START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A 8/4/06

Peggy Van Scoyoc (PV): This is Peggy Van Scoyoc. Today is Friday, August 4, 2006, on this extremely hot day today. I am here in the home of Ms. Ruby Merritt. Ms. Merritt has lived in and around Chapel Hill all her life. She is going to tell me about her life, including some time that she spent in Cary when she was younger. So, Ms. Ruby, if you will start out by telling me something about your family, maybe your parents and even your grandparents and where they came from.

Ruby Merritt (RM): My parents came from central Virginia. They came out here in 1904, because my grandfather was in the sawmill business. Where they lived in Virginia there were only these knotty pines and he wanted some of the good pines like they had in North Carolina. So he came out and came from Durham. He came from Gretna, Virginia to Durham. When he got to Durham, then he had to take the Chatham Wiggler. Now that was a train. The reason they called it the Chatham Wiggler was because the railroad track was so crooked that came from Durham and went to Bonsil in Chatham County. It was just for the convenience of the people. You remember, you didn't have cars in those days. It was for the convenience of the people.

So he went down in Chatham County. He found lots of farmers who wanted to sell their timber. So he went back to Virginia and collected all of his laborers who would come with him, because it took a lot of laborers in those days. You had a steam mill and you had mules to pull the logs out of the woods. They cut their trees down with a cross-cut saw with two men cutting the trees down. I remember seeing that as a child, because I'm ninety-eight years old. He moved down. It took them almost a week. My father has told me about it so many times. Of course, I wasn't born then. But he has told me about it so many times, I feel like I could almost see it. Because he said there was one buggy, and I don't know how many wagons and then log

carts, because they had to pull the logs out of the woods with a log cart after the mules would pull them to the log cart. And they pulled them out. And they brought the mill. Of course, it was taken to pieces and on the wagons, and the log carts.

It took them almost a week to come from central Virginia to Chatham County. Their last camping place, they had to camp at night. Their last camping place was in Mount Carmel church yard, just before you get to the Chatham County line. That is my church today. I have been in that church eighty years. I wasn't born there. Isn't that significant? I wasn't born then when they came. He told me so many times, he said that was the best well of water he had ever drank water from, because they were so tired. They had been on the road so long, and they were looking to see where they could camp overnight. When they got there, there were lots of oak trees in that yard, so that they could tie the mules to the oak trees. Of course, that well was wonderful to give mules and men a good drink of water. And that's where they spent the last night. And then they went on down into Chatham County.

I was born in 1908. Where I was born was in a, considered a "sawmill shanty." It was three rooms, my mother says, that my father and his laborers built in order to cut Mr. Stone's timber. He was a Mr. Stone and he had a lot of timber to be cut, so that was where I was born. Grandpa brought down another son besides my father, another son came with him. But he was single, he wasn't married. My father, of course, was married, and there were several of the laborers who were married, but they left all the wives in Virginia until they could find, either build a shanty or else get a place to stay. And then, finally, the wives came down on the Chatham Wiggler. They would get off of the Chatham Wiggler at what was then Farrington, a little, there were three stores there and a blacksmith shop, and a planer and that was to plane lumber. A planer was there, and natch covered in water with Jordan Lake. The Chatham

Wiggler, I suppose the railroad tracks were taken up or else they were under water, I don't know which.

Anyway, I rode that train as a child many times to Durham, because that's the way my mother would take me and then a little later my brother, who was three and a half years younger than me. She would take us to Durham and we would have to spend the night when she needed to go shopping. That's the way she'd have to go shopping, she'd take us to Durham and we'd spend the night at a boarding house there, then come back on the train. So I can remember that. That was a long trip. It was very exciting.

When I was about ten years old, I think, my grandfather and grandmother Hunt, of course see my grandfather came because grandmother came on the Chatham Wiggler with the other wives when she came down. They lived just in walking distance of us, just a short distance out there in the country. Because they both had, my grandfather and my father had built homes then. They bought some land and built some homes, but they were still in the sawmill business. So I just enjoyed going to Grandma's. Of course, it was out in the country and we weren't afraid of anything. I would run up to Grandma's maybe twice a day, or three times. She never had candy. She never did have candy, but what she would always give me was lumps of brown sugar. She kept them in a jar, kept those lumps of brown sugar in a jar and that's what I would get for being good, I guess. My little brother, of course, was younger.

Well, one day, I went to Grandma's and even though I was probably nine years old, I haven't forgotten it. She gave me my brown sugar and I ate mine. And she said, "Take Onyx," my brother, "Take him this." And she put it in an envelope and gave it to me. "Now take this to Onyx." I went back and between her house and our house, it was dirt of course. I looked down and there were some lumps of dirt that looked exactly like brown sugar. I wanted that brown sugar. I guess the devil tempted me, I don't know what else. So I ate the brown sugar and put

some lumps of dirt in. When I got home, of course, he was so thrilled, you know. He put a lump in his mouth and of course, he went to screaming and coughing and spitting. Mama found out what it was, and I got the switch. I mean, she switched me good, so that's why I haven't forgotten it. I'll never forget that.

As time went on, my mother was a teacher before she married. It was over a mile to a school, and they only taught seven grades. It was over a mile and I would have to walk with some of the local boys. There were no girls at all, I would have been the only girl. And it was four or five boys that I would have to walk to school with, so my mother said she wasn't going to let me do that. Of course, you didn't have a car then. You had to go by buggy everywhere, and that would have been too much. So she taught me until I was in the fourth grade. So that was home schooling right there. When I was in the fourth grade then, she boarded and roomed and sewed for a girl that she knew who was in the seventh grade in order for her to walk with me to school every morning. So that's what happened.

In 1916 then, I would have been eight years old, wouldn't I? My father bought a car. That was just a wonderful thing. I have a picture made of my father and mother. It was a Ford that you could let the top back, so you had a sports car in those days. His was the third car in all of Chatham County. The doctor had one, the one doctor in Chatham County had one, and there was a merchant. And Wilsonville is named for that merchant. Do you happen to know where that is? It's on 64 as you go from Pittsboro to Apex or to Cary, it's 64. It's the back end of, the south end of Chatham County. Mr. Wilson lived there at that time. He lived and had what you'd consider then a very fine country home. He had a car. So then my father bought a car, so that was one of three cars in Chatham County at that time.

PV: Was your father's car a Model T?

RM: I guess it was. It had two seats to it though instead of just one. It wasn't a roadster. It had two seats.

