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Judith Powell
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Ronald L. Atkinson
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4/16/96
(Date)

ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: RONALD ATKINSON

CONDUCTED BY: JACKIE FOURIE

HISTORY OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN HUNTINGTON, WV

DATE OF INTERVIEW: APRIL 16, 1996

Jackie: My name's Jackie Fourie and I'll be interviewing Ronald Atkinson on April 16th, 1996, at 640 Ninth Avenue, Apartment 2, the Morgan Building in Huntington, West Virginia at 25701, for the Oral History of Appalachia Project and Drinko Foundation on the effects of the Civil Rights Movement on Huntington residents. First I would like to get permission from Mr. Atkinson to be interviewed and to release tapes and transcripts for public domain. May I have your permission?

Ronald: You certainly may.

Jackie: Okay. First, I'd like to start off with a brief history, family background. And then I'll start off with that, is that okay? Then we can move into the civil rights era and your experiences.

Ronald: How far do you want me to go back to?

Jackie: Actually, as far as you can remember.

Ronald: Okay, I am one of ten siblings. Well, I'm the oldest, we lost three, the first three. And my mother bore all of her children at home in her own bed. None of us were born in a hospital. Needless to say, speaking of grass roots, we came up like a seedling. And in the local area, we were all born here in the Huntington area, and now it's only my brother and myself here. I have two sisters and another brother in California, I guess still alive. Most of myh parents are deceased. But I guess I'm the oldest of the clan that's here now. Hopefully to be here for a long time. Lord, if you're listening?! [chuckling]

Jackie: Okay, I'm trying to think...what we're focusing on today is the civil rights era and I understand that you grew up here in that era, of course. Give me an idea what organizations were you involved in and what occurred, a little idea of what happened....

Ronald: What years are we speaking of?

Jackie: 1950's, '60's.

Ronald: '50's and '60's, okay. You know, it's strange, because I

thought about that after our initial contact. True that I was around. But back then I think...I think my priorities sort of kept me from being in the middle of this, allowing myself to get too involved. But I've always, I've always worked. When we came up, we came up in a household that as long as you're in the house without a job, then you do all the chores. You mop the floors, you wash the dishes, you do all of it. If you want to get away from doing all that, you go out and get a job. I went out and got a job. [laughing] I did everything imaginable to just be out, to bring money in the house. And I didn't have to do a lot of dish washing. However, I learned, because well, my mother, God bless her soul, taught me to be one of the most independent people on earth. Now, we came from a strict family. My father wasn't a person who liked raising a passel of children. However he liked getting them. He kept my mother barefoot and pregnant. Okay, but one day she decided she'd had enough so she ran him off. That's an interesting story in itself how that happened. And my mother took care of all her children herself. And so we've learned. She set priorities and we learned. She'd tell us, she's told us so many times that as long as you're here in the house, you'll listen to what I have to say, you'll respect me or if you feel like you've got too old or too big to do that, the door's open. If you go out in the world, you go out in the world. It's as simple as that. She never restricted us in any way. She taught us all she had to teach us. And she made us learn, well, she didn't make us learn either. She just presented it and you either picked it up or you didn't. And so we were a close-knit...I admired the lady for that. I always felt well, I'm gonna be here, I'm gonna do the best I can to help her. And just by watching her, watching her cook, I

learned to cook. I watched her wash, take in washing and ironing, I learned to wash and iron. So much so that I learned I could do my own and I wouldn't let her do it for me. And of course, she didn't like it, she was upset because I wouldn't let her do my washing. But she had so much to do for all of the other children. And she took care of neighbors, she took care of my cousins family, she just raised everybody; she took care of everybody but herself. Which is why she went in to an early grave at age 55...unfortunately. But we learned so much, I learned such a wealth from her. I just feel like I can do anything I needed to do. I wash, sew, cook. And I give her the credit. Then I went in the military, and sort of just increased my knowledge in those areas and it just allowed me to be as independent as I wanted to be. And so I've never really, even...getting back to the subject...

Jackie: No, that's okay. That's the background of your history, though. That's great.

