Hello. My name is Pennie Borchers. I’m Special Collections Librarian at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio – and am delighted to be interviewing Dr. P.I. Nixon, Jr., eminent physician and son of the late, distinguished doctor and historian, Dr. Pat Ireland Nixon, who built a quality historical collection of antiquarian texts dating from the 15th to the early 20th century, which became the Health Science Center’s rare book collection, The P.I. Nixon Medical Historical Library.

Dr. P. I. Nixon, Jr., has graciously consented to sharing his reminiscences relating to his father and to the development of medicine in South Texas.

Our focus today will be on Dr. Nixon’s earliest memories, his childhood and education.

Dr. Nixon, where were you born and when?

I was born in San Antonio May 28, 1913, at 5 o’clock in the morning down on Quincy Street, which is near the Baptist Hospital. They were renting that house because the house that I was raised in was not quite finished. It was at 202 East Courtland, which is near the front of Main Avenue and Dewey, and I lived there ‘til I went off to college.

So there was a lot of continuity in your childhood, a stable home?

I had a stable home.

How about siblings…you had brothers and sisters?

I had 3 brothers: Robert, who is also a doctor, was 13 months older than me, and my twin-brothers, Thomas and Ben, who are 8 years younger than me. So, as a result, when I went off to college, they were not even old enough to be really close.

So you were closer to your older brother then?

13 months.

We were raised in a close family. And about 1921 or ‘22 Loma Brown, the colored lady who worked for us for 43 years, came to work for us. She had a daughter named Clarabelle, whom Dad helped put through college. And she stayed with him until he died. And around the house. He was never in a nursing home or any home. She (and friends she had) took care of him, then she took care of me ‘til she died, and then I took care of
her! She lived in the quarters for the maid in the backyard over a double garage. Put her house on Lombrano, rented it, and got it paid for in a few years, but she didn’t live in it. Then she sold that house and bought one over on one of those streets south of Fort Sam Houston – I don’t remember which one it was - and lived there until she died.

Dad did a lot of things for us. He bought that farm we had out on Bandera Road, where he had a dairy and sold milk before the days of pasteurization. I remember to this day that we had Permit #9 in San Antonio. And we went out there all the time, took all the neighbor kids, and we shot a 22 rifle out there, and everybody was taught how to handle firearms. In those days we shot that gun, shot it to the point that the rifling was gone. I don’t know whatever happened to that gun, whatever happened when I was gone. See, I left San Antonio in 1931 when I went to the University of Texas and didn’t get back until 1945, December of ’45, when I got out of the service. So there was a complete break.

I used to drive my mother downtown to shop. She used to shop at Joske’s, and I’d either go in with her or sit in the car and wait for her. So I never was bothered by sitting and waiting.

**Tell me about your mother. What kind of lady was she?**

Well, she graduated from the University of Texas in 1902 or ’03. Met Daddy, and they didn’t get married until after he graduated from medical school. She was from Mineola, Texas, and her father, Ben Read, and his father came to Texas from Tennessee about 1841 or ‘42 and moved to Crockett, stopping in Arkansas. But they had a malarial epidemic and decided to move on and came to Crockett - which is Houston County and one county over from where the early settlers came in the settling of this state - which makes our family eligible to be Daughters of the Republic or Sons of the Republic of Texas, which I never was interested in joining.

**You never made a point of being part of that, but you could have at any time.** Yeah. **What about your mother, did she feel staunchly Texan?**

She was a member of the organization of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She got all those records and joined, she and her sister, who was Ms. Randolph. And Randolph Field is named after her husband

**Now what was your mother’s first name?**

Read. R-E-A-D

**Her first name was Read?**

Olive. Olive Gray Read. We moved from Crockett to Mineola because we thought there was going to be a railroad built up there that crosses Texas Pacific, named the Houston & Northwest. Well, that never was built because it was moved.
The census of 1950 – excuse me, 1850 - showed that great-grandfather and grandfather, Ben Read, were worth around $25,000 in his own name and about $15,000 in his business. He had a furniture store and a general store and sold goods. And he’d go down to the courthouse whenever there was an auction and - probably for tax purposes - and would buy it [land that was re-possessed] if you liked it – or try to buy it - and if you didn’t, you would leave it alone. So I don’t know anything about what money difference it is, but I suspect that was a million dollars now.

**Probably so. Now, about your mother…what did you call your mother? Did you call her “Mother?”**

Mother

You did? And were you closer to her or closer to your dad?

I was close. I was close to both of them. We never – I don’t remember - I was even talking to my brother just recently. We got very few spankings, and we never did…if they said do something, we did it! There wasn’t any of this “why” stuff that you hear today. And if I was to be paddled, I was sent out to pick my own switches and bring ‘em in! That hurt as much as being switched!

**And who did the spanking – your father or your mother?**

My father.

We went places; we traveled. We went hunting out in Yancey, where my dad’s cousins lived – correction, his half-brother and his half-sister lived. They went out there to rent a ranch that belonged to my grandfather – 4500 acres – of land, and they married brother and sister, and that’s where the name Nixon-Wilson Reunion came from. And we used to go hunting out there. In those days, if the weather was bad, we’d get up at four or five o’clock and get on the road and get there by dark. Now, with modern roads you are there in an hour. So that’s how much things have changed.

**What did you all hunt?**

Deer and turkey. And there was plenty of them out there except in the dry weather, and we had several periods of that. I remember the story of Garrett Wilson buying a piece of land between there and Pearsall called “The Lost Ranch,” and he took his wife down to look at it, and she took a look at it and said, “The Lord sure was lost when he made this piece of property.” It looked pretty bad with that drought, but later it looked great. And I also remember that whenever any of those people needed medical treatment, they’d come and stay at our house, and Dad would either take care of them or would refer them to the doctor who could take care of them. And they, along with the other patients, would bring chicken and eggs and so forth in as payments.

**And you got first-hand experience with medicine?**
Oh, yeah.

**Were you interested in it at an early age?**

No. I didn’t know I was. My father was way ahead of his times. And refer to *Pat Nixon of Texas* for the descriptions ’cause there is more in there than I could tell you. But I remember walking down Houston Street when I was a little boy, and he could diagnose 50% of them just by looking at them. In those days we didn’t have the tests, so we had to learn to diagnose people by talking to ‘em and looking at ‘em. Now they use the tests and don’t use as much personal relationship as we did in those days. And, as a result, there’s been a change in medicine - some ways good, some ways not good. The close relationship is lost, and that’s bad.

**And people miss that.**

And the people miss that. BUT the advances in medicine have been so great, the things we took as being extremely serious surgery are now done in 30, 40 minutes. I went to a seminar, I went to a reunion - Duke had a reunion, class reunions, every five years, and I tried to go back when I could. And one year we had a man that was very prominent in the use of lens implants in the eye, which is totally different from what the older doctors did, so there was a conflict until they got it perfected, and then it took over very rapidly. And we told all of the problems and the changes, and you have the doctors who don’t want to change and the doctors that know that changes are needed. I remember Dad’s famous statement, “Be not the first by which the new is tried or the last to throw the old aside.”

**Good saying!**

So, I’m away from where you started, but…

**Well, I’d still like to know a little bit more about those early years. Were you aware when you were young, did you realize that your dad was a famous man or to become a famous man?**

Well, I knew that he was different from most of the doctors, and I knew he was ahead of the times, and I knew that he was involved in many things. So he was a very quiet, reserved, bashful person in his early years. He’d rather take a beatin’ than have to talk! Which, I was the same way, in a way.

I went to Travis School, then I went to Hawthorn Junior School, and was close to Doctor Walter Walthall, and Mrs. Hupperts was his aunt, and she was principal there.

**Did you like school?**
Yeah. Then we went to Main Avenue, which is now Fox Tech. At that time there were only two high schools in San Antonio: Brackenridge and Main Avenue. It was a good school. We had a lot of good teachers, and I learned a lot, and from there I went to the University of Texas.

**What about hobbies – did you have hobbies before you went off to university when you were young? Or sports? What were your favorite pastimes?**

We played tennis. Belonged to a local fraternity called the Phosphor Club, which was local, and it was in high school. And Mrs. Roy Smith from Smith motor company used to invite the whole club over *every* Sunday afternoon and fed us. She told me one time that she had more money than she knew what to do with, and she would rather spend it on all of us and keep us off the street. She didn’t know anything better she could do with it.

**So that was a tradition.**

Yeah. And I only know one person that was in that group, that’s – I have to take it back, two – that I remember. One, Bond Davis whose father was a judge here; and Arthur Newton, who was also a judge. And Arthur’s father had a Model A Ford, and we ran around in it all the time. ‘Course cars weren’t plentiful, and …

**You all had a good time?**

Oh, yeah.

**So were you more of a serious, young man or a wild, young man, or how would you characterize yourself?**

One other thing - I was neither wild nor too serious, but - Mrs. Smith’s daughter was Katherine Smith. She married Pop Gunn, whom you know. He didn’t know anything about the automobile business. I tell you this to show you the kind of people they were and what kind of brains they had. When they got married, Mr. Gunn says, “Pop, I’m goin’ to put you in the automobile business. I’m goin’ to teach it to you. You’re goin’ to start and work two years in the shop. You’re goin’ to wash cars, you are going to change tires, you are going to fix brakes, you are going to do all of those things and slowly work up, and in two years you are going to move in the office with me, but you’ll know what’s going on in the shop,” which very few people know today. That’s what wrong with things, in my opinion. The people here don’t know what these people had to go through. Well, everybody said that was a crazy thing. I told him, “Mr. Smith, I think that’s the smartest thing I ever heard.” So we were pretty close.

I have to tell you one more story about him. Someone came in and said “I need a car. I don’t have any money, but will you take some land?” He said “Yeah,” so they made a deal. I don’t know how many acres. A few years later they struck oil on that land.
Oh, my!

So the man came back and said, “Mr. Smith, can I buy the land back? He said, “No, it’s too late.” So he was a smart man, and yet he was not a big-shot businessman. And I tended to make friends with people like that. I didn’t care about being a big shot, mayor of town, member of the commission. I liked people that I liked, and I liked people that were smart. I tolerated the rest of them. So therefore the friends I had were close, but I probably didn’t get along with some of my acquaintances as well as I should have.

What about the girls? Were you interested in girls?

Oh, yeah. But in those days we didn’t pair off. We had friends. We’d go to movies, go to the dances. Even though Dad was a Methodist and supposedly didn’t believe in dancing. But actually he did. He had dances at our house. When the Methodists were totally against it! I said to him one day, “Daddy, why do you do that?” He said, “I’d rather have you here, where I KNOW what you’re doing than I would to have you off somewhere else where I DON’T know what you’re doing. And that’s why I don’t think dancing’s so bad. So, that gives you a little of the type of person he was.

He was down-to-earth.

Yes. But he would come in as the radio was playing, he’d say, “You aren’t listening to that,” turn and go sit at his desk - that picture of him you’ve seen sitting at his desk working - and would go on and work, and we had to be quiet. Since the ‘phone was one line, we were limited how long we could talk - a couple of minutes, and that was it! We said what we had to say and got off the line!! And consequently, I’m organized that way too.

When I went up to university – pretty young – and I lived in my aunt’s home as a boarder with four people. Dr. Walthall, who was my roommate at the time (we were fraternity brothers). And I remember that I lived on $50 a month. Paid fraternity dues, ate at the fraternity house, paid the rent for the home, and could go to a movie or whatnot when I wanted to. And I guess I should have added…have dates.

And did you pursue medicine at that point? Did you know that’s where you wanted to go? What were your main interests at that time?

My first year I took engineering. And then I decided: this is not for me. But engineering did not bother me in medicine; it probably helped because it gave me a different approach to thinking. I had no problem in school.

You were a good student?

No. Average. I was either a 79 student or an 89 student. A week after the test was made, something would be said, and I was a 95. I was probably a little slow to get all of the things, and I flunked math at the University. I got a bad teacher who had a bad
reputation, and I failed it. I took the second half, and got smart - I’d learned to get the good teacher - and I made an A. So I thought a failure and an A made a B, so I didn’t take it over. My senior year I was told I had to take it over, so I took it with the new teacher, and got another A.

You had a lot of math in your background then, didn’t you!

Average. And I wish I’d had a better teacher. I took physics by a man who had 200 in the class (there was another class that I was warned to stay out of that also had 200 in the class - maybe 250). And his hobby was buying all organs out of all theaters all over Texas to get pieces. Then he made a master organ, which is at the University to this day. And instead of running it on vacuum, like the original, it is run electrified. And a vacuum organ has to be played about a half a note ahead of regular music, or you’re not in rhythm. But, with the electric organ it would play right with it.

He would get to the board and write a little bit and say, “This is not important; HERE is what’s important.” For example, “What’s the pressure difference on the dam at the bottom and at the top when there’s four miles of water pushing down on it?” Well, the answer is what you wouldn’t think: Nothing. The pressure’s the same. But he didn’t go and write that problem on the board and spend all the time showing you a problem you’d never need. He told you what it did! So, at the end of the class, we all made good grades. And his class had to be - what do you call it when they slide ‘em up – they had to add 10 points to everybody. On the curve? They had to curve them up 10% to make as many pass, or make a lot of them pass, because they didn’t know, like we did, his explanations. So that made an influence on me.

And you had other special teachers that you remember?
Dr. Walthall and I were classmates, were roommates in college. We went out dating together, and we installed a Model-A radio in his car, and we’d go out. And they drew a lot of power! And we’d go out and park and listen to the radio. And we had a wire hooked - the antenna was under the running board - they didn’t have the times we have today. We’d hook a wire to it and drop it on the ground, and we could pick up WOS Chicago and get the big bands from 10:00 to 10:30 every night and get great music! But we had to be careful because it drew so much current, if we ran it over thirty minutes, we’d run the battery down!

He had his own shorthand. He took down in his shorthand the words to every song, and he had a book of the music on any song of the ‘20s and ‘30s – all of them! All of them until we went to medical school in 1935.

And I remember one time I bought a wrecked Model-A. Put it in my aunt’s backyard and was working on it, and at one time my father came out to find me. I was out there fixing that car. He wouldn’t give me a car, but I’d bought it for about $25 or $35. It had gone around the corner and run under a wagon. Radiator and hood and bent fenders made it kind of bowed down. And I fixed it, and we had it the rest of the time we were up there.

And we decided we wanted to go to Galveston. There was three boys and girl. And this was a coupe! But the three boys sat on the bottom, and the girl sat on their lap – all the way down there and back. Guess what that trip cost?? A dollar and a half! Gasoline was 5 cents a gallon at that time. So…and at that time – and I should have brought the book to show you a picture, but I imagine you’ve been to Galveston – a long pier and a big building, and that was a big dance hall and had the big dance bands there. There was another building – room – farther out which was a gambling hall. And if it were raided, they dumped everything into the water! And they also had another one out in town, and even after WWII, one of the big band leaders played there, and he gambled so much, he had to stay there for two weeks to pay his debt. So, it was an interesting trip. We saw a lot. We visited all of the doctors and everything down there and so forth. That’s just one of the trips I remember.

I studied a lot. I remember I fixed the phonograph in the fraternity when I was a pledge. When I took it apart - we didn’t dare because we figured you wouldn’t put it back together.

And you liked to use your hands to fix things.

Yes. I remember that the bathtub was used to make home brew one time.
And you were part of that too?

No. But we could always when we came to San Antonio stop in New Braunfels and buy home brew made by those Germans. But I was never a drinker. Same thing for cigarettes.

You didn’t smoke?

I smoked one cigarette. And I said this is a dirty, filthy habit, and why should I do something that I don’t like, and I threw the package of cigarettes away, and that’s all I ever smoked!

By contrast, my daddy with my twin-brothers brought home a normal lung from the Baptist Hospital and brought home Dr. Nick Champion’s, who was a cousin that died of cancer of the lung, as another. And he called ‘em in and said, “Son, this is what your lung looks like when it’s normal and you don’t abuse it. THIS is what happens when you smoke. That’s your uncle, Dr. Champion. Now, I’m not going to tell you not to smoke; I’m telling you it’s YOUR decision.” They never smoked again – neither one of them! So, that gives you another incidence of how he functioned.

Anyway, Dad went to John Hopkins and, while there, had the professors reform the school. Most of them had already moved back to England. And he was very close to one of the professors and even ran the department as a student when the other one, when he would take time off. Then he made a trip to Pennsylvania, to Philadelphia, and New York and then another one and then out to the Mayo Clinic, in which he summed up the quality of medical schools were very bad, and the only decent place was the Mayo Clinic, which he stayed close to all his life. And that’s where he had to send the patients for special things. He’d send them to the Mayo Clinic.

He was a general practitioner?


And you chose that as well?

Yeah. And in his autobiography, which is here in Nixon, Texas, which, incidentally, whether you’ve found it or not, is in this Library. You knew that?