PV: Did it have a windshield, or was there a wind screen or glass? There was.

RM: Yes, it had a wind shield. It had those little lights on either side of the windshield, those little posts. I'll show you the picture, if you want to see it. ( ) After we got a car, we'd go to Seaforth to shop. They had everything from horehound candy to horse collars. They had everything in that store. The owner of the store is standing on the porch with a hat on [in the picture]. The train, that is the Chatham Wiggler. It just happened to be there at that particular time. The roving photographer got out in the cornfield and made that picture. I wouldn't take anything for it.

PV: It's a wonderful picture of a very large log type building which was your shopping center, you said. There is a train in the background, so that would be the Wiggler, right? And there are several horse-drawn buggies and carriages. And then your father's car right in the middle with you and your brother in the back.

RM: Right, and my father and mother in the front seat.

PV: Father and mother in the front seat, and you and your brother in the back seat. It's got a windshield, and the top is folded down. This is just a wonderful picture.

RM: That was made in 1916.

PV: 1916. That is just great. That is a wonderful picture. So this was just a traveling photographer that happened by?

RM: Yes, because in those days, if we went to Durham, I have some pictures that were made at a photography shop in a studio in Durham. But we had to go to Durham to get a picture made. We didn't know what a Kodak was. But they called them roving photographers. They'd go through the community periodically and stop at houses and ask them, could they make

pictures, you see. So he just happened to come by when we were there. It's a treasure. I just wouldn't take anything for it.

PV: So now, was the store owned by Mr. Wilson of Wilsonville? No, somebody else owned this store?

RM: No, that's a different one.

PV: Oh, Seaforth. The little town was called Seaforth?

RM: No, only the store. There were just two houses, I think, that were nearby, and the school wasn't too far away. And that was it.

PV: That was it. And this was near Jordan Lake?

RM: It's incorporated in with Jordan Lake now. All that area, Seaforth. And they still, that Seaforth landing now at Jordan Lake where they put boats in is Seaforth landing now.

PV: So that name carried on.

RM: So the name goes on, anyway. But all the store, everything is gone, all the houses, everything is gone that were there.

PV: So was that the closest store of that kind and size for you?

RM: That was the closest for us.

PV: How long did it take you to get to the store from your house?

RM: We could have walked it if we'd wanted to, I'd say a mile and a half, something like that to us. But every Saturday, if we were good children, we got to go to … that's why I call it my shopping center now. See, you didn't know the word shopping center then. But now, I call it my shopping center. I look back on those days with pleasure now. Even though I was a child, I haven't forgotten it.

PV: What memories do you have of riding in the car? There were no real roads?

RM: No, and if it rained when you were riding, you had to get wet. It blew in. Of course, you'd put the top back up. But you had these curtains, these side curtains that had to be snapped all the way around. So if on Sunday morning, because we always went to church on Sunday, if on Sunday mornings it was raining, while my father had it in the garage, why he had to snap up all the curtains, you see, so that we could go. We didn't go all the times when it was raining. But of course it was grand to have the top back down, especially for Brother and I.

When I was then, I only went to Groves School. That was the name of that school was Groves. There were two rooms, a big room and a little room. The little room went through the fourth grade. The big room went from fifth on through the seventh. What I remember about going there so much is at Christmas. Always one of their farmers would bring in a big Christmas tree, cedar tree, bring it in. Every child got a gift. Oh, naturally, it was a very small, but oh my, you looked forward to that. So that your name was called out, you see, and it was put on that tree. Now I'm sure the teachers didn't, there was one teacher in each room. One teacher taught through the seventh, one teacher taught through the fourth. I mean, I guess I must have learned something because I never did fail when I went through high school. I only went to college one year, but I never did fail. At Christmas, that is the most outstanding memory I have of going to school there.

PV: Do you remember what the gifts were? Do you remember what you got?

RM: Oh, maybe a little bag of candy, or I don't know. Maybe a handkerchief, I can remember getting handkerchiefs. That was the thing. Or some little something like that.

Before I was in the fifth grade, my father built a larger house. He moved about five miles away, because he was sort of getting out of the milling. My grandfather had died and my grandmother, so he was sort of getting out of that. He invested in a planer in Durham, he and another brother did in Durham. So he, you see, had a car then. So he sort of got out of that. And

we moved to that other house. In that vicinity, of course, I can show you where it is, the house is still there. Yes, of course it doesn't belong to me but it's still there. He decided that, I'll tell you, we were on the west side of New Hope Creek. He had malaria a lot and he felt like it was, maybe he lived so near. You had to have water when you ran a mill, a steam mill. So he had to put his mill down there. That is really why he and grandfather bought those places, because they had to put a mill down close to the creek. He had malaria so much he decided, well, let's get on the other side of New Hope Creek. So he bought over there and built.

But there wasn't a school over there at all. Then if you had a school, unless it was in a city, if you had a school out in the country, or at least it was that way in Chatham County, if you had a school the community had to build it and find their own teacher. So my father had right much land he bought over there. He told the community, the men met together and he told them that he would furnish the land and furnish the lumber if they would build the schoolhouse. So I have a picture of that. It's in that little book of mine. I wrote that little book.

PV: Oh, this is a great little booklet called *Bits and Pieces*. It has that wonderful picture on the front.

RM: It's in there somewhere. Anyway, it had a porch at the front on this one-room school with a porch on the front. Once a year, in the spring,

PV: Is that the picture? Yes.

RM: That was, I think, that was my last year, I believe it was, there. I finished the seventh grade there. I don't know the year exactly, but I believe it was the seventh one, I was in the seventh grade when that was made. But you see, there weren't too many, you can see.

PV: No, there are about twelve children in front of the school.

RM: And yet she taught seven grades. But that's when you had discipline, and parents cooperated. That meant a whole lot. You see, there is a frame all over that porch. That's

because at the end of the year, and always at the end of the year, there was… well now we would call it a production. But we called it a play then. We would have a play. The teacher would select it. And there wouldn't be enough children to put on the play because, you see, there were some big boys in there and some right fairly large girls. But those children weren't enough. So the people in the community would take a part in the play. We had no stage, so they'd always build that frame out on the porch and use sheets for curtains, so that you could draw it. You could dress back in the schoolroom, you see, and come out from there. And all the community, it was a community affair. It was so wonderful. Unless you brought your chair, you'd sit on the ground to see it. That's why that picture has the framing on it.