Ronald: For a long time I had my home environment, of course, I had my church involvement, I joined the First Baptist Church over here in...Easter of 1946. And I love to sing, so I...I been in the choir for almost fifty years, up to this point. And I had my military involvement. I joined the National Guard, primarily as an extra source of income, but I found out I liked it. And it was another of those areas of expression...we were able to travel, we were able to things that we didn't normally do. And then I had my job at that time, before I started in regular organized employment, by cutting grass and shoveling sidewalks in the wintertime and shining shoes and selling papers. And we did all of that just to get a little money. Because we knew our mom had a hard row to hoe

with ten children and she was raising them by herself. So we did all we could to help...help her. She, in turn, worked outside of the home and took in washing, ironing.... She was just a grand lady. She took care of hers. And she'll tell anybody, "These are my children. If you have to chastise them for any reason, tell me what it is and we'll let it go at that." And nine times out of ten we'd get a chastising from a neighbor and then we'd get whipped at home because we'd done something bad. And she was just that type of lady. And all of these things wrapped up in a ball, I think I'm a better person today for having gone through that. I don't know what it is beside.... I don't want this particular entre', I want something else. My house, when we were coming up, you ate what was put in front of you. If you didn't want that, you'd get up from the table. It was simple as that. Or if you started to eat it and you chose not to finish it, you would put it in the icebox and before you got another bite of anything else, you would eat that food. We didn't waste food in our house. And consequently now, when I'm asked if I like this dish or that dish, I respond, "Well, it's food, isn't it?" I love everything to eat. And my health is excellent, for my age. And I contribute that to my healthy eating, (that's great) wild greens. I can spot a field of wild greens a mile away. She fished and oh, she just made something out of nothing all the time. I've eaten a many a plate of drop biscuits made out of flour and water. Every can from state-run program such as free peanut butter and free meal, you made a meal out of it.

Jackie: That was a program where they had...

Ronald: Yes, I suppose state-run program.

food and.... It's just like the commodities that are given out now.

Jackie: I've forgot the name of that. That, they still, I don't know if they still do it.

Ronald: I don't think so. I think it's probably into just commodity distribution as we know it today. But it helped us. And we ate as healthy as we could. And we're all, well the ones that are still living, are healthy. So evidently we were doing something right. And she would ask friends who went hunting to bring rabbits or she went fishing, she would bring fish.

Whatever money she made outside of the kitchen. I remember when my dad was living, he used to work at the old Charles Restaurant, which I might add was during the time, just before the civil rights upset. No blacks were allowed to eat there. However, my dad cooked for everybody who did eat there, even blacks. And there was an alleyway that was where the deliveries were received and we would always go at different times of the day, to the back of the restaurant. When they were serving chicken, of course, they wouldn't use the hearts, the livers and the gizzards, we would take all of those things home. This was part of the things that kept us healthy.

And uh...as I think now, the White Pantry was in the same area. The reason I mentioned the White Pantry, this was one of the first areas we started to desegregate during the civil rights times. And I remember that particularly because at that point, I was involved in the 1st Baptist Church over here and the Baptist Training Union, and we were required to help make the signs that the people, like one of our local leaders, that was Phil Carter that we spoke of and some of the other Marshall University people and other local leaders would actually walk back and forth in front of the restaurant carrying signs trying to desegregate the White Pantry.

And in that same area was Bailey's Cafeteria at that time. No blacks could eat at Bailey's Cafeteria. In fact, no blacks could eat anywhere downtown. And it's hard to say, it's hard to get people to believe now that back during those times blacks couldn't go to the theaters. Blacks couldn't do anything downtown hardly...except do their domestic work in the back. My dad cooked in a black restaurant which blacks. And he did all the cooking. It's funny if you think about it. And so I was, I was pretty supportive in the areas that I helped make the signs and we helped serve the coffee and the doughnuts for the people who were the pioneers, who were strong enough to go out and actually go into these areas and be sprayed on with fly spray and have coffee dumped on them and not being served and shared their embarrassment and all and these things. However, when I look back on it, it was well worth the effort. Although I can't take credit for being you know, in the middle of all of this. But in [inaudible] yes. But I always felt like...I guess I had, I guess I had an over-abundance of pride because I felt like...I don't want to be anywhere I'm not wanted. I did not feel that way today. And it's another story. Today I'm having problems with my church because of my dress (type of dress). They don't particularly like it. But I don't even want to go over there, if I don't feel like I'm wanted over there. I don't care. Time doesn't transit that thought in my mind. And reiterating about what our mom teaching us to be so independent. If they don't want me to be there, it's their loss, it's not mine. But...but...I went through the service. I took a leave of absence. I went to work at H.L. Greens. I'll never forget that. This was a local variety store. And back then it was during the times when all the people that lived outside of the