Yes. Was he so low-profile when you were growing up that you had no inkling that he would make a big name for himself?

Why, I knew that he was involved in everything but did not do the things that the public knew. He was back here, he was down here running things, but not out here as the front man. And, anyway.
Was he writing all along as he was—yes—or did he do that at the end?

No, he did it all along, and I’ll tell you about that now. Ms. [Mary] Johnson was with us for 43 years as a secretary, and excellent person as far as individual, typist, shorthand, everything. And he’d write something, and she would edit it before typing it. She also did the typing for all of his books: The medicine in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas Medicine, the Texas Medical Association.

And he used to go out to the Prude Ranch, which is at Fort Davis, and we started going to the Prude Ranch back in 1928 when I was in high school. And in those days we lived in the main house, which is 3500 square feet made out of adobe. And if you protect adobe, it’ll last forever. And they had a metal roof. And we stayed in the house with the family, ate at the table with the family and the cowboys, and ate there. I remember we used to make a trip on one of the times out there by horseback for about ten miles up to the Observatory. We’d have a picnic and then we’d ride home in the trucks. And I said to John Robert, who is the 3rd generation Prude today, about that story. And the cowboys would bring the horses back. He said, “Do you know why they were doing that?” “No.” He said, “There was great grass up there in that area, so we let the horses graze for three or four hours coming home, and we didn’t have to feed ‘em!”

Anyway, I went back recently a few years ago. We were going to have an old car tour up there, and I went up to him and said, “John Robert,” “Dr. Pat Nixon,” and he threw his arms around me and said, “It’s like having relatives come visit.” And they built an adobe building the shape of an L, in which were cabins, rooms for visitors, and they started moving them out of the main house. The corner room of the L was big and had more room, and he [P.I. Nixon, Sr.] wrote these books up there. He’d take off two or three weeks and go up there. And when my kids were young, he would have them get on the Southern Pacific Railroad and ride to Alpine, and he’d drive down to Alpine to get ‘em. They would stay in the room next to it, make the trips, and ride with the cowboys and then when the week or 10 days was up, then they’d all come home together in the car. So he was close to even these grandchildren.

And he wasn’t too strict?

No, he’d say “Do it,” and you did it, and that’s all there was to it. As long as it wasn’t too much.

I’ll tell you one more story about the Prude Ranch…we were up there for another old car meeting about two years ago. They’d had the usual problem with the bookkeeper, who was keeping, handling the money. And they were stealing from ‘em. So one of the grandchildren had taken over that job, and she was living in a house where the old man Prude, 2nd generation Prude, was his house. She ran into me and got to talking, and this was 11 o’clock at night. She had all of her money and everything there. And we got to talking, and we talked ’til 1 o’clock. She didn’t want us to leave! She was finding out things about the family which—we were just talking like we’re talking now.
So I haven’t talked to my children, but my son John and my daughter Nancy were up there last weekend because John is a restorer and collector of motorcycles and new cars. And they went up, and I said, “Be sure to look it up,” and Pat says, “Tell Nancy ‘cause John will forget.” So, I haven’t heard whether she talked to her or not, but she can tell a lot of stories that I don’t know. But anyway.

**So, there’s still this strong connection to the Prude Ranch?**

Yes. Old man Prude – 1st generation – and his wife used to sit on the front porch, and I’d sit and talk to them. She said, “In the early days when we went to Alpine, we took a log, a big heavy log, and tied it on the wagon and drug it to make us a path to Alpine so we’d know how to get back!” And also she said that the grass was so high, that they could only ride a horse for about six days, and the chest would be so beat up and bleeding from the grass hitting them that they had to change horses and move to another field. That’s how much has changed!

And at the last Nixon reunion, they let a lady get up and talk, and she told about the life in the Big Bend Park. Her name was Wilson, relatives of the Wilsons I mentioned earlier. And her father was Homer Wilson, who was a geologist with Mobil Oil Company, which was a subsidiary of Standard Oil, which is now ESSO, EXON. And he was sent down there to check out the minerals in that area and somehow ended up buying 14,000 acres of land down there. And this girl was brought there, and this is a story of her life in the Big Bend before the government condemned the land and took it over. And one of the pictures is The Window. Do you know about The Window?

*I do.*

Anyway, it’s taken from the other direction, where the farmhouse was. And they owned the Basin, they owned the Window, and they owned the Overlook into Mexico – the three main things in that park. And he spent his last years up around Alpine before he died. She’s married and lives in Kansas, but this is the book. I should have brought it to let you see it. But it tells a story, and it shows you the changes. There’s a picture of a house, saying “This house was bought from Sears Roebuck,” and there it is. You could buy houses, you could buy cars, from Sears Roebuck.

And the other radio station in Chicago that was big was WLS: World’s Largest Store. So, anyway. I haven’t even started Duke.

**No, but I want to ask you one more thing about that. So those mountains and being out there in the country represented a big chunk of your childhood and happy memories?**

Oh, yeah. That reminds me of another story. My father collected cactus, all these potted kinds. He had everything. We made a trip out there in a - I think it was in a 1928 Nash Ambassador.
We put four new tires on it. We got down to Big Bend, and the main lead to the spring broke. With mechanical brakes, when it dropped back, you put the brake on and you slid the car, slid all the way through that brand new tire. So here we were with a broken spring. We put the spare on. I got the jack out. In those days the bumper was just as much of a spring as the spring itself. And I got that bumper against the end of the spring and pushed it back in place and wired it with bailing wire - no, with fence wire. We had to take to do it and drove it all the way back to San Antonio. And that car ‘til the day we sold it would stick you in the rear end with spines.

So, going to the Bend Bend was a -

**A real adventure!**

Interesting story.

While out there we took the Boy Scouts, and we went with nine. And he had an early Plymouth station-wagon, and he drove at one speed. He put his foot at a certain place, and he held it there, and we dropped down to 35mph going up a hill and 55mph going downhill, and 50 mph on a straight-away. It drove me crazy. We took them camping out there, and we took ‘em on that horseback ride to the Overlook, and we took them on walking trails, and so forth. And – another thing – you didn’t have pressure caps on radiators, and when you went up that road into the Basin, they had places to stop where you could put water in your radiator. It boiled out because you didn’t have anything to keep it in there! That’s how much cars have changed.

So, anyway.

**So, you’ve always loved cars.**

Yeah. And mechanics a little bit. But it never hurt me in medicine because that knowledge made me better with my hands to where I was a better assistant in the operating room than most people because I learned to anticipate what somebody needed before they ever asked for it. But most of them have to ask every time.

Well, we also used to go down to the coast fishing. And Dad used to go with Dr. Hicks, who was his partner. Dr. Hicks was an older doctor in the building named for his family, and Dad moved over in with them. And they used to go fishing for tarpon, which are gone there now. And other things.

And then we would go out on the Point North of Rockport, where an old fisherman had a boat, and we lived in tents. And there were so many mosquitoes that they had mosquito netting for everybody. And if the wind was blowing off of the Gulf, there wouldn’t be very many mosquitoes, but if it came from inland, the tent would be black from mosquitoes! And we’d go out fishing, and we didn’t use all this fancy stuff. We had a cane pole, and we’d use that. That was all. And we had pictures with two people holding it – going like this. That’s the way the fishing was in those days.
And in those early days when we went to Port Aransas, we’d put our cars on flatcars, and the train carried us out to the ferry. And we got on the ferry and went across. And in the early days that railroad was built, and there were tracks on the ferry and across to build a breakwater. And they hauled that granite from up in granite shoals and all those places up in there where the granite rock is, and they had a pier with a crane on it, and they were laying the granite and putting railroad track out, and they’d run the car out, and they’d lift a two hundred pound rock off and drop it down and make a breakwater that way. And one of those restaurants in Rockport has a picture of that. And before my time, the railroad had a 95-bed hotel in Rockport out on North Beach with railroad track all around before cars. They took the private cars and rode down there. They sat there until they got in to come home. 95 beds. It burned in 1905 about. Never rebuilt it. So…

And Port Aransas – that was the place you usually visited?

Rockport. And Port Aransas. And Fulton. And Fulton Beach had the remains of a cannery when I was a kid. They canned turtles. There were big turtles there.

All those memories!

So anyway…

It was a vacation time for the family when you went down to the coast.

Oh, yes.

Did you do that several times a year?

It started when I was little. I remember there was a boat that was sunk out at Rockport, was made out of concrete, from World War I. I guess I should put this in. We went down there with the Stevens, which was one of Daddy’s relatives from the first marriage. His father was married twice, had seven children by the first marriage; six children by the second, all of which had children. One of them was named Stevens. We went down there and went around. It got so bad, we just had enough and came home. Three days later the big hurricane had hit Corpus Christi and washed everything out. Washed away where we were, and when we went back, nothing left of the cedar post on the house we were living in, the cabin we’d rented.

You got out just in time.

You see, you never know…

So that was in 1921? I don’t remember. I think 1921 was the flood of San Antonio. That’s why they built the Olmos Dam. And in the early days you could ride across Olmos Dam, and they tore the top off and made it all a spillway. And…can’t remember
who built it, but his son was a friend of mine. We used to say the dam was going to break; he said, “No, it’s not; it’s well built.” And it was built right. And they upgraded it and took the road off the right below the dam now. But if you’ll look at the other end, you can see where it used to start across. So that was one of my early experiences.

You’ve seen many changes in San Antonio.

My mother belonged to the Christian Church, and my daddy belonged to the Methodist Church, and they never changed. Bob and I went to the Christian Church; Thomas and his brother went to the Methodist Church. That was their solution. And my name is on the flag in Central Christian Church for serving in World War II, so that proves I was a member there.

And at home, did you say prayers?

Yeah. I remember, my mother was very cold-natured – I mean hot-natured, couldn’t stand cold. Daddy was just the opposite. And I installed a wall furnace in mother’s room. Daddy would come in and said, “That’s too cold,” and would push it up. Too hot, and he’d push it down to 70 degrees, and Mom would nearly freeze. So one day I took the cover off and turned it so it would read 76, so she was warm. And he never bothered to check.

A good solution!

Yeah. So I didn’t give you much history of what went on. We were with our family a great deal. My mother was a weak, sickly woman and was all her life.
Tape 2, Side 1

Interview with Dr. P.I. Nixon, Jr.

Right!

You were talking about your mother and that she was...

She had to stay in bed a good part of the time when the twins were born, but even so she had problems with her eyes. She suffered even when they went back to Johns Hopkins and she had her eyes checked. They told her there’s nothing wrong with your eyes except you read too much. And staying there with your husband and trying to read all the time he does. Go on up to your room and go to bed.

Dad’s library was this library [The P.I. Nixon Medical Historical Library], which you know all about. And I might say that it was moved here because during the time of the war when people were burning books and so forth, this library was behind two glass doors, which one sledgehammer would have gotten very quickly. If they’d burned that building, this library would have been gone. Now that building is sold, and they’re moving. What would have happened to it with all that change? Would they have sold it or what?

You’re talking about the Bexar County Medical Society?

Yeah. It’s moved over here to this building near Crossroads one mile short of town on [IH-] 10, and so there’s another reason – or piece of luck, whatever you want to call it – that the library’s been moved.

So, I must say, Daddy had another library. It was on Texas history. Had a paper drive on Courtland Street, and somebody threw away a pair of books on the Texas and Santa Fe expedition, which my father got to reading and kept it for himself instead of throwing it away, which was good, which started his collection of books. And from the same people that he bought medical books from, he bought Texas history books. He had a full library and bookshelves in his room and writing this where he wrote much of what he wrote in San Antonio. I took that picture – Oh, you did? – with a cheap camera. It’s a good picture. And people would go visit him, and he’d say, “this shelf up, no, third shelf from the top, fifth book over, bring it to me.

He knew his books.
He not only knew his books, he knew what was in ‘em. And he’d have books where they would say bear meat wasn’t good to eat. And it would be written in there by somebody. Bear meat is good. I’ve eaten it. I know.

And if you want to know a lot about the library, talk to Milton Jacobs. Go visit him because Milton is from Luling. Daddy was from Luling. Milton’s grandfather and Daddy’s father were friends. Grandfather, in addition to running a farm, ran a freight line from Indianola to Gonzales, and Milton’s father sold goods – like pots and pans and needles and threads and all the things women want and went from farm to farm selling it. And grandfather bought all that stuff. So they were friends for over 30 years. And maybe longer, I don’t know.

Now, when you were growing up, were you a reader? Did you have favorite books?

Some. More an outdoor person.

And in school, did you have a favorite teacher or a favorite subject?

I had a lot of them. I had a lot of good teachers.

In the lower grades – you can remember some of those?

Not really. I remember our English teacher. Came to me after the war and said, “Pat, I took care of you in high school. You can take care of me ‘til I die.” I said, “That’s a fair deal.” And after we became close friends, she says, “You’re the only student who ever got the best of me.” I said, “I don’t know what I did.” She says, “I jumped on you about your poor spelling.” And I said, “Well, I’m going to have a secretary when I’m grown, and she’s going to spell for me.” What’s turned out to be true.

Now did your dad have a look at your grades, at the children’s grades? Did he supervise that?

No. I never made bad grades; I never made good (I call A’s good). I had B’s and C’s and a few A’s. I should have had. I was always 79 and got a C or 89 and got a B. I was always that close to being a grade higher.

Your parents didn’t look at the children’s report cards?

No. And, anyway. I remember, they brought in a turkey from one of the ranches out there at Yancey for Thanksgiving, and we all ate over there on Thanksgiving. My kids learned to play with it [the turkey] when they were growing up. Rung its head off and cooked it for supper. When they got to the table, they said, “Is this ‘Gobble Gobble’?” “Yes.” “Well, I don’t think I’m hungry.” And they didn’t eat a bit of it.

And so I saw a lot of the barter system. And so I wasn’t above bartering whenever I ran into a good deal. I remember a patient owed me who was an alcoholic, Lewis, and he was
in charge of the rental cars at Gillespie Ford. And he came in to me all of a sudden and says, “You want to buy an LVD?” I said, “I’ll buy it if the price is right.” He said, “Well, if the price would be right, I’ll sell it to you at Gillespie’s cost less what we’ve depreciated.” So I bought it, bought an LVD for about $3500 – I don’t know, maybe $33,000. He came back to see me, and he told me, “Well, I sold all the rest of them for a thousand dollars more than I charged you.” And one day he walks into the office, puts his cigar on the desk, and says, “This is a special day.” I says, “I don’t know what it is.” He says, “I’ve been dry 25 years today.” I said, “Yes, it is.” And so we stayed in touch all these years and so forth. And about a year ago - he runs an AA meeting that he pays for himself - I was asked to go to his birthday party, and I said, “I’ve got a conflict; I can’t go.” He called back the next day, “Well, can you come to the next meeting? I’ll pick you up?” I said, “Sure, I’ll go.” We got to talking, telling him all the things we’d done over the years. He says, “First thing I remembered you gave more stuff, and I drank anyway. And it made me so sick, I was across Broadway, I had to CRAWL across Broadway.

So, we went through all of our stories, his stories. About buying the car and his daddy. I go back to his daddy. And Willis had a used car lot, and they bought one car, and we had Armstrong Tires and Rubber and Sears Roebuck. Had a tire testing out San Pedro by Olmos between San Pedro and Olmos Creek. And they rented the big Chrysler Imperials, took the seats out and floor mats out and put a driver’s seat in it and bolted a lot of heavy weight to the floor. And they drove to Hico and back twice a day, which was 600 miles round trip. So they were driving 1200 miles a day. So in 270,000 miles they sold her, put the brand new seats and floor mats back in them, and auctioned them off. And they bought one. And a man walked in and looked at the car and says, “I want to buy it.” He says, “You don’t want that car. It’s got 200 some thousand miles on it.” He went back and looked at it and said, “You’re a goddamn liar.” Bought his car.

So I bought a car from them which was stolen. It was a leased car. It was stolen in California, and it only had about 4000 miles on it, and it was the first of the more modern cars, and the speedometer got to doing this. [Hand movement] And it had a lock on the speedometer. And we wrote the company and asked them, would you send us the key, and we’ll send you the key and the lock back. They says no, so we had to break it out! And put a new speedometer in this car. It was an excellent car. I found out in those days Ford put twice as much insulation in the leased car as it did in the regular cars. It would be so nice that you’d buy one!

That was my experience with that. And now I’ll start with Duke.