As I look back over it, I think it's such a pity we don't have such, what would you call it, such love for each other and wanting to help each other. And we learned. I don't care if there were seven grades in there. She boarded at our house, so I had to… and my mother was a teacher, you know, so Brother and I had to learn.

Well, when I finished, Rock Spring was the name the school. When I finished the seventh grade there, then I had to go away to school. Bonlee is in the western section. Chatham County is a big county. And Bonlee was in the western section. ( ) They sent me to Bonlee to school. I had to, my father and mother took me up there, all dirt roads all the way. It's not but about twenty-five or thirty miles from here. But it was just like worse than me going to New York now. I'd never been away from home other than, my grandmother in Virginia, my mother's mother…

( ) [Ruby's daughter Clarice Page came into the room and stayed for the remainder of the interview.] instrumental in me doing that. All three of my daughters are teachers. She taught second grade. Every fall she'd have me to come to tell the children about when I was young and how it was when I went to school and all of that. She'd keep saying, "Mother, you

tell a different story every time you come. So please write a book, ‘cause we can’t remember them all. Please write a book and tell us something about it.” So I thought, oh it’s too much trouble. But one winter, it was bad weather and I thought, well I’ll sit down and start that. So I wrote a whole lot of it. Then I put it away and forgot about it until the next February. And the next February it was cold and all. I sat down and finished it. I called her and I said, because her husband is a whiz with a computer and all that. I called her and I said, “Well, I’ve done it now. If you can read it, you just come over here and get it.” And she didn’t even know I was doing it. I said, “Now you read it and you can throw it in the fire, or you can do as you please.” About an hour, hour and a half later she called me. She said, “Mother, I’ve read that and I laughed and I cried. Please let us put it in book form,” because Billy can do it. You know, he’s computer. “Let us do it and give it to everybody at Christmas.” I hadn’t thought about doing that. But they were the ones that were instrumental, so they came over here and they looked through my album and got the pictures. So her husband did it.

PV: It is wonderful. It must be a real family treasure to you.

RM: At Christmas, after we’d had our dinner and they were all seated, part of them on the floor and all around in here everywhere, that I presented it to them, one for each family, and gave it to them. Well, it was one for each person, wasn’t it? Not just each family.

Clarice Page (CP): Each grandchild got one.

RM: Each grandchild, all of them. Well sir, it was such a noise here with them all. I mean, everything got just as quiet as a mouse. Everybody was reading. It was just as quiet as could be. I was to have surgery right after, colon surgery. Of course, we didn’t know what it was and whether I’d live or not, anything else, so I think maybe it was the opportune time for us to have it. Thank the Lord, I pulled through it.

PV: So you were telling me about… you showed me the picture of the Rock Spring School. Now you went to what, grades five through seven at that Rock Spring School?

RM: I went through seventh grade, and then they sent me to Bonlee to school. And I thought I was going to die, I was so homesick. I was thirteen years old, and I just thought I was going to die I was so homesick. After I'd been up there a month, my father and mother came to see me one Saturday, and little brother, and brought a picnic lunch. And I cried all day long, all the time they were there. I couldn't even enjoy them because I cried, begging them to take me back home. My father would have done it, he would have taken me. My mother said, "No indeed." She was a schoolteacher. She said, "No indeed. You'll get used to it. You're going to stay here." So I stayed, and in another month I was fine and really I was just as happy as could be. She was right.

PV: So now where did you stay? Were you in a…

RM: It was a dormitory. They had a girls' dormitory and a boy's dormitory. It was a boarding school, is what it was. Well, that year the flu was still raging that year. Of course, it was worse the year before, but it was still bad. Practically everybody in that dormitory had the flu. They had to get a doctor from Liberty, North Carolina. He had to come down on the train to see us because they didn't have a doctor there at Bonlee. It was just a little village. They didn't have a doctor there. I was real sick, and practically everybody in the dormitory was sick. Bless their hearts, the teachers took care of us there, who didn't get sick, the ones that stayed up. In the meantime, my father was at home just real sick, just very sick with the flu and pneumonia and I don't know what all. And that was my mother, she stayed up fortunately. Then there was telephone communication at that time. The telephone that you screw with a, like that with a handle. But my mother could call the dormitory and speak to somebody. But yet she knew I was there sick. My father as too sick for her to leave him, and she said she thought

she was going to loose her mind. So they said, my father said, “You’re not going back next year. That’s too far from home.” Even though, but when you had to go on dirt roads and couldn’t even get over them in the wintertime, why, it did seem a long ways. It certainly did.

So that’s when I went to Cary. That was ’22, the year 1922. That fall it was nearer, and I had an uncle and aunt that lived in Apex. Of course, they were macadamized roads, you know, they didn’t have cement roads like they do now between Apex and Cary so that there was a good road. If I didn’t get to go home on the weekend, even though from Apex to our home was a dirt road. But if I didn’t get to go home and wanted to, some weekends I’d stay at the dorm. I wasn’t homesick down there. Aunt Hattie would come and get me and I’d spend the weekend with them if I wanted to go. So it was much more pleasant to go to Cary. We had a boys’ dorm there and a girls’ dorm.

PV: So you stayed in the girls’ dormitory?

RM: I stayed in the girls’ dorm at Cary. The directory, the book that you can see there the teachers that we had. Of course, I had took music, everywhere I went I took music. I started, well I didn’t tell you this. When I was twelve years old, I was good sized for my age. My father would have to stop the mill to take me to music. Because he loved music and he wanted me to take music. And I loved music too. We’d have to go down by Wilsonville, and down just beyond Wilsonville, you know where it is now, today, where Wilsonville is, for music which was about, I supposed about five miles from home. He would be willing to stop the mill to take me. I took an hour music lesson, and he was willing to do it because he wanted me to have music so bad. But, he told my mother, “Now, Ruby can learn to drive that car, and I won’t have to go.” My mother liked to have a fit because she wouldn’t attempt to drive. She thought I was too young. Well, Papa was such an easy-going person that he taught me how to drive. I went around that house oodles of times learning how to drive. Anyway, I finally go to

the point, you know you didn't have to have a license to drive then, because there were only three cars in the county still. He told me, "Now, if you meet a car, it will be either Norma Wilson or Dr. Upchurch, if you meet a car." And they knew me. He said, "You drive off." See, it was dirt roads. "You drive off. Don't get in a ditch, but drive off as far as you can and stop, and let them pass you." That was orders when I drove alone, the first time. Of course, he'd been with me several times. But I could not learn to reverse. I could pull right forward. You see, you had gears then, you know, down hill like this. I could go forward but I just couldn't reverse for some reason. He said, "Well, let Rastus," that was my music teacher's husband and they had a lot of trees in the yard. So he said, "Let Rastus turn you around so you won't hit a tree. Turn you around and head you toward the road." So that's what Rastus would do, every time I'd go. My mother would ride with me, but I know she was scared to death. Anyway, I started driving when I was, I was twelve years old in May and I think I started about July, something like that, alone when I started driving alone. Because he'd been teaching me ever since I was eleven years old. So I started driving. The youth at Mount Carmel church, they came here one night for me to tell my tales to them. When I said that I started driving at twelve years old, everyone of those little boys perked up. They thought…

