

Interviewee: Emerson Lamb  
Interviewer: Brian Clark  
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

BC: This is an interview with Emerson Lamb for the Neighborhood Oral History Initiative. My name is Brian Clark. I am the interviewer. Today is November 26, 2007 and this is in Emerson's apartment at Our Lady of the Valley. Emerson, thank you again very much for agreeing to help out and do another interview with us.

EL: Yes sir.

BC: Let's start with the basics. When and where were you born?

EL: June 15, 1924.

BC: And where was that?

EL: Newcastle.

BC: Newcastle, Virginia? Any particular location there? Was it a hospital?

EL: A hotel.

BC: A hotel, really? Is there a story behind that?

EL: I was born in a hotel. The old Wick Hotel. Its still there.

BC: And how long did you live in Newcastle?

EL: 13 years I think it was.

BC: After you lived in Newcastle, did you move straight to Roanoke? Where did you live in Roanoke?

EL: On Dale Avenue, Southeast.

BC: How long did you live there?

EL: 7 or 8 years. I bought a house over on Tazwell and after that, I got married and moved out.

BC: When you moved on to the Dale Avenue house, was that with your family? What was your family like as far as your parents or any siblings?

EL: Just me.

BC: So an only child? What about your parents, what type of work did they do?

EL: My mother worked at Viscos. Do you know what I mean by Viscos?

BC: The rayon plant?

EL: Yes.

BC: And what was her name?

EL: Reba.

BC: Was it Lamb? Reba Lamb? What about your father?

EL: No information.

BC: No information. So you were raised by a single mother?

EL: Actually, most of it was by my grandparents.

BC: What were there names?

EL: Wood and Lizzy Lamb.

BC: And did they live in Fincastle?

EL: Newcastle.

BC: Newcastle, I'm sorry. What brought your mom to Roanoke?

EL: Work. She was working over here. And then after my grandparents died, I had to go somewhere so she ended up with me. That's pretty much it.

BC: So you didn't move into Roanoke until after your grandparents died?

EL: Right. I lived with them. I didn't know the difference – I thought they were my parents.

BC: So your mom and you lived both lived with your grandparents?

EL: No, just me. She lived in Roanoke.

BC: So when your grandparents died, you moved in with your mom?

EL: With her.

BC: Oh, OK. What was it like growing up in Newcastle?

EL: Well, it was pretty quiet generally speaking. We had some unusual things that I did. I followed the construction when they were building the road and I'd go and watch the machinery work, you know, mostly I had chores to do of course. It was – We played baseball, things like that. That was about the extent of it. There wasn't a whole lot of activity over there.

BC: What type of house did you grow up in there with your grandparents?

EL: It was an old house. It had 2 stories. Certainly wasn't the best but it was comfortable. We heated with wood primarily. Part of my job was getting the wood in and so forth.

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BC: I was going to ask if that was one of your chores. (EL laughing)

EL: I didn't have too much real responsibility. I used to like to go fishing. There are two creeks there, you know, in Newcastle. Craig's Creek and John's Creek come together less than half a mile from where I lived. I used to like to go fishing down there. Even as a boy. (knock at the door)

Unknown: Hi. How are you.

EL: Hello.

Unknown: Are you busy. I'll come back in just a little bit.

EL: He's doing an interview. I remember one time I was fishing and I was just a kid. I threw out my line way across the creek. When I caught the fish, it was an eel. First one I had ever seen. It was about that long.

BC: About 2 ½ foot 3 foot long?

EL: Yeah. I was pretty well shook up with that. I didn't even take it off the hook. I wrapped my raincoat around it and took off home. (laughing) But that's part of what I did. I did a little fishing, a little swimming, things like that in the summertime. In general, it was pretty quiet. I did have to go after cows everyday. That was about a mile, a mile and a half. They'd wander off up the road. I'd have to go get them and bring 'em in.

BC: Was it a farm that your grandparents had?

EL: Just a plain old country place. They had 3 cows and they had hogs. For a while, they had horses but – my granddaddy was crippled so he couldn't get around very well. A horse kicked him when he was working and broke his legs so he never was any good after that. Arthritis set in. He was in a wheel chair all the time.

