

Interview Transcription

Interviewee: Claudia Akers

Interviewer: Brian Clark

September 17, 2007

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 was conducted in Claudia Akers' personal room in the assisted living facility. There were a couple of interruptions.

Interview Start

[Claudia did not hear many of my questions the first time. If the transcript shows her continuing on after a question, she did not hear it.]

0:00:00.0

CA: That sound right, right? (chuckles)

BC: So you were born, April 25th, 1912?

CA: Yeah, nineteen- Uh huh.

BC: That's a long time ago.

CA: Yeah. Hanging in there aren't I?

BC: Yeah, you are.

CA: And I've had two husbands to pass away on me, and, well I reckon, let's see- I got one, two sons I reckon, they- One of 'ems a Johnson and one of 'ems Akers, Bill Akers. I don't know, you might've heard of him.

BC: I haven't.

CA: He works at- Where's he work at? GE. He works at GE. He comes by here every day, same time. He, he don't go home without seeing me.

BC: That's great.

CA: Yeah it is. He's a- Well, he's been my base, you know, to talk and tell him anything I want to and he comes all the time, everyday. He don't miss a day. If he does, he calls me. So that's the way that goes.

BC: So Bill is your son?

CA: Huh?

BC: Bill is your son?

CA: Well, my oldest son is- He's retired. He's at home. Yeah, he comes once and a while. He's a Johnson. Robert Johnson, I reckon everybody- I call him Bobby.

BC: Now-

CA: He lives on- Now let's see, I don't know the, what road he lives on now. I don't write or don't go there—haven't for a long time. It's not in my memory. Or Bill either, for that matter. (laughing)

BC: That's ok. (chuckling)

CA: They come, but I don't know- I've just lost out on their addresses.

BC: Now you mentioned your address.

CA: huh?

BC: You mentioned your address.

CA: He did?

BC: Was it 4308 Longwood Ave?

CA: Yeah. Yeah, that's the one where I lived before I came here, or wherever I was- They put me somewhere, it wadn't nice like this. It wadn't- I was treated awful. And whatever they gave me to eat, I never could eat it and I lost- I was always real fleshy. And I just went away to nothin'. And when I, I didn't even know my own self because I lost the weight so, and I didn't look like myself (chuckling), and I had red hair then, and, oh me. I don't know. It's just all been a pipe dream. You might say. It come and went. But, I try to think of a little of it, and I try to forget a whole lot of it. So that's the way that goes.

0:02:37.9

BC: What are some things that you like to remember?

CA: Huh?

BC: What are some things that you like to remember?

CA: Oh, gee. Wish I could think of some. I've got plenty of memories. I should have-

BC: [interrupting-Claudia did not hear] Just putting them all together?

CA: I've had two husbands. Yeah, both of them were nice fellas, nice men. And, they died younger than I am. Uh, now, I'm ninety- what, four? What'd I say? (laughing) I forget how old I- I mean what year I was born. I was born nine- Must have been 1912, wadn't it?

BC: That's what you told me [Claudia started telling stories before I could get the recorder started].

CA: Yeah, well that's what's right, I guess. That's-

BC: If you want to change it later, we can.

CA: Huh?

BC: If you want to change it later, we can.

CA: Oh well. I think I'm right, but?

BC: How long did you live at Longwood Ave.?

CA: Oh gee. Long time. I don't know that- Long time I lived there. Well, I lived there till they took me to put me in some nursing home. My sister died and left me alone and I fell and injured myself and I- They had to put me somewhere and they put me down in some nursing home but I- I couldn't- To save your life I couldn't tell you where it was at. It was down the valley here somewhere. And they must've just- I just fell away till I wadn't a nothing but skin and bones. I probably wouldn't eat their food, you know, sometimes people just stick any old food in front of you and think you'll eat it. And I didn't. I was- To fall away like I did, I was just so skinny and, and I didn't know my own self hardly. Course I never had nothing to look in. (laughing) Didn't know my own self. But anyways, Bill's always been- But I think, you know, he had more on him than he could take, I know he did. He couldn't just- But he did the best he could, bless his heart. He's my, I reckon he's my- I have two sons and one daughter. She- I don't know, did I tell you one daughter? Or, cause I-

BC: No, you didn't.

0:04:59.6

CA: (chuckles) And she works at Hecht's. And she's in the beautician stuff, she buys and sells make-up, you know, all that stuff. She works there. And uh, she comes when she can, but keepin' house and cookin' and goin' to work, I know what that is, so-

BC: It's busy.

CA: (chuckles) Everybody does, don't they? I know I did. Had a lot of that. But, anyways, I'm here and I like it. Everybody's- Course, I don't go out there and sit where the rest of 'em- It's too cold, I cain't- Less I can put on my overcoat. (chuckles) I can't stay where it's cold. I- Bill'll come in here, he'll cut it back, he'll say, 'Oh Mommy, it's hot in here.' I say, 'Well, cut it back. I'll put on

my overcoat.' I kid him a lot. He say, 'Awh, it ain't that cold.' But, he comes everyday. He don't miss a day, got to see, going to see if Mama's doing alright. (chuckles) So that's good of him. I don't know what I'd- Course he put me down here. I reckon he feels like he oughta look after me.

BC: I'd hope so. (both chuckle)

0:06:10.2

CA: Yeah. He does. He looks after me. He comes right straight on from work and oh, stays till- Sometimes his wife calls him, sometimes she don't. I say, 'Hon, don't, don't neglect your home life.' 'Oh Momma, I ain't neglecting nobody. If I do anything, I neglect you.' And I say, 'No, you don't. No, you don't.' We have little arguments. I say, 'You go home cause Momma don't no want a, you know, messin' up your married life.' I said, 'Awh-' She's real sweet. She wouldn't- She don't care, I know, but, I, I just know she's- She had a daughter, got married last, about two months ago now. Her picture's over there, she- She's, she's real sweet girl.

BC: [At same time] Does that make you a grandma?

CA: [At same time] She comes around and sees me every once in a while.

