James Fuller interview for Wright State University Oral History Course 685

Brett Stolle

James Fuller
Summary of Oral History Project

Scope:

This project is the complete transcript for two (2) one-hour interviews with Mr. James E. Fuller resident of Spring Valley, Ohio. The interviews cover a wide variety of topics all drawn from the memory of Mr. Fuller during his seventy-six years of life. The collected transcripts of this interview describe both Mr. Fuller's life history and the environment upon which he has lived.

Method:

The interviews were performed using two on-hour length tape cassettes at Mr. Fuller's personal residence in Spring Valley, Ohio. The interviews began at approximately 6:30 pm on February 11 and 26, 2003. Mr. Fuller's excitement during the interview was apparent and he was never short on things to say. In fact, it was only with great difficulty that I would be able to stop his oration long enough to ask different or more revealing questions.

Biography:

James E. Fuller was born in Whitehouse, Kentucky September 29, 1926. The rural backwoods country of his birth was not a safe and healthy environment. The poverty, feuds and racism often lead to bloodshed and combined with illegal moon shining operations made the area quite dangerous. Mr. Fuller moved from Kentucky to Dayton, Ohio in 1939 where he lived and worked in West Dayton. He attended high school at Hickman Street School and worked a variety of jobs beginning at around age fifteen. His job searching lead him to take jobs with the RKO Colonial Theater and short-order cook at a variety of local Dayton restaurants. In 1944, Mr. Fuller enlisted with the U.S. Army and was sent to fight the Japanese in the Pacific. He served in the 7th Infantry Division, 52nd Battalion, Company E and was stationed on Okinawa when he received news the war had ended. His late arrival into the conflict tasked him with the responsibility of performing mop-up missions and peacefully removing the Japanese invaders from Korea.

Following the war he returned to the Dayton area where he held a number of jobs as a mechanic. Desperate financial situations and his new marriage lead him to answer an advertisement to join the Kettering Police force. Serving with the Kettering police as a detective until his retirement he worked many important cases. He spent his free time operating an automobile body shop in Spring Valley, Ohio. A good provider he spent much of his waking hours on the job. In addition to his regular responsibilities he cultivated his love for horses by investing in horse racing. Early successes lead him to pursue this dream for nearly fifteen years until the financial burden became to great and he was forced to abandon the enterprise. Together with his wife Jean he raised four children Leslie, Lisa, Steven, and Rebecca. All of whom have chosen to remain in the Dayton area. Mr. Fuller's life has been one filled with hard work and excitement. His formative years spent during the Great Depression engendered within him a strong work ethic and honest manner.
I interviewed my wife's grandfather James Fuller. He was born in the hill country of Kentucky in 1926. He was raised during the Great Depression in a family with 5 children. His father was an alcoholic and switched jobs constantly. When he was thirteen when he moved to West Dayton. He never had much of a childhood most of his time was spent earning money for his family. He joined the Army in 1944 and served in the Pacific. His unit was responsible for removing the Japanese occupiers out of Korea after the war ended in 1945. He arrived home and was married. During his life in Dayton he has run a body shop, served as a detective with the Kettering Police Force and raised thoroughbred racehorses. His interview covers many aspects of adversity, which he has overcome in his many years of life. He is now retired but mows lawns with his last remaining brother for extra money.

My interview was done at his farm in Centerville, Ohio. From the audio you will hear some background noise. During my interview his housemate was watching TV in the other room. I recorded the interview at 7:00, a time mutually suitable for both of our schedules. I was tongue tied in the beginning of the interview as you will see, but as the interview progressed and during my return interview I was much more confident and relaxed. One problem I encountered was the fact that he led the interview in the beginning. I was uncomfortable with stopping his lecture and injecting new questions. He also talked fast at times and did not finish complete thoughts. Mostly, I was very satisfied with the material we covered. We discussed several notable topics, such as his war experiences, crimes he worked on and childhood stories of the tough hill country. He mentions several instances of violence and murder that took place in his community when he was a child. We recorded two one-hour sessions, which I found worked well. He became dry-mouthed and hoarse after about an hour.

I have clipped some audio from the interview that I feel helps define his character and experiences. The audio also indicates my lack of proficiency at oral history interviews. Please bear with me:

The first audio clip was taken from the beginning of the first tape. This clip illustrates the life he led as a child and some of his family dynamic.

My father was a telegraph operator for the C&O railroad and periodically they shifted him from one place to another because he could take care of a station that normally demanded two people he could handle it because he was able to concentrate more so. Consequently we moved a lot. My childhood was spent back in the hills of Kentucky in a little place called Whitehouse, Kentucky about nine miles south of Paintsville, Kentucky. That is where I entered into school. A two room school house that taught everything from first grade up to the eighth grade and there we moved to Winchester, KY and the old man lost his job on the railroad I don’t know how come I think it was from drinking but anyway we moved to Winchester KY and lived on a farm called the Vestalinda Dairy Farm. Nothing but purebred jerseys on this farm and it was owned by this Dr. Garant who had a clinic in Winchester KY and we lived in one of his tenant houses for several years before we lived there I stayed with another family up the road named Lee they also run a dairy farm and I stayed up there with him and his son and worked on the farm.

His response after being asked about what he did for fun as a child.

James: We used to go horseback riding, hunt for skunks (Laughs), go fishing. We had a big pond on the farm, we’d horseback ride, we had one horse we couldn’t ride until we got her out in that pond and got on her and kept her going around, around and around until she got so damn tired she couldn’t throw us off so then we could
ride her. But I came off that horse several times. She wouldn't jump a fence. She'd come up to a fence put on all fours and stop and I'd go overhead across the fence. We didn't have too much time for fun really. You worked damn near seven days a week.

Brett: When were you doing all this? About what year?

James: Mmm. I don't recall exact year but I was about ten years old, ten or eleven years old. I milked thirteen cows night and morning, well that was like twenty-six cows a day.

I asked James about one of his most memorable experiences, the day he caught two very large catfish and how it became cause for family celebration.

James: I hunted and hunted for all the fish bait I could find but it was kind of a dry season and I couldn't find no more bait so I bought a little block of Velveeta cheese, cut it up into very small cubes and baited the trot line and two or three throw lines with it and the following morning I went down to raise the lines and I had two very large “Bluecats” catfish on the line and one gar. I hated the gar so I stuck him in the sand bill first to kill him and I was on my way home with those fish when the store merchant Mr. Coolain seen them and wanted to know what I had and when I told him he said that he would sure like to have one of those fish, the small one. So I said ok, fine. So I went in to give him that fish and he said I tell you what I have half a roll of bologna that I will give you for that. It is good but it is getting a little old. So I said ok fine. So he gave me the half a roll of bologna and started to put it in the sack and then he said hell just take the whole thing. Which was a hell of a deal as far as I was concerned. We didn’t get much bologna in those days. I started to leave and he said wait a minute come back here. I went back and he says I think I’ve got a pair of overalls back there that will fit you. So he gave me a pair of overalls and I put them on. He says, well with a new pair of overalls you ought to have a new shirt. So he drummed up a little blue long sleeve shirt to match the overalls and gave me that too. Well I went home really proud over my fish and bologna. Needless to say it tickled the hell out of the family because they’d rather have bologna anytime rather than fish. So uh, that was one of the interesting points of that day.

The next clip of audio was taken from his wartime recollections. The following is his response to how he joined the U.S. Army. He makes a quick reference to a health problem discussed elsewhere in the transcript.

James: During that time the war broke out it was 1941 and I tried to enlist in the Navy went down to take the physical and they told me I had a spot on my lung and they wouldn’t take me. So I figured I'd better get out of that Emory dust and that Universal Lens Company so I went to work for Railway Express Agency driving and delivering freight and cargo and so forth. So I worked for them till December 14, 1944 when I got a call from Uncle Sam to go down for my physical I had been selected. I went down and I signed an immediate induction slip and went straight on in to the service.

Brett: What branch?
James: The only thing that they were taking you for at that time was US Infantry. I got quite a joke out of signing up for that. This old sergeant sat up there and you had to go up to him and he would say “What would you like son?” One guy would say, “I like the Air Force I wanted to be a pilot” He would say “OK” bang US Infantry. (Laughs) The next guy would come up and he would say, “What would you like?” He would say “Well I’d like to get in the Marines” “OK” bang US Infantry. This one schoolteacher walked up and he says, “I’d like to get into teaching I am an experienced school teacher” and he said “OK” bang US Infantry. (Laughs) So I thought well I’ll be smart I’ll go up and he said “What would you like son?” I said, “I believe I’d like to get in the Infantry” and he says, “OK you got it” (Laughs). So that is how I got into the Infantry.

Twice during the interview I asked him what was his opinion of the good life. Below is his response to our class question.

Brett: What was your idea of the good life right after you got home from the war?

James: Jean and I were running around together having a good time, go dancing, drinking beer. We had several enjoyable evenings. We used to dance quite a bit. Sit around and listen to music a lot of times. But that was, neither one of us had a great deal of money, so there was nothing extravagant, you know. Money was fairly tight back then. At least it was with us (Laughs). We got married on a shoestring, we took a, I had a car, I sold it and got a truck, and we went to Indiana in that truck to get married. And we stopped on the way back and had a bowl of chili and a cheeseburger and that was our wedding dinner (Laughs). We had a good time. Had more fun than anybody.

