

**W.I. “Bill” Hairston**

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## **W.I. “Bill” Hairston**

W.I. “Bill” Hairston, 71, is a storyteller, old-time musician, and pastor (Westminster Presbyterian Church) living in Charleston, West Virginia. He was born in Phenix City, Alabama, and his family moved to Saint Albans, West Virginia in 1960 when he was 11. Through his storytelling, Hairston, as he says in the interview, “combines the Appalachian culture that he was exposed to on the Coal River, to the African-American culture that he is a part of.” For 35 years, he served as music coordinator at the Stonewall Jackson Jubilee, and is currently the coordinator of the Vandalia Gathering’s West Virginia Liar’s Contest. Hairston is an active member of the West Virginia Storytelling Guild, the Kentucky Storytelling Association, and the Ohio Storytelling Network, the National Association of Black Storytellers, and serves as the West Virginia liaison to the National Storytelling Network. He has performed in concerts, festivals, libraries, corporate meetings, conventions and schools throughout the region and the country.

In this interview, Hairston speaks about growing up in one of three Black families in the Lick Skillet area of Saint Albans along the Coal River, his interest in and work with rural West Virginia old-time musicians and 4-H camps, his friendship with Frank and Jane George, experiences with racism in West Virginia, and his work and mission as an Appalachian storyteller.

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BH: Bill Hairston

EH: Emily Hilliard

00:00

EH: Alright, so why don't you introduce yourself and tell me your name and when and where you were born.

BH: Okay, I'm Bill Hairston, I call myself W.I. Bill Hairston. That's to distinguish me from the other 9 Bill Hairstons that are in this three county area. So I'm W.I. Bill Hairston. I was born actually on the road in Phenix City, Alabama. My father was in the service at Fort Benning. We lived across the road. That's a story in itself. I was born during a flood and all that, but we won't get to there. We moved to Saint Albans, West Virginia at age 11, 1960. And I became part of, the fabric of the Coal River and the rural part of Saint Albans before homes and all that were built, etc. So I'm one of those country kids from out on Coal River.

EH: Nice. Why don't you tell me a little bit about your family background?

BH: Well, my mother was from rural Alabama, a little place called Seale, Alabama. It's in Russell County and like I said Russell County is directly across the Chattahoochee River from the second largest town in Georgia, which is Columbus, and Fort Benning, Georgia which is there. So she was born there. My father was born in McDowell County [West Virginia]. He was born--my grandfather had moved there and was working in the coal mines and my father of course was born there and received his education through the seventh grade in McDowell County and then he joined the service. He was actually 16 and he was supposed to be 17, but that again is a story (laughs) I don't want to get--go down these rabbit holes with all these different stories. But, and then they met while he was in the Army. He was at Fort Benning, they met and eventually had me and had my little sister. And my mother was a divorcee with already one child. So, there were 3 of us running around.

EH: Tell me about growing up in Saint Albans.

BH: Absolutely. Well when I think about it now it's wonderful. Wasn't then! It was a community that was predominantly white. Actually most of West Virginia is predominantly white (laughs). But this was different from say the Charleston or even in town Saint Albans. We were one of maybe 3 families out our way. If you know where Strawberry Road is, well, when you go down Strawberry Road on the Coal River, following the Coal River, and you get to what's called Fairview Drive. It's called Fairview Drive now, back then it was called Lick Skillet. And you go into Lick Skillet and that's the area that I come from. So therefore I grew up with, well went to school and grew up with pretty much your standard West Virginian. You know, we were the folks that played the music, did the storytelling on the porches, tried to take care of our kids. We played all day and slept at night like most--we ate the beans and all the different kinds of things that you talk about. Except ramps, we never had ramps, that came to me later. But it was just a good solid existence where we were part of the community and it just worked.

It was happening ironically in the 60s when the whole country was sort of stirring up, particularly around black and white issues. And to a large extent, Lick Skillet missed a lot of that. They just did. Now as I left Lick Skillet I started experiencing all kinds of things. But for whatever the reason, and I think it was because we were in such a small minority in the community, that we just either didn't notice it--I'm sure it was there--you know, but we missed a lot of it. But you could see it on TV when we finally got our TV (laughs). And by the time I got to high school it was strong--the whole tensions around race and around this country and all the things that were happening.

EH: So you were one of three Black families on Lick Skillet?

BH: Yes, uh-huh, three families in Lick Skillet--I have to make that clear. There are other parts of Saint Albans, but in Lick Skillet, where we were from, we were part of three and I would say that there must have been 30, 35-- nobody really counted, but we were less than 10% of the residents in the area.

EH: So were your parents musicians?