BC: Does that make you a grandma?

CA: Yeah, no- I'm not. Yeah I reckon I am grandmom, but (chuckles)- Yeah that makes me a grandma don't it? Yeah. I guess I'm grandpa [used wrong word], grandma several places.

BC: Um hmm.

0:07:17.7

CA: And I've got one, uh, I reckon, uh, one grandson named his baby after me. Claudia.

BC: Oh wow.

CA: Yeah. He come and said, 'Nan. I want to ask you something.' And I said Ok, hon, well- He said, 'Would you mind if we named our baby Claudia?' I said, 'Oh Lord, I'd be tickled to death!' (chuckling) So he gave me a picture of her. She's over there on the dresser. She's real- She's just growin' like a little weed.

BC: Is this the, the young one over here? [went over to dresser to look at pictures in room]

CA: Uh huh, yeah. She's about, she's probably about four months old maybe. More than that old. I can't keep up with 'em, but, she's comin' on. Course I don't see her like I'd like to, but- (laughs)

BC: Try and spoil her? [Claudia didn't hear my question]

CA: That's her name. I said, 'Lord no. Name her after me. That's fine.' So I ask Claudia everyday how she feels. (laughing) Bill said, 'Mama, somebody's gonna think you're crazy.' I said, 'Oh no. I talk to her, ask her how she feels.' And he just laughs. Tells me I'm- I said, 'Awhh, just somebody to talk to.' (laughing) Even if she don't know she got a grandmom, yet. Oh me. Well, that's just about my life here, it's pretty nice.

0:08:39.4

BC: Now, have you lived in Roanoke all your life.

CA: No. My first hus- I lived in Huntington, West Virginia for a long time.

BC: Oh really.

CA: My first husband passed away, and I come back home.

BC: And were you born in West Virginia?

CA: No, I was born here in Roanoke.

BC: Here in Roanoke. Ok.

CA: Um hmm. Yeah. Born here in Roanoke, Virginia. And I married and went to Huntington, West Virginia. I lived there till my husband died and then I married- Let's see. I can't keep up with my husbands. I said- Well, I had two I guess. My first husband was a Johnson, I think. You know, stuff like that disappears- I'm glad it does kinda- But it comes and goes, you know, your mind does on things. And uh, I think I went by Claudia Johnson for a long time. Then I married a- Who did I marry then? Bobby. Oh me. What I'd tell you any before that? (laughing)

BC: You, you told me Bobby Johnson.

CA: Bobby Johnson. That's his name.

BC: [at same time as CA] And then there was a Wilson, wasn't there?

CA: Well that's who- That was my first, that was my first husband was Bobby. Bobby wadn't- No. That was my first child. Bobby was. And uh, Billy's by my last husband. The one that comes all the time, stays with me pretty close, knows what I- Well he, in fact, he put me on here- I didn't know a thing about it till I walked in here. (chuckles) So, he looks after me. He comes and- Everyday. He don't miss a day. If he don't stay long, that's ok. If he does, I'm glad he comes and checks on his mom. 'Yeah, I'm gonna check on you mom.' (chuckles) I said, 'Yeah, I know you are. But don't neglect your family for me now.' 'Oh, I'm not, I'm not neglectin' nobody.' (laughing) But, I'm sure- He sits down here, relaxes and almost goes to sleep sometimes. But, that's the way it is, anyways. And this is a nice place. You have good food. The food's really- You couldn't find it no better. Course, I...I was always told I could, was a good cook. But, I'm glad I don't cook. (laughing)

0:11:16.6

BC: What did you like to cook?

CA: Oh, everything, I just cooked everything. Green beans, potato salad- I uh, worked in Hollins College for a long time and then I had- That's where I went from, when I went to work, I worked at Hollins College a long time till I had to retire.

BC: What did you do at Hollins?

CA: Cook- Uh- Fixed, made salads. Took after the girls, looked after the girls and made, to see if they made 'em right. I was kinda the overseer of the dining room, you know, just uh, what went on, what- How many tables to set up, and- Sometimes you set up all of 'em, sometimes you just some of 'em, but they have to be told and then I had- I always helped 'em, jumped in and went along with 'em, everything. But it was fun, I hated that I had to- Mr. Woodson, did you know him?

BC: Unh unh. No.

CA: Well, he had a big restaurant downtown, then he took over- When I, well I didn't know this till after I'd worked at Hollins for awhile. He, he took over the Hollins, uh, like territory- On eating and- Like kinda like- It's kinda what's reminded all this downstairs, you know, when, I had to see everything was ok and ready to eat and what was havin' and what to cook and all that mess and- (chuckles) I worked there till they retired me, so- I went then to- I went to the silk mill, worked till they finally retired me there, from there. And- I had a-

BC: Now what was the last one? [didn't catch 'silk mill' during the interview and CA didn't hear my question]

0:13:00.7

CA: I had a son to bring up, you know, and I worked- I liked to work. Well, I liked to work in food and- Course I didn't have much to do with the cookin' or anything of it, but I had to see that everything went right in the dining room, and- It kinda puts me in mind of all this [kitchen at Our Lady of the Valley], puts me in mind of me overlooking, you know, and everything. But it's- Bill said, 'Mom, it's kinda what you did when you was working.' I said, 'Yeah, it is.' Kinda like- (laughs)

BC: Very similar. Yeah.

CA: (laughs) Oh me. But-

BC: Were you able to, or did you take any classes or anything at Hollins when you worked there? [CA didn't quite understand my question, based on her following answer]

CA: I don't know. I haven't decided(??)- Mr. Woodson, I think's passed away. He was the one that run it. He was a mighty nice man to work under. No, they probably wouldn't take me now. Nothin- (laughs) They think I'm too old now, and I don't, I don't think I'll try to work anymore. But, I did enjoy it. I enjoy doing the same thing that's goin' on here now, but I, you know, I don't say nothin'. I think everything's all right.

BC: Good.

CA: But it puts me in mind of Hollins.