Dad went to Johns Hopkins. Duke was a new school. And the professor, Dr. Davison, whom we all called Dean Davison, is the only dean that built the school, staffed the school, and ran the school until WWII when he was taken to building medical schools around the world. So he was only a consultant after that. And it was a brand new school. I was in the fourth 4-year class. They had about two classes of two-year, where they had two years somewhere else and got them to come over to staff the hospital. So I was probably about the seventh class, but I was the fourth four-year class. And Dean Davison
went to Hopkins. Looked at the records of the people they planned to keep as professors, interviewed them and said, “Which would you rather be – a professor at Hopkins at 64 and retired at 65, or a professor in a new medical school and be a full professor at 30 with the same salary you’re getting at Hopkins?” So he staffed it without too much problem. So instead of being like the university where I had student teachers for the first two years, I had the professor of medicine, the professor of surgery, the professor of bacteriology, the professor of chemistry, and so forth, as my teachers the first year we were there.

The secretary was the wife of the Professor of Anatomy – and I can’t remember her name, and it’ll get me when my computer lets loose. They had a deal, where you paid so much a semester for your supplies. You got the stuff for your books, your microscope, your stethoscope, your blood pressure equipment, your lab equipment. You graduated, you got it free. If you didn’t graduate, it was given to another student. Anyway, she was kind of a mother hen. If you had problems, you talked to her, and she was close to everybody.

Did you have friends from Texas who were in your class with you?

No, I was the only one there. We only had 69 students. And 50% had to come – no, 30% came from North Carolina, and 50% had to come from North Carolina and the surroundings. Not North Carolina - Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina and Georgia, Virginia. The rest were from all over. The percentages were close, but it may have been slightly different. So we had people from New York, we had people from Baltimore. We had one from, a Mormon from Salt Lake, and people from Florida.

What made you decide to go to Duke?

Well, I was accepted. Among other spots. Dad wanted me to go there.

He did?

So that’s why I went. And in addition, my brother was going to the University of Virginia that year. So I still had my Model-A Ford, and we drove into Virginia, dropped him, and I went down to Duke.

Were you homesick?

A bit. But I had a radio. First year I lived off campus because of the school. And I lived with an old man who had a Model-A Ford, a business coupe which I’d never seen – and I’ve never seen one like it since – and we were very close. And the one female in my class lived upstairs. So I carried her to school, and she’d put money in for gas, and so forth. And we worked on the same anatomy table with a cadaver – female.

Do you remember her name?
Doris Searles. And we got into an argument once cutting along the nipple. (And you can cut that out if you want). “Doris, what would you do if somebody raped you?” She’d blush and blush. We’d just laugh. And she got where she’d say, “I’d just lay back and enjoy it.” And after that, the fun was gone.

But she was a good sport.

Yeah.

And the feeling amongst you, you had a good camaraderie?

Yeah. The whole class is still close.

Is it?

Yeah.

Did you find the studies difficult? Did you enjoy them?

Well, since we had 2-hour classes and nine people in a class. I don’t have to answer, do I? You had to study. You had to know your subject, and you had to expect to be called on two or three times each time. So this whole studying for tests wasn’t done; you studied EVERY DAY. And we didn’t have where you could go down there and get out a video tape. You had to use it and so forth. Anyway, we weren’t taught just that; we were taught how to be a doctor, how to act with patients. We had one course… the last semester we would have one patient a week. We’d go to anatomy, physiology, for a half a day, pathology, chemistry, everything. And then we’d sum it up Saturday on that half-day. And I liked it real well.

They did away with it. I think they were wrong because it made people understand how each factor tied in with the other, which is part of this training we’re talking about. We also had a course from a professor at the University of North Carolina, and he talked about all the epidemics that we have: typhus, rocky mountain spotted fever, bubonic plague, syphilis, and all the rest of them, and the flu epidemic, how they get like this and they flare up big, then they calm down and go a long way, then they flare up again. Now you look at them - they still do it! On your flu – now you watch - they reported on the radio just exactly what I’m saying. And he was predicting all this stuff even back then.

So studying a lot, we could go to a movie occasionally. We could have a beer. Beer was legal. But they didn’t open the theater until noon on Sunday. Bob Tate, who was at Alamo Heights Methodist Church for years. His brother was Willis Tate, was president of SMU, and he was with us at the YMCA when we used to go up to the YMCA camp which is now “something Arrow”, “Flaming Arrow” or something. I was up there with Willis Tate the year they bought it. And all they had were cabins. We spent half the time to build the thing and build roads and everything. So we had close ties with the YMCA in those days, not the Boy Scouts. And so one day Willis came in to see me. We used to
go have a beer together  He’d say, “I can’t stand those damned preachers anymore.” (I’m going to get in trouble).

So they graded us. I was flunked one quarter. I caught a professor cheating. And he knew it. We had a patient with a heart on the wrong side. And they had x-rays showing it was over here. And he went and looked at the x-rays before he came over to talk to us. And I happened to walk in. Well, he never liked me. We had a Handsome Pruss. That was his name (I called him Hansom Puss). Doctor Kempner, who did the Rice Diet for hypertension, took his place and took him an extra semester, took it over, and he said to me later, “You don’t have to take that over; you aren’t dumb.” I said. “The professor didn’t like me, that’s why.”

Years and years later I was back there for a class reunion, and I walked through and I saw his name and walked in, and I told him who I was. He said, “I’ve thought about you lots of times.” He said, “Whatever happened to you?” I said, “I became a damned good doctor, that’s what happened to me. And you helped me get there.” And I said, “I interned in Baltimore, I went to Walter Reed Hospital, I met a girl who I later married, I was transferred to West Point from Walter Reed because the man who was supposed to go there was married, getting married, and they had no quarters for a married person. That much I knew. And I was disappointed because I was supposed to get six months in surgery, and I didn’t get any.” He says, “Doc, sometimes the thing that seems to be the worst thing that ever happened turns out to be the best.” And it did. So that’s how I went to West Point.
Dr. Nixon, you were talking about Duke and your experiences there. Will you tell me more?

I was the only student from Texas, and as I remember, half of the students had to come from the surrounding area – North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, and maybe Tennessee, and the rest of us were scattered all over the United States. I had classmates from New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Illinois, a Mormon from Salt Lake. That’s all I remember right off.

How did you decide to go to Duke?

Well, Dad went to Johns Hopkins, and Duke at that time was known as “Little Johns Hopkins.” Did I discuss how they picked the staff earlier or not?

I’m not sure, but maybe you should just tell us what you remember.

Well, Dr. Davidson who was elected or picked to set up the new medical school was a graduate of Johns Hopkins, was also a Rhodes scholar who took time off from Duke and went to England, where he met Osler and became a close friend of his and visited in his home and so forth. For more information on that, get the book, Dr. Davison at Duke University, and you can get all the information you need on him. He worked with the architects to lay out the school and saw it built, went to John Hopkins and looked over the people they had planned to keep as professors and said to ‘em, “Which would you rather be – a full professor at 64 at Johns Hopkins and retired at 65 or come to a new school and be a full professor at 30?” And most of ‘em accepted. And those that he didn’t get from Duke, he got from other medical schools. And that was what we had as teachers.

Our classes were small, as small as ten at a time, with a full professor asking you questions, so you either learned to study EVERY DAY – you couldn’t bluff yourself like you did at college, where you could study for a test and make an A when you hadn’t studied [since] the last test. That didn’t work. So we all had to study. And you would get called on once or twice EVERY DAY because of the small number of people in the class. And as a result, you always studied! And we only had one girl in the class, named Doris Searles, who worked with me on the cadaver, which was a female. And the other was Harold Munson and – I can’t remember who the fourth one was. And Doris and I interned together in Baltimore – I don’t remember where Harold moved. I haven’t seen much of him since because he never came to reunions.

We had a lot of interesting teaching that, I don’t think, they use today. We would first learn the different departments - history and anatomy, physiology and pathology,
chemistry and so forth - and learned all of the stuff and got to where we’d – after being on that subject for a week – we’d meet on Saturday and go over it with the professor and be questioned on how much we knew. And that went on for two years that way, and one semester we had, we’d be given one case – now this was after we got on the ward –

I’ll start with something different. We had a professor from the University of North Carolina who spent a whole semester talking about epidemics that we had: typhus, typhoid, tuberculosis and all the other big epidemics, in which he showed us how they would build when small amounts were very severe, dropped down to medium with a larger population, then another rise at the end. And those things hold today. And so we got an unusual training, I think, that they don’t use today, and much of it is good, but for time’s sake, a lot of it’s been changed. And they picked, they taught us not only medicine but how to deal with people, how to deal with the public in a PR point of view which is probably not done at all today.

What about the humanities? Did you have to take courses in…

No, not too much. That was mostly undergraduate when we did that? And you look back and say, what should I have taken, living in Texas, that I didn’t take in the undergraduate or high school? One, is to know Spanish; the other one is to learn to type. And, as a result, I felt a little handicapped, for not knowing these things.

Were you able to make up the lack, to take courses?

Oh, I don’t think we had to do it. I would have liked to have had it. It wasn’t required and didn’t need to be done. We learned that diseases can be endemic in certain areas and not in others. For example, when Duke was organized, they said that 98% of the people that had a primary exposure to tuberculosis were under the age of 18, or they’d have a positive tuberculin is what they’d test. Well, they found that in that rural area of North Carolina it was 20%. So what you find according to where you’re located can set your idea of how prevalent the disease is.

That reminds me of when I was an intern in Baltimore City Hospital, where we had a thousand bed acute hospital, relatively new, a 600-bed chronic hospital, 1200-bed old people’s home, and a 100-bed mental hospital. We had a ward that was full of nothing but syphilitic aortitis, which means syphilis of the aorta which comes off the heart. If you checked them, they would have a 90% syphilis rate. And most of ‘em were black. So, if you were reasoning, you’d say every black had syphilis. To show you how wrong I was, I went down to the obstetrics floor and checked the number there, and it was 2%! So, statistics can be totally wrong if you don’t get the right thing to start with. That’s why I don’t always agree with what I read because I saw how you can be wrong.

What other diseases were prevalent at that time that you remember having to deal with?
Well, we got all of the diseases – malaria because there’s all that waterfront. They got pellagra, which is a disease of not eating the right foods. And I’ll give you an example: We’d get a patient in with pellagra with all of this rash and so forth and dietary insufficiency, and we’d put ‘em on a good diet, and they would start getting better. And we’d go in the first week, we’d say, “how’s your food?” “Wonderful!” Next week, “How’s your food?” “OK.” Third week, “How’s your food?” “All right, but I’d like to have some fatback.”

They wanted to revert to their old diet.

To their old diet. So you didn’t cure people or break ‘em from their old ways of doing things by curing the disease. The other thing we used to see: burns on their legs. They would have a potbelly stove, and they would have wood or coal in the stove to keep warm. They’d go and straddle the stove and burn the inside of their legs.

And we also saw bromide poisoning. I guess I saw two or three thousand of those. And bromide poisoning was caused by RBCs which were common drugs: Aspirin, APCs, Stanback, Tylenol, and bromides to calm you down so it worked better. And, of course, when they overdosed, they’d get bromide poisoning. Just like we’re getting problems today from the – I forget the name. And we put them in the hospital and give them proper potassium and salt. See, salt, potassium and bromide belong to one group in the tables of metals and so forth, and so bromide would replace the potassium and salt in the body. And they’d get nuts – to put it in plain English. And so we cured a lot of them, but you’d get where you’d see them. What I was leading up to is… I came home after internship. My daddy sent me on a call to see a patient of his that I’ll call “Mrs. Smith,” which is the wrong name. And I said to him, “Daddy, she has bromide poisoning.” He says, “No, I’ve never given her any.” “But Daddy, I’ve seen too many; she’s got bromide poisoning.” “You’re wrong.” Well, that made me all the more determined to find out. So I called the druggist, “Is Mrs. Smith getting bromide?” He says, “Yes” and “Who gave it to ‘er?” He said, “Dr. Hicks” (this is 1946). I said, “Dr. Hicks has been dead since 1923, and you’re refilling that prescription?” “Yes.” “Well, kill it!” Now, that shows you how bad it was in the opposite direction.

Now, we’ve got just the opposite. We kill prescriptions before they should be killed! And to show you the other side of the coin, I saw a very rare disease at Duke, and I learned all about it, so when I came home for Christmas and said something to Daddy about it, he looked at me and says, “So what! You’ll never see another one as long as you live. Learn to treat the common cold, learn to treat influenza, learn to deliver a baby, learn to take out appendix, learn how to take out a gall bladder, and a few other things. Let somebody else do the 5%,” and walked off. The question is – did I ever see another one? No! So that will show you how things can do you.

Was your dad pleased when you had chosen medicine as a career?

I think so, but he never pushed. As I said earlier, I took a year of engineering before I went into medicine, and that didn’t hurt me because of the training. It probably changed
me in being different from other doctors a little bit, but it never hurt me. And I always
felt that I used it, so it wasn’t wasted, and of course the first year of engineering is pretty
much 50% the same as any other course, but then it began to change, and that’s when I
decided to change too.

**Did you want to be a doctor like your father, or did you want to strike out in a
different direction?**

I never thought that. In those days, we were all alike. Nowadays, things have changed.
The latest joke I’ve heard is: The internist is now taking the place of the general
practitioner, and the super-internist is either an electrician or a plumber!

And, you know, that does cover it because they work on the blockage in the arteries and
electrical changes in the arteries. Well, roughly, it is the same. And the general
practitioner has died to a great extent though it has re-grown in recent years. The
advantage of being the general practitioner was you knew your patients. You knew when
they had something to say, you knew all about ‘em; you didn’t have to ask them a lot of
questions to find out why they were there. You just knew enough psychiatry that you
could find out things by just talking.

**And you had some of that in your training?**

Very little. No.

**That was just experience then?**

Experience. We had a little, mostly the bad ones. I remember one they always showed
us who put on such a show and was allowed to grow stuff in the psychiatric facility and
grow some cotton or corn or something – and then they’d ship it. They’d even let him out
to do things, and one time we went down to the Southern Railroad depot, and they said
you can’t send it; you’ll have to put it on, have it packaged as well. And he convinced
them that he was the President of the Southern Railroad, and they took it! I mean he had
that ability!

I remember as an intern, we had another one like that. See, Baltimore closed their
psychiatric hospital in 1908 or ’09 at the city hospital and moved it all to the State, but
they had a holding area of a few hundred, and they kept those that could work. I
remember one of them on the side. He did his work that he had to do on the side. He
washed cars for 25 cents. But he washed and polished ‘em for 35 cents! So we had the
cleanest, most polished cars I had in my life.

He was one of these – this we saw in the old days, and we don’t see it anymore – he felt
that people were following him. He got on a train and rode to Chicago, and whatever
was following him was in an airplane right on top of the train and followed him out and
then followed him back.
Oh, my goodness.

We had a doctor who liked to ride trains. This was while we were interning. Someone had his appendix out, and he was sent home for two weeks or so, and he rode to New Orleans, and this other doctor got on the train, was going to ride to Washington, and he didn’t get off and ended up in New Orleans! So, you see, we had people that had quirks even in the doctors!

And you had some interesting experiences in the wards, I suppose.

Yeah. I don’t remember many right off, but we had…Our wards were named for famous people in medicine. There was a pediatrics ward named for a famous pediatrician, and if there was an obstetrics ward, it would be named for a person who was in obstetrics, and the surgical ward, for people who did early surgery and so forth. And, as a result, we got a little education on famous people in medicine.

Did you take a course in the history of medicine? Was that offered?

No. Nothing was optional in medical school. And nothing of that nature was taught in college. The course was 100% that you did everything they gave you, and you had no options. You might do something extra for extra credit like my brother did. He did a study on the patch test for tuberculosis, and ‘course, number one on his check was me. And it was negative. And he got to 99. And he says, “We might as well check again, and he checked again, and this time I was positive!

Oh, really.

So I knew I’d been exposed to tuberculosis in a period of six months. So it worried me.

What did you do?

Worried. Bob Tate, who ended up as preacher out here at Alamo Heights Methodist, used to come over and say, “I can’t stand those preachers any longer. Let’s go get a beer.” And he’d come, and I said, “No, I’ve got to study.” I didn’t have to study; I was just worried. Finally, I went to Student Health and said, “I want a chest x-ray.” And they listened to my chest and said, “You’re all right. You don’t need it.” That satisfied me ‘til I got out the door.

About a week later I went back and said, “Now, I want a chest x-ray, and if you don’t give it to me, I’m going to the Dean. And if he don’t give it to me, I’m going downtown and pay for one. I’m going to have a chest x-ray!” “Well, if you feel like that, we’ll do it.” But all that time I was suffering. Afraid I had tuberculosis and so forth. Well, I had a normal chest. Oh, yeah, I got pains in my chest. I knew I was in real trouble. They took the x-ray and called me back the next day and said, “You have an extra lobe in your lung, that’s called an azygous lobe, but you’re fine. That satisfied me, and in about two
weeks my pain was gone. So I learned a psychiatric lesson: that you can have pain that’s psychosomatic and not real.