BC: Did your grandparents or you have a garden of any sort?

EL: Oh, they had a garden, yes.

BC: So more than just cows?

EL: Yes. They had a regular garden. My granddaddy would get out there – He couldn't walk without canes or crutches or something like that. He had a push plow. You know what I mean by a push plow?

BC: Is this on a horse?

EL: No.

BC: Or just one person pushing?

EL: Yes. It had a wheel on it, you know. He would get that push plow and he'd stay out there in the sun until the sweat would run down in his shoes and make mud. He stuck with it. That's immaterial to anything but -

BC: That's all part of it.

EL: OK.

BC: Did you do any home canning or anything like that?

EL: Yeah, they did. They did home canning. Of course they made butter, cottage cheese, things like that. We had our meat which we butchered each year. It was just basically just living off the land

because we didn't have any money. They didn't have any.

BC: Did they have an income?

EL: No, no.

BC: Oh really.

EL: No income.

BC: Does make a difference in how you live doesn't it?

EL: I'll tell you. I think my aunt maybe paid the rent. She was a nurse in DC and I think she paid the rent for us.

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BC: Was that an old family farm?

EL: No. It was just a place that we got to rent after we left the hotel.

BC: Do you didn't actually own it then?

EL: No.

BC: You were renting.

EL: Not until later on when my aunt bought it for the family. We didn't own it at that time.

BC: Do you remember what road it was on?

EL: Walnut Street.

BC: Right in Newcastle?

EL: Mm mm.

BC: Did you go to school in Craig County, Newcastle?

EL: Yeah.

BC: What was that like?

EL: I did pretty well for the first 7 or 8 years. The last year I didn't do any good and that was one of the reasons why I think people decided that I'd better go to Roanoke to live. So I finished over here. I went one year to Jackson Junior and 2 years at Jefferson.

BC: That was in high school?

EL: Mm mm.

BC: What was the difference in the first 7 or 8 and then that last year?

EL: Well, we didn't have but one classroom. Each class was just one group, 20-40 in a class and that was it. When I came to Roanoke, it was hundreds in a class. (laughing) I don't know how many. It was a tremendous amount. Jefferson was a good school. I won't say nothing against it. In fact, I've got my annual here from 1941-42.

BC: You're kidding.

EL: Yeah.

BC: What was that first day like coming into Roanoke from Newcastle schools?

EL: I was lost. I didn't know where I was, didn't know a soul, didn't know anything. I went in on my own, nobody to go with me. I just had it all alone. It was tough I thought.

BC: Did you have to come in mid-year or - ?

EL: No I started at the beginning of the year - at the beginning of the 1939 semester.

BC: How did you get to school?

EL: (laughing) Good question. Walk. Well, if you didn't walk, you could ride a streetcar, but walk. If you rode the streetcar it cost money. If you walked, it didn't cost anything.

BC: How far was that walk?

EL: Oh, about a mile.

BC: Not too bad.

EL: No, it wasn't too bad.

BC: A little bit of a walk then.

EL: Back then, fresh out of the country, everything was walk there you know. After I came to

Roanoke, I learned the city by taking a – getting a weekly pass on a bus and I just rode it everywhere just to see how the city was laid out. Tried to educate myself a little bit. It was a little difficult, some of it was.

BC: What were some of the hard parts?

EL: Well, you didn't know anybody, you didn't know where to go. You didn't know what you were going to do. After I got to school of course, they led me around there but after you get out of school, you're on your own. You don't even know the children. Didn't have any friends or anything. So it made it a little bit more difficult than normal.

BC: How long did it take you to feel comfortable?

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EL: Uhhh... Probably a year or more. Of course I began to make friends. Of course in junior high, I was on the baseball team and I did get some, make some friends there so that made a difference.

Believe it or not, I have a clipping here that mentions about the school and the letters that were given out.

BC: For being on the team?

EL: Yeah. I've got a letter from track team and baseball.

BC: What position did you play in baseball?

EL: Whatever they needed except catcher. I didn't want to be the catcher. I pitched and I played a lot of 3<sup>rd</sup> base and a lot of outfield. Didn't do too much on 1<sup>st</sup> but I did some of the other positions pretty well.