populated area, the farmers and all would come in on Saturday and they was lining the front of the store and they exchanged pleasantries and tales of what happened the week before that. It was such a joy then, because there was such an outgoingness, people seemed to care about each other. And it wasn't like dog-eat-dog and you don't survive, it was just expected. It was just expected. See, all these people who came in...of course, there was a lot of shopping. And there was a little lunch counter that you had to keep clean and so.... But we met some of these people. They would take the time to say hello and to speak to you. You didn't feel like you were just a pawn. All of that went a long way, I suppose, because all of my other jobs when I become older was dealing with different groups of people. Like I worked for H.L. Green for oh, seventeen and a half years.

Jackie: Was that...H.L. Green, was it called?

Ronald: Yes. And it was also called McCroy's. Back in those days it was Silver's Five and Ten. (okay) Some of you might remember that. Silver's Five and Dime, then it was H.L. Green. And a little story connected with that, after we left Silver's, it became H.L. Green and then we also united with another group of stores who had an outlet down in Georgia. So during the time when I first went in the service we had to go to Fort Benning, Georgia to become Airborne qualified. So at one point doing the training I had some free time. So I went into town in Columbus, Columbus, Georgia. And I saw one of these stores that we had just connected with. And I thought, well, I'll go in and make myself known as you know, it's a small world. Here I am from West Virginia and we work for the same people. So I went into the store and as soon as I walked in the front door, I looked straight down the center isle and there

were two water fountains. One had "white", and one had "colored". And that was my first inkling of real...it reminded me...it brought me back to reality, reminded me where I was. So I didn't bother to go any further. I just simply turned around and walked back out of the store. Because I wasn't ready to handle, you know, to become confronted with this I couldn't drink out of a certain water fountain. I didn't...I didn't feel like these people were cordial enough to talk to a black person who gave a darn where he came from or where he was going, for that matter. So I just simply left the store and went back to the Greeting center.

Jackie: That was in Georgia, right? Georgia.... In the South that's where probably the worst of it was, segregation and the fighting. And Huntington, I don't know how much the media was involved at the time in publicizing here. Was it pretty publicized here? What was going on?

Ronald: The media was then like it is today, it's so biased. And it was so one-sided. It was...it seemed like the media never did anything to...to offset these particular problems. They just went along with the masses. If the masses were against blacks walking on the sidewalks, then the media would slash, "No blacks on the sidewalk." And it wasn't, it was never aloud the media of the stronger of the people. Maybe it would be better to think this way or that way. Media was one-sided. It was funny back then how when we wanted to go to the theater, we had to walk in what's now the Camelot. And there was a side entrance, a long, dark hallway and we called it the pigeon coop. It was just a balcony, one single, small little balcony that the blacks were able to go to after going through this side entrance and the long, dark hallway. And there was also a little lightened window where ticket sellers were and we

would go there. And of course, the bums at that time, the street walkers, also used that for their bathroom, sleeping quarters and everything else. As we look back on it, it wasn't the place to go. So we just simply go to the movies much. Back then we were content playing handball out on the street and stopping at the sewers so we could swim on the curve, playing hide and go seek on the curbing, under a pile of leaves and this kind of thing. As far as we were concerned, that was fun. It was life and it was what we did. We would barbecue out in the front yard. You could just sit along the side of the house and sit out and eat watermelon in the summertime. It was just grand. We didn't think anything about it because we didn't have anything to compare it to. We thought we were living as best as we could live. And I think as I look back on it, though, those were the good old days. These days we're going through now are days of survival. Even after going into the service, I took a leave of absence [inaudible]...