05:57

BH: My grandfather played banjo. My mother was a vocalist in church, singing vocalist kind of sing. My father, no. He never--to this day I don't know him ever even picking up an instrument or trying it or even--I think he took us to a couple of local events, you know, around town, but that was probably because his buddies were there with other recreational things. But no. My grandfather had stopped playing banjo by the time we got there. But we knew he did and you'd ask him questions and he, this is going back down into McDowell County, they would play for dances and that kind of thing. Front porch get togethers, you know, that kind of stuff. So that's, but no, by the time that my father came along, that was just not an interest of his. He just had, he had no interest whatsoever as far as being a musician, you know.

EH: What was your grandfather's name

BH: Colonel Isaac Hairston. Colonel was his first name, not his Army designation. But he was Colonel Isaac. I am William Isaac, my father was actually Odell Isaac, which was ugly but he would sometimes use William, you know. But he was, my grandfather would always say, "You're Odell! You're named after your uncle!" So he would have to 'fess up. And the part Isaac comes out of a tradition within the family all the way back to my great-grandfather.

EH: So what was your initial interest in traditional music and folklore?

BH: Well, this will take a second.

EH: Okay!

07:56

BH: I am...was active in 4-H being from where I was from, etc. and so I ended up in 4-H Camp and in 4-H Camp every now and then some musician would come around. It seemed as though I just connected to those guys. I wasn't playing or anything, I just connected. I had a mentor, a woman that I had meant in 4-H Camp of all places, who very, very interested in all facets of folklore and folklife, etc. She worked actually for what they call the Dept. of Commerce at that time. She was one of the people initially that started the Mountain Arts and Craft Fair at Cedar Lakes. She was one of those. But little by little, she started introducing me to this and that and different music, particularly starting with Scottish kind of thing. She believed and it later on turned out right that there was a Scottish background within the Hairston family. I don't know where she got that or why she knew that, but she continually told me. And so I literally would be involved in even Scottish dance, you know, it's a long story, but in my first year at Glenville State College, I was asked to come to what they called Mountain Heritage Weekend. Now my role there was to do what they call a cèilidh in the evening. That was where all the musicians and the storytellers and the poets--everybody that was there for the weekend, sharing with the participant, came together and shared something. And I was to be the one that emceed it and coordinated it and put it together. I was an 18-year-old and that was gonna be my role.

At that point in time, that whole--it was something that was, I should say, that was funded by the, there was no Division of Culture and History, but whatever was there at first. Norman...

EH: Fagan?

BH: Norman Fagan, yeah. And so they were, and it was done by the Extension Service, WVU Extension Service and they did these for children, mostly junior high, high school children, and adults--different adult groups. So I ended up going, I don't know, maybe 8, 9 times a year traveling around the state in different places in these Heritage Weekends and doing that same thing. In doing that, I started meeting musicians. If you'll remember, back in 4-H Camp, I was already sort of attracted to these musicians that would show up and do this or that. Well here all of a sudden I was spending weekends with some of the most interesting people to me that I could possibly think of. A lot of them are dead now. But you know, that's where I met originally The Morris Brothers. David had just gotten back from Vietnam and John was doing his thing and they were invited to one of those weekends. That's where I, I don't know, Lee, oh there's so many, Lee Triplett, I can go on with names, but...And so during that period of time I met musician after musician, writer after writer, folk scholars from WVU that would come down and do this or that. Singers, etc. And I just simply befriended them. I ended up other weekends visiting them. I was, I probably was the most, I visited everybody all the time. Every weekend I was going somewhere and dragging somebody along with me while I went off to Clay County or went off to wherever. And just that overall experience brought me to an appreciation not only of the music--By the way, I was asked to come and be a part of what was Negro spirituals, to sort of interpret that as a part of that weekend. But also to do those cèilidhs, etc. and so I just found myself deeply involved. And deeply involved in all kinds of things to a point that before, as life moved on I was part of the Arts and Crafts Fair at Cedar Lakes. I was part of several, several different events, and then one year, I was probably I'd say 22, and they were having a music festival. And this was not Ivydale [The Morris Family Old Time Music Festival], this was on up the road from Ivydale. I'm trying to remember the name of the town. It was before Gandeeville, right in there they had a festival.

EH: In Clay County?

BH: In Clay County. It was--it might come to me in a second. But I slept underneath my van. I was pure hippie by then. I mean there was no doubt about it. I was pure hippie. I was the kid that got a job at Dept. of Natural Resources in the summertime, and they would give ya a state car so you'd go around and do what you had to do. And there would be all these calls and complaints from, you know, all these different places, Wayne County and Pocahontas County, etc. that there's this black guy who doesn't wear shoes who has stole one of the state cars.

EH: (laughs)

BH: And that--and it just kept happening over and over, cause people saw this guy with all the hair and the cut-off jeans and no shoes and whatever and he couldn't possibly really be working for the state of West Virginia. But I was! Now I've forgotten where I was! (laughs) Okay, you'd asked me, oh my, what was your question?

14:53

EH: Well just your initial interest, and you were talking about the festival.

