

PRESERVING OUR HISTORY: ROTARY CLUB OF GREENSBORO
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: WALTER BURCH

INTERVIEWER: KATHELENE MCCARTY SMITH

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[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

KS: Good afternoon Mr. Burch. Thank you for coming for this interview. I appreciate it.

WB: Thank you for having me.

KS: This is Kathelene Smith and we are here for the Preserving Our History: Rotary Club of Greensboro oral history project. I am interviewing Mr. Walter Burch. Mr. Burch, please tell me when and where you were born.

WB: I was born in Asheville, Buncombe County, which Asheville is in, October, 21, 1918. I am old enough to be your grandfather; great-grandfather.

KS: Oh, I don't know about that. Then I must not look my age, that's all I have to say about that. [Both laugh] So where did you grow up? Did you grow up there?

WB: No, no. Actually, I was born at my grandmother's while my mother was on vacation, which indicates that I came a little earlier than expected. But, no, I've been in Greensboro all my life. I just happened to happen there.

KS: So tell me about your family and your home life. After you were born, you went back to Asheville – after your vacation.

WB: After I got older, I remember going back there and visiting with my grandmother. She lived out – about five miles this side of Asheville off of old Highway 70. The railroad used to cross by [Highway] 70 and we used to stay out there on the front porch and watch the trains go up. She had a big apple orchard way back over the mountain behind her house and a nice little spring house down there that I'd love to have one of right now with the good spring water in the spring house with a little trough in there, I guess you'd call it a trough, a trough brought the water in. Anyway, a little basin in there where they sent the milk from the cows and so forth and kept it cool and made buttermilk and all that. I did a little bit of that churning.

KS: She put you to work!

WB: Oh yeah. I spent some time there, but not a lot.

KS: So how was growing up in Greensboro? Tell me about your family.

WB: Well, my dad and mother, of course we lived here. My dad worked for Western Union and worked with the – talk about technology, it was technology to me then and I still don't know much about it – these tickers that do the stock market – that used to do the stock market. They had these mirrors up on the wall and they reflected off, how you read them – kind of a reverse mirror and the people out front could see it and could read it. It would go into it on the back side upside down and then come out on the front side. I don't know exactly how it worked, but anyway, he did that for them. But he died early; he died when I was fifteen, in high school.

KS: Oh, I'm sorry, that was early.

WB: He had an ulcerated stomach and went down to Duke, and I'll always remember, Dr. Hart operated on him and thought he was going to be okay, but it just didn't work out.

KS: I'm sorry about that. He was so young. So you stayed in Greensboro?

WB: Yes, we stayed here, and I went to grade school and high school here.

KS: Now where did you go to grade school and high school?

WB: I went to Asheboro Street School first and later to Gillespie Park, and then went to Greensboro Senior High School which is now Grimsley High School.

KS: So do you have brothers and sisters?

WB: I had a sister. She also graduated from Grimsley.

KS: So how was growing up in Greensboro. What are some of your memories from childhood? What did you like to do?

WB: Well, I did a little bit of everything, I guess, as boys do. [Both laugh]

KS: Uh oh, I've got one myself, I know how that goes! [Both laugh]

WB: But in high school, I played football and wrestled and I was on the wrestling team and on the track team and stayed over there a year extra to play football. The year

– my last year there, we won the co-championship of North Carolina and co-championship of Virginia; we tied both games.

KS: That's something to be proud of.

WB: Well, we were proud. Coach Bob Jamieson, who was formerly in the Rotary, was a well-known name in Greensboro for many, many years, he's dead now, was my coach and one of the finest men – I kind of think he helped develop me after my father died, and then I had a wrestling coach who did the same thing. And I kind of think they kept me on the straight and narrow path when I was young. I could never forget either of them. And we had a good principle, Mr. Ruth, Mr. A. P. Ruth, who was well known in Greensboro for many years.

KS: So you were an athlete.

WB: Well, of some sort – of sorts. [Laughs]

KS: Now, did you like – what about going to school, what about academics? Did you enjoy any of the courses, or could you just not wait to get to PE and sports?

WB: Well, I hate to admit it, I got by in school okay, but I never did much studying and I really didn't apply myself as well as I should have, and I found out about that later. [Laughs] It really gave me some problems later on. But I got along fine in school and as I said, I stayed over an extra year. This would be interesting to you: Louise Smith was my English teacher and she said to me one day, she said – they called me "Sticky" in high school – she said, "Sticky, if you'll do anything in this class, I'll pass you." And I never will forget, I said, "Miss Smith, I don't want you to pass me." And she didn't! [Both laugh]

KS: You wanted to stay and play football.

WB: And she didn't. It was a mistake, I should have gone.

KS: But look how much fun you had going that extra year.

WB: Oh yes.

KS: So when you graduated, what did you end up doing?

WB: Well I thought I was going to State. I graduated in – I said I stayed an extra year, so I graduated in January and went to work for the American News Company in Raleigh and thought I was going to State College [North Carolina State] and actually stayed down at State College at the field house from January over until the summer when I decided to go somewhere else. Things didn't work out for me with my scholarship there because I was a little fellow and they found a couple of big fellows. [Both laugh]

KS: I can't believe it; you were little? You seem like you'd be big.

WB: Well I weighed 150, 160 pounds, and that's not big for football. So I didn't go to State, but while I was down there, a coach from Presbyterian College down in Clinton, South Carolina, came down and asked me to come down there, which I did.

KS: Where was that?

WB: Clinton. That's a liberal arts college – a small school, a lot smaller than it is now – a fairly well-known school in liberal arts. But I stayed there a year, and came back and went to work for the city during the summer and thought I was going to have to go into the Army and went to work on December 15, 1941, I went to work for the Police Department for the city. Stayed there thirteen months, and in the meantime, I enlisted in the Air Force Cadet Program, and went into that in February of '42, I guess it would be. Stayed there until '46.

KS: Now did you go overseas?

WB: Yes. I was in the European Theatre of Operations.

KS: So tell me about that.

