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Laney R. Wheeler

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Methodology

Oral History Interview

Lonnie R. Tilley

The following is an interview with Mr. Laney R. (Roy) Wheeler of Coal Mountain, Wyoming County, West Virginia. He is a retired encyclopedia salesman who has lived in southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. Mr. Wheeler was born 14 March 1911 in Johnson County, Kentucky near Paintsville. This interview was made on 12 July 1976 at my home in Oceana, Wyoming County, West Virginia.

Lonnie Tilley

L. Tilley: Now, what were your parents's names, again?

R. Wheeler: Franklin Wheeler and Elizabeth

L. Tilley: What was your mother's maiden name?

R. Wheeler: Fairchilds

L. Tilley: Ok, where were they living when you were born?

R. Wheeler: At, they change those post offices so much out there, I believe when I was born it was Davisville.

L. Tilley: Davisville; How long did you live in Davisville?

R. Wheeler: Until high school, uh, approximately eleven years.

L. Tilley: Was it a pretty big place?

R. Wheeler: No, it was rural, very much.

L. Tilley: Do you remember anything of your grandparents?

R. Wheeler: Oh, yes, both of them, both sides. Uh, grandpa Fairchilds, do you want to know about them? Is that-

L. Tilley: Yes, just tell me what you remember about them.

R. Wheeler: Well, my Grandfather Fairchilds was a United Baptist preacher and a farmer, and, uh, quite a fruit grower; and back in those days, of course, nearly everybody raised some fruit but he, he raised a little of everything; and, uh, I used to love to go to his home in the middle of winter; and, he lived in an old log house, a huge thing. - had a upstairs and, and just for the fun of it, I guess, he'd get a bunch of us kids there, he'd get up there and he'd paw those apples out like a dog and let them roll all over the place and we'd catch them, where he'd keep them. It was quite, quite a treat to go to his home, especially in the winter or any other time for that matter.

And my Grandfather Wheeler was a farmer and also a merchant, uh,- Well, I have some of his old ledgers where back then the big thing, to now it's tobacco raising out there, but back then it was shipping molasses, swapping molasses actually was what they were doing, for other commodities.

L. Tilley: Uh, huh

R. Wheeler: And, selling hay, selling corn, cornmeal, some wheat, wheat was not a big item out in there but we raised some, but very little compared to the corn and other grains.

L. Tilley: You said your Grandfather Fairchilds had a log house?

R. Wheeler: Oh, yes. Yes, it was a dandy. It was out of about, I don't know, fifteen, twenty inch poplars, I guess, hewed.

L. Tilley: How big was it?

R. Wheeler: Well, it was four huge rooms and a lean-to on the back with a dining room and a kitchen.

L. Tilley: Sounds interesting.

R. Wheeler: It was, it was. I'd like to have that house today. I guess it's long since been gone; I haven't been back over there in a long time but it was in a good state of preservation the last time I seen it.

L. Tilley: Is that right? How close to your grandparents did your parents live? Was it in the same neighborhood or-

R. Wheeler: Uh, Not exactly the same neighborhood, uh, my, uh, on the Fairchild's side it was, they lived at; Winifroid was the post office and it was approximately, uh, five miles from where we lived but that was a long ways then.

L. Tilley: No automobiles, huh?

R. Wheeler: No, no automobiles, nothing but either hoof it, or mule or horse, mostly horse. Uh, My Grandfather Wheeler lived right close, about, oh, three-fourths of a mile I guess. That was close back then.

L. Tilley: What was the house like that your parents lived in?

R. Wheeler: Well, the, uh, the house has been remodeled and it is a hundred, little over a hundred years old. The house, uh, is now standing that we lived in. Uh, It was originally, Lon, a, it was a two-story affair with a, I don't remember what they called them, but they was, uh, they got this from the English, because we were all English, and they built the, well now you'd call it a breezeway, I guess; but they had this in between the livingroom and the kitchen and diningroom, where you brought your cows in to milk in the dry. In other words, you milked your cows right at the ditchen door. Now, uh, they built this other house which is well over a hundred years old, some of it from that but the original house we're still using for a barn, with the big logs.

L. Tilley: Is that right?

R. Wheeler: You ought to come over some time. I've got a picture of all of it.

L. Tilley: Do you still have access to the old home place?

R. Wheeler: Oh, yes; still own some property over there.

L. Tilley: It would be interesting to go down there. About what age did you start school?

R. Wheeler: I started, I was just barely five. Back then there's no compulsory law that we couldn't start early and that's why I was only out there till I was about eleven. I was in high school, uh, at approximately eleven years old, cause I graduated from high school when I was about sixteen.

L. Tilley: That's pretty good.

R. Wheeler: So, uh, going to high school back then from ot there was like a child going to college now from here to, uh, farther away than Marshall.

L. Tilley: Is that right?

R. Wheeler: Well, you didn't come back home every night, you only come back home for Thanksgiving and Christmas, when you went to high school.

L. Tilley: Had to board out?

R. Wheeler: You boarded out.

L. Tilley: What was your grade school like?

R. Wheeler: It was very good. Uh, had, I went to the eight grade in a one room school, and really, I think today if we had some of those it would beat this consolidation that we got, maybe it would and maybe it wouldn't, but I think it would because there was very few in our, in the entire school, usually the enrollment averaged around eighteen to twenty-two. And there was eight classes taught, well, a person, a boy and a girl in the first grade, when he got through with his assignments, he went back and you had to sit through all, up to eight so you learned, Lon, I think, uh, from others moreso than you, uh, as much so as you got from your own class and your own teacher. Of course, you had the same teacher, but I mean, it was very interesting. When I get to thinking about it, I think, I used to go back

and, instead of, I didn't have much studying to do, well. you have all this time there so you listen to all the other classes.

L. Tilley: Sort of a preview and not only that you could get an idea of what you were expected to learn next and, maybe, get a jump on it.

R. Wheeler: Well, I did get, uh, I skipped one grade; I think, I don't remember which one it was, but I believe it was the sixth. I think I went from the fifth to the seventh.

L. Tilley: Did the teacher determine that?

R. Wheeler: Yes.

L. Tilley: They didn't give you a test or any thing?

R. Wheeler: No, no test.

L. Tilley: They just thought you were ready? What were the teachers like then?

R. Wheeler: Well, I guess like they are today, the good and the bad. Actually, uh, all the teachers I ever had and I don't think out of the eight years I went to the one room school, I don't think but two years I had the same teacher; they did change them. I don't know why, the reason, but, well, you know that back then teachers only made fifty dollars a month. Which was an awful lot of money, really, so everybody was a digging for that fifty dollars that was capable of teaching school. So, therefore, I think, that was the big turnover, you

had, you'd get to teach one term and then, maybe, you wouldn't get hired back here but you'd get hired back three or four mile in another territory, see, in another community. So, I had my Uncle, who is still living, was my first grade teacher. I never went to kindergarten or anything like that, and that wasn't known then; and he is still living; he lives in Detroit..

L. Tilley: How old is he?

R. Wheeler: I think Uncle Laney is about eighty-seven, eighty-eight, maybe, I don't know, he was the youngest of the Wheeler family and they're all dead but him..

L. Tilley: How do you spell his first name?

R. Wheeler: L-a-n-e-y

L. Tilley: Were there any special qualifications for teachers? Did they have to go to college?

R. Wheeler; Well, you had to do preparatory work, uh, which was called, uh, I'm sure I'm right on this, they called it Normal, Normal school; and it consisted of either six or ten weeks and I think it was six.

L. Tilley: Just six weeks?

R. Wheeler: Yes. Then from there, from him, I had him in the first grade and I had a lady in the, by the name of Harris, last name was Harris, in the second grade, her name was Laura, and then in the third grade, I had

her sister, Nettie Harris. Neither one of them, neither one of them was, well, maybe distant, related but not to amount to anything. Then, uh, fourth grade, I had my, a Lamasters, I can't remember first name, Angie, Angie Lamasters, in the fourth grade; and the fifth grade, uh, most of the year I had Jimmy Sloan, he went to World War I, was drafted in World War I, and he taught part of the year and unfortunately was killed in Germany. He didn't come back and, uh, another Lamasters finished his school term out.