That’s why bromide, nembutal – any of those drugs – put in with aspirin to relieve your pain, it relaxes you, and you get rid of your pain. And it doesn’t say whether it’s real or not real. It doesn’t matter!! It’s as much trouble to you whether it’s real or not real. So that’s why the smart people in the old days made up those products like BC. They relieved you of your symptoms but didn’t relieve you of your cause. So there you are.

And going on to tuberculosis, one of the reasons I was worried so is we were doing a very radical surgery in which the ribs were removed to collapse the lung for tuberculosis surgery. And when you’ve got a cavity or hole in your lung with tuberculosis, it wouldn’t heal because it couldn’t get together and heal. So they took the ribs out and collapsed the lung, and then it would be healed of any tuberculosis. And I was working in that particular part of surgery during that period. So you see why I had those symptoms.

Now, General Electric came out with a special neon light, and - I don’t remember - something like 25/32 or some such figure of the rays number, and we put on, looked like spacesuits today, to operate and do this surgery, but somehow I still got enough to get that primary lesion. It turned out that it didn’t work too well. I don’t know whether it would have helped or not because I’ve never heard of it. Then, you see, in later years they came out with the drugs for tuberculosis, and tuberculosis is not a major disease today though it was then. In fact, in the early days families didn’t talk about diseases that families had. They didn’t talk about the fact that somebody had tuberculosis. They were sending them to an elevated, dry climate like Kerrville. Just a change in the altitude and dryness, many of them did get well or get better, and they might be well for two or three years, go home and relapse. So I learned a good deal about tuberculosis.

During the war we had certain diseases like bacterial endocarditis, which is a bacterial disease of the heart. And there were certain areas in this country that if you send ‘em there, they’d get well. Why? To this day we don’t know. And with our modern antibiotics probably nobody pays any attention to that. But if it takes a thousand doses to get you well here, probably if you send them there, they’d get well on five hundred.

**You were in good health growing up? You didn’t have any problems?**

No. I didn’t. None of my family did. I don’t remember anybody having any tubercular disease. I remember a first cousin of mine had – let me think – osteomyelitis of the knee. In those days you didn’t have antibiotics, so what you did is go in and operate and take all the dead bone out, hoping the thing would heal. And she stayed at our house for years off and on like most of the rest of the people Dad would operate on, and they would live with us.

**Oh, really.**
And all those people up at Yancey came in there, and they would bring in food: turkeys, deer meat, sides of beef, sides of pork. Nobody had any money. It was a kind of barter system.
We were talking about tuberculosis and illnesses, and I was asking whether you think that people are less healthy today than they were back in the early days.

Well, my answer is this: Why did they only live 40 years? Now they live an average of 70, and some of us live to 90. But, as I said earlier, I know, in my review of genealogy, that when somebody lived to 80, which was very rare, they made a point of putting it down in the church records. It didn’t matter what name it was, they put it down.

It was so special.

Yeah. My grandmother lived to be 95, and if you go by the census records of 1850 or ’60, she was 97 because the age on the census didn’t tally with her age by two years. So you’ve got two choices: Her age is right, and whoever gave the census estimated it and missed.

What do you think about the diet today compared to the diet when you were growing up?

In some respects better; in some respects worse. I think we have destroyed a lot of good food by purifying it and taking the vitamins out, and maybe we have changed the way we live by taking foods out of the food, and maybe that’s not true. I don’t know. We’re getting into a period where the nature of people think this is true, and they feel by going back to eating normal foods, it may make your life better and not have to add vitamins and all the things we add today. The next twenty years will answer that question. I can’t do it because it may be true, and it may only be partly true. But it will be decided just like this genome thing is going to be decided.

Our present treatment with chemotherapy is to give a drug that doesn’t kill you but will kill the cancer. And the difference between killing you and killing the cancer may be 10%. But it makes you so sick frequently, that you don’t care to be alive.

I was just talking to a dentist named Dr. Nabors, who went in to have his heart checked, and they took an x-ray and found a lesion on his lung. They did a needle biopsy and said it was not very belligerent and they want to use a very mild chemotherapy. Well, they gave him the first dose. They told him it wouldn’t make his hair fall out or anything. He had absolutely no symptoms from it. They gave him the second dose three weeks later, maybe two, I don’t know what – he didn’t tell me – and he reacted. His hair fell out, he couldn’t eat, he lost 20 pounds and all the other things. So, what is the right dose for each person ‘cause it varies? And, as a result, he’s not going to take any more.
So we were discussing that.

But as far as age is concerned, you were talking about arriving at the age of 80. Tell us your age today.

I’m 91 ½.

And you’re in remarkably good shape, I believe.

No, I have to answer. Malignant melanoma of the ear, which was white and not black. So they didn’t diagnose it by color early. And it metastasized to a lesion in front of the ear and down into my salivary glands. And Doctor Stratton operated on me and did a radical mastectomy of the neck and the ear two ½ years ago, and he tried to send me to an oncologist. And I said, “I won’t go. I know the drug. I’ve seen it used on patients, and I never saw it do anything but make my patients sick, and I’m not going to take it. I’ll take my chances. If I have another metastatic lesion, you can take it out. If you find anything that you know is going to work, I’ll be glad to take it, but I’m not going to take anything I know is not going to help me.”

And so far, so good.

In my 2-year checkup last spring, he said, “Everything’s normal, and I really didn’t know whether you would be here in two years or not.” And I said, “Well, it’s my decision and I made it, but still what I say holds: You can treat me if you have something to offer.” So, my personal opinion is that the genome thing, which has come out recently, in which they have diagnosed all the genes in the human body and all other types of animals, and they set it up where it cannot be patented. And somebody with a computer made a program that could check 100 at a time, where these people were checking one at a time, so it was completed ten to twenty years before they expected to finish it.

Now, the dots on the gene can be patented because this then indicated that these dots have to do with our diseases - cancer, tuberculosis, you name it - and that if you can get that diet, work on it and find how to treat it, and if it works for cancer of the melanoma, for example, they can find something, a drug or something that works. And for melanoma – yes, you can patent that.

Now on the x-chromosome, they’ve come out with tests in which you can tell where your people came from. One gene shows that certain tribes of the Jewish race came from Africa. It can prove you’re from Scotland, Ireland, England, Scandinavia, Iceland. Of course, if you read history, they are all mixed up anyway.

What about your forefathers. What is their lineage?

The English. The Nixons came from Nottinghamshire, England in 1675. Dad wrote the mayor of Nottingham, sending money to check about ’em. Wrote back there’s no record
of any Nixons in Nottingham in those early days and sent the money back. So we hit a dead end. I have heard since that the Nixons were supposedly good fighters and were in the troops of the King of England, the private troops, soldiers, guards which is what they call them, which parade around the castles and all the other things which protected the king and the royal family in the early days. I also heard that a lot of those Nixons came from Ireland, where most of the Nixons come from. That’s only a hint. I don’t know how much truth is in it. It’s all second-hand.

Was your father’s name Pat or Patrick?

Neither.

What was it?

He was named Ireland Nixon.

Really!

Named for the governor of the state of Texas named Governor Ireland. Not from the country of Ireland. Got nicknamed “Pat,” and he changed his name to Patrick Ireland Nixon.

I see. And you have the same name?

Yes.

And your son as well?

Yes.

What did they call YOU when you were growing up?

Pat.

You’ve always been called that?

Yeah.

You didn’t have a nickname?

Nothing more than “Pat the Irishman.”

Have you been to Ireland?

No. I’ve never been to Europe.
You never wanted to travel?

I’ve traveled extensively in the United States.

Really. What areas did you enjoy seeing?

All of them. I belong to the Old Car Club and the Horseless Carriage Club. The Antique Automobile Club of America and the Veteran Motor Car Club of America had a national tour every year. And they had them all over the country, and I never could take the time to go as any other would go. I’d fly up there, and there’d be people that had plenty of room to ride in the cars with them, and I rode on more of those tours as a passenger and never took a car!

What did you see?

Well, let’s see. I’ve been to Florida. I’ve been to Virginia, West Virginia. I’ve been to Pennsylvania. I’ve been to New York and Niagara Falls. I’ve been to Indiana where French Lick is and to the old hotel that’s American-style, where you had all your meals. And that hotel had railroad tracks in the front yard where in the old days people parked their private railroad cars and stayed there. On the third floor the family ate. On the second floor the maids and the help and the children ate. And you could have a seven course dinner every day.

And we went all the way around the country – Santa Claus Land, Indiana - I was riding in the rumble seat. I heard a kid say “Look at that person, coming out of the back of that old car!” I was riding in a rumble seat.

Did you go to the national parks?

All of them. Not all of them; many of ’em. You name it; I’ve been to it. I’ve been to the one out there in West Texas – Big Bend. And I was there many times before it was a park. I guess I have had a mechanical touch all my life too because we were out there and broke a main lead of the spring, ruining the tire. And in those days when it dropped back, you put the brakes on and slid the tire hole in it. We’d put the spare on. I’d jacked it. And in those days the rear bumper was made out of spring steel like that. Took the jack and jacked the thing back in place. Took barbed wire from the fence and tied it closed, and we went all the way back to San Antonio like that.

Getting back a little bit to Duke and your career. Did you have any mentors there or anyone who sponsored you? Or were you on your own? Did you feel as if you were on your own?

We had a lady who was the wife of the professor of anatomy, and I meant to look up her name, and I can’t remember it. I’ll give it to you later. His wife was kind of the mother of the University students.
Duke issued to the older students a microscope, stethoscope, blood pressure machine, mirror and eye examining machine, and you paid so much a quarter for it. And if you graduated, it was yours. And if you didn’t, it was given to someone else. You forfeited it.

And she was kind of a mother confessor of everybody in the school. She took the place of - they did have fraternities, but they weren’t very active. As they needed the room, they took the rooms away from the fraternities, so we had no place to meet. And they didn’t amount to anything. And incidentally, ARA was the room that they gave to students who were graduates. There was one for undergraduates – Phi Beta Kappa. When Dad went to school, medical schools gave Phi Beta Kappa, which he got.

Oh, really.

Uh huh. See how little things come up!

Were you homesick for Texas when you were living there?

I was a bit at first. But I lived in town for one year. I had a radio. And in those days WOAI had a 50,000 watt station. For some strange reason, the towers which held up the antenna were not exactly in tune with the antenna, and it hit the tower and flipped it into the ionosphere, and went to Australia. And I could throw a wire out into the tree in the daytime and listen to the football games in Texas. The freaks of nature I took advantage of.

Was there time for a social life?

Oh, yeah. The school put on parties and so forth mainly because they wanted us to know how to get along with people. They tolerated moderate drinking, which a few of them overdid occasionally. I remember we were in were in the Washington Duke Inn and had a party. Students that got drunk were crawling up the stairs to the second floor when the Dean was standing there looking at them! I fortunately was not in that and never was a drinker.

But, yes, they had parties, and they instructed us in art and science, and getting along with people and so forth. One class I remember, well, it was a class where they’d give us one student patient that had died. We’d examine the patient. One day we’d go to anatomy. One day we’d go to physiology. One day we’d go to chemistry. Another day, to pathology. On Saturday we’d come back and review the thing. And so we had that sort of training which is not done today. I thought it was great. I don’t know that they did ’cause they discontinued it. I don’t know whether it was because of the meeting time for other things. I don’t know because I never had anything to do with the running of the school or anything, or even talking to the Dean about such things.

But when you finished Duke, were you glad the studies were over, were you ready to go on with things?
You’re never ready because you don’t think you know enough. But I went to City Hospital Baltimore, and the first thing the residents told us was two things: First one, listen to the nurses; they know more medicine than most of us do from their years of experience. Now, you can be a big shot and make them mad, and they won’t help you a bit, or you can be nice to them and they’ll help you a great deal, and you’ll learn more medicine than you learned in medical school. The other thing we were taught is when you’re working the emergency room and you have somebody come in with a cut foot, don’t sew it up. Ask them where did you cut it and were you on Back Bay? And if the answer is yes, don’t sew it up.

Why is that?

Back Bay was where the City of Baltimore dumped its sewage - without adequate plants. So that always got infected if you sewed it up. It might not get infected if it wasn’t. Did what you could and watched them closely.

And we’ve had parties, and we’d get things. We had four meals a day – three normal meals, and at 11 o’clock the dining room opened up, and you had a buffet supper for those that were working all night. We would eat because that was about all we had to do, and I gained 15 pounds in 45 days!! I outgrew my uniform!

In Baltimore?

In Baltimore. And we had good food: shrimp, crab, oysters, crabs from the bay. And we had the streetcars that were two tied together that went down to Sparrows Point, which was the big naval base where they built battleships, airplane carriers, and everything. And we could go down to the water. In those days the big airplanes were flying boats. We didn’t have the runways for big planes to land on. They came with World War II when they built all of these big ones so many thousand feet long and so forth. And we’d watch ‘em land from England, from France and so forth – and flying boats, which once in awhile you’ll see pictures of on television today. Anyway, I found out later that my wife’s mother worked at Sparrows Point during WW II.

But anyway, they had a lot of railroad tracks along the streets where we were, and every once in awhile we’d get cars that had run into those boxcars that were parked along the street. We’d have them in the Emergency Room. So we had a rule up there (just like we did at Duke) that if a patient came in before 7 o’clock, you’d have to do a workup THAT NIGHT. If it’s after seven, we didn’t have to do it ‘til the next morning. And we did all the lab work ourselves! We had no lab! WE did it all. But we didn’t have many tests. We had – I can’t remember which is which now – but all our work was in milligrams per cent, which was a logarithmic thing, which is like the logarithm of water, water which is from seven which is zero, to eight is 100, and from seven to six is 100, but it’s so much weaker. It’d take 100 times as much to kill 100 down here, and that’s why it’d run in a logarithm instead of a true value.
After the war they changed it to milligrams per cent. And it’s a straight line. And we had to learn all of that ourselves without any training. We were taught in milligrams like they’re doing today and not in grains. What is the grain relation to grams? He thought a minute and he says, “300 grains is one gram.” He said, “All I want to know is, how many bi-grains of aspirin is how many milligrams?” So, he gave me the equivalent and so forth. I can remember miles – 60mph is 88 km. So, if you have a speedometer, you’re going to go 60mph, but if you have a kilometer, it’ll show 88.

And I remember I was in the Orsinger Hudson place, and every car that Ancira Winton sold in Mexico had a speedometer in kilometers. They’d trade in a car and somebody bought it, and they were supposed to order a speedometer for it. He came in about three months later, and said, “Have you ordered that speedometer for me?” He said, “I forgot it. I’m ashamed. I’ll order it right now.” He says, “Forget it. I’m having so much fun scaring the hell out of my friends.”

I had a car when you punched a button it would change from kilometers to miles per hour. And all you did was punch a button.

That’s pretty good.

Just a side point.

We were talking about Baltimore, weren’t we? What kinds of decisions did you make when you were there, did you have an idea of what kind of future career you’d have?

No. I just applied to go to Walter Reed and was accepted.

What year was that?

1940 – June of 1940. And I was a civilian, and they put me on as contract surgeon while they were clearing me a commission, and I met my first wife there. She was a nurse from South Carolina, who like so many nurses in those days didn’t make a great deal of money, but they would work in one area of the country and then go sightseeing. And then when they got tired of that area, they’d move on to somewhere else. My wife was from South Carolina, a little town called Maitland.

What was her name?

[Ruby] Baker. She worked for that doctor Griggs after graduating. Her daddy was going to send her to college, but due to the Depression he couldn’t do it. And he was the only one kept his job. He was the foreman or meatpacker or butcher and tobacco buyer, and everybody got all the land put in his name because he was the only one who had any credit. Of course, when things got better, they wanted their land back but didn’t want to have to pay for it, and so they broke him. He was in his 50s chasing a cow and jumped over…
As I said, my wife’s father died in his 50s jumping over a little creek and died of a heart attack, and my mother [in-law] lived a long time. And then my wife died in her 50s of a heart attack. She had pains in her back; no pain in front. Had pain during the night, and the next morning her heart ruptured, and she died on the spot and never had a pain in front! In the back. And now we are finding that women DO have more pains in the back. And so my children have worried about if they’re going to inherit this, of dying in their 50s. And they’re all almost down to their 50s and haven’t died and have no symptoms. But my wife had a few symptoms before she died. But my son will be 52 this year in December – 62! – so you see, they’re getting along now.

My children were close together. There’s a point where, 62, 61, 60, and 59 - all in one, and then it spreads out. But, anyway, they’re worried about this, and I can understand why, but it may show you that you don’t always inherit exactly the same thing because they are a mixture of things that come from other people. I don’t know. But it’s an interesting thought.