BC: Good memories.

CA: Although there wadn't quite as many as there are here now. But, there was a right good crowd, Hollins. Went to Hollins College, yeah, there was. Big bunch of 'em. My daddy one time know how many tables we set. We puts 'em in mind and- We just had to set the tables up just, just like, you know, they ate everyday, three times a day. Breakfast, dinner and I reckon supper. Whatever. I call it supper. (laughs) And- Awh, it was fun. I hate I had to go, but when you get a certain age you have to go, so-

BC: Understand.

0:14:55.1

CA: I went on home, stayed with my mom, wherever I'd been staying of course. I think at the time, I was married, maybe. I had a- My sister is passed away last month and uh- I- Oh- She's- I'm the baby of the family and she passed away last, last month and we come down off on- She was goin' with a fella and I had a Ford, one of these one-seated Ford cars, you know. We went up on a mountain to see some people and as we come back, the lights blinded the guy that was goin' with my sister then, blinded him and we had a wreck and I went over in Back Creek.

BC: Oh no.

CA: And when I woke up, I was, all I seen was...a bottom of a car, you know, layin' on top, well it wadn't- But I had, I had a right- I think it hurt my side here. It hurt this side, that's why I probably- I have problems with it now. I can't- I have a lot of pain with it and I been, these, runnin' these girls here crazy about pain. Well, and they gave it to me though. I said I don't ask for it unless I need it. I don't want to be no- (short laugh) I said, 'But if I need- If I ask you for it, I wish you'd give it to me, cause I don't ask for it unless I need it.' And sometimes I'm in pain and I need it, but otherwise- But anyway, when I woke up, I was laying in Back Creek with that Ford- I- It was my car, a Model T Ford on top of it. I was looking up at that- It was- I- It knocked- It must've knocked me out for awhile, but when I come to, well, they could get to me, get that car off of me. (laughing) I was, I was working on- The whole inside of it, I could see it. I said, 'Oh' I'd like to not made that trip. I had- It was a long time getting' over it. I don't reckon I ever did, really.

BC: I bet. How old were you then? Do you remember?

CA: No. (laughing)

0:17:12.3

BC: It was a while ago for a Model T.

CA: No, I was probably- I was probably in my early thirties, maybe, bout along in there. I wadn't very old. I was just young when I married, the first time. My husband died, then I married again. I was a Wilson. I married a Johnson. Then I married Akers. I married, I had three men, they- All of 'em- I had three good husbands and every one of 'em the good Lord took.

BC: It's good that you had three good ones.

CA: Yeah. That was something else, you know, thank for Him (??). I- Here I am, all of 'em was good men. And uh, I don't know, it just- But I really never reckoned, never- Kind of been on the swirl ever since. I'd go home, stay with mom, my mother till she passed away. And uh, my sister she passed away too, so- I was there in the process of selling, going to sell my house I reckon. Well, I guess I don't [need the house anymore], unless I marry again, I don't reckon- (laughs) I don't know about that. But anyway, it's a nice home. But, Bill said- Billy, that's my son, he takes care of things, he said, 'Mom, you can't go back home to live now. You got- The doctor says, positively, you can't live by yourself.' And I said, 'Well, I can marry again,' I told him. Well, he could've said, I'm all done with you. Oh, I kid- I was just kiddin' him. I said, 'Well, I'll get married again.' 'Get married again?!' [Billy said.] ...I carry on with him.

BC: What uh, what neighborhood is your house in?

CA: Huh?

BC: What neighborhood is your house in?

CA: That I lived in?

BC: Yeah, the Longwood-

CA: You know where the City poor farm is?

BC: No I don't.

CA: Well, it's like goin through Roanoke, you go to Cave Spring- [Claudia is actually starting to describe the house she grew up in, if I'm not mistaken—not the Longwood Ave. house.]

BC: Ok.

0:19:25.7

[Interruption by Gail, explaining that another resident was ready for an interview.]

0:19:33.3

CA: Uh, what you got somebody else you-? (chuckles)

BC: We have a couple today, so- But no rush, we have time.

CA: What- What was I saying?

BC: Tell me where your house was. You go through Roanoke-

CA: You know where uh, well you know where the City poor farm, if you don't know, it's on that road, goin', like goin' to Cave Spring. You turn off and- I wanted to tell picture, uh Bill, to give me a picture of it here. A real good picture of it, the other day, showed it to me, but I didn't ask him for it and I'm going to tell him I want a picture of it. Uh, it was a nice home. But, it's just doctor's orders, so they going- Mama can't stay by herself. Yeah, might fall and break my neck next time.

(chuckling) But, they look after me here. Well, I mean, he does, but they come in, check on me, sorta like she poke her head up, see if I'm Ok, you know. Sometimes, and sometimes they don't. And as I say, I'd go out there and sit in that place [the front lobby common area] but they all, it's just too cold for me. If I could sit on the porch, I'd go on the porch and sit, but that cold, I can't stand it. Bill comes in here and fusses, sits down there, 'Momma, you (laughing), you freezing me to death.' I said, 'Well, turn it on, fix it for how it suits you.' I said, 'I just can't get, be cold.' And I'm not cold. It's plenty warm in here.

BC: Feels good.

CA: Now, now I guess it's pretty warm.

BC: It feels good.

CA: Now, I put on this, I thought, 'Well, if I go down there to that dining room it's cold sometimes,' and I put on something heavy. (chuckles) But I think it's too heavy for me to sit in here. But, anyways-

BC: Now, Sherri was telling me that you had an interesting story about how to get to school.

CA: Do what?

BC: Sherri was telling me that you had an interesting story about how you got to school.

CA: How I went to school? (laughing)

BC: She said something about riding trains?

CA: Oh, yeah. (laughs)

BC: What was that all about?