L. Tilley: Say it was about the fifth grade when, when World War I broke out? Can You-

R. Wheeler: Uh, huh, along about then. Well, it had been out for, but I mean, that was when he happened to be drafted.

L. Tilley: Can you remember what your impression of the war was or were you too young to think about it?

R. Wheeler: The only impression, the biggest impression that stands out in my mind was, uh, the signs that was all over school, they's all over the post office, they's all over, well, sometimes on a tree out in rural sections, of Uncle Sam with his finger stuck out saying I want you. Now that's the big impression I got; and, then the second impression that I got from it was the boys coming back, maybe on furlough, uh, wearing those laced, uh, khaki pants with the big bush, I don't know, don't know what they call that, they

come out from your hips, you know, and down, and those leggings; and they kept them shined so you could see yourself in them. Now, I was, I was carried away with those leggings. I didn't care so much about the rest of the uniform but the leggings were the prettiest things I had ever seen. Of course, that's about the extent of- as far as them, well, this Jimmy Sloan I was telling you that got killed in Germany somewhere over there, uh, they brought him back for burial, brought his bones back. Well, that make a big impression on a kid, yes.

L. Tilley: Did they have a military funeral for him?

R. Wheeler: Well, no. Uh, If they did, it was nothing like, I'm sure they didn't.

L. Tilley: We have got up to the fifth grade.

R. Wheeler: Well, the sixth grade, I skipped. We've been through that. The seventh grade, I had one of those Harris girls again. Nettie, I believe. In the eighth grade, I had my brother, Arville, and-

L. Tilley: How do you spell his first name?

R. Wheeler: A-r-v-i-l-l-e. So from the eighth grade, uh, he taught one year and he was, got a job in the county seat, Paintsville, of Johnson County, as, uh, principal of the high school and that same year he went to take the principalship, well, of course, uh, my sister and I, uh, well, sister was a little ahead of me but she was going to Mayo College, and, uh-

L. Tilley: Mayo College? Where's that at?

R. Wheeler: That was in Paintsville.

L. Tilley: Paintsville.

R. Wheeler: There's quite a story behind that college. A fellow by the name of John C. C. Mayo, a pretty smart character, very much of a swindler, too, uh, talked all those farmers into leasing their land. I say all of them, now he didn't get my dad, but dad was too smart for him; he wouldn't, wouldn't do it, so we still own the gas and oil rights on our property out there right today. But, uh, to a lot of them it looked like a big money. He gave them a one time proposition, a dollar an acre for the gas and oil, supposedly; but in writing up the lease deeds, it was written up for everything on top of the ground and under..

L. Tilley: That was more than just mineral rights?

R. Wheeler: Oh, yes. So my Grandfather Fairchilds, he had, he had about ninty-some acres and ninty dollars was a whole lot of money. Now, it wasn't a thing you pay, I'm getting a rental now from oil and gas, I get every three months, but they only got this the one time; and, uh, he, uh, ninty dollars, as I said, looked big to him, so he fell for it. So actually when it come time to divide his property, which was very valuable property, ninty acres of level land out there where we lived was worth a lot of money, it was

almost worthless, nobody wanted it. They don't even want to pay taxes on it to tell the truth about it. So, John C. C. Mayo made millions, back then, I mean millions, literally millions. He built this big Mayo mansion, which has twenty-eight rooms, if I recall, and he built the Mayo church, the Mayo hospital, with this money he made, stole actually, you might say. Uh, Well, he didn't steal it either, the people just didn't read what they was signing.

L. Tilley: Didn't he explain to them though what, what would-

R. Wheeler: Well, he told them he was just leasing the oil and the gas.

L. Tilley: Would you say that was a type of fraud?

R. Wheeler: It was, but they had already signed everything and got their money. What the heck? There was not much they could do about it. So, uh, then, well, I don't know, he had two or three other big buildings there, elaborate buildings, stone, huge stone, but I can't remember what they were used for, but anyway they turned all this into, uh, Mayo College. I guess when he died, I don't know how it was, but evidently the state must have taken the major part of it; and they taught business, it was Mayo business college, that's what it was. They taught that for quite some time and that's when my sister was in college taking business. Then for some reason or other, I don't know, Lon, but it was eventually turned

over to the Catholics. They called it the Sacred Heart, something of the mountains, now I forget what it is; but the Catholics have control of it now. And, uh, then there's a big vocational, Mayo vocational school there.

L. Tilley: What is your sister's name?

R. Wheeler: Vivian.

L. Tilley: What kind of subjects did they teach in the grade school?

R. Wheeler: Well, they taught, we got, uh, we were taught, uh, mostly arithmetic, very much, and, uh, reading, of course, writing and the the upper grades, health and hygiene was really stressed, because that was a period, or I presume it was the reason for this, it was a period of an awful lot of typhoid, flux, what they call flux, which was nothing but what we would call diarrhea today; but they died with it. I mean they didn't get well, if they got the flux; and I suppose that was one of the reasons, but I have one of the old hygiene books at home, now, which even goes into detail how to build a sanitary out house, diminsions and everything and thre was such a thing as having a sanitary one for that matter, where you don't have to be bothered by the flies, bees, snakes, lizards and what not. Now that, and care of our teeth, that of course come in hygiene, and care of the body in general; that was stressed, that was a pretty good sized book we had.

L. Tilley: What about discipline in the school?

R. Wheeler: Very strict, but everybody respected it.

L. Tilley: Did the teacher punish you or punish whoever misbehaved?

R. Wheeler: I don't recall ever being punished myself, but if you misbehaved it was standing in the corner and that I guess, if it was me, it would be, I can't stand, I can walk or run but I can't stand; and they'd kill me for a classroom period which lasted about eight till twelve and one till four. That was the class day. And, of course, there we had the out houses, the his'n and the her'n but they weren't called that then; and if you wanted to be excused, it was permissible. You went up and put a book in the door, and went on out to the out house. As you came back in, you picked up your book. If there was a book in the door when you wanted to go, well, you didn't go because there was already one out and there was only one allowed out at a time.

L. Tilley: How was discipline at home for most, most kids that you knew and yourself? Were your parents pretty strict?

R. Wheeler: My daddy was strict but not to the point of getting you all tore apart and distracted. He believed in utilizing every ounce of energy there was, regardless of if it was a human body or a piece of timber. He believed in utilizing it, he didn't want nothing wanted, whether it was human energy or any other kind

of energy. And no, there was no; I was telling the children, grandchildren over home, if they had to eat at Granddaddy Wheeler's table, a lot of times they would get sent away, because you didn't dare take out more than you ate. Now it was all right, you could have all you wanted; you could come back four or five times and get seconds, thirds and fourths but you didn't take out a great big pile and eat about a third of it and push it back and take off. He would make you come back and eat it. Time you eat something you didn't want a time or two you're not going to take out so much the next time. That was just a rule he had. There, again, he was conservat- ing, trying to utilize food energy and what not; and another, well, I can remember this from the time I can remember anything, many and many's the time he has told me, and it's a pretty good philosophy, he would always say a quart of sorghum will make you sick, and just leave it at that. Well, it took me a year or two to figure out what in the world he was talking about; and that was that indulgence in anything to the extent that it's harmful whether it's eaten or whether it's any thing else; but a little bit of sorghum is pretty good eating. So that was his philo- sophy, I guess you would call it when it came to food. Of course, we always had plenty of food. Never did know of us to want for anything to eat, but, never-the- less he didn't want any of it wasted. Why, we had food

to give away for that matter and he would have his workhands in. We'd feed ten, I've seen mother cook for ten and fifteen workhands. I was waterboy, I'd carry water to the fields, and two gallon, two jugs of water was all I could possibly make it with at that age and sometimes I couldn't hardly. The fields were pretty long; they'd be a couple of miles from the house, Lon, they'd send me to the well to get water for those fellows putting up hay, and I don't know why it is except it's usually at a hot time of the year, people working in a hay field can drink more water than any people I've ever seen in my life.

When I'd get back with a jug of that, and they'd guzzle it down. Then it was right back to the well again; and they used me for a gin boy; and that's about the hardest job on a farm, being a gin boy. You'd rather do anything else, much rather, than to gin. All right, the mowing machine would break down and they'd send you about two miles to get a monkey wrench. Monkey wrench, and hammer and a pair of wire pliers was all you had to work with, a bale of hay wire; and they could fix about anything. Well, there I'd go get the wrench, by that time they'd need the wire pliers and they hadn't told you. Back to the house again to get a pair of wire pliers. So, it was, I was the gin hand, but I like it, yet, I didn't like it; I resented it. I'd rather been working.

L. Tilley: Did you ever get a chance to work in the fields?

R. Wheeler: No, by the time I got a chance to work in the fields to amount to anything why I was in high school. I was never back home anymore after that. The only thing I didn't resent about being a gin hand was, I don't care how thirsty they was it didn't matter to me, mother would always cook, if it was green bean time, and that would be at that time of the year when you're putting up hay, or whatever else, if it was dry bean time, she'd set a huge, it held four or five gallons I guess, in a big kettle of green beans. Because if you go feeding- In coming and going for the water, as I said, it didn't matter how thirsty they were, I knew that kettle of beans was setting on the back of the stove and it was just about half warm. On a coal stove, you know, they would set them on the back and they'd stay good and warm till the grease wouldn't be congealed in them. So, I'd take time out, to pour me, and I always did like cold coffee, do yet, if I drink it, I'd rather. I'd pour me a glass full of cold coffee, dip me out a plate full of them beans, a big onion, a piece of corn bread and a piece of meat and I'd just let them stand out there in the hay field with their tongues out. So, I ate me, about three o'clock in the afternoon, I got me, got my second meal; and, I don't know, when you are tired and hungry, those beans, I've never eaten a green bean since that tasted as good as those beans tasted at three o'clock in

the afternoon, while soon of the men out there just about died. So that part of the jinning I liked. I did get a break every once in a while.

L. Tilley: Were there plenty of men around for your dad to hire to work?

R. Wheeler: There was then, yes. You can't hire anybody now.

L. Tilley: uh, Were these men, people who just lived in town or around the area that-

R. Wheeler: Lived around the area. Some of them, Lon, out in there, some people, uh, we used to say, and the work is still used, I think it is a word, but we used to say gouged. uh, They'd gouge around on a little ten acre farm or something like that and about half-way make a living, then they'd work the rest of the year for my dad at a dollar a day and two meals. They'd get dinner and supper.

L. Tilley: So that would be all the small farmers around would hire out on the bigger farms?

R. Wheeler: Yes. They would have great big young men that would do as much work as anybody else and a dollar a day was a whole lot of money. So they'd work from six in the morning until six in the afternoon for a dollar a day and get two big meals and I mean big meals.

L. Tilley: What was transportation like at this time?

R. Wheeler: Well, it was either wagon, buggy, we had a buggy

if you wanted to travel fancy. We had a wagon if you wanted to take it a little slower and a little rougher and sled which was reasonably fast in the wintertime when the ground was frozen but terrible any other time, uh, and horseback. Then the nearest was a C&O railroad which was, was about twenty miles to the nearest station; and the condition of the roads then, it used to take us, well, my father would leave home with a peddling load, they called it then, I don't know what it's called now, if anybody does it now, I haven't seen anybody selling anything in a long time from a wagon or a truck or anything else. I think they call it huckstering now don't they? Well, he'd load up and leave home about twelve o'clock one day to go to Paintsville and Vanleer and Muddybranch and various places up there where there's quite a few people live to sell his goods; and it would take him nearly all the afternoon and part of the night to get to town and put up in what they called a livery stables. L-i-v-e-r-y, I believe is the way it, livery stables; and they would take care of the horses and they had lodging there also, nearby for the drivers, owners, or whatnot. Then he would spend the next morning disposing of his load of goods, and get back in home say late the following night and I guess a big load of beans, or corn, or molasses, or what ever he had to sell, milk and butter, chickens, eggs, oh, Lon, if he had a big day, he probably

wouldn't have grossed over twenty-five dollars, I don't guess. That was a big thing. Beans was a dollar a bushell, sometimes fifty cents, and a pound of butter a dime, of course we had a lot of milk cows and we had lost of butter but we didn't get much out of it. Eggs about eight cents a dozen, approximately eight cents, has been cheaper than that, I can remember selling some for six cents a dozen. So I imagine his, he would be, he would have been lucky to have grossed from a solid wagon load of whatever he would haul, twenty-five dollars would have been big.

L. Tilley: Some of these guys really make the money now, don't they, along side the road?

R. Wheeler: Oh, yes.

L. Tilley: What about your high school years?

R. Wheeler: Well, my high school years, as I said started at approximately eleven, between eleven and twelve, I guess; and I got a job at, uh, in a drug store, part-time. I went to work at three-fifteen in the afternoon and worked till eleven o'clock that night. I worked Saturdays and Sundays, and went to high school during the day and, believe it or not, kept my grades up and make good grades; but I did have some time working in this drug store to study in between, well you didn't actually, didn't have, the only time you had a rush was when the show would be over and everybody come for an ice cream soda, Coca-Cola or

whatnot; and that was usually around nine-thirty to about ten-thirty at night.

L. Tilley: Where was this at?

R. Wheeler: Paintsville.

L. Tilley: Paintsville.

R. Wheeler: Paintsville High School.

L. Tilley: And your brother was the principal?

R. Wheeler: He was, yes. For three years of my high school, I had my brother and then I had my Aunt, taught me English, taught English, then my brother was elected or appointed, I believe elected, to be superintendent of the County schools and in my fourth year of high school, I had a fellow by the name of H. G. Taylor, that was, uh, principal.

L. Tilley: What was your brother's name?

R. Wheeler: Arville.

L. Tilley: Arville, you told me that a minute ago.

R. Wheeler: But the whole four years I worked. I do think I missed out on some things which really didn't matter. When I get to thinking about it, it didn't matter. I didn't, I never did participate in any sports for the simple reason I never had the time. But I was never much inclined to want to do it anyway. So, in fact about the matter, I couldn't care less about sports today.

L. Tilley: What did they emphasize in the high school?

R. Wheeler: Well, we had to have four years of English in Kentucky, I don't know if it has been changed or not, but we had to have four years of English, two years of foreign language, uh, preferable Latin because, well, it had Latin and French, but nearly everyone took the dead language. And I especially took it because I was wanting to go into medicine, was what I intended to do and did; and we had to have two years of foreign, and it was, well, we had three years of foreign but it was optional, the third year you didn't have to take it, but you had to have two. You had to have, uh, math two years, and algebra, and geometry, trig and it didn't make any difference how many set credits you had, you could have fifty, if you didn't have these subjects you didn't graduate. You had to have them.

L. Tilley: Did they have very many in high school?

R. Wheeler: I guess back then it was, compared to what you had to go through to go, get to school, to go to high school, I guess it was pretty good. There was, uh, I graduated in twenty-nine and there was twenty nine in the class. I don't remember how many we started out with, Lon, but there was twenty-nine graduated.

L. Tilley: Did you, uh, go to college any?

R. Wheeler: Yes, I had two years at, which is now the University of Louisville. It was the Louisville College of Pharmacy at that time. It is consolidated with the University of Louisville now, has been for years. It was in the

process, I think, of consolidating then; and I worked off my two years apprentice under old Doctor Wilson, who is long been gone, deceased. You had to have two years apprentice under a registered pharmacist before you could enter in Kentucky. Now it's different regulations over here, and it's different over there now, it's changed too. So, I had two years under him and I had two years at, in Louisville, Louisville College of Pharmacy.

L. Tilley: Let's see 1929, that was the year the depression sort of started.

R. Wheeler: I had saved a little bit not a whole lot working in the drug store. Uh, We rented a three-room apartment house, well it was just a little house but it was called an apartment; and my sister, my brother and myself, uh, stayed in that, and lived in that and, uh, the entire four years that I was in high school; and, so, I don't remember precisely what I made per month while I worked part-time and went to school. Through the summer months, he paid me a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. It seems to me like it was sixty, was my part-time pay; and I'd saved a little bit of money and of course dad had money then. And there was no sweat when I went to college but we was getting a big thing from oil and gas. Then, uh, when I got in college, of course, that '29 crash, you didn't really feel the effects of it until the following year, actually the full impact in other words. But it was

nothing, Lon, to, uh, walk down Broadway; the Brown Hotel was the largest hotel there was in Louisville at that particular time, It was ten stories and that was a big hotel back then, and it wasn't an uncommon thing, sight to see, somebody either had jumped or was in the process of jumping, that had been rich the night before and a pauper the next day, jumping out of the tenth story, story of the Brown Hotel in Louisville. And it was just a common thing and they's committing suicide every which way. Well, in school, and I'm sure you realize, you don't really have contact with the outside world as much. You know there's a depression going on, we knew these things but we didn't know they was that bad. So it went on to the following year, I guess it was, pretty sure it was, uh, money was, dad was still in pretty good shape but he was getting cut back on a lot of things, such as oil and gas rental, that was cut to rock bottom and getting so he couldn't sell his produce and having to throw it away and couldn't can it, and he couldn't eat it and so what could you do with it? People didn't have the money. So, the second year he borrowed some money for me, four hundred dollars. That was to pay my room and board, I guess, for the entire year, I never did figure it up, I've forgotten, but I paid six dollars a week for room and board, and we were fed well and housed well. But anyway, he had sent me four hundred dollars like today, Lon, I put it in the Fourth Street National Bank in Louisville, and the darn thing closed, didn't

open the next morning. Now that was to pay my room and board for, and that was borrowed money, borrowed at the Paintsville National, Second National Bank in Paintsville.

L. Tilley: What bank did you put it in?

R. Wheeler: Fourth Street National. It was a branch of the big bank of Louisville. So it didn't reopen. Well, I never did get anything back out of that. That was the first big setback I had. There I was, I couldn't pay my room and board and I didn't have any money either. And he didn't have any more to send me. That was the impact of the depression. So I went ahead; I managed, I don't know how we managed, but I went ahead and finished up that year. I guess, I don't know how he got the money, he may have sold something off the farm, I don't remember, but anyhow, that was borrowed money, he may have borrowed some more for me, I don't remember, but I went ahead and finished up that year and I still thought everything was, you know, pretty good. I didn't realize it was bad. So, with two years you could take, in Kentucky then, you could take the State Board for assistant registered pharmacist. All right, I was making a hundred and twenty-five dollars jerking sodas and, uh, as an understudy under old Doctor Wilson before I went to school; and that was pretty good hay. So, I thought, well, I'll take the State Board and get me an Assistant Registered certificate and I'll get up there. I'll make at least

two hundred dollars a month, maybe. I did, I passed that. So, I went out to apply for jobs. I went to Hook, which was a big chain; Bushmyer was another big chain, Wallgreen, which was a big chain in Louisville. Well, I don't know, there was several independent ones, but I can't remember their names, but I can remember them. I applied for jobs all over that town. Cause me, I thought, boy I got something now, I got Assistant Registered, I got a shingle to hang up and I don't have no trouble. Well, I didn't have any trouble getting a job, but it was a dollar a day for six days, and that was all. I could have got plenty of jobs, in fact they wanted me but, uh, that was what they paid and I run myself to death all over that town and it's a big town. So, I thought, well, I made a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month working for old Doc Wilson, so, I'll go back and work for him. So I packed up and come home broke, now I mean I was broke. Well, at home I went down to see Doctor Wilson and he had cut off all his help. He and his wife was running the whole thing, soda fountain and all. He didn't need anybody. So, there I was, golly, I had a half, half of a shingle and no where to hang it. So I loafed around for, and looked for work and there just wasn't any, and if there was, they couldn't pay you anything: and at that time my sister lived in Paintsville and I was staying with her while I was looking for work. Well, my brother lived there too but I always favored by sister and so I never did stay with my brother much. But anyway, he

got sorry for me I think. I don't know if he needed the work done or not and I guess that's beside the point, but they had a lot of broken down school seats from all over the County, and tore all to pieces, and so he give me a job at two dollars a day, I think it was, to repair those school seats, and if you remember the old school seats that's made of beech, you couldn't put a nail in them, you couldn't put a screw and you couldn't even bust them with a sledge hammer. Well, I worked on those things for about, I don't know, two or three weeks or a month. Then they had a few, they bought a few pre-fabbed school houses, going from the one room schools that they had, to two and three rooms and they had bought these, uh, in sections and they hired me to haul those schoolhouses, whole sections at a time over those country roads. Well, I had some pretty narrow escapes with those things, now now that was a whole lot of witht. You go hauling one room wich went together manybe to make three rooms and you hauled one whole room on an old 1919 Dodge, that didn't hardly know whether to go backwards or forwards. But anyway, I worked there a little while and Kroger grocery, that how come me in, uh, merchandise business. Kroger Grocery and Baking Company was the first company, first of anybody that had any incentive to want to go to work for, offered me a job. But he told me, he said, Now, right now I can't promise you much, but he said that I'm sure you can work yourself up. And it was six dollars a week for Monday, when

they got deliveries, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, four days. Six dollars week, well, Lon, that wasn't much money, but there was millions of people that wasn't making any. And there wasn't no such thing as going to the hand out and, and saying, well, I'm unemployed and I need some money, you just didn't do it. You either worked, you eat or you didn't work and you starved. Now that was the whole thing in a nutshell. Well, I was tickled to death to get this job. They put me into hustling produce and I liked it. I worked the produce department for about three months at six dollars a week, four days a week. So the supervisor took a liking to me and he liked the way I was handling the produce and I always did like to handle produce, I do right today. I go into a store, that's the first place I go, the produce department. I buy things I don't even want, don't even like. Uh, He liked me and he came in one day and he said, How'd you kike to go to Pikeville, Kentucky as procuce manager. There was a big store at Pikeville. Eighteen dollars a week, Lord have mercy, how would I like to go? Eighteen dollars a week, a jump from six to eighteen. Of course, I had to work six days but what he heck. The days didn't matter. So, I went to Pikeville and I worked there a year or two as produce manager and that's how come me over on Bloody Beaver, that was close to Weeksbury, Kentucky, and there wasn't too much incentive except they painted a rosy picture, a fellow by the name of Fitzwater came along, that was over Koppers Coal Company's

stores and he was telling me what a nice place Weeksbury was, and what a good incentive they had to work. So he offered me ninety dollars a month plus a bonus. Well, that was a little bit more than eighteen dollars a week, especially the bonus was. So, I jumped at that thinking; I didn't even go over and look at it. I took his word for it. And, now that had the equipment, they had everything, that was like he said. But that was the meanest place you ever stuck your foot in.

L. Tilley: What was the name of the place?

R. Wheeler: Weeksbury.

L. Tilley: Where was that at?

R. Wheeler: That was in Kentucky; they called it Bloody Beaver.

L. Tilley: How do you spell weeksbury?

R. Wheeler: W-W- Just like you spell week.

L. Tilley: W-e-e-k?

R. Wheeler: Yes, So, oh, it was mean. One of the fellows that worked for me, I was manager, by the name of Hatler Hall and his daddy had twenty-two notches on his gun. His daddy had killed twenty-two people. he was one of the finest fellows, Lon, you ever talked to in your life but he'd kill you in a minute. And there his son was working for me. Which, his son was a nice boy, Hatler was a heck of a nice fellow; but he was dangerous. uh, And it was, well, it was nothing uncommon on Saturday night for somebody to get killed

at Weesbury, nearly ever Saturday night or Sunday one. I didn't stay thre too long, the money looked good, ninty dollars a month was good and I'd get a little bonus of four to eight dollars, I think it was, the biggest bonus I'd get was eight I think it was; but most of the time I bonused around four and maybe five dollars a month. I stayed there about two years and I got my job back at Pikeville. And I got out of there and I come back. And was I glad to come back. I was manager of what tey called department J, Lon, I had the poolroom, soda fountain, the drug store, the filling station and a picture show. We run the picture show two nights a week.

L. Tilley: Sounds like a pretty big affair.

R. Wheeler: Well, it was a twenty-four hour a day job there so it just wasn't worth it. I mean, I did little physical labor, all I did was manage but, goo gravey! All of that and have all those people working for you. You didn't know half the time what they were doing which came out all right but soon as I could and there was an openning, I came back to Pikeville to work for Kroger Grocery and Baking Company. So I didn't work very, there long. Now that's about the extent of my life up to coming to West Virginia now.

L. Tilley: Why did you come to West Virginia?

R. Wheeler: I was transferred.

L. Tilley: Transferred by Kroger?

R. Wheeler: Yes, by Kroger in 1939. I worked there at

Pikeville until they transferred me to, uh, Matewan to take manager of a store.

L. Tilley: During this time that we have been talking about from 1929 to 1939, what did people think of the Presidents? What did they think of President Hoover?

R. Wheeler: Well, they thought of President Hoover, uh, let me rephrase this, people back then were not educated enough on politics as well as enough of them are not educated on politics today. And they thought of Hoover as a man who could turn the button or flip a switch and do something. They didn't know that you had Congress and you had legislators and you had senators and, uh, committees who were a bucking everything. So as far as thinking of Hoover the rank and file and majority thought of him as about the lowest I guess that any President could have been thought of. And they also thought that of his mentality, which Hoover was a smart man, but he had no, he didn't have any, He didn't have a chance in a Democratic, uh, Congress from top down.

L. Tilley: Well, how did they see FDR when he took office?

R. Wheeler: Well, they saw him as a, you might say, a savior. That's just about the way they saw him. The ignorant did. And, but, uh, they didn't take that all in stride like they should have. Now we had, during FDR's days, we had the WPA, they formed their unions and they went against the government, they, uh, marched against the government, they marched against the courthouses, local courthouses, they marched against the Statehouse.

R. Wheeler: --- back then we didn't have any of the synthetic drugs like we have now. We doctored, we made most of our tablets and nearly all capsules and practically, we, all of our exizers, uh, and, uh, tonics and things like that was made right back in the store, backin the the drug store. I've pressed a many a pill out with a little pill press, filled many a capsule; and one interesting story, while I was working off my apprentice. A fellow by the name of Dr. Kessel who considered himself very smart and was, I'm sure. But, uh, he give, uh, a patient a prescription for, some of them pronounce it efferdine or efferdine; I think efferdine is more correct, for efferdine sulfate, five rains taken as often as needed and Dr. Wilson was out playing golf at the time this prescription came in, and I was legally qualified to fill prescriptions all righ but I had to do it, should do it under his supervision. But he was out playing golf. This man was needing medicine bad, he thought. He didn't but he thought he did. So, I, I proceeded to try to fill it. So, I went back and we already had those already put in capsules and one-fifth of a grain was the largest dosage we had. It went from that down to about one-twentieth or one-fiftieth or something, I don't remember now and curiosity got the better of me. Now we had efferdine sulfate in the bulk and we had the capsules. I could have put it up. I thought, well now, if it is dosed out in five grain capsules, why don't we have some? We got everything else from one-fifth on down, One-fifth of a frain. And, so I

went to the Matura Medica. While the man was waiting I was behind the counter doing some research. And it said that it shouldn't never be given in doses over one-fifth of a grain at intervals, I forget the hours now, that one-half a grain had proven fatal. And there this doctor had prescribed five grains. He wouldn't have needed but one for pain.

L. Tilley: What did you do about that?

R. Wheeler: I went and called the doctor and me being a little old young squirt of a boy about eighteen or nineteen. Oh, God, he went into an outrage. He was the doctor and he said fill that prescription the way I wrote it. Well, now I was in the process of going giving it back to the man. There was another drug store on the corner and I was debating whether to tell him we didn't have it, which we didn't. We didn't have it in five grains. And in the meantime I was thinking what if I tell him we don't have it and he goes down to Hagar Drug and they accidentally fill it for him? He is a dead man. And so I was just stalling for time and here come Dr. Dessel, was a short fat fellow nearly as big around as he was tall. He come paddlefooting it down that street, walked in there. After I had talked to him, he realized what had happened and he wanted to see that prescription. And he didn't even thank me or anything, he was very arrogant. He grabbed that prescription, wrote the man another one for one-tenth of a grain not five. So he had looked it up too. So anyway we saved the man's life. He didn't

die there anyway. I don't know what he died of.

L. Tilley: It was close though wasn't it?

R. Wheeler: It was close.

L. Tilley: You came over to Matewan to manage the Kroger store there? What was Matewan like then?

R. Wheeler: In '39 I think there's three adjectives that will describe it. Dangerous, uh, ignorant, I don't know whether mean would be the work or not, it was a dangerous to stick your head out. It was, uh, they treated me fine. I got along fine with them but I'll declare it was dangerous.

L. Tilley: Were the mines unionized then?

R. Wheeler: Yes, they had just got over their big, oh, they had got over it in '22, '23 and '24. But there was still some carry-over of friction. I lived in an apartment house up over the Droger, the Droger store. And, uh, there was one side of the wall, it was a plastered house, where the Baldwin-Phelps, which was the detectives hired by the coal companies I guess, hired by somebody anyhow, come in and tried to disperse all, quieten them down, there was five of them, Lon, the train station was right back of my apartment, as they got off the train there was a bloody war issued between union, the non-union was housed in my living room and the Baldwin-Phelps and the non-union. Well, the five Baldwin-Phelps men, as it was related to me. I'm only quoting what was told to me, four of them

was riddled with bullets, one died but had not a scratch on him, died of fright. I don't know how many others lost their lives but in the apartment, all of one side, where they had used these 30-30 high powers and what ever they had, made little dishes and they hadn't put the plaster over over it, they had just painted; over the whole side of one wall of my apartment was dishes the size of saucers where bullets had hit and they were still talking about it in '39, you know, it takes about twenty years for it to plumb die out and there was still some, the fact about the matter, there was a little of talking, and that had been gone a long time, the Hatfields and McCoys was a little bit, uh, there was still a little friction, cause I had a Hatfield that worked for for me in Kroger and I had a McCoy. And, uh, they got along but you know, there was little things they would say that led you to believe they didn't care much for each other, but they got along working together. Uh, It was nothing uncommon, there, on Saturday nights for somebody to get killed. Back then we used to put a big display of feed, produce, whatever we had to sell that would stand a little bit of rain, a little bit sunshine and, the weather in other words, all outside and line it up in front of the store, on the outside and put price tags on it. The first Saturday Night I was there, I was out there bringing in my wears from the ouside; bang, bang, bang, right beside of me. I turned around and a woman had shot another woman, I

was standing as close as from here to that door, killed her. I later on worked with that woman, what was her name, well, anyhow, later on when I worked for Redjacket Coal Corporation, she worked in the store with me, uh, she was a Cox. Now, I can't think of her first name. But that was, uh, a common event for, uh, big street fights, or a killing, or something like that to happen nearly every Saturday night. Matewan was pretty rough back then. A lot of good people lived there, but, some fo those good people would get out of line once and a while. I had a girl that worked for me, I thought the world of her, an awful good worker, she had a sister who was a nurse in the Matewan hospital, a little hospital there then run by, old Doctor Hodge. And one of the Chambers, which the Chambers are a big family today in Mingo County, and they were the top figures back then, uh, one of their sons, Brook Chambers's son, who was high sheriff, took this Farley girl out and, I don't know if he raped her or what happened, but anyhow, he killed her, run the car over her several times, claiming that they had a car wreck and she jumped out and he couldn't help it and he run over her, but, uh, as far as I know he left there, he didn't serve a day, he got out of it and went out West. I haven't heard a thing from him since, and he might be dead by now. He was, I believe, a little older than I am at that time. And, well, we had the, we had the street gangs, uh, let's see, there was five boys, they

had a nickname for them, that controlled the streets on Saturday night. And, one was a Ward, one was a Chambers, the other three, I can't recall. But you didn't dare get in their way.

L. Tilley: How long did you stay in Matewan?

R. Wheeler: uh, I stayed there until, let's see, we closed the store down, we couldn't make it there with Kroger. We'd have big business one week, that was payday week and Kroger expected us to have a big business the next weekend and we had nil. We had the same amount of help and all this. So, we operated that, uh, the only reason we were there in the first place, a fellow by the name of John Anerson, no, a fellow by the name of Shannon had crisscrossed a fellow by the name of McCoy. I believe in a poker game, I don't remember now how the story goes, but McCoy owned the building that I lived in. A fellow by the name of Sailor McCoy. The Shannons were in business and was getting all the business there was in Matewan at that time, in the grocery business, produce. So, uh, Sailor in getting mad at him and their friction, uh, instead of feuding, he takes this store building, which was a nice building, and he gives Kroger free rent for ten years to come in to try to put Shannon out of business. Well, that happened all right, we put Shannon out of business but when the ten year free lease was up, we weren't making enough money in the store with the fluctation, big week one week and nothing the next week. Well, we had to pull out and so that was when I went with

Redjacket Coal Corporation, was when we pulled out. They offered to send me to Louisa, Kentucky to a little store they had down there at, uh, thirty-two dollars a week, I believe. And I could have gone to, uh, I could go to Red Jacket and not be responsible for anything, working as a clerk for almost twice that. So, I went with Redjacket instead of going to Louisa. And I worked at Redjacket.

L. Tilley: Where was this at, Redjacket Coal?

R. Wheeler: Well, they had five stores and I worked at all of them, major branch, junior, number five, four stores; major branch, junior, number five and number six. That's where I made the sad mistake, maybe it was and maybe it wasn't I don't know, but while I was with Kroger, uh, see, had, uh, combination stores then. uh, The store manager done the butchering, managed the store and unless it was an awful big store he also managed the produce. And so, they sent me to six weeks, two weeks butchering school, Cincinnati. So during, uh, World War II, uh, they found out that I was a pretty good butcher and they couldn't get butchers. They had four stores there, no butchers. So they paid me the same amount of money they was paying a store manager if I would butcher for the four stores, and that's where I made my mistake. I ought to have told them I couldn't butcher. And I did, I butchered for the four stores. I cut it at one store and shipped it to the other three

stores. So, uh, the contract was that when the war was over, they would put me back in management but they never did. But I didn't lose any money, Lon, but it was, uh, will, I like butchering, it was all right, there's nothing wrong with it except it's monotonous, the same thing day in and day out. So from there they transferred me, Redjacket Coal Corporation transferred me to Coal Mountain and that's how come me in Wyoming County in 1949. And I worked under Redjacket at Coal Mountain until Island Creek bought out Redjacket's holdings in '55, I believe was the year.

L. Tilley: Do you remember much about the beginning of World War II?

R. Wheeler: Oh, yes. I was in it. uh, They drafted me and I never did get to go. uh, Course, that's beside the point, I guess, but maybe you don't even want this in it, but they took, uh; oh, yes, we gathered scrap to ship over there to those Japs to throw back in our face. I've got pictures of, uh, scrap heaps in Matewan that looks like a five story building that covers a whole block. Where we had our scrap drives, we got every piece of metal there was in the river, Tug River, or anywhere. And, then they were taking them quite, well, actually more than they had room for in the camps. So, I went down with a group of eight hundred, eight hundred and three, I believe, to be exact. Took us into Huntington for examination

and we had all passed, I think, except two. There were two from Letcher County, Dentucky, the ignorantest county there is in Kentucky. One of them was in front of me and the other was behind me. They had gone through, great big, healthy, young fellows, eyesight good, hearing good, everything good, except illiterate. And we got down to the literacy test, that was the last thing. We were a coming through, the one in front got turned down, flat, on the literacy test. As we was moving up the one behind me said what in the hell am I going to do, I can't read either. And they wanted to to, they wanted to gight. They wasn't trying to get out of it; they was begging to go, but they wouldn't take them. They were the only two that was turned down. They were taking people that, I guess, should have been turned down but, they was taking them pretty keen. Well, they had eight hundred and two or three of us there and no place anywhere to send us to camp to take our training. They called all over the country and for some reason they got a backlog of people. Well, they kept us one night there.

L. Tilley: What year was this?

R. Wheeler: That must have been in 1940; it must have been in '40.

L. Tilley: Let's see, didn't Japan bomb Pearl Harbor in '41?

R. Wheeler: It might have been in '41 then. It was when they was needing us bad. Now I don't, yes, cause I remember listening to that on the radio in Kroger store, when he daclared war; when Roosevelt declared war.

L. Tilley: What did they finally do with all of you?

R. Wheeler: They kept us until the next day, and, uh, they finally found room for two people, that they could send two of us. Well, I had cashed up; I had cashed in my job, sold my car, moved my family back to Pikeville, Pikeville, Kentucky and rented a place over there. Had everything stashed away, and not that I wanted to go, Lon, but I came down there, I was like those fellows, fellows from Kentucky, I come to go and I thought I might as well go and get it over with. I didn't have any job to go back to. So there I was a fellow there from Blackberry City, I don't remember his name, uh, they had an opening for one in a commissary, that's what they were going to put me in and one that done some mechanixal work or something and they were going to take him, which they did take him. And this fellow from Blackberry City was about two-thirds drunk, maybe three-fourths and you know your don't too much cursing and swarping around a place like that and get by with it, but he did. Well, he didn't get by, but he cursed that sargeant, corporal or whatever stripes he had, I don't remember now. Called him everything under the milk, under the sun but a milk cow and he said, now, I came down here to go to this man's army, this is the way he put it, and he said, I'm a going if there's a place, if you got one opening, I'm a going. He talked so mean to him it was pitiful and finally this Army sargeant turned around to me and he said would you mind letting that s.o.b. go in your

place? I said it would suit me fine and he said you can go back home and stay thirty days and come back. And you know, I don't know if this had anything to do with it or not, they took that fellow on, I come back home, stayed thirty days. They took that fellow on and didn't give him any training at all and in less than six weeks he killed, and he never did come back. So, he saved my hide. And, uh, I come back and stayed thirty days, went back and they still didn't have room for us. Of course, the war had begun to water down a little by that time, it wasn't over by any means but it was watering down. So they sent me back for fifteen days and in the meantime, the fifteen days were about up, they give me a deferment and guaranteed me a job and I went back to work. But I worked under a deferment, Lon, for, looking every thirty days to have to go for about two years, and never did have to go.

L. Tilley: What was your impression when the Atomic Bomb was used? Do you remember?

R. Wheeler: Well, personally, I was glad of it. uh, The quicker it was over with the better it is. They were just slaughtering them. Well, they used it on us, I mean they didn't use the Atomic but look what they done at Pearl Harbor. Of course that was all pre-planned, I think. I think that our officials on this side of the globe knew we were going to be bombed. They knew when, or approximately when. I don't think I'm the only one that thinks it either.

L. Tilley: When did you meet Alice?

R. Wheeler: Well, let's see, that was '32 I guess, the latter part of '32 or early part of '33. It was while I was with Kroger in Pikeville. She lived in Pikeville.

L. Tilley: Were you married the same year?

R. Wheeler: No, uh, we dated for a year or year and a-half, I guess, Lon. I don't remember exactly how long we dated but it was quite a while. We were devating on whether or not to get married on, on eighteen dollars a week salary. And this fellow come along from Weeksbury, Kentucky and offerred me ninty dollars a month plus a bonus so we got married and I took that job, and that's, not getting married wasn't the worst thing I ever done, but Lord have mercy, taking that job over there was the worst thing I ever done in my life, dangerous.

L. Tilley: And you had two children?

R. Wheeler: We had three. We lost one when he was six years old.

L. Tilley: When was your son that's living born?

R. Wheeler: I guess about '34. uh, He is forty-one. Forty-one from seventy-six. That don't make sense. uh,

L. Tilley: Is he forty-one?

R. Wheeler: Yes.

L. Tilley: That would make him what? He would have been born about 1935?

R. Wheeler: I believe he was born in the latter part of '34, middle part of '34. He's, I guess, he's forty-two, was his last birthday.

L. Tilley: What is his name?

R. Wheeler: Ronnie, Ronald Roy is his name but he goes by Ronnie.

L. Tilley: And, uh, your daughter?

R. Wheeler: My daughter was born in '38.

L. Tilley: Let's see, What is her name?

R. Wheeler: Betty Sue. And William Robert was born when we lived in Matewan. William Robert was born in about '42, cause he died in '48 and he was six years old when he died, so in fact, he died on his sixth birthday.

L. Tilley: How long did you stay with Island Creek after they took over Redjacket?

R. Wheeler: From '55 to '60, until they closed down everything at Coal Mountain.

L. Tilley: Why did they start closing down everything in Coal Mountain? Did the mines work out?

R. Wheeler: Not only Coal Mountain-

L. Tilley: Did they start shutting them down all over the place?

R. Wheeler: That was a presidential switch-over, and they claimed they didn't have a market for their coal. Oh, you know, they claim a lot of things, but this might not be a good thing for Island Creek to put on tape but

they can close a mine down and make money. They can charge all that off, because they only closed it down from '60 to '62 and opened it back in '62. But there was mines closing all over the country.

L. Tilley: Say, we had a recession or something. I can just barely remember it. There were a lot of people out of work.

R. Wheeler: .Oh, yes. Cut off.

L. Tilley: Then, after they shut down the store at Coal Mountain, was that when you went into World Book?

R. Wheeler: Well, I worked a little while for a fellow named Ed Clay over at Gilbert that has a super-market over there. I worked from first of October of that year, see, we closed down the store June thirtieth. Then from June thirtieth, I got a little job, uh, up at Matheny, uh, for a fellow named Campbells, that owned that little store, old man Campbell from Glen Rogers. He owned it, his son run it. He later died of premature, uh, life I guess was pretty much premature. He was very young, died of a heart attack, over indulgence in many things. And his son run it. I worked for him, I think six weeks. Pay wasn't much and Ed Clay offered me, in the super-market which was a lot closer home, didn't have all this driving to do. So I went to work for him over there and got a hundred dollars a week, approximately a hundred dollars a week, maybe a little over a hundred dollars a week; he let us have everything at cost, plus my salary, so I guess

actually it amounted to maybe a hundred and ten or fifteen dollars a week. So, I worked for him until in December, right around Christmas time. uh, A lady came in by the name of Ethel Shannon, which I had known her at Matewan. And she was district manager then with World Book. It was just her way, I liked her but she could, boy, she could turn you off sometimes. She walked in and hse was getting something back in the butcher shop there. I was in the butcher shop over there. And she said, Wheeler, I don't know how much you're a getting here but you're working for a song and singing it yourself. Well, my first impression was, none of your business, at least I'm keeping bread on the table. And I had a daughter in college then. And there's a lot of things you do that you might not do if you had some responsibilities. She was in Concord. And back then we didn't have any give aways, grants, or anything else. I was footing the whole bill. So a hundred dollars or so a week coming in wasn't too bad. She said why don't you come with us, and I thought come with you, thunder, I wouldn't work with you even if I'd never get a job. But there wasn't too much said there that afternoon and I told her I'd talk to her sometime when I wasn't busy and wasn't on duty. I was getting paid to work there and not to-, so anyway she invited me over to her home at Mateway, North Matewan. So Alice and I went over one Sunday, Lon. I listened to her story; I didn't believe it, except what I wanted to believe, I believed my part in it. And the money could be made in World Book..

And she got out pay checks and showed me, but she was only showing me a pay check, I've done the same thing, uh, one every now and then, whereas she didn't show you fifty-two pay checks a year, you know. And she had several there of eight, nine hundred and a thousand, fifteen hundred dollars. But I'm sure she had some that were almost nil that I didn't see. But anyway, I thought if as mean a talking woman as you are, if you can do this I know good and well I can. So, I took a job. I signed up part-time representative. Her brother was store manager at, uh, Wyoming for Island Creek. They didn't close Island, they didn't close the Wyoming store. Arthur and I sorked together for years and, a very fine fellow, he'd give you the shirt off his back and Ethel would take it. That was the difference between them. They were twins, that's the truth, they's twins. She'd take it; Arthur'd give it to you. He was one of the finest fellows I've ever worked with. I never did work for him but I worked with him. So, uh, when she hired me, put me in as a part-time representative, just like Lucinda* goes out here and hires someone part-time. I didn't know if I could make it or not but I thought if Ethel Shannon can make it, I can. I know I've got more sense than that woman's got. Well, she was smart, Lon, But she was, I din't know, a mean talker.

L. Tilley: About what year was it when you took a contract?

* Mrs. Lonnie Tilley

R. Wheeler: That was in '60. So, uh, went to Ed Clay, that was along just before Christmas and I said, Ed, I'm going to be leaving you the first of the year. That's what I signed up for to take effect January second. And I thought he's, help was hard to get. Butchers was hard to get, now it was no problem, you could get all kinds of help but you couldn't get butchers. Well, he followed me around all day long and he finally upped my salary to, I think, a hundred and twenty-five if I'd stay. Well, that kind of burned me up. I thought if I'm worth a hundred and twenty-five now, why wasn't I worth a hundred and twenty-five three months ago? You know that kind of goes against the grain and he could have done a lot of things that might have influence me but that didn't influence me. That just burned me up. Well, I worked here for around three months for around a hundred dollars and I've been worth a hundred and twenty-five all the time. Well, anyway, I told him no, it was definite, that I was going. He said, Well, You'll starve to death. I said, Well, I may do it but I'm going to try it. Well he said, I'll keep it open, you'll be back in two weeks. I'll keep the job open. I said, no, if you can find a butcher, get him, because I won't be back. I made up my mind if I didn't go back there, I mean, if I didn't make it World Booking, I would go somewhere else. I wouldn't go back there after quitting. So anyhow, I got out, started on January second. Supposed to have gone to a training

class at Logan. It came a big snow. I hadn't had no training, the only thing I had was a picture of the books, what they call a broadside, you know what that is. I did have an order book and a broadside and I didn't know nothing. I didn't even know what World Book was all about, to tell you the truth about it, I had never heard of World Book. I had heard of Britannica and a lot of things; we had Britannica at home, my brother did. And he had two or three others, I don't remember what they were now, but, uh, Britannica stands out cause it's an old one. World Book, actually I'd never heard of. So anyway in this interview they had told me that I could sell one out of five. One out of five people you would call on, you would sell. I bought that story, and it does work. It's true. It don't always work but it will if you keep at it. And so I went out, no training whatsoever. I didn't even know how, outside of counting them on that broadside, I didn't know how many books we had, to tell the truth about it. And, uh, so I was determined to get my five calls in the first day and make one sell. So, I really put in a day and I had my five calls in and I didn't have nothing; I hadn't even gotten to first base. Hadn't even got close to a sale. So, on the way home, I was kindly discouraged, in the meantime, I had talked to a business associate that lives right below me and he said, Wheeler, everybody's got books, you had better not go in that business because everybody's got them. Well, I got to thinking,

maybe they do have, I don't know; and he said, you'll starve to death in the book business. He said, you can't make it. He said, you can't sell books. The last works he said to me gave me more determination than anything. He said, have you already resigned and given up you job? And I said yes. He pointed to a little, old '55 Ford he had a sitting out there and he said, you better get in that damn car and get back over there and get you job back. You'll starve to death in the book business. Well, I didn't. uh, So I made my five, getting back to my five calls, I'd make my five and I thought, now by George some of these people might have been right. An old fellow that lived right below me over there, coming back in and I was just a little bit discouraged and I stopped and I said, Frank, I'd just like for you to listen to me for a few minutes and see what I'm a doing wrong. He didn't know enough about it; he wouldn't have known if I was doing something wrong but I needed company I guess. And so I went through my little sales pitch the best I could cause I didn't know any, really, except what I could read off, that's the only time I ever got nervous. I got through, I wasn't expecting him to buy. I wasn't trying to sell him. I just wanted him to listen to me. When I got through, he said, I'll take them. I was so nervous I couldn't write my name; I couldn't write the order up. So he bought the whole thing. Well, that was a pretty good, well, that was the sixth one

but that was still one out of five. I could have gone on four more and maybe got another one. That would have been two out of ten. They worked and so that done me a whole lot of good. That fellow buying them. Now, he bought them, I didn't sell them to him. I'd say he just bought them. But he had a house full of children. So, I went out the next day and I sold one or two. And you know, when you've sold one that's the best time to sell another one and not let it ride, if you let it ride like Lucinda and I does for two and three weeks and don't even to out, well, it's pretty hard to get the first one. If we can get the first one, it's easy to get another one. It does something to you, I don't know. Anyway, I made about a hundred and fifty dollars that week and didn't work half the time. So, that wasn't bad for my first week out. That was more money than I had been making in the stores. And I went one the second week and done all right, done pretty good, I don't remember what I made but seemed like I had four or five sales, make about a hundred and fifty or a hundred and seventy-five dollars, maybe two hundred. So, I was riding pretty high horses and I think it was the third week, to show you how the law of averages will catch up with you one time or other, and it caught up with me. I'd been selling like, the first one was one out of six. From then on it was one out of two and one out of three. And, uh, the third week I went out one Monday; I worked

all day and there's nobody knocked on more doors than I knocked on. I got in but I didn't sell. I never had any trouble getting in; it was selling them after I got in. Some people has trouble at the door. I never did have that. Monday, I come back home, nothing all day. Well, Alice didn't say anything that day, cause I guess, she figured it was logical to have a bad day, one out of six or one out of seven. I went out Tuesday, all day long, nothing, and come in that night. She didn't say much. She said, what did you do today? And I said the something I done yesterday. So, she went ahead and fixed my dinner; we ate, and nothing was said. I went out on Wednesday and it was the something, Lon, I couldn't even give a set away, I reckon. Came home. She said, well, what did you do today? I said, the same I done Monday and Tuesday. Well, it's not what she says; it's the way she says it that, oh, God, it can just paralyze you almost. She said, well, Roy, just like the world was going to come to an end. I thought, gee, whiz, how much I needed that. Well, I said, well, I guess the law of averages is catching up on me. Maybe I'll do something tomorrow. I went out Thursday, blessed goodness, I didn't get anything. I know it now but then I was so eager to get a sale that it was showing. Then I got home. She said, well, Roy, don't you reckon you might have got in the wrong business? I said, well maybe I did, I don't know. I went out on Friday and I didn't

have a thing on Earth. At six o'clock at Mallory, I didn't have nothing. Didn't have any, not even close to a sale. I stopped at a little service station there to get two dollars worth of gas to come home on. I had spent gasoline that whole week and bought my lunch; I used to take my lunch. Didn't buy my lunch but still I spent a little bit every now and then. And this lady, I had been up on this hill, previous, earlier in the day, she wasn't at home. She come to the ledge, a ledge, like over look there at the service station and hollered and wanted to know if I wasn't the World Book man. I almost felt like saying no. But she said when you get through, come up to the house. I went up and I sold her, uh, World Book and Childcraft. Now it pays a lot more today but then it paid forty dollars and fifty cents. And that was pretty good hay back then. And so that kind of build me up. It really wasn't a hard sale, she was, you know, in a notion of buying them. That kind of built me up so, coming up to Landville, which is only about three or four miles, maybe less, from where I was. I decided to make another call. And I did, and I sold another one with a Childcraft. That was forty dollars and fifty cents more. Well, I was kindly feeling pretty purt by that time, as the old farmer would say it, so I came on to within six mile of home and made one more call and sold another one, World Book and Childcraft. Well, that was a hundred

and twenty-one dollars and fifty cents I had made in about two hours and I hadn't made nothing all week. I don't know what that did to me but I couldn't sleep a wink that nigh. I drunk coffee and smoked cigarettes all night long. Could not, I just could not go to sleep. To think I had made a hundred and twenty-one dollars and fifty cents in two hours and I had worked all week for nothing. But that's the way the low of averages can get up on you. So, anyway, I done all right as a representative. A lot of these representatives think they can't make it, but I done as good as a representative, I guess as I did as a manager sometimes. uh, If you know you got to get it and you know you can get it, you can make a hundred and fifty to two hundred dollars a week. All you have to do is get out there and dig for it.

L. Tilley: When did you take a managing position?

R. Wheeler: They would set me on a high pedestal every time I went to Charleston to a meeting and, the ting that always burned me up, Lon, Ethel would rear back and say, look what I trained. She didn't train me; I never had no training.

L. Tilley: Ethel?

R. Wheeler: Ethel Shannon. She was in district manager and I took all the honors there was, going and coming, top man. So, Delmus Elkins was regional manager and Ethel was district. Well, I was doing so good, and when anyone is doing good then you are supposed

to do, if you use any common sense and reasonable judgement at all, is elevate them. Don't wait until they die plumb out, just like we done Lucinda. Just as soon as she was ready we was ready to do something for her. Now a lot of managers doesn't carry that philosophy, but if you can have two or three people a little but, it is better than one doing a whole lot for you. So, uh, well what I mean is money wise. It takes a little of your overwrite, see, when you put somebody in as area manager but in turn, that area manager is going to hire somebody and you're going to make up for what you lost and more too. Ethel Shannon couldn't see that so Delmus Elkins wanted to put me in as area manager but Ethel was against it. She wanted to get all that big overwrite. I was chalking up two and three sales a week and sometimes five. I was hitting the tips. I guess keeping her from starving to death too. And so any how Delmus over ruled. In May, Delmus went ahead and signed my contract as area manager. I worked from January to May on a part-time representatives contract. He signed my area manager and at that particular time, Arthur, her brother, told her, Ethel, Roy will have your job within six months at the rate he's going. And I did. But I didn't realize I was going to get it.

L. Tilley: Let's see that was regional manager? You went from area manager to district?

R. Wheeler: I went from area to district. I was only area

for a month or two and I went right on in to district. So on district I got a salary plus. And made some good money but it costs a lot of money to finance all this. But the point I was trying to get at was all these people said I would starve to death. I lived fine and I enjoyed it. And I enjoy it yet, I just, uh, after I have got, after they retired me and after I have finally got adjusted, I'm really enjoying it more than ever cause if I want to get out and sell I can and if don't, I don't.

L. Tilley: Let's see, they retired you last year didn't they.

R. Wheeler: Yes.