BH: Okay, oh yeah, I was gonna tell you about the festival. I was asleep underneath my van is where I slept. I didn't have a tent or anything. And this little boy and his father came over and started talking to

me, woke me up, and it turned out to be Kenny Parker. Kenny Parker who had a deep interest in traditional music, finally started a group at Stonewall Jackson Jubilee about 45 years ago. And he asked me if I wouldn't come up and help with that event. And so I started going up and helping to coordinate music at the Stonewall Jackson Jubilee and we were traditional music, all totally. That's what we did. Even the bluegrass folks came in and they'd have to do, you know, and so over those years, and with all my interest and all my exposure, I doubt seriously if there's a traditional musician that exists in West Virginia now that I haven't experienced, know personally, or sang with, at one point even played with. I don't, I ended up on an autoharp and I don't really do that anymore. But I've been a part of, you know, just like weekends like last weekend and other weekends where you just run into people that you've known for over 45 years, you know, just in music. So that's, I guess that's essentially who I am.

As a part of all of that, I started reading, I started studying, I started interviewing people and so I have this sort of vast knowledge of folklore and folklife in West Virginia. You know, I've experienced the, like I said, I visit everybody and I've been in some places, probably, particularly in the 60s and 70s, where it might not have been wise for a young black man to go, but my interest sort of overtook that.

EH: What were those places?

BH: Well, Clay County--lots of great, great people down there. Let's see, up there around Calhoun County where Phoebe Parsons and going blank on names--where they were...

EH: ...Sylvia O'Brien?

BH: What's his name...Well, she too--I knew! Even younger people like down there in Summers County. Jimmy. Jimmy...

EH: Costa?

BH: Costa. We went into one area and when I say we, I meant Jane George and Frank George--I not only visited them, I stayed with them every chance I got. And so I spent tremendous hours with them. I traveled with them, they were on their way to some event or some place, and I just drove down to wherever they were. At this time either Putnam County, and then they moved to Mercer County and I'd just drive and hop in the car and go with them wherever they went. And again, picking up on the music, picking up on the people, picking up on the culture.

And it's a culture that if you'll--I didn't get to West Virginia until I was 11 years old. And so I had a real strong understanding of being a young black kid in Alabama. That was, and all of a sudden I lost it immediately when we got to West Virginia. It was gone! I mean, Alabama even though I was less than 11, Alabama--I went all day not really talking to anybody white or--see them on the street, see them in a car--but my doctor, the stores I was in, everybody in the life, the pastor, everybody and all the people I knew were black! They were! You know, and all of a sudden here I was introduced to rural West Virginia and there were just a few, very few Blacks. So it was...I'll give you one example and then I'll... okay.

The summer, we got here in June of 1960. So that summer, we were playing with the kids that were in our neighborhood. All the kids. You know, just, we were having--we'd go places, do things. My little sister and I--by then my older sister had graduated nursing school and was already in Cleveland, Ohio. But we were, we had a great summer our first summer in West Virginia. And it was school time. And my mother had taken a lot of time teaching us where to go, in Alabama, in Phenix City, we didn't have a bus that we had to ride--we just walked to the school, teaching us, walking with us to the bus stop, etc., so we were prepared that morning. And we started out, my little sister who was about, a little less than 2 years younger than me, we started out to the bus stop. The white kids were also walking with us to the bus stop,

and we said, well maybe they catch the bus in the same place! So we got to the bus stop and we had the number of the bus and all of that, and when the bus came, the number of the bus, the white kids were getting on the bus! We thought, well maybe we all use the same bus to get to our schools. And guess what? When we got to school, they got off and it was the same stop. Nobody had told us that we were gonna be in an integrated school. We never experienced an integrated school and here we were standing on the bus, or sitting, and really the last kids off trying to get that in our minds what was about to happen.

EH: Wow.

BH: And we made it. I was the only black person in my homeroom. That's again another story, but that's one experience I'm talking about of how we had to learn as we went along. And we were real sort of upset with our mother and she said, well I don't know that she knew that.

EH: Yeah.

BH: You know, I'm not even sure if she knew that. But it was what it was.

EH: So Brown v. Board was '58?

BH: '55.

EH: But...