0:21:30.4

CA: Well, train just went like- You go down from our house, bout...like you'd go from here to yonder. And uh, they'd go right along our house, by our house, you know. They'd always flirt with my older sister. They'd blow that horn. When they'd- That passenger train, all them men, they'd blow that- But uh, when we'd be goin' to school, that's all I'd hear. I'd get on till the man in the caboose come out and get me. 'Get off there, girl!' Scare the fire out of me, and I'd jump off. 'Don't you know better than to settin' on-' I'd be settin' on the step riding to school. Yeah, I rode it. And they'd fuss, and- I won't- But she never did tell momma, but Lord now, I said, 'Don't tell her. You know what a fit she'd have!' Cause I was the baby of the family, I reckon. But I liked to ride on the-

I'd sit down on the steps ridin' on, you know. They went real slow. You'd just get on, get off. And, (laughs)- Cause there's- It wadn't no fast train. Now I wouldn't try to jump them passenger trains. Oh boy, they went fast. But them freight train, them guys would come out there, 'What are you doing girl?!' Scare the shoot out of me. (laughing) I'd jump off- If I'd have heard 'em, course I'd have jumped off, you know, but I didn't. I- You couldn't here everything.

0:22:50.3

BC: How far was it to school? Or, how long did it take to ride?

CA: Well, it was a mile, a little more. It was a long ways. Yeah it was. We- But I never did that, after that. I never did try it no more. (laughs) I thought that was- Got me for that, I know, if I'd jump on it again, they'd probably get me. Well it was just like you'd walk along, you could sit down on it, it was goin' so slow, you know. But, now, passenger trains that go up through there, man they'd blow their little horns and my older sister would get out there and raise a lamp you know. She flirted with them all the time. And uh, I guess I picked up some of her goin's. And, she did, she got married and left home, but- They'd holler, they'd blow their horn, blow, blow, blow that horn, all them trains. She'd get the lamp, and it'd get to winter and it'd be dark, and she'd wave it. (laughing) Now that's how she flirted with the railroad men. I used to- They'd come and work on railroads, you know, tires, and everything. Goin' to school, we liked to, always liked to ride the, liked to walk the railroad cause it wadn't a lot of dirt- Well, there wadn't a lot of dirt. Wadn't like walking through the, uh- You had to walk through a mountain to go to school, to Ogden School out there.

0:24:14.6

BC: Is that were you went?

CA: [at the same time] I don't know whether it's still sittin' there or not. It was the last time I was around that way, and uh, one of these girls that my son went with some, has built a house right out from our driveway there at home, and, up in the woods like that. They build their houses in woods. She built a house- I don't know whether she knew that or not, but he, he did go with her, I think, a little bit. And uh, and he married some girl. I guess they do all right.

BC: We hope, right?

CA: Yeah, she, she uh, he- Course you know, like he is, you know, he gonna come, do as he pleases, with according to me. (laughing) But I told him not to- I said, 'Don't do nothin' [to] neglect your family, honey,' cause I don't- I'm all right. If I'm not I'll let you know. 'Awh Mom you wouldn't let me know nothin'!' I said, 'Oh, yes I will too.' Oh well, I don't have to let him know. He's gonna come, just- I- So I just leave him alone. He, uh, he's gotta be satisfied, he's been so good to me, look after me, and all of 'em. I just go on with it. Well, he was trying to sell the house, he's not having very good luck, I don't think. They worked on it all summer, you know, redoing it on the inside. It's got upstairs, two bedrooms upstairs and, uh, a closet where you hang your clothes. And it's got, well, dining room, living room, kitchen on lower floor. It's a nice home. I'd like to go back there myself.

BC: It sounds like it.

CA: But I can't. I mentioned it, but I didn't get no where.

0:26:07.3

BC: What did you like about living there?

CA: Huh?

BC: What did you like about living in your house? In that area?

CA: Well- Ohh, I loved work, living out there. It's nice. Course now, the transportation was what was, if you had to go to town, or anywhere, you had to go all the way to south Roanoke County to catch the street car. So, if you didn't drive, which I later- I went to work, bought me a car, so I drove then. I had a car, and I drove. Till, I reckon, I don't know what happened. Some of that I don't remember. (laughs) I don't remember whether I- It was when, after I had that wreck, course, tore my car up. Probably that. Wadn't workin', didn't have any money to, to have it fixed. Maybe I just sold

it like it was and somebody- Well it was a nice little car. Somebody fixed it up and went on with it. But that's what they did with that, I think. And I didn't- I guess I married again, probably...I went to Huntington, WV and lived for a long time with my husband till he passed away. All my husbands is passed away, and I didn't kill 'em. (laughs)

BC: I wasn't thinkin' that. (laughing)

CA: I don't know. I said, somebody said, 'Well sounds to me like you might've given something-something,' you know, just kiddin' me. I said, 'Well, no.' But they all was young men, they wadn't really old. I don't know what. Just had different things that went around. Uh, we had- Let's see what- He- It kinda slips my mind what they worked at. One of my husbands was a, was a, work on cars. And boy was he, if there was anything wrong with your car, he could really work on that. He could put it back just like it was, almost.

BC: That's a good person to have in the family.

CA: Huh?

BC: That's a good person to have in the family.

CA: Yeah. Yeah, he uh, he kept the cars on the road for me, go to work. He didn't live long.

0:28:16.3

[interruption by Alicia Sell dropping off a recording kit, and a few questions that CA asked BC]

0:30:50.0

CA: I had- Let's see, I had two boys, and a girl, when I was raising a family. And I was thinking I lost one of them. I cain't remember. My memory's not as good, like it once was. I don't remember things. But I don't remember a whole lot. I think sometimes well I cain't remember it.

BC: What was your daughter's name?

CA: [Did not hear my question] Yeah. So that's the way it is.

BC: What was your daughter's name?

CA: She works at Hecht's, my old, my daughter. I've got one daughter and two sons.

0:31:27.9

CA: She works at Hecht's. She works in the beauty parlor. And she's- She's nice, you'd enjoy her, I mean she's of course married. She married a Goodykoontz (??), I don't know whether you run up with any or not, but her husband, he's a mess and he's cute though, I like him. I like Georgie. Georgie and I have a, fussin' at one another, but a- Let's see, Bill works at uh-

BC: You said GE?

