved the people.
BC: It's good people out there. Well it's, same as anywhere, my wife complains about the way the paper mill smells, Mead Westvaco, and then I said, 'But there's good people.' (chuckles)
WW: I know, that's right. There is. Otherwise, it would have died years ago. I sometimes I used to tell Bobby, his wife, I'd say, 'The reason they're good people is the only way you can keep people here is by being good to people because nobody else would stay.'
BC: (chuckles) Might be some truth to that.
WW: People who live there say they don't smell it though usually unless the wind's blowing the wrong way.
BC: Yeah, and unless it's a real bad day. I grew to not really notice it that much, as well. Well let me turn this….

[end of interview]