I believe the last statement he made in regarding the question best illustrates his outlook on life. He has seen so much suffering and violence, and lived in poverty through much of his life. But through it all, including the death of his wife in the mid-1990’s and the loss of his brother last year to a drunk driver, he has persevered and continues to look at what is good in the world.
Brett: Tell me a little about your childhood.

James: I was born on September 29, 1926. Into a family that already had four boys and one girl. My father was a telegraph operator C&O railroad and periodically they shifted him from one place to another because he could take care of a station that normally demanded two people he could handle it because he was able to concentrate more so. Consequently we moved a lot. My childhood was spent back in the hills of Kentucky in a little place called Whitehouse, Kentucky about nine miles south of Paintsville, Kentucky. That is were I entered into school. A two room school house that taught everything from first grade up to the eighth grade and there we moved to Winchester, KY and the old man lost his job on the railroad I don’t know how come I think it was from drinking but anyway we moved to Winchester KY and lived on a farm called the Vestalinda Dairy Farm. Nothing but purebred jerseys on this farm and it was owned by this Dr. Garant who had a clinic in Winchester KY and we lived in one of his tenant houses for several years before we lived there I stayed with another family up the road named Lee they also run a dairy farm and I stayed up there with him and his son and worked on the farm.

Brett: What sort of things did you do on the farm?

James: We got up at 4 o’clock in the morning and got the cows in and milked them. Bottled the milk, got it ready for delivery in town, and then we cleaned up the milk house and turned the cows back out, and then we went in for breakfast at 7 o’clock and then from there we went to school. When we came back in from school we had chores to do on the farm. Baling hay, hoeing corn, planting corn, feeding the cows, feeding the horses, cleaning the barn there was always plenty to do. So we worked primarily from 4 in the morning to 9 or 10 at night and went to school too. Well, after so many years of that why we moved to Dayton, Ohio where the age of about fifteen I went to work in the theaters as an usher. RKO Colonial, RKO Keys I worked there for awhile and then I went to a restaurant called the White Clock so I worked there as a chef, a cook, a fry order cook for a period of time then I went to a place called Wimpy’s Hamburger Joint down on East 3rd Street and I worked there for quite awhile and later I got a job at Universal Lens Company out on Leo Street, grinding the bifocal part of eyeglasses.

Brett: How old were you when you did this?

James: Seventeen. I tried to enlist, during that time the war broke out it was 1941 and I tried to enlist in the Navy went down to take the physical and they told me I had a spot on my lung and they wouldn’t take me. So I figured I’d better get out of that emery dust and that Universal Lens Company so I went to work for Railway Express Agency driving and delivering freight and cargo and so forth. So I worked for them till December 14, 1944 when I got a call from Uncle Sam to go down for my physical I had been selected. I went down and I signed an immediate induction slip and went straight on in to the service.

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"I believe I'd like to get in the Infantry" and he says, "OK you got it" (Laughs). So that is how I got into the Infantry. From there I went to Camp Aderbarry Indiana no first we went to Chicago. We went to Fort Sheraton Illinois in Chicago. We spent one night there and the next day we went to Camp Aderbarry Indiana we spent about three or four days there on KP duty washing dishes and from there they sent us to Camp Walters Texas where we went through I think it was sixteen weeks of military infantry training and from there we went to Fort Louten Washington we spent there we got all of our overseas stuff, our overseas shots then we went to

Brett: What was that stuff? The overseas stuff?

James: Overseas shots? Hell I don't remember. They gave us so damn many. Then we went from there to Honolulu Hawaii were we spent two weeks in amphibious basic training for landings and I thought they were going to drown us there but they didn't. And from there we shipped out and we went to Okinawa we made one stop on the way we stopped at Ioshima that is the place where news commentator Ernie Pyle was killed. We unloaded a ship there and then we went on to Okinawa and when I joined my company on Okinawa there was thirteen men in the company. There was supposed to be 250 the rest of them had been killed or wounded. We stayed there on Okinawa while we was building up the company and we was scheduled for the invasion of Yokahama Japan my battalion was but before that time came they dropped the A bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the Japanese surrendered. So from there we went on to Korea. We landed in Hinchong Korea and freed Korea of the Japanese who had been under Japanese rule for 45 years. Shipped all the Japs back to Japan and we spent the rest of the time there guarding and just maintaining the peace being idiots and so forth. I stayed there for about sixteen months and I wound up getting shipped back to the United States we got our time served so came back to the US we came back into Fort Louten Washington, Fort Louten Washington we shipped back to Fort Sheraton Illinois and that is where we were discharged at Fort Sheraton Illinois. After that I came back and worked at numerous jobs.

Brett: Can I stop you for a second? I had some questions I would like to ask you. Well, a few questions back to your childhood. So you didn't live with your parents?

James: Basically I did, but I stayed with another family during the summer. Well, approximately a year I guess it was.

Brett: Was it just you or did any of your brothers and sisters go with you?

James: No. Just me. Course they just lived down the road I went back and forth to visit with them.

Brett: About how far?

James: About a mile or so.

Brett: OK, not very far then. Now as a child do you remember some of the things you did for fun?

James: Oh yah! We used to go horseback riding, hunt for skunks (Laughs), go fishing. We had a big pond on the farm, we'd horseback ride, we had one horse we couldn't ride until we got her out in that pond and got on her and kept her going around, around and around until she got so damn tired she couldn't throw us off so then we could ride her. But I came off that horse several times. She wouldn't jump a fence. She'd come up to a fence put on all fours and stop and I'd go overhead across the fence. We didn't have too much time for fun really. You worked damn near seven days a week.

Brett: When were you doing all this? About what year?

James: Mmm. I don't recall exact year but I was about ten years old, ten or eleven years old. I milked thirteen cows night and morning, well that was like twenty-six cows a day. I had a grip on my hand; tear your head off if I'd wanted to (Laughs).

Brett: I'd heard some stories that you'd like to jump trains.
James: Oh yah! That was back in Whitehouse, Kentucky we used to catch trains and ride them up and down the roads and ride them up the river. Get off catch another one and come back. Well I got my ass beat several times over that. But it didn’t stop us. One day we tried to catch one, my older brother caught one and we was going down to one of my aunts to get some apples. We had a coffee sack and he was a lot older than I was and he caught the damn train. It was going to fast for me; I told him it was going to fast I can’t catch it. He says oh yah you can catch it. So I made a run at it and caught it and it slung me right underneath the damn car and the way I hit I just spun around my legs went across the rail but I spun around and landed right beside the rail. I could look up and see the stirrups going over my head and I rolled my head over I didn’t dare raise it up. Rolled my head over and I could both wheels to my right I just rolled over to the next track and got up. And before I could get home, course I was all bruised up and cut up, before I could get home somebody done passed the word to the old man that I was laying down there with both legs cut off. Well here he come, god damned flying down the rail road and he see me and Curly walking he see he aint got his legs cut off so he just stopped, went over the hill and cut him six switches, three for me and three for Curly. Tied them together and he cut the blood right out of our ass with them. I had blood running down my back before we got done. But that didn’t stop us either (Laughs). And we’d fish a lot down the big sandy river down there. We’d fish for food not for, we was poor as church mice, we’d fish for food not for pleasure. I hunted bait like worms, crickets and crawdads...waterdogs. So I hunted every stream every rock and I couldn’t find nothing so I stole some coal off a railroad and sold it to the woman that run the grocery store. And I bought me a pack of Velveeta cheese about that long (3 inches) and I cut it up in little cubes and baited my throw lines, trout lines with it. Next day I went down to raise them and I had two of the biggest catfish I had ever caught. On that damn cheese (Laughs). That’s called tough living though.

Brett: How old were you when you moved to Dayton?

James: I can’t recall exactly. We moved to Dayton in 1939 and I was born in 1926 so that makes me about thirteen years old.

Brett: Where did you live when you were in Dayton?

James: Well we first started out we lived with one of my aunts down on Maple street. We stayed there about a month until we could find a house. Then we moved out to the West Side down on Fleet foot Avenue. And I went to Walgaman school. And after that I went to Hickman Street school. Which is no longer in existence. But then I started working part time.

Brett: Can you tell me a little bit about what school was like?

James: Oh it was enjoyable I didn’t mind school. In fact I used to stand up in front of the class and sing songs for them (Laughs).

Brett: What kind of songs?

James: Oh well anything, I don’t remember all of them. One of them I recall was about Lake Louise in Canada. “When there is a breeze on Lake Louise”. They all liked that. So I sang it pretty often.

Brett: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

James: Uh huh. Me and my cousin Wade Fuller was in the McCook theater on Kiowe Street. We were walking. Just got out of the theater and was walking down to his house, he lived on Park side homes at the time and we got news that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Brett: How did that make you feel?

James: Made me mad. It was the reason I wanted to join the service when I wasn’t old enough.
Brett: So did you go down there and try to join up?