CA: Well, what's that, what's that-?

BC: You said GE?

CA: GE. Yeah. Bill works at GE. Bob he's retired of course. He's- And Caroline she's working at Hecht's in the beautician part. (chuckles) So that's the way about my, that's about the part of my life, and me, I'm sittin' here doin' nothin'. (chuckles) But I guess I've had a lot to do in my life. I always managed to work and have what I wanted myself.

0:32:44.2

BC: Claudia, what was it like growin' up in Roanoke?

CA: Do what?

BC: What was it like growing up in Roanoke? It sounds like the roads were kinda tough and-

CA: Yeah, they were. Yeah, they- I really think that sometimes if your husband dies, you know, you sorta left out in the left field and sometimes it's a sudden thing and you don't know right from wrong. I don't know. Course I, I stayed at home. I always had to come back home. And just jump in, help out, go to work. I worked, as I say, I worked at the drugstore for a long while- My older sister, she run, uh, McKesson/McKess n' Robin (??). She...mixed, made their medicine, you know, and all the- She was noted for that, you know. She'd go in and fill- And I'd have to pour, I'd have to- I worked with her and I filled Castor Oil bottles, all this stuff, you know that you see in stores. And that's what I

did when I worked there, just helped her out. I didn't get a lot of money, but I got a little bit.

(chuckles) I don't know.....-

BC: Now where was that? Was that in Roanoke?

CA: Huh?

BC: Was that in Roanoke?

CA: Uh huh.

BC: McKess and Robins?

CA: It's on Salem Ave.

BC: Oh, no kiddin'?

CA: Uh huh. It was on Salem Ave. then. And I haven't been, I haven't really been back there- Course I left, married, and then went away. I didn't get home too often. When you had children, your husband works, you don't know that much, so that's the way it is. But, I kinda, I don't much want to sell my home. But, maybe I'd better listen (laughs).

BC: Do you have any really good memories living there?

CA: Huh?

BC: Do you have any good memories of living in your home?

CA: Oh sure. ... It was- Oh, I don't know, I have good memories but I can't think of a whole lot of them.

BC: Were there any holidays, or did you do the big holiday dinners?

CA: Oh yeah, we had all that. Sure.

BC: You said you were interested in cookin'

CA: Had big Christmas trees- Go up there in them woods and cut down the prettiest one we could find and, and bring it down to the house and set 'er up to the window and- She pretty as- I've gotta lotta pictures, but I don't know where they're at. Not here I don't think. Probably somebody, some of the chi- kids probably got 'em. And uh, what- I'll always up and at 'em. I worked at the Hollins College for a long time and then from there I went, I went to uh, silk mill. I worked there for a long time. I worked there I think before I went to, to uh- And then when I went back I went back to work at the silk mill. I worked there till they closed it down. So, whole lotta all this stuff [motions around the furniture in the room], I bought myself. (laughing) So that's the way it was.

BC: That's a good feeling.

CA: Well, I guess it's been alright. Been kinda bad in some ways. I guess we all have that. Good and bad. But, just have to make the best of it and go on. Try to do the best you can, that's been my fix of it. (chuckles) Oh me. But that's the way life is sometimes. I wish I could live it over. It was a lot of fun. (laughing)

0:36:44.9

BC: What's a, what's a really fun thing that you remember?

CA: Huh?

BC: What's a really fun thing that you remember?

CA: Oh, gosh.

BC: Anything in particular?

CA: Go up in the woods, and hang a rope up on them trees and swing out over- (laughing)

BC: Was this as a kid?

CA: yeah!

BC: When you were young?

CA: Yeah, and then when I got big too. We'd go out there and get in that swing and swing up as high- I think that's about where that new house went up there. They probably gonna build houses all up in there. It's a big- It used to belong to Garrett's, was the, old Garrett Farm. Now we first went there it was horse and cattle, mules. It was just like an old- I guess my mom and dad, I don't know if my dad was living then or not. I guess he was. Seem like that's all- Mom, I kind of know when she

passed away, but I can't remember my dad much. I was the baby of the family, so I reckon I wadn't very old. But uh- Walked up the railroad track to Ogden School anyway and rode the railroad (laughing). That was-

0:37:53.8

BC: What was school like?

CA: It was, it um- What was what?

BC: What was school like? Ogden School?

CA: Oh, it was nice. We had- I believe, I don't know- I can't remember now whether it was a one room just starting from the first, second and third and seventh grade, I believe. It went far as the seventh. And uh, I think I remember startin' just when I was real small, just an ol' ... How old was you when you, when you started school?

BC: About five, I think. Six?

CA: Well I think I might have been four or five, somewhere in there when I started. And we'd, we had a- Well, it was right hard to go to school because we had to go through the pines and it rained, or snowed, it just- We had to uh, we'd have to go the railroad track. Momma, she'd worry, so we wouldn't do it. She's afraid we'd get up- (chuckles) My sister said, 'Now see, I'm gonna tell Momma if you get on that.' That's the way that goes, you know. She said, 'I'm gonna tell Momma, tell Momma on you for gettin' on that seat.' And I'd ride a good ways before they'd caught me. 'What are you doin'?!' Scare the fire out of me and I'd jump off. I'd tell her, I said 'You watch for me. When you see him coming through the cab, holler and I'll jump off.' 'I'm not gonna do it,' she said. So that's the way we used to have a lot of fun, that way. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whole lotta fun. I had- I hadn't talked and thought about all that for a long, long time. It was fun. Yeah, it was fun. We, they had them big old banks, red clay banks at the, where the train went through, you know? (laughs) I'm known to ride through them things. Where they cut through the rail line, old red clay. I would jump off before I got to school cause I's afraid they'd pile (??) 'em and get on the- I'd tell 'em I rode the train, though. Say, 'Where a train? What train?' And I'd say, 'Well watch me and I'll jump off sometime when I'm going through that-' Now, idn't that kid stuff? But I did. I'd ride through there, show 'em I was ridin' on the- If the men didn't get me, they'd get me sometime and I wouldn't get to ride. They'd watch me, or they got wise to my jumpin' on it and jumpin' off. Well, mercy, if momma know'd I did that she'd had a fit, I reckon. But, they wouldn't tell on me. (laughing) My sister wouldn't tell on me.