took a leave of absence and went into my three years active duty. And when I came back, I never shall forget the day I walked back in that store. After not having seen most of my co-workers for three years, we were really happy to see each other. We were shaking hands and hugging and this kind of thing and just exchanging pleasantries. And for some reason, it got quiet. And we were...back in the back of the store was a horseshoe type of fountain, a lunchroom if you will, luncheonette. And as we stopped and looked around, everyone that was sitting there and had stopped eating and was wondering who this black guy was walking around and hugging and carrying on with everybody else in the employment of the Five and Ten. And I...that must have made an impression on me because I never forgot it. But I was still the type person, you

know, if you have a problem with whatever I'm doing, you know, say something about it, if it's any of your business. If it's not, mind your own business and leave me alone. Because they never stopped me, never bothered me from doing anything that I wanted to do. I have always been able to just, you know will where ever I was and with whom ever I was just either be apart of it or not be a part of it. It was my choice and I always felt that way about it and even today, as we mentioned earlier, if I'm in a place and I just get the feeling I'm not wanted, I'll be the first one to leave. I don't have to ...I still think it'd be your loss, not mine. And I came up pretty largely through that period in the Civil Rights undress wherever we were asked to be supportive, we were supportive. And if I wasn't asked, well, I wasn't asked to become involved. I didn't seek out, you know, particular given. But belonging to the church over there, it was more of a group effort.

Jackie: Yes, the churches seem to play a big part in....yeah.

Ronald: Back then, the church was about the only thing positive in those areas, the preachers and...the preacher that we had then. And he did play a big part. And we had a group of young people from Marshall University, we called them the 73r's because it was actually at that particular time. And they were involved in about anything that was important in the community with the backing of course, the guy the preacher who was Charles Smith, and who made quite an impact in this area, in this entire state, as well as the city of Huntington. He's no longer here now. He left and went with the national office of the NAACP in New York. And he's still named the pastor-emeritus over here at the Baptist Church. I'm not sure what he's doing now. I think he works with the American

Baptist Convention. But he was instrumental in molding a lot of young lives the time he was here. He was a very young man when he came here. He came here at the age of about 18. And he stayed and he got involved. He was so talented. He was multi-talented. And he could get a group of young people.... We had the youth organization of the entire area. We would have five-state conventions [inaudible].... assemblies in different states and this type of thing. And all the other kids from the different tri-states would come here and they would have their little conventions. (just sit back) And being older and not being involved but just watching these young people take over and to express themselves and love each other.... I had to bring that out because now all of us has gone just the opposite direction. You would think it would build on, become something greater, but it hasn't. It has died out. I think going to church now is now like living now. You doing what you think is supposed to be right. But I'm not sure you gain anything by being there. Because I don't see, I don't see any abject evidence of loving people. I don't see that at all. I see young preachers stopping by to become so-called leaders. Only as a stair-step for bigger and better things. They get involved in the political arena, they get involved in things other than becoming a pastor of the local church. And I don't, I can't handle that because being brought up through these other areas, as we spoke, preachers are supposed to be good leaders. The guy with the candle who molds everybody together. I don't feel that. I think the one we've had in the last, the last three or four that we've had...they've just used us. They're moving on to bigger and better things.

Jackie: It's not cohesive group-type thing....

Ronald: No. Even today. I'm sorry to have to say that, but it's true. It's the same today. They'll go down, they'll go down on Sunday morning and they'll praise the Lord and they'll sing and preach and clap and do all that. They walk out on Sunday and it's the same old, the [inaudible]... next Sunday. And it's sad because people are dying and people are getting sick and there's problems with fires and all that. And there's no sizeable group helping each other.

Jackie: That's sad because you know, I know in the 60's and 50's, the church was so strong in that the students were involved and all that. You just think that that would still be something part of the church, to keep people together and ...

Ronald: There was a time back when we had the group from Marshall that was involved in our church, that the Marshall plane crashed. And a lot of the football players and some of the local people were killed. And we put together a program, a memorial type of program.... We had, we enjoyed having a lot of the students and a lot of the football players and a lot of the students as members, as watch cure members of the church at that particular point in time. And we put together this excerpts from the stage play "Curly", I'm not sure if you're familiar with it (no). It was up, a musical, singing and dancing with a religious connotation. And we put together excerpts of that and we had an old bus, an old school bus we painted blue and white, we called it the "Blue Goose". And we took that group of people from here, including some Marshall students and myself. And it was one of the greatest things we've ever done. And we went all across the South, Texas and Louisiana, Mississippi, any and all of the football players would come, and we presented this play as a type of a memorial thing for

them. And the Lord was definitely with us because we had a blowout one time, we were all sleeping one night and the bus of course, the bus was moving. And one of the tires blew out and before the bus had come to a complete halt, it had gone clean on the other side of the highway. But nobody received a scratch. In fact, we didn't wake up. That's just one of the things. We ran out of gas more than once because we had a defective gas gauge. And, but we, there was no problems. We were on a mission. We were on a mission of a memorial-type mission and I'm sure we had the blessings of the Lord because he took us and he brought us back. And I compare it to...when I was in high school, I was in the, spent four years in the high school band and we'd go on football trips, or we'd go on band trips, we'd support the football team. And this was the closest thing I compared it to. It was so much fun. It was like a troop of [inaudible]...going and putting on a show. And we cut each other's hair and braid each other's hair and do all this stuff on the bus trips. And we'd sing, we'd play cards, we'd do all this stuff on the bus trip until we got to where we were going. Then we got down to business and we put on this program early. And we met a lot of people. Met all the relatives of the football players that were killed in the crash. And all the time I kept a cassette, pictures and all, they're somewhere around here. But it was, back then, the church was a caring church. Now, when you spoke of belonging to a church, you were somebody. And it was really a part of your life. It was I don't know, don't have the words to uh...explain how you felt then as compared to now.

Jackie: But you seemed to be more involved in the church back then, more than now...

Ronald: It's a different type of involvement. It's the same

church, but it's not the same I guess not a truly the same. I'm not speaking of anything good. I think it's gone downhill, rather than uphill. See what I'm saying? And I think it's because we've lost so much of the impetus that we had then. Everybody was pulling for each other. We don't have that now. (no) Because it's so cliquish now. Everybody's in their own little groups and the power plays, the unhealthy competition. And I mean from the pulpit down. And it's really very sad. Very sad. I anguished over it for the longest. And I got to thinking, "Well, I can't keep going to church and coming back upset, instead of vim and vigor, to go on and face the week, face my...whatever I have to face for another week." But it's not like that anymore. I didn't think the day would come that I didn't want to go to church. Now I go when I want to and when I don't go it's really sad.

So now I'm visiting. I don't particularly go over there every Sunday. I really found out it's problematic everywhere. I think being a nation that gives you all the liberties that you have and...I don't know. There's no way to gauge what direction they're going in. I think churches all over, at this point in time, are having problems. Because the thinking has changed so radically. There's the disbelieving segment that which has been pushed into the middle of all of this and it's just taking it's toll. And I think it's taking it's toll nationally, not just locally. However, I can speak locally. But I still go. (that's good) I'm not as involved as I used to be.

Jackie: That's interesting.

Ronald: I didn't realize it until the latter few years. I spent almost fifty years singing in the church choir. And that's a long time.

Jackie: That's a long time.

Ronald: That's a long time. But I loved it! It was as a part of my life as getting up in the morning and putting on my shoes. And I loved it. And I think it's always gonna be down in my heart, but I'm not sure being involved is not the same. And I daresay [inaudible]...we're moving away from it. We're moving away from serving God and serving...as opposed to what we used to believe. And I...if there's any fault to be given out, I think it's the ...the teachings that the newer ministers bring. One had the nerve to tell me that the Bible is outdated. How can you...you don't outdate the Bible. It's just a matter of how you interpret the Bible and go from there. And uh...so there's no wonder that the world's chaotic.

Jackie: Saying that they give a different meaning and they try to give you their philosophy or their meaning and you're like, "Okay."

Ronald: Really.

Jackie: You take that and God's there and there's so much that happened in that era. I'm trying to think...you had the role and the positions...I know you talked about your mom being very involved in taking care of the kids and your father was mainly working out of the home, right? So your mom was the actual caretaker....

Ronald: My mom was...that's exactly

Jackie: Wow! So she had a big...ten kids. Douglass High School. I remember looking, actually reading about Douglass High School. Did it close down eventually due to desegregation?

Ronald: Yes, Douglass High...I think it was in '63. So the class of '62 was the last class, '63 it was when it closed down. But

that was, as we look back now, that was one of the worst things that could have ever happened to this area as far as the blacks are concerned (right). Because then, if like the churches, it was another place to express yourselves, you see. The teachers were our second parents. The teachers were caring people. And they...they wanted all their students to excel. And if the history was ever told, a large percentage that came through Douglass did excel. Because they had that, the roots, we had the driving roots, the loving, caring roots that meant a lot. Now we have, we have a three-year reunion, every year, every third year. Anybody that ever went to Douglass that's still alive come together. And this is happening this year, the first week of July, we'll have another Douglass reunion. I'm not sure what the numbers is. But I definitely will be there. A couple of times I missed it because I was busy. One time I was asked to sing at a friend's wedding, and I was replaced without them telling me. So I felt that my pride was stepped on and I didn't go. And I was sorry. I was so sorry I did that. Because I missed seeing everybody that would come by and come together. And we were involved in the class. But Douglass High School was the institution. Douglass high school now. It sort of rings within itself every time the word is spoken. We're looking forward to coming together again that week in July, July 1-7, I think this year. (wow) At the Gateway. And we're waiting, expectantly waiting for the actual coordinating paperwork to be mailed out to each other. My sis is in California. She's biting at the bit to...(is she, she's going to come out for it?) Oh, yes, she's coming here. (oh, boy, that's going to be exciting) That couch you're sitting on, I just recently changed it. (it's beautiful) It's a queen style sleeper, so she'll have a place to

sleep. (oh, gosh, she's going to be in Heaven) And I'm looking forward to her coming so we can get together for that week. Jackie: Because I had read up on that and I just think that is so interesting. It seems like it was just such a...really a school that was dedicated to teach these children that, you know, they were gonna be somebody.

Ronald: It was. And the teachers, and the teachers who were there, not just, just two or three weeks at a time, they didn't change teachers. They came in there, young people, they were not ready to die, a lot of them. In fact, I think we only had two living teachers that came up through Douglass High School.

William Jackson, who taught printing, he's still alive. And Thelma Gordon, who taught, who was incidently my homeroom teacher of the class of '48. Class of '48! Don't tell anybody. [chuckles] I graduated from high school in 1948. (wow!) And she's still living. She's still living. To this day I call her every now and then to see if.... She's living alone and I always try to help her as much as I can, at Christmas time, I help her put up her Christmas tree and this kind of thing. She seems like a second mom. And uh...those were the good old days. And we didn't have to be carted or transported to school like now. Today, if any kids go to school, they have to be taken, driven. Usually by a bus or by local, family taxicab or whatever. I think that's the most ridiculous thing in the world. And to build a school out that far, is necessary for every mother's child to be carried to school. We walked to school. We got to school.... When my mother, when we all came up, my mother would tell us the night before, "Make sure..." and we didn't have that much. But as you look at it, we had everything. We had, the clothes...the clothing that we wore to

school.... We came in from school, we would change clothes and put on our coveralls or our scuffies and go out and play. We didn't play in our school clothes or our Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. We would change clothes. And when we came up, we were supplied with new clothing three times a year. When school started, Easter time and at Christmas. Those were the three times we all got new clothing. And it was like from skin, inside out, underwear, socks, the whole nine yards. And, but we appreciated it. My mother was the type of lady, she didn't buy things to fit exactly. Our clothing a lot of times were at least one size larger than they should have been. Because we had hand-me-downs. We got the new clothing three times a year, because the other times, everything that somebody else grew out of would be handed down to the next person that could wear it. This kind of thing. (that's the way to do it) But we learned. We'd dare to go to school without clean clothes. Because all our teacher had to do was call Mother and tell, "Well, so and so was here and he/she socks wasn't as clean as they should be." I bet you that didn't happen but once. So, but Mother was a type of lady, she taught us how to do things. And she expected us to carry on because she couldn't watch all of us, she couldn't be there to make sure everybody did what they were supposed to do. She would tell us, I'll never shall forget this. When you get up in the morning, you cook your oatmeal, usually the older of the children would cook the oatmeal that we'd have for breakfast. You'd make sure you were clean and make sure your clothes were clean, you'd get out of here in time to get to school and you better be on time. And don't wake me up. [laughing] I'll never forget that.

Jackie: There was discipline...like if you guys got in trouble,

what kind of....? I mean, I know a lot of people don't believe in spanking children and all that, and grounding seems to be the big thing nowadays, because if you do spank a child, you might get thrown in jail. But back then, it seems like punishment, when you had done something wrong, it seems like you knew better not to do it again, once you were punished the first time for doing it, right?

Ronald: You probably got two punishments. Because whoever, like for example, if you do something wrong in school, and you might get a paddling at school, then the school teacher's gonna call your parents. And they're gonna tell the story. And then when you get home, you know you're gonna get it. [laughing] You're gonna get it a second time. This was happening back then. This is why back in those days, we didn't have petty robberies, and gang-bangings and stuff that's going on today. Because people cared about each other and they would correct you on the spot. If you acted up in the presence of my mother, I don't care whose child you are, you're gonna be corrected on the spot. And then she's gonna go home and she's gonna call your parents and tell her exactly what happened. And nine times out of ten, like I said, you're gonna get a second whipping. And it wasn't ...wasn't any child abuse. You got your butt whacked when it needed whacking.

Jackie: Right. But nowadays, it's just...

Ronald: Child abuse.

Jackie: Nowadays, my son....And I do myself, personally, I think the child does need a little spanking. And abuse and spanking is two different things.

Ronald: Yes.

Jackie: I don't know. Things have really changed. I don't know

if our kids are controlling our lives or who's controlling them anymore. It's....

Ronald: My mother ruled the roost. And she didn't spare the rod and spoil the child. She didn't have time. Okay. I'll tell you a couple of incidences. We uh...my mother would can. Everything she'd find a bargain on, like blackberries or greens or potatoes or whatever, she would get a large amount. And generally she would can what she couldn't use immediately. And she had just done this, she'd gotten several crates of blackberries so she made blackberry jam. And we lived up in the east end of the city. We had one of these real large, round kitchen tables. And Mom had canned blackberry jam all day long. And she had the quarts and pints and whatever jars she could find in the middle of the table to cool before you could put the paraffin on it to seal it and then transport it to the pantry or whatever. So before, in between the cooling of the jam and putting the paraffin on it, well, it was like overnight, somebody would, with their fingers or spoon or whatever, got into about every one of those jars of jam. [chuckling] So the next morning it looked like a bunch of rats got in the jam. And we all was lined up around the table. Mom wanted to know who got in the jam. Of course, nobody would talk. Because nine times out of ten it was all of us.

But when we were coming up, one of our additional items that was widely used was castor oil. If you got just a little whisper of a cold, you had to take castor oil. Or if you got, castor oil was the remedy for, for whatever. And we all hated it so badly because it was tasteless, but it was oily and yuk! We would, Mother would punish us with castor oil. So we had to line up around the table. She first had one of us to go out in the garage and bring in two

switches. She was gonna whip us all. But then she decided, well, no, she said, "Since none of you will tell who got in the jam," she made us all, she got a huge cooking spoon and we all had to take a cooking spoon of castor oil. So none of us enjoyed keeping it for long. I'll never forget that as long as I live. I really....we were punished with castor oil. (wow!) But to this day, nobody ever owned up to getting in the jam. Because I say, it was all of us. I had one brother that would run, if Mother was gonna whip him. So she chased him one time. The next time when the whippings came up, he'd go in the bathroom and lock the door.

Jackie: That's one thing...

Ronald: Speaking of child abuse, we had, if you can envision, an electrical cord, just tied with a handle okay. About 18 inches long. We were corrected with [inaudible]....

But she'd whip our butt, so we wouldn't do that again. Whatever it was, it was done. We were whipped with Johnny quite a lot.

She started using switches, which would break. Johnny wouldn't break. [laughter] As I think back about all of it, it was, there was no child abuse. They were to be corrected.

Jackie: Back then you had more control over your kids. It just seems like, there wasn't a neighbor spying on you, seeing what you were doing. You knew what, the things you had to do in your home to correct your children. If it was a good whipping, then that's what it took. But nowadays, it's got to the point where, God, the kids are just going wild. And there's no such thing as control.

Ronald: To this day I don't have too many people come into my home or apartment, especially those with children. Those children will start dropping things. And, "Johnny, don't do that," breaking up my ashtrays and isn't that cute, breaking up things.

Jackie: I tell you, my son, I have a lot of compliments on him. But I tell you one thing. I do not put up with disrespect. And I tell him, "You respect people." And I will make him say, "Thank you," and I say, "You respect anybody's home you go into." And it's, it's a constantly up-to-date thing. You have to constantly be on your children to respect other people. A lot of people think...

END OF SIDE 2

END OF INTERVIEW