James: Yah I went down and tried to join up with the Navy but they wouldn't take me because I had this spot on my lung.

Brett: How old were you when you tried to join up with the Navy?

James: Seventeen.

Brett: Now is that the age that they would have accepted you?

James: Maybe it was sixteen. Probably sixteen. Yah they would have accepted me if I hadn't had that spot on my lung. I don't know maybe that was an excuse not to take me, I don't know. But anyway when I went down to take the Army physical there wasn't no spot on my lung. If your butt was warm they took you.

Brett: Do you remember much about Basic training?

James: Oh yah. I remember it all (Laughs).

Brett: Do you have any interesting stories?

James: Well, I almost shot a damned sergeant. We were on a what they call a cover and advance maneuver. And I was a machine gunner and I had a M4 machine gun. The guy beside me carried a tripod. And another boy carried the ammunition. Well this machine gun ways oh about twenty-five pounds. I ran all the way across about dammed a thousand yards with a machine gun through an open field. And we got to were we were supposed to set it up at the edge of some trees and this sergeant come out behind the trees with a bucket of tear gas. Well if you ever run a thousand yards with a machine gun in the hot sun then get a bucket of tear gas brought to you then you damned near choke to death. I got my mask out and put it on but before I could get it on I had swallowed maybe four or five deep breaths of that tear gas. Made me so damn mad that I was in the process of loading that machine gun, with live ammunition by the way, just as I clamped her down and reached for the trigger the boy who was carrying my ammunition he grabbed my right hand and shoved it in the ground and he said “don’t shoot him Jim, you’ll kill him”. I said I hope I do (Laughs). But anyway he held my hand until I couldn’t shoot him. That sergeant turned white as a damned sheet. First he was laughing, when he seen that machine gun pointed towards him and my hand trying to get to the trigger he changed his expression real quick. He said I’ll have you court marshaled for that and I said yah you do and I’ll hunt you down to my dying days and when I do you’re a dead son of a bitch. Well needless to say he never court marshaled me. Which he could have, but he didn’t. That was on of the most interesting that happened during basic training, other than the fact that I was in with two other guys, one from Oklahoma and on from Texas. There last names were Fowler and Fulton and mines Fuller. Hell we stayed right together in the same squad all the time alphabetical order. They were both crazy as I was. On them advance and cover fires we’d see how close we could shoot to each other and knock dirt up in their face (Laughs). We were all good shots. We’d splash mud on each other (Laughs) and a guy would be laying there like that and a bullet would hit here (motions six inches from his head) POW! Fill his face full of mud. We had a lot of fun doing that.

Brett: A little bit dangerous though, huh?

James: Oh yah, a little dangerous. But I in basic training I hit nineteen bull’s-eyes in a row out of twenty shots. So sergeant told us to set the windage at 10° and elevation at 300 yards. My first shot I fired I missed the damn target completely. I rolled it back to double zero and I hit nineteen bull’s-eyes in row. He come over and say what you got you windage and elevation set at Fuller, and I said double zero. He said you damn briar hoppers are all alike, go ahead you’re doing all right (Laughs). Didn’t need no damn windage and elevation. I made my own elevation and there wasn’t no windage to amount to anything. But that’s the kind of crap you went through in the Army. But when I got oversees there wasn’t much going on over there. We got in a few scraped with some of them Japs. I had one Jap walk up to me one day and he says, “Where you guys come from?” and I said Okinawa. He says, “Oh I fought against you guys on Okinawa
and I killed lots of Americans”. I had my rifle slung over my shoulder and I just brought the butt up and caught him under the chin and knocked about three teeth out and knocked him out colder then hell. I just kept on walking (Laughs). He never said that to me no more.

Brett: Did you get into any firefights?
James: No. On Okinawa we had several clean up patrols I got fired at. Damn Jap raised up out of the weeds about as far as from here to the middle of that driveway out there.

Brett: About thirty or forty feet.

James: Well a Jap with Namboo pistol fired three shots right by my ear. And I heard all three of them go by. Just as he was firing me and the guys on both sides of me fell to the ground. I was carrying a Browning automatic rifle. Fired six hundred rounds per minute I just fell to the ground with it open. One of us got him right through the damn heart. He had a billfold in his shirt pocket with Japanese money in it. I had some of that Japanese money for a while but I don’t know what became of it. Wallet had a hole through both sides of it. I don’t know if I hit him or if one of them others hit him. One of us got him. (Laughs)

Brett: Now I had heard while you were on the boat going over that you had some tense moments.

James: Not going over so much as I did coming back. When went over we went in a convoy and there was ships everywhere. There must have been a hundred ships in that convoy. We zig zagged this way to keep the subs all confused. But anyway, they did site a sub or locate one and there was kind of a tense moment then. What they called destroyer escorts and sub chasers came screaming through the convoy with a hell of a loud siren and I mean they were flying low them buggers can go they was wandering through the convoy and they went up there and dropped a bunch of depth chargers and uh they were also laying down smoke screens at the same time, that is so the subs can’t pinpoint the ships you know and that makes you a little nervous when you are out there and you know that there is a sub out there that is trying to blow you out of the water. But uh, they didn’t get us thank god. Coming back from Korea we went into a storm up off of the Aleutian Islands that lasted five days and nights. I didn’t sleep for five days and nights. Every time I closed my eyes I would get sick. Two-thirds, no better than that, about 90% of the crew was sick. The ships crew and the men on the boat. Smelled like a regular gut wagon. I sat in the hallway of the middle of the ship played dice, shot dice and played cards for five days and nights and drank coffee. I couldn’t lay down. If I laid down I got sick that is the only time I ever got sick on board.

Brett: Now what was it like keeping the peace in Korea?

James: It wasn’t too bad. When we first got there we was putting these Japs on rail carways. They shipped us from Inchong up to Seoul from Seoul up to Kaisong and we got my platoon got chartered a guard station at a guard at the train station. We loaded the Japs on that train, shipped them down to Seoul from there I guess that put them or Inchong I guess they put them on boats from there and took them back. Oh there was a few incidents. I ran a bayonet through the side of one. The old fat Jap. I put him line about three times. They don’t understand you. He wanted to talk to somebody else over there. I wanted him to be in line. Well after about three times I got tired of it and I run a bayonet through his side of him and pointed him back over there and I said “Get over there in that god damn line and stay there” well he did then (laughing). But I got about that much of his side with a bayonet.

Brett: About an inch of his side?

James: Yeah. Didn’t hurt him. Didn’t hurt nothing vital. I didn’t mean to hurt nothing vital. I just wanted him to get back in that goddamn line where he belonged. (laughing) But on the way back, getting into that storm, the old captain come on the loudspeaker he says, “We are heading into a storm. I want every man to have a life jacket on. If I catch any man without a life jacket until I say so you will be court marshaled” And I thought now what the hell good is a life jacket going to do you in waves higher than this house (45 ft). The front of the ship would go into water far as from here to the barn (60 ft) out there and the back end the propellers would come out swishing and spinning around like that and then it would rise up you know and spout water like a whale and then the back end would go under. Then she would roll side to side and
the sides would go under. And I thought “what the hell good would a life jacket do you in water like that” The waves would drown you. But anyway, we just he told us we are not loaded, the boat is not loaded. With these kind of waves it could break it in half. He says, “Don’t be caught without your life jacket” We didn’t. We kept it on. (laughing).

Brett: Five days?

James: Five days and nights we rolled around. Couldn’t make no time. Couldn’t go under power. We just sat out there and bobbed like a cork. If you tried to go under power, when the front of the boat would go under you would just drive it on down. So all you do is just sit there and ride it out.

Brett: Now when you got back were sick? Did you get sick during the war?

James: No. Oh I had my appendix taken out over in Korea. But that I had trouble with them before I left. I tried to get them to take them out in California and they wouldn’t do it. By the way I missed California. We went to Fort Org California for a couple weeks training too. I got the worst damn sunburn I ever had in my life in California. Me and Billy Everett who was a he was a boxer he was a champion in about three states in the middleweight class. I used to go down and spar out with him and he would beat the hell out of me. I would hit him as hard as I could and couldn’t didn’t affect him. But anyway, he got out on the beach there in Monteray California with a couple of girls. One of them was the mayor’s daughter, that was the one I was with, and uh she kept telling us “you guys are going burn up, you guys are gonna burn up” I said “hell there ain’t no sun out it is just hazy” She was right we did burn up. My toes the top of my toes peeled off three times. I damn near got court marshaled for that because you aren’t allowed to get sunburned.

Side Two:

James: Worked for them for a while and I thought this ain’t gonna get it (Laughs). So I decided to go to Chicago to go to mechanics school. And get up there in Chicago damn near starve to death because I didn’t make enough money working part time to eat and pay board too so when you get in a weak and run down condition that is when malaria will attack you. So I got malaria and I stayed in that damn bed for about a week up there and this woman I was renting from she carried me a gallon of ice water every hour and I would drink it and sweat it through the mattress I swear water would drip off the bottom of the mattress. I was running about 105, 106 fever. But every other day I would feel a little bit better. So one day I thought well since I feel better I’ll check on the bus schedule and I’ll get out of here. I went to a doctor up there by the way. He told me I had a throat infection, a virus. I said there ain’t no way because my throat wasn’t sore. So uh the day I felt a little better I went down to the bus station and found out what the bus schedule was and I knew I would be sicker than hell the next day so I didn’t do nothing but stay in bed. So then the days I felt good I got up went down there and caught a bus and went to Southern Illinois where Jean was at and uh

Brett: Who’s Jean?