BH: And West Virginia integrated schools immediately. '54 come to think of it. 'Cause my mother-in-law...it was '54 because my mother-in-law was--in Kanawha County, they started integration I guess that year in '55, that Fall of '55 or '54, I'm not sure which, by staggering classes. In other words, the 1st grade was integrated, the 2nd grade was still black, the 3rd grade was integrated, etc. And they went the whole system in Kanawha County that way so that it would be, one year later everybody was integrated. So my mother-in-law was one of those that was put in an integrated school the first year and she has all these stories about that. But by the time we got here, that was 6, 7, yeah, 6 years later, and integration was solid in Kanawha County. Now, I have to say that. Some of other counties--McDowell County, Raleigh County, I know all this because obviously I've been, I've read it all, but I know that. '68 was the year. I mean way into...now we're talking about 1954. Raleigh County was, or McDowell County was '68. Raleigh was right in there somewhere and some of those other counties. There were also counties ironically that had such few Black children in it, being West Virginia, and also having such low budgets, and not having a lot of money, because what you do was to send your children or the county school board would send the Black children into the next county or 2 counties over or whatever where there was a Black high school. That's just what they did. But in some of these counties they couldn't afford the transportation, the...for instance if you were in high school, you probably, unless you were in Kanawha or Cabell or one of the Southern counties, you were a resident--if you were gonna go to high school, you were a resident in some school. West Virginia State College had its own high school where kids were sent from all over the state. And that was the same in some of the other schools. So what I'm saying is, there were kids--there was such a low amount of black children in the county, with not enough money to transport them, etc. into the next county or even have a school, that they just [hits table] put 'em in the school! (laughs) So you have some, I don't know, I've been meaning for years to take a look at that, but most of those counties were above say, Gilmer and out to East of Gilmer over in that area. But they just didn't have the money, so they just--the heck with segregation, the law said they had to educate this kid so [hits table] they educated the kid! (laughs) But now you see, I've forgotten where I was again.

26:16

EH: You were talking about how there just wasn't really a black community--you had a real strong sense of black community in Alabama.

BH: Yeah, yeah. I had that and that left here. And I think because of that, that was my struggle. I was trying my best to identify with my family, my Hairston family which as that time I really didn't have a good understanding of. I just knew that they were from McDowell County. I knew every little about 'em, but I remember the banjo was at my grandfather's house and so there was that connection. And so I think a lot of what happened to me and a lot of my interests and understanding and zest to learn came out of a desire to just identify. And of course I'm way of age now. I identify with everything. I know what's going on, you know, etc. but that struggle back in the 20s in particular, 'cause high school sort of was its own thing--that's a whole different kind of life. But to end up at Glenville State College, to go back that summer to the place where I went to school and see the West Virginia Folk Festival and see all of these people and all these musicians, none of which back then were black, but still, fascinating! And so I just hooked on to that.

At the same time, I was hooking on to Black traditions. Still to this day you know, I can be at the Glenville State Folk Festival one day and then back here in Charleston singing with Martin Luther King Jr. Male Chorus in a little African American church just enjoying my--that...I'd learned to do that. My son who grew up traveling with me, is a kid that can blend into any kind of situation. There's been weeks that we went to Alabama for say a family reunion and then went to maybe to Stonewall Jackson Jubilee and then got invited to the Rockefeller compound, 'cause that's something else--I used to be heavily involved politically. And my child could just adjust from being that kid in Alabama with them to the rural families to these other families. He just--and he still does that even today. So it worked out.

EH: What about Uncle Homer Walker? Did you really latch on to him?

BH: Yes we did! Again, I followed Jane and Frank George almost to whatever they were doing. That was just natural for me. I had taken a week off my work and I had gone down to Princeton, WV where they were doing a day camp and this was a day camp for just children in that community. It was a mostly African American community in the Princeton area. So we were just doing the day camp, day after day and one day Frank pulled out his banjo and was just gonna do a demonstration for these kids and he started doing it and teaching them about the banjo, etc. And one little girl said, "Uncle Homer has one of those." And we looked at her and she was an African-American kid. "Uncle Homer?" Well there was sort of a starvation to find Black musicians, particularly banjo players. And this little girl was saying Uncle Homer. And we thought--I looked at Frank, Frank looked at me and we both looked at Jane and we said "Oh my goodness." We found, talked to that little girl, found out that her Uncle Homer lived in a little town on the edge of the state, on 460 leaving the state, called Glenn Lyn, Virginia. That was all we knew. Glenn Lyn, Virginia. And so that very Saturday, we drove down to Glenn Lyn, Virginia and started asking around. "Is there, do you know a Uncle Homer?" or whatever, we weren't having much luck at first. And then finally a guy at a bait and tackle place said, "Yeah, Uncle Homer lives up that hill" and blah blah blah. So we went up that hill and followed the direction and there was Uncle Homer, sitting on his porch--not playing banjo--that would have been too (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

BH: But he was just sitting on his porch just enjoying the afternoon. And we introduced ourselves and talked to him for a while and "I understand you play banjo." He says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." And eventually he pulled out his banjo, Frank pulled out his banjo and they started playing and immediately we brought



him to the next festival. 'Cause he was ready to go, was bored sitting on that porch. And I think the next festival was, you know I'm not sure which one but I remember when it was time for Ivydale Festival, Uncle Homer had lost his banjo and we were so excited about him going, and I was telling John Morris. So John Morris sent me back to Glenn Lyn with a banjo for Uncle Homer and then I drove Uncle Homer up to Ivydale and from there he became this person that you know, way, he was so popular that other people invited him to things and they came and got him--Uncle Homer didn't drive, he didn't. But all of a sudden I was reading about Uncle Homer had been here or there. But that all happened because of that little day camp down in Princeton where the little girl said, "Uncle Home has one of those." So...