BC: I think most momma's would have fits. [at same time, Claudia did not hear]

CA: 'If you do it today I'm going to tell her!' she said. They didn't though. (laughing) I'd ride a little ways, but I wouldn't ride very far. But it was fun jumpin' on the seat of the cab of a railroad, where they will, the men sit, you know, to watch how everything is goin'. That's why they kept trackin' me, I guess. Oh shoot. But anyway, it was fun.

0:41:09.6

BC: What kinds of things did you do during the summer?

CA: Huh?

BC: What kinds of things did you do during the summer? Like when school was out?

CA: Oh me. Well I tell ya. I went to- My sister run a drug company here, well drug store as I'll have to say. You had to keep Castor Oil, turpentine, all that mess, you had to put up in bottles, and so I'd go to work with her and I'd fill turpentine, so many to a box you know, and turpentine and uh, Castor Oil. All them minor things, you know, that doctors'd give you to take that you could buy over the counter, you know. Course my sister- I'd have to fill 'em up, wipe 'em off, put the label on 'em, put 'em in boxes, and then we'd send them out to the drugstores. And it, see this was a wholesale house. So I went there and filled turpentine, Castor Oil, well, all that stuff that they, that you had by bottles, you know. And then you'd stack 'em- I put 'em in boxes and then send them to the drug stores that, if they had a order on 'em you'd have to do that, so. But I kept 'em pretty well organized

and with Castor Oil, turpentine, oh just so many different things, but I don't remember them too.
(chuckles)

BC: So you worked a lot during the summer.

CA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I worked in the summers with her. Course I had to go to school in the winter, but all the summers I worked with her. She's more like a momma to me than my mother. My mother was always sick a lot, and she [the sister] was the oldest girl, and I had two sisters and a brother. And I'd go to work with my oldest sister, and we had to walk down the railroad track for a long time to go to work. It was...it was hard coming up then, we didn't have things like, like they've got 'em now. And we would have ta hurry and finally I did buy me a car. (chuckles) Bought me a Model T Ford, don't I wish I had that now! (laughter)

BC: Yeah. A lot of people would.

CA: Boy I'd get in that old Model T and go to town, go anywhere I wanted to.

0:43:38.3

BC: What did you do in town when you drove in?

CA: Huh?

BC: What did you do in town when you drove in?

CA: Oh, go to the, one of these drug stores where they sold sodas and then you'd go in where you'd buy clothes, look around, see what's in style, then we'd go to, as you'll say to the drug stores and order up your drink and get you something to eat if you wanted it. That's kinda what it was, you'd sit around these, uh, tables, you seen these- I don't know whether you've seen 'em or not, but there was, there's tables just everywhere. Not the round tables, you know, and so many's at the- And, we'd go in the drugstores and order us up something to eat and drink and sat there and laugh and holler and- It was fun then, yeah it was. You know, I wonder sometimes if children have fun like they used to. I don't believe they do, really.

BC: How come?

CA: They might though. I- Course I don't- Difference, difference in a-

BC: How come you don't think they might have, or why do you think they might not have fun?

CA: Well I know they have fun at some things, but it, you know, like goin' in a drugstore and sittin' down and ordering up your stuff. I reckon you could do it, I mean I just, oh I did for a long time, I guess you could, it'd be fun. ...wasn't like I go out with anybody now. (??) We go sometimes to- Did. Before, before I come out of the cap all round, but I always had a car though. I'd go and get a bunch and we'd travel somewhere. Not far off, but we'd- Them Model T Fords, they could be fixed, most anybody come along if someone break down and they could fix it.

0:45:23.8

BC: How many people did you fit in one?

CA: Huh?

BC: How many people did you fit in your Model T?

CA: Well, you could uh- Not many. (laughing) Probably three could get in there if they squeezed a little bit, in that front seat, you know.

BC: Was it just a front bench seat?

CA: Yeah.

BC: Ok

CA: Yeah, just had a front seat. And then, that was about it. (laughing) But, it took you there and brought you back, that's about all you were looking for then. Sometimes we'd go pick up somebody if there wadn't nobody around and, and go pick 'em up or call 'em up. We always had a telephone, from when they first come in. I'd call 'em up and tell 'em, 'Be ready. I'll be right over.'... We'd go to town, or go somewhere and sit. You used to go up on Bent Mountain and that's where I come off on- That's where I come off and was layin' with the car on top of me.

BC: That's steep around there.

CA: Yeah, it was. It was goin' round that corner and that- I wadn't driving though, I wish I had a been, but- My sister's- One of my sister's friends, Bose (??<pronounced Bows>), was driving my car around this, and he was goin' round these sharp curves, you know, such sharp curves. I haven't been up there for years. I'd love to go.

BC: It's still steep. (chuckles)

CA: Huh?

BC: It's still steep.

CA: Is it?

BC: Yeah.

CA: I would know that bend, if they hadn't cut it down, just as well if I'd- It was a, it was a sharp bend in the road. And it- And I cain't, I cain't remember who was driving us now, less it was this fella that my sister was goin' with. I was on the outside of the, you know, I was just one, one seat Ford, Model T Ford and it had- Just three could set good, and that wadn't good. And I's settin' on the outside I guess that's why it put me in the hospital. Oh well, I got over it. I didn't- I wadn't too bad, I don't, I reckon maybe I- (chuckles) But, I don't know, I got married after that and had ch-, babies so I reckon I was ok.

BC: Sounds like it.

CA: Yeah, I got two boys and one girl so I guess I made it ok.

BC: You did.