James: My wife. She was at her mother’s at that time. I went down there and I stayed there about 3 days and they called the doctor in for me down there and he didn’t know what the hell was wrong with me. So I thought well I am going to lay here and die. I need to get home. So the day I got to feeling better I made arrangements and caught a train back to Dayton and went home. The next day I was down in the bed again and couldn’t go. The following day I felt better and went out to the VA and I said check me for malaria I think I’ve got malaria. So they done a blood test and he come back and he said you sure as hell have. And in the meantime I had lost about 15-20 pound and uh so they gave me some atabrine-quinine pills said take these and you’ll be all right and well I was. Well anytime you get malaria it won’t bother you never get rid of it but it won’t bother you unless you get in a weak and run down condition and that is when it will attack you. And I got over that dude and I went to work for Brook’s Body Shop as a spray painter, painting
speakers for drive in theaters, a dollar an hour and we had Leslie at the time so I had to work about 15-18 hours a day in order to make a living. And uh we couldn't paint enough of them damn speakers for drive in theaters because that is when they was first coming into being and everybody wanted them so I painted and painted and painted hooked up to a sixty gallon barrel of paint with a spray gun and sprayed them things it was 12 speakers on a hook. And then when I got through with them they went into a heat oven a bake oven and then when they came back out they went through a series of fans and then his wife and son would stand there and pack them for shipment. And uh the only time I would stop is when I'd run out of a barrel of paint or something else broke down you know (Laughs). But anyway, they started slowing down once we manufactured umpteenth thousand of them and uh I stated doing body work, painting cars so from that I finally quit and went down to Brown Auto Sales were I got a quarter more on the hour and then I worked there for a couple of years.

Brett: What were you being paid then?

James: $1.25 an hour. And Roger’s Pontiac needed a man and they was working on commission. So you got 50% of all the labor you turned out plus 50% of all the parts you saved. So if a car needed they had a set of motor mounts on a car and you didn’t need them. We would take them off and straighten them put the old ones back on and turn in the new parts price into labor. So uh, they had a $2.50 guarantee down there so uh I worked there for I don’t know four or five years then old Eisenhower got elected and the bottom fell out of everything. We wasn’t getting no work and sometimes we would make our payday and uh one or two days a week. Seen an ad in the Kettering Oakwood Times one day Kettering was wanting policemen. I thought well hell that don’t pay much money but at least it will be steady and I’ll work part time to make up the difference. So I went and applied for the job and I didn’t hell there must have been 75 applicants and uh I got called in for a physical went in and took the physical and they hired me. (Laughs) They hired uh 5 of us out of those about 75 applicants. So I stayed there and worked. I think there starting wage was right at $3300/year. (Laughs) And, I was changing shifts midnight to eight, eight to four and four to twelve and uh but I went to work at Spence’s Body Shop part time to make up the difference in what I was making and what I went down to on the police department but this as time went on we kept getting raises.

Brett: When did you start? About what year?

James: It was 1952. And uh, after 23 years and a half I was able to buy my service time which game me 25 years and I retired at age 55 with by buying my service time. In the meantime we had moved down to Spring Valley and started that Spring Valley Body Shop and sold our home on Pittsville Street in Kettering. Bought that one in Spring Valley. Consequently we grew from there. When I retired from the police department then I worked full time at the body shop for oh I don’t know 5-6 years. And Steve (my son) was coming up and I thought hell might as well break him into running it so I just quit him. (Laughs) I said you run it so he did. And that is about the story of my life.

Brett: Oh I think we’ve got some more.

James: (Laughs) Well there is a lot of it left out I didn’t need to put it all in there.

Brett: Well when did you first meet your wife?

James: Right after I came out of the service. My older brother worked at Delco-Moraine and his wife worked there too. And they she was bowling one night and he wanted me to go with him to pick her up and I did and uh Jean was down there bowling with Evelyn on her team so I got to talking to her introduced to her and she was dating some other guy who worked with her and I drove up one night as she was getting off and I said come on let’s go and she said I can’t I’ve got a date and I got her by the arm and threwed her in the car and said you going with me. (Laughter) This guy was walking about as far from here to the door behind her (15 feet) and he never said a damn word. (Laughs ) So from that day on we hit it off pretty steady. Wound up getting married.

Brett: Were you married here in Dayton?
James: No we was married in Indiana. See I was 21 at the time and she was 20 and uh in order to get married in Dayton you had to be 21 or have parents consent which her parents were in Southern Illinois but her mother was up here on a visit before we got married. I told her mother I says “I want to marry your daughter” and she says “You don’t want to marry her she can’t cook” and I says “That’s alright I’ll teach her” (Laughs). She told my wife she says “You don’t want to marry him he’s got mean eyes” (Laughs) and, she didn’t like none of her son-in-laws. Her family was just exactly opposite of my family. They had 6 girls, one boy and one baby dead. My mother had 6 boys, one girl and one baby dead. And uh she wound up I was her favorite son-in-law. The reason was every time we went in I gave her a big hug and a kiss. And she would act like she was embarrassed to death because nobody else did that, not even her own kids. Her own kids wouldn’t. They’d be gone for six seven months go down there walk in Hi Mom. Hell I would grab her and hug her around the neck and kiss her just like I would I was taught to do with my family. She loved it. (Laughs)

Brett: So how long were you married before Leslie (the oldest child/daughter) came around?

James: Uh, see we were married March 29 and Leslie was born January 18th. She didn’t stay long, she was pregnant.

Brett: So you weren’t yet on the police force at this time. Were you?

James: No. No,

Brett: Still painting?


Brett: Now what was life like on the Kettering Police Force?

James: Well it was busy. Busy busy. Lots of nights we went to work there was only two of us reported in for the midnight to eight shift, uh one of us had to dispatch. We used to flip a coin to see who was going to dispatch and who was going to work the road. If you worked the road you had the whole damn city by yourself and if you got in trouble it was tough shit, you fought your way out because there was nobody to call for help.

Brett: Did you find a lot of trouble?

James: Well, once in awhile yeah. Never found any I couldn’t handle. (Laughs).

Brett: What were the most common kind of crimes that you would have to deal with on a nightly basis?

James: Well we had burglaries, robberies, family fights, dog bites, missing children. Everything in the world. As the department grew then I got assigned to the detective section and I worked homicides and missing juveniles, what the hell was it burglary.

Brett: Are there any specific cases that you remember working on?

James: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah I remember several of them.

Brett: Are there any that you could talk about?

James: Oh yeah, we had a little girl, I don’t know if you ever heard of it or not there was a school teacher from Dayton who lived in Columbus who was teaching down here and she stayed in those Woodman Apartments out there on uh off of Woodman Drive and she got abducted one night and uh out at Rink’s Department Store Lot and taken out and murdered and raped and brought back and put in her Volkswagen floor. Well, they wrote a book about that, The Girl on the Volkswagen Floor, and uh I worked on that quite
a bit but not a hell, I didn’t do anything of any importance on it. We had another murder where uh little Regina Dushanasky was her name she got in a car with a guy over on Rainbow Drive in East Kettering there and she was taken out and murdered raped and left to lay in the woods out in Greene County. Well horseback riders found her and we got the call I went with uh Sgt. no not Sgt. the Sheriff of Greene County I can’t think of his name right now anyway we went with him and one of the news broadcasters who was what was his name. He always predicted the weather by whiffly worms. Anyways he died by cancer later on but we went out there and found her and I had that case to work on and I was canvassing the area where she was picked up and I talked to a little boy about 11 years old in one home there I don’t remember his name but anyway he says “I seen her get in the car with a guy” and he says “I got part of the license number and I went in the house and told mom Regina’s nuts” and my mother says “Why?” and I says “because she just got in a car with a stranger” And uh from that information we was able to run, and he described the car a two tone Oldsmobile and uh we wound up getting the guy, Jimmy Wayne Howard was his name and uh he is still in the pen. He is in the pen for murder, kidnapping and murder. He has come up for parole several times, they won’t parole him because he is about half nuts. Her dad says “They better not parole him they ever do I’ll kill him” If he ever gets out the old man will kill him. He swore on be damned he would do it and I believe he would. Ah that is two of the cases, I had one case one time, I was going to homicide school in Cincinnati and uh we had been gone for two weeks me and Bill Hicks and I come back and there was a complaint of a girl out in Oak Creek being raped. Couldn’t no more than walk through the door Lt. Horne handed me the complaint and said get on this right away. City manager is all upset council is all upset. I read the report and I said this is a false complaint. He said how do you know this is a false complaint? I said I am telling you it is a false complaint. I says, “I’ll take care of it” I got on the phone called the mother I says “bring your daughter in here I want to talk to her” So she brought her in. I took her over to the interrogation room that we had and I says “Alright now I want you to tell me why in the hell you submitted this false report” She busted out bawling and said it ain’t no false report and I said yes it is. “Well how do you know it is?” I said, “I know damn well it is a false report now what the hell did you turn in a false report for?” Well after an hour or so she finally broke down cried and told me. Her mother had recently joined a card party, her dad was a traveling salesmen so he was gone all the time and they only had the one kid and the mother was leaving her home while she went to these card parties all the time. So in order to get her mother’s attention she conjured up this report that this colored guy, she answered the door and this colored guy forced his way in and raped her in the hallway. I said ain’t no way. She said well he did and I said no he didn’t. I said, “according to this report he pulled your pants down to your knees, you was wearing tight Levi’s, and got on top of you and raped you. I said there ain’t no way in hell he could do that because you can’t get your legs spread far enough apart for him to rape you. She finally admitted it was a false report. (Laughter). That is how I knew it was a false report. If a girl is wearing a pair of tight Levi’s pull her pants down to her knees try and rape her and you can’t do it. Might bend her over backwards but you can’t get on top of her and rape her. (Laughter) Ah we had all kinds of damn complaints.

Brett: Did you ever feel your life was in danger?

James: No a couple times it come close. A couple of burglaries. But never killed nobody, never beat nobody to death. Shot one but missed him. (Laughter)

Brett: Well I guess that is a good record.

James: Yep. I always classified myself as a pretty good policeman. I don’t know what other people classified me as but I thought I was. I had a lot of common sense that a lot of other people didn’t have. Some of them rookies coming on there didn’t have enough sense to get in out of the rain. They never been rolled in horse shit before either.

Brett: Now when you were working on the force, where was your family living?

James: Where was the family? We lived I bought a house there on Pittsfield Street, the north dead end of Pittsfield Street right in the cul-de-sac. We raised a big garden, it was a small house but we dug a basement under the house uh after the house was built. When they built the house they pushed dirt down there and they had to put the foundation so many feet in the solid ground, it was a VA house and they wouldn’t approve it unless it went so many feet into solid ground. Well that made the foundation deep enough for a
basement. Well they had about four feet of dirt, there was a crawl space under, but they had about four feet of dirt all over this floor in the basement so I cut a whole in the wall and I built about 45 ft conveyer out of junk that I got from the scrap yard and I run the dirt over in the neighbors backyard because it was low and he wanted the dirt and uh we put in a basement. Tiled it. We bought tile at 5 cents a piece. That tile was marbled colored. We bought the leftovers from jobs. I had an old picnic table, not a picnic table, a ping pong table put down there and I put all these tiles on it on this ping pong table. I’d go over to get them and I would get one of this and one of that. I laid that floor and everyone that seen that floor thought it was absolutely beautiful. It had tile that didn’t cost but 10 or 15 cents a piece and then it had some in there that cost a dollar and a half a piece. It had gold tile, yellow tile, red tile, blue tile, green tile, black tile, brown it was really nice. It turned out that it was a hell of a nice basement. I had to take out the center supports one at a time and put uh steel post in there and pour a footer for it. I had that thing all, of course I had to get a permit for that and I wasn’t allowed to pour no concrete until I got an inspection on them posts. Well, I got it all set plumbed up and everything, had it wired in place ready to pour the concrete I call for an inspection but I wasn’t home and neither was Jean, I told them to go in the back door or in the back go down the steps I had put in there and uh inspect that thing. I had notes for him to inspect. He left me a note said if you are going to pour a floor there you got to remove the rest of the dirt, put in drain tiles, and so many inches of peat gravel. I said, “You dumb son of a bitch” So I went ahead and poured it without his permission. He come over and looked at it after I got it all done and he said that is a fine job, good job. (Laughs)

Brett: So what did you and the family do for entertainment in those days?

James: Hmm. We would go to drive in movies. The police department, a theatre out there on County Line Road gave us free passes for the theatre because we were policemen. So we didn’t have to pay for that so I’d take the kids out there when I was off. Yeah we went and visit with people. We’d go to parks and play around. Sometimes go visit my mother and dad.

Brett: Where were they living?

James: Yeah they were living out on Salem Avenue at the time. Now you talked me hoarse. Not really. When I was an usher at the Colonial Theater, uh kind of a highlight, you might call it a highlight, I was about fifteen years old at that time and uh Betty Grable and Billy Lewis and Ann Miller came through with a personal show you know and I took Betty Grable to breakfast one morning. She wanted to know where to get something to eat and I told her there’s the White Clock Restaurant she could get some pretty decent breakfast. She said well would you mind going with us. I said no I don’t mind. (Laughs) She took me up there and bought my breakfast for me. She was a beautiful woman. That was the gal with the million dollar legs. She had them insured for a million dollars. I got hell of a fight right there in front of the Colonial Theatre one Easter. I’d been down there to a movie. I was all dressed in a gray suit standing out there ready to catch the trolley bus. The bowling pin boys got off to go to the Royal Bowling Alley they were all colored were walking west on Fifth St. They walked past me and then one of them turned around and hit me in the back of the head with his fist. So there was about five of them and we was right in the middle of Ludlow St fighting. I was all hunkered down and every now and then I would reach down and get one pull his head down and bust him right in the mouth you know. They don’t like to get hit in the mouth. Them lips bust all to hell you know, and uh here come a Dayton cruiser down Ludlow, he broke it up. He wanted to know what was going on I told him I said “I was standing here waiting on the damn bus and they come along walk past me and then turn around and hit me in the back of the head, that is how the fight got started” The police officer said “What the hell are you doing here anyway” and I said “God dammit I told you I was waiting on a bus” I said I think I got that right don’t I? He said “Yeah but you get the hell on home, and you guys get the hell across the bridge.” And that was the end of it. (Laughs) Oh we had some swinging times. I won’t go into them with you. (Laughter) I can’t tell you everything I done against the law. (Laughter). We used to have some swinging times when I was young.

Brett: When you came home from the war did you come right home or did you spend some time out west?

James: No. No. I came right home. See we could come back into Ft. Louten Washington and we was restricted to quarters for three or four days thinking maybe we brought back some germs from the Orient with us which we probably did but anyway that night three or four of us snuck off and went into Seattle
went down to the theater and watched Sally Rand do her fan dance. (Laughs) Snuck back, got about half drunk and snuck back into the camp nobody was ever the wiser. There was a hole under the fence that we went under.

Brett: What was your idea of the good life right after you got home from the war?
James: Jean and I were running around together having a good time, go dancing, drinking beer. We had several enjoyable evenings. We used to dance quite a bit. Sit around and listen to music a lot of times. But that was, neither one of us had a great deal of money, so there was nothing extravagant, you know. Money was fairly tight back then. At least it was with us (Laughs). We got married on a shoestring, we took a, I had a car, I sold it and got a truck, and we went to Indiana in that truck to get married. And we stopped on the way back and had a bowl of chili and a cheeseburger and that was our wedding dinner (Laughs). We had a good time. Had more fun than anybody.

Brett: Well I'd like to thank you very much for your time.

James: Ah you're welcome.

Brett: Thank you very much.

James: I think my life's been kind of a bore myself.

Brett: I don't know about that.

James: There's been a lot of it Ill tell you that.

Brett: You've done a lot of living!
Brett: You explained to us last time the story about catching fish with the cheese, but I heard that there is more to that story.

James: Right. Well, I hunted and hunted for all the fish bait I could find but it was kind of a dry season and I couldn’t find no more bait so I bought a little block of Velveeta cheese, cut it up into very small cubes and baited the trot line and two or three throw lines with it and the following morning I went down to raise the lines and I had two very large “Bluecats” catfish on the line and one gar. I hated the gar so I stuck him in the sand bill first to kill him and I was on my way home with those fish when the store merchant Mr. Coolain seen them and wanted to know what I had and when I told him he said that he would sure like to have one of those fish, the small one. So I said ok, fine. So I went in to give him that fish and he said I tell you what I have half a roll of bologna that I will give you for that. It is good but it is getting a little old. So I said ok fine. So he gave me the half a roll of bologna and started to put it in the sack and then he said hell just take the whole thing. Which was a hell of a deal as far as I was concerned. We didn’t get much bologna in those days. I started to leave and he said wait a minute come back here. I went back and he says I think I’ve got a pair of overalls back there that will fit you. So he gave me a pair of overalls and I put them on. He says, well with a new pair of overalls you ought to have a new shirt. So he drummed up a little blue long sleeve shirt to match the overalls and gave me that too. Well I went home really proud over my fish and bologna. Needless to say it tickled the hell out of the family because they’d rather have bologna anytime rather than fish. So uh, that was one of the interesting points of that day. Now where do we go from there?

Brett: Can you tell me a little bit about your brothers and sister?

James: Yeah, I had five brothers and one sister and one brother that died as a baby. I was right in the middle. I had two older brothers and one older sister and then me and then I had three younger brothers. So needless to say I wasn’t big enough to run with the big ones and too big to play with the little ones. I was always out of place. (Laughs) So me and my next older brother he was pretty much a cry baby and me and him fought a lot. One day we was playing cowboy and Indian. I was the Indian up behind the big rock, he was the cowboy down at the barn. He was shooting a slingshot at me and I was shooting horseweeds with a slingshot at him. He had a big lock of curly hair that stuck out in front at the time when he would stick his face out there by the time I would shoot he’d see the arrow coming and duck back. I’ll wait until he sticks his face out there when that curly lock comes out again and he stuck it out there and just as that curly lock of hair came out behind the barn I shot he stuck his head on out and the stick weed hit him right in the jaw and went through the one side of the jaw and pushed the other side out. Needless to say that was the end of playing cowboys and Indians for a while (Laughs). But my mother didn’t go along with that very good. She got out the old switches and I must say that my mother was one stout woman. She’d grabbed us kids by the hair of the head with one hand and the switch in the other and wear your hide out completely. She was tough. We got that very often (Laughs).

Brett: What were the names of your brothers and sister?

James: Oh, the older sister was named Evelyn, my next brother was named Earl Arnold Earl, then there was Rawley Edwin, then me James Ernest, and then there was Ronald Eugene, Eldon Hanes and Robert Russell. At this stage of the game, there is only two of us alive and that is me and Eldon, the rest of them are all deceased.

Brett: What did they do after they grew up?
James: Well when we came to Dayton in 1939 my oldest brother and next oldest brother went to work for Elder Beennan Company, no not Elder Beerman’s I am sorry, Elder Johnson Company as dishwashers in the cafeteria. Jobs were pretty hard to get at that particular time so even though my oldest brother had a college education he went to work as a dishwasher. Later on jobs started getting a little more plentiful he went to Moraine products and got a job as a plant guard. Followed by my other brother who later got a job also as a plant guard. Well the older brother worked himself up to the Chief of the Guards and then he became a foreman for Delco Moraine products. Then my younger brother Curly took over Earl’s job as Chief of the Guards. They both retired from Delco Moraine products after so many years of service. Myself after the second World War, I came back and got two or three different jobs that I didn’t like so I didn’t stay with them then I went to work as a painter for Brooks’ Body Shop out on N. Main St painting speakers for drive in theatres and I must have painted enough speakers to reach from here to California and back. But when the drive in theatres craze got finished there was no demand for speakers so I went into bodywork, repairing automobiles and painting them. And from that led to nighttime work, part-time work, a lot of work, and then eventually, in 1955, 1956 I read an add in the Kettering Oakwood times about the city of Kettering needing police officers and times were pretty tough far as work was concerned so I applied for the job and got it. So then I kept working as a body and fender man part time at Spence’s body shop, in my own garage, with a friend of mine in his garage and finally bought a house over on Pittsfield Street in Kettering. And stayed on with the Kettering Police Department until I retired but in the meantime we moved to Spring Valley where I opened a body shop down there, started a body shop down there. And that has been approximately 40 years ago and it has done well. The business has done good. And, my next younger brother Ronald he never was too crazy about work and he was a rotten salesman for a bread company and he kept that job for awhile. Then he got divorced, turned into an alcoholic and got laid off and from that day on he didn’t work at nothing steady. My next brother Eldon he also worked at Delco Moraine Products for something like 30 years and he retired. Made a good living, and a good wage, had nice savings and so forth. While that was going on just before he retired my youngest brother Rob he came down with cancer of the lung and lived about a year and then he died. So that takes care of most of my family.

Brett: So you owned your own body shop and business can you tell me what it was like working there?

James: Same time I was a police officer I started this body shop, this body and fender paint shop in Spring Valley. Needless to say we started out on a nickel and dime basis. We didn’t have any money to speak of and lots of times would charge the materials and parts we used until we got the check for the job we done and then I would go pay them. To give you an idea how tough things were starting it, we was in an old barn, which later burnt down, but we didn’t have any heat in there. In the middle of wintertime I was working on fenders and so forth and the cracks in the walls you could see out side. The only thing I had for heat was a gasoline blowtorch. I would warm my hands with that. I finally bought an old heat stove from a lady up the street for $25 and agreed to pay her $5/week until that stove was paid for which would have been five weeks. Well about the fourth week I didn’t have the $5 to pay her so she called me up and wanted to know where her $5 was at and I said I don’t have it but I’ll get it and bring it to you. So I went to a friend of mine and borrowed $5 took it up and gave it to her and then when I got enough money I paid my friend back and the following week I paid off the stove. But that is how tough it was getting started. We worked for damn near nothing compared to other shops that were going in business you know. But we eventually got our customers built up and made a very good business out of it. After I retired from the police department I worked at the shop for approximately ten years and then I turned it over to my son Steven to run and he still runs it today.

Brett: Tell me a little more about your children

James: My children. Well we had four children, one boy and three girls. The oldest girl was Leslie she was born while I was painting speakers for a drive in theatre at $1/hour working 17-18 hours a day to make enough money to meet the bills. Shortly thereafter Lisa Jo was born and then bills got more and more, but the work picked up a little bit and I in the meantime went to Brown Auto Sales who was a Hudson dealer down on South Ludlow Street and started a body shop for him and worked for him for 2 or 3 years at $1.25/hour. When a job opening came up for me down at Roger’s Pontiac with a guarantee salary with a
guarantee of $2.50/hour and working commission well then I took that job and old man Brown says I hate
to see you leave because you make me more money than all of them damn mechanics upstairs on the line
combined and I says well you wasn’t paying me accordingly so that’s the reason I am leaving and he says
well I will pay you more and I said no you had your opportunity but you didn’t take advantage of it so I am
leaving. So I went to Roger’s Pontiac and worked for him for about 5 years. When I noticed an ad in the
Kettering Oakwood time for a policeman wanted and I applied and got the job. In the meantime we had
Steven, our son, we had purchased a home on Pittsfield Street in Kettering by working part time and saving
up enough money for the down payment. Incidentally there is one interesting thing about that down
payment I shouldn’t skip. I had to pay $1150 down and took me about two months to save that up working
damn near 24 hours a day and I finally got it by going to the junk yard and buying a rollover job, a
practically new Plymouth had been rolled over, we repaired that thing and I sold it for enough money to
make the down payment on the house but when we went to closing there was closing cost of $2.50 and I
didn’t have it. I wrote a check for the $2.50 but that check bounced (Laughs). That woman called me up
and said Mr. Fuller if you are going to write bad checks you ought to make them for more than $2.50.
(Laughs) So I had to go borrow $2.50 from somebody and go down and pay, then I had to pay the bank for
bouncing that check which was another $2.50. But that is how tight things were. You can’t imagine that
unless you have been through it. With the day’s wages and so forth it seems unreal that that would be true
but it is. But I enjoyed it and shortly after that Rebecca came along which ended up that was the last of our
children and they all grewed up strong and healthy. We moved from Kettering to Spring Valley where we
started that shop and all the kids had to help work in the shop. Even my wife, she worked in the shop, took
care of the kids cleaned house and so forth too. We got to where every parts dealer in this part of the
country knew all the kids. As they grew up they run after parts and so forth and they all knew the wife but
they didn’t see much of me because I’d work full time at the police department and part time at the garage
and I always needed more at the garage. They’d do something work hard all day and couldn’t get it right.
I’d come home and in 15-20 minutes have it fixed be on the way. That was very aggravating to them.
Steven finally caught on to enough of it that he became a real good body man and still is. But, that is it for
now.

Brett: Can you tell how did you raise your family and specifically what was important to you in how you
wanted your children brought up?

James: Well I wanted them brought up dope, narcotics, and marijuana free. I wanted them all to get an
education. I wanted them all to learn how to work and they did. I insisted on that and they done very well
by never had no trouble with any of them ever being in jail or ever being involved in anything serious. The
most involved any of them ever got was a speeding ticket or something of that nature and then they got
there butt chewed out for that. Leslie was the only one that went to college and got a college degree. The
rest of them had the opportunity but they didn’t want to do it.

Brett: How did you feel about living in Dayton? Is Dayton the place you thought you would end up?

James: Well, I never really lived in Dayton too long after we came here in 1939, let’s see I finished up three
years of school and then I went to the service in 1944 and stayed in there until 1946 and when I came out I
married shortly there afterwards and we moved to way out on North Main Street and it wasn’t considered
Dayton it was considered Randolph Township and the from there we moved to Pittsfield Street in Kettering
and from there to Spring Valley. I didn’t particularly like Dayton; I didn’t have anything particularly
against it I just didn’t care for it. I liked to be out farther.

Brett: As a young man growing up in Dayton how did you spend your free time?

James: I didn’t have no free time. I worked. (Laughs) At age fifteen I was ushering in theatres in the RKO
Colonial and Keys theatre. At sixteen I was working at White Clock Restaurant and Wimpy’s Hamburger
Joint and I worked at Wimpy’s for $12/week, twelve hours a night from 6PM to 6AM and all you could
eat. That didn’t leave much money to run around on. But occasionally we would go out on a picnic with
girls and so forth.

Brett: What was your idea of the good life at the time?
James: (Laughs) There wasn’t much good life left. (Laughs) There really wasn’t. Kids today don’t realize how tough it was back then. They got no idea. You take Laura’s family for instance those kids have never been subjected to anything no where near what we were subjected to. I couldn’t go to my parents and say I want a couple dollars to go to the movie or can you loan me a couple dollars. He wouldn’t give it to you, they might have loaned it to you if they had it but chances are they wouldn’t have it because the old man was an alcoholic, drank up everything he made. So there wasn’t a whole lot of really good life. The best part of my life was after I married and had children become independent and on our own.

Brett: Can you tell me about some of the adversity that you faced in your life?

James: Well, yeah. I went to buy a house out on Dayton View. It was a nice little three-bedroom brick home with a full basement and so forth and I had to have $300 down. Well I didn’t have $300 down but my mother had been hit by a ??? funeral home ambulance on the way to the train station with a dead body on Soldier’s Home out there on Third Street. Out of that she settled with them for about $3000. That is more money than she ever seen in her life in one clump. So Jean, my wife, and I we stayed with her while she was laid up, she was bruised up pretty bad. We re-papered the house and so forth and fed her the meals and cooked and cleaned after her. One day I asked my mother I said would you loan me $300 to buy this house with. She said no, if I can’t have a home I am not going to use my money to get you one. So I had an aunt, my dad’s older sister lived there in Dayton, who was she and I were pretty good friends so I went to her and asked her to loan me $300 which she did. She wrote me out a check for $300 and I went and got on the damn bus to go down to the closing and pay the closing cost on that house and I think the payments were going to be like $56/month and that included escrow, taxes, everything else and I got to thinking about that on the way down there I got so mad at my mother that I got off the bus turned around caught another bus back home took my aunt’s $300 down there and told her forget it I wasn’t going to do it. But that is an adverse situation, which makes you pretty damn mad. But that was the way life was back then.

Brett: Do you remember some of the accomplishments that you are really proud of?

James: Probably the body shop is the biggest accomplishment I made in my whole damn life. I have had several accomplishments on the police department that I was pretty proud of, cases I was on and so forth, but far as accomplishments for in itself probably the body shop was the biggest accomplishment I ever made.

Brett: What were some of the police case you worked on?

James: Well I wound up not totally clearing but bringing up a witness who eventually led to the clearing up of a murder case of a little thirteen-year-old girl, Regina Dushaunskey over on Rainbow Drive. I was in the detective section at the time and I was canvassing the area to see if anybody had seen Regina disappear. An eleven year old boy, I knocked on this one door and I was talking to the mother about it and she said yeah my son knows a little about that that she invited me in and we sat down and talked to him and he says yeah I seen Regina get into a two tone tan Oldsmobile with a guy and I was upstairs looking out my bedroom window and run downstairs and told mother that Regina Dushaunskey is nuts. She just got into a car with a stranger. And he had part of the license number wrote down and with this information it led to the arrest and conviction of a guy named Jimmy Wayne Howard who lived out in South Dayton close to the area where she was picked up and she was a mental and he is in the penitentiary today serving time for that. He has been up for parole several times but they will not parole him because he is not mentally stable enough to be paroled. The Dushaunskey girl’s father made the statement that if they ever parole him I’ll kill him, I don’t give a damn what they do to me, I’ll kill him. So they haven’t paroled him yet. Another interesting case I had one time, I had been to Homicide School in Cincinnati and for two weeks I came back and the first thing they hit me with was a rape complaint. City was all up in arms; the city manager, the councilman, the Chief of Police and everybody wanted us to get on it right away. Really got the town upset. Anyway it was a false complaint and I proved it was false and got the girl to admit it was false.

Brett: I’d like to ask you a little bit about horse farming.
James: (Laughs) Oh yeah. We did that too. Well we decided to buy some horses for the kids just to ride and we had one horse that was pretty fast and a friend of mine Chester Gayheart up by Yellow Springs wanted us to come up and run that horse against some of his since he had a training track and starting gates and so forth. So we did. We went up there one day and we out run one of his better horses and he couldn't believe it. He talked me into going to Gallatin Tennessee and entering that horse in a race so we did. We went down there for a weekend, her name was Samran Candy we entered her in that race and she ran off and left the rest of the crowd. She won her first race out and the funny thing happened I was standing in the audience next to the race track when they left and paraded up to the audience and on the way to the gates this one guy says look at that they're running their little broodmares in there. I didn't say nothing. He was talking about my horse Candy so she ran off and left them that night we was all down at the motel restaurant eating and he came in he says, he seen me and he says you're the guy that had that little broodmare, that funny little mare in there. I said yeah but she wasn't much fun to run against was she. He says she sure as hell wasn't she skinned my horse. (Laughs) But anyway that is how come we got started in the horse racing. You go out and win your first race and it encourages you instead of discouraging you. So from there we kept messing around and we won several races. We run in Indianapolis Indiana at the Fairground Track, and we run at Buehler Park in Columbus, we run at Latonia in Florence Kentucky. We run up at Saginaw Michigan at a private owned track. We had a horse scheduled for the Ruidoso Downs, the All American Futurity which is the richest horse race in the country by the way but she didn't prove to be worthy of that so we run her in the Oklahoma Futurity out there she didn't do any good there either. But anyway, at the time I started to decide to get rid of the horses we had 21 horses. The feed bills were humongous, the vet bills, the blacksmith bills and so forth, it just got to be too much work and you couldn't watch it all. If I could have stayed and trained my own horses chances are we would have done a lot better. But to give you an idea I was paying a trainer in Oklahoma to train this horse and when I went out there to check on him the horse was standing in the goddamn stall with manure up on him, the stall hadn't even been cleaned. So I fired him and brought the horse home and it just got to be too big of an expense for the pleasure you got out of it too much worry and work. But my wife had me a diamond horseshoe ring made with a diamond in the eye of the ring for every time I won a race she would go and have a diamond put in it. I don't know I think she's got about ten little diamonds in it now. It is kind of a novelty thing. But we had a lot of fun. I love horses, I watch nearly every Western that comes on not necessarily for the plot of the Western I just like to watch the horses. I like to go to the racetrack to watch them. Whether I bet or not I just like to watch them. I think I must be reincarnated, I must have been a cavalry men at one time. I am almost sure of it.

Brett: Did your family help you with the horses?

James: Oh yeah. Yeah we all worked at it. I had an exercise track out here in this front field. John, Steve rode them and exercised them. I rode them and exercised them. Then I had an electric horse walker out here in the front here and we would bring them in here hook them on that and let them walk cool, hook them on that for about half and hour until they cooled off then we would take them in and give them a bath and feed them. They were all beautiful horses. I had a horse and racing in Buehler Park in Columbus and one of the jockeys named Ed Young and I said Ed I want you to run this horse like you have never run a horse before and she will win this race. I said she is going to lay down on you like a cat running I said she will start out running fast but when you hit her on the rear with that whip she will drop down into another gear and you will think she is falling I said don't pull her up, don't whatever you do pull her up. Normally you would lift there head up if you think they are going to fall. He said ok. He said this was some kind of Futurity race I forget now, anyway we won the blanket. He told me later, he says Jim if you hadn't told me not to pull her up I would sure pulled her up. When she dropped into that third gear man she was gone and I had the dammednest feeling to reach and grab her up. I just for a split second thought of what you said don't pull her up don't pull her up and he says I left her go and we won it by daylight. She come past five horses and won by daylight. It means that there is a space between the horses. Another time up in Saginaw Michigan, there was a little jockey by the name of Ed McFarland and we were going into the cafeteria to eat and I looked down and found a penny. I reached down and picked it up and I said Ed this is our lucky day, we are going to win this race and set a new record time. He says Jesus Christ Jim he says I wish I had your confidence. I said all you have to do is think positive. Think positive we are going to win this race and set a new track record. He says ok. So we go to the track and we are saddling up and I says remember think positive, you are going to win this race and set a new track record. In the meantime there was another guy there that had
a mare very similar to ours only she was an ornery mare. He was trying to put shoes on her and she'd kick him all over the place and twist and turn. He was cussing and raising hell with her, Jean was sitting there listening to him and he called that horse everything under the sun. Finally I went down to him and I said “fella I've listened to about all your foul mouth that I want to hear and my wife don't appreciate it a damn bit so I suggest you keep your mouth shut. If you can't handle that horse better get somebody that can.” Well he never said no more vulgar cuss words. He come up after awhile and said I bet you a hundred dollars that I can out run you today. I said no I don't want to take your money because I was kind of pissed off at him anyway otherwise I would have bet him and he says I can out run you. I said no I ain't going to take your money I don't want your money just get away from me and leave me alone. Well when we come out of the starting gates, a friend of mine one of the Kettering policemen, was there and he had a camera with him and he was down at the gates and he took a picture of our horse and that guy's horse and their horse had his nose out the gate about an inch more than his horse and they run and they changed leads every stride. Got to the finish line and my horse was about 3 inches in front of his. (Laughs). We set a new track record that day won the race got a double A register by that time. (Laughs). I kept telling that jockey got to think positive, think positive. He said boy I would never have believed that. But that is the kind of fun you have racing horses. It is really an interesting thing if you've got the money and can afford it and the time to do it. We were down at Latonia one time and we was running the race and this old doctor that was sitting up behind us had been racing horses for fifteen years and had never won a race and his horse won that day. He says that was my horse that won, he says that was my horse that one, he says Jesus Christ that was my horse that one (Laughs) He was so tickled that he couldn't realize that after all this time he had finally won a race. (Laughs). That was funny. But it got to be a lot trouble a lot of aggravation a lot of expense. Very time consuming. So we sold out and forget it.

Brett: Did you buy the property here on Lytle Five Points Road to raise the horses?

James: Well it just happened that way.

Brett: Now I heard that you also had property out by Caesar’s Creek.

James: Yeah we had a 100 acre farm down on I can’t think of the name of the road now. It backed up to Caesar’s Creek. We had a creek that ran through the farm that was called Buck Run Creek. Buck Run Creek dumped into Caesar’s Creek Reservoir and the government wanted our farm because in case it had any flooding the damn would back water up onto the farm instead of all over the place. Well it turned out that they just wanted it. We fought them in Cincinnati in Federal Court and they still got it at their price. You can’t beat Uncle Sam and they made a damn dog run training course out of it down there where people could go and train their dogs. It was a beautiful farm, rolling land, 100 acres; if we had it today it would probably be worth probably a million and a half. They paid us like $5000-6000/acre for it or something like that. Tore down the house, nice little house, barn, wells, creeks, it had two creeks running through it. But that attorney that had our case said you can expect an audit next year on your income tax. I said oh is hwy that? He said anytime you fight the federal government, they red flag your account. There was red flags they send the investigators out on, and they did. That son of a bitch spent two weeks going over our accounts with my wife and Steve because I was gone I was working. He spent two weeks going over our accounts and after two weeks times he okayed it, but he okayed the wrong year so we just left it go. (Laughs) My wife had him so confused he didn’t know which way to turn. (Laughs) The son of a bitch okayed the wrong year. He wrote it down as the right year but he took the figures from the wrong year. (Laughs) Which were about the same but just goes to show you that even the smarties make mistakes.

Brett: Did you have this property well you were raising horses?

James: Not then no. We were raising cattle then. We raised cattle down there on that farm.

Brett: How did that work out for you?

James: Ah we had a lot of fun with them. We didn’t make no money see the big shot controls these markets they know when you are going to have a cow sale so the price of cattle drop. They know when you are going to have a hog sale so the price of hogs drop as soon as that sale is over the price goes up. You’d be
surprised. Unless you have ever done it you don’t realize they control it. You go out and pay $75-80 for a calf and you keep it a year and a half and you’ve got it up to 600, 700, or 800 pounds and then the price will go down to thirty cents a pound. They know when you are going to sell it because you don’t want to winter them through because if you winter them through you are going to lose more money on the feed bill. It is nasty, nasty business.

Brett: Are you glad you got out of it?

James: Oh yeah. Too damn much work for an old man anyway. (Laughs) I still like to have horses but I can’t take care of them in the winter with this heart condition and so forth. If it wasn’t for that I would still have them. I would have me a couple broodmares and breed racehorses but can’t have everything. Steve’s got a half interest in a couple of new foals coming on in April friends of ours that we ran horses with Charlie Fox and his wife their still running thoroughbreds and they’ve got a couple of thoroughbred mares up there and Steve paid the breeding fee for the stallion to breed those two mares and they are going to raise them feed them and take care of them and run them and he gets half of everything and if they are no good at running and they sell them he gets half of what they sell them for or half of whatever they make. Which ain’t a bad deal. You still dappling in them in a roundabout way but the breeding fee is like $2000/3000 on them.

Brett: Can you tell us about some more of your childhood experiences in Whitehouse Kentucky?

James: Yeah me and my older brother went down to the train station to watch the evening trains go through which you always had one up and one down in the evening. And just out of something to do we’d sit down there and see who got off the train and who got on the train and in what direction they were going. Usually we’d get a gang of teenagers and a few elder people but uh we’d congregate there around train time. We went down there and sat down on the rail and there was a great big old boy by the name of Jim Butcher and what caused him to do this I don’t know but he had a leather strap in his hand about that long and he got up and walked over to Earl and hit him right under the eye with this leather strap. Well Earl was a skinny little fellow he probably didn’t weigh 135-140 pounds at the time and this guy weighed better than 200 and Earl flew into him like a tiger but this guy was beating the hell out of him so I thought “well I got to stop this one way or another” and I reached down and picked up a rock about the size of a hen egg on the railroad and I threw it at him and I hit him right above the eyebrow. When I did his eyebrow just fell down over his eye and that stopped the fight in fact it knocked him senseless for a minute or so it damn near knocked him out. He went home and told his dad who was a moonshine maker that my dad did that to him. Well here his dad come with a damn shotgun after my old man. Well news down there travels faster by mouth than it does over the telegraph wires before he could get to our house we already knew that he was coming. So the old man got down behind some concrete steps with a German Luger pistol waiting on him and he seen him coming up the road and he stopped at John Delaney’s store to buy some shotgun shells because I guess he didn’t have no shot gun shells. Old Delaney told him you’d better not go over there to Fuller’s because the old man is behind those steps with a German Luger pistol waiting on you, it was not him that hit your boy it was his son Ernie, they called me Ernie then. He finally convinced him that I was the one that hit him so he turned and went back home and I don’t know what he done to his boy he probably beat the hell out of him when he got there but that could have resulted in a nasty situation but it didn’t.

Brett: Did things like that happen a lot in Whitehouse?

James: Oh yeah. We ad one guy sitting on the railroad track one day his name was Tuck Price and he couldn’t him and his brother neither one could say three they were both tongue tied. They would say “thutty-thea” and “nutty-nea” for thirty three and this one guy got to teasing him about it and he got mad and left and went up to the house and got a 22 rifle and come back down stuck it in the guy’s mouth shot him and killed him! We had one election year they used to buy votes either for $1 or a gallon jug of whiskey they all got drunk and they got in a fight and this one guy pulled out a German Luger and shot 7 people. He didn’t kill them all but he shot them. It was hard country. (Laughs) That is what they used to say about the west, it was hard country so is that east. Them hillbillies was mean sometimes. Every now and then you’d hear where they tied somebody to the railroad and the train would run over them and chop them all to hell.
Brett: Was there a lot of moon-shining going on there?

James: Always has been and I lay you 10-1 that there still is. I went down there one time we went down to Dewey House State Park and my sister and her husband lived down there. I told her husband I want to go up to Jim Butcher’s and get me a gallon of moonshine. Oh you don’t want to do that he says. I say why not. He says, oh they are mean bastards up there, they’ll kill you. I said I ain’t scared of them. He says, ah you’d better let me go because I know them. (Laughs) Well when he was running moonshine off he would set his boys out in this hollow with high powered rifles and if you come up that hollow and they didn’t know you they would holler out from behind rocks Mister this is a one way road, you’d better turn around and go back or you won’t get out if you keep on. So anybody that was strangers they’d turn around and go back and if you didn’t they’d knock the bark off a tree right beside you or something to let you know that you meant business, but that is just how they were. Hell Old Shine Welsh and some other guy was up on the hilltop one day target practicing with rifles a hobo, a colored guy was riding down the road on top a boxcar and they just up and shot him off. Just for the fun of shooting him.

Brett: Were there a lot of problems like that? A lot of racial problems?

James: There wasn’t no law if a colored guy got off the train down there as a hobo in daylight, the first white person to see him would say “Nigger don’t let the sun go down on your ass in this town.” In other words you get on out of here. That was very common.

Brett: Yeah I heard that things like that happened.

James: My mother was always real generous though with the hobos. She’d never turn a hobo away. If she had anything at all to give them to eat she would. Sometimes we didn’t have a whole lot but she would give them what we had.

Brett: Were you glad to get to leave and come to Dayton or would you have rather stayed there?

James: Well yeah I was glad hell when we moved we didn’t come directly to Dayton. We left Whitehouse and went to Winchester KY on a farm, Vestalinda Dairy Farm and I stayed with people by the name of Lee but when we rode into Winchester I was in the back end of a two and half state bed truck loaded with furniture sitting on top of it in a dish pan. And I saw a little old theatre there called Key’s Theatre and man I had never seen a marquis all lit up with those electric lights and I thought Jesus Christ that must be fantastic. We didn’t have nothing but kerosene lamps back where we were from. There was no electricity in the town (Laughs). To see electric lights and stop lights and street lights well hell that was great. Hell I thought we was going into another world. When we got there everybody teased us about the way we talked because we talked hillbilly language and down there it was a lot different. One case, I wasn’t with the family then or if I was I don’t remember anything, we lived in Mississippi and somebody told Earl that he talked like a nigger and he says “I don’t talk like a nigger but my sissy do” (Laughs). You take on the accent wherever you are at and some people never lose it once it is. Bill Hicks one of the policemen up here in Kettering, he was from Juliet, Tennessee and he has been living here 25 years and he still talks just exactly like people in Juliet, Tennessee. He never changed.

Brett: Well that is about it. That is some really great stuff. Thank you very much.

James: Your welcome.