She went to Chicago and worked at Michael Reese Hospital, which was a Jewish hospital. Many of the people that were there were refugees from Germany getting away from Hitler. And most of them changed their name. And they’d come in - and she was night supervisor even though she was young – and they’d come in and in their excitement would give their original names. And they didn’t put tapes on them like they do today without taking them out of the operating room. And they would remember their new American names and couldn’t find the old.

So that was some of the problems they had. I left Walter Reed after five months and transferred to West Point. My year was up, and the colonel called me in and said, “What do you want to do?” Says, “You’re either going to be discharged or you’re not.” And I said, “Well, extend it for six months.” He said, “OK. We’ll send you to medical field service school, which is now here at Fort Sam, and it was at Carlyle at that time, which was the old Indian school. And I had driven on into Washington with my wife – first wife – before we were married, and we were riding along. And of all places – The White House – when it was announced on the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed.

And that’s where you heard it, in front of the White House!

Yeah. No guards or anything to amount to anything. Took her back home, and they were saying, “Go back to your post,” which I did. And I was transferred back to West Point. Most of ‘em were transferred to new assignments as a result of the war. Back in those days the regular army had one set of numbers for being an officer, the Reserve had another, and the soldiers had a third. Now all they do is use their Social Security number.
The service has changed. I can remember my number to this day: 0399207. So my number was fairly low. I was the second reserve officer at West Point. The first one was a veterinary officer.

And I lived in the bachelor quarters. There were no other quarters available. They had a deal there that so many of them being moved out that I took a chance on getting better quarters after we were married. My wife came up, and she said, “I was told that if I want all of the service, I had to get married now. So we got married in the chapel at West Point.

And when was that? What was the date?

’42, April.

What was the mood in the country at that time?

Scared. We were not prepared. Fortunately, we WERE prepared to a certain extent because we were helping keep Great Britain from falling, so we had started doing these things. But we didn’t have very much. And, as a result, we did a lot of things quickly to try to help. My brother was drafted and went into the Marine Corps. Went through basic training and they asked, “Has anyone had any flying experience?” And he held his hand up, and he was one of four of them that was pulled out of the group that was sent to Guadalcanal in that first fight. And he had all of his training in the Air Force part of the Marines and went to the South Pacific. Tells wild tales about what happened down there. He wrote his daddy and said he was sleeping with a “wench.” Spelled the same as a female instead of a piece of equipment! So that was one of his favorite.

The other one was about - Dad had sent him some Whitfield’s ointment, which was an ointment made in San Antonio for treating fungus of the feet. Said he had one over there that they’d used everything on and had not cured it when he finally gave the doctor what Daddy sent him, a bottle of half-strength Whitfield ointment, and cured him.

That’s another thing that happened. Just yesterday Dr. Jacobs was talking about reading this article about this parasite that got in this person’s leg where it would go in a path around the leg and how they had nearly killed him trying to cure it. He said, “I know the cure.” And so did I. That is, you just take the ethylchloride spray, which we used to spray on a boil to numb it, and then open it. You just spray it on there, and it’d freeze the area, and you’d kill the parasite. It’s just one of those many things that’s important and we’ve forgotten.

I had a patient that I opened the septum of the nose two or three times because of a boil. And it would drain and it would get better and then it would start again, and I sent him to Dr. Clark, who was an ear-nose-and throat doctor. Instead of writing me a fancy report, he wrote back, “Pat, you’ve forgotten what a drain is? Stick a piece of cloth up in there in that area and keep it open until it heals.” It’s a drain. See, I got caught up with getting something.
So there a lot of interesting things that occurred at West Point. Used to make those trips to Aberdeen, which was a proving ground, and happened to make the trip in March or April just before the invasion of Europe, and they showed us everything they were going to use, including the rockets mounted on tanks and so forth, that they were going to use for the invasion.

And you got to see them.

Yeah. I went down twice. You got to go every so many years. We had a restaurant by Lake Popolopin for the training area during the time I was up there. And we’d go out there, and all the cadets were out there being trained. The lake was there, and they could swim in the lake. When I went out there, I had the jeep, and I had sick call for the soldiers, so I knew all the soldiers. And I never treated them. So I got along well with them. So I’d go by, and they would have this shooting range, and they said, “Come on over. You might as well learn to shoot.” I already knew that. My dad taught us that. So I got to shoot that and shoot an anti-aircraft, drive a tank, you name it. I did everything that they trained the soldiers to do during my time out there. The area was open; they’d abandoned all these houses. My wife and I even went there and went through the houses, looking for goodies that people had overlooked and found a few trophies. I don’t remember which ones. I think I found an ashtray, was an antique from West Point. Stuff like that.

And the families could come out and go swimming while the soldiers did. We even had amphibious jeeps, 4x6 trucks that were amphibious, and so we even went to ski behind those things. So I used to glide with one of the people who were stationed there, teaching, off the Hudson River, an amphibian. He was one of those people that graduated in one of the early classes. In fact, the soldiers that graduated in 1921 stayed second lieutenant fifteen years before they went up to first lieutenant. And THESE people had been there since about ’35 and had just been promoted to first lieutenant and captain in the front, moving them up real fast. And I used to fly with them in the AT-6, used to fly on the Beacon. And Ed studied Russian, so he put me on the Beacon and said, “Stay on it now, and when you get down around Bear Mountain, it’s going to curve around there. Don’t be surprised. It does! It’s not supposed to, but it does.” So I’d fly up to Albany and down toward New York and so forth. So, anyway, I flew on East to fly me to Washington to see my future wife, so I got to fly in those early planes. He started rushing and pulled the canopy over his head and started rushing, and I got the plane.

Did you ever fly a formation? That’s scares you to death. We had a student pilot from the Field there. I’ll think of the name of it in a minute. One Saturday we flew formation over the auxiliary field, flying 200 mph thirty feet or twenty feet off the ground in formation. That’s the only time I killed it.

You never wanted to do it again.

No. The other strange feeling...we had a pilot who was stationed at Stewart Field
up there in Connecticut, and whenever President Roosevelt was at his home at Hyde Park, he would be stationed up there at Stewart Field. One day he flew under Bear Mountain Bridge, which is a suspension bridge, and the general called and gave him hell, so the next day he flew under it upside down! General gave him hell, and I was there. Sent him into combat. That’s what he wanted, see. He didn’t want to be guarding.

Those were exciting days for you it sounds like.

My brother was stationed down there at the Field right by – what’s that last island in Florida? Key West? He was stationed at a field down there close to Key West, and all of them were told, “Don’t fly over And they’d fly up and down and over. And I said, “What did you do on the [Bermuda] Triangle? Where people get in trouble and get lost and so forth. And he said, “That’s very simple. When we got out in the Triangle, we turned our radio station on the big radio station on the Florida land. That was the way in, a straight line. Then when we got to that, we turned down. We knew where we had to go. We didn’t pay any attention to that Triangle!” Now that’s smarter than hell.

Well, anyway, we had exciting days, flying. One day we took off on the Hudson River when there was ice in the river, and a big wave came up and covered the windshield with ice. Couldn’t see. I found a little peephole; he found a little peephole. We took off like that, and when we got up about 100 feet, it had all melted. So I guess you can say that’s the time when we could have gotten killed. The Lord didn’t want you to go.

We were changing the subject back. We were married in the chapel, and we had three children while we were there.

And what are their names?

Pat, Nancy, John, Peggy. Actually, in order it’s Pat, Peggy, John, and Nancy. Pat’s a teacher at St. Philip’s. John’s a dentist. Peggy’s a teacher in Lubbock. And Nancy’s a CPA, but she doesn’t work. Her husband works for Shell Oil Company, and he’s a big shot in the seismograph work for Shell.

These children came in rapid succession, didn’t they?

Yes. We didn’t have anything else to do in those days!! NO television. They did have one television station off of the Empire State Building. There was one television station out there, and mostly there was wartime training on it. We had movies, which were free. We had all of the big shots from Broadway, who’d come up on Sunday and put on their show. I saw “Oklahoma” by the original cast. I saw Eddy Cantor when we were on our honeymoon in New York City. And people like that that came up to West Point and put on a show. I saw all of them.

I made a trip up to Niagara Falls with a corps of cadets. We all went up by jeep, and we stayed in a little town just on the way. I walked in the town center, stayed on the barge in the center of town, had our tents up. We slept in vehicles. There was a thrift store, and
I went in and bought a silver service, quadruple-plated. The plate was bad, and I bought it anyway and I sent it to my wife. And when I got home, she was crying because she couldn’t make it polish. Took it to New York and had it re-plated. When the war was over and I said goodbye, and do you know that thing showed up a year later! They mailed it here. No note. No thank you. No nothing. It’s all paid. And my daughter has it to this day.

But we went up all around through the hills up there, and in the meantime that’s when my wife’s father died. And I flew with a C-47, which was the Army DC-3. They used to change engines in Dallas, and I looked at the log on this, and one of them had 1400 hours, ran like a new engine. The other had 2400 hours, and it ALSO ran like a new engine! I flew it back to West Point. It got to going up high and I said, “What are you doing?” He said, “Well, it says on the map that the mountains are 3000 feet, so I’m going up to 7000 feet. And I thought to myself, “Now that’s the kind of pilot that I want to fly with!”

So I rode the train on down to South Carolina to his funeral and back. I knew all the soldiers. They’d have all the radar. In those days they had to put a big transformer that weighed 500 pounds 20-30 feet in the air. And if you got within 100 yards, they’d shoot you.

I look back, and I must have had a clearance that wouldn’t quit. And didn’t know it. And I’m sure that the reason was that Dad met with all of the people. Before Brooks General Hospital the soldiers, doctors, met with Bexar County Medical Society. And so Dad knew them. So when they picked me from Walter Reed, they knew who I was, and I ended up with a clearance in three weeks. Instead of six months. Because of him and knowing all of the things. And they probably said, “You know a son of his is not going to be a spy!” So, anyway, I think that had something to do with me going up there. I’m not sure; it’s just a guess.

So we had parties and everything else up there. I’d see rare cases. I had one come in and said, “Doc, I don’t know what’s the matter with me. I’m in the band, play for all of the music, and I was in the orchestra playing for the big party. And I blacked out, and they tell me that I played for 30 minutes without even knowing where I was. And playing, not even missed a note.” You know what that is, don’t you?

No.

Low blood sugar!

And I had another one. I don’t know what it is, but this one stood out. I even have people after the war write me and say, “I came down with Lou Gehrig’s disease, and I think I was having symptoms, and I need you to say. You put it together and, sure enough, they did. But only the very beginning. Things like that. So I talked to them, even I wrote, talked to people years later.
And you enjoyed those challenges in your career?

I never called them challenges. It was fun. But it was more than most people… I would see a division in our field house, and if they happened to be from Texas, I’d visit with them. And the other thing I remember, generally an alcoholic craves alcohol. Texans and people who have been soldiers out at Fort Sam crave Mexican food. And if you got any, you got Gebhardt’s canned food. You got tortillas, enchiladas, rice and beans, and so forth. And when you got it, you’d set up a party and ask everybody that liked it.

And Doctor Hartmann – Al Hartmann - who is a member of Bexar County [Medical Society] was a resident in Massachusetts General during those days. And I went up to visit. And Flora Day Towns was his wife, and she was from Luling, where Daddy was from. We used to date – we were not boy and girlfriend in those days - and I went up to visit and stayed with them. And he took me out to Massachusetts General and MIT, and I saw the first computer that was ever built in this country. Used about five rooms. Had over 100,000 vacuum tubes in it.

Do you know where the term “it has a bug” came from?

No.

Moth got in one of those computers, and they dug that moth out of there, and that’s where the term “bug” came from. And they transferred that to something that messed up the computers. It’s a “bug.” Isn’t it funny how words start?

That’s right. How they evolve.

Yeah. And there’s plenty of them. Well, anyway. And he’d take me out to show me where they were doing all that research on the radar. (Which you weren’t supposed to know as I learned later.) And I didn’t have enough gasoline, so I mixed it with kerosene. And I smoked all the way to Boston!

So I wasn’t restricted. And when we left, I got some soldiers I knew down in the quartermaster corps to go in their trailer to help, and I went down and borrowed an axle that I took out of a ’32 Chrysler convertible, which I drove to Madison. Would take you down and made a trailer, and we took that trailer into Texas with clothes and stuff we needed, figuring I wouldn’t see anything when we got home until months later. And six weeks later there was our stuff. And in it was two things: a snow shovel about that wide and a sled, which of course we didn’t need!

So the other warrant officer when I got ready to leave authorized me a set of tires to put on my car, which gave me tires for my trip. Can’t remember his name… That’s one of my failings in life – I can’t remember names. But in my practice I was all right. You could hand me a chart on a patient, and I could tell you who it was just from reading the chart, not looking at the names. But the other way around, I’ve always been weak. So anyway, that’s how I got back to Texas.
Were you happy to be back?

Yeah. But I moved in with Daddy and Mother, and of course I knew in six weeks that I was either going to have a divorce or a house! The girl didn’t mind, but Mama did.

Two women under one roof!

I got to looking, and I found a house on 2000 West Kings Highway. Owner of it was a baker. I don’t remember his name, but I remember he was down on San Pedro near Fredericksburg Road, where it starts. And I bought the house from him for $4500, I think.

And what year was that?

’46. And we added to it, and I think all my children were born there.
Came back to Texas. Discharged Thanksgiving Day, 1945, I drove from West Point to South Carolina. The warrant officer in charge gave me four new tires, and I built a two-wheel trailer down in the shops, and I put the best tires on it. And we drove to South Carolina. And that’s where my wife’s mother lived and her sister. Her sister’s husband had just been discharged. He was in the Battle of the Bulge and had frostbite in both legs and both hands. And we became friends – that’s later. And we drove on to Texas and stayed with my father and mother. And as I said earlier, I had to move – lose a wife or lose a mother (they didn’t get along that well that close together).

So I bought a house for $13,000 on 2000 West Kings Highway, and we lived there 'til the kids were all sixteen, and we moved on Mary Louise to the best house I ever owned - two-storey, tile roof, rock.

And how did you start your career when you got back to Texas? What did you do?

Went to work with Daddy. He had extra room that he kept during the war, so I had an office and would take calls for the exchange and make calls for him and slowly built up my practice. I was in the Medical Professional Building, which is now a hotel, the Emily Morgan Hotel, across from the Alamo. So I had plenty of time to sit in the Alamo yard, eat lunch, go through and look at things, whatever.

Were those happy years?

Yeah. My children were young. I spent a good deal of time with my children.

Did you have any obstacles that you had to overcome at the beginning of your career, or was it a very smooth transition?

I would say smooth. Because if I needed to know anything, I asked my father for his opinion. He said to me, “I’ve been on call now for five years every weekend [during the war], so now YOU’RE on call for every weekend. And I stayed that way until Pat McKay and I joined forces and put me off every other weekend. And I started taking off Wednesday, and he’d take off Thursday. And that way we covered each other for a long time until we finally built it up to where we had four. We had Perry Post at one time. We had Dr. Shingle. We had Otto Kruger.

And Pat McKay and I stayed together until I retired. Otto was just out of medical school, and he was a lab technician before he was a doctor, so he had double training. He knew more about labs than, what tests meant, than anybody else around. And one of the first contacts I had was when he worked for me for two weeks while I took a vacation, went to
South Carolina to visit my wife’s family. And we asked him to come in with us, which he did, and we sat down to set up the year’s thing, and he said, “Why do you take so much time off?” And we said we’re not taking much time off. And about six months later, he called me and said, “I need to take off, so I’m taking a week off.” So you find out that the pressure of doing a practice is not the same as the pressures of medical school, where everything was taken care of.

So, by and large, as a group you all got along well?

Yes, extremely. And if you wanted to change a date, you’d call up and do it. So we always covered for each other with no problem. And we’re still good friends.

Did you socialize or was there no time for that?

Not a great deal. We’d go to some parties and so forth. I remember Bexar County Medical Society had a meeting out at Brooks Air Force Base, and I cut up with an officer who was a full colonel at the time. “Do you know who that was?” I said, “No.” He said, “That’s the Surgeon General there!”

So life in San Antonio must have been very different from what it is today?

I missed all of the society of San Antonio – the Cavaliers, the balls and so forth - because I was away from 1935 until 1945, and that took me through those years, so I was not close to any of those groups. And that made a difference. I elected to live on this side of town which is the Medical School side instead of Alamo Heights, so I didn’t get into the group. I got into a local club like the … I don’t know why it’s called the Conopus Club. And three of us whose fathers were in it were elected first ones in after the war. That was ______, Doug Morgan and myself. And I’m still in it. The other two are dead. The son of Morgan is Doctor Morgan, the psychiatrist here in town.

And what is the Conopus Club all about?

Just a luncheon club. It was started out to be a national, and we probably ended up being the only ones in the United States. Our motto is: *We do nothing, but we do it well.* They used to have parties for the people who came down for the winter. They had parties in the Milam Building. They had dances. They had get-togethers. All sorts of things. But now we follow the motto a little better. We have parties for ourselves. That’s about it.