EH: Thank goodness she said something.

BH: We found a man...And he [Uncle Homer] had been playing for years. He was one of those guys, he was in his 80s and he played for dances, he remembered a time when lots of Black people played those instruments. I've discovered and I've been challenged at this, but when radio became really popular and banjo in particular was picked up by this whole new group of musicians--they were becoming more popular--Black folks were either overshadowed or just didn't want to play. They didn't want to identify. So little by little, like my grandfather, which I finally decided, that's why he stopped. They just didn't want to identify and so that whole thing left. And every now and then even today you can find a musician--I ran into a guy 2 years ago down in North Carolina, but Frank ran into a guy up in the state of Washington, he went up there for a festival, that was from Louisiana but the rural part of Louisiana. Great, young man. He even brought him here at one point.

EH: Oh...

BH: I wasn't in the state then, so I was doing something.

34:46

EH: Well I know he befriended Jerome Paxton.

BH: Yes, yeah right. And they, and Kim, banjo player Kim...

EH: Yeah, Johnson,

BH: Johnson! But Frank was just fascinated by him. I was still visiting them, I never stopped visiting. I remember going up to their house one weekend. Frank had all these tapes and videos and all of this stuff and he baptized me with this guy for about 2 hours or so. And said, "You gotta meet him!" And when he came here, I think I was, I believe that I was, I know I was out of state but I don't remember what it was, but I couldn't be there for him.

35:34

EH: Do you think some of that was because the image being put forward--you know like the way that they separated race records and hillbilly music...

BH: Exactly!

EH: ...so it became affiliated with whiteness?

BH: Right. And once it was affiliated with white "hillbillies" it wasn't attractive, I don't believe, to some Blacks. They didn't want to play--they were embarrassed to play it some of them, and to be very honest

with you, I think they were discouraged by, you know, you didn't want this black guy at your dance playing...I mean I really believe that was part of it. Not a huge part, but part of it. So little by little, guys like my granddaddy just sort of put it aside and went on to something else. And that's a sad thing, but it happened.

EH: Yeah, yeah.

BH: You know, it did happen.

EH: So you mostly played autoharp or did you....

BH: Yeah, well, what you have to understand is that I kept picking up instruments. My first instrument was the fiddle. I picked it up and I was hanging around with folks that could just unbelievably play fiddle, I mean great. So I ended up--either they didn't want me to play or I didn't want to play. So I left the fiddle alone. And then I picked up the guitar which is basic, but still the folks that I was running with, different people, or the same people in some cases, they were just so much better that I would put it aside and do what I did well, and that was vocal, and run my mouth and etc. etc. and I never got that, and finally I tried the banjo and I just, that was, I couldn't do it, period. The other two there was that possibility but the banjo I just couldn't, I couldn't get it. So then along comes this autoharp which was just downright easy! There was nothing to it! (laughs) And so I started playing autoharp and I played with groups, etc. etc. and I did it on my own. I even had a point in time when I was just going out to Holiday Inns up and down [Interstate] 81 playing music--me and my autoharp! But I remember, I also had my mouth and I had stories, I could capture that audience and they paid me to do that, so hey, why not, you know? (laughs) So yeah.

And even the last few years I haven't done a lot with autoharp, but I'm getting back to it. I pulled it out. The music that I used to do and basically was really traditional tunes, songs, things taught to me by people like Aunt Jennie Wilson down in..."I wish I was single again, again, I wish I was single..." And just over the years, that's not what people want me to do. And so I just...And as the years past, particularly the last 10, maybe even 15, but particularly the last 10, people identify me as a storyteller, which is fine 'cause I am, and that's what they invite me to do. They aren't inviting me to sing or play music, they're either inviting me to be a storyteller or to emcee the event that's going on, so I end up emceeing a lot, and that's because of Stonewall Jackson Jubilee and other places. So I've become this person who's an emcee storyteller who sings you know, and I guess that's who I'll be for a long time, you know so, mmhm.

39:47

EH: Was there any reaction to you as this hippie Black kid from some of the people you were going to visit?

BH: Actually, let me see how I can put this. Simplistic. People are very simplistic. I won't call names, but let me just say that I would go to visit a person and they could very well see that I was a Black kid. And they, because I think because of their inner nature of just being good people, they immediately put up with this Black kid that they didn't know. They might have even been uncomfortable, I'm not sure. But I used to get phrases like, "You're really a good kid even though you ARE negro or colored," was mostly... And so what they were doing was getting to know me, and even though they had their own prejudices and misunderstandings of people, etc., 'cause some of these people you know just never left their homes, except, you know. They were accepting me because I was a good person even though I was colored, you know--kind of thing. And I guess that's the attitude that will sum it up. They thought I was a good person. Or "a good kid" in a lot of cases, or whatever. "Even though I was colored." Now they wouldn't say that

now in this day and age. They probably will as time goes on, well maybe I better not--I'm not going there. (laughs)

EH: Feel free! (laughs)

BH: (laughs) But yeah, so if you ask me, I--there were incidences that I experienced where people would react to this Black person by either believe it or not, getting up and leaving, being bold and calling me the N-word--that happened over the years a few times. And one of my stories which I, it's very long, is a story of an incident that happened to me simply because I was in fact Black. And what people forget is, that wasn't, that's not something that happened in big cities or whatever. It happened here. It happened...I was a kid that--well I will mention it.