BC: What about track?

EL: You know its strange. I don't remember a whole lot about that. We had 10 events we had to qualify in to get your decathlon. That was the discus and the shot-put, javelin I think. I can't – That's talking about a number of years ago. That was in '39 and '40.

BC: That is a number of years ago. (chuckle) How much schooling did you complete?

EL: I completed Jefferson and I took a few college courses but I never went to college. I had a few college courses. I took what I liked. I went to the University of Virginia extension and went to Virginia Western some. Just enough to get some credit. Nothing else.

BC: Nothing wrong with that.

EL: Of course I picked up a number of credits if you want to call them credits from the postmaster's meetings that you'd go to. They'd have seminars and you go and get some credit, I don't remember how much but they would give you credit for it.

BC: You mentioned some of the things you did as a child growing up in Newcastle, were there any sort of activities that you did here in Roanoke once you moved here.

EL: Well, yeah. I started working part time around the theaters.

BC: This was during high school?

EL: Yeah. And I worked maybe nights, most anything to get to see the movies for free. (both chuckling) That was one thing. We walked a lot. I had a couple of buddies and we didn't think anything about walking to the top of Mill Mountain.

BC: That's a good little walk.

EL: Yeah. We were up to it. So, that was one aspect of it.

BC: Now, if I say Roanoke, you know, was it Dale Avenue?

EL: Mm mm.

BC: Kinda growing up here in Roanoke, what are the first memory or two that come to your mind as far as – not maybe the first in order but what immediately pops in your head when I say Roanoke, Dale Avenue, that sort of thing.

EL: We lived in an apartment house there. It wasn't a whole lot going on. After the second year or so, I had a couple of friends in the high school and we'd get together and make music. That fellow there.

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BC: This is Bill Atkins?

EL: Yeah. He played the violin for the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and then he'd come up to our place and we'd beat out the old country music you know. He was a fiddler then.

BC: What did you play?

EL: Oh, I played a little guitar and the other boy played the banjo so we made a lot of fuss.

BC: Did you have a big audience in Roanoke for that sort of music?

EL: No, we were in our apartment by ourselves. (chuckling) We didn't have any audience really other than maybe some of the other residents there maybe heard it. That's about all. I don't know if that's of any interest or not but -

BC: Its all of a little bit of interest. (chuckle)

EL: You'll know what to do with it then.

BC: Certainly.

EL: But as far as the things around Roanoke, there wasn't a whole lot. I liked the railroads tremendously, you know. I'd go over and watch the trains. Then, when I got out of the service, I went to work on the railroad. I worked there for 10 ½ years as a brakeman and a conductor. Then, I got a job as postmaster. I worked there for 30 years. Then, I worked for Oakey's.

BC: The funeral home?

EL: Mm mm. 16 years.

BC: That's a lot of workin'.

EL: I retired at 80.

BC: Put in a few extra years then huh?

EL: Yeah. (both laughing)

BC: That's wonderful.

EL: You'll have to ask me some questions – I don't know where to lead.

BC: I have a whole list of 'em. We'll get to 'em if we get to 'em. If we don't, that's OK too.

EL: We want to get to as many as we can.

BC: We will, we'll try. That apartment you had on Dale Avenue, did you have a front porch or anything there or could you tell me a little bit about what that apartment was like?

EL: It was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. We had 3 rooms. We had a bedroom, maybe a sort of living room like and a kitchen. That's all we had. So, it was sort of small, cramped situation if you wan to call it that. But, if you don't know the difference its all the same.

BC: What neighborhood did you identify with, or did you?

EL: Southeast.

BC: Southeast. Wasn't exactly sure where Dale Avenue was.

EL: Its a block off of Tazwell then it runs parallel to Tazwell.

BC: Did you have any chores to do here in Roanoke as far as at home?

EL: Not a whole lot, no. I was able to go out and work in theaters and all. When I worked as an usher, they paid me 10 cents an hour.

BC: Was that big money?