CP: They used to, when I was teaching second grade too, they would all say, "Well, that's the age of my brother."

PV: And you were driving already. So you were learning to play the piano? That is what your music was?

RM: Oh yes, I was playing the piano. I took piano. I started taking piano, I guess, when I was about ten and a half or eleven, something like that. Of course, I took it when I went to Bonlee. I had a good music teacher there. And I took it when I went to Cary. Then, well, after that year, my brother was going to be going the next year to… and he would have to go away to

school, you see. So my father said, “Well, y’all will never be at home anymore. Are we going to move?” Because he then didn’t have the sawmill. And if we’re going to leave. So he put a tenant in his house down on the farm where we were living, he put a tenant there and bought a place between here and Durham, over on the Durham Road. I went to Chapel Hill School the next two years, and finished at Chapel Hill. Of course, Brother went to that.

Then I went to college. I was going to be real smart, go to college. But I’d already met this brown eyed, you see her brown eyes? All four of my children have brown eyes, just like him. I’d met that brown eyed young man when I was a junior, my first year up here. I was a junior in high school. I met him on New Year’s night. His sister brought him to my house, because she was in my class. He was away at school, so he was six years my senior. So she brought him at Christmas time to meet me. Well, of course, he went back to school. But when school was out, he started coming over. From that, then, at Christmas when I was a senior in high school, at Christmas I got that [holds out her ring hand].

PV: An engagement ring? Oh, that’s beautiful.

RM: No, not when I was a senior. It was when I was in college. I’ve got that wrong. I’m sorry. You can erase that. Just as soon as I graduated, I graduated at the last of May or first of June in ’25, that year ’25, and in order to get for a girl to get in to college up here, you had to be registered by that summer. So I was going to be real smart, you know, and I got right out of high school, registered for summer school and then they had quarters instead of semesters. So, I finished one quarter, you see, in the fall. Well, by the time I had finished that one quarter in the fall, and my parents wanted me to be a teacher. I wanted to be a nurse. My father especially, my mother wasn’t quite as bad about it as my father, but my father thought it was a disgrace to be a nurse, almost.

PV: Why?

RM: He just thought it would, I would be just, it was terrible, just terrible to be a nurse. Now, that was appended. In those days, the only thing you could do that was really respectable was to teach school and be a mama. That was just about it. Well, so it was that Christmas that I got the diamond. Well, I went over to school. I finished the year, you see, by having three quarters, I finished the year and then in June the 12th I married. I was eighteen years old and did not know one thing about cooking, hardly at all. My mother was a wonderful cook and did not want anybody in her kitchen when she was cooking, certainly not to try to cook, because oh you'd make such a mess. Well, how are you going to learn unless you make a mess? You've got to learn that way, but she couldn't stand that. Now, I had to clean the house, and we had a big house, and I had to clean the house on Saturdays when I was going to school. I had to clean the house on Saturdays and she did the cooking for the weekend, for Saturdays and Sundays she did the cooking. My oldest daughter Virginia, Libby's mother, is exactly like her. Clarice will tell you, she doesn't want anybody in the kitchen when she's cooking. So I did not know how to cook, but I had the best husband about that. He knew I didn't know, I told him I didn't know how to cook. You see, nowadays you can get things that you can put in the microwave. You didn't have that then. You had to make biscuits and cook from the bottom out. Everything had to be prepared. Well, it was very difficult but he would say, "That's all right." I thought I never would learn how to make biscuits. One time they'd be so hard, and the next time they'd be crumbling, and the next time they'd be something else. I'd almost cry, and he's say, "That's all right. We can eat them. That's all right. It's good." He was so good about that. So I said, "If the good Lord gives me girls, they're going to learn to cook while they're with me." And Clarice can tell you, every one learned to cook when they were with me. They knew how to cook when they married. And they can all three cook. He did them just like he did me. Clarice will tell you. He would, no matter what kind of mess you'd make or anything else, he would

say, “Well, that’s all right. Next time cook it a little more, next time…” So he was just as good about it as he could be.

PV: Now, what was your husband’s name?

RM: Eben Merritt. This latest great-grandson is named Eben. They named him Eben. We are very proud. They did.

PV: What were your parents’ names?

RM: My mother was a McHaney. I’m Scotch-Irish, got a part of it in me. My mother was a McHaney. Her father came from Scotland when he was a little boy. He was in the Civil War, her father was.

PV: What was her first name?

RM: Maybelle. And my father was Charlie Hunt.

PV: Did his sawmill have a name? The sawmill that he owned, did it have a name?

RM: Well, it was just Hunt, Hunt and Son. My grandfather, you see, and he had it together. It was Hunt and Son.

PV: How long did that sawmill last? How long…

RM: Let’s see, I must have been… My grandfather had it way before I was born. Of course, they bought a new one but I mean he was in the business before I was born. I must have been about eleven years old, I guess, when my father finally went out of the business. My grandfather had died. He died when I was about nine years old.

PV: Did he sell it, or did he just close it down?

RM: He just closed it down, he didn’t sell it. He just closed it down completely. At least, I don’t remember if they did. Maybe he sold the mill or something, for somebody to take it off. Anyway, it wasn’t run there near us, because I don’t remember about that.

When I was a child growing up, Brother and I, of course, loved to go to the fair. The state fair, you see, was there. But, in the fall when they had the state fair, in October, of course was the time that sweet potatoes had to be dug. My father always had a big garden. Now he had a farm, but he didn't farm himself, he had tenants on the farm. But we had to get up those potatoes, he had to dig them. Well, he would plow them up but we had to… that was required that we had to pick up those potatoes. Of course, he'd take them to the house that they put them in. That had to be done or we wouldn't go to the fair. Well, I hated that job, I just hated it, but yet I wanted to go to the fair. So Brother and I would always have to pick up potatoes.