CA: Yeah, but it was, it was fun. All- I had a lot of fun growin' up. I wish kids had a lot of fun like they used to, but they don't I don't believe. They seem like they want...(??)- They like to go to movies, and like to do things like that, but, you know, I used to love to get out on the road with the old Model T and have a ball. (chuckles) My momma'd be fussin' all the time, 'Don't you go up on that mountain! Don't you go up on that mountain!' While Harriet'd (??) drive straight for that mountain...(??)(laughing) That the way you did when you was growing up? (chuckling)

BC: I think we all have a little bit of that in us. I did a little bit of that too.

CA: Yeah, that's right. You do, and I tell you, it's fun to think about it and talk about it. But I don't think children have as much fun as we did, growin' up, you know, as I did. I had a lot of fun growin' up. Finally decided to get married (chuckled). And he didn't live very long. He died. He, he worked in the- If you go to Huntington, West Virginia, he worked in the hotel, um, I can't think, I can't- Now I- That won't come to me, what the name, hotel, what the name of that hotel was to save my life. He uh- Pritchard. Hotel Pritchard. Jimmy was head of the, all the work they went on there, you know, like uh, fire, like the- Keepin' it warm, you know, keepin' the whole building- ...Let's see, what was that name of that hospital, that hotel, that they stayed, oh, they worked in- Oh me, can't think of it now, but anyways they worked in it and my, my boyfriend then had a Model T Ford. Oh, I had one and I'd take him (chuckles). Yeah I take him places. I'd go pick him up. And then I married him, and he died too. And that's my life, all my husbands has died, left me, but, my last, last husband he made good money. I'm not poor. He, he supplied for me so, uh, that was good. Yeah, he- Yeah, I get good sized check from him every month. And that, sure feels, sounds good to me. Course I ain't seen it, but- (chuckles) It sounds good. Keeps me here.

BC: It's nice bein' comfortable.

CA: Yeah. Yeah, he's- He lookin' out after me so I, I reckon, I guess I'm better off than a lot of 'em. Cause, he wanted me to have everything.

BC: Did you deserve it? [not sure if she heard my question]

CA: And I guess I did.

0:51:07.7

BC: Did you deserve it? To have everything? (chuckling)

CA: Yeah, I reckon. (chuckling) Yeah, I had- No, I didn't have everything but I had, just a good life. And uh, and I, course married again. He was a- Hadn't talked about my husbands. He, he, he

was a- I married a Johnson, I believe the last time. I hadn't thought about talkin' about gettin' married and havin' husbands. Well I had, let's see- One, at least three, and two of 'em passed away. No, I don't guess I had but two, I don't know. (chuckles) I cain't keep up with 'em. I hadn't thought about 'em in a long time. But uh, they were both good men, if I had two husbands, I think. I won't put that third on cause I cain't place him. (chuckling) But anyways, we- They was there, one time or another and uh, I have one...one son by him. He's retired. He comes in, he comes in and fix the menus for me to eat, most every week. 'This would be good, Mom.' He's, he's married, got a son, two girls, and a wife. He lives out like goin' to- Well, goin' to Bent Mountain, up that way, it's a road that goes out that way. Well, that's the one I lived on till I, until I married and left Roanoke. Seem like, my life's a whole lot of mystery. (chuckles) It's done faded away. I've told you a whole lot of it. But I don't- It's probably more to it then I'm thinkin' of-

0:53:10.1

BC: It's hard to keep it all in mind.

CA: [at same time] I've, I forgot most of it. Yeah, you do. I think of it, a whole lot of it sometimes. But uh, just seem like I married and done like I wanted to do. Well, I worked in Viscose [rayon plant in Roanoke] when I was married. That was- Made pretty good money there. And, when I was younger I worked with my sister, as I say, puttin' up Castor Oil. She gave me money, you know, along. They did, but- That kep' her from doin' it, she had prescriptions to fill for drug stores and I'd do the Castor Oil and the turpentine and all that mess, puttin' it in gallon jugs, or pints, quarts, whatever they wanted. So many pints, so many quarts. It's a wonder I can remember that. But, I am, I've got into it now, it's got in my brain. And uh, they'd pick it up, drugstores'd pick it up. (small laugh) Oh me, it was fun, I liked it. I don't know whether girls have fun anymore, like we- Wadn't a whole lot to have fun with, but then you could go and do and have fun. I loved to dance and boy, I'd go to- uh, I was trying to think of that place where I danced so much. It's going out the other road. Oh gosh. I had, it just come to me now, but I can't think of what the name of it- Probably will, once, sometime when you ain't sittin' there to talk to and I say, 'Dang, why couldn't I have thought of it.' It was a popular place. You could go in there and dance, drink beer, you know and all that stuff. But I never drank anything. I may tasted just ta let on like I was drinkin', (chuckles) but I didn't. I'd be afraid to go home if I was.

0:55:11.8

BC: What kind of dancing did you do?

CA: Oh, well, two steps- I used to do the Charleston...you know, I'd dance up at, I could do that great. And then, two-step, one-step- I could dance most anything. I was, danced up a storm. (laughs)

BC: Was that every week?

CA: Huh?

BC: Was that every week, that you went dancing?

CA: Huh?

BC: Did you go dancing every week?

CA: Oh yeah, every Friday and Saturday night. On the dance floor we were- Somebody come along, 'Let's go dancin', and that's the way I- Momma said, and I was afraid Momma'd worry about me, and I, I tried to keep that from her. I'd say we were goin' to the movie, goin' to a movie. Didn't go to a movie no more than nothin'. We went dancin'.

BC: [at same time] Were there a lot of people?

CA: Well she liked to dance, too, so she, she'd known it. I told her, sometimes I'd tell her, but not all the times we'd tell her we was goin' dancin'. But nobody didn't like to dance like I did. Now I had two sisters, they wouldn't (??) dance, but sure I'd dance any of it. (laughing) I, I was the baby and I could just get out there and do anything, dance any of that stuff. Two-step, one-step, Charleston, I'd do that Charleston and all that stuff, you know. Oh, it was fun.

BC: Which one was your favorite?

CA: [didn't hear question. At same time] I haven't thought about that stuff and you sittin' here listening to me. I hadn't thought about that stuff in a time. That's my life's past history, but it was fun. I'll have to say, I enjoyed it.

BC: That's good.

CA: Yeah.

BC: Now, I, I- What made you, what made you interested in talking with me? I mean, I'm a stranger. (laughs)

CA: Oh, I know, Oh, I know. Well, I don't know! (laughs)

BC: I was just curious. (chuckling)

CA: You just sat down there like you was, might be interested. (laughs) I don't know, not in what I had to say, I just, went ahead and jabbered away.

BC: Well, thank you.

CA: [didn't hear] Well, I have, don't have anybody to talk to, you know, it's kinda good to, you come in, I was goin' to talk to you as all my past, present, and future. (laughs) But, I say don't think girls have as much fun as they used to. They might, I don't know. I really haven't been on a dance floor since I've gotten married the last time, and uh, always- I never did stay out too late and worry my mother. I'd always try to get in before it got too late, if I could.

0:57:47.6

BC: What time did you have to be home?

CA: Well, before two or three o'clock anyway. (laughing) Yeah, I better try to make it before two or three o'clock. Sometimes she'd be asleep...and then I'd get married, and that's the way it is. I was married twice. I married a Johnson the first time and he passed away on me, then I married a-

BC: Wilson?

CA: (laughs) [didn't hear me] My last husband, I can't think of his name.

BC: Was it Akers?

CA: Huh?

BC: Akers?

CA: Akers. Oh me, I just said it not long ago. Slips my mind. Yeah, I married an Akers. Oh me, well-

BC: Claudia, I've taken up a lot of your time today. Thank you.

CA: (laughs) Well, I ain't doin' nothin'. You, you might have a lot of things you want to do and I've talked my head off at you.

BC: That's ok.

CA: Well, I don't have nobody to talk to. Bill come in, watch the news, watch the, looks at the paper. 'Momma, is there anything you want?' and then, time almost to go eat. That's the way we go. But he comes in everyday, sees everything is alright, and- I told him, I said, 'You don't want to make Judy mad.' I said, 'She might not like you comin' everyday.' 'Nah, Judy ain't got nothin' to do.' (laughs) That's the way that goes, you know. Are you married?

BC: I am. I am. Been married for about four and half years now.

CA: Well, that's nice.

BC: Gettin' started. (shared laughter)

CA: Well, if you're happy, I'm glad for you and wish you all the happi-

BC: I am.

CA: Have you got any children?

BC: No, no.

CA: Don't have any children.

BC: No, just dog and a cat.

CA: Well-

BC: Not yet.

CA: Well, I've always liked children, but still, I guess I- Had 'em anyway. (laughs) Yep, I had 'em anyway.

BC: Well Claudia, is there any last closing thoughts that you want to-

CA: Do what hon?

BC: Are there any last closing thoughts that you wanted to offer, or-? Cause I'm gonna have to wind down here and go, go pick another victim. (laughing)

CA: Somebody that lives here, you mean?

BC: Yeah, I'm actually scheduled to talk with another person.

CA: Honey, I don't know anybody here yet. I ain't been here- And I don't get out, plug around like I used to. I probably would though, do a little better than that, but I just- If they come in and talk to me, I'd jabber away at 'em I reckon, but I don't, I'm not much on- Well, if they'd come in, we could talk...sometimes- I have two girlfriends that come see my quite often, course they're married and they come. One of 'ems, I think one of 'ems got a baby, or child. The other one, probably has. I don't know. Some comes more often than the other one then I forget 'em. Whoo, I put this thing [house coat] on this morning cause it was cold in here and now it's gotten hot. (laughs) That's, I've been running my jibber jabber, I'm burning up. I'll have to hunt me up something to put on that's cool. Oh me.

BC: Well Claudia, I want to thank you for your time today. I really appreciate it.

CA: Oh honey, I'm real glad to see you and jabber at you. I hadn't talked about none of that for so long that I guess, I'd...remember, but I, I haven't. I remembered.

1:01:43.9

BC: Oh you remembered just fine.

CA: Yeah, it was, it was fun. I had fun growin' up.

BC: It sounds like it.

CA: I really did. And I had fun married too. Then my husbands all left me, but (laughs) in a good way. So-

BC: Well I'm gonna go ahead and turn this off

CA: [at same time] The good Lord left me here, and took- Let's see, I've been married what, twice, three times? Which is it? (laughs)

BC: Well you told me both. (laughing) I think, it sounded like three though.

CA: Huh?

BC: It sounded like three.

CA: Yes, I believe it is. I've been married three times. And all my husbands passed away on me. Well, I reckon it was time for the good Lord to take 'em. I guess I was good to 'em all.

BC: Sounds like it.

CA: Oh, I think we did have fun. My last husband was kinda old fashioned. His mother lived with us. She was real sweet, but- You know, it uh, he's kinda old-timish like. He wadn't crazy like I was. (laughing)

BC: He didn't stay out til two or three in the morning?

CA: No. He didn't- He might- He did drink, but not out of proportion, but he did like his- Well, sometimes I drank with him. But, uh, anyways, I guess I did when I was goin' with him. Probably after I got married, I didn't drink. Oh, I never drank that much. [Claudia rattling a candy wrapper in the back ground] If I'd've come home drunk my mother'd shot me. (laughing together) No, I might take it to please 'em a little bit, may drink a little bit. Oh well, a little bit of whiskey ain't gonna hurt you, but I don't want to- (laughs)

BC: A little bit won't. A lot might. (laughs)

CA: But it do, it'll make you happy once in a while. (laughing)

BC: It will. It definitely will.

CA: Yeah, I've had some big times, I'll tell you, in my life. I hope the good Lord'll forgive me if I've done anything that wadn't right, but-

BC: We can all hope, right?

CA: Yeah.

BC: Well thank you Claudia, we'll have to-

End of interview