EL: Well, it was better than none. Of course, you could take your whole week's pay and blow it on a meal. But, yeah, we worked – I had an unusual job also with the theaters there. It didn't pay me anything but I got to see the movies for free. I carried the film. I'd go down on Tuesday and Saturday nights and after they'd get through running the film for the movies, they had a metal case they put 'em in and I'd carry those cases down to the American Theater which had a pick up there for the express and they picked 'em up and shipped 'em.

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BC: Is this when they'd stop running the film.

EL: Mm mm. See they changed on Tuesday and Saturday.

BC: And which theater did you work at?

EL: I worked at the Park and the American. And then after I got out of school, I guess I worked a little before over at the Roanoke. I had a regular job there for a while.

BC: The restaurant?

EL: No, the Roanoke Theater.

BC: OK, I'm sorry.

EL: The Roanoke Theater. It was there as part of the old bank building that they added on. The old First National Bank. They took in the theater and the American too I think.

BC: They may have. I'm not sure. I know they're not there now.

EL: No.

BC: From growing up in Newcastle with your grandparents and with your mom, were there any family stories that were passed down or recipes or were there any things that you picked up from living with your grandparents or your mom that you do now that's sort of a tradition in the family?

EL: I don't know of anything. That's a good question but I don't know of anything.

BC: Some people do and some don't.

EL: Yeah.

BC: You served in the military?

EL: Right.

BC: It was the army, correct?

EL: Mm mm.

BC: For World War II.

EL: Right.

BC: You mentioned that you had a wife. Did she serve at all?

EL: Oh no. I didn't marry until after I got out of the service.

BC: Did you have any children?

EL: Three.

BC: Three. What was your wife's name?

EL: Blake, B-l-a-k-e.

BC: What about your children?

EL: Jean, Sandra and Charles.

BC: Jean, was that a girl?

EL: That's a girl.

BC: So 2 daughters and a son huh?

EL: Uh huh.

BC: When did you have them?

EL: Well, the first came along about 1948 and the last one in 1956.

BC: OK. Did any of them serve in the service?

EL: No. My son was on the borderline. He didn't even have to register. Because the registration stopped just when he became eligible to go to sign up. All the children did pretty good. One's a doctor. One was a pharmacist and the other girl was going to teach – I better not tell this.

BC: (laughing) Didn't end up teaching huh?

EL: No. There was a only 2 people that were eligible for the job. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with very high honors and she tried to get a job in Chesterfield County. But I guess the race got into it.

BC: Chesterfield is pretty tough.

EL: Yeah. She was ready to go. She never did teach. She worked as a manager of a Piece Goods Store and things like that but she never worked much at all. She kept house really. The other two were

career people. Now Jean just retired from the VA. She's put her time in and retired. My son, he's way up in Salem.

BC: Still putting time in huh?

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EL: Yeah. I don't know how he does it. He just has so much going for him all the time. But that's his life. I don't try to interfere with it you know.

BC: You might say the same thing about you working 'til you were 80. (both laughing) When you just moved to Roanoke, were there any special businesses or shops that you went to often in your neighborhood in Southeast?

EL: Yeah. There was Sam's on the market and there was on the market, there was a number of stalls that we bought food from and then there was a little store up at the, just a half a block away from where I lived, Solebi (??) Grocery.

BC: Solebi?

EL: Uh huh. I still see one of the boys now and then. The rest of the family is dead I think but the one boy is still living.

BC: Now when you say the market, you're talking about the farmer's market downtown?

EL: Yeah.

BC: How far away was that from home for you?

EL: About 6 blocks I guess. Something like that, 7.

BC: Pretty close then?

EL: Yeah.

BC: Were there any places in Roanoke that were real important to you where you would hang out of a place to go to be alone or just places that you always went to?

EL: I never was – I was a loner but I wasn't a loner, you know? I didn't hang out by myself much. Of course, I ought to take that back and change it because I did have to because I didn't have any choice. Anyway, it was not as much as some places where you'd feel like a person had seclusion. I didn't have that. I guess my seclusion would've been down on the railroad watching the trains.

BC: Favorite pass time then?