WB: Well, I was in a recon outfit. We flew A-20s that had all the armaments taken out of it. The A-20 was a twin engine bomber and they took all of the armaments – it had a gun turret in the back, they took that out to reduce the weight and they left – because they built two machine guns in the front and they weren't operable because we didn't use – we didn't need them. We flew intelligence – well, we were a photo intelligence group – and what we actually did, most people didn't know this, we flew – in our bomb bay was a photo flash bomb. And we would fly over targets not too far away from the front lines or close to the front lines to make pictures – intelligence pictures for the folks in battle the next day so they would know what to expect on the ground.

KS: So you would take pictures of what they would come in and bomb the next day?

WB: Not what they'd bomb, where the ground troops would be in operation. So, what we were actually doing was getting intelligence, what was going on, on the ground the night before the next day. We would fly those missions and come back, and they would develop pictures and we didn't – with those photo flash bombs, you just got two or three pictures. It was one of those fast things, so what we really did was kind of a hit and run thing. We'd leave our base and fly to the target and drop this photo bomb, take the pictures, and high tail it back and hope that the J-288s or whatever it was, German planes didn't get us.

KS: Were you ever shot at?

WB: Oh yes.

KS: But they took your guns out.

WB: We had to hit the deck and run. You see, we had a short distance. I mean, when I say short distance, a couple of hundred miles was far from – we didn't go but maybe two or three miles over enemy lines or something like that.

KS: So where were you stationed?

WB: First in Belgium, and then we came on up into the edge of Germany and I cannot think of that little place there and I was there at the end of the war. And then went from there to Wiesbaden, Germany, and was stationed there and the war was actually over when we did that. But we flew out of Belgium most of the time over the border and over the lines.

KS: So when you went to Europe, had you been out of North Carolina before? Was it a shock going over to Europe?

WB: I'd been a little, but I hadn't been a lot of places out of North Carolina, really, a few. I'd been to Atlanta.

KS: You hear about men going over there who had not been much away from home and they were sent to Europe. How was it over there?

WB: It wasn't bad. Well, it wasn't good, but it wasn't bad either considering for us. I think the worst time I had was when we landed in England in the wintertime and they put us in some tents and we almost froze to death. We had these high altitude bomber suits that we slept in part of the time.

KS: Where were you stationed in England?

WB: Just at a little place about thirty miles out of London. And I didn't stay there a very long time.

KS: Have you been back to that area since the war?

WB: Yes, I have. I've been over there two or three times since the war.

KS: Have you been over there with Veterans' Societies or on your own?

WB: No, no, no. I just went with other groups. I think I've been back three times. I went to the Balkan countries and then down the Rhine River on another trip and then went into France. And then right after the war, it was interesting, they put us

– they gave us these – I think the Army’s designation for them was C-64, it was a single engine airplane that had a pilot and co-pilot seat and we just used the pilot and the photo person and we flew – they gave us targets. The State Department gave us maps of targets that they would like to take for future use, and we flew over into Italy and over Italy and France and several areas there taking pictures for future use by the State Department. And most of these things – these targets, as we called them – were small bridges and stuff down between the valleys and stuff like that. And it got right interesting in that airplane because sometimes you would have to get the picture and you had to – it wasn’t really like – the bombers were higher class planes and faster planes and sometimes we just got up off the top of the hill sometimes and it would be right scary. [Laughs] One or two times I remember that.

Then I remember another time, it was really interesting, I was in the co-pilot seat and we were riding – we were down over the beaches there around Monaco actually looking at people on the beach and seeing what we could see. [Laughs] And the pilot had forgotten to switch the gas tank and that thing sputtered and I was sitting there, and of course the first thing I thought of was, “Get this pump going,” and we did. I thought we were going to go in the drink, but we didn’t, it caught up and we went on.

KS: Well, did you ever get any time off? Did you get to meet the people?

WB: There was – you know you’ve got a lot of time around really because you’re only flying at night. and some nights you couldn’t fly because of weather. And some nights they didn’t give us a target to fly so we got to go around in the neighborhoods and got to know people. And then right after the war, I stayed over there about eight months after the war doing the pictures that I was telling you about and we were in France a good part of that time, and moving around in France, and I got to know a lot of people and a lot of their ways and really enjoyed that. Part of that time too we were down around Germany, down in Marseille, France, and stationed right outside of Paris awhile and ended up – the last place I was, was just out of Marseille. We were there in that area, so I got to see a lot of France and a lot of England; a lot of England and a lot of France and a little of Italy and a good bit of Germany and swimming around the river a few times.

KS: How nice.

WB: Well, it wasn’t so nice. [Laughs]

KS: Well, I guess not. But it was good to meet some different people though. Were you glad to get home?

WB: Oh yes. I never will forget coming into New York Harbor, they were playing, what is that song? Gee whiz, I can’t think of it. I’ll think of it in a minute. But

anyway, I was glad to get home and that song got me almost crying. We went into the Red Cross and had milk and coffee and donuts and that milk tasted so good because I hadn't had any. [Laughs]

KS: You hadn't had any in a while?

WB: No.

KS: So you were shipped back into New York.

WB: Yes, I came back into New York Harbor and then came back – actually got out of the Army at Fort Bragg. They shipped us down there and they went through all this stuff, you know, the process of getting discharged.

KS: So after the War, did you go back to the Police Department?

WB: Yes. I thought about not going. I didn't go back for a couple of months, then I did and I was there for forty years. You know, from the beginning time. You get credit for the time – in your retirement, you get credit for the time you were in the military.

KS: I certainly hope so.

WB: So I actually had forty years. I retired in July 1981.

KS: Now had you met your wife before you left, or did you meet her when you came home?

WB: No, I met her when I came home. I was free when I was overseas. [Laughs] Whatever that means. No, I met her when I got home and we had twin girls and about four years later, we had a son, and from all of that we now have seven grandchildren and – one, two, three, four, five – five great-grandchildren.

KS: So you have a big family!

WB: Have now! [Both laugh] And most of them are around this area, North Carolina, anyway. None of them are out of North Carolina.

KS: So, how did you decide to go into law enforcement?

WB: I don't know. I don't know. Well, as I said, I worked there for the city. They had a program back then listing taxes for animals and they hired students to do that and that's what I did and then I just got interested, I guess. I don't know. I wish I'd never had, but I did. [Laughs]

KS: Oh really?

WB: Well, it's a tough life. It's a tough life. Well I was fortunate; I didn't stay out in the field for too long. I got out – but it was real tough going through all of the years of school integration, I mean integration and school integration of course, and segregation, you know Civil Rights movements and all that stuff.

KS: You know, I've been surprised, not being from here, when I read about Greensboro, all the things that happened here through the years. What is your impression of all that? When did that all start?

WB: I think – I think Greensboro was probably picked for these sit-ins that they had, probably because of the colleges and universities and that sort of thing in and around Greensboro at that time. And really, Greensboro accepted these kids marching on the streets – [North Carolina] A&T college kids – accepted them fairly well, but I think because of the leadership – let me think how this sounds, I don't know how to say this. I think because of the leadership we had that came from the colleges in and around Greensboro, that this was just a good atmosphere for that to go on and because there was a lot of help from the colleges and the universities, from the academic world; a lot of help from higher class citizens and that sort of thing for this to happen in Greensboro. And we had very little problems in Greensboro up until years later – a little later down the line.

KS: Did it all start with the sit-ins?

WB: Well, of course you had school integration before that and you had the Klu Klux Klan coming out and trying to – well, being at the schools and trying to entice the kids not to go in and fighting them and you had a few cross burnings back then and that sort of thing. It was a pretty tense time. When I say a tense time, at any time you had one of these things happen where you were having a confrontation between the Klu Klux Klan and the kids and the parents trying going to school, it was always pretty thick, you know, the air was kind of thick, you know. But we had that and then, you know, the kid who died at A&T did a march in there for several years – well a couple of years, and this is when Jesse Jackson was the president of the school down there.

KS: Now what years were those?

WB: In the sixties, the early sixties.

KS: So someone was killed?

WB: Yes, there was a young man killed, but I think that was about 1970 – somewhere along in there. Willie Grimes was killed in a riot down there they had. We don't know who killed him. We don't know whether someone in the Police Department may have done it. They were shooting all over the campus, you know, so we don't really know. And he was shot with a double-ought buck. If you're familiar with

shotguns, they've got a shell – four double-ought bucks, they call them. And they are about the size of a thirty-two caliber pistol bullet.

KS: Is that like extra big buck shot, so when you shoot it, it sprays out?

WB: Yes, there are four of them that spray out. Well, he was just hit by one, I think, but that's all it took. And we don't know. There was no way of tracing the weapon, and we had all kinds of witnesses and information. We had one witness who said he saw a plain clothes police car fire out of the window and we had a student or two down there who said no it didn't happen that way, it happened when he was going across the campus and they were fired at from one of the buildings up there – all kinds of misinformation. And we never did solve it.

KS: Now what level of the police force were you in then? Were you on the ground?

WB: No, I was in charge of Operations really then. I was a major in charge of Operations unit then. That's why it made it so tough – feeling responsible. But we were fortunate, I think, again, in having a class of people in the city that kind of kept things from getting out of hand, if that makes any sense. We also had a Chief of Police who didn't believe in anything but what was right. He started out when all of this started a program of use of force every time you had any kind of force used against a prisoner or a person arrested you had to make a report of it then, not later if somebody complained. It had to be on record and on file saying what you did and why it was done and that sort of thing. About eighty percent of those never amounted to anything. Twenty percent of them you had to go back and investigate them later because there were complaints and that sort of thing. But in plain language, he didn't tolerate any use of force. He just didn't have it, and that helped us quite a bit.

And then, I think, we were very fortunate – a lot of people don't like Jesse Jackson, but I think we were very fortunate having Jesse here because his philosophy was the same as Martin Luther King: No violence. "We want to force integration. We want to be arrested. We want to do all these kind of things, but we don't want any violence." And we were very fortunate in that, I think. There were times, and some of this came from the Black Panther group and Students Against – whatever it was, I don't remember it now.

KS: They were all here?

WB: Oh yes, they'd come here.

KS: So is that who you thought picked Greensboro to a certain extent? Do you think outside people came in?

WB: No, I think the black people at the schools where it all started, A&T – I think they started it here because they thought it was a good place to do it rather than a place

– in a town, a coal mining town where you had a lot of rough people and that sort of thing. I think they tried to stay away from that and most people talked about that back then, back in those days. And of course we worked with the preachers. There were a lot of preachers who put a lot of pressure on the Police Department and also worked the Police Department to manage these situations without a lot of problems. And consequently with our marches, which Jesse Jackson lead for a couple of summers here, we had – we made arrests, we made a lot of arrests, for trespassing, for going into place where black people weren't allowed, and that sort of thing. To you and I today it sounds silly, you know, but back then the law said you can't do it, and we had to make the arrests. They wanted – these kids wanted to be arrested because they wanted to force the issue and for that reason, we didn't have a lot of problems with one another.

KS: It was peaceable.

WB: It was real peaceable. They would sing up in the courtroom while we were taking the time to get the arrest warrant filled out, and actually, that was a friendly situation in a lot of cases. It really was, but it was a really tight situation. The air was just so thick sometimes.

KS: Well I know that for the sit-ins, we actually had some of the UNCG girls go down to the sit-ins with their jackets on. There seems to be a lot of people involved with the sit-ins. Were you in Operations then?

WB: Through all of that, yes, up until – I missed out as far as Operations were concerned on the November 3, [1979] deal.

KS: What happened there?

WB: That's when the Communists – Nelson Johnson, was an A & T student. He was vice-president down there when Jesse was there. And I think – Jesse got a lot of attention and Nelson was looking for it, but Nelson was a Communist and he worked with the Communist folks and they set up this Klan march and actually threatened people themselves before the Klu Klux Klan came there. And then when they came there, a fight broke out and the next thing you know shooting broke out and they killed about five people all within fifteen seconds. Not quite that, but within about five or ten minutes there were five people dead.

KS: Did you know it was coming? Were there police out there at the time or did you get there later?

WB: Our people were not right on the scene when it happened until it started to happen. Really, in hindsight, I'm glad there wasn't because you had a group of people that had shotguns and all that stuff, and had they been there when this broke out, if the police had been shooting too, no telling what would have gone

on. It was just a blessing for everybody, although we got criticized and still are criticized.

KS: Why? What did you do?

WB: Well, they criticized us for not keeping them – protecting them from this happening, although they stirred it up. And one of the things, the reason that – and I wasn't in charge of this but I know what happened is that Nelson Johnson had a place set up to have this and then he put in – got the newspapers and they knew about it but nobody told the police that they were going to meet at a different place. So the officers went to the different place, Windsor Center, and down there they wouldn't tell them anything. They had a few people there who wouldn't tell them anything and other folks were over here having all this confrontation when the Klan came in. But our people followed the Klan in so they knew. I'm not making excuses for the police but we weren't there like we should have been there had there hadn't been a diversion on his part, but we got criticized for that and probably deserved it.

KS: Is that what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came out of?

WB: Yes.

KS: Those documents, there was something in the paper not too long ago–

WB: Yes, the summer before last they had this hearing here. This group came in – they won't let it go and I think that's our problem in Greensboro, they just won't let it go. Basically, my personal feeling is that blacks and whites in Greensboro get along pretty good together if you'd leave this situation out where something comes up all the time by someone like Nelson and this – I call it "Truth and Consequences" [Laughs] I got to doing that and I say it without thinking. But anyway, I think if there was no Nelson Johnson and his group, I don't think we'd have all the problems we have. Most of the things we have problems with, between black and white, is when these things continue to be brought up, so I think if they ever died away themselves or went away, or however they got away, we wouldn't have that problem.

KS: Now, do you think that incident dispersed the Klan a little bit or did it continue to have a presence?

WB: Well, it broke it up right well after that for awhile. There's still some Klan people around but I don't see anything going on. Not in this area, anyway. But at the time, when these kids marched on the street, they would march on the opposite side, or when they were going back down – when the kids would go back down Market Street – do you know Market Street?

KS: Yes.

WB: Down to East Market, there's a railroad trestle down there, and when you go under that railroad trestle it's always been black down in that area so the Klan would follow them down that far, but they would never go any further. But we always had to stay between – we would have somebody between the people who were doing the marching and the Klan to keep from having problems. But it was trying times really. Real tough times. Tense times.

KS: So that was 1979 when that happened. After that did it settle down a little bit or did it continue to escalate?

WB: I don't think we had anything after 1979, any racial instances of any significance. They'd come back and march to commemorate the dead and that kind of thing, and then it would bring back some tensions and police would have to set up – they'd have a parade and the police would have to bring in extra people and that kind of stuff but as far as any outbreak or anything, no.

KS: So then you were on the police force until, did you say, 1981?

WB: In 1981, yes.

KS: So how was that? You retired from the police force and what did you do after that?

WB: Nothing. No, I did some volunteering and stuff like that. Spent a whole lot of time down at the health club and trying to keep myself in shape. And then in 1986, we had a sheriff here who got into a lot of problems having sex with somebody in the jail and that sort of thing, and they wanted someone to run against him and they asked me if I'd run and I don't know one iota about politics and don't want to know anything about them. [Laughs] I think I know too much now. In 1986, I ran for sheriff and one of my Rotary buddies, Paul Schenck – Paul Schenck's father started Rotary in Greensboro years ago. Paul died a couple of years ago. Paul is actually the guy that got me into Rotary. I was in the Exchange Club for twenty years, I guess, past president of that and so forth, but Paul got me out of that and come into Rotary. He told me, "If you go into Rotary you ought to get out of that." So I did, and I kind of miss the Exchange Club because I had been there for a long time, but I enjoy Rotary too. But Paul tried to talk me out of running for sheriff, and I said, "Paul, I don't know if I'm going to file or not." And then I did go file and came back and told him, and he said, "How did you file?" And I said, "What do you mean how did I file?" And he said, "What name did you use?" And I said, "Walter A. Burch." And he said, "You should go back down there and change that to Walter "Sticky" Burch. Nobody knows Walter Burch." [Both laugh] And I did, and he's right because nobody knew me by Walter. That's a name I picked up in high school, and I had been called that ever since then and I still am.

KS: There's got to be a story behind that.

WB: Well, that came along with my football in high school. I played end, and of course, I tell everybody it's because I had sticky fingers and I could catch and hold the ball. And I always tell it but Coach Bob Jamieson wouldn't say that 'cause I wasn't that good. [Both laugh]

KS: Well that's not how we're going to tell the story.

WB: We had a lot of fun. Well, I didn't do bad. I played fairly decent football. I wasn't outstanding, but I played decent football.

KS: And you were an end, you said?

WB: Yes. Back then, you know, you play defense and offense. You know, you didn't have an offensive team and a defensive team. When the coach said, "Go get 'em," you went either way, you know.

KS: So, I bet that tired you out playing the whole game. Did you play the whole game?

WB: Sometimes you did, yeah! Of course we had enough people where he substituted, you know and that sort of thing. I think we had about thirty something people on the squad so you know, we always had enough. We didn't have to lay down on the field and rest or anything. [Both laugh] But that was the way it was done. Everybody did it that way.

KS: So you went back and filed as "Sticky?"

WB: Yeah! Sure did, and won without any trouble; had about eight people running.

KS: Wow, that's impressive.

WB: I told everybody I wasn't a politician, and I think they wanted somebody who wasn't a politician. Well, I stayed in the Sheriff's Department for eight years.

KS: Eight years.

WB: Yes.

KS: So where was that?

WB: Guilford County.

KS: Guilford County.

WB: B. J. Barnes, a guy, the big fella' – I don't know whether you've ever seen or heard of him – but he's Sheriff now. He's about 6'8" tall and weighs 300 pounds. I ran against him. He ran against me every time I ran. He was a Democrat and switched over to Republican, and he ran against me every time until he won in 1994, and that's the year the Republicans won everything. I told him, I said, "B. J., you couldn't have beaten me if you hadn't had all that help from Washington." [Both laugh] He and I get along fine. We don't have any problems at all.

KS: So did you like being Sheriff?

WB: Well, you know, I kind of enjoyed it because it was a challenge. Our Sheriff's Department – I didn't think it was a very good Sheriff's Department. There were a lot of things that we didn't have. The sheriff that got into trouble before me was there only one term but he was trying to get things done; to get them a little more training, stuff like that but the sheriff before him, he was just a politician and just a good fella' and everybody liked him and he got along fine and he kept getting elected, but they never did anything to progress until I walked into the place. Anything I did was right. I couldn't do anything wrong.

So, I never will forget the manager, the county manager, called me over and let's see – the county paid me, they paid the sheriff, but the sheriff's elected and – but they aren't the sheriff's boss, the people are like any elected person. But he called me over and he said, "You know, we've got a little system, a little policy where every so often we'd give a salary increase, a cost of living increase and that kind of stuff." And he said, "I just want to go through the thing just like we do with everybody else." And I said, "Fine." And we sat down and talked and he said, "You've done more for the Sheriff's Department than anyone has done in ten years." And he said, "I really appreciate what you're doing" And of course, he – he was real good to us too. Real good to me. He helped me. I went over and talked to him right after I got there, shortly after I got there, and told him I wanted to see if we could become accredited, national accreditation, which was a fairly young thing at that time, but I told him, "It will cost a little money and it would cost us more in time, but it would cost us a little money and if you don't think we ought to do it, we will do it without having accreditation." He said, "No, you won't." He said, "If you don't get it and have rules to follow, you won't ever do them. So you do what you see fit, and I'll back you."

So we worked for about a year and a half and got nationally accredited and the only Sheriff's Department in North Carolina who has ever been accredited. And they aren't accredited now because B. J. chose to be a little too political to start with, and then when he wanted to go back and talk about it, they wouldn't consider it because he would have had to go back and dismiss some people he hired politically. And you know, he's done an outstanding job. But he politicked against me on accreditation. He said it was a waste of money, so he kind of had to shy away from it. Syl Daughtry, who used to be Chief of Police here, who was a Rotarian, is National Director of Law Enforcement Accreditation. He went there

from here, and he and I talked with B. J. about considering accreditation and he said, "I'd like to do that after a while." And then when they got into it, they couldn't accredit him until he went back and did some things he didn't want to do, and I didn't blame him. I wouldn't have done them either. It's too far gone then. But anyway, we were fortunate to get that.

KS: So you were Sheriff for eight years and then you retired, and what have you been doing since then? I bet your wife was glad to have you home.

WB: My wife wanted me to lose. I actually ran the last time against B. J. and she didn't want me to. I ran because I had several people say, "If you lose, or if you don't run, B. J. will get in and he'll fire us." And I said, "I don't know, I'll run" and he beat me. And he didn't. He fired a couple and that's all. All of that was for naught. And she said I didn't need it, and I said, "I know I don't need it."

I'll never forget, the County Tax Collector came over, Roger Cotton, and Roger said, "Sticky, what are you doing working?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You make more money not working than you do working." And I said, "Well, Roger, I'm enjoying spending your money." [Both laugh] But really, it helped – by being there eight years it helped my retirement because it's based on numbers of years of employment, you know, and salaries are a little better eight years down the road, twelve years down the road, than when I left the Police Department. So when you put it all together it helped my retirement. But I really wasn't making a whole lot more when I was working. I was drawing social security and paying it! [Both laugh] Paying Social Security, I said, "This is really a joke. Here I am, I'm getting – I'm drawing Social Security and then I'm paying it."

KS: That's funny.

WB: I was seventy-six when I ran for Sheriff the last time.

KS: That's great!

WB: Everybody said, B. J. told everybody, "Sticky's too old to be sheriff, we need a young sheriff." And I think they bought it and they elected him anyway.

KS: So since then have you gotten to travel? Have you been having fun?

WB: Well, I did a little traveling when I was working. I've been in the Shrine for many, many years.

KS: The Shriners you said?

WB: The Shrine, yes, and we did a lot of work for hospitals and back in 1967, Bill Pettit – is a lawyer here in town and a judge – was Potentate at Oasis Temple and

his father was Imperial Potentate. Dr. Poteat was president, chancellor of Wake Forest University, and Bill came along and they gave me his Shrine pin, his father's pin.

KS: How nice.

WB: And I lost it on a cruise. Someone stole it, I didn't lose it. I bet that thing was worth five thousand dollars. Bill appointed me, and I said, "Bill, I'm not going to accept it, I don't want it. I don't have time to do it." And he said, "Well, you're going to have to get up in front of the group and tell them because I'm going to appoint you. You can do what you want to." Anyway, to make a long story short, the Shrine every so often will take a trip, and he did this time to San Francisco and spent a week in San Francisco and then a week in Honolulu. Then as different ones came along, we went to Europe a couple of times, and then when I came along, I went to Europe and the Balkan countries. So that's how I kept going overseas. I'd go with this group. I got to see a lot of the country and a lot of the countries and had an awfully nice time doing it. But I'm still involved in the Shrine and still working with them. I went out last weekend and stayed four hours at Walgreens collecting nickels and dimes for the hospital.

KS: You're a good man.

WB: Well, somebody has to do it. This lady came up and she said, "I want to tell you I gave already at Sam's [Sam's Club]." And she said, "But I love the Shrine so. My brother is the administrator of a hospital in Iowa." What am I trying to say? I can't think of the name –

[End of Tape 1, Side A. Start of Side B]

KS: Okay, please continue. What did the lady say?

WB: She was just telling me that her brother was the administrator of a hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, and that she thought a lot of the Shrine and that sort of thing. And then I had a black lady who came up and she said, "I'm a surgeon." And she had this little child with her, and she said, "I'm a surgeon, and I worked in the Richmond Shrine Hospital, and I got to know these kids real well and I think so much of the Shrine." And she went on talking a little bit, and she said, "When I come out, I'll give you a donation." Well, I don't know whether she came back out or not but I got to thinking, "You know, we don't have a hospital in Richmond. If we do, I don't know about it, and I've been to most of them." [Laughs] I don't know where she was coming from but she was awfully nice. But you know, we stayed out there for four hours and I think I put a hundred dollar check in there, I always do, every time they have that paper sale, they call it. When we got through we had three hundred dollars or something like that, but all of that helps because, you know, we have a budget of – it costs about, right now, about two million dollars a day to operate the Shrine hospitals. So every little bit

that comes in helps, you know. So if you do enough of that, and enough people do it around – and we had people all around town doing it, and I don't know how much we made, because it was last weekend.

KS: Now when I was a little girl they used to have the Shrine Circus. Do they still have that?

WB: They still have that. They have them, yes. They still do.

KS: So you are also in the Rotary Club. You're in the Shrine and the Rotary Club.

WB: Yes.

KS: So are you involved in anything else? That would probably take up all your time!

WB: Well, let's see, I'm not really involved in anything else. We've got a group here in Greensboro which is a One Hundred Club. It was started by General Townsend who was the City Manager back in the early fifties and the Fire Chief who was Moon Wyrick, everybody knows him – knew him, he's dead now. They started this group not to exceed one hundred people back in the early fifties. What it was was people working with the city and business people, and once every quarter or four times a year, they'd have a steak dinner, and they'd all meet out there and have hors d'oeuvres and eat steak and stand around and talk. And one of the rules of it was, you can talk all the politics you want to, but the club doesn't talk politics. You know, you can talk politics if you're over here. The main reason for it was to get the leaders – the city leaders – involved with people in business so they would understand each other and could work with each other better. And that's been going on ever since the fifties.

Well along about twenty-five years ago, the guy who was handling it died – Lee Forbis of Forbis & Dick Funeral Home – Lee Forbis died and somebody said, "You're going to be the president." Now they call it the president, and that's when I started the Board of Directors because I didn't want to do it all myself. Just as of last December, I told them it was time for me to quit. You know, when you reach my age, you don't know how much longer you're going to be around and, then I think you ought to have some younger people. So I told them I was going to step down, and we got a couple of other folks started in with it. And I went out there a few meetings later, and they came up with a little envelope and a plaque on it and the guy in charge said, "We are going to present you with this plaque." It's not really a plaque, but it simulates a plaque, it was an envelope, and I knew it had to be money or something like that. I had \$1,905 and then they sent me another check that someone had mailed in for \$25. I said, "Well isn't that great. I haven't done a thing but sit up here and eat steaks with you and enjoy myself." [Laughs] And he said, "Buy yourself a new set of golf clubs."

KS: How nice!

WB: I almost – I didn't know what to say. I was flabbergasted.

KS: That's lovely.

WB: That is a good group. Joe Bryan, Jim Melvin. You've heard of Jim Melvin, you've heard of Joe Bryan. Joe was a member. Jim was a member, he'd been mayor for twelve years. Now we have about 180 members and we have about 100 that come every time.

KS: What a nice group.

WB: And we pay so much a year. If everybody came, there's not enough to pay for it but everybody doesn't come every time. And it keeps you involved with people. That's what I like about Rotary, it keeps you involved.

KS: Now, are you a golfer?

WB: I don't know whether to answer that or not! [Both laugh] Maybe you ought to rephrase that.

KS: Do you play golf? [Laughs]

WB: I try, I try. We've got a group at our church that plays golf at least once a week. One of the guys will set up – anyway, we just go all over and play wherever we can. None of us are good golfers, but we play all the time.

KS: It seems that everyone plays golf in North Carolina. When I came up here, I was amazed.

WB: I played about three weeks ago in a Victory Junction Tournament they had. I've never seen a tournament like that in my life.

KS: So you play in tournaments.

WB: Well, I did. I'm not that good. Let me tell you about this. You'll enjoy it. They've had this for three or four years since they started Victory Junction. The Shrine has joined in with Victory Junction because we found out that they had a lot of people coming in with spina bifida and different orthopedic problems that we could help with, as well as helping us with some of our problems. So we decided to start working together, and we got the National Shrine, the nationwide Shrine, the Imperial Shrine, the International Shrine, really, to get involved with them and them with us. But anyway, getting back to Victory Junction, they have this tournament, and I've played in about three of them, I think. Outback [Outback Steakhouse] furnishes lunch. Lunch is about 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., because you start to play golf at about 11:00 a.m. A steak about that thick, a chicken breast if

you want it, a pie, cake, a vegetable, and a salad, all of that, and then you go play golf. We had six golfers on each hole, which is unheard of, you don't do that, and we had – and having six golfers on each team, I mean. We had two teams on each eighteen holes. See, and all of this is to bring in money because you pay so much on every tee. You play the best ball all the way to the cup. Now most games you play captain's choice, but this you play all the way to the cup. You get people like me, long hitters – I can get there and help out every once in awhile. It was interesting, we played for about five or six hours to do it. But about half way around, the hospital down in Asheboro has got this nutrition tent set up with nutritious food and they've got fruit and that stuff with a big all beef hot dog and most people would have a hot dog. Then when you get back in they have this big spread out there, you go right in and get whatever you want to eat – sliced beef and hors d'oeuvres stuff and all that stuff – and then when it's over, they have an auction. And they've gotten a lot of stuff, a lot of NASCAR stuff together and Rich Brenner, who just retired over at Channel 8, usually MCs that and handles the auction. So you go out there about 9:00 o'clock in the morning, and you get home about 10:00 o'clock at night. Of course, we left the auction and got home a little earlier. But that's a full day, but they make a bundle of money on that thing.

KS: That's amazing.

WB: It is amazing and, the money does a lot a good, too.

KS: And it sounds very nice, too.

WB: It is. Everybody enjoys it – people from everywhere around. I played with some people from Tazewell, Virginia, that's in the coal mining part of Virginia – they came down for that – Tazewell County, Virginia. I don't know, it's a moneymaker for the camp down there and it's a lot of fun. But I still stay involved in little things like that.

KS: So you've been in Greensboro all your life. How do you think that Greensboro has changed since you've lived here?

WB: Well, forty times. [Laughs]

KS: For the better or for the worse or can you say?

WB: Well, it's growing all along. I think we're going through a bad time right now with the Police Department. Have you been reading about all that mess?

KS: What's going on now?

WB: Well, a couple of years, it's been almost two years now or a year and a half since they kind of forced the chief to resign, and then Rhino Times and Jerry Bledsoe is writing articles about it. And they've got some corruption in the Police

Department and they've lost a bunch of people and lost all of their command staff. I don't know, it's just been a hassle.

KS: Do you find that discouraging?

WB: Very discouraging, very discouraging. I am so disappointed. You know I love Keith Holliday – you know Keith, Keith was the mayor who just went out. Keith was a Jaycee and always been a leader in Greensboro – just a good guy. But why they didn't get these bad people out of the department, I can't understand – and they're still there. They got rid of the chief. Anyway, this has gone on in the paper for over two years. It bothers me a lot because we had a – we were proud of the Police Department during all of the – well from 1950 on, we had a Police Department here that was known all over the country and was known as one of the better ones in the country. And then all at once, about three or four years ago, they bring in a guy from Washington D. C. and he – I don't think he was a bad guy, but he didn't have any discipline. Things got to going not right and I think we've some bad people up there now that need to go. But no one is doing anything about it, and that's what's bothering me.

KS: Why is that?

WB: They seem to think that Chief Ray did everything wrong and everybody else is right. And this is a racial thing, too, partly. You see they're denying the racial part now but–

KS: See I'm from Winston-Salem so I miss this.

WB: Well if you ever read the Rhino Times you see it there all the time. And the paper hasn't done much about it – the Greensboro paper hasn't – and I think they kind of supported the city council. And I'd like to support them because they're good people and I like them, but I don't see why they haven't done something, like get rid of these people.

KS: Why is it a racial issue?

WB: Because they had some disgruntled blacks that really became involved and that kept them from, in my opinion, kept them from promoting some people in the department when they brought the guy in from Washington and that sort of thing. It's just a bad situation. I think they think they were right, but I don't. [Laughs]

KS: Do you see some improvement down the road a little bit?

WB: No. Not until they do something about it. It's like cancer. You know, it's just like a cancer. If they don't do something about it, it will keep growing, I'm afraid.

- KS: Well, what do you think about all of this expansion downtown? It's pretty impressive.
- WB: Well, you know, I'm glad to see it. You know for a long time downtown was dead, for many years.
- KS: That's what I hear.
- WB: I remember when we used to have Christmas parades, and we used to get everyone out in the Police Department out extra and all the fireman to help up near Jefferson Square where the bank is now and the Jefferson Building. Market Street, on the east side, we'd have to put a cable across there. Traffic engineers would put a cable across there and they'd park fire trucks on that side. They might get a call to come to that side of town if something happened in the middle of the parade. We had to put it up there to keep the people back, there were such crowds. And we were so scared to death all the time that folks were going to lean into the plate glass windows and they'd break, and it was going to cut them and all that. You were just scared to death 'cause that place was packed. And now I think if you went down Main Street with the best play in the world, you wouldn't see twenty. We'd have 10,000 or 15,000 people out there and have beauty queens, North Carolina beauty queens. I don't know, it was a lot of fun. We used to call it the Holiday Jubilee Parade. Have it every Christmas. But Greensboro was dead downtown. I think they're doing fine – they're coming back fine. We've got to do something. We've lost Burlington Industries; we lost Cone Mills, Guilford Mills. You've got to have something. You've got to do something.
- KS: It's growing. Now, what are some of the issues facing Greensboro; there's population growth, economic growth, leadership and race relations, water shortage. How do you think any of those can be solved? Any ideas?
- WB: I think we're trying to solve them if we can ever work together on the water problem. If we can ever get High Point in there to work with us. Apparently, they are – they're making some headway with that now. So, hopefully, that will be a big help to us. But I think the city's done a pretty dog gone good job. Of course, they're having to buy water, but they've done a good job getting water from different places and a lot of the folks are critical of them because they say, "Why are they let them do all of this building continue when we don't have water?" But they let it, in my opinion, continue because they're finding water somewhere else to take care of it and by doing that they're increasing the tax base where they can do more and do more. So, you know, I think they're doing a pretty good job with it really. That's the reason I don't want to be critical of our council, I just don't agree with them about the police matters.
- KS: Right. Understandable.
- WB: I think they've done a pretty good job with that.

KS: So it is about to celebrate its 200 anniversary, so what do you see in Greensboro's future?

WB: Well, they – I don't know. I'd love to see Greensboro be a big sparkling city like Atlanta or somewhere like that, but I don't know if that would be the best thing or not. The larger cities get, the more problems you get – the crime problems. If you talk about what we were talking about a minute ago, crime in the Police Department, you got, in these bigger cities you have corruption in the Inspection Department, people. Well, New York city is big with the Mafia and all that, the Mafia would control inspectors and get paid off for all that and everything. The larger you get, the more problems you get, is all I'm saying. Sometimes you can get too big.

KS: Well, do you think Greensboro's problems are pretty much proportionate to other cities this large around the country?

WB: Oh, I would say yes. Yes, yes.

KS: I know they say there is increasing gang violence. We've had that in Winston too.

WB: Well, that's been going on. We've been talking about this – we've had these problems for twenty years, I guess, and they're beginning to come out more and more and more, and it's beginning to be a problem where before it was talked about and not a lot done about. That may be some of the problem. But I think that Greensboro has always been progressive, and they've tried awfully hard to be a good clean city and we've always had – I think we've always had good representation as far as politics were concerned, city leaders, and we're fortunate to have had that. Ed Kitchen has just left as city manager and did a good job, did a great job as city manager. And I guess Ed is doing a good job with Jim Melvin now keeping things going. But you know, we're very fortunate to have these philanthropies in Greensboro that are keeping things going. I don't know where we'd be if we did not have the people who are doing these things for the city and actually spending their money to keep the city going. So, I think we've got a bright future, and I hope we have a bright future because I love Greensboro. I always have loved Greensboro, and I would love to see it do just great.

KS: It's a wonderful city. Well, I've come to the end of my questions, but is there anything else you want to talk about? What have I forgotten?

WB: I don't think you've forgotten anything. I think I've done all the talking. [Laughs]

KS: You have! It's been so great! I just don't want to miss anything that you might have to add.

WB: You know, you asked me how it has been in Greensboro. When I first came to Greensboro Police Department, we didn't – let's see, the year before I came to the department, they hired about ten additional people and they sent – all of them had to be tested here at UNCG [University of North Carolina Greensboro]. The testing was for psychological things, you know, to see how they would react and that sort of thing – that kind of behavioral questions and stuff. And then in 1957– I was promoted to major in 1956 – in 1957, we doubled the size of the city of Greensboro. The size, not the population, and we had some problems with that as we didn't have police personnel or any personnel to take care of all of that gain right away. But let me go back a little bit. Right after I came back from the war, we had a situation here, you probably never heard of it. There was a group of people that ran the "butter and egg lottery." They sold these tickets, most of them in the black neighborhoods, and black people would do it. White people would buy them, but most of it was done by the black people. They were the underlings, if you want the runners and all that. That was based on the Chicago "butter and egg market," the figures that came out every day of the winners and that sort of thing – based on that. Well these people had a pretty good control of some of the police officers back in that time and I saw some times that – you know we had back then, you won't be familiar with this either, we had bootleggers that handled non-tax paid whisky in fruit jars and five gallon tin cans. That's where NASCAR started, running them in the mountains, you know. We had a lot of that.

Well, I didn't know it at the time, but I learned a little bit more about that with a few years of working out there with folks. I saw some things I couldn't believe. For example, the detectives, for example, would use the bootleggers as informants to help them solve burglary cases, murder cases, and all of these kinds of things. But in order to get them to inform on other people, they were kind of letting them ride, so bootlegging was flourishing, you know, that kind of thing. The "butter and egg" racket was flourishing, and it wasn't many, but there were several policemen down at the grocery store who would go by and pick up groceries for their families. And I don't know how deeply they were involved, but I had a particular case myself, and this will be interesting to you I think – Bannent and Trulove was an old grocery company here and I stopped one of their trucks one night down in the eastern part of the city for some reason and the first thing – he had bottled and bond whisky there on his truck. Well we didn't have liquor by the drink then and bootleg was the only way you can get it. So what he was doing was delivering it in Bannent and Trulove's grocery truck to the bootleggers. Well, anyway, to make a long story short, I called and the detectives came down, some of them, and they confiscated all the stuff. And I took care of him, and when I got through with him, I go up and I say, "Where is our evidence?" talking about the liquor. And they said, "Well, we divided it out. We don't have to show that in court. All you have to do is tell them what you found." And I said, "I do? Well it doesn't make sense to me."

But you see things like that – and I guess what I'm getting at is that we had some problems back then with corruption in the Police Department. So General

Townsend who I was speaking about earlier, the city manager, hires a man from Florida as a public safety director to come in and the idea – and I didn't know it at that time, I didn't have enough sense to know it at the time, but they were – they brought in this man as a public safety director, Bill Reeves, to get rid of the Chief of Police and they were going to hire another one. Well, they actually did this. They brought in a Chief of Police from Virginia – from Richmond, Virginia – named Jeter Williamson and he immediately started cracking down with the help of Charlie Hagan – Kay Hagan who ran yesterday, Charlie's her father-in-law – he was the prosecutor. With his help, they started cracking down on the “butter and egg racket” and the bootleggers and that sort of thing, and trained police officers better, and hiring them, making them taking examinations for promotion and all that. That's how I got my first promotion and that sort of thing.

So what I'm really saying is we had some corruption in the Police Department, it was not good, although some of it was helpful in solving cases. But we worked awfully hard, well Jeter did, and I was in traffic investigation then, but and then he left in five years and went with AID, that's a department working with the government overseas – police training, you know, in the Philippines and different places – ended up in Bangkok. But that's when we started working in a Police Department that didn't have any of this thing in it, and I think over a period of years working night and day, we have plenty of good people that we had a good Police Department, and when I left the Police Department I was proud to say I worked there. I wouldn't be proud to say I even knew them now, but I was proud to say I worked for them. But what I'm seeing now, we had this in 1950, now we are in 2007 and 2008 and here we are – we've got a problem that looks like it could be somewhat the same. Although maybe a little different, the results are the same anyway, aren't they? And that's why I have a little problem of how this thing has been handled, but I don't think it's insurmountable, and I think they can take care of it, but I think they're going to have to bite the bullet and do it. In spite of saying all that, I haven't said much.

KS: You have and I want to thank you so much.

WB: But you know that's an important thing for people to be able to depend on the Police Department.

KS: Sure.

WB: We had problems – we had problems with officers who broke into some places. They had keys and were supposed to be protecting a man's business and stealing his stuff while they had the key and that stuff. But we caught them and we did something about it, got rid of them. And you know – but that's what's bothering me now. They're not doing anything about these – and it don't sound so good. But anyway, we've got a good city, we've got great people, we've got good colleges, and we've got people like you who come from Texas to help us out [Both laugh]. So, we're not in bad shape.

KS: I'm a recruit. I love it up here. [Both laugh]

WB: I'm glad you do. I love Greensboro. I just want it to do well. I really do want it to do well. I think, you know I don't know whether you've heard it or not, Jim Melvin was mayor for twelve years here. And Jim was mayor during a lot of the civil rights problems. I've never seen a mayor who was any prouder of a city. And I've never seen a man who boosted the city employees and the Police Department. He'd say, "Dizzy Dean said you can brag all you want but if you prove it, it's got to be right." That's not exactly what he said. I can't think exactly what he said but anyway he'd use that all the time about "Dizzy Dean said." But he'd brag on this city and backed the people in it, and he'd done so much with Joe Bryan's money for it on top of what he did as mayor and people are critical of him and it just bothers me because he is really a dedicated person who loves this city and always has and we're fortunate to have him. With all that said, can I go home? [Laughs]

KS: You can, you're sprung! Thank you so much. I appreciate it. Thank you for coming today.

[End of Interview]

[End Tape 1, Side B]