PV: So how did you harvest them? How did you, did you have to dig them up?

RM: He had a plow. He had a mule hitched to a plow. That's the way he worked his garden with a mule and a plow. He had an old horse, Maude was her name, that she wasn't able, she was getting too old to work at the mill. So he just put her in the pasture and he was kind to Maude. But Maude could plow some in the garden. But she was gentle as she could be. I was always afraid of a horse or mule. I don't know why, I just… they looked so big to me. I was afraid. Well, he persuaded me, Papa did one day, to get on Maude. When I, of course I didn't have a saddle, and Maude was, I'll never forget it, she was grazing out at the edge of the yard. She was privileged horse to do what she pleased just about. So he put me up on Maude, and Maude put her head down, of course, to get some grass, and when she did I slid right down over her head. That's the first and last time I ever got on a horse, it scared me so bad. And I didn't like it anyway, so that ended my horseback riding.

PV: Do you have any specific memories of when you were at the Cary School? Do you remember any of your classmates or your teachers?

RM: Well, as I told Clarice or one of them the other day, I said one thing I certainly, after Libby had called me and told me she wanted. I said, "Well, about the only thing that I can

remember is the one mean thing I did when I was down there. I may have done some more but that one is outstanding. Because it was a weekend I was spending down there. Once a month, our dining room was in the basement and the kitchen of our dormitory. That's where the students ate who were boarders, who boarded there, and the teachers, they stayed in the dormitory too, most of them. Once a month, the boys were allowed to come over on a Friday night and we just played games. You didn't go out with them, no indeed. You didn't go out with the boys. Of course, I was just fourteen years old, but a lot of the others were too, maybe some of them younger than me, and some of them were older, of course. There were seniors, all the way juniors and seniors there. But the boys from the boys' dormitory were allowed to come over and we had a social every Friday night. Even then we had movies. We would have something planned, anyways. We enjoyed, we looked forward to that, of course, because you were not allowed to date or anything any other time during the week. You could walk to church. You could walk down there to the Baptist Church in Cary with a boy. You were allowed to do that. I reckon they thought we'd be all right to do that. You could walk to church, but that was it. So we looked forward to it.

One weekend that I stayed down there at the school, it was our weekend to have our social. The teachers, I can't tell you, I don't remember that, why they decided to have, evidently, some guests. They had some guests, it was for some reason but I don't remember why, that they were going to need that dining room for something that night. So we weren't allowed to have it. Well, we were so outdone and so mad, we didn't know what to do. We decided we'd fix them.

Then, you only had one bathroom on the hall. You did have two commodes and two bathtubs, I think, in that bathroom. You had to sign up when you wanted to take a bath so everybody could have a bath at certain times. In our rooms we had these metal wash bowls and

a metal pitcher, so that you could fill up your pitcher, you see, with water and have your wash bowl and that's where you washed your face and your teeth in the morning. Well, I think we went to the bathroom to wash our teeth. But you could wash your face in there if you wanted to, take a bath. Each room had one of those.

So we just decided, well, we'll fix them. We'll just simply take all these pitchers and wash bowls, because they were metal, we will take them all and at a certain signal we'll throw every one down the steps. And that's what we did. I mean, we didn't get to have it the next time either. We were punished severely, we felt like. But we were so mad, we didn't know what to do. You can imagine what a noise that made. Here came some of the teachers running to see what in this world. Everybody ran to the room, you know, after it was done. Of course we had to clean it all up and get them all up. We threw every one down the steps. I think that's the meanest thing I ever did at school. We got punished for that. That is an outstanding thing.

Mr. Dry was our superintendent. He was very kind. He knew every child that went to school, I think, personally. He was such a delightful person, he really was. And the teachers were, and I had a wonderful music teacher. She was really kinder to me than the one at Bonlee. That one at Bonlee was very, very strict. In fact, my dentist that I have now is from Liberty. She was from Liberty but she'd come down on the train. She was kind enough that she took me home with her one weekend, the only time I ever went to Liberty. That's a village in Chatham County. I don't know, I guess maybe I was younger then, and homesick to start with, and so I just didn't admire her as much as I did the one that I had at Cary. She was just such a sweet little person. I can't even call her name right now.

PV: What was your room? How many girls were in a room in the Cary School?

RM: Two.

PV: Oh, so just two girls to a room, one roommate?

RM: Yes, I had a roommate. She lived out from Raleigh in the country, out from Raleigh.

PV: How many rooms were there on a floor? How many girls had to share the one bathroom?

RM: I would guess about fourteen to fifteen. What I mean, the teachers… Now, there weren't as many girls on the first floor as there were on the second, mostly teachers on the first floor. They stayed there. I guess they just had one bathroom too. But I remember we had to sign up when you wanted to take a bath in the bathtub. Didn't have a shower. You didn't know what that was. You were fortunate to a bathtub. I was reared without such. I know all about going out to the outhouse. At Bonlee that's what we did. We didn't have a bathroom at Bonlee. Had a large outhouse. Maybe it had six holes. Yes we did.

PV: Was there one for the boys and one for the girls?

RM: Oh yes. Because the school building was in the middle and there was a dormitory on each side.

PV: And you had to go outside morning, noon or night to use the outhouse?

RM: No, we had a slop jar, but you had to take that out to empty it. I was reared in a home like that, so it didn't make any difference to me, because I was accustomed to it. Of course now it sounds very repulsive, but…

PV: It's what everyone had. Now how did you take a bath when you were at [Bonlee]?

RM: You took a bath just, at home we had a washtub. Once a week, unless it was hot, well, if it was hot it was more often. Once a week Mama would put that washtub in the kitchen, because it was warm in there. It had a heater in there. It had fireplaces in the other places. And put water in it fairly full and get in it, get in the tub. As I grew up, I couldn't get everything in

there at the same time. I grew so it must have made me grow. And everybody in the country, that's what they had.

PV: Did you all share the same water, everybody took a bath in the same water, one after another?

RM: No, not the same water.

PV: You changed the water for each person? Did you have to haul the water in from outside?

RM: Yes, we had a well. We had to draw the water from there.