EL: Yeah. I remember one time I was standing down there on Randolph Street Bridge and one of these mallies (??) was coming up the track and there I was looking right over it, down into the stack. The engineer down there shaking his head, exhaust blow up there in my face, like to took me away. (chuckling)

BC: Is this where they had all the ash and everything coming out from the coal fire?

EL: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I worked 10 ½ years there and I never worked a day on the diesels. All of 'em were steam.

BC: When did the diesels come in?

EL: '56.

BC: So then right after you were finishing up there?

EL: Uh huh. Well, they actually had gotten some but they weren't using them in Roanoke. They sent 'em down on the \_\_\_\_\_ line or someplace like that.

BC: After you lived here for a few years here in Roanoke, was there anything you missed about Newcastle or that you were glad to have left behind?

EL: I went back a lot.

BC: Did you?

EL: Uh huh. They had bus service over there you know at that time. Catch the bus over there and it only cost a dollar to go so you could afford that. I still have a lot of friends over there in Newcastle. A few girlfriends and things like that. I never was much of on girlfriends but had some I'd go to see. But I don't know of anything in particular that was more outstanding than anything else.

BC: Have you ever, since you've lived here for quite a while, have you ever participated in any community groups or community projects, that sort of thing?

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EL: Early on, I was on the American Legion Baseball Team. As far as community groups, I don't know of any that I participated in. Not a good citizen I guess.

BC: Were there any things in your neighborhood that you got involved with at all or - ?

EL: No. No. There was work and family and that was about it.

BC: That's a lot.

EL: It is. I worked pretty regular on the railroad and then of course my wife and I'd go out on the riverbank lots of times and sit down and just maybe take something to eat or something and just enjoy the time. We used to go up to Salem there. It was pretty interesting.

BC: That's where you went to the river was off of Salem Avenue?

EL: It was up in Salem itself.

BC: Oh, oh.

EL: It was in Salem. We had that Riverside Drive or whatever it is through there that went along side the river. We used to go up there.

BC: Were there any, when you were growing up or even once you were married and working and everything, do you remember any cultural events that you went to in your neighborhood or in Roanoke that really stands out like a concert or shows, performances?

EL: No. Actually, I wasn't in Roanoke that much longer before I moved to Blue Ridge.

BC: That's where you were postmaster, right?

EL: Right. I moved down there in 1951 so time span is \_\_\_\_\_. I enjoyed those things but I didn't take part in 'em much because my wife just didn't care for 'em. So, I stayed home.

BC: Did you ever go back through Southeast?

EL: Oh yeah.

BC: How did that change or did it change?

EL: Yeah, its changing. The last I remember, the old apartment house was torn down.

BC: The one that you lived in?

EL: Uh huh. In fact, the house that I bought over on Tazwell has been torn down. So, they're trying to get rid of me.

BC: Why were they torn down? Were they building something else or just - ?

EL: Just torn down. The tax problems I expect.

BC: How else has the neighborhood changed?

EL: Not a whole lot. Its the same as it was 50 years ago.

BC: Did you live near the big house Buena Vista?

EL: No, no.

BC: Was that over in that area though?

EL: That was where Jackson Junior High School was.

BC: Oh, OK.

EL: It was right next door so to speak. I'm familiar with it from there but no, I lived about a mile in towards town. We had streetcar service right on up to the school if you wanted to take it. It came right by, right in front of the apartment.

BC: And if you could afford to?

EL: Yeah.

BC: You were living in Roanoke up until '51?

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EL: Yes.

BC: So you had already moved out by then. What I was wondering is if you had any memories of



desegregation in Roanoke or the surrounding area. Anything that might stand out.

EL: No, not in Roanoke.

BC: Anywhere else?

EL: I had some knowledge of it in Blue Ridge. We had a black community there. It was a little bit sort of touch and go there for a while. They were pretty unhappy. Then after things began to settle down, the community got along pretty well.

BC: That's good. Southeast was one of the areas that was targeted here recently for urban renewal and went in and did a lot of renovations. Are you at all familiar with that?

EL: No.

BC: Or have you seen what it looks like now compared to before?

EL: No. I haven't seen anything about that.

BC: I'm just curious, having lived there.

EL: Yeah, well, certainly. But that was – My living there was a long time ago. Much of my memory is kind of blotted out anyway. I don't know what's going on. I just can't remember very well.

BC: Memory is a funny thing.

EL: It really is.

BC: You mentioned that your mom worked for Viscos. How long did she work there?

EL: I would say about 27 years.

BC: Did she work there up to the point when it closed down or did she stop working there before that?

EL: I'm not sure. I would say that she worked until it closed.

BC: Do you remember what kind of impact that had on your community?

EL: Well, I wasn't living up there then. It made a difference. In fact, she was still living there in the house and my – I just don't remember what took place.

BC: Were there any other major closings or economic impacts while you were living in Roanoke that you remember?

EL: Yeah. One was American Bridge or Virginia Bridge whichever one you want to call it.

BC: What was that like?

EL: It was a steel erecting plant. They built bridges and things like that. They were right on the corner of – You know where the transfer plant is for the garbage? That's where it was.

BC: How do you remember it impacting the community?

EL: Well, about a thousand people didn't have any jobs after that thing quit.

BC: That's huge.

EL: Yeah, it is. The railroad suffered a whole lot during these times. They had cut offs too. Of course when I worked on the railroad, I was only cut off once for 15 days.

BC: That's not very long.

EL: I thought that was pretty good.

BC: As you were coming back after your service in the war, were there any types of work that you felt weren't available to you for whatever reason?

EL: Oh, I'd do anything.

BC: So, you felt it was pretty wide open.

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EL: Yeah. In fact, after - the railroad was the first job I applied for. I got the job and then I had to get off for a tonsil operation and while I was off, I worked for 7-up. So, I'd do anything. I worked for the 7-up bottling company.

BC: What'd you do for 7-up?

EL: Well, I worked in general for about a week. The next week, they put me in charge of mixing the syrup for the drinks 'cause I was already familiar with not only the machinery but how the drink mix went in. I worked there 4 weeks I guess. My tonsils cleared up and I went back on the railroad.

BC: Did anybody in Southeast that you were familiar with own their own business? Any neighbors or friends?

EL: One of my neighbors had his own business. It was a little store there beside of us. I don't remember his name. Not sure I can come up with it.

BC: Was it a convenience store?\

EL: Uh huh. Just a very small one.

BC: What about Newcastle? Did you know anybody there that owned their own business in Roanoke?

EL: Yes. I knew several people that did. Mr. Elmore, he had a grocery store there where I went to visit quite a bit. Then there were others in town that had – one had the drug store and one had kind of a convenience store. One had a little just sort of a whole in the wall store, you know, not much. And I remember his name, Jim McPherson. But anyway, its hard to remember those names and all.

BC: I have a hard time and I'm not hitting 80 yet so.

EL: Laughing.

BC: Suppose, since you lived here for a good portion of your life or the surrounding area, if you were asked to tell someone who is coming in from out of town who had never been to Roanoke before about Roanoke, what would you tell 'em? How would you describe Roanoke to somebody who had never been here?

EL: You make it hard. I'm not used to that kind of question. It would be similar to everything else. Could tell 'em about the economy and the people and the activities in the community and things like that. Its not being very specific but it is – that's about what I would do.

BC: Are there any specific things that you would mention just out of your experience here?

EL: I don't believe I can answer that one very well.

BC: OK. Fair enough. We'll go on to the next question.

EL: Good.

BC: When you were growing up here, was there a favorite walk or drive that you liked to do that really stands out in your mind?

EL: Yeah.

BC: What was that?

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EL: I used to like to walk – everything was walk – I used to like to walk downtown to just look around. You had all the dime stores and things like down there then. You could stay down there and your eyes -

BC: Just twitching.

EL: Yeah. That was one of the things I liked to do. Then I liked to go to the ball games and things like that.

BC: Where was that at?

EL: Out at Woodrow Stadium. Was that it?

BC: It may be. I'm not sure.

EL: The stadium where they tore it down.

BC: Victory Stadium?

EL: Victory Stadium.

BC: OK, yeah. Did you see a lot of games out there?

