William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Interview with

Tom Purvis
Texarkana, Texas
16 August 2002

Interviewer: Michael Pierce

Michael Pierce: Hi. This is Michael Pierce. It is August 16, 2002. I am in Texarkana, Texas to interview Tom Purvis. P-U-R-V-I-S. For the [Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History's] Clinton History Project. The first thing I wanted to ask you, Mr. Purvis, is when and where you were born?

Tom Purvis: I was born in Guntown, Mississippi on September 25, 1917.

MP: Where is Guntown, Mississippi?

TP: Guntown is thirteen and three quarters miles due north of Tupelo, Mississippi, on U.S. 45 Highway.

MP: Who were your parents?

TP: My parents were Thomas M. Purvis and Ora Wilson Purvis.

MP: What did they do?

TP: Well, my father was a bank teller in Bogalusa, Louisiana. He died when I was sixteen months old with the flu and pneumonia in January of 1919, and my mother moved back to Guntown. We were living in Bogalusa, but I was born in Guntown at my grandfather's home in the northeast room upstairs. My mother moved back to Guntown after my father died, and she resumed teaching school. She was a school teacher when she married, and my mother was thirty-one years

old. She was thirty years old when she married the first time, the only time she was married. And she was only married for a little over two years. And she taught school again, and we went to Springhill, Tennessee when I was in the first grade. She taught school there one year. Then we came back from Springhill.

MP: How did you end up living in Hope?

TP: I came to Hope, Arkansas in 1941. I taught school one year of my life in the largest school in Jackson, Mississippi, in Central High School. [I had the worst five occupations?] I taught the school year of 1940 and 1941, and when school was out, a friend of mine called me from Dallas, an ex-classmate. Incidentally, I graduated from Mississippi State in 1940.

MP: In Starkville?

TP: In Starkville. That's right. And this friend called me from Dallas. He said his daddy had a contract to do the insurance for a government proving ground they were going to have in Hope, Arkansas, and he said, "Would you like to [come to Hope]?" At that time, schools only paid you for nine months, and from the end of May till September, you were out of work. I said, "Yes. Where is Hope, Arkansas?" He said, "Well, it's in south Arkansas." I said, "Well, I'll go down to a service station and see if I can find out where it is." "When can you be over here?" I said, "Tomorrow afternoon if it's not too far. I've got an old 1937 Plymouth, and if it'll make it over there, I'll throw my duds in." Of course, I was single at the time, and I came to Hope, Arkansas, that afternoon. [I] stayed three months. I've been in this part of the country for sixty-one years in Hope and

Texarkana, and I lived in Fort Smith for eight years. Who's interested in my life history?

MP: Well, we just have to provide the context. So what were your first impressions of Hope when you arrived in 1941?

TP: Well, it was a nice, little town, and I met this girl over there in Hope. And that was—well, I knew some of her people in Mississippi. Actually, she had visited Guntown, Mississippi, with her parents. She had an aunt that lived there, and I met her. Her aunt called me, and she wanted me to see this girl so I did.

MP: One thing led to another?

TP: One thing led to another, and that's the way it went.

MP: And so you stayed in Hope?

TP: I stayed in Hope, yes.

MP: Until you went into the service?

TP: Until I went into the service in April of 1942.

MP: And you got out in . . . ?

TP: In May of—well, I got out of the service in October of 1945, but I came back from overseas the last week in May after Germany surrendered over there the first of May in 1945.

MP: The question is, when you got back from the war, did you notice a big change in Hope from before the war and after the war?

TP: Well, really, when I got to Hope it was a—they were hiring people. People were looking for places to stay. See, there was quite an influx of people. They had to get rooms at different homes. People had to rent rooms to these Army people and

civilians that were crowding into Hope. And, of course, some of them lived in Prescott and the little towns around Hope. They drove in.

MP: When you first arrived in Hope in 1941, I heard there was a housing shortage?

TP: That's what I'm trying to tell you.

MP: Where did you stay?

TP: I stayed in a home. I had a room there, and then I got married in August of that year. I met this girl.

MP: What's her name, by the way?