PV: From a well. Draw the water, bring it in, heat it up on the stove, put it in the tub? That's a lot of work.

RM: Sure it was. But I said, people today, they just don't know. They think they work hard but they just don't know anything.

PV: All that work just to take a bath.

RM: My children, they don't know anything.

CP: I don't either. Well, we did heat water for our tub bath way back.

RM: Oh, that was in the summertime, because when you children were young, we had a coal heater in the kitchen with a tank behind it to heat the water. Well, it would be so hot, when it was weather like this, because you didn't have air condition. We did have fans but we didn't have air condition. It would be so hot to build a fire to heat water so that I had a great big pot and I'd heat that, boiling, and pour it in the tub and then run… the water was most too cold for them to take a bath. That would take the chill off it. The water to take a bath in the tub.

PV: Where were you living the first time you had indoor plumbing? What house was that, do you remember?

RM: The house we went to housekeeping in. You don't know anything about Chapel Hill, do you? Its south Chapel Hill is where it was.

PV: Now, is this after you were married?

RM: When we married, my husband had already bought this little five-room house before we married. He'd already bought it. It didn't have the plumbing when we went there, but then we built another room onto it and a bath add to it. We'd been married, now we had water in the house. We were out, then I thought we were way out in the country. Of course, we were incorporated then in '69, we were incorporated. But then, when we first married, we were about, it's a little over a mile, I reckon, to the center of Chapel Hill from where we lived in the old house. Every one of my children were born at home in that house.

PV: Really, born at home.

RM: All four of them were born at home. This hospital wasn't here then. You had to go to Durham if you went to hospital, and not many women went to the hospital unless they lived in Durham.

PV: Did you have a doctor or a midwife?

RM: Oh yes, had a doctor.

PV: Who made house calls and delivered you, [Clarice]?

CP: Sure did. He made house calls if you were sick.

RM: Then when Wendell was born was when my next door neighbor, when she was just like a sister to me, just about, and she was over there with me that night when he was born. She laughed about that until she died, periodically she'd laugh about it. She said, "Just as soon as he was born, Esber said, "Eben, it's a boy." And he said, "I see it, I see it." That was always so funny to her. "I see it, I see it." So I laughed and said, "Well, I can stop having babies then." There he is. He's so much like his daddy, with me over there [a photograph]. Of course, he's

sixty-six years old, but he says he's not going to retire until his hands go to shaking. He laughs. See, all three of my daughters taught school and they all three have retired. He said, "Well, somebody in this family's got to work." So he's sixty-six.

PV: Now he's the surgeon, right?

RM: Right. He's a plastic surgeon. He does a lot of reconstruction, though. That's what he does.

PV: What did your husband do for a living?

RM: He operated a fleet of trucks for general hauling, and ran Merritt Store for forty-nine and a half years.

PV: What was the Merritt's… I passed a sign on the way here that said, Merritt Mill Road. Is that related to him, his family?

RM: No, that's not his family.

CP: It might be that some of the slaves of Mr. Merritt that, you know that they take on the name of their owners, and you don't know. It could be.

RM: The Merritt Store is on S. Columbia Street as you go out toward Pittsboro. It's the same as 15-501, which is S. Columbia until you get out of the city limits.

PV: What was the store? What did it sell?

RM: It was a service station and general merchandise.

PV: A general store and gas station?

RM: Yes. It was, well, they didn't carry everything but, light groceries, I'll say that.

CP: I'll tell you what it was. It was a 7-11.

PV: Okay. A convenience store?

CP: Yes. That was before 7-11 was ever invented. But Dad had one before they ever had one.

RM: He ran it forty-nine and a half years.

CP: He ran it 7:00 until midnight.

RM: Yes, he sure did.

PV: All by himself? Did he have…

RM: No, he had…

CP: During the Depression he did, didn't he, Mother?

RM: That's right. During the Depression, I went through the Depression. I know all about that. I was pregnant with Virginia. It was the year '29. He didn't have enough work. Those three trucks he could not buy a license for them. He didn't have enough work to buy a license for them. They sat in our backyard, those three trucks. He had this store that he bought. So he just ran it by himself because he didn't have enough business. People couldn't run the cars. Talk about gas, you couldn't sell gas because there weren't enough cars running. So he would sell enough 7-11 things that he could afford to run it and make a little something so that we lived on it anyway, because it was just he and I. Then Virginia was born in November and he laughed and said, well business began to pick up after that. She was born in '29 and it did, it began to get better in '30. It wasn't perfect but it began to get better.

There were a lot of… down in the country beyond us, I'd say a mile from us, or anywhere from a half mile to a mile from us, down there were several carpenters, and good carpenters. There were four of them that I knew personally. They're gone now. They could not afford to run a car to go to work. They were working on a dam that now dams our water supply, or a portion of it here at Chapel Hill and Carrboro. They would walk, they were working on that dam. Early every morning you'd see them coming up the highway with a little bag with their lunch in it going, they would walk all the way. And it was at least two miles. They would walk to work every day. They got twenty-five cents an hour, and they were glad to get that. I

said, if that happens again with the generation now that we have, that has been raised to have everything, there is going to be more thievery than there's ever been.

PV: I can't even imagine it today. So was that a government work project, a WPA project, that dam, to give work?

RM: It was, that's what it was. And there was a camp that's not too far from here, its in Chatham County there was a camp down there and it was a WPA camp that they had. They worked on road projects and various projects. And they were glad to get the work, even at twenty-five cents an hour. They were glad because people just simply didn't have anything. You see, the banks closed. My uncle and my grandmother, my grandfather McHaney had died. Because Grandmother was his second wife. His first wife died, and she was quite a bit younger than he. You see, he came back from the Civil War and he married, his wife had died while he was gone and left one child. So he married a much younger woman before. So she was still living during that Depression, but she lost just about everything she had in the bank. So many people did. My father fortunately, he was one of these. He always said that the world will never grow any more land, so he invested in right much land. He happened to have that and that was our savior because he had it later then that he could dispose of it and get money. But I know about that.