And what is the Conopus Club all about?

Everything. Doctors, lawyers, FBI, CIA. In fact, we had a bunch of talks just this last year by the head of the Homeland Security, and what his area is. His area is San Antonio to El Paso to Houston and to all of South America. We had a retired man from the FBI who talked the next week. We had a man from the CIA who talked. And one from the Air Force. So, as a result, I’ve had the opportunity to know more of what’s going on than the average person.
But it was only men, not women?

Yeah.

And what about your wife…did she have time for any hobbies?

My first wife was a nurse. She never worked after we got married. But she worked with organizations like the social groups and so forth and was very active in the church. We went to Gibson Methodist Church. We were there when it built up.

And your father was going there too?

No, he went to Woodlawn - Laurel Heights Methodist Church on Woodlawn.

And were there family get-togethers, where you, your wife, and children…

Oh, we had family get-togethers. Daddy - until he was unable to have us over - for Thanksgiving. And we would have him over Christmas. And that went on all the way up until Daddy died. And for one or two years my brother Robert took over and had us for Thanksgiving. And now the whole family is still at the place for Thanksgiving. And for years we had Thanksgiving at our place in the country. And then Christmas when I settled down, in town.

What about your brothers, were you in pretty close contact with them at that stage of your lives?

I was close to my oldest brother because we were roommates in medical school. And my twin brothers: Thomas was in the Marine Corps in the South Pacific, and Ben was in the Army Air Force and flew the hump from India to China. And they hauled supplies over there, but when they had the bad wind, they might have to take the gasoline they hauled over and put it back in their own plane to get home. So it was, they didn’t have planes that had the long-distance ability we have today, and they didn’t understand what a jet stream was. And you couldn’t get back. You’d get into a jet stream and burn it up. In fact, we rode planes flying B-17s, the bombers flying to Hawaii that almost ran out of gasoline because of the jet stream. It would take enough to go a long way. And my brother’s pretty well-versed on the battles in the South Pacific, and he also wasn’t a drinker and wasn’t a gambler, so he didn’t have anything to do on that 180 days he was on board ship. So he studied the manual on foreign airplanes so he got so he was better than the Navy! He was on board ship, and they said, “You come up and stay with us.” And he ate with the Navy instead of with the Marine Corps that were on board ship. And he said, we used to get – what’s that meat that’s so salty? – Thomas said he used to get it from Australia and said it was so salty they washed it in sea water to get the salt off!

He said the only one time he was a coward, said, “I got behind a bulldozer when a Jap-Zero was shooting at me.” But anyway, he was in a lot of those things. He said he was
once inside a tank when it hit a mine, and it blew his pants off and just put a little nick in his leg.

**He was lucky then!**

Yeah. He said, “I guess I deserved a Purple Heart just like anyone else. I didn’t even take the time to turn it in.”

**What was the atmosphere like in San Antonio after the war? How do you remember it? Was it a sleepy, little town?**

No, it had pretty well grown out of it. Gotten to the place to where they had enough outsiders that moved in. The old-timers that ran the town no longer had control of the town. So there were radical changes.

**Who were the old controlling families? Do you remember some names?**

The Gillespies. The Beckmanns. I can’t think of all those names.

**But it changed in character?**

Yeah.

**Was it a good place to raise your children?**

All of those people who lived down on King William Street.

See, I realize what so many people never realize that San Antonio would have remained a sleepy, little town if it hadn’t have been for the Irish, the English, and the Germans coming to San Antonio. Because they changed it from a sleepy, little town to an industrial town. You had two big groups and the Jewish people. They were the ones that made this town grow. We had places like Strauss Frank, which is a big supply thing. Alamo Iron Works. And the other one. And they put the industry in San Antonio. And it wasn’t the Indians or the Latin Americans that did it. They helped carry it, but they didn’t bring it in.

One of my good friends was Ed Fest. His family came over with the people in Castroville, with Castro, and his family realized they couldn’t do very well there ‘cause they were millers. They brought their mills to San Antonio. Beckmann set up Pioneer Flour Mill. Started in Fredericksburg, and the city set one up in competition, so they moved to San Antonio. Beckmann found a place on the River that was curved, and the river depth here and there was a few feet different. He dug his channel over there and ran his little flour mill off of that water.

**Is it still there?**
Not the water wheel but the business. Used to be called Pioneer Flour Mill, and they tell me now it’s called C. H. Guenther & Son. That’s because it’s the Pioneer Flour Mill, the supply – I don’t know the name of it – but they make all sorts of other products like biscuit mix and cornbread mix and all the sort of stuff. And they just made a big contract with McDonald’s to supply the buns for their new product, so this stock has gone wild. The latest acquisition is they bought White Lily flour, which you may have known in Florida or may not.

I’ve heard of that brand.

It was in Tennessee. Pioneer never could break into it, so they bought the company, and it was run down, and they put in all new equipment and so forth, so it’s just taken off like a bullet.

Thomas was married to a Beckmann, who was one of the descendents of the original owners. He still owns a good deal of stock. And the income from it has doubled in the last year just due to that one contract. And she gave one share of stock to each one of her children. Just to say you’re an owner. He used to give us a Christmas present – a box about so big with all sorts of things: the gravy mix, the cornbread mix, the biscuit mix, samples of the flour and all the other things they make – gravies and so forth. And the old home is now a restaurant down there by the flour mill. So that’s all you need to know about that.

Well, I grew up as all these things happened, and I went through the enlargement and the growth and so forth.

Do you think it’s changed a lot in character?

Oh, yes. Totally.

Do you think the changes are for the better?

I would say some are good, and some are bad. Because we lose things that are good, and we shouldn’t. And then if we don’t do something about it, it’s too late. For example, you know where the auditorium is, the Municipal Auditorium? Do you know what that ground was? The River came like this – like a horseshoe – and then went on down, a channel that was filled in. That’s the old riverbed. Straightened the river out. A horseshoe which is now the - what do you call it along the River – the River Walk. Now, they’ve got another channel that’s just straight through. In case of a flood or high water, they’ve got a dam down there that they fixed with a floodgate to empty all the water so it doesn’t flood downtown. Then recently they built a tunnel from over by Hawthorne School right at the edge of Brackenridge Park that they used that big 18 or 20 foot Roto-Rooter thing and ran all the way down and comes out on the San Antonio River south of town. So if they ever get a flood, it doesn’t flood downtown.

Did you see tourism beginning to come into San Antonio through the River Walk?
Well, a lady talked to the luncheon club about tourism and so forth last week, and she said that two biggest tourist attractions in Texas are the Alamo and the River Walk. The Alamo is first, and the other one is in the Top Ten. So the answer to your question was made by the person that is in the know. And there are other things – conventions. Our convention center is now big enough that we can have large conventions, which we couldn’t in the early days. And we have enough hotels, so they can do that.

What about all this expansion to the Northwest?

The largest employer is the Medical School area, and it’s the thing the city has spent the least money in trying to encourage. It’s done it on its own. They spent all this money getting Toyota here, and it’ll be over later, and we won’t have a million people working. If they’d spent that much money in this area, I don’t know what all it would have done. So this is not my answer. This is the answer of the people who were talking. But Toyota will help.

When you were starting out in your practice, what historical events can you remember that come to mind to you that had a big impact on your life or career?

That’s a hard question. Historical events in San Antonio? I don’t know right off.

Did you have a strong political orientation? Did you belong to a party?

I’ve been a member of the Rotary. That way I’m either. I’ve many times called myself a disenfranchised American. One group’s too much for giving away the money to the rich, and the other one’s too much for setting up roadblocks that runs business out of this country. So I only vote for who I want and regardless of party.

And you never dabbled in local politics?

No. I’ve known a lot of people that did. But I never did.

Were you optimistic about the way things were developing in San Antonio?

Always. My dad used to say when you have an impression, it hits San Antonio about a year later than it hits the East and lasts about a year longer.

Look at the times. It hasn’t changed totally. A lot of buildings were built due to laws we have, that you can build a building even though it was empty. Take it off your income tax and not have to spend money on it and get a ride on it. They passed that law and did away with it a few years ago. And now that’s not true. I’m saying developments occur, and things move out and enlarge.

I was driving out to Helotes to see my nephew, and I noticed that the city limits of San Antonio is here; the city limits of Helotes is 100 yards away. There’s a space about 100
yards wide that is neither. I don’t know why they didn’t put them together. We’ve always had cities within the city. We’ve got Alamo Heights. We’ve got Leon Valley. And so forth. I don’t know whether that helps or hurts.

**You said you had a country place, your family? When did you get that? You lived in the city but met out in the country sometimes?**

Oh, we’ve got about four acres. Used to be in the country; it’s in the city limits now. And so the taxes are awful high, but it’s too late to move.

**But your career went very smoothly being there with that group? Your colleagues -**

We started out as a general practitioner, doing everything including surgery and obstetrics. And, of course, we cut things out later and so forth. Plus the fact that the insurance has gotten so high on each one of those that you couldn’t possibly do all those things now. I was talking to a colleague of mine from internship, and he’s an obstetrician, and he said they paid a full amount on himself and his two partners. Each one of them paid the full amount, then they paid another full amount to cover each other.
I started remembering things that happened. There was an alcoholic that lived out about twenty-five miles out San Pedro Avenue up toward Johnson City. He’d get in trouble and call people up there to come take care of him. This was about 1937, and nobody had money. He’d offered to pay with a hundred dollar bill. Word got around, so finally he called out there, and he took that $100 bill and drove all the way to the Medical Arts Building and went into Medical Arts Pharmacy, which was open all night, got the change, took it all the way back to him, and the other one was sitting there, who was telling the story, says, “Why don’t you give me a check?” He says, “I know the value of that.”

So we had a lot of crazy things.

**Some interesting characters you met along the way.**

I remember Dr. Reppert came in to that Saturday brunch at the Saint Anthony Hotel, which I think I told you about, where we met after working ‘til Saturday noon, and Dad would take up money to buy books for this library when it was a young library. He came in with me and said, “What’s the matter?” He says, “I got called to have a house call down by the Missouri Pacific Station, which is now part of Union Pacific, and he says, “I walked in, and there was a man cleaning a 45,” he says, ‘he’s up in that upstairs bedroom. He sure is hurt. I want you to give a half gram of morphine.’ I says, “Reppert, what would did you do?” I gave the half gram of morphine. What would you have done?”

So, we had a lot of experiences like that. We had one doctor that worked so much ‘cause he couldn’t get along with his wife. Then he had a heart attack and died at 30!

We had a smart doctor, though, that never admitted he could understand Spanish. He’d make all these house calls, and he’d ask in English – what is so-and-so? – and they’d go back and forth and then tell him what they wanted him to know, and he would hear exactly every word of it.

**And understood everything.**

And he NEVER until he quit making house calls ever admitted he understood EVERY WORD.

We also had doctors that checked medicine for drug companies. One of them had a drug – had three drugs, in fact – checking for *herpes*. And he was letting us all get it and try it. Two of them were worthless. The third one worked. It would dry herpes up in a week, and all the lesions would be gone, and all the pain would be gone. But that was back in
the time when the Pure Food and Drug was acting real horsey. If they didn’t like the company, they would take the literature, put it on their desk, and leave it a few years and write on the envelope, “More Tests to Run,” without ever looking at what had been done. So they were just as bad in those days in destroying things as they are now lettin’ them go through too fast.

You’ve seen that change.

Anyway, I don’t know what the drug was; he never did say. It was numbered. And obviously, it was . . . Finally, the company threw their hands up in the air and discontinued it because we never got the drug that cured it. We HAD the drug that could cure it, but we didn’t have any . . . it never got on the market.

And there were good drugs that were being tested. Daddy had that Parkinson’s from the flu of 1918, and he had a drug that kept him going for about three years. He finally said to Loma, the colored lady that was with us for over forty years, “It’s no longer working. I’m going to have to take to my bed.” And lived thirty days. So I was in touch with what was going on.

I had a friend named Howard Hahn, who is still my friend. And he worked for Letterle. And if he didn’t know the answer, he’d get in touch with them and find it in that big library. The early days we worked giving polio shots to everybody in San Antonio - free. We gave our time. And we gave the first lot, and they had that epidemic of polio during the shots. They found the Polio Foundation had recommended around 23 tests on it. Only thirteen, and those that filed it produced bad polio vaccine, and people got polio. Those that said, “You can’t do it at thirteen, and we’re going to make it the way we know how to make it good.” As a result, when we started giving the second shot, I walked up to the city health officer and said, “Doctor, this is the same medicine we had before.” He nearly had a heart attack. He says, “How do you know?” I said, “I wrote the log number down in my little book.” So he gave me 100 doses. I couldn’t get them through the private sector, but they were almost expired, had six weeks to run. And I knew I couldn’t get a hundred doses in six weeks.

So I asked Howard Hahn, “When something expires, what does it mean?” Howard said, “I don’t know, but I’ll find out.” About a week later he called me and said, “It means, the day it expires we guarantee it’s 100% of what we say it is. We put 103% in it when we make it, and we allow it to lessen.” I said, “How fast does it deteriorate?” And he said, “One tenth of one per cent a month. That’s 1.2%/year.” I said, “So then, most drugs are still good for a year or two?” He says, “The exception is antibiotic. Some of them go bad, so we put it on everything.” For example, salt tablets which have been in a salt mine for 500 million years expire in a tablet in three years. So Pure Food & Drug says. As a result, I used to get all the samples from all the drug companies that had expired and get it together and haul it out to Kelly Field to a person from Venezuela, and they would carry it to Venezuela in an airplane and give it to the Methodist Hospital in Venezuela, and they’d tell us how wonderful all the stock was. An expired drug is not expired,
number one; and number two, an expired drug is a whole lot better than nothing! So that’s the kind of crazy things I used to do.

Did you make house calls?

For a few years, yes.

What kind of patients did you have?

Everything. I had people that said it was just worth the difference to pay for a house call when you come into your home. I had people that couldn’t come. I made a lot of house calls for my father. I remember one of them saying to me, “I could kill your daddy. When I want to talk to him, he won’t talk to me. But when I say he’s right, I KNOW he knows what he’s doing.”

I had patients like that. I didn’t retire until I was 77. And I had gone on 50 years, never been sued, and never… so I figure it is time to quit.

Patients, even the children that you take care of, most of them go to younger doctors because they realize you’ll quit before they are raised anyway. And so, your practice always drops off when you get older. So I quit.

But you enjoyed it up to that point?

Yeah. See, I had a great advantage. If I had a bad patient who would run me crazy, I didn’t have to connect with them. I’d just transfer them to a specialist. So the patients I had were good; they were close friends; I knew them well. I remember, one of them came in to see me to talk and I was trying to get moved. He said, “You’re trying to get me … You haven’t asked me why I’m here.” I said, “I know why you’re here. You told me.” “What did I do?” I said, “You haven’t asked me any questions about medicine. So I told him why he was there. He looked at me. He says, “You knew more than I wanted you to know. But you do have it right.”

One day one of my nurses said, “Why do you get a lab test? You tell me what it is, then get a lab test, and you are right. Why do you get a lab test?” I says, “To cover my rear end.” To keep lawyers from suing me.

And I guess it worked because you were never sued!

Those ten years I did not write a note down; kept it all in my head. But I realized I had to. And I’m not good on remembering things. But you can hand me a chart, and I’ll read it and I’ll say who it was. I had a reverse there. I never had these things about remembering names like our cell phone number was 410-8640. It’s not any more. My wife said, “410’s the Interstate, 86 is your age, and 40 is my son’s age.” So I didn’t remember a lot of things, but…
You were talking about the St. Anthony [Hotel]. Can you tell us a little bit more about that meeting at the hotel?

Well, in the early days we met and ate lunch on the second floor of the St. Anthony, and we worked ‘til noon and talked about everything – books and so forth - and on the days that Dad said, “I just talked to one of my registrars in New York, and we have a very valuable book, and I need some money.” And he’d get ten or fifteen dollars and buy the book. They never turned him down. He had wealthy oil people who bought many of these expensive books for him. And there’s a pamphlet been printed on the books, which covers the early books. All of those.

And he was the one who had the idea to start collecting?

Yeah. Yeah.

Where did he go to find these books? Because it’s a fabulous collection he put together!

Well, he got in a historical society, and the book dealers would be around the state meeting, and he met them all. And he got them interested in buying more than Texas history. And they would talk to their contacts about all of this, and one thing led to another, and he ended up knowing all the big dealers in New York, who got the books from England or France, who had duplicates and were selling them for cash that they needed to get started after the war.

And your dad was able to raise the cash too.

Yeah. Yeah.

Did he have any colleagues who worked with him closely, or was that his own …

He had a bunch of them. I guess I’ve got a list of who those people were. I’ll bring it to you.

All right.

Most of them were members of this P.I. Nixon Library Society [the Friends], including ones who have died off like Jack Matthews and all of those people. And all of them contributed money to building the library which ended up out here.

But that was really your father’s project. He was very involved, I guess. How many years – when did he start collecting?

That I don’t know. I know how he started collecting Texas history. They were having a paper drive on the street. Somebody threw away the two copies of the Texas and San Antonio edition, which was published by the New Orleans Picayune, and they also
published the pictures. They say there were lots of books but not many of the picture books and they were in the basement, and there was a flood and filled that basement and ruined all those books – both kinds. So the picture book is small and a lot of the other ones, sold. And that library was given to Trinity [University]. And he started buying first editions and so forth. A lot of the well-known writers of Texas, and a lot of them, teachers over at the University of Texas. His brother was a teacher out at Canyon University – up there where the canyon is near Amarillo. They have one of the best museums there of western art you’ll find. And Texas Tech has an outdoor museum. It has buildings of all different kinds – dogtrot houses, log houses, houses partly built into the hills and a train museum with early railroad cars and so forth. And they found a drover car. And before they could get around to getting it, it had disappeared. So they didn’t get it. You know what a drover car is?

Not really. Tell me.

It was a combination of a caboose and a place where the drivers who drove the cattle to the road put them on the railroad. They went along with the cattle up to Kansas. They were called drovers. They were cattle-drivers, and they had special cars for them. And, of course, none exist. And they would have had one.

But as for the medical history, you’re not sure when your dad started that? What was his intention when he started collecting, was it for himself?

For Bexar County Library. Never for himself. For the doctors in the area. He got interested in books when he was at Johns Hopkins. And studied a lot of them and knew the professors well. So that’s where he was interested.

Well when he made these important purchases, did he share that with you or show you the books?

Always.

Do you have an affinity for them?

Not as much as he had. My affinity, I guess, was when I got interested in genealogy when I was at Duke. When I was at the library at Chapel Hill by the Capitol… He found my grandfather’s marriage certificate to his first wife, which I didn’t get a copy of. Because in those days you had to pay to have a picture made of anything you wanted. And this practice today . . . didn’t exist. So I said to Dad we ought to write a book on the Nixons while there were people who were alive and can do it. He said, “No, they might find a horse thief.”

But, then, you must have inspired him to do it.

Well, I said no more about it. And he said about six weeks later, “I think we should.” So Miss Johnson and I sat down and wrote out a paper, and we mimeographed a hundred
sheets and sent them to everybody in the family and gathered everything we could on everybody, and published that book. And the man that published it in El Paso – these people are private printers - and so we paid for it and people that contributed.

We had a meeting in Luling at the country club, and everybody had a chance to buy the book for about a dollar and a half or two dollars. One of my cousins called me and said, “I’m dying. Do you want that book back?” I said, “Yes.” And he sent it. It had the sales slip when it sold. And he’s dead. He died blind. Everybody wanted to collect it. They ran the price up on the Nixon book too – to about $200.

And so, I got interested in genealogy. We printed the book, and I dropped it for fifty years, then went back with my computer and click - all the genealogy plus ten times more - on my computer, and I have taken every wife, every daughter, who they married – if I can, I’m still looking - what their name was and get enough of their genealogy, to where somebody later can take what I’ve got and go even farther.

The family must be pleased that you have taken the time to do that.

Yeah. And I get help. I have eleven thousand. I may have a few of them yet to attend to, but they’re relatives of relatives.

That represents a lot of work, doesn’t it?

Yes. I thought I’d found my wife and my distant cousins, which I think I’ve told you all this before, and . . .

So you had your projects, and your dad had his private projects, the books he was writing too.

Yeah.

Did you know about his research when he was writing the books and the medical story of early Texas?

Well, I will tell you one thing. He made a call to a Mexican family that had hepatitis. They asked him is it all right to give them this Mexican tea. Dad, being polite, says, “Of course.” And they called a week later, and the patient was well. There’s a pamphlet on it, and they sent it off to all the laboratories and didn’t find anything in it, but when you think that today we measure in millions of parts. In those days they only measured a part. So that if it were checked today, you might find that what it was and build it up, and it might work for hepatitis. Because most of the cures that were found that don’t kill you, if you take too much of it or nearly kill you – come from products that are natural.

So you respect those herbal therapies? Alternative methods?
Oh, yes. I think they have value, and I think we have gone too far over here and don’t give credit about what’s over here. The radio is full of those that are talking about those things today, and a lot of them are even saying that if the Ph of the blood gets changed, then you’re going to get cancer. If you return it to normal, your cancer can be controlled. I don’t know if you’ve seen that one or not? There’s another one called coral calcium that comes from China and Saigon, which I take, not for the … I went in on it because I have such horrible leg cramps. And if I take regular calcium, it helps but doesn’t cure them.

So they say it will help control cancer and so the company was put out of business by claiming too much. I say, “yes,” and they said, “You’re going to have to listen to me read this disclaimer about cancer.” I said, “But I’m not buying it for cancer.” All they said was that the people who live there – maybe because they live to be 130 years of age and don’t get cancer! So maybe this product helps contribute to their not getting cancer. But that’s saying too much. And so there’s a big ruckus going on about these things today, and I think that some of them will be good, and some of them won’t be good, but I think in my case it’s good for cramps.

**Did you ever go to a curandera?**

I don’t believe in all of that stuff. All I know is that I have known cases where it does work. And they’re OK. But I’m not going to fool with a hundred things to find out about what. I haven’t got time to start that sort of thing!

Most of the drugs that are found in the Amazon, the Indians had used it, says it works. They check it and find it does, so the research has been done for them. But I don’t know what things in the United States work, but they’ve got to be one. Doctor Jacobs was real mad about reading an article about somebody had a bug. That you walk around in the South, and it gets in through your feet, and it makes a circular thing on your leg, and how they’re treating cancer. They finally killed it, but it almost killed him! And do you know what WE used to do to cure it? Do you know what ethyl fluoride is? It’s a spray thing that you spray on a bug, so when you stick it, it doesn’t hurt. You spray it with ethyl fluoride like that and freeze it all the way around, and you’ve killed the bug that’s inside. And you don’t hurt them at all. So the things we knew are being learned, which are very important.

**And, again, that is why our history of medicine collection is so important because there are all kinds of …**

That gives leads to people to do something better.

But that was an example of just last Wednesday, and how bad we’ve gotten in forgetting important things. And things that farmers used to do to kill ticks and other things. You know, back in the ‘30s we had dipping vats for cattle. And we had ticks that were carrying disease - I can’t remember what all.
Dr. Nixon, I’d like to ask you how you see medicine today and how it seems different from the early days of medicine you remember.

I see good and bad. The good is that the new things are extremely good. The surgery, for example, is so greatly improved. My own brother three weeks ago, Thomas, had a gall bladder operation at 83 years of age. I called his wife the next day and says, “Can he have visitors yet?” She says, “He didn’t even go in the hospital.” Said, “They did the surgery and kept him in Recovery for three hours, and sent him home.” So I went over to visit him and being a doctor I said, “How are you doing?” He said, “I’ve vomited a couple of times.” He says, “The first time was bitter, and in the afternoon it was sour,” which to a doctor means that he vomited up bile with the first one, and he vomited up stomach acid with the second. See, you didn’t know that, did you?

Anyway, he got better very fast and went back to work on the thirteenth day. And he said he was real sore like he’d been exercising. I says, “That’s normal. You didn’t use your muscles for two weeks, and now they have to be recharged to work again.” So that’s an example to me of the changes on the good side.

And on the bad side is that he doctors don’t know their patients, and the patients don’t know who to talk to anymore. Not in all cases, but in many. So the relationship between the doctor and the patient is not as close as it was. And, of course, a lot of that is due to the fact that you’ve got a third party you’ve got to talk to, that’s your insurance company.

What do you see as the major challenges of medicine today?

Well, I personally think that the big change is going to come with DNA. And that DNA, the genome field, which probably is going to end up controlling all of our inherited things and also all of our diseases. It’s a guess because nobody knows that far, but that’s the way I think it’s going to go.

You can’t _____ the genome itself, but you can these knobs. So it gives them an incentive to work on a medicine which could cure disease. So I think that’s going to be the big change. But the law says that back in my day you knew your patient, you knew his family, you knew his children, you knew the husband. And as a result, you knew when they were really sick, and they didn’t know that you knew as much about them as you really did. So you knew when they needed something – either medicine or counseling. Now, if they need counseling, you send them to a psychiatrist who doesn’t know them. So the lost relationship and the friendship between doctor and patient which was present in my time and the generation before to a certain amount is lost, and the patients resent it. Because I can hear ‘em fussing about it all the time!
Well, what about the cures?  For which diseases are cures most needed?

Who knows.

There seem to be certain diseases of civilizations which have become more prevalent.

Well, the biggest threat right now is AIDS. That’s an interesting thing too. They’re finding some people have the virus but don’t have the disease. They think it’s due to something they’ve had in the past that changed the pattern in the genes. And I think that will be studied and will give us a lead because the disease changes enough from time to time where we think we’re getting somewhere, it jumps away from us.

I’ll give you an example. I was reading – I was watching television – talking about venereal diseases during the Civil War and how half of our hospitals on both sides were full of venereal diseases rather than wounds. Of course, the big cause of it was syphilis. Well, the thing about syphilis, which I learned from my father, was that there’s only a very short period of time during which syphilis can be transmitted, only when they have a rash. And that only lasts about six weeks or two months, and the rest of the time they can have the syphilis but can’t give it to anybody else. And, as a result, when the MDs were put in charge and they started locking up the people who were sick, they stopped the epidemic because they didn’t let the people who were sick infect anybody else. And they let ‘em out when they looked like they were well, but it also controlled the disease during the war.

Reminds me of the old story I was told in medical school about the old doctor who used to go to Grand Rounds in Chicago. The young students said the professors tolerated him, might have asked him his opinion sometimes. Man came in with a very rare skin disease which the professors all tried to explain but couldn’t. Finally they turned to him and said, “What do YOU think, doctor?” He said, “I don’t think; I KNOW. That’s syphilis. I’ve seen a thousand of them.” And, sure enough, it was. See, the professors in the medical school had never seen one. But he was down in the slums and saw it all the time! So your diagnosis by one person is very simple, and by another one, you are screwed up.

That reminds me of another story about my brother and myself. Had a patient in the Baptist Hospital downtown. Perfectly well, breathing about 60 or 100 a minute. I called my brother. I said, “Bob, I don’t know what’s wrong with this gentleman.” He says, “You ought to know.” I said, “Bob, if I knew, I wouldn’t have called you.” And he arrived in about ten minutes and he said, “That’s aspirin poisoning.” Did a salicylate level and put 1000 cc of normal renal alactate which is salt solution, and the tests were all right. And in the morning he gave another test, and it was normal, and he sent him home. Why? Turned out it was exactly like he said it was. Three or four weeks later I walked into the Emergency Room, going to see a patient, and there were three or four doctors with the patient breathing about 100 times/minute, and I said, “What’s the matter?” “I wish to Hell I knew!” I said, “I KNOW.” “Well, tell us!”
Because that’s what medicine is all about – we stick together and help each other. And know more than if you get to thinking you know everything without any help. So that’s an example of what I don’t see now.

There’s always been a conflict between doctors. I went to a seminar at one of my reunions at Duke. A man who was talking about cataract implants and how much they fought with the other doctors and finally won. But he was telling of all of the problems and road blocks that were put in their way. And when they got through, they ended up doing surgery which was very catastrophic.

When I first started out to in my own days when I had implants done, I looked up at the doctor and I was getting ready to say, “When are you going to start?” He said, “We’re all finished and you had a cataract.” I stayed in Recovery about two hours, put an eye patch on my eye and went home. Went back to see him the next day, took the patch off, and I could see good.

And the thing that happened to me was the radical change in color. The sky, which had been gray for years, was a vivid blue, and the wall which were an off-white like yours, was a vivid white. And that color contrast bothered me worse than whether an eye was seeing or not seeing. So I had the second eye three weeks later. And I went from being legally blind to 20/40, which I’ve stayed ever since. So that’s another example of the radical changes.

But this doctor still had the ability to talk to you. I said to him, “I was told to put this off as long as I could because I have degeneration of the internal cornea.” He laughed and said, “Don’t worry about it. We’ve got medicine that can control that now. You won’t have any trouble.” And that guy went so long before I did it. I waited ‘til the medicine covered my disability. So, there is still a great deal of the old medicine still around, but a lot of it is gone.

Well, what advice would you give to young doctors just beginning their careers?

Remember that the old doctor’s not stupid. That he knows a lot of things, and that if you work with him, you’re going to learn. Like I was told when I started interning in Baltimore, “The nurses on your ward know more than you do and if you’re nice, they’ll teach you. And if you be the big shot, you’re not going to learn anything.” So that’s what I’m saying. And if you’re going to be a specialist, learn all you can about general medicine too. I’m not so sure that a little time in general medicine before they went into specialties might not be beneficial and practical.

What do you think of the kind of education that medical students get today? Do you think there that should be humanities offered during their course of study?

A real hard question. I can’t answer except to say that with the modern electronics and the fact that if you miss something, you can go get a tape and review it, which of course we never could do. So if we missed something, we had to find a way to get around it or
ask your colleagues or apply what you get later to make up for it. But they have the ability to get more than we did. But I’m sure they didn’t have the closeness with the professors that we had because being a new medical school, the professors taught, and we only had classes of ten, so you get called on at least once or twice every class, so you had to study every day, which I don’t know about now, but I assume they have to study.

**How can doctors today keep up with developments in their field with this world of rapidly expanding information?**

Seminars. Videotapes. Experience with other doctors. Read your medical journals. Use your common sense.

**I’d like to ask you: Who are your heroes in the field of medicine?**

My professors, of course. And the people in the past who got medicine along.

Instead of answering the question, I’m going to change it slightly. With all the research and things that are being done and finding early cultures, I saw a tape on the fact that they found a whole new culture last year that was in Italy in an area around Rome that lasted for a hundred years. It died about 100 years before the Romans and lasted about 1000 years. They had no written language, but they did all this stuff with pictures and so forth. I have to take that back, they did have some written language which we can’t read. But they gave us the Roman numerals, which the Romans were given credit for, but they were using it 1000 years before. And we’ll see more and more of that sort of thing.

And I also saw one along the line of when the apes from the trees stood up, and then they have able to prove with genes that there were three different lines. Two of them died out. One of them continued. That’s where we come from. One of those catastrophic earthquakes, and the dust in the air. We migrated all over the world. And they’re finding now that the American Indians, the people in Australia, and the people pretty much all came from Africa. That’ll grow, and there’ll be more and more filled in because as they find skulls and shed DNA, they find that they belong in this region or that region of the scale of ______. So we’re finding more knowledge each ten years than we knew from the beginning of time until World War II. And no one person can know it all.

**Do you try to keep up with the latest developments?**

I know a little bit about a lot of things. Not all is something to know, but it ties in with all of these things. You know, I’ve had several hobbies. I like railroads. I like old cars. And I collected cameras. I was at a flea market with my wife in Boerne one day many years ago and got to talking with a salesman. He had some railroad stuff, so we got to talking railroad and finally he said, “I’ve got two books that were privately printed, and I’m going to sell one of them. It is on the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad, which ran from San Antonio to Aransas Pass. And I’m going to sell one of them.” He showed it to me, and I bought one of them, one of six hundred printed. And it was interesting me
because some of my relatives were telegraph operators on that railroad. Porter Loring’s,
the funeral director’s, grandfather worked on building the railroad.

So you collect books about the railroad?

Yes. I have a lot of interesting books on the railroad. I have interesting books on
medicine.

Do you read a lot these days?

Yeah.

What kind of books?

All of them.

Do you have a favorite author?

Not really.

Do you read both fiction and non-fiction?

I was going to say, there’s a book by Doctor Green, about his life. He was a veterinary
doctor out in West Texas. Very, very interesting books, but they’re fiction. He couldn’t
possibly have done all the things that he said he did! And he probably wasn’t a
veterinarian in the first place. But his books are extremely interesting stories. Cattle
drives, diseases, and so forth. I just happened to find that book one day in the thrift store.

And Howard Hahn, the retail man I talked about before, who’s been in the detail business
for fifty years, had a lot more. And things they did just couldn’t possibly have been true,
but they’re extremely interesting, and they’re about stories of veterinarians and so forth.
See, Howard was a detail man for Letterle, and he was in the veterinary for five years,
and he’s the only one who’s ever changed back to the human. And he was with them
right after the war. Veterinarians didn’t know anything about giving shots or much of
anything. You had to teach them all, all over Texas. And introduce penicillin to them.
And uses with drugs and so forth. So he knows a great deal about it. He enjoyed the
books too.

But I don’t stay with medicine day after day. I don’t stay with railroads day after day.
And I don’t stay with old cars. I’ll jump around and look, and then I’ll get on my
computer and review my genealogy, which we’ve worked on. My dad and I wrote the
book on the Nixon family in Texas. Natural history tree. And when I first brought it up,
he said, “I don’t want to do it. We might find a horse thief.” About six weeks later he
told us to go ahead. And so we got Miss Johnson, who was his secretary for 43 years and
mine for about six or eight. Mimeographed a page to send to everybody, which we did.
Many of the 90-year-old women were still alive. That’s why we got so much information
on the family which would have been lost. And I couldn’t have done it now with all the ———— we have. So all the things would have been lost. Much though will be captured with the research that the Mormons are doing and so forth. What I’ve been concentrating on is the daughters of the ancestors. We’ve got all the original males. We only had one error, which didn’t amount to too much because it didn’t apply to us. But I have found all of the daughters that I can, who they married by name. And found what I could in the genealogy references. And combined that with mine, which makes it at the present time 11,000 people. So I have multiple hobbies, and I really have not suffered from being retired.

I miss my very close patients, and I miss my good friends who were in medicine with me. But what’s happened is that I’ve outlived most of them.

**Do you see some of them at our meetings of the Friends of the P.I. Nixon?**

Used to be a great many; now there are very few.

**I saw Dr. Milton Jacobs yesterday.**

Yeah. Dr. Jacobs is so much younger that he wasn’t in the early part. The only one, whom I brought up, who was in my class in high school, was Perry Post.

**And he was there yesterday too!**

Yeah.

**We are very grateful and pleased when we see what loyal members…**

I told you what Perry called himself in high school? He called himself the nerd of the class. I said, “Why?” He said, “Can you see a seventeen-year-old girl dating a fifteen-year-old boy?” He graduated from high school at fifteen. Had to get his mother’s permission to go to medical school and graduated at 22.

**And he’s STILL active.**

He has the same problem. He doesn’t want to drive at night because he doesn’t see as well as he used to, and the other reason is that the two of us don’t want to have a wreck and lose our driver’s license. Because you don’t realize what a penalty it is to not be able to see. And you’re TOTALLY dependent on other people. And having been there before I had my cataracts, I understand it, and I’m extremely careful about my driving. I don’t drive on the expressways very much. If I can get there, I drive in through town.

**But you still get out to various functions?**

A little bit, yes. My wife says I do a lot!!
Tell me about your wife, her name, and how you met her.

My wife.

Your second wife.

Della Price. P-R-I-C-E. She’s from Tennessee. Was born and lived fifteen miles from Cumberland Gap, where all of the early settlers came through the mountains and that low pass to go west. And even Daniel Boone moved from Pennsylvania to North Carolina, western North Carolina, went through the Pass, had all of these experiences in Kentucky and on to the Mississippi River. And her family has been there about two hundred years. They were also Quakers, and they came in to Baltimore in 1852 on ships called The ____ and the Dove from England. They stayed in the Maryland area for about 150 years. Moved into Virginia and then into Tennessee, where they’ve been for all these years. Daniel Boone said the area was worthless ‘cause there was no transportation out of there. To move any supplies – if they had anything to sell – ‘cause the rivers weren’t big enough. That’s where they began. Down the same river there was plenty of water and transportation.

She was a nursing home administrator. Her first husband was a CID agent with the Army. That’s equivalent to the FBI in civilian life.
We were talking about your wife’s background…

I guess I’ll repeat a little. They came into Baltimore in 1852 and lived in that area for about a year, 150 years – correction, 1652! - and lived there a couple hundred years and then moved to Virginia, and then on to Tennessee in Claiborne County which is right at Cumberland Gap. And Daniel Boone used to go through that area on his exploits. Daniel Boone’s family were Quakers. His father was kept away from church because his daughter got pregnant, unmarried, and he was blamed for it. His answer was, he can’t watch her 100% of the time. And they said, “That’s not a good enough answer.” And they asked Daniel Boone, “Are you a Quaker” And he said, “I know all about that stuff.”

Anyway, getting back to my wife’s family. They were farmers, tobacco farmers, and he would shoe horses. Her grandfather would shoe horses. He was a sheriff. My wife was raised there.

And how did you two meet?

Well, she and her first husband were traveling around. Actually, we met several times, and she went back to San Antonio. She went back to school and got her degree at Incarnate Word as an administrator for hospital and nursing homes, and she worked in nursing homes for twenty-six years. I knew her long before my wife died. About two years later my wife died, we got married and have been married for twenty-one years. My first wife and I were married for forty-two and ½ years, so that makes about sixty-three/sixty-four years I’ve been married!

That’s a pretty good record.

I have four children by my first wife, which we’ve already discussed. I have no children by my second wife.

Tell me what your children are doing today.

My oldest son went to Texas Tech. His first wife said he didn’t have sense enough to graduate. He was too young, too immature, let’s put it that way. They got a divorce. And he went back to Texas Tech and graduated. Stayed in the area and ended up with a tune-up shop all through the period of the changes in the automobile industry – carburetor to fuel injection. He was extremely good at what he did, and one day the chief of police comes and he says, “Pat, I want you to fix this thing ‘cause it won’t run but 55 mph, and we can’t catch anybody with an old car anymore.” So he gave me his police car to drive,
and the chief of police came back, and he says, “I can fix it but it’ll run you gas mileage,” and he says, “I don’t care; I want to catch people.” So they modified it.

He had it about 15-20 years then went to work with Texas Tech Research, which is like Southwest Research in San Antonio, and they work with Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler, converting to the fuel injection. He had a hybrid car up there back many years ago, worked with fuel cells and so forth. In ’55 he got a divorce and came back down here and ended up as a teacher at St. Philip’s College. He has to do with the future of the automobile, fuel cells.

My oldest daughter [Peggy] is a teacher. Her husband was the principal of Snyder. Snyder has a very unusual thing: every grade is in a different school. First grade is in this school; second grade’s in another. And their reasoning is that they will know all the people of their own age in the town. And he had the fourth grade and was an excellent teacher. Now retired, they live in Lubbock. My daughter is still teaching and is commuting to Lubbock. She has three children. One of them is a teacher, has a Ph.D. in Library Science. The first one is a teacher. The second one is a teacher, and he teaches in ____ , has a degree in Library Science. And the third one has a business, cleaning out buildings that have this fungus that grows - mold. Getting rid of it. So that’s what they’re doing.

My third son’s a dentist. He lives in Castroville. His daughter lives in Florida, and his son, in Longview, and he’s a civil engineer.

My youngest daughter is a CPA. She lives in Houston, doesn’t work. Her husband is in charge of, not in charge - he’s high up, manager of the computer part of Shell Oil, which is doing all the seismograph work for Shell Oil. They started out with a big Cray computer, went through an IBM computer, now they’re using home computers. They told me they had 100 hundred of them could do the work in a month. Next thing I hear, they have 200 hundred and can do it in a week. Now they have about 400 of them, running all at the same time. Two or three of them are running empty. Then, if something goes wrong, they need to automatically switch over. And if it doesn’t, he with his home computer can make you switch over and lose just a trivial amount of work. And they have been able to do the work at half the price of what the competitors overseas were doing. And are bringing it back and also doing work for other oil companies, and now are doing it in one day. And he told me the last time I saw him that they’re going back and redoing all of the seismograph that’s ever been done for Shell Oil Company because they might have missed an oil field. Because the work was too crude in those days compared with what they’re doing today. So it’s the first step in bringing things back to the United States because they can do it better and faster than they can do it overseas.

So there are my four children.

Do you get together often, all of you?
When we can. My son in Tyler, the dentist, is restoring antique motorcycles. They went out to the Prude Ranch on motorcycles, took their motorcycles out. But something happened. They got damaged slightly, and he said, “That’s a good sign.” So they went out without it. They met two people, one from Houston and one from Dallas, drove his motorcycle down, and they all went out together and stayed out there. And I told him what to do and what to say to Mr. Prude, and they didn’t do it. I told him to look up Mr. Prude’s daughter, who the last time I was out there found out at 11 o’clock at night – well, first I better say she’s now the bookkeeper for them because the one they had was stealing from them, so they had to fire her. And she took over and is doing the work and was bringing in results. The day we were going to the cab, the set of cabins where Dad wrote his books, she found out who I was and how long ago I’d been there, 1928, so she got to talking, and we talked ‘til one o’clock, and she still didn’t want to go to bed. And I said, “Just go and look her up and tell her who you are, and you can go on from there.” Which they didn’t do. I would have done it, but they’re too bashful. So, yes, we get together.

Do you usually get together out there at Prude Ranch or in San Antonio?
Where is your meeting spot?

All over.

Out in the country too?

We used to get together when I was a kid at my father’s house, with his grandchildren, and then later we went to my place in the country, and then later in life my second wife, got ‘em together – always at Thanksgiving. In recent years we’ve gone from place to place. We went up to Brownwood one year. And ended up going into Brownwood, and they had the 50th reunion of the Texas National Guard, which had headquarters in Brownwood in WWII. And they had a bunch of old vehicles up there, and we went up and saw them all by accident.

There was a vehicle which my son had run when he was in that airlift to Germany many years ago, and he was there with the tanks they had, and he was interested in them, and a man said they’ve been converted to diesel in recent years, but they don’t have the power they had with the gasoline engines. Now we have the Abrams tank, which is much bigger, which is not a gasoline or diesel; it’s an airplane-type engine. I was talking to a friend of mine…”Do you know why that Abrams can shoot while it’s doing like this? And can hit this thing?” They’ve got a computer that holds that gun locked out, and when it hits the aiming point, it allows it to shoot. So it shoots at the right time even though it’s moving up and down. That’s why it’s so accurate. And that’s another field where the advances are so great. But remember, the advances from war are used by the civilian population during the next few hundred years each time we have a war. So no telling where we going with advances the military have in airplanes and tanks, submarines, and so forth, and all of that is applied to the civilian population.
What do you think about development on a personal level? Do you think the world is becoming more humane? More compassionate? How do you see it on a moral level?

No, because we don’t visit like we used to. We sit and watch television or read or are too busy – too tired in many cases! – to visit. So we’ve lost that contact we used to have. I mean, after all, the difference is this: when my grandfather used to go into town to Luling from the ranch, his horses would take him in there ten miles. He’d shop, buy what was necessary, and then he’d turn the horses loose, and he’d sleep on the way home. Because the horses would do all the thinking for him. You think now too much while you’re driving. Or go to sleep. You have no horse to take care of you. So, that’s what I think. I think we’ve lost a great deal of it.

What about other ethical issues? How do you see the world developing? Do you think we’re better people now than we were?

I don’t know whether we are or not, I think we’ve had bad people all along.

And is spirituality important to you?

Oh, yes. It always has been.

What about the traditions that you had? Is it harder now to maintain them?

Everything’s harder now! At my age.

What about – you’ve always loved animals? Do you have animals with you today?

I’ve always had pets.

What pets do you have with you today?

We have a pug which is eleven years of age and dealing with complications that pugs have. They have breathing problems because of the shape of their head. We have a yorkie. Supposed to be registered, but I wonder if he was made in a woodpile is ‘cause he’s twice the size and twice the weight of what a yorkie’s supposed to be. They get along good except for when they go to bed. Both of them want to get in bed with us, and whoever gets there first. They don’t sleep because they’re guarding the bed. Frequently if we scold the one that’s in, my wife gets up and puts the other one in. She has one up, and the other one agitates the second one. And it ends up that we lose some sleep like I did last night. Then when I wake up, I can’t go to sleep, so I go and turn on the television. Sometimes I see some very interesting thing on the History Channel or one of those science channels. Some of these things on genealogy - I shouldn’t say genealogy, but anthropology; it ties into genealogy – and so forth.

It sounds as if you’ve continue to maintain all your interests.
I do it in a sitting position.

**Looking back over your life, of which of your achievements are you proudest?**

I don’t know. I’m very happy we did the genealogy because I’m sure that it couldn’t be done now. I’m happy I collected those cameras because it would be impossible today. I didn’t finish about those cameras anyway…

**How many did you collect?**

Probably a hundred. A hundred good ones. Maybe two or three hundred not good ones.

**Well, that was like a little museum in itself.**

Yeah. But anyway, the Nagel camera sold out to Eastman. Nagel had three cameras. And I happen to have two or three of the three, and I can’t remember if I have a 3rd one. They started making a special 8mm camera, but it was a small enough lens that you didn’t have to focus it very much because the smaller the lens, the more pure the picture will be without focusing. The better the lens, the more you have to focus it to keep the quality level. So for a beginner, the fixed focus, or the smaller focus lens, probably gives better pictures because they forget to do the all the things you’re supposed to with the camera. And they got better and better. So that’s the reason I have so many lenses.

**Did you like to take pictures?**

Yeah. I even had movie cameras when they first came out. My wife and I were up at Tennessee one time and had a camera that weighed about twenty pounds and a six foot cable on it that went to the battery that weighed another twenty pounds. I took pictures of where the three states run together: Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina. North or South? Well, I think it is. And Kentucky almost comes to it, but anyways there’s a point out there on the Gap where there are signs, and that’s why there was so much fighting during the Civil War there because both sides wanted it. If that were blocked, you couldn’t get past and so forth. Most of the stuff went through there. The railroad went through the mountains later. And about two years ago they opened a new road through there – a new four-lane highway. Two lanes in each direction, and any time there’s any heavy cargo, ammunition and all that sort of stuff is carried through, it’s led through by a, it’s closed during the time it’s going through. And it’s a shortcut from Detroit to Asheville, North Carolina. Keeps you from having to go all the way to Knoxville and cross. It cuts across. And they’re building a road that’s going to be the equivalent to an interstate. But whether there’ll ever be an interstate, I don’t know.

**Did you create a lot of photo albums? Did you frame some of your pictures?**

Well, I quit taking still pictures. I’ve taken movies. I have all sorts of movies. Then I went from that one to the other, and I’ve taken pictures all over the country from old car
tours and antique cars and so forth. And I’ll give you an example: I went to the 70th meeting of the Antique Car Club of San Antonio, the oldest club in San Antonio – used to be the Horseless Carriage Club – and it was at the Officers’ Club at Fort Sam Houston, which is closed. And it was a chore to get there. Had to go down to Walter Street, go in, be inspected. Some got driver’s license checked, some got insurance and driver’s license.

And we had seventy-two people there and a very interesting meeting about the early days and things, and many wives – about your age – whose husbands had died and stayed active, and they all got up and talked about their experiences and so forth. Talking about the first tour. Danny Dreven, actually he was registrar of the tour, and he had kept all that stuff, and he got up and read the names of the automobiles that were on that 6 Texas Tour in Kerrville: Stanley Steamer, Saxon, Pierce Arrow, Hudson, Packard, Auburn, Dussenberg, Cord, and a lot more I can’t remember. There were 190 cars. And Mobile Oil gave us a credit card to buy gasoline and go on the tour and ride on.

That must have been fun.

It was! We stored the cars in the barn, where they had the horses during the county meeting – what do you call it? I can’t think of the word. Well, anyway, we had them in there, and one night we were going to look at the cars, and I got up and said, “Mr. Dreven, do you remember what was eaten?” “No,” I said, “180 dozen tamales,” and this was not a meal, we ran out of tamales, so we went into Kerrville and we got thirty-four dozen more, and we ran out of them. So everybody remembers a different thing.

I also remember . . . Most of the time they got to where they just wanted to show the car, didn’t want to drive them. So we took a tour out to Kerrville and around, and along the road we went through water for about half a mile, so when they came to bringing their car there, they had to change the registration of cars. About thirty of them changed to different cars.

I’ve been all over the United States on tours, to Florida, West Virginia, Hershey [PA], Colorado, Indiana, California.

You’ve really had a very rich life, haven’t you?

Well, what things would you still like to do? Do you still have some plans?

I still like to travel. If we had kept the second motor home, we could still take it. But we sold it. It was an Airstreamer, an Argosy, which was a painted Airstream. It was their second, and it belonged to a club member, and I bought it from him. We drove it to Colorado and around. ‘Course we wanted a bigger one. Got a little one to get around, and my wife would drive it. If you’d get a bigger one, then you can’t get around. I’d have to drive it; she wouldn’t drive it. Then my eyes went bad, so we get rid of all of them. But, you see, the value is this: you got a big one, there’s more room to live when you’re there. You got a little one, it’s easier to get around, but it’s harder to live in that small space. The little one was 24 foot long, not that small for two people; it could sleep
six. But sleeping people in there - I don’t know. They say, friends and relatives are like fish, “After three days they begin to smell.” That’s the way it is in a mobile home!