The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History

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Arkansas Memories Project

Dale Bumpers

Interviewed by Archie Schaffer III and Ernie Dumas

March 8, 2010

Little Rock, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at http://pryorcenter.uark.edu. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/ redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
  - annotations for clarification and identification; and
  - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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Archie Schaffer III and Ernie Dumas interviewed Dale Bumpers on March 8, 2010, in Little Rock, Arkansas. The second part of the interview with Dale Bumpers was recorded the following day.

[00:00:00]

Archie Schaffer III: Senator Bumpers, you and I both grew up in Charleston, Arkansas—you a few years before me. Uh—what was it like—uh—growin' up in Charleston, Arkansas, in the late [19]20s early [19]30s?

Dale Bumpers: Well, first of all—uh—nobody felt underprivileged simply because we were living in a little, country town. The highway sign outside town said "Charleston Population 851." And nobody looked at that or was embarrassed by it. Later on we felt a little put out because everybody around us—Ozark, Booneville, Paris—they were all—Greenwood—they were all bigger than Charleston. But—uh—we—we got to where we didn't really pay much attention to that. The thing that we did pay attention to was, because of the movies, we saw—uh—that there was a better—a—a better life in communities almost the same size we were—maybe slightly bigger—in the movies. And so the city fathers took an interest in—uh—for example, putting in a city water system. Everybody had well water. I

know—uh—at our home—uh—you stepped out the back door, there was a little shed there, and it would—it was a well, and you used a rope—lowered the bucket—picked up water. That's a—and that's what we drank. And—uh—but as I say, we didn't have what they call "city water." Didn't have city sewers. We had outhouses. And—uh—we felt privileged because a—at our house we had what we call a "two-holer." Most people in town just had a "one-holer." And it was an unsanitary situation because of the—the two-holer outhouse was right in the corner of the garden where my mother grew vegetables and fed us on the kitchen table. And—uh—it was not uncommon for a lotta people to get typhoid fever back in those days because of that situation. [00:02:18] But there wasn't anything we could do about it until later on when Franklin Roosevelt became president, and it was really sorta similar to the stimulus bill today. Uh—after Roosevelt became president, he started putting huge sums of money into what was called the WPA—Works Progress Administration—and the purpose of that was to—uh—provide public works projects for the small towns like Charleston. And so we got paved streets. We got—uh—city water. We got city plumbing. Uh—we—uh—we began to get our children vaccinated against typhoid and against per—per—per—uh—tuberculosis and

so on. So it was a progressive thing, but we didn't know how poor we were. We didn't know how at risk we were from health matters until we saw every—everybody else—uh—experiencing some serious problems and doing something about it, and that's the reason—uh—a little caustic story—we thought when we died we were goin' to Franklin Roosevelt because he really took an interest in rural areas. And—uh—from that time on, we made nothin' but progress. And while, you know, we could've taken exception to some of the things because—uh—we could—we could've taken exception to it by saying we didn't realize it. But as we began to realize it, we began to do something about it. And that's one of the reasons my father—at the dinner table in the evening, we talked politics. My father was a politician—served one term in the legislature. But he wanted his children to be public servants and help their neighbors and make the community a better place to live, provide us with—uh—uh—public funds and—uh—and so on, so that we could—we could live a more—a more enjoyable, healthy life.

[00:04:31] AS: What were the—uh—schools like in Charleston? You went to school—uh—from first grade through—uh—high school in Charleston, I guess. What kinda schools did you have in Charleston back then?

DB: We had a grade school, which was two stories high and had four—had—uh—eight classrooms. And—uh—we—uh—that went through grades one—uh—through, I believe, through six. Could've been through eight. But—uh—anyway, that's—uh—that's what we had for a grade school. For high school we had a fairly modern building. It was—uh—the heating and—and air—uh—the heating system—we didn't have air-conditioning—the heating system was always quite modern. And—uh—eighth through the twelfth graders were going to high school and, as I say, it was a very nice high school. And, course, compared today, it—it—it wouldn't be very much because we've got a wonderful new high school there and all that sorta thing. But our schools were really not bad, and the teachers were certainly not bad. There were some thing—there were some that could—that the—could've been much better. But it was not—it was not a—a—a thing that—uh—that we—we believed was really—uh—deprecatory to us. We thought we were doin' okay.

[00:05:57] AS: Tell us a little bit about your favorite—uh—grade school teacher—uh—Miss Doll.

DB: Oh, Miss—I'm glad you brought her up. Miss Doll was probably—if I was just guessing—I'd say when I started in the first grade, she was—now she was a high school teacher. I

didn't get Miss Doll until probably about the seventh or eighth grade. But—uh—Miss Doll was an absolutely magnificent woman. She was a perfectionist when it came to grammar. Uh—she was a perfectionist where it came to literature. She taught us to speak properly. You know, don't use language that—uh—that just doesn't fit. And—uh—so she taught us grammar, and that's when we learned to diagram sentences. And the way we learned not perfect English, but certainly it woulda been desirable, perfect English—but—uh—the thing that—that we learned was that if we knew grammar, we would speak properly. And Miss Doll made that clear to us all the time. [00:07:07] And the other thing was she chastised us. You know, it was not a harsh thing, but—uh—she let us know when we misspoke—when we used poor grammar—told us why it was poor. And she—as I say, she was just an absolute—uh—hawk on—on—uh—diagramming sentences. And so we learned to diagram sentences. Uh—most of the children you meet today wouldn't know what you were talkin' about. But it was the best way to learn grammar there was, and Miss Doll drilled that into us from sunup till sundown. And if we spoke to her or if we spoke out loud in class and used poor grammar, she chastised us—told us that that was wrong. And—uh—we ju—we just

learned to appreciate—uh—things like good grammar. And—uh—we were very fortunate to have had somebody like her. I know when I got home from the marine corps after World War II, after I said hello to my mother and father, I bet—beat a track down to Miss Doll's house, and we adored her. And I could never—I could never have learned to speak or much of anything else if it hadn't been for her. And gram—grum—uh—grammar—uh—er—uh—what do I wanna say? Uh—grammar was a must with her, and it became a must with her—with us. [00:08:39] So goin' back to your original question—uh—we were not deprived. We didn't feel deprived simply because we didn't have things that cities had and that modernity brought to so many communities. And—uh—but I can tell you when I went to the University of Arkansas in my freshman English class, our teacher—our professor gave us certain—uh—certain stories or maybe lines—grammatical lines to write and to see if we could write 'em correctly. And it was a must that we be—that we be—uh—trained in correct grammar, and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. It helped me through the University of Arkansas and through Northwestern Law School. It was just everything to us. And, of course, I keep a picture of Miss Doll in my office. I have for as long as I can remember, when I was

governor and senator, and that's how much respect I had for her.

[00:09:47] AS: What—uh—kinda commercial activity was there in Charleston? You were growin' up during—uh—the depths of the Depression and what have you. What—what kind of commercial businesses were there in Charleston? What did your father—uh—do?

DB: Well, that's an excellent question. My father—uh—was a clerk in the Charleston Hardware—Charleston Hardware and Furniture Company. And later on, he and—uh—uh—a fellow who worked there borrowed the money and bought the Charleston Hardware. And it was also affiliated with a funeral home, so it was the Charleston Hardware and Funeral Home. And—uh—they were both fairly profitable, and that's the first time that my mother—uh—convinced us we weren't gonna starve to death 'cause she was a—she was a pessimist—told us, you know, how terrible things were. But when—uh—Dad and—and his partner bought the furniture store and—uh—we began to have food aplenty on the table—uh—for all three meals. And so we just—we just felt very much more attuned to—uh—to the good life. [00:10:59] I might also say that—uh—uh—we—we were taught by our parents that—uh—it was our political system that made us what

we were. We—uh—we loved our political system. Uh—we used to say we were taught that we were goin' to Franklin Roosevelt when we died because we—uh—we loved politics. We thought that—uh—our very futures depending—depended on our political system and how well it functioned. And, in fact, it did. It was just that—uh—it was just that—that true. But—uh—we didn't have everything, but we—we were much better off than most. I mean, there are a lotta small towns smaller than Charleston who had it much tougher than we did.