I counted up how many wars I lived through. I can barely remember World War I. I was nine years old. My grandfather and grandmother McHaney, this just stands in my mind and that's why I can remember it, it impressed me so. They came from Virginia and came down on the Chatham Wiggler to visit us one summer. They stayed, I don't know, maybe a month. I don't remember now. The only way we'd get the paper, my father always took the newspaper, was when the mail came. That's the way we'd get the paper. So he would bring it in to them. It was in the summer and they'd be sitting on that back porch. They'd take the paper. You see,

you had no other way to hear the news or learn the news about the war was what was in the paper. You had no other way of knowing. So they knew so many people in World War I, and they'd read the paper and read about the deaths and things, and they'd sit there and cry. And you see, that impressed me as a child. So that's why I remember it so well. That's about all I can remember about World War I. Now when they declared armistice, I remember everybody in the whole community, they were ringing dinner bells. Now that impressed me so that I can remember that. Everybody was so happy about it.

Well then, World War II, now can you remember, Clarice, those stamps?

CP: I can remember us sitting in circles with those stamps. You and Daddy would let us put stamps on.

RM: You see, we had to have stamps to get the children's shoes, so we were allowed, since we had four children, we were allowed so much for that. I remember all that very well. Wendell was…

CP: He had polio during that time, didn't he?

RM: yes. Wendell was born in '40. Of course that's when the war started. We were attacked in '41, I believe. When he was three years old he had polio. He sure did. Of course, we went through a whole lot then. You had to have stamps, you see, for your gas. Unless you had a business of some sort, you were just allotted such a small amount of stamps to get your gas. Well, my husband was operating that service station. But he could not buy not one gallon of gas to put in his storage tanks unless he had a stamp for that gallon.

PV: Even to resell it to customers? Really?

RM: That's right. Then he had to collect the stamp from the customer. I can tell you, that was a headache. You put a hundred on a sheet. They were like stamps, you dampened them and..

CP: That was just one of the best skills to read. She wasn't aware of that, but we had to find the light stamps to go on the light sheets, you see, and that was a wonderful reading skill.

PV: You learned how to read by putting the stamps on the cards?

RM: That was a headache.

PV: So you needed gas to get him to a doctor?

RM: He was in the hospital for about a month, I think. Twenty-six days I believe it was.

PV: In Durham?

RM: He was at Duke. This hospital wasn't here. He was in Duke. Well, it is a right good little ways, thirteen miles to Duke. Of course they wouldn't let us visit him for the first… He was quarantined for two weeks, and he was just three years old. I thought I would die when I left him that day. I sure did. My husband, when he would close that store at night, no matter what time it was, he'd go back over to Duke. He was in a room that was half glass because that's the way those wards were, so that the nurse could stand up, you see, and look all the way down the hall to see if a child was up or something, she could. Well, he wouldn't want Wendell to see him, of course. He'd go there and peek at him if he was asleep. And he'd always find out from the nurse how he was. But I wouldn't go. I said no, I feel like I'm looking at him in the casket. I would not go. I just wouldn't do it. After two weeks they'd let me stay two hours, us rather, both of us, let us stay two hours was all a day. Nowadays they welcome you, the mother or father to stay with them. That's the way they did in those days.

PV: What parts of his body were affected by the polio?

RM: At the time he was taken, it was his back because I was holding him. I remember the night before he went to the hospital, it was so hot. It was, in fact it was in August and it was just about as hot as it is now. We all had fans. We had a back porch. I remember, I took him out on the back porch, not knowing you see what was the matter with him, and sat down in a

rocking chair and held him. I thought it was because his head, he would just fret and cry, but yet he had a temperature so that he would just… I think just about semi-conscious. Every time I'd try to raise him up like that he'd press his head back. I mean, that's what I thought that his head was hurting so bad. When the doctor examined him, he said, well he didn't tell me, he told my husband. He examined him the night before, I sat up with him. He told Eben, he said, "Don't tell Ruby," because he's a personal friend of ours, "Don't tell Ruby tonight because it won't do any good. But Eben, I'm afraid he's got polio." And I said, "Poor Eben, he had to live with that all night." You know, I didn't know it, so I sat up all night long holding him out there on the porch like that. The next morning, Dr. Hedgepeth came and he told me then, he said, "Well, I've already called Dr. McBride in Durham," a pediatrician at Duke. He says, "I want you and Eben to take him over there this morning. Ruby, I'm afraid he's got polio." Well, I was so in hopes he was mistaken.

So we went the next morning, took him. Dr. McBride looked at him and he said, "That's what it is." And that's when I had to hand him over to a nurse. I thought I would choke to death because, to give him up when he'd never been away from me and hand him to strangers and him sick like that. But that's what you had to do in those days, and it was hard.

PV: Did he have any lasting damage?

RM: Yes, he wears a shoe that is built up just about that much on his right foot, and that shoe is two sizes smaller than the other one. He has to buy two pairs of shoes. He's got expensive feet. Walking hard floors all these years…

PV: Does he have to stand during surgery as well?

RM: He's had three, is it four surgeries? He had one when he was five years old. They had to operate on his foot. His back did get the strength back in his back from all that therapy, but his leg and hip he didn't. He had to have therapy for about, at least a year, maybe more than

that. When he was in the hospital they started therapy, but they used a tank of water, you see, so it's built up so that the nurse, you're back wouldn't kill you with that. They put a towel under his arms and clinch it together in the back and hold him like that and have him to keep doing. They made a game out of it. Now we're going to do this and the other, fly like a bird and all those things, make a game so he could enjoy playing it, and kept him in water. He was in water. You can move in water, and that's what they did. Well, they got his back just about cured. In fact, I've never heard him complain with his back like that. But they didn't his leg. They told us that they thought he would need to go and see… they built a hospital at Greensboro, because the year before there had been so much polio throughout the nation that they set up hospitals here and yonder and everywhere and in North Carolina. It was epidemic in North Carolina. But it was the year before, it wasn't that year. They had a hospital in Greensboro. Then they had a rehabilitation center, it was toward Ashville up there somewhere. I don't exactly know where it was. Anyway, they told us that they recommended that one. They says he'll need to go there to finish. That's what they told us at the hospital. Now that was when he'd been up there maybe two weeks or something like that.

Well, I just thought, I just can't leave these other three and go with him and stay. I can't do that and yet I just thought, well, I can't stand the thoughts of him going up there by himself. I was just devastated. But after they would allow me to go to the hospital, they would allow me to go in and watch him have the therapy. So I would watch what they would do. One day I went, and they'd applied to this rehabilitation center. They'd already sent in the application for him to go when he left Duke. Well, I went one day and the nurse said, "Mrs. Merritt." One afternoon I went up there and she said, "Mrs. Merritt, Dr. McBride wants to see you." And I thought, oh it's time to go. Well, I just almost shouted. He said, "How much time do you have to spend with this child?" I couldn't understand what he meant. He said, "What I mean is, if

you have plenty of time, I think you're the type of mother that would do it. I've thought I probably would just send him home with you and if you'll go to school here at least a week or ten days and to take the course, you'll learn how to do it. And bring him back here three times a week, that we'd do it." Well, I said, "My time will be his. The other three are fine." So, I think it was the twenty-sixth day that, they had me to go to school for a week. I went to school every day up there and…

CP: It was the Sister Kenny method.