TP: Martha Houston.

MP: Martha Houston.

TP: Yes. And we married in August of 1941.

MP: And then you shipped out . . .?

TP: I shipped out in the spring. I stayed at the proving grounds until I got in the service. I volunteered for the service in the spring, [because] I saw I was going to have to go. My draft board was in Tupelo, Mississippi, but I went on and volunteered with a friend I had met there in Hope named Buddy Evans. He and I went to Little Rock and enlisted at Camp Robinson, and they shipped us to Wichita Falls, Texas. And from there, I was at Shepherd Field in basic training, and they shipped him up to the other end of the field, this Evans, and he went in distributing clothes, shoes, and everything.

MP: The quartermaster?

TP: The quartermaster core. And I was shipped out to Scott Field, Illinois, across the river from St. Louis, to radio school, and I stayed there until the end of October. I

graduated from radio school. They shipped me to Hindly Field, Texas, between Dallas and Fort Worth. I got there at two-thirty in the morning on the train. Went out to the base, and the next night, I had to go on the net working. And the first message I took was "have the following enlisted men prepare for immediate overseas service," and my name came up first. That's the first message I took in the net. I had to take a bunch of shots and went to Mitchell Field, Long Island, and stayed up there most of the winter and in the spring. I was up there for about four months.

MP: You took a boat to North Africa?

TP: Oh, yes. They piled us all on a boat.

MP: When you got back to Hope, is that when you first met Virginia Cassidy?

TP: Really, I can't remember whether I met her before I went into the service or after I got back. But I never did know her husband, Blythe. I knew she married Billy Blythe. I remember when he was killed, drowned in a [ditch] in Sikeston, Missouri, coming home from, I think, Rantoul, Illinois.

MP: Were you in Hope at that time when he drowned?

TP: Oh, yes.

MP: Do you remember the reaction of Virginia?

TP: No, not really. I really wasn't that close at the time. I knew them, and really knew her mother, who was Mrs. Cassidy.

MP: Can you tell us about her mother?

TP: Her mother was a nurse. She was an all-around nurse, I guess, a registered nurse. I don't know whether she was a registered nurse or not, but she was one of the

head nurses at Julia Chester Hospital at the time. And she was the nurse on duty when my son was born, and I guess when Bill was born. I imagine she was there. I know she was the nurse for my son.

MP: What was she like as a person?

TP: Well, she was a heavy-set woman. She looked like she might weigh 160 pounds, which is not all that big, but she wasn't a skinny woman. Virginia never was as big as her mother, at least the way I recall it, and I knew her mother quite well. In fact, I knew her mother a whole lot better than I knew Virginia, and we just didn't run in the same circles all together until our children, Bill and Joe, went to kindergarten together and the first four grades in school there. Of course, they were at different grade schools, but they were in the same kindergarten down at Miss Mary Perkins's backyard. [Laughter]

MP: Is that where the kindergarten was?

TP: I think it was. That's the way I remember it, down in Miss Perkins's yard.

MP: So did they go into her house or . . .?

TP: I guess. I don't know. I never went down there. Of course, at that time I was traveling the United States with an insurance company out of New York, and I wasn't home. I [sold] insurance all over the United States for six years with Equitable Life Insurance Society out of New York, my office on Seventh Avenue in New York and I lived in Hope, Arkansas.

MP: That's a long commute. Did you know Eldridge Cassidy?

TP: Yes. That was his granddaddy.

MP: What's a good memory [of him]?

TP: Well, he was the ice man at the very beginning. Of course, back at that time there were quite a few ice boxes in town—not electric refrigerators, iceboxes—and he delivered ice. I can recall him with a pair of tongs and a block of ice on his shoulder. He had a [leather flap], a bib, a backward bib on his back so the ice wouldn't get on his shirt.

MP: So was he a big man. You think of ice men as these big, brawny types.

TP: No, he didn't seem to be a brawny type. He wasn't heavy. His wife looked heavier than he did to me, but, of course, I didn't go measure them.

MP: So your son, Joe, when was he born?

TP: He was born November 25, 1946.