[00:11:50] AS: What do you remember being—uh—your first job. What did you do as a . . .

DB: First job . . .

AS: . . . kid growin' up?

DB: First job I ever had, I was about twelve to thirteen years old, and I was a janitor at the bank. We had one bank. And I went down there every morning at seven o'clock—swept the bank out—used floor sweep—and—uh—picked all the paper up off the floor. If there were any documents that looked halfway formal or official, we would—uh—we'd put those in a separate packet, so that the tellers when they came in could find 'em and—uh—nobody was—uh—nobody was hurt by it.

[00:12:31] AS: [*Sniffs*] Who was the—uh—banker then? Was it Mr.

Hiatt or Mr. Sherman or . . .

DB: No, Mr. Hiatt. Uh—well, as long as I could remember. I'm—uh—before that, there was a man named Smith. Uh—we called him "Banker Smith" and—but the Depression took him out, and he was no longer the banker. And then the Hiatts took over. And—uh—Mr. Hiatt was a very conscientious banker—a very good man. Uh—he saved a lotta people. In other words, instead of lettin' people just go broke, he'd figure out some way to help 'em. And that way we were all much, much better off than we would otherwise have been. There were a lotta bankers who were really caustic and—and—uh—indifferent to the people who lived there. Mr. Hiatt wanted Charleston to be a progressive town. He wanted everybody to—uh—understand that they had privileges—a bank really belonged to the people. And—uh—it—it was just a—it was an exceptional community. Every community was not fortunate enough to have a—a sensitive, thoughtful banker like that—uh—who practiced noble politics and who did things to—to make things better for everybody else.

[00:13:53] AS: Were there any Republicans in Charleston back then or . . .

DB: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

AS: . . . were they—everybody a Democrat?

DB: All the bankers—uh—uh—were Republicans. The Hiatts were Republicans and the McDonalds were Republicans. But—uh—as I say, that was not as an acute a problem as some people would think it would be today, that the—the bank to be all Republicans, for example, or all Democrats, for that matter—all anything. And Charleston was just a—a bank—the bank in Charleston was filled with people who were generous, thoughtful people. If—if there were—if there was a Democrat who wanted to borrow money and he deserved it, they paid no attention to his political affiliation. And we were very lucky to have had a bank like that. However—uh—during the early 1930s, during the Great Depression—uh—we took hits just like everybody else did. I know my mother went around the house sobbing when Roosevelt declared a banker's holiday, and my mother's father had given her $1,900 when she got married as a sort of a safety latch. And when—uh—the banker's holiday was declared, Mother went down to the bank to get her—draw her money out 'cause she didn't wanna leave it in the bank any longer, but she got there too late. It had already been taken up—uh—by the state or the federal government. I don't know who. But her money had already been disposed of, and—uh—so she just lost

her $1,900. And she never got over it.

[00:15:38] AS: You had a brother and a sister. Uh—they were growin' up in Charleston the . . .

DB: Yes.

AS: . . . same time and—uh—what—what did—uh—how did—how did they do in Charleston, and where did they go when they graduated from high school?

DB: Did very well. They were all—uh—my brother and sister were both—uh—extraordinarily bright. Uh—my brother was—uh—valedictorian or salutatorian. I forget which—of his high school graduating class. My sister was exceptionally bright—very talented. She was an excellent pianist. Uh—she had an excellent voice. She even wrote songs, and some of 'em were really very, very good. And—uh—my brother—uh—was quite a speaker. We used to have declanation contests. Most people wouldn't even know what that is, but that's a—a speaking contest—a county speaking contest. And my brother, I remember, entered the Franklin County Declamation Contest. Went to Ozark—I guess my father took him—and—uh—spoke. And I think the speech was—uh—it was on the Civil War and—uh—he memorized the speech, and then he delivered it, and he won first place in Ozark in that declamation contest. The—the

declamation contest was a speech called "The New South." It was a well-known speech, and it had been—it had been—uh—crafted by somebody in Atlanta. I've forgotten what it was. "The New South" was the title of it, though. And my brother was—uh—he really was a great speaker to be a fifteen-, sixteen-year-old high school student.

AS: So that would've been in the [19]30s—in the . . .

DB: In the [19]30s.

AS: . . . mid-[19]30s. Mid to late [19]30s.

DB: Yeah, it would've probably been around—uh—the mid—the mid to late [19]30s.

[00:17:37] AS: Yeah. [*Coughs* and *clears throat*] Um—who's the first governor of Arkansas that you remember personally?

DB: Uh . . .

AS: Either being elected or serving—uh . . .

DB: I can remember—I guess the earliest memory is of a man named Carl Bailey—uh—as governor. Now I can remember hearing my mother and father talk about other governors, but now those have eluded my mind. I can't think of who they were. But—uh—uh—most people always knew who the governor was, and they knew whether they liked him or disliked him, or whether they thought he was honest or dishonest, and so on.

But—uh—Carl Bailey—I can remember—uh—I had a—a habit or at least—uh—what shall I say? Most people believed as a matter of—uh—uh—common knowledge that he—he—that he drank whiskey. And—uh—so he was not quite as well regarded as some governors had been. But a governor's position was a very high one then. Every—everybody had a high respect for whoever the governor was.

[00:18:48] AS: Was there—uh—whiskey drunk in—uh—Charleston? Was Charleston—uh . . .

DB: Char . . .

AS: . . . wet or dry?

DB: Charleston was dry. And—um—they—uh—you could not buy whiskey in Charleston. There were no whiskey stores. No—no liquor stores. And—uh—people—I believe Ozark was not dry. I think if you wanted to drive your car to Ozark, you could go over there and buy a bottle of whiskey, but you couldn't do it in Charleston. But some people did it in Ozark and, of course, brought it back to Charleston for parties and so on. But it was a—it was a very—uh—uh—closely fought thing in the churches there. All the churches were adamantly opposed to drinking, and so—uh—the more—more people who—who disliked drinking, the tougher it was to get a drink. But—uh . . .

[00:19:44] AS: You—uh—the war started while you were in high school, I guess.

DB: It did.

AS: You graduated from high school in [19]43. Is that right?

DB: That's right.

AS: And—uh—went to the university and then left the university to go into the marine corps. Is that right?

DB: That's correct.

[00:19:58] AS: And tell us about—uh—your first year or two in—uh—Fayetteville at the university?

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:05] DB: Well [*coughs*]—excuse me. The first year at the university was in the summer because I knew I was gonna be drafted or I was gonna enlist in the marine corps or in some branch of the service. And pending that time, I knew that I could get in a few months of education. So I went to summer school at the university. I took twelve hours of Latin. My father thought—he wanted us to be lawyers. He thought in order to be a lawyer you had to be knowledgeable in Latin, and so he wanted me to take Latin, so I could be a first-rate lawyer. And so when I went to the University of Arkansas, I took twelve hours of Latin my summer semester. As I look back on it, of

course, that was foolish, except it was nice to know as much Latin as I did, and it's served me well, incidentally, in many instances ever since then—many, many years. But anyway, when I went up there, I took twelve hours of Latin, which requires to go to Latin two hours a day. An hour in the morning, an hour in the afternoon—five days a week. Ten hours. And there were only five of us in the class, and they were all brighter than I was. [00:21:40] They came from excellent schools across the state. But we all helped each other in that. And I'm not sure, but I think—I know that I made all A's in Latin, and I know my father almost fainted when he got a letter from the president of the University of Arkansas congratulating him on having a son who was so well-versed in Latin and to tell him how proud he should be of his son. I never saw that letter till long after I got out of the marine corps. They—my mother and father had saved it. I didn't even know they'd gotten it. [00:22:16] But in any event, to go on, the twelve hours of Latin that I got during those summer months—I went back to school that fall, but I didn't get any credit because I had to leave right in the middle of that semester. And I could've graduated, you know, from undergraduate school much sooner had I not had to do that. But those were tough times. We just took ever—we took

advantage of every—what shall I say? Every—everything that came along that we thought would be valuable to us, we took advantage of it.

[00:22:53] AS: So you were—you went into the marine corps then in the fall of [19]43 . . .

DB: I was. I . . .

AS: . . . and were there until the war was over?

DB: That's right. I went into the marine corps—I believe it was on November 3, 1943.

AS: And were in the marine corps for how long then—[*DB sighs*] for . . .

DB: Just . . .

AS: . . . a year and a half, two years, I guess?

DB: Oh, no, no. It was almost three.

AS: Three.

DB: I got out in the spring of 1945. The war ended in 1945. And if I'm not mistaken, I got out—I'm almost sure it was in [19]45—maybe early [19]46.

[00:23:31] AS: And you then came back immediately to the university?

DB: Yes.

AS: And got your undergraduate degree there?

DB: Didn't get an undergraduate degree. I went to—I took all the fine arts—a fine arts schedule, studied history, took a course in debate, and had a course in politics—had several just political science courses. And I guess—I was tryin' to think—I went back to school that fall, and then the semester ended in January. And I made excellent grades during those—during that one semester. But—no, I'm gonna have to retract that. I made perfect grades that summer, but that fall I went back to school and had planned, of course, to finish that semester, but I didn't get to finish it because I went into the marine corps in November. So I never finished another semester after I left the summer school.

[00:24:57] AS: Goin' back a little bit—your wife grew up in Charleston as well. When did you and Betty start dating? And tell us a little bit about how that came about and what the Bumpers and Flanagan . . .

DB: Well, I . . .

AS: . . . relationships were?

DB: We met that summer. When the Flanagans moved to Charleston during that summer, Betty stayed home. She was not in school then. And that's when we met, and that's when we started dating. And then from then until I got out of the marine corps three years later, we were faithful correspondents, kept up with

each other—kept up with her health. I remember my mother wrote me a detailed letter when Betty had appendicitis and had to be operated on. And so we stayed in close touch. We had one breakup and dated other people for a while, but then we got back together and the next thing you know, we were married.

[00:25:58] AS: What caused you to decide to go to Northwestern to law school instead of going to the University of Arkansas?

DB: There were two or three reasons for that. Number one, I had been so steeped in the idea that I was goin' into politics, and I also strongly believed, along with that, that I wanted to be in an urban setting. For example—this sounds foolish in the extreme for the time being, but I thought, "If I'm going to—if I'm gonna be president, I'm gonna have to know something about urban life." And I had been stationed in San Diego and in Florida and in Chicago and realized all of a sudden that there was an urban life that I knew nothing about. Now urban life to us had always been like Fort Smith, population thirty thousand people. But when we went to San Diego, for example, and Florida—you know, I don't know what the populations were, but much, much, much greater than that—perhaps, like, a couple hundred thousand. And then when I got out of the marine corps, I went back to the University of Arkansas, which was Fayetteville. That

was not a big city. But I wanted to get my undergraduate degree, and then I wanted to go to law school in an urban setting because I wanted to know—if I was gonna get into politics, I wanted to know as much as I could about urban life 'cause I wanted to be mayor or an official in a city. And so I looked at Columbia. I looked at Northwestern. And the third school—I'm tryin' to think of the third school I looked at, and I can't remember now just offhand what it was. [00:27:59] But in any event, I was accepted at Northwestern and was thrilled to death that I was. And I found—I—incidentally, I believe that with my application, I submitted a letter from the president of the University of Arkansas—the one I alluded to earlier. I sent that letter along with my application, and the president of the university wrote my father back congratulating him on havin' such a fine son and all that sorta thing. And, you know, I didn't even know that that letter had been written until long after I got out of the service.

[00:28:39] AS: So you were in Chicago at Northwestern for three years, I guess.

DB: Yeah.

AS: How was that? Did you enjoy living in Chicago?

DB: I did. I liked Chicago then, and I like Chicago now.

AS: And you believe you got a good education at Northwestern?

DB: I got an excellent education. Northwestern then was rated as one of the top five or six law schools in the country and still is. And I'm always happy and take pride in telling people that I went to school there.

AS: Yeah.

DB: But I do want to reemphasize that my whole justification for going to Northwestern was to go to an urban setting 'cause I knew, as I say—if you're gonna be a big-time politician, you gotta live in a city. And if you're gonna live in a city, you're gonna live where there's a heavy population. And there are a lotta things different in a population—populated city—an urban setting—and towns like Fort Smith or Charleston, Arkansas.

[00:29:37] AS: While you were at Northwestern, your mother and father were killed in an automobile accident, right?

DB: That's right. I was . . .

AS: Tell us how that affected you and . . .

DB: Well, I can't overstate the drama of that. I—Mother and Dad owned a farm in Oklahoma, which was just across the river—the Arkansas River. And my dad had bought a farm over in what we call the Arkansas River Bottoms, and he used to go over there. He and Mother used to go over there with some neighbors.

They'd take neighbors with 'em who knew that area. And they'd go over there on Sunday afternoon and see how the crops were coming along, if they were being grown—whether the farmer was tending to the crops as he should be and that sort of thing. And so this was—I started to Northwestern in 19—let's see, it was 1946, I guess. And I had gone from the fall of the year when I entered until March of the next year, and it was then, when I was sitting at my—at a desk in my dormitory room, and one of my friends came in and said, "You've got an urgent telephone call." We didn't have call—we didn't have phones in the room. I had to go down to the hall to a telephone booth to take the call. And my sister's brother-in-law, who was a top-notch dental surgeon, was on the phone. And he said, "I have some really sad news for you. Your mother and father have been in a terrible car wreck, and you should make arrangements to come home immediately." And he didn't know much about what had happened, but he did know that the male—that the man who was riding in the front seat was dead—was killed in the wreck. He was already dead. And my mother was in critical condition. And, of course, you know, I could—I have to say that's probably the most dramatic moment of my life. I just simply could not accept it. Couldn't believe it. And

so I go down and make plane reservations and got a plane out the next day that got me to Fort Smith by about two o'clock in the afternoon. And I went immediately to the hospital and saw my mother and father, and my mother and father neither one recognized me. They were both unconscious, and I could dwell on that for a long time, but that was just the most—probably traumatic experience I ever had.

[00:32:29] AS: And they didn't . . .

DB: And they both—they were both dead. As I said, the male passenger was killed instantly. And my mother died—now this was on Sunday evening and my mother died the following Tuesday evening, and my father died the following Saturday evening. So three of the four people were dead. And the thing that made it even less acceptable was that the man who caused the wreck was roaring drunk and hit 'em head on. And he did time in the penitentiary and—I think he spent three years in the penitentiary and later on became a preacher. And I don't know what kind. I just heard. And he later held a revival at the Assembly of God Church in Charleston and sent an invitation to me to come and visit their church and worship with them some evening, but I never did do it. I never did go. He had—he was—as I say, he was roaring drunk when he hit my mother and

father. It was a tough thing to accept.

[00:33:39] AS: Did you drop out of law school then or . . .

DB: I did, as a matter of fact. That was in April, and so I dropped out of law school, came home, started puttin' all of our affairs together—my mother and father's business affairs together—and got a pretty good job done of it and went—then I went back to Northwestern. My brother incidentally was in Harvard Law School at the time, and he had dropped out also. I went back to summer school. My brother at Harvard—you can only go one—you can go one time during the year. Northwestern had two semesters. Harvard only had one. And so my brother went back to Harvard, but had to start all over—start his second year all over. I—that woulda been—let's see—yeah, that was his second year. He would've—because he started at the same time I did. And—anyway he came through it very well. He got married while he was in law school, as I did. We both got married. And our wives worked to help put us through and, of course, we were on the GI Bill, too. So things began to look up, you know, after a couple of years and then . . .

AS: You graduated from law school and then came back . . .

Trey Marley: Excuse me, Archie . . .

AS: Yeah.

[Tape stopped]

[00:35:08] AS: So after you graduated from law school, you came back to Charleston immediately and . . .

DB: Yes.

AS: . . . went back to the hardware—practiced law. What . . .

DB: I did. I bought my father's old business and opened a law practice in the back of the hardware store and built a little cubbyhole about fifteen by fifteen there. And that's too long a story to tell, but I practiced law in the back of that hardware—and the first year, I took in sixty-two dollars. And—but later on a couple of years later, I rented an office—a really nice office in the bank. And two years after that, I bought an old blacksmith's shop and refurbished it into a really nice office. Had a library room, and I had a counseling room. It was really a nice—it was a nice office. And I stayed in that office and practiced law until I decided to run for governor.

[00:36:16] AS: And you continued to run the hardware store though . . .

DB: Oh, yes.

AS: . . . while you were practicing law?

DB: Well, I sold the hardware and—it was a hardware and furniture, and I sold the hardware and furniture store about three years

before I started back to law school. I ran—I just had the—I had the—I guess I had the hardware and furniture store for three years and—but I had other people running—mostly running it for me. And I was virtually in the full-time practice of law.

[00:36:52] AS: You were the lawyer for the school board back in the early [19]50s—mid-[19]50s . . .

DB: I was.

AS: . . . and one of the big things that took place back then was the desegregation in Charleston after the *Brown* decision. Tell us a little bit about that.

DB: In the *Brown* decision, as you know, was—entered—the Supreme Court rendered the *Brown* decision in May of 1951.

AS: Of [19]54.

DB: I mean [19]54. I'm sorry. And it was in 1954—as you know, the *Brown* decision—the court said they wanted the court—the decision to be enforced forthwith, which meant, you know, get at it as quickly as you can. And so I was the only lawyer in Charleston, and when the school board took it up, they probably would've done it anyway, and I've taken credit for it that I probably didn't deserve. But when they asked me about it, I told 'em about the forthwith provision in the *Brown* decision, and I said, "You will be light years ahead if you do it immediately, as

the court has instructed you to do. And you'll be pleased that you did, and you'll save a lotta money on buses and food and everything else that goes with running a school system." And so the school board met. I wasn't on the school board, and I did not attend the school board meeting. But the school board met, and I belie—it was in August, I guess, of 1954. The decision was entered in [19]54, and it was then—it was that fall that the school board met and passed a resolution that Charleston would integrate its schools on—I believe, it was September the—August the twentieth. I'm not sure—about that time. [00:39:04] But in any event, they decided to go ahead and just bite the bullet. It was the most amazing decision. You know, very few people in this country know about that, but it was the most amazing thing that happened in this country when the little town of Charleston. The school board met. They said, "We're gonna honor the court's decision, and we're going to integrate, and we're gonna integrate on August the twentieth." And on August the twentieth, the school buses rolled in with black children getting off them. It didn't have many. I don't wanna overstate this. There's always been a controversy about how many black children entered. But whatever it was—fifteen, twenty—it was a moving, unbelievable moment. We had no idea

that at that very moment we were really making history, becoming the first and only school in the United States to integrate its schools. And Fayetteville followed—Fayetteville, Arkansas, followed us two weeks later. They only integrated their high school. They didn't integrate their grade school. But we were the only school that integrated that year. And today Charleston, Arkansas—which I started off telling you had a population of 851, which now has, oh, 3,000 or more—that they became historic—a historical community. And today it is a national commemorative site administered by the national park system. And it was nothing in the world but a few brave men who took the horse by the tail and did what they knew had to be done. My role in it was very, very simple. It was—there was nothing to it. And I told 'em—I said, "You can do it now, or you can do it later, but I would strongly recommend you do it now." And they were in a mood to do that anyway. I don't think I had all that much influence on 'em. But they were—that has just now—all of that has come to light now in this country. But for a long time, very few people knew it.

[00:41:24] AS: You went on the school board not long after that and served for a few years and then made your first attempt at public office beyond the Charleston School Board in 1962, when

you ran for the state legislature. Not many people know about that either and know how unsuccessful you were with that campaign. Tell us a little bit about that campaign and what happened.

[00:41:49] DB: Well, there again I had never—I had run for school board incidentally. I didn't mention that. But after Charleston integrated, there was a big brouhaha. The rednecks came out of the woodwork and started planning for a big school election to desegregate. That would be the purpose of the election—special election—to desegregate the Charleston schools again. And I was up for reelection. I got a partner who was a fine man in Charleston to join me. There were two seats open, including mine, and we did very little campaigning. But people had seen what happened in Little Rock at Central High School, and they'd seen the mess that Little Rock had become, and so Ralph Wingfield and I—we didn't campaign really vigorously or anything. Everybody just knew we were running, and that if we are elected, we were gonna stay integrated. We were not gonna desegregate. And we knew what Little Rock had gone through, and we didn't want any part of it, and we had already become historically famous for what we had done, and we wanted to stay famous. And so we won that election handily. Won it big. And

it showed really that the people in Charleston showed a determination and an intelligence that was really remarkable. Those people did not want any more fighting—nothin'. They wanted it over with. And so . . .

[00:43:31] AS: So that election would've been in [19]58, I guess. Probably . . .

DB: That was in [19]58.

AS: Yeah.

DB: It was March of [19]58. And that was sorta the end of the story, I guess I could say.

[00:43:42] AS: Right. And then it was four years later that you decided to run for the state legislature.

DB: That's right. Now that's—again that's the original question you put to me.

AS: Right.

DB: And I ran and was soundly defeated. Now Franklin County, where Charleston was located, had two county seats—one in Ozark and one in Charleston. The one in Ozark was much bigger, and it was really a sort of a simple issue and simple pol—it was simple politics. Ozark had all the votes. They had roughly three times more votes than we did, and they just outvoted us, and I lost. And that was in, I guess, May or—I

think it was in May of nineteen . . .

AS: [Nineteen] sixty-two.

DB: . . . sixty-two.

AS: Yeah. Mike Womack was your opponent then.

DB: That's right. Mike Womack was my opponent. He didn't last very long in the legislature, and I—and then four years—let's see, that was [19]60—that was eight years later, I ran for governor.

[00:44:46] AS: You almost ran for governor in [19]68 though, right?

DB: I did.

AS: You thought about running two years before you did. Tell us about that and why you decided not to run and what your thinking was.

DB: Well, there was a mayor in Little Rock, and Martin Luther King had been assassinated, and Little Rock was having a terrible time of it. They were having fires. There were shootings. Everybody in Little Rock was upset and distraught about what was happening. Now the Little Rock integration crisis had already happened the years before, and the rednecks, of course, wanted to undo it. So anyway, that was in nineteen—can—what year was it?

AS: [Nineteen] sixty-eight was when—when Dr. King was killed

and . . .

DB: Yeah.

AS: . . . the year you almost ran for governor . . .

DB: Ran for governor. And I called . . .

AS: . . . and went to Little Rock and talked to Mart . . .

[00:45:48] DB: I called the mayor of Little Rock. That's right. I called the mayor of Little Rock—told him who I was and told him I'd heard good things about him and that I was thinking about running for governor. And I said, "I know this is highly presumptuous for me to be asking you to run a campaign for me when you don't know me, and certainly I don't know you. But I'm just presumptuous enough to tell you that I will run if you will manage my campaign. And all I know about you is the things that I have heard from other people who are friends of yours." And he said, "Well, why don't you drive down to Little Rock, and let's talk?" Well, I was amazed that he even—you know, that he even agreed to talk to me about it. But we had a wonderful conversation that day and concluded on his advice that I would wait a couple years. He said, "You know, you're a nice-lookin' guy. You've got a chance to do this. I don't think you can do it this year because of this Martin Luther King thing, and I am so busy, I don't know what I'm doin' because of it." So

he said, "I think if you'd wait a couple years, you might have a much better chance." And that was 1968. And he said, "I will arrange some speeches for you in communities where you are totally unknown—introduce you to Rotary clubs where you don't—you've never appeared before. And we'll sorta get you running a little bit before you announce." And so we did that. I went around the state and made a few speeches, all well received. And then when the time came two years later, I announced for governor and started off the governor's race with 1 percent name recognition in the entire state.

[00:47:29] AS: There were eight Democrats in that . . .

DB: Eight demo . . .

AS: . . . first primary.

DB: Eight Democrats in the first primary, and they were all—the attorney general was in the race. The house speaker was in the race. There were—I can't remember who the others were but most all . . .

AS: Orval Faubus, of course.

[00:47:49] DB: Orval Faubus, who had really almost destroyed the state of Arkansas, had been out of office for four years then decided to make a comeback. So there was an awful lotta heavy liftin' to take place if I was gonna make that race. But I did it. I

started off with 1 percent name recognition. Only 1 percent of the people had ever heard of me. And over a period of roughly three months won the Democratic nomination, which meant I beat "Win" Rockefeller. I beat the attorney general. I beat everybody—seven other candidates. And then that fall—then the runoff—Orval Faubus and I were in the runoff, and I defeated Orval Faubus two weeks later in the runoff. And then that fall our governor at the time was Winthrop Rockefeller, and Winthrop Rockefeller was running for a third term. We had two-year terms, and he was running for a third-year term. And so he and I were pitted against each other—in 1974, I guess.

AS: No, that was . . .

DB: No, [19]72. I'm sorry.

AS: No, that was still [19]70.

DB: That's right, it was 1970.

AS: Yeah.

DB: I'm sorry.

AS: Nineteen seventy. Right.

[00:49:16] DB: And so I defeated him in that runoff. And then I—course, I had to run against Winthrop Rockefeller, who had a little more money than I did to spend.

AS: Uh-huh.

DB: But roundly defeated him, so that's the way I became governor.

AS: Yeah.

[00:49:31] TM: Excuse me, Arch. What do you remember as being the issues at the time that you were running with the guys—against the guys?

DB: Schools. Everything was related to the schools. We were trying to put the Orval Faubus era behind us and actually give our children a decent education or certainly a good chance at a good education. And I had said all along that the Faubus years were over. We're here to educate our children and not play politics with it. And that really resounded well with the people.

AS: Your . . .

[00:50:13] DB: I might also say that my brother and sister had all—had both become relatively well-to-do during this period of time, and I was the only one that was not well-to-do. [*Scratching sound*] But raising money for that race was tough in the beginning because, as I say, nobody had ever heard of me. But in the race, my brother and sister were both able to help me financially. I could never have done it without 'em.

[00:50:44] AS: Politics was much less expensive then. I think . . .

DB: It was.

AS: . . . Governor Beebe, as I understand—his last [*DB coughs*]

election four years ago, spent five or six million dollars getting elected governor. Do you remember what you spent in that first primary in 1970 against the seven other . . .

DB: A hundred and . . .

AS: . . . candidates

DB: A hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

AS: And . . .

DB: And I got 21 percent of the vote, but that was enough to get me in the runoff 'cause everybody else was below 21 percent. So then I won runoff, and course, that put me in the runoff—I mean, the Democratic runoff. And that put me face-to-face with Orval Faubus. However, I spent $300,000 then over the next three or four months in the runoff with the Democratic—I mean, the—against Winthrop Rockefeller, the Republican.

AS: Right. [*Sighs*] Do we wanna take a break?

[Tape stopped]

[00:51:45] AS: [*DB clears throat*] Let's talk some more about the early days growin' up in Charleston. And you mentioned earlier that you worked in a bank as a janitor for a while. What other jobs did you have? I remember you tellin' a story about workin' in a cannery. What kinda cannery was there in Charleston and what did you do?

DB: It was just a fresh vegetable cannery, and it was only open, like, twenty to thirty days a year. But the farmers there had small plots—maybe an acre. Some of 'em had as much as two acres. And so everybody—all the farmers around there who had a little acreage of fresh vegetables looked forward with anxiety and anticipation for the cannery to open. And then they would have people gather at the space between the American State Bank and the drugstore where the trucks would come. I say the trucks—maybe a couple of trucks would come and pick the workers up and take 'em back out to these fields where they'd pick beans. They also picked boysenberries. They picked strawberries. And they picked cotton for a while but not much. Charleston—at one time, I can remember when I was really small—Charleston had two gins, and between 'em, I believe they produced a thousand bales. But the cotton just played totally out. No cotton at all. And the farmers were living off of these fresh vegetables. The cannery was living off the fresh vegetables. And they paid—people were almost universally paid ten cents an hour for their work. But I can tell you, ten cents an hour against zero was a lotta money.

[00:53:40] AS: How did you get around? What kinda transportation did you [*DB sniffs*] have in Charleston in those days? Did

you . . .

DB: Pickup trucks.

AS: . . . your family have a car? And when did you get your first car?

DB: Oh, Lord, I didn't have a car. I was probably twelve years old when I went to the fields. They'd—they would have a pickup truck, and you'd just sit in the back of the pickup truck. And usually the pickup truck belonged to the farmer, or he might hire a neighbor, and there'd be two pickup trucks. And if you were there between the American State Bank and the drugstore, you know, you could get in. They wouldn't let everybody in because they didn't want too many people in the field.

[00:54:21] AS: What did you do for entertainment in Charleston then? You mentioned the movie theatre earlier. Was there just one theatre in Charleston and . . .

DB: Well, we had radio, too. We listened to the radio—*Lum and Abner*, *Amos 'n' Andy*—I can't think of the name of all the other people, but entertainment was all radio. I know my mother wouldn't let us turn the lights on. We'd go into the living room and sit in the dark listening to the radio because Mother couldn't stand for the lights to be on and the radio playing at the same time. That was just using too much electricity.

[00:55:02] AS: [*Laughs*] Huh. [*Clears throat*] What kind of movies do you remember seeing at that time?

DB: The movies—we had a theatre—the first theatre—the Gem Theatre was built in Charleston in the—probably the mid- to late-[19]30s. And the—we got movies roughly six months to a year after they were shown at the Joie Theatre in Fort Smith. And when theatre—when the movies were shown in Fort Smith—if it was—if the people who—in Charleston could afford to go to Fort Smith to the movie would come back and tell us how wonderful it was, we could hardly stand to wait until that movie showed up in Charleston, and that was always a three- to six-months wait. We never got to see 'em until they'd been in Fort Smith for a long time.

[00:55:55] AS: Did you go to Fort Smith to the movies? Was the road paved from Charleston to Fort Smith?

DB: It was. That road was paved in about 1920—oh, maybe the early [19]30s. And so it was possible to go to Fort Smith. Automobiles were becoming more modern then. And I think that—I can't—I was tryin' to think about how we handled that, but we loved the movies above everything else, and we watched the tags—you know, the pictures outside the theatre of all the motions, and the action that was taking place. We could hardly

wait. And tickets were fifteen cents, and that was not easy to come by. As a matter of fact, I've got two fifteen-cent Gem Theatre tickets hanging in my office.

AS: Hmm.

DB: And those were the days, my friend.

[00:56:58] AS: How often did you go to Fort Smith—make that trip? It's twenty-five miles from Charleston to Fort Smith. Did you do that . . .

DB: Not often at all because, first of all, it was not common for the father to let the oldest son drive that car just wherever he wanted to. Carroll—when Carroll was a junior in high school, Dad would let him have the car occasionally to have a date, go to the junior or senior prom or somethin' like that. But there just weren't many cars. There weren't that many cars. And the parents were reluctant to turn a child loose with an automobile just to have a date.

[00:57:37] AS: When you started to the university that summer of [19]43, how did you go from Charleston to Fayetteville to . . .

DB: Hitchhiked. Now my dad took me the first time, and we ran into a snowstorm incidentally, and I worried—even at my tender age, I worried about Dad driving back down that mountain to Charleston in a snow. And I was—because [*laughs*] he was a

terrible driver, and I was scared to death of what might happen to him, but he made it. One time I drove down the mountain with my father, and we had to stop and spend the night 'cause we just couldn't make it.

[00:58:14] AS: Mh-hmm. [*Clears throat*] Anything else we wanna talk about related to Charleston . . .

TM: Well, just . . .

AS: . . . in the early days?

TM: [*Clears throat*] Are you—earliest memories? Can you think of, like, going way, way back—maybe about your house and what it was like growin' up? Just young, young-type memories.

DB: Hmm.

AS: Anything there you can think of you wanna tell a story about?

DB: I can't think of anything really.

[00:58:45] AS: A lot of the Bumpers lived at Cecil. We talked about Cecil a little bit earlier. [*DB coughs*] How—who—tell a little bit about the Bumpers family that lived in and around Charleston or Cecil and how you all got together for family outings, family reunions, and what have you.

DB: Well, I had two families. My mother was a Jones, and her father had been the only shopkeeper—the only store in a little community six miles north of Vesta, and by the time I was the

age of reason or knew anything, he had moved to Charleston and closed the store. But he also was the postmaster, and the post office was just those few boxes in the back of the grocery store. And then Mother was actually made—at one time my mother, when she was just, I don't know, maybe eighteen years old, replaced my grandfather as the postmaster. And she got a little money for that. I'm not sure—it wasn't much. But anyway, Dad—my grandfather got—when he got rid of the store in the [19]30s—sometime during the [19]30s, he came to town and started living with his children. He'd spend a week with one and a week with another. Now that would be considered quite a chore today, but those children actually fought to see who he was gonna stay with next. They wanted him. He was a wonderful man—very bright—and they wanted him in their house as long as they could keep him. But he'd rotate. He'd go to one child's house for a week or two and then go to another one's for a week or two. And then the—one of the restaurants in Charleston was owned by a man who had lived up on the mountain when my grandfather had the store and had incurred us a pretty good debt to my grandfather. Well, he had this restaurant, and so he'd go down there at noon and have lunch in that restaurant. It made my mother so mad, but he told her,

"You know, there's no point in you fixin' dinner for me when I'm—you know, Doc Fry down there can feed me." And so that went on for several years. Those were simple stories, and if you know—you knew 'em all, you could tell 'em for ages, because everybody got by. Everybody just got by, by craftsmanship, I guess you'd say, or—I don't know what the word would be for it, but just like my grandfather. [01:01:34] And he—and medical practice back then—Dr. Bollinger and Dr. Neissl were the two doctors in town, and that was a—that's a long story which I won't get into. But Dr. Bollinger had a car, and Dr. Neissl didn't. Dr. Neissl had immigrated to this country from Germany, I think, through Czechoslovakia. I think he went to medical school in Czechoslovakia, and then he practiced medicine in Arkansas in Charleston. He got his license and everything. He was a wonderful doctor. He knew as much about the human anatomy as an awful lot of the doctors know today. And he cured me of pneumonia twice in three years, and I'm talkin' about a very serious case—high fever—everything that goes with pneumonia. I can still remember my mother crying and think that I was dying. And Dr. Boll—and Dr. Neissl just simply—you know, he'd—he would kinda stop at our house the first place in the morning. Then he'd go down the street and see Mrs. Brown and

then Mrs. O'Bar. And he just made rounds, walking. He didn't have a car. Dr. Bollinger had a car.

[01:03:00] AS: Mh-hmm. What about lawyers? Your book, *The Best Lawyer in a One-Lawyer Town*, was published a few years ago—some notoriety. What—who were the lawyers in Charleston in the [19]30s and [19]40s when you were growin' up, before you went back to practice?

DB: The six lawyers in Charleston—I can't name 'em all for you—but six lawyers for a town of a thousand people was just—you know, today that would be unthinkable. But I would say that when I got outta law school—I know this was true—when I got outta law school, there were no lawyers in Charleston. They had all left. And so when I started practicin' in the back of the hardware store, I was the only—I was it. I was sellin' merchandise and practicin' law. And . . .

[01:03:49] AS: Who were your mentors in the law then? I know I've heard you tell lots of stories about Mark Woolsey, who practiced in Ozark.

DB: Yeah.

AS: Who—tell us about Mark or any other mentors of yours in your early law practice.

DB: Mark Woolsey was a lawyer who became a lawyer because he

was a member of the legislature. And back then if you remember the legislature, you could simply apply and become a lawyer. That entitled you to practice law, and we had—at that time, we had no lawyers in Charleston—maybe before I got back, there were one or two—maybe even three at some point. But by the time I got home, there were no lawyers left. But we had court. We had circuit court twice a year. But we had not had a jury trial in roughly three to four years when I returned. And what I did was mostly just draw deeds and wills for people. I'll tell you, Mark Woolsey was—he was one of the most humorous people. I can remember him comin' to see me one time, and he said, "Dale, I've got a case for you and me, and we're gonna make us a tub of money." I said, "Well, how are we gonna do that, Mark?" He said, "You know, these"—he named the family out there—the Fitzgerald family and the Meisners. The Meisners were a part of the German immigrants. Charleston was loaded with Catholic—German Catholics who had come there years before. And Mark said, "Do you know them Meisners?" And I said, "Mark, they're Meisners." "Whatever!" He said, "You know, they had a wreck out there, and they got hurt." And I said—he said, "You and me can make us a pocketful of money off of that." And I said, "Mark, I don't wanna—I can't get

involved in that." "Why not, son? Why not?" I said, "Well, first of all, the main reason is because they're all good friends of mine." And he says, "My God, son, I'd hate to think I could make a livin' off of my enemies." [*Laughter*] He was a—he was one of the cleverest humorists I ever knew.

[01:06:15] AS: [*Clears throat*] One of my favorite Mark Woolsey stories you used to tell is a little risqué. [*DB coughs*] I don't know whether you wanna tell it or not. But you wanna tell the story about Mark and the . . .

DB: No.

AS: . . . the—stayin' in the [*laughs*] . . .

DB: In the café—in the room in the back of the café.

AS: Oh! [*Laughs*]

DB: No, I don't wanna tell that one.

AS: You don't wanna tell that story. [*Laughter*] That's a great story.

DB: It is a great story. [*AS laughs*] And it's a true one.

AS: Uh-huh.

[01:06:40] DB: The Mark Woolsey stories [*clears throat*]—not all of 'em are true, but most of them are. And the ones that are, are classics.

AS: Uh-huh.

TM: But we can't tell that one?

DB: Mmm. [*AS laughs*]

TM: Oh. [*Laughs*]

DB: Not with the [*unclear words*] here.

TM: All right. You got it.

[01:06:52] AS: [*Laughs*] How 'bout the story you used to tell about when you first opened your law office and them hookin' up the telephone? Is that a true story or is that . . .

DB: No.

AS: . . . apocryphal?

DB: No, that's apocryphal.

AS: Oh! [*Laughs*] That's another great story that . . .

DB: That is a great story.

AS: Yeah. What do we wanna talk about . . .

[01:07:15] TM: One thing I was thinkin' here—when were some of the first times that you realized you were gonna get into public service and serve? I mean, your father kinda pushed you that way, but can you remember any of those points that really kinda shifted you, and you knew you were gonna head that way?

DB: Well, hardly until I had almost made the decision. It was on my mind constantly, and I had a few people, just like Archie's father, who were obviously gonna be involved in it if we—if I made up my mind to do it. But those stories all carry their own

history and—I don't know. What was your question originally?

TM: Basically—I mean, when—at what point when you were young did you start bein' directed and feel like you wanted to go do public service? I mean, can you remember the first . . .

[01:08:08] DB: Well, I guess the first time was when I ran for president of the fifth grade.

TM: Can you tell me about that?

DB: I got elected, and I just couldn't get over it. [*AS laughs*] But [*AS clears throat*] so far as politics are concerned, I always had it in the back of my mind. And if you read my book, do you remember the story where Dad told me on the way home from goin' to see Franklin Roosevelt? Told my brother and me that we could be president, too. And that had such an absolutely unbelievable impact on me, to think that, you know, the fact that my father told me made me believe it. But the magnitude of the story was just almost more than I could take, and I never took my mind off politics. And I wanted to be a politician, and I wanted to be a public official. I wanted to make a difference in people's lives educationally, medically, and everything else, just like now. It was on a much smaller scale then, but I wanted all those things then that we got later.

[01:09:21] Ernie Dumas: There was a story you mentioned about

a week ago when we were at lunch about your sense of ethics and how—from your mother and your daddy—and you told a story about your daddy taking you out to the pond . . .

DB: Yeah.

ED: . . . to go fishing. Maybe that's significant.

AS: Yeah.

DB: It's true. My father was, I always thought, the most honest man I ever knew in my life. And were taught as good Methodists, you know, to honor every biblical rule that we could find and never to lie and never to steal and never to cheat—nothing. And that was just a—you know, that was something that didn't bother us. I mean, we thought it was right, or our father wouldn't be hammering us with it. And then one afternoon when I was in about the fourth grade, I guess—Charleston had just built a lake for publi—for city water, and there were no fishing—there was no fishing allowed for three years in that. The—they had stocked it with fish, but they wanted the fish to be able to grow and multiply before any fishing would be allowed. [01:10:39] And so one afternoon I came home from school, and Dad was there, and Dad said, "Son, get you somethin'—clothes on. Come with me." And my mother said, "Son, don't you do it. Bill, don't take that boy with you." And he said, "Come on, let's

go." And so I did whatever he told me to. I guess he told me to get a fishing pole. We were going fishing. And so we drove out toward the lake, which was a mile north of Charleston, and we drove down a road, which had been a road over to Potato Hill, one of our scenic spots. And we decided we'd stop there and fish where the road ended in the lake. And I didn't think much about it. I've thought a little bit about what Mother's admonition had been—her warning, you know. "Don't take that boy with you, Bill," as though that was really gonna be a king-size sin. And so we started fishing and Dad—they had stocked it with bass—Bigmouth Bass. And so my dad started fishing, and he'd put bait on my line, and I started fishing. I didn't catch anything, but he caught three fairly good-size Bigmouth Bass, and we took 'em home. And Mother just threw a fit, and she refused to cook 'em. So Dad had to cook supper that night. [01:12:18] But I—it was a lesson for me that I can't describe for you perfectly because I took some joy in us fishing and catching fish, but in the back of my mind, I was terribly troubled about catching those fish. And I knew fishing was not allowed in that lake and—but there wasn't anything I could do about it at that point. But it was an honest—one of those honest lectures. It wasn't a lecture, but it's similar to an honest lecture

[*scratching sound*], and it's one of those things you don't ever forget. And it's a magnificent thing for children to hear about and to talk about.

[01:13:01] AS: You mentioned that your father was also in the funeral home business . . .

DB: Yes.

AS: . . . when he had the hardware. Tell me what you remember about funerals in Charleston and how important they were and you—your involvement in 'em or your father's involvement.

DB: All small towns had funeral homes and hardwares that were together. For example, Charleston Hardware, Furniture, and Funeral Home was the one my father and his partner had. And there was another hardware down the street that had a funeral home with it. And so Dad's and his partner's was easily the most popular and the busiest and so on. And they had a—there was a blacksmith's shop behind us, and it was also a sort of a carpentry place. And Dad and Herman would hire this man in the carpenter shop behind—across the alley, behind the store to make caskets for 'em. And they'd buy a casket from him for maybe twenty bucks, maybe thirty. But almost every hardware store had a casket-manufacturing facility with it. And so that's where Dad got his caskets. And there was something else I

started to tell and I . . .

[01:14:32] AS: Did your father participate in the funerals himself?

DB: Oh, yes.

AS: I remember hearin' stories about your dad singin' at funerals or . . .

DB: No, he didn't sing.

AS: . . . preaching at . . .

DB: He spoke.

AS: . . . funer . . .

DB: It was not uncommon for some of the rural people—I mean, they were there with their families in overalls and barefooted and that sorta thing. They had nothing. They didn't have anything to wear that was special for a funeral. And I can remember this one family had about six or seven children, and one of 'em had died with typhoid fever, I think. But I remember we had the funeral out at the funeral home. They'd dug the grave, and the casket was situated on the top of the grave, and the family was—you know, they were carrying on somethin' awful. I mean, they were just crying and carrying on. And so, finally, we got 'em quieted down enough for Dad to deliver a little sermon and a prayer and got that over. [01:15:39] And then they had the funeral car from the funeral home—but they had about six or

seven kids. They liked to never got everybody stuffed in that car to take 'em home. And they were all in overalls, you know, and shoes that were virtually falling off their feet. And finally got 'em home—liked never got 'em outta the car. I took 'em home, and Dad followed me. And when we got there he said, "You stay with these—this family until they're out of the car and in the house. But when you leave here, you get away from here by a certain time because," he said, "you know that creek we crossed?" It was raining like all get-out. He said, "You remember that creek we crossed?" "Yeah." "I want you to get across that as soon as you can because you'll get stuck in it, and I'll have to come all the way back down here and get you." And so that's precisely what happened. I—we finally got the family in the house, and he took off, and I was still workin' on the last two or three kids to get 'em outta the car and into the house. And so I take off in the car by myself. It was our family car. I took off by myself, and I get down to this creek, and I start across it, and I can't make it, so I'm stuck in this creek. And it was flowin' pretty heavily. I'd say it was a foot deep, maybe a foot and a half. [01:17:15] And I—well, I was terrified. I—make no bones about it. I was scared to death. It was beginnin' to get dark, and I just stood around there—didn't know what to

do. But my father obviously had sensed that I was late catching up with him. He had stopped down the road and was gonna wait for me. And since I didn't show up, he turned around and came back down two or three miles to where I was stuck in the creek. I've never been so happy to see anybody in my life 'cause I was really terrified. And so he had me go across first, and then he got behind me. And it was a newer car and more apt to get me out. But he got behind me and put his bumper against me, and I floor-boarded my car. He floor-boarded his car, and we both got out and then took off home.

[01:18:19] AS: Tell us a little bit about the Methodist church in Charleston. I know the Methodist—you grew up in the Methodist church. It was important to you. What was the Methodist church in Charleston in those early days like and . . .

DB: Well [*coughs*], excuse me. We were practicing Methodists. We went to church every Sunday religiously. We attended Sunday school class. My mother taught a Sunday school class. My father taught a Sunday school class. And incidentally, I taught my father's Sunday school class after he died, which has long since even before he died been named the "Bumpers class." And I really felt a sense of enhancement and excitement about teaching his Sunday school class. And my—as I say, my mother

was an excellent Sunday school teacher. She was—she—while her education was limited, my mother had a very fine mind. And church was every other Sunday. The preacher would go out to a rural church one Sunday, then come back to Charleston. They discontinued that when I was still just pretty young. But in any event, the church was very limited, but we had every year a terrible time raisin' the budget. I never will forget your father, who was not much of a believer—I never will forget the preacher was sort of a dramatician, I guess you'd say. He was preaching—gettin' ready to start preaching the sermon that Sunday, and he began to talk about—he didn't say anything. He just walked up to the pulpit, and he looked at the Bible for a moment—didn't say anything. And he looked up, and he got a startled look on his face, and he drew back like this [DB looks past the interviewer]. He said, "Look who's here!" And your young brother, Chris, who knew your father was about half atheist, was scared to death. He said, "Oh, I know it's Daddy." [*Laughter*] [*Coughs*]

ED: Integrating the church.

AS: Huh?

ED: Integrating the church.

[01:20:46] AS: Integrating church. [*DB clears throat*] Yeah. Tell us

about integrating the Methodist church in Charleston.

DB: This happened after the schools were integrated, and there were a few of us that had begun to talk about integrating the church. The Catholic church had already integrated, and [*clears throat*] they were coming into the Catholic school. And so one day, our pastor came to my law office and came back to my office—sat down—said, "I've got an urgent problem we need to solve." And I said, "What is it?" And he said, "I need you to give me a hundred dollars." I said, "What for?" He said, "To put a new roof on that *N* church." People were not as cautious about their language back then because he said, "We need to put a new roof on that *N* church out there." And I said, "You know something, Roy?" I said, "We don't need to put a new roof on that church. What we need to do is to invite the black people to our church." He said, "We can't do that." I said, "Why?" And he said, "The church would empty out. Miss Floyd and Miss Frensmeir would both get up and walk out. We'd never see 'em again." And I said, "No, you wouldn't." He said, "You don't think so?" And I said, "No, they'd be scared they were gonna miss somethin'." [01:22:14] And so he said, "Well, I guess we could take it up with the board." And I said, "I'll tell you what, when's your next board meeting?" And he told me, and I said, "I'll be there, and

I'll do my best to make sure every board member is there." So they—we came, and sure enough there wasn't an empty seat. Everybody in church knew what the program was gonna be at the board meeting. And so Roy just said, "Dale has a presentation he wants to make to the board." And so I got up, and I told 'em the story. I said, "The Catholics have already integrated, and they're doin' just fine. And there's not a reason in the world we can't integrate, and we should, and it's the Christian thing to do. You cannot really take credit for much when we've got a black church two miles east of town with nobody attending it, and nobody coming into our church." And I said, "It's a sort of a shame for us to sit here and pretend to be Christians and allow that to continue." When Roy had first presented this to me, and I said, "We oughta invite 'em in," he said, "Oh, we can't do that. Mrs. Floyd and Mrs. Frensmeir will get up and leave." And I said, "No, they won't." He said, "You don't think so?" And I said, "No, they'd be scared to death they're gonna miss somethin'." [01:23:49] So sure enough, that [*clears throat*] following Sunday we set off about three pews over on the right side, and we made arrangements with the black people to come into church, be treated fairly, that we'd be honored to have 'em—the whole works. And I was on the

committee that went out to talk to 'em. And that Sunday the church was full, except for the empty pews that we had left open on the other side. And, Spike, you remember Mary Evelyn Ferguson, one of the most beautiful women you ever saw in your life—her—the whole Ferguson, the whole Webb family, the whole Jones family—they were all there. And we sang hymns together, and we made—talked. The preacher talked about how we were all God's children, that nobody was better than anybody else in the sight of God, and it was that kind of a sermon. And to make a long story short, the next Sunday I had two black women in my choir. I was the choir director, and I had two women in my choir, and we got along just fine ever since then. [01:25:07] And now—today, we occasionally have a black woman who will attend church, but for the most part, they've moved out. They're no longer residents of Charleston. And—but that was a really significant thing, and everybody was so pleased they were beatin' on their chests about having taken the courage to do that.

[01:25:32] AS: Talk about law enforcement in Charleston back in those days. Charleston had a famous constable, John Sommers. What do you remember about John Sommers?

DB: I can't remember much about John. He—John Sommers was

accused of visiting a cathouse in Fort Smith most of the time—most Tuesday afternoons, but he was never formally charged with that. He was formally—he was—people in Charleston considered him to be sort of a practicing coward. You know, he always had a big six-shooter on his hip. He was a tall, lanky guy and, you know, never arrested anybody—never did anything much. And at one time, shortly after John lost his job as the deputy sheriff or constable—whatever he was—he'd just walk up the streets—up and down the streets at night, no—not a soul in town. Not a soul on the streets. And he would occasionally go up the alleys to see if there was anything goin' on in the alley, and then he'd go home early if there was no action. And home was on the second story of where the barbershop was. John—despite everything else, people didn't want anybody to sic him on 'em. Now John could—you know, he could be a little difficult for somebody even though he was usually frightened of anybody that was a threat. [01:27:28] And I can remember one night, him just walkin' up and down, and somebody—they said, "Somebody down the street's got a six-shooter on his hip." John says, "Well, I'll take care of that." So he starts off down the street, and he cuts through an alley—comes back up the back alley and then comes around, and he says, "I couldn't find

nobody." Course, he didn't look for anybody. But John—if you'd read Francis Gwaltney's book that he wrote when he was teaching English at Arkansas Tech, he covers that story. What—do you remember the name of that book?

ED: *Yeller-Headed Summer*?

AS: *Yeller-Headed Summer*. Yeah.

DB: *Yeller-Headed Summer*. That was it.

AS: Yeah.

DB: Aren't you about dry by now? [*AS and TM laugh*]

AS: [*Clears throat*] Yeah, are you ready to call it a day for today?

DB: Yeah. Yeah.

AS: Sounds good.

[01:28:31 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]