EL: High school games. I saw a number of 'em. I had an annual pass to the – just bought the whole thing. Went every chance I got. It was pretty nice. That was one of the other things I liked. Of course, I always liked to go to the theaters in the winter to see what was going on.

BC: Was that a big hang out spot for kids growing up?

EL: No, you didn't hang out there. You could go to the show and go in and sit down, but there wasn't any hanging out unless you were an employee like \_\_\_\_\_. Otherwise, they'd ask you what you were

doing and why. I enjoyed that. It was pretty interesting. Then you walk sometimes, take a walk and go to Lakeside. That was interesting.

BC: This was the amusement park, right?

EL: Yeah. That's right. I keep on forgetting that you might not be up to stuff on these things.

BC: I'm a little younger but I actually do remember Lakeside.

EL: It was nice. We had a swimming pool up there, you know, and all these rides and everything. Had the mountain speedway thriller.

BC: That was one of the rides?

EL: Yeah. That was one of the interesting things we did. Usually, I had to do most of this by myself because my other friends they were obligated somewhere else you know. Didn't have many friends to tell you the truth. I came along. I got there.

BC: It sounds like it. You had mentioned one of the walks that you liked to do earlier and that was to go to the top of Mill Mountain.

EL: Yeah.

BC: I'm curious having been up there when you were relatively young looking out over here recently, what do you really notice that's different about that view?

EL: A whole lot different. You didn't have the big bank buildings and things like that down there. But you had the Mill Mountain Park up there. There was a building up there. I know I went up there one time, once or twice to dances at the Mill Mountain.

BC: Was that the old lodge?

EL: Yeah.

BC: I couldn't remember the name of it.

EL: I couldn't think what it was. Yeah, that's right. Used to go up there to dances and all. It was an interesting place to go even before the zoo. They did pretty well. They had fairly good things going on there. Sometimes they'd have a play or something going on. This was just a place that you could go instead of like the old Academy of Music that they had. You don't remember that one of course. It was down on Salem Avenue, places of entertainment. This is one of the places we used to go for entertainment. Wrestling, boxing, things like that. That was the old auditorium.

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BC: Where was that at?

EL: It was over there close to the N&W station. But it burned down. It was owned by the railroad and they used to have wrestling matches and things like that that you could go to. So you get to thinking back, you can think of a lot of things of interest. I don't know if that was of any interest. It certainly was very refreshing to be able to have something different to do.

BC: Did you feel like there wasn't a whole lot to do? You've told me about a lot but I imagine on an everyday basis -

EL: That's right. You didn't know what you were going to do next. Just couldn't figure it out.

BC: Some things don't change. (both laughing) It sounds like you were here when the star was built on Mill Mountain. Do you remember that?

EL: Yeah, before the star was built.

BC: Do you remember that while it was being built?

EL: Yeah, but I don't remember a whole lot about it. I just remember we could see it going up.

BC: What did you think of it that first time you saw it lit up?

EL: I was very impressed. Star city of the South. I actually thought it was pretty nice. Then they built some radio towers and all up there. In fact, we've got a repeater up there.

BC: For radio?

EL: Uh huh.

BC: For the CB?

EL: HAM.

BC: HAM. That's right. I forgot about that from last time.

EL: You say, "Well, what's the difference?". The difference is that you have to have a license to be a HAM operator. You have to be licensed by the FCC.

BC: That's why everybody has those call signs, call signs.

EL: Yeah, right.

BC: Call signs, that's right. How long have you had a license.

EL: Since 1980. I got mine – I didn't much want to try for it because that code, you know, you had to do Morse code. When I was in the service, when I first went in, that was one of the first things they did is give me a test for Morse code and I was tired and wore out. Shoot, I just flunked that good. So, I didn't figure I could pass it. I refused to even try for it for a long time. My son, he got his and he said he kept insisting that he got to Richmond and he was at MCV and we couldn't communicate without radio or telephone and telephones was pretty expensive. So, I went ahead and tried for it and got it and I moved up and got my next step which gave me voice and so, it was pretty interesting.

BC: What's an MCV?

EL: Medical College of Virginia.

BC: Oh, OK.

EL: I'm sorry, I wasn't -

BC: That's why I'm asking. I just wasn't familiar.

EL: All three of my children graduated from MCV. Or actually, the new name is VCU.

BC: That I am familiar with.

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EL: My daughter graduated from Pharmacy. My son graduated from Medicine. And my other daughter graduated from the Teaching section.

BC: Did pretty well.

EL: Yeah, they did. They've done well. I certainly am proud of 'em for their – they never did give me any trouble.

BC: That's good. Well Emerson, I'm pretty much out of questions but is there anything -

EL: C'mon.

BC: I know, we made it through.

EL: Oh, no.

BC: Is there anything that I've kinda sparked that you just want to tell about or another one of these vague questions for you?

EL: I do remember the streetcars.

BC: What were the streetcars like? 'Cause I know now they're talking about potentially bringing back one. What was that like?

EL: They were just like a railroad car almost. They were on rails and they were powered by electricity by the wire. They'd haul 40 or 50 people on one car. And I've seen 'em loaded.

BC: I bet. And you said they went all over town?

EL: Yeah. And down at Campbell Avenue and Jefferson Street, they had one of the few diamond crossovers that there were in the world.

BC: What is a diamond crossover?

EL: It means that you could come down – You've got 2 tracks coming in from both directions and you can go any direction off of 'em.

BC: Oh wow. That would be helpful.

EL: Yeah. And that's one of the things that many people don't know about it. They pulled 'em all out.

BC: How much did it cost? Do you remember?

EL: To ride the streetcar?

BC: Mm mm.

EL: Probably a dime. I think it was a dime and you'd get 3 tokens and you got 3 tokens for a quarter.

BC: Once you paid your money, would you stay on it until you got off of it or did you have specific stops that you had to get off at?

EL: Well, you rode it to where you wanted to get off. For instance, if you were going to Northwest, I guess its Northwest, went up West-end, they had a track that ran all the way up to 18<sup>th</sup> Street West-end. If you were going to someplace in-between there and you'd get there, all you did was pull the cord and they'd stop at the next stop and then you'd get off. They had a door at the back. They had one going in at the front and one at the back. You'd go in at the front and out at the back. That's what they did. That would pretty well cover that because it depended on where you were going, you'd get on the streetcar and you'd ride to where you wanted to go and then you'd get off. Or, you could ride on to the end of the line. But not advantage to that if you wanted to get off.

BC: That is true.

EL: Well -

BC: Any other last thoughts.

EL: There should be.

BC: Of course. Emerson, I'd like to thank you again for doing a second interview and I appreciate your time.

EL: I hope its been something that you could use.

BC: It is. It is. There's a lot of stuff that's floating around in your head right now that most people living in Roanoke have never experienced and that's what we're trying to do, get it down and preserve it. I really appreciate your time.

EL: There used to be a streetcar line that ran from Vinton all the way to Salem.

BC: How long did that take?

EL: I don't know. I never did ride it. It went all the way from Vinton to Salem. And down across Tinker Creek, one time they had a streetcar wreck there.

BC: Were you on one of the streetcars?

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EL: No. But I just happened to read about it. That was before I came to Roanoke. The streetcars were noisy but they were certainly very helpful as far as transporting you from here to yonder.

BC: During the time of the streetcars, did they have a small bus service available as well.

EL: Yeah, that came after they first got 'em. Streetcars were first. They started way back. The buses – I remember some of those old buses. They were scrongy looking things. I didn't like 'em. Then, they got a newer model and then I'd ride them all the time.

BC: Wouldn't ride the old ones though, huh?

EL: No. I didn't care anything about them. I used to use the buses and streetcars to find my way around town. They used to run – the bus didn't come up my street, it was one block over. I used to go over to catch it and ride along and talk to the driver for an hour or two. That was my entertainment.

BC: His too, right?

EL: Yeah, I guess. Oh me.

BC: You can learn your way around the city pretty quick talking to the bus drivers and the streetcar drivers.

EL: Yes.

BC: Emerson, thank you. I appreciate it.

EL: You're welcome. I'm sorry that I didn't have much to add.

BC: You had quite a bit more to add.