MP: Basically the same . . .

TP: He was born two-and-a-half months after Bill. Bill was born on August 19—I was forty-six—and Joe was born on November 25.

MP: Did they know each other before kindergarten?

TP: I'm sure they did. We went to the Methodist church, and Joe was in the basic department there. Now, I don't recall whether Bill was there or not. I just wasn't that close to them in that situation, and I can't verify that.

MP: Okay. One of the other questions I had for you was about Mary Perkins's kindergarten class. That was a private kindergarten? How did that work? Do you remember?

TP: Well, the best I remember we paid so much. I mean, she was the individual that had children. I don't think it was subsidized by the county, the government, or anything else. I think it was totally from the parents of the children that were

there, and she had—Joe has a picture. In fact, when Clinton was running for president, that picture appeared. Of course, Joe was called to Washington several times during Clinton's presidency. "Hardball" [a political television program] had him up there. Old [Chris] Matthews worked him over the coals, and he worked Matthews over the coals. He could stand his ground with him. Now, this was when Clinton was beginning to have problems up in Washington, and they called Joe. He was on CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System]. In fact, when Clinton was first inaugurated, "48 Hours," [a newsmagazine television program] old Dan Rather, had Joe and another family in Little Rock that were going to the inauguration.

MP: The Leopoulos family, I think it was.

TP: Yes. That's right. And that was—but getting back to the kindergarten, I think that was subsidized by the parents of all the children that were in this kindergarten.

MP: Do you happen to remember how much it cost?

TP: No. I don't. My wife took care of that. I didn't look at the checkbook to see.

MP: Another question you might not know or might not remember: do you remember why you sent your child, Joe, to Miss Perkins's kindergarten class?

TP: No. I don't recall anything. We just thought it was the thing to do. Of course, at that time I was on the road quite a bit. I was usually gone for two weeks at a time, and I'd come back and have a week off. And that's just the way it went for about five or six years there when I traveled for Equitable Life out of New York. Of course, I might be in Seattle, Washington, one week—Boise, Idaho, the next, [or]

Des Moines, Iowa, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. That's where I went more than anywhere, those two places.

MP: When you were in Hope, you probably just slept the whole time.

TP: No. Well, I was with my family, and sometimes I had a project from the insurance company I had to get out. But it was my time. I could spend it with my family. That's what it was for. See, I didn't stay on the road constantly. I would go out for two weeks and be home for a week, sometimes three or four weeks, but usually each session, each town that I would go to, I was usually there about ten days, about a week and a half.

MP: Where did your family live in Hope at this time?

TP: 315 North Pine Street. Three blocks north of the Missouri-Pacific Railroad.

MP: Okay. Now I know where it is. Was it off [Hervey?] Street?

TP: No. Pine Street was parallel to [Hervey?] Street and the next street over.

MP: So it was further to the east?

TP: There was Main Street and Elm Street. Elm Street was across the Frisco Railroad. Elm and then . . .

MP: We can look this up later. I can get an old map and find out.

TP: That old house—I passed it not long ago on 315 North Pine. Hope was built upon some kind of land that wiggled like a boat in the water. One season the doors in the house would have a crack two inches under it, and then if you sawed the other end off, then the thing would come back the other way. The houses just shifted back and forth, and I don't know whether they ever stabilized that land or not.

Somebody said, "Don't cut the door off if it's dragging. It won't drag after the next three or four rains."

MP: Our house in Fayetteville is the same way. What I'm trying to understand is what it was like to be a four or five year old in Hope, Arkansas, around 1950, so could you—what would your son, Joe do? How would he play? What would he do for fun? What would his day be like?

TP: Well, we had a sand pile in the backyard, and, every now and then, we had a cat that stayed out there with him. And that's bad to have a kid and a cat in the same sand pile. [Laughter] Things can happen, you know. But I don't know. At that time, my wife and I belonged to the country club, and they had a lake, what they called a big pond out there at the country club east of Hope. And she would take them fishing, Joe and some other kids his age. And they'd go out to Fair Park and play and swing and what not. I mean, that's just about what the young people did. And then on Saturday night, they'd go to the picture show, the Sanger Theatre. Boy, they kept that thing going on Saturday night.

MP: What is your oldest memory of Bill Clinton?

TP: Well, really, we weren't—he was just another kid in town, you know, and as far as I know, I remember one of the—I know he was jumping the rope down there and broke his leg one time. And I've got a picture of Joe—I say I've got it. Joe's got a picture of him down there signing Clinton's leg when he had a cast on. But Clinton lived over on—if I remember right—somewhere about Thirteenth Street on the east side of town, and we lived on the north side of town. But they were—well, there was [Mack] McLarty, the Thrash boy, [Richard] McDowell. I'm

trying to remember all of them. There was a whole bunch of kids that age. I can see the little picture of the boys at Miss Mary's kindergarten, and I say it's in the backyard. It was down at their house. I don't think it was any school or any public land or anything like that.

MP: When you read biographies of Bill Clinton, a lot of them talk about the racial divide in Hope. They suggest that Hope had a large race problem in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Could you comment on that?

TP: Well, I didn't really see any of that. Now, of course, the late 1940s—I started in with Equitable Life out of New York in November of 1948, and I traveled with that company through 1953. So, in that period of time, I was in and out, and I really didn't notice any racial strife of any kind in town. I didn't notice it. It really wasn't too predominant as far as I'm concerned. Now, I lived on the side of town where—well, no. It wasn't all that—it was colored in the other part, too. They were kind of scattered all over town, the black people and the white people, but on up toward Rose Hill Cemetery on 29 Highway, going out towards Blevins and McCaskell, you went through two or three black churches. I don't recall any real racial problems. So it was kind of minor as far as I was concerned.

MP: Is there anything else about Hope around 1950 that sticks into your mind?

TP: Well, Hope seemed to—well, the proving ground, of course, they sold that. And when I got back from the service in 1945, I joined the American Legion, and I was elected the next year. Now, it appears in a magazine up there that Harry Hawthorne was the first American Legion commander after World War II, but I was. He wasn't. Mary Nell Turner got that mixed up. She was talking to Harry

before he died and getting this several years later, but I was the first commander of American Legion in Hope. And we put on an air show in the spring of 1947. We had people at the—we had army airplanes coming to the airport, which was a big airport. It still is, I guess. And, anyway, we put on an air show one Sunday out there that was out of this world. I don't know where all the money went, but they collected money. They charged $5 or $2.50 or whatever they did, for a carload of people, and it just covered that territory. The American Legion put it on, and I was worried to death because I was the commander of the post. And it was just too big to really handle and keep up with.

MP: Coming back from World War II, did you sense a lot of optimism in Hope?

TP: Yes. They wanted to get the air force to put the base that eventually went to Jacksonville, Arkansas, the big air force base for the state of Arkansas. They tried. Hope thought they should have been in the running to have that airbase out near the airport at Hope on the proving ground. And then, of course, they sold off the proving ground, and they came in there and got the shells. There are still shells out there. And, of course, old Paul Klipse, who passed away this year, he—I knew him real well.

MP: Who's Paul Klipse?

TP: Paul Klipse came to Hope with the proving ground, and he was in charge of the seismograph and all that. He was a technician. And, then he stayed there and bought a bunch of that land at the proving ground and had [invented the] Klipse Horn, which was one the finest—it's known all over the world. Klipse horn?

MP: I'm not familiar with it? What is it?

TP: It's a speaker they put in for theatres and homes.

MP: Oh, okay.

TP: Klipse started all of that. He was quite a sound [technician]. And he was in charge of when they dropped those bombs out there testing them as to how much damage—I don't know how. I knew very little about electronic stuff, but he was quite a character, and I'm surprised nobody's mentioned Paul Klipse to you.

MP: You know, they have, in fact, now that you mention the speakers.

TP: He got to be known the world over, Klipse, Klipse speakers.

MP: You know, I just saw something about the company in the paper the other day, a couple of months ago I think it was.

TP: Well, he sold it to a nephew of his in Indiana. They may have moved a bunch of it up to Indiana. I don't know, but it was—the whole thing originated in Hope, and that was one of the big things that happened in Hope after the war.

MP: Well, where did the other people work when the proving grounds closed down? Were there major factories?

TP: No. Well, they Brunnarrow Handle Factory was there, and they had a little, old walking stick factory that had about a half dozen people there. That's one of the walking sticks right there that came out of that. An employee down there gave me that walking stick fifty years ago, and it was made right there in Hope, Arkansas. I use it some now.

MP: A fifty-year-old walking stick.

TP: Yes. I've got one in the car and that one there.

MP: So when Bill Clinton and his family moved to Hot Springs, was that something you knew about or noticed?

TP: Well, I knew Roger, his stepfather . . .

MP: Oh, did you know him?

TP: Oh, yes. Roger Clinton was the Buick salesman there in Hope. Yes, I knew Roger.

MP: Can you tell us about him?

TP: Well, Roger was about like everybody I knew. Roger liked to take a drink, you know. He seemed to be all right. He's just an average person that would get slightly inebriated, and I understand they may have had a few little domestic stirrups. I don't know anything about them, but I knew Roger. I talked to him, had coffee with him. In fact, one time he nearly had me driving a Buick, but I never did. I never did buy one from him.

MP: I've heard that he was a charming man.

TP: He was. Well, he was a good salesman. I'll tell you, a man had to be a charmer to be a good salesman. You've heard that all your life, and you know it's true. See, more sales right now [are] made on the golf course than any other place. Salesmen just—in fact, I did quite a bit of selling myself, and I don't think I was a charmer at all.

MP: Were you a big golfer?

TP: No. I was a duffer. I went out. I tried to play golf, but frankly, I just wasn't an athletic man.

MP: Did you have much contact with Bill Clinton or the family after they moved to Hot Springs?

TP: No. I really didn't. Now, Joe did, I'm sure. When they had Boys' State, and they were all juniors, between their junior and senior year in high school, Mack McLarty was elected Governor, Bill Clinton was either senator or—and Joe was either a senator or a congressman in that thing. All three of those boys were elected to some office in Boys' State, but that was between their junior and senior years.

MP: So that was in the 1960s?

TP: That was in the 1960s about the summer of 1963, I would make a guess.

MP: When did you encounter Clinton next after that?

TP: Oh, I guess when he was elected governor. I just kind of lost out between the time he left Hope until well—I knew very little about him going to Oxford [University] in England and all of that. He was in Hot Springs, and I was in Hope. Joe had a lot more connection with him, a lot more than I did.

MP: When Clinton was elected attorney general of Arkansas, I guess in 1976, your son went to work for him?

TP: Yes. My son was in law school at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock at the time. He wasn't even a graduate then. He worked for three of those attorney generals up there. He worked for [Jim Guy] Tucker, and he worked for Clinton, and . . .

MP: And Clark.

TP: When Clark took over, [but] he didn't agree with Clark on a lot of things. I don't know what the situation was, but he bowed out.

MP: When your son was in the attorney general's office, did you see Bill Clinton much?

TP: No. I didn't go to Little Rock too much. I stuck around Hope. And incidentally, in that time when he was in Little Rock, we lived six years in Fort Smith. I moved to Fort Smith. I was district manager of Equitable Life out of Fort Smith for six years from 1953 through 1958.

MP: Oh, so from 1953 to 1958, you were in Fort Smith.

TP: I am in Fort Smith. Of course, Joe went to school in Fort Smith. He finished his grade school in Fort Smith, and we moved back to Hope in the latter part of 1958. I left Equitable Life at that time. I went to work for another insurance company out of North Carolina.

MP: When Bill Clinton became governor, did he go back to Hope very often?

TP: That I can't tell you. I don't know. He'd go, I guess, just like any politician, just every so often. I knew very little about that.

MP: Is there any thing about Bill Clinton we haven't talked about?

TP: Well, I always liked Bill. He was very likeable, just your kid. You had being a father of—it was just . . .

MP: One of the kids who was in the neighborhood.

TP: He was just one of the kids. Yes, and a good one, as far as I'm concerned. I don't agree with everything that Bill did and thought, but after all if the truth was known on a whole lot of people, and if it hadn't been for Linda Tripp, I think a

big lot of this mess—I didn't like Kenneth Starr because he was on [the Whitewater investigation] and jumped into Bill's closet and jumped in there. And cost the American public—they talk about what it cost people.

MP: Sixty million dollars, seventy million dollars.

TP: Yes. That I couldn't stomach at all, and I don't think Bill was anywhere near the only guilty person. I don't have any idea. I don't even know whether he was guilty or not. I'm not a lawyer. I don't know, but I just detest that they got all over him because I think he made a good president.

MP: Could you tell us about your trip to the White House?

TP: Yes. We just flew up there for three days.

MP: How did you get the invitation?

TP: Bill and Joe got together. When Bill was in Washington, Joe would go up there four, five, maybe six, seven times a year. He was a guest up there, but he didn't stay in the Lincoln room. He always stayed in the hotel.

MP: So you went to the White House in 1997?

TP: In April of 1997.

MP: Can you tell us what the Clintons were like?

TP: Well, frankly, I didn't see Hillary at all on that trip, but Bill was—we were invited to the White House. [We had] the whole family [there] and we went in—I don't remember which gate—but up there. They had a bunch of people we had to—of course, they had our social security numbers, and my youngest son, Thomas M., Jr., he's in the sheltered workshop in El Dorado. He had been in the Conway [Human Development Center] since he was thirteen years old. He's slightly

retarded. He started out in Conway, and then he went to Booneville. He's been in El Dorado since 1981 in a sheltered workshop over there. Works for Benchwork, and he was with us. We had trouble getting him in the gate at the White House, and Joe took care of that. He called Clinton's firsthand or something, and they got him in. I don't know. It was just a mix up on his social security number or something like that. Of course, Tom couldn't talk to them too well, and he was just left there at the gate. And Joe took care of him and got him in. And we went in to the White House. We were in the Oval Office when Bill made a radio address. It was on—I can't remember what day of the week it was, but it was one of his radio addresses, and the room was full. And Bill told us, "You all wait until everybody gets out of here," and that's when we took all those pictures. It was right after his radio address, and then we were shown by a lady—I don't know who, but one of the assistants. [She showed us every room] in the White House, and I sat in the Roosevelt chair where [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt had his fireside chats. I forget which room it was they called it at the time. And then we went and saw the dining room. We saw everything on the first floor, but we did not go to any of the living quarters. And we saw other visitors. They were going through there. We saw one girl from Texarkana, Judy Marbly, who is president and CEO of Commercial National Bank here. We happened to see her. She and a group of friends were there at the same time.

MP: What do you think Bill Clinton has meant to southwest Arkansas?

TP: Well, I think he's meant quite a bit to southwest Arkansas. Of course, I read this Republican newspaper we get out of Little Rock all the time. I get it this

morning, and I'm always interested in it. And I'm very fond of Gene Lyons, and most people just hate him. I mean the Republicans. And I think, listen, Gene Lyons tells it like it is.

MP: Have you noticed when people write into the [*Arkansas*] *Democrat-Gazette* complaining about Gene Lyons, they just call him names? They don't ever provide any facts.

TP: No facts at all. They just—and they talk about Bill being sleazy and that just—there's more crap in that newspaper. I don't know Mr. [Walter J.] Hussman [Jr.], the publisher of it, but it's definitely a Republican paper, in my opinion. And I, incidentally, to tell you the truth about it, I voted Republican. I don't say that I'm a Democrat, and I don't say that I'm a Republican. But, for years, when Roosevelt was running when I first voted in 1937, 1938. 1938 I was—I voted for whoever was running against Roosevelt at the time.

MP: Wendell Wilke.

TP: Wendell Wilke. That's exactly—I voted Republican quite a bit, but then I got off of them because they—One exciting thing. I was on a train going to New York City from Hope in 1948. Headline in the paper, I got off in Washington, DC, for a stop. I was on the train on Election Day, and I saw the big headline that [Thomas E.] Dewey beat [Harry S.] Truman. And I wished I'd saved the paper.

MP: This is a question that's totally off the subject. How long would it take to go from Hope to New York City on the train?

TP: This time, I went through Memphis. You could either go to St. Louis or go on the New York Central or the Pennsylvania Railroad back then to New York, or you

go to Little Rock and Bald Knob and go across to Memphis and get the Southern Railroad and go in through Virginia and up through Washington, DC. If you went to St. Louis, you didn't go through Washington, but this time I went through Memphis. I'd leave Hope at about 2:00 in the afternoon on the train going north and counting that way to get to Washington. And get into Memphis at about 7:00 at night. Take the train out of Memphis about nine, and the next morning, you're eating breakfast in Knoxville, Tennessee. You've already gone through Chattanooga—that old Chattanooga Choo-Choo—we've already gone through Chattanooga, and we spend all day going across Virginia. You get into Washington that evening some time and get on into New York early the next morning at Pennsylvania station. And if you went through St. Louis, you could either go through Pennsylvania Station or Grand Central Station depending on what railroad you were on. But back then, there were a lot of trains, and when I traveled the country, if you could fly, the company didn't [unintelligible]. But if you were delayed by weather, that wasn't good. But if you were delayed by a train delay or an accident on the railroad, that was . . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

TP: . . . Burlington Zephyr, which had dome cars all over it. I went through the tunnel at Colorado. Went down the Feather River Canyon. I've been in all the forty-eight states except Alaska, and my wife, she's been to Hawaii a couple of times since we've been married. This time I told her, "No. I've traveled all I want to

do." She can look at the flowers over in Hawaii. She's gone twice. I would kind of like to go to Alaska, but I doubt I'll ever make it.

MP: Well, I've heard you can go to Seattle and get these cruises that are very nice.

TP: That's true.

MP: Is there any thing about Bill Clinton that I haven't asked you about that I should?

TP: Not that I know of. I just like him. That's all. I can tell you that.

MP: Or anything about Hope in the late 1940s, early 1950s? Do you remember any incidents that have occurred that stick in your mind?

TP: Well, not any extraordinary incident. I enjoyed living in Hope. The people are real friendly there. A bunch of them came down there and wanted me to run for mayor one time. I said, "No. I'm not in politics. That's not my cup of tea." That was back in 1947, I think. They were electing a new mayor. I don't remember what it paid if anything.

MP: Who was the mayor in 1947, 1948?

TP: Albert Fink. He was a Nabisco salesman, and he was mayor. And they got on him. He sold some timber off of some city land out east of town, and he got in a jam. I don't know how it came out, but some sawmill company wanted to buy this timber. It was nice virgin pine, but he didn't pocket the money. They just didn't like getting the pine trees cut.

MP: Oh, okay. So he wasn't corrupt.

TP: No. I don't think so. No. I never did hear anything about corruption. A lot of the citizens there in town got goofed off because he sold that [land, and] let them go out there and cut that timber.

MP: Were there any other events like that?

TP: Of course, they sold off the land, and they auctioned off the houses that the officers lived in out on the proving ground. I was on that committee to decide [who got them]. The veterans of World War II had the first rights to get them, which they did. Veterans bought all the houses out there on the proving ground. They were fine houses, too.

MP: I've heard they were very nice.

TP: They were very nice. I would have liked to have one myself, but I was on the committee. And I didn't think I should put my name in the pot.

MP: Understandable. Well, I just want to thank you very much for sitting for this interview.

TP: Well, I put a lot of personal stuff in it.

MP: Well, it's actually the personal stuff that is the most interesting.

TP: Well, it's just like my son. We went over to where I was born in Guntown, Mississippi. He went with me over there, and I had a cousin who knew all the history. I grew up with him. I grew up in my grandfather's home with three cousins who lost their mother, and I had lost my father. My grandfather and grandmother and my mother raised four extra grandchildren just like they were of the original bunch. My roots are still back over there. I go to Mississippi quite often.

MP: So what did your grandfather do?

TP: He was a farmer.

MP: Cotton?

TP: Cotton and corn and soybeans and hay. We had a good hog pen. We had cows. We had chickens. During the Depression, we didn't have any money, but we had plenty to eat.

MP: How big a farm was it?

TP: We had two farms. We had one about four miles west of the one that we lived on. It was two hundred and forty acres, and the one where I grew up was two hundred and thirty five acres. And the other farm, over in what they call Tishamingo Creek Bottom, grew a lot of good cotton. It was bottomland, kind of like the Delta.

MP: Did he do his own farming, or did he have tenants?

TP: Hired tenants. He had sharecroppers. He had four families living on the local—and he rented the other farm out to some manager, and, of course, when he rented the farm, he got a fourth of what it produced. And on a sharecropper, you got half, and the sharecropper worked the land and Papa furnished the mules. We had mules. We didn't have a tractor. This is back in the early 1930s. He didn't believe in the tractor. They plow up more cotton and corn than they would—you had to plow what we called the Georgia Stalk.

MP: What's Georgia Stalk?

TP: That's a single mule pulling one plow, and you had to walk yourself to death with it, too.

MP: Did he ever switch to a tractor?

TP: No. He never did switch to a tractor. He never did. In fact, he just finally played out. He lived to be ninety years old, my granddaddy did, and he was a pretty active farmer up past his eightieth birthday.

MP: Wow.

TP: My mother, she was one of eleven children, and they had four grandchildren, which made fifteen that were raised in that house, at that place. I was the youngest. Four of my mother's sisters lived well into their nineties. One lived to be ninety-eight, and one lived to be ninety-six. One lived to ninety-four, and the other one lived to be ninety-two. My mother died at age eighty-one. She was the second oldest of the whole family, and these other kids, their mother was the first child of my grandmother. And the four grandchildren grew up in that house. It was a great life. Oh, I have some tales to tell about that. I won't go into . . .

MP: Well, the tape recorder's here and . . .

TP: We wanted to go to a ballgame. This cousin of mine, he was ten months older than I was. We grew up together just like brothers, and we had to go down and get some corn out of the corn patch. That day it had been raining quite a bit, and [it was] before Thanksgiving; grandfather wanted to get the corn in before. Anyway there was a basketball game that Thanksgiving afternoon, outdoor basketball. We didn't have a gymnasium. It was an outdoor basketball game and we wanted to go. He said, "Boys, you've got to get the corn in first." He said, "Now, when you hook the mules up to the wagon, you go down there, and you go down to the far end of the field and turn the wagon around and start loading from the far end facing the barn." We took it down there, and when we got to this end

of the corn field, we started loading that thing, and we got down to the end of the row. There was a ditch right along there, and it had a bunch of cane, what we used to call fishing poles. So we pull the mules around going to turn the wagon, and the rows were a little bit high, and the wagon wheel jumped over and mired down in the mud there. We had a great big, old red mule on the left—what we call the lead—and on the off was a little, old black mule, and my cousin cut a cane off that thing and hit the red mule on the buttocks with it and just whammed him with that trying to get that wagon out. That mule came out of [the harness]. Just tore it all to pieces. Didn't move it the wagon, and of course we tore the gear up. And you know what kind of ball game we had to see. I mean that mule just came out of his gear. But it was the good old days. When I went to school at Mississippi State, I could eat on less than a dollar a day, three meals a day, and have money left over for Saturday night to see the picture show. It didn't cost but sixteen cents to go to the show. I could get a steak, a baked potato, a vegetable, a drink, and a dessert—a piece of pie, what not—for thirty-five cents.

MP: And you thought that was a lot of money?

TP: Yes, of course. I played in a dance band. I made four dollars a week on Saturday night. That would be about my share of it.

MP: What instrument did you play?

TP: I played piano. I still play piano a little bit. I'm the musician for the Elks Lodge.

MP: Well, Mr. Purvis, thank you very much. This has been a lot of fun.

TP: Well, it's been a genuine pleasure doing business with you.

[End of Interview]

[Edited by Cheri Pearce]