RM: That was the method. Doing it there, standing up with that water was much easier, when I got home and had to get down on my knees at the bathtub. That's what I had to do when I got home, had to do. But I did it, and Wendell said, "Mother, I know that's what's wrong with your back now." He's thanked me many times, I'll tell you. Of course, he was so little he doesn't remember it.

I'd go three times a week, and they'd watch me before they ever let me bring him home. They watched me do it, the therapists.

CP: She got to be a nurse after all.

RM: I got my training in nursing.

PV: When was he able to walk again?

RM: At Christmas we brought him home. He had it in August. It was Christmas week. I'll never forget it. We were in the living room and the children, Santy Claus had come and we had everything because it was close to the tree, that's where it was. We'd been trying just a little, like you would a child that is just starting to walk. And he turned loose and made some steps, and we all just shouted, you know. From that then he started walking a little bit. But I took him, then it got to be that I could just take him once a week. And I think it was about two years before we ever completely were discharged from Duke.

But I stayed on my knees many, many, many hours. I had one of these, in my kitchen I had one of those little porcelain-topped tables. It was about so long and maybe that wide, just a little kitchen table. One thing they emphasized, they said don't put anything that he has to do that will force him, that he has to force himself to do. Everything had to be slick, very slick so it would be easy to do. Because he just couldn't do it if it was too hard, a three-year-old child won't cooperate as well. So I used that porcelain-topped table and I would put powder all over it so it made it slick and put him on there and let him move his leg back and forth, and sit him up and put him down.

PV: It paid off though.

RM: It sure did. I didn't have to send him to a rehabilitation center. I have often wondered if that wasn't the reason that he chose his profession. Because he has so much compassion for people. He will come down here and if he has a patient, even though he's maybe left somebody in charge, but if he has a patient in the hospital that he's not completely satisfied, he's on that telephone by the time he gets here. Of course, he always leaves the number where he will be. And he gets called every time he comes. He has so much compassion for people.

PV: So that was probably your primary memory from World War II was really Wendell's polio far more than the war itself.

RM: Before he took polio, before he got sick, they had some training center here for pre-flight school was here in connection with the college some way or other.

CP: And Victory Village…

RM: Yes, that was after the war is when they formed Victory Village. So they would come down to our street, come down our street marching down the road. Wendell, of course, there he was three years old. He was three in April and had this in August. He'd run out in our

yard as soon as he heard them he'd run out in the yard. Of course he wasn't allowed to go out in the road. He'd march all the way parallel to them all the way across the yard, parallel to them just march, march, march.

PV: So these were soldiers that were practicing their marching?

RM: Oh yes. The road would be full of them. The cars would have to stop for them. The street would be full coming all the way down. He'd march the full length. I said, poor little fella then, he was thrown off his feet.

CP: Grandmother said, "At least he won't ever have to be in the army." Remember that?

RM: That was Grandmother Merritt. She always tried to find something, because I was just so killed, I was just so hurt after he went into the hospital I just bawled and I was just crying. Grandmother Merritt said, "Well now look at it this way. He won't have to go to war." Lo and behold, he had to go to Vietnam.

PV: He did, he went to Vietnam?

RM: As a doctor, he sure did.

PV: So he was in a field hospital in Vietnam? Like a MASH unit?

RM: He was in a field hospital.

CP: Like a MASH unit.

RM: He was in the nearest field hospital to Hamburger Hill. Do you recall that? Where so many…

CP: And when they were taking him in and the guys were checking him out when he came down. They said, "How in the world did you ever get in here," because he had two feet, they were getting for a uniform. They said, "How in the world did you get in this war with feet like this?" They had to buy two sets of shoes.

RM: Wendell threw out a curse word and said, they had to fit him in uniforms with shoes and everything. He said, “Because Uncle Sam told me to, that’s how I got in.” No doubt if he had appealed to one of his congressman, he wouldn’t have had to go, but he said no, his buddies were going. He went over with some others. He said they went and he didn’t attempt to object to it, he went right on.

PV: What years was he, when was he there?

RM: ’69. He left I think it was December because he was over there at Christmas of ’68, he was over there at Christmas, but he came back in ’69. He went in the fall, I think it was, of ’68 because he was over there a year. My mother died while he was over there. She was in the hospital when he left, and he went over. He felt like he wouldn’t see her anymore. So I didn’t even call him to let him know about it because it was too much to come back. He could have been sent back, but it was too dangerous. Yes, he was in the nearest field hospital to Hamburger Hill. And that’s the only depressing letter he ever wrote home. He’d write every week, we heard from him every week except at that time. See, we heard it over TV how horrible it was and we knew sort-of where he was. Of course, the enemy had no respect for a field hospital. They’d bomb that as quick as they would anything. We didn’t hear from him and we didn’t hear from him. Eben and I were both so disturbed. When I did get the letter, he said, “I feel, it’s the first time I’ve felt like a butcher instead of a doctor.” That’s what he said in the letter. Because he said, they just brought them in one after the other and he said, we could have saved so many limbs on boys if we had had the equipment. But we did not have it and in order to save their life, they had to remove a leg or remove an arm or whatever it was in order to save a life. That was the only depressing letter that we ever… and no doubt he felt like he wanted to write it. But I think he was so hurt. He said after he got home he told us this, he said, “that we were in blood so much, there were just so many come in that we could not, did not have time to

take a bath or change clothes or anything." He said, "Our uniforms [were just stiff with blood.]"

PV: They were just stiff? Oh boy. I cannot thank you enough your taking your time. You have told me so many wonderful stories, and I just treasure having this information. This is so great. This is exactly the kind of thing we are interested in. It is just from days gone by. We just really appreciate all your time and effort today and we will try to put this to very good use.

RM: Well, I hope you can use some of this. I've enjoyed it, because Clarice will tell you that I always loved to talk.

PV: I think it's wonderful, so thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW