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Raymond Adkins

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GS: I am doing an interview with Rev. Raymond Adkins who lives in Welch, West Virginia. He was born May 15, 1910, and we are interviewing this in the church on August 11, 1974, and my name is Guy Sutphin, and I am doing this interview for Appalachian Culture. Rev. Adkins, where were you born?

RA: I was born in a rural community just outside of Louisa, Kentucky. My parents were separated when I was about a year old or a little more. Both were typical Appalachian folk. Both very young. Mother was 19 when she was married. They separated because neither one of them were mature enough to assume the responsibilities of marriage. Then, Mother came to West Virginia in Mingo County, and I was reared in Mingo County. Grew up in a mining community. My stepfather was a very experienced miner. A man with no formal education, but a man who knew mining and was a expert at it. Later served at, as I grew into the teenage years, he was superintendent of a small mine. And, ah, I grew up in the mining areas of West Virginia, and then worked myself the last two or three years I was in high school. Worked in the mines at night. Went to school of a day. And, ah, didn't seem to hurt too much. I seemed to get by very well in grades and, ah, enjoyed, of course, the income that came from my working at night. Gained a lot of practical experience in dealing with people and techniques of how to do the work of a miner. Lived then until I was graduated from high school in the little town of Kermit, West Virginia, in Mingo County. I happened to be the first member of my family, as far as I could ascertain on any side of my folks background, that had advanced as far as a high school graduate. Preceeded to go to college at it was Marshall College then back in the early '30's. First year I was there I (inaudible). My stepfather had a good income, but the Depression had hit, and, ah, he ran into financial difficulties. Of course, since he did, I did. [GS: Right.] And, ah, I worked at Kroger's on Friday afternoon and Saturday's with a grand total of \$2 a day. Went to work at seven, but you weren't sure when you got through. There were no such thing as hours. [GS: Right.] But, I got through school the second year practically on that \$3 a week that I made from Kroger's. Back in those days, in this area, the majority of the young people in college simply could not get four year's training, and the best thing we could do was to go back home and exercise a little influence with the member of the local board of education, get a school, usually a one-room school back up in the country. Ah, I started teaching

with the two-year's college and made the grand sum of \$75 a month. We weren't guaranteed any certain amount of months. Most of us averaged seven to eight. You were very lucky and your district was rich, you could make \$75 or even far as \$80 a month as a beginning teacher. And, then we would go back to what we called spring term and summer and, ah, take extension courses. Through a process of study over the years, we would finally reach our degree. It took me in a matter of about ten years to receive my degree. And, ah, in the meantime, I was teaching. Taught for nine years beginning in a one-room school. I, ah, had, and a tremendous influence in my training, and in those days we took method courses. One of the sweetest souls I've ever known and a person whose influenced me probably more than any other individual in the matter of teaching and even carried over into my ministry was Miss Virginia Falk, who served as, I think at one time, was state superintendent of schools and, ah, Superintendent of the Cabell County System and was a teacher and very, very influential teacher in Marshall at that time. [GS: Uh huh.] She gave us, ah, we had to take two-hour courses in this specific subject, I think, [GS: Right.] teaching like reading and so forth. They were terrific. Miss Falk gave us, ah, ah, ah, background that would enable a green boy or girl to, to come out of even two years of college work and do an acceptable job. I, ah, had some terrific experiences in my one-room school teaching. Ah, being reared in a mining community, I really didn't know too much about country life. [GS: Uh huh.] Ah, fortunately, I could always get along with people and, ah, just fell in love with the most wonderful group of rural people who were typical Appalachian mountaineers. I came into this community without any experience. Ah, ah, sort of a spoiled boy who had been reared in a mining community with all the advantage of the superintendent's son. [GS: Yeah.] And, ah, thrown on my own in the mountains with these independent characters that I hadn't really known because I hadn't even though I'd lived in Appalachia I, I didn't know the real old mountaineer. And, so I, I really did more learning than I did teaching [GS: Yeah.] in those first two or three years that I taught in one-room school. Ah, I had the experience of, ah, and I have them now, a pair of mittens that was knitted by one of the dear ladies in the home where we were staying. Although we were making 70 or \$75 a month, ah, we got room and board for \$15 a month. [GS: Huh.] And, I mean it was food! Ah, they had plenty to eat. And, ah, they had a large flock of sheep. And, she would, they would cut the wool from their

back and, and carry that wool through the process of cording, and, and weaving, and dying, and knitting, and, ah, I have a pair of mittens today that I wore it for many, many years; and Miss Adkins wore them when she was teaching in, in the rural schools. They're the warmest things ever.

GS: Probably much better than anything you can get today.

RA: Terrific. You just can't imagine how warm those old wool. They, they tried to get me to, get me to wear socks, but I couldn't. They were too hot. But, now, I had that experience, and very few people have ever actually seen wool come off of a sheep's back and then put into a item of clothing. I did learn to cord, make little round, ah, balls about six or eight inches long which the woman would use and, and make into thread which she would connect together with terrific skill. Ah, one thing I never did learn to like. I learned to like almost all the foods they served except dried pumpkin, and they used to cut pumpkins into big slices, hang it over the fireplace, and, and, I never, I could eat it, but I never did enjoy it. All of the other food that they did, I liked. Dried beans and dried apples and all of those things. Now, you see to me they were all new because even though I was an Appalachian boy, grew up in a mining community [GS: Uh huh.] which is an entirely different life from that one-room school back there in, in the mountains of Mingo County. You can't believe how isolated these mountains were even in the early '30's. This young man and I from the town of Kermit had been together all our lives. Both of us, by the way, had started in pre med and, ah, had to drop out because of finances. We had gotten hold of an old Model-T Ford with a Munsey transmission which made a pretty terrifically powerful instrument, and, ah, we were the only automobile that had ever come up and down the (inaudible). It was 15 miles from Kermit to the place we stayed. Even that thing wouldn't get through the mud in the wintertime. And, so we, we would go as long as we could make it in the old car without a top, and, ah, finally we just had to park it and walk. And, so we would come out early on Friday. See, there were no supervisors around [GS: Uh huh.], and you could leave at noon and nobody cared. And, we would leave school early on Friday, and then when we'd come back in from Kermit, ah, this 15-mile walk was, ah, most of the time up hill and down, and when it wasn't that way, it was through the creek because the roads always boarded the

creek that ran down through the valley. We wore high-top boots and, ah, what they called back in those days riding trousers, and that was the customary dress. You wore it in the classroom, and you wore it on the way to, to home or back to school [GS: Right, right.] along with a raincoat. That's about all. In the wintertime, you wore a warm hat like a toboggan, but you never made the trip without wet feet, because you had to go through the creeks so much. One time it, my boots would leak less than his, why, I would carry him across the creek on my back. If his happen to be leaking, he got to ride. If mine were worse, he'd let me ride across. Occasionally, you'd, ah, find a fellow who would give you a hitch on a mule. You could ride behind him as he came along. If a wagon came along, that was allright. You had it made. But, ah, I, I shall cherish those experiences, because I learned so many things from the, the folk up in those mountains. We had, ah, custom then of giving the parents a chance to come in. We didn't call it P. T. A., because, ah, they wouldn't agree to any formal organization. So, we learned that the last Friday of the month, ah, it was more important to let these youngsters have a chance to show off their achievements through the weeks than it was to have lessons. So, he would walk over the mountain and bring his boys and girls over to my school. Ah, it was about six miles from his school to mine over a mountain.

GS: Pretty good walk.

RA: But, it meant nothing then [GS: Right.], because we were young. And, at that time, I could average a mile every 15 minutes, and that 16-mile walk was no more than a four-hour walk, which was nothing. I couldn't do it today, but the people who lived there, oh, Daniel, ah, ah, six or eight-mile walk was nothing. So, we'd get the youngsters over, and they would learn a few poems, and, ah, they would show off their adding and subtracting ability. And, ah, one of the older girls would read a story. And, now that wasn't exciting to us, but it was terrifically exciting to these parents, because they were seeing that their children could do things. [GS: Yes sir.] And, ah, we even went so far as to, ah, which was scandalous in a lot of cases, we would let the boy bring his five-string banjo. He'd pick a few tunes. That, that was pretty brave he just do that. And, ah, this is a little bit of my own ingenuity. Ah, in college I had, ah, been interested in tumbling, and in acrobatics, and in work in the gym, and I learned a few minor

tricks. There was no way to get supplies. It was just unheard of. [GS: Yes sir.] Ah, school teachers, I mean, the board about all they could do was pay the teacher. A lot of times they couldn't do that. So, you had to be a little inventive. And, I had made a complete playground without nails, ah, without metal. Plenty of trees, because they were right in the schoolyard and all around it. We made, ah, cross bars, and parallel bars, and uneven bars, and, ah, we even had a swing. Course that had to have, ah, a little bit of metal. [GS: Right.] But, we had, we didn't use a chain. We used a pole for the chain, and you had to have either a rope or a small chain to fasten at the top. That's about the only metal you could afford, and, ah, then into tumbling. We just had oodles of the weed that grew back of the playground. Ah, it made a very soft mat when you picked it and piled it up about four inches thick. And, ah, I had those boys and, and the girls doing tricks on the playground that the kids in the city schools simply wouldn't have even thought of under the circumstances. So, you can see my background in the rural area was not a drudgery. It was difficult. And, and, ah, that 16-mile walk was a hardship, but it, it, I grew in it. And, the thing that I thrilled about was the fact that these youngsters were so eager to learn. You can't imagine. A kid growing up 16 miles from the town of Kermit, little old town of probably 600 people, and they'd never been there. They, they didn't know what a railroad train looked like or a track. Remember one little boy we brought out in the old Ford car with no top, and, ah, as we came out of the creek, it was Marrow Bone Creek. A lot of folks may know Marrow Bone Creek just below Kermit between Wayne and Mingo Counties. And, just at the mouth of that creek, ah, where it emptied into Tug River was a large railroad tunnel. And, just a short distance from the entrance of that tunnel, you crossed a railroad track, and it put you up on an elevation. Then, you dropped down into Route 52 which was a hard-surface road. We came out, and we hadn't prepared this little fellow for it, and we just took for granted that everybody knew a hard surface road. [GS: Yes sir.] The only connection he could make with a hard-surface road was when we hit this little elevation that shot over the railroad track down onto the hard surface, 52, he said, "Whoopee, a tar-paper road."

GS: A tar paper road.

RA: That was his only thing to associate with that look and that firmness. [GS: Yes sir.] His daddy had used tar paper on the house. [GS: Right.] We kept him there in town. We, and he was the, he was absolutely the most fun. Everybody fell in love with him. He was the, he wrote back home, because he could tell some big tales. And, ah, that, when that train drove into the station at Kermit, he could describe in minute details of how the steam and all the whistling and all the excitement. And, everybody loved to hear him tell it when he got back home. Ah, experiences like that are very meaningful. I had one little fellow, first or second grade by the name of Glenn. Glenn was a genius, but he was the biggest liar ever was, ah, to his Mother and Daddy. But, I guess in my youth and my enthusiasm, I, I said, "Don't fuss at him, don't." They said, "I'm going to whip him for lying." And, I said, "Don't whip him, because that's an indication of imagination, and he, he may grow up, grow up to be a terrific novel writer." [GS: Yeah.] "He could just be, ah, ah, an outstanding young man with the imagination, so let him use it." And, they said, "No, Mr. Adkins, it just ain't right. He's lying, and we don't want it." He come to school every morning, and I'd always listen to Glenn's story. Ah, he could tell big bear tales and terrific stories. He had either dreamed, thought up, or remembered partially what Grandad had told, he added to it. And, I encouraged him, and, ah, so about three or four years after I left up there I was back up in that country squirrel hunting and ran into his brother John up on the hilltop, and I had wondered what had happened to Glenn, and so I asked John. And, he said, "Why, Mr. Adkins, I guess you've heard he's on the radio in Williamson. He's playing a fiddle in a hillbilly band." But, what might have happened had that kid had opportunities [GS: Right.] that some of the other youngsters have had with imagination like his with musical ability and talent.

GS: It's hard to tell how far he would have gone.

RA: So, you see, even back in these remote areas, ah, back then they were really isolated. [GS: Yes sir.] Now, they're not. They, one Christmas I remember this boy that he and I were teaching together, ah, not together; we stayed together. We were teaching six or eight miles apart, but, ah, he, ah, he said, "If you'll take my kids and, ah, keep them I'll go out on Thursday," I believe it was before we were dismissed for Christmas, "and I'll get the treat for the children."

Now, here was the treat, and it was terribly extravagant for two teachers who were making 70 or \$80 a month for six, seven months a year, and ah, both of us helping support families.

[GS: Yes.] But, the man we were staying with gave him a horse to ride over the mountain. Well, that meant at least 14 miles, when you go over the mountain you cut off a couple, there and back which meant an all-day trip. And, he wasn't an experienced rider either (laughter). But, we decided that the treat would be one banana, 'cause three fourths of them had never tasted a banana [GS: Yes sir.]; one orange, because very few had ever seen an orange; and, ah, just a tiny bit of hard candy which they had seen, but hadn't had an occasion to get it very often; and, and one-five cent rough pencil tablet; and one one-penny pencil. You could actually get them for a penny. [GS: Yes sir.] And, that was the most exciting thing for them. One banana, one orange, and (laughs) just a tiny bit of hard candy, one rough pencil tablet, and one one-cent pencil. That's the biggest Christmas they'd ever had.

GS: Probably one that they'll always remember, too.

RA: I imagine. They would because it was just a thrill for us. Although this old boy coming back through the mountain happened, happened to squash a few bananas (laughter) 'cause he was an excellent rider. And, ah, that, that, although we did manage to live. I was supporting my mother, and a step sister, and a step brother, a half sister, and a half brother. [GS: Uh huh. Right.] Because they were a result of the second marriage. And, ah, I being the older was already there. In my thinking they, they were just as close. [GS: Yes sir.] So, it was two sisters and one brother. And, ah, one of the sisters is retired teacher from Huntington in Cabell County. And, ah, up in the suburb of Detroit, Michigan, and down now living in Florida. The other sister is the baby of the family. She's a teacher in Huntington now. And, ah, the brother, who was not interested in teaching, and, ah, he works in a factory, I think, in Kentucky out of Lexington, work in that area. But, I was having to, to assume the bigger responsibility for the support of those three and Mother. And, but we actually lived on that small salary, ah, 'round 70, \$75.

GS: Well, that sounds like you did a fine job in helping the family. Ah, what grades did you have in your school?

RA: In the one-room schools we had, ah, one to eight. Ah, you don't see how it can be done, but yet it's done today, ah, in, in your classroom. There is no classroom. I don't care how you divide it. I wound up as principal of an elementary school in Williamson, and, ah, we had, ah, as many as three and four groups in say the sixth grade. [GS: Yes sir.] And, ah, at that time, we were trying to experiment a A, B, a Six A, Six B, and C, and D, and, ah, we were by the tests we were able to give we were trying with our utmost fairness to, to grade according to ability. [GS: Right.] Put your better student in A, and the poor students in B, and so forth. But, even in the hardest effort we could make, your Group A would have variations of [GS: Oh, yes sir.] almost as great as we had in one-room school. What you did in a one-room school then you had the big seat up front that you called the recitation seat. Usually you had small desks where you put the first graders and larger desks where the seventh and eighth graders wound up. But, you see, you couldn't have over 15 in a class. [GS: Yes sir.] If you ever had let's say fifth geography, you might bring in the fourth grade or the sixth grade. [GS: Yes sir.] The fact is you might bring them all three together. That way you could spend 25 minutes if the lesson is interesting, and they were responding. So, you could make a schedule, but you, you, there's no way you could possible stick with it. [GS: Yes sir.] Another thing that I think is terrific about a one-room school is the fact that when the fifth-grade geography is reciting there'd be a brilliant second grader even a first grader who's not doing nothin' (inaudible). His work he's been assigned it's too easy, and he's not interested. There isn't anything you can do, because you're busy reciting. So, he listens, and you'd be surprised how much he picks up from the fifth-grade geography class. And, the fact of the matter is a brilliant first grader may learn more than very poor students in the fifth grade [GS: Yes sir.] as he listens in. Another thing you learn early in the rural school was to let the older, more capable students help the others. There was a seventh grader who was always teaching a first grader and, ah, surprisingly well. And, to me that was an advantage of a one-room school. [GS: Oh, yes sir.] Ah, another thing is in the one-room school if you had the desire and the ability the sky was the limit. You could try and experiment. [GS: Yeah.] You see, you didn't have to get the supervisor's approval. [GS: Right.] You could just do some daredevilish things, ah, that were almost impossible

if you were under supervision. [GS: Yes sir.] Some of them worked out pretty well. I remember one boy I had was a nature lover. One of those little fellers that couldn't learn the routines [GS: Yes sir.], but he, he knew nature. And, I let little Euwell have a, ah, a regular exhibition that would do credit to, to an amateur zoologist. He, he just had some terrific specimens of snakes and salamanders [GS: Boy, that sounds great.], bugs, and so forth. And, he kept his interest in school, and he learned even though he didn't get as much of the things that went on in, in the books. He, he was happy, and he learned of things that interested him and made a better student by his and kept him in school.

GS: Yes sir. What about the discipline you used?

RA: Well, we, we were, back in those days, ah, the parents up in the mountains there was no such thing as psychology, and Dr. Spock wasn't even invented (laughter). And, ah, about the only thing they knew, and it seemed to work fairly well, was just walk out into the yard and cut a big hickory whip. Not a switch, because a little old thing like a twig from a peach tree wouldn't do the work. And, of course, you must remember that in the seventh and eighth grade you had some boys that could, if you weren't in pretty good physical condition, they'd handle you. And, they were accustomed to doing it, because they'd, force was all they knew. [GS: Yes sir.] And, that was one of the first things I learned in my experience in the mountain schools was fear the Lord, and you did that by now this, of course, wasn't in the (inaudible). And, ah, but you learned, ah, ah, it was forced discipline, just plain brute strength. And, you usually tried, if you were a strong man, and back in those days I was fairly strong, good physical shape, walking 16 miles to school you had to be, and, ah, 'course we didn't do that everyday; we just walked about five. [GS: Yes sir.] But, ah, you've got the big switches, and, ooh, they were powerful. They were almost clubs. You put them in the corner, and what you tried to do was to take a chance to catch the playground boss in something and just whale the tar out of him, unmercifully. [GS: Yeah.] And, ah, always make a point that he cried. If he didn't cry, it didn't effect. And, ah, that's all. You had no more discipline. If you let that big boy, and he'd tried you, if you let him get by, then some small ones would try first. Now, that wouldn't be approved today, but it, it was the only thing they knew. [GS: Yes sir.]

Back there parents said if you didn't whip, you weren't a good teacher. But, after one good example of the fact that you would do it [GS: Yes sir.], ah, seemed to, I don't know how the modern teacher in the elementary field would say about that today, but it worked then, and it was, and there was no more discipline problems then than there are today nor the need for it. [GS: Yes sir.] But, you did have to let them know that you would spank them. [GS: Well, good.] (Break) This was in the early thirties, remember, ah, the Depression was on. About the only way these folk had of making any cash money. Farms were small. There was no, no large amount of level land. Most of them were just little hillside farms, and there was no way to make money, ah, dollar. [GS: Yes sir.] And, so most of them were pretty inventive, and they started making moonshine whiskey. [GS: Huh.] at this time. And, by the way, I had my experience. I always was, always was curious. Had a good reputation in my hometown. People knew me. I'd worked in the Sunday School in the Methodist Church there. But, ah, and my reputation was pretty solid. So, I was always curious to see a moonshine still. And, one day I went to school, and, ah, the foot logs had all been washed out, and there weren't but just two, three children at school. So, I came back to where I was staying with the president of the board of education, and his boys had a moonshine still. They talked about it. It was no secret. Even the kids at school would talk about their daddy's making whiskey. [GS: Yeah.] And, here was the picture of this moonshine. They didn't need but about \$3.75 a week to live. That's hard to believe isn't it? [GS: Yes sir.] And, they could support a big family on \$3.75. See, because all they had to buy was flour, chewing tobacco, smoking tobacco [GS: Uh huh.], coffee, baking powders, salt lick, and the rest was raised right there on their own little farm. [GS: Yes sir.] And, they didn't go into any big money-making deals on moonshining. They would make I think what they call one barrle of mash. Ah, they would buy the meal, and the corn, and whatever it took, and the sugar. And, then every two weeks, they would run this one barrel of mash [GS: Huh.], and I forget how much moonshine they got. I think it was around three gallon, and, ah, they sold that for \$2 a gallon. And, there was always a man to pick it up or who would assemble it, and then carry it into the towns like Williamson, Logan, Welch, I guess, on into Ohio. And, ah, it got rather big at the end of the deal. But, here in the mountains, these poor fellows needed around \$3.75 to live

on. That's all they made from moonshining. They didn't, ah, they didn't, ah, go in for any big amount of money. Every two weeks they'd run a barrel [GS: Right.] of mash, and, ah, that gave them the money to buy the things they needed. They weren't mean people. They were good, good folk, but they were violating the law, and they always had to be on the alert. But, I have been in homes, and it was always an act of courtesy for them to bring out their half-gallon jug. And, ah, it was not fancy. They didn't even serve glasses in most cases. They'd just pass around the half-gallon jug, and everybody slugged out of the jug. [GS: Right.] And, ah, being a young fellow full of, ah, vitamins, and all of that stuff, and wanting to experiment, I wanted to learn life. So, this young man and I were always receptive to that jug that came around. And, everyone of these old fellows wanted to be proud of his product, and, ah, he'd want your official opinion how good it was. Well, even though it took your breath (laughter) and almost struck you blind (laughter), you had to smak your lips and, "Gee, that's good!" And, ah, ah, now, now the thing that surprised you was the first relief program that came into being in the '30's was called the CWA way back, years and years ago and was very limited. But, these folks qualified, because they had no income, and the majority of the people went onto that CWA program where they worked a few hours a week [GS: Yes sir.] and got in the neighborhood of 3 or \$4, and that was all they needed. They didn't, they worked two or three days a week, and, and that supplied their needs. And, ah, that relief program helped. But, now, in the meantime, ah, I, though my district superintendent who lived in Kermit, ah, this young man and I started our own relief program. The American Friends, the Quakers, out of Philadelphia have always been interested in, in poor folk [GS: Yes sir.], how to help them. And, ah, my district superintendent picked me, because for some means or other I was just a little better teacher than the other fellow. Ah, he was interested in medicine, wanted to go on in it. I was interested, but had already reconciled myself to the fact that I couldn't go on and was interested in teaching and could teach. [GS: Yes sir.] Ah, so, the superintendent came to me, and he said, "Could, could you and your friend manage to carry up enough milk, graham crackers, cocoa, sugar, and peanut butter to feed your schools?" Now, that didn't, that, that sounds like an awful lot, but it really wasn't for a young man. [GS: Yes sir.] So, with the old army haversack, World War I, we would load up a few cans of

condensed milk, ah, sugar, cocoa, and peanut butter, and graham crackers. Ah, when we ketched somebody out in a wagon, we'd go by his home and load up a big load, and you wouldn't have to carry much. [GS: Yes sir.] But, ah, we carried most of it. I made arrangements with a dear old lady who lived close by the school and was the school janitor. And, she would fix a great old big galvanized bucket full of steaming hot water, and, ah, one of the older girls in the seventh or eighth grade would make sandwiches, peanut butter and graham crackers. And, then I would mix that big bucket of steaming hot water into the cocoa and sugar and, and the milk, add milk, and, ah, those little youngsters were like a gang of colts. Not in the morning 'cause they were dragging. [GS: No.] They hadn't had anything to eat half of them. But, afternoon, boy, they had all the pep in the world. And, ah, what would you do for cups? They, they wouldn't have cups. They wouldn't have glasses. So, we had the bright idea of putting those, ah, cans of milk, and they were not a little can like we have now. It was a terrifically big can. [GS: Yes sir.] And, ah, we put one end of that can in the old ironside, burnside stove. And, it was soldered, and the solder would melt, and you would have a perfectly smooth cup. No handle of course. [GS: Yeah.] But, you could drink the hot chocolate from that milk can and even when school was out, ah, we had saved all the cups, and they all asked to take them home with them. Those were prized items. But, that was the first relief program. That was the early '30's that the Quakers started into this mountainous area. Ah, these good, ah, friends who were in the moonshine business as I say were not mean. [GS: Yes sir.] And, to them they really weren't trying the law. It was just doing what they say feeding the family. And, the relief program grew on the CWA, but most of them went on. And, the surprising thing about it I would say three fourths of these men who made moonshine turned out to be Baptist preachers (laughter). Now, they were not of our Baptist group. [GS: Yes sir.] Ah, they were of the Freewill and the old Regular Baptist. And, ah, they preached in their own style to appeal to their own people. And, ah, many of them did a terrific job became famous in that area [GS: Yes sir.] as preachers. But, I have drunk their moonshine and had, ah, in this one case went to see them make it. [GS: Yes sir.] I actually saw them make it, and one of those boys said, "Mr. Adkins, what, what would you do if the Federal people would come along?" And, I said, "Well, I would just have to

explain to them that I was just watching, and if I couldn't prove my character pretty good, I guess I'd have to suffer the consequences." But, I wanted to see it badly enough that I took the chance, and I sat there and watched them for a while. And, ah, so they took me out, brought me across the creek on a mule, and I went on back to the place where I was staying. But, ah, I did see it, and it was an experience that I sorta appreciated even though I did watch an unlawful act but was not a participant. I just sat there and watched. They didn't make me participate.

GS: Yes sir. That was just another experience in your life you wanted to fulfill.

RA: Well, I had the chance, and I thought, heck, I might never see it again.

GS: Yes sir. Well, how did you get into the ministry?

RA: I've always worked in a Sunday School. Grew up as a Methodist. Taught, but I was never conscious of, of an experience in a, in a definite decision. I was just always a fairly good boy and even though I would slip out and do a few things I shouldn't I'd still go and teach Sunday School [GS: Yes sir.] and accept it. When I went to Williamson, I'd never had any experience with a Baptist group, and, ah, I began to be challenged. These men in East Williamson had a in that church had a wonderful little habit they used. I didn't know it, but what they would do when they'd meet with this men's Bible class on Thursday evening, they met in the homes, and one of the old experienced men would ask a question that he knew the answer to, but he was doing it for my benefit. And, and, then this other pastor or this one of the laymen would explain the answer. And, I was hearing things I'd never heard before that there ought to be this personal experience with Jesus Christ. [GS: Yes sir.] And, and, ah, consequently, when that went on for a while, the Holy Spirit begin to work, and I felt, my goodness, this is something I never heard of. I'd been a fairly good guy, and maybe I can get by. But, here was a group of men quoting the Bible showing the need for a personal experience with Christ, a personal committment. And, eventually after the Holy Spirit worked, these men witnessed, I would attend the service, and there came this conviction. I needed a Savior; Christ is the Savior. He's available. And, so, I was a (inaudible), principal

of their school, and I made my public profession, asked for Baptism. And, then in a couple of years, well, of course, the pastor knew what he was doing. I didn't know, but he was sending me out to these mission schools. I was teaching Sunday School. But, he'd send me out to what he called speak to the group. He wouldn't dare call it preaching. But, as I knew that I was going to be called on to go out to these mission points round Williamson, I would study. And, he would make it convenient for me to have books to study.

[GS: Yes sir.] So, he'd say, "Now, Raymond, you better have a sermon ready, because you may have to preach." So, I began to prepare a few sermons, and then I began to feel this call to preach. Ah, it was very definite. I had done the boy's work with the Railroad YMCA there, and, ah, the leaders of the local Y, and it was a terrific building, ah, terrific program, ah, a big thing, completely gone now, but the Railroad YMCA was a big outfit. So, one of the leaders asked me to prepare a paper to read in a their meeting in the Mayflower Hotel in Washington on work with boys. And, so, I prepared it, and apparently it was well received. And, ah, one of the officials out of New York called me one day, and he said, "I'd like, I'd like to come by and talk with you." And, I told him to come on. I would be at school and would be available. And, so he set the date. He came in, and he said, "We need young men like you in our YMCA work." And, I said, "Yes, but I'm planning to enter the seminary. Ah, I'm going into Christian work." He said, "This is Christian work." And, ah, he made, ah, ah, terrific appeal financially, and chances of promotion, and all those things. And, ah, it was hard to resist, but I felt that I was called to the pastoral ministry. And, ah, that didn't appeal to me at all. So, at the end of the school year I resigned. To show you that there wasn't any possibility of my being fired my sister became the principal after I left (laughs), so we kept it in the family. But, ah, it was not, there was no pressure at all to leave. It was all a matter of I left now here you've spent four years preparing to teach boys and girls in the field of education. Ah, if you really believe this thing you call spiritual life and religion, then it's important that you go back and spend some years preparing for that. [GS: Yes sir.] So, I was married and had one child. Ah, I went to the seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Spent three years there for my master's, and, ah, came out into the pastory. Spent ten years and a half in Milton. My first pastorate out of the seminary. And, I've been here in Welch

for 21½ years, so I will have served the two pastorates. Although, I served three churches in the years I was in that seminary in Kentucky and one before I went to the seminary. But, ah, the interesting field in this Appalachian area is the field that we mentioned. There's been some terrific things done in the study. I experienced some things myself in those one-room schools. I had never been in a rural church. My experience had been in these little town churches and in Kermit [GS: Yes sir.] where the predominate church was the Methodist Church. Fact is, it was the only church. And, all, everybody went there that went. But, it was not a big church because the Appalachian folk don't go to their churches in droves. Ah, when I went out into the country, we had no place to go. And, when they were having these meetings in what they called the United or Regular Baptist Churches, a lot of times we'd go as a social event. [GS: Yes sir.] And, I would go, and, ah, one of the old fellows in Kermit who knew me well and knew that I worked in the churches, the Methodist Church at Kermit, he, he came up to me one day, and he says, "Raymond, why don't you get up front?" See I was sitting in the back cause I was lookin', and you were the biggest sinner if you sat in the back, a indication of your pioucity it was. The closer up front you could get, the better you were. So, he was wanting me to make the impression of being a good person by sitting up front. And, he said, "Raymond, what you ought to do is learn to shake hands." Now, we didn't do that in the Methodist Church. And, I hadn't, ah, had any experience in shaking hands. And, these dear old Baptists up there in the country, they could really shake hands. That was, that was the indication of your spirituality and your friendliness. [GS: Yes sir.] Now, I'm sure you've studied Jack Wells and other people in this field of study of religion in Appalachia. But, most of those Regular Baptists, United Baptists, they would split in a dozen groups. They didn't know it, but Jack Wells and others have shown how the doctrine of those churches came almost purely out of the old Carthage background, ah, the Calvinistic background, ah, predestination, foreordained. [GS: Yes sir.] And, even today they call themselves Baptist, but they're preaching that old Calvinistic, Presbyterian doctrine and don't know it. And, if you would try to tell them that, you'd get into a fight. You might get hurt, because, ah, they were isolated, and, ah, there was no way that these early pioneers could have a trained minister. It was just impossible, and the only thing they knew when they came in here was that

old Calvinistic, Presbyterian, predestination doctrine. That appealed to them, and they kept it, but they couldn't be Presbyterian. There wasn't any way they would be ordained, but you could be a Baptist. So, consequently, because the Baptist, ah, didn't demand any college education. [GS: No.] Fact is, you didn't even have to know how to read and write to be a Baptist preacher. So, they became Baptist in name, and they don't know it today, but they're far far from the Baptist doctrine. [GS: Uh huh.] They're, ah, the old Calvinistic, predestination, foreordained, ah, preachers. And, in my first church experience while I was principal at the school in Williamson, I helped to organize a church in adjoining South Williamson. A little place called Roger's Park. While I was serving as the principal, I helped organize that church and served as its first pastor. And, I mean it was full-time work with visitation, and two sermons on Sunday, and mid-week service on Wednesday. Just about everything a full-time minister did. But, ah, we ran into the experience there of this old regular hard-shell Baptist influence, We, ah, were the American Baptist or, or the as they termed us, the Missionary Baptist. And, ah, we would win a boy or a girl, say, ten years of age, ah, to Christ in the Church School. He would make a decision, but when he, he came to asking for Baptism, his dear old Dad or Mom would just set their foot down. Say, "No, you can't do it. You can't do it till you're 14 years old." Now, why they struck the age 14 I don't know. But, apparently that was the age they thought he was able to make the decision. [GS: Yes sir.] And, frankly, they'd tell us, now, if God wants that boy to be a Christian, He'll, He'll make him a Christian. [GS: I see.] And, if he's foreordained, and if he doesn't, there's no use to put him under the water, put his name on the book. And, so, so that idea still hangs on into the rural sections of, of West Virginia in the religious field. It's, it's the old predestination foreordination. If God wants ye, He'll get ye. [GS: Yes sir.] If He doesn't want ye, and hasn't foreordained ye, there's nothing you can do about it, so it's more or less a fatalistic concept. But, I had that experience in my first church back in the '40's.

GS: Uh huh. Have you had any other, ah, experiences, ah, marriages or something [RA: Oh, yeah.] you'd like to mention?

RA: Even here in, in, ah, McDowell County which is not really, it's really a mining section. It's isn't a rural, ah, section at all.

And, they're not really many farmers here. /GS: Yes sir./ But, it so happens that the church I serve in Welch is opposite the court house. It's just across the street from the court house. They come in from all over the county to be married, and, ah, as you know in West Virginia nobody can perform a marriage except a judge /GS: Yes sir./ or a clergyman. Now, a lot of folk think the Justice of the Peace can do it. He can't. There's nobody can perform, and it's just been a few years that a judge could do it. The Ministerial Association's and the United Council of Churches in West Virginia put the pressure on the legislature and just a very few years ago they permitted judges to perform marriage ceremonies. Up until that time only ministers. But, the thing is this, the judges won't do it. So, in effect, all the marriages in West Virginia are performed by clergymen. In West Virginia you do have to fill a bond. I think it's \$500 to guarantee that, ah, the Certificate of Marriage that's issued by the county court will be filled in by you as you perform the ceremony and return it to the county court by the tenth of the month following. /GS: Yes sir./ That's what your \$500 bond is. In West Virginia you don't actually don't need any witnesses at, at a marriage ceremony, because your bond of \$500 will take care of that. Being close to the court house, and, ah, many of these people who live in the mining sections and up in the hollers, McDowell County are church goers. Consequently, they have no favorite minister. /GS: Yes sir./ And, the only thing that they can do when they get their license is to ask the young lady who give the license, "Do you know where I can get married?" And, I've been here 20½ years, and they all know me over at the court house, and it's the closest place. /GS: Yes sir./ They just say, "Go down these steps and go up half a block, and you'll see a church there on the corner, and, and you can get married there." So, I've performed 448 marriages. Some of them have been, of course, our own members, and they've been actual worship experiences, which a marriage ought to be /GS: Yes sir./, a religious service. But, the majority of them are things that something that I do in a civic manner. It's something I do for the state, and although I try to make it religious, most of them aren't. They're a service that I perform for the state. There is no fee required. I performed two, three weddings this last week. Two paid me nothing; one gave me \$2. So, you see, it's not a money-making proposition. /GS: Yes sir./ But, ah, ah, it's a job that I do to help the state.

Some of the things that have happened in my 20 years here in these 448 weddings might shock you a little. I don't know if you, I'll tell you one or two. I'll tell you this one about a couple that came into be married from down in the lower end of McDowell County. One child was walking, one was on her hip, she was about six months pregnant, and, ah, when they sat down, and I began to fill out the marriage certificate, the young boy left to go to the bathroom. And, I said to the young lady, ah, "Are these his children?" He said, she said, "Yes sir." And, I said to him when he came back, "Are, are these your babies?" And, he said, "Yep!" I said, "How do you know?" He said, "'Cause." Ah, that was a scientific explanation.

[GS: Yes sir.] And, ah, finally, I said, "Well, how come you got married now? Why wait this long?" She was six months pregnant with the third one. He said, nothing, just sat there. She said, "Well, my mommy went down the creek and talked with his mommy, and we decided to get married." Now, that's, that's the reasoning that was back of it. Ah, they might have had half dozen more children, but chances are my experience has been in order to be eligible for relief, you see, they had to have a legal marriage, ah, something on that order. There may be other factors that entered the picture. That's just one. One couple came in. They had one child, and she was pregnant, and, ah, after I had performed the marriage, he said, ah, "How much do I owe you?" I don't know why I did it, but this time I said, "How much you got?" He took out a little handful of money, and he had a dollar, about dollar and ninety cents. She said, "Bus fare," and punched him. I said, Oh, yes, take out the bus fare." He reached over and took it was a quarter then. He took out two quarters. He, he counted it. I think it was about dollar and thirty cents, and took him a long time to count it. I was being very firm, and why I did this I don't know. Never did it before and haven't done it since. But, I felt sorry for the little girl, and he said a dollar and thirty-some cents. And, I said, "That's how much you owe me." He reluctantly handed it over to me. I turned to her and I said, "Well, my dear, this is your wedding present. You can take this money, and spend it any way you want to. It's yours; I gave it to you." She said, "Thank ya." And, they left the church. I know he took it away from her when they were out on the step, because he wasn't going to let her have all of that high finances (laughter).

[GS: Yes sir.] So, those are just two little things that have happened. But, now, all of these 448 weddings haven't

been that way, but the majority of them have.

GS: Yes sir. Well, Rev. Adkins, I sure do appreciate this interview. And, ah, Rev. Adkins is the minister at, ah, the First Baptist Church in Welch. Thank you very much.