I was a kid that in my early years (phone rings), in my twenties, I wouldn't even drive in the city of South Charleston because I was pulled over for no reason. And here I was a state employee working for Natural Resources--a college student. A good kid! And I was being pulled over, so I would, to go to Saint Albans, I would go the other way down through Institute and Dunbar and across the Nitro Bridge just to get away from the hassle of being pulled over.

The answer is and I would never ever say that West Virginians are without a doubt the most, and I've heard people say this, "we don't have prejudices here," etc. That's all a bunch of hogwash. What I can tell you is that people in West Virginia, particularly rural West Virginians will size you up before they make their final decision. And just because they make a decision that you are okay, doesn't change who they are and how they see in general pictures, so.

EH: Yeah.

BH: Okay.

EH: That's what I have observed as well.

44:26

BH: Yeah.

EH: Why don't you talk about your development as a storyteller?

BH: Well, back in Alabama believe it or not, the old folks, the old guys I should say, the old men would get together. There was one little section that was named after my mother's family now, Boddie Avenue, B-O-D-D-I-E. That was her name. But they would get together and just start sharing with each other and a lot of good stories! And again, you were a kid, that's not something you could participate in, but you were welcome to sit there as they passed the bottle and did all they did and told their stories. So that was something that was always there and I always just had fun just sitting there. Low and behold, when I get to Saint Albans, the same thing was happening on porches, under trees, wherever they were. Back then it was mostly men who were just telling stories and telling, I mean these were tall tales, etc. Where then I started--and that's when it really fascinated me. So in high school, every now and then I'd get an opportunity and I would try to tell a story. That wasn't something that would work for the talent show at high school. Nobody was interested in anybody telling a story, but you know, I would do it in other places. Then I got an opportunity in church and the MYF, I was a good Methodist kid and there I could get up and tell stories, and to just little by little, by the time I got to be the, I guess personality of the Stonewall Jackson Jubilee, 44-'45 years ago, I was telling stories between--while this person was getting ready to play, or this band was getting ready to come up or whatever. I was telling stories, little short

stories of things that came into my head. And it just built from that. It built to a point where I can, I do concerts. I'm what you call a regional storyteller. I'm not the Bill Lepp that's all over the country doing his thing. Bill Lepp is probably my hero, if I could call him that. Along with others, but I'm the regional person. I'm the person that you'll find at the festival in North Carolina or the festival in Kentucky, West Virginia...less in West Virginia than say in Kentucky. I'm a member of the West Virginia Storytelling Guild, the Kentucky Storytelling Association, and the Ohio Storytelling Network. Those are my three organizations. And I sort of work out of all those groups and so on. And I have learned to, my stories at one point in time were things that I guess heard, things that I read, picking stories out of books of other storytellers etc. And over the years it's just become me. And this--I was at the Folklife Center at Fairmont this weekend. I told a story for the very first time that was totally about a coincidence, I called it, that involved me. So I'm at a point now--the stories are becoming extremely personal. But I'm not, I mean I can do the funny stuff and I do it, I have several of those--what you have to do is look at your audience and look at the reaction of your audience and then chose what you're gonna do based on the feedback you're getting or the look you're getting or whatever.

But basically, oh and I forgot that one of my outlets were 4-H. As I came through the 4-H program I was allowed to tell my stories. So I'm one of these that just all of his life, liked the music, but more with the stories, it's something that people did, I enjoyed and I picked up on it. I am now able to actually make money (laughs) doing it! And it's great to be able to do what you like. And as a retired person--I was doing it before retirement, but now hey, I can take off on any day of the week and go anywhere. I've got, I'm scheduled, well for the next few months, I've got Wednesdays and Thursdays and Tuesdays with everything from libraries to just organizations that just one group--I can't even remember the name of them. But I'll be a part of the National 4-H agents' meeting down at the Greenbrier in November. What they're doing, people are coming in from all over the country and they're trying to showcase some of their talent and I guess they consider me one of their talents.

50:48

EH: Well yeah!

BH: (laughs) So I'll be there.

EH: So do you still, are you still involved with 4-H? Is that just through Stonewall Jackson Jubilee?

BH: Well technically Stonewall Jackson Jubilee wasn't actually 4-H even though the Extension Service was there and did some things. I am, for years, what I always do at least 2 4-H camps, at least visit 2 4-H camps every summer, somewhere in the state. As far as locally, I'm on what's called a visiting, what do we call it, anyway, the local body with Extension that I can't...Extension Service Committee, maybe that's the name of it. I do...this summer I wasn't able to do anything because I've been traveling. But last summer I gave my services as a storyteller free to places like Ohio County and within the 4-H Camp. I support 4-H financially, particularly in scholarships for children.

You see, when I was a kid, yeah, my father was an Army retired person, but we didn't have a lot of money and it took other people that paid for my 4-H Camps. It was the local dairy which no longer exists here, but they would pay money, not directly to me, but it was that money that paid for me. And to go to State Camp, there was always scholarships of money. So as I sit back now knowing that that's one of the most crucial things in my life as far as leadership development and being who I am. And by the way, friends of which I have friends 50+ from the days, from 4-H, I don't have any choice but now to put some of my money back into camps and into scholarships for kids in camp.

So to answer your question, I'm a part of the West Virginia 4-H All-stars and we're a service group to 4-H here in the state. In fact we have our meeting, our state meeting in a couple of weekends from now. And I'm a part of the Extension Service Committee locally and I do, whenever asked and I'm able to, I'll do volunteer efforts. Not only in Kanawha County but across the state, 'cause this is my playground, so to speak you know.

53:49

EH: What are your stories about?

BH: Question is asked all the time! "What kind of stories do you do?" Well, it depends on the audience. Over all of these years, I have developed what I call the personal funny life stories. I have developed the personal stories period. I have developed Jack Tales. I have developed what you can call running comedy things. I do some folklore. I don't like to do folklore where I'm talking about a particular incident that happened in West Virginia or whatever but I'll do a little bit. I've got a really great John Henry story that's about 20 minutes long. But it involves all kinds of things. So I... but they're not about any specific thing even though now it seems to be I'm calling up on incidents in my life that I think are prophetic or I think deserved to be shared. And I'm starting to go more there. But if I'm with a child, a children's group, particularly an elementary school, then the stories are gonna be African tales and they're gonna be tales about genies and just things that keep them involved and keep them making noises and participating in different ways. And I do a lot of that, a lot less than I used to, but I'm still doing it. I'll be in Athens next month and I'll be, I keep thinking I'm somewhere this month, like Gassaway or somewhere. But so to answer your questions, all kinds, different topics, different tales, and it really does depend on the audience that I'm in front of.

I have been called on in corporations, small corporations where they're trying to build a community of new management where they've either combined with another organization or combined 2 and so now these people don't know each other--management folks that don't know each other. And I'm invited to come in one evening, tell stories and do it in such a way that then I get them telling their stories. And then they start sharing with each other and it makes for a closer knit group of managers. And the first time I did that, I thought "huh?" You know? But then again all you gotta do is read and research or whatever but I got it, figured out how I would do it, and it worked the first time. So... I do all of that and I'm trying to think of some other.

But you can find me even emceeding a banquet. The Greene County, PA Yucatan club or whatever and I'm there as, I'm the speaker for the evening, and my job is to speak. Kellogg Foundation, if they come through, they came--they were here, well they were actually in Morgantown, I think the whole group, and I was that evening's entertainment. So it just depends on where you are and what you're doing. But I'm open for anything as long as it's about the story. And I'm open to go anywhere if it's about story. I'm open to work with people. I have workshops that I do on story. One that's popular now is one I call "It is all about me". It's just a workshop that teaches you, not just as a storyteller, but as a person who has to be in front of a group of people and speak, how to keep their attention. What you do and what you don't do and how--and learn and understand what it is to be a communicator in front of people. And so that's what that's all about. It's 90 minutes and when you leave hopefully you've got some things under your belt that you can use. So you know.

59:02

EH: Do you feel like you have any goals or missions as a storyteller? Like with bringing African stories to kids, introducing them to more cultural diversity, or are there stories you want to remain in circulation?

BH: If you see my promotions, it says that Bill Hairston combines the, I don't even remember--He combines the Appalachian culture that he was exposed to on the Coal River, to the African-American culture that he is a part of. So one of the things that I'm always doing particularly with children and also with adults, without saying it, is putting together a storyline where it then makes the person understand that the culture, the Appalachian culture that you're sitting in down in Monroe County or up in Gilmer County or wherever, isn't that different from the African American culture as far as the expectations, as far as the people, as far as the food, etc. And I try to do that. So yeah, I'm always about combining or at least bringing people...Over the years I've been in a lot of situations where I was it, I was the only Black person in a 100-mile radius. I'll never forget years ago, well not that many years ago...

1:01:03

END OF TAPE

HairstonBill2.9.10

BH: Bill Hairston

EH: Emily Hilliard

00:00

EH: So yeah, you were talking about your storytelling and how you're kind of...your mission and how its presented.

BH: Oh yeah, okay, okay. Yeah. Oh my, I wish I...but basically I have over these years tried to introduce the culture that I know and who I'm a part of to the world at large, you know? I don't care if I'm in California at the National Storyteller's Conference. I advertise myself as an Appalachian storyteller. And I am an Appalachian storyteller. And so what I try to do is to bring that bridge between African-Americans and Appalachians. Of which, there are a lot of Black Appalachians.

I worked for CORA, Commission on Religion in Appalachia for a while. And our job was to fund grassroots organizations within the Appalachian region that were about certain, you know, community development or whatever it was. A lot of those groups were groups that I found fascinating because they had within them some of the African Americans in the community. Others, there weren't African-Americans anywhere near and here I was again the only African-American person probably within you know, like I said 100 square miles. But I learned through stories, the people will listen. And when people listen then they start understanding you. When they can laugh with you, when they can cry with you, when they can be shocked with you, they tend to start identifying and it works in such a way that I leave, but the next guy that drives through town to pick up gas is treated and looked at differently. That's sort of my goal. And I think it happens. I really think it happens. Not all the time, but you know, I know of a couple of times that it happened. I'm not gonna take credit, but at the same time, if you can introduce people to a new way of looking something, particularly race, particularly when they're not saddled with the--I'm trying to think of a word for it--the arrogance, the hate that people bring with it. Or that people share. People then start looking at people for who they are. And they start...now and my arrival, my goal will be when a person is able to look at me or whoever and has a certain opinion and then if there's a "bad" person that comes along, they can see them as a bad person and not as a Black person.

One example and I'll leave it alone (laughs). Okay?

EH: (laughs)

BH: I had this friend right here in Charleston that would go over to the West Side of Charleston after work every day actually. And he drank a lot, drank all the time. But he drank at a bar over on the West Side at Central Ave. at that time that was completely white. I mean there were Black people in that neighborhood, etc. but this bar completely white. And he invited me to that bar. And I didn't know the reputation of the bar. I had seen it there. But when I walked in and we sat down, we sat down at the bar, and I'm sitting there and the bartender who is also the owner is looking at me, and John is one of the most, one of his most beloved and popular customers in the place. So he's real careful about how he's approaching me, but you can tell immediately that he really doesn't want me there. That by the way, is easy to do sometimes. So after a while he comes over and he said, after my very first drink actually, beer, he comes over and he says, "I gotta tell you something." I said, "Well what's that?" He says, "I know you're with John but he says I don't like Black folks in here." Says, "I don't really want 'em in here." He said, "I'm just being honest with you." He said, "My brother was shot and killed by a Black man and I don't have a lot of, a lot of, I don't want you here. Now you're with John and you can just say but I don't want you here." And I looked at him and I didn't know what to say or whether to say anything and finally it hit me. And I said, "Well can I ask you something?" And he said, "What." And I said, "If the person that killed your brother was white, would you not want white folks in here?" And he thought a second and he just walked away. Two years later, I'm sitting, my wife and I are sitting with him and his wife at the West Virginia Symphony.

EH: John?

BH: Yeah. The guy that owns the bar.

EH: Oh, the guy that owns the bar!

BH: We're sitting at...in other words, for whatever the reason, I'm not gonna say I was totally...but he didn't answer my question. "If the guy was white, would you not want white folks in here?" And all I'm saying was over a period of time, John came, I came, John would invite him to something and he would come and I'm just saying that two years later there were two couples that went to the West Virginia Symphony together and the owner that told me he didn't want black folks in his bar was who went with us that evening. So I don't...Now I don't even remember my point. But I had a point!

EH: (laughs) Well, you were talking about sort of changing people's perceptions.

BH: Yeah, yeah, okay, yeah. But that's, but what I'm saying, people just accepting people without the hate and without the other stuff that comes along with it. You know, the little boy that 13, 14-year-old boy at Stonewall Jackson Jubilee that's there with his parents and they're doing a demonstration, or the Civil War reenactor kind of thing. And he says to me, "You know, my family we don't like Black folks in my family." 14-year-old, of course he doesn't know any better than to say that to me. But then he becomes a project for me. And the next year he was coming up to the barn to say, "Hey, I'm here!" Or blah blah blah. Or the little girl in Wayne County, one of my best friends graduated from Marshall when I was much younger, and his first job was band director at Wayne County High School. And like friends do, we were two single guys and every now and then he'd want, the parents of course went with the band some of 'em, but I traveled with the band too. That's my friend, I could go down there and we could travel all over. Kids got to know me. And one day I'm sitting in the stands and a little girl is next to me, and she says, "Mr. Hairston, I got a new blouse," 'cause you had to wear something under the thing. And she says, "You got to see this it's my n\*\*\*\*r blouse." (laughs) "What!" She's 14, 13, 14. Well they start with 9th grade so whatever that is. And she said, "Yeah," and she was so proud of her n\*\*\*\*r blouse and when she opens up her uniform, it's just like a black knitted blouse with, well with sparkles on it, you know? There are threads of sparkles, so it's sparkly and it's black. And she had, was just so proud of it. Her parents had evidently said to her, "You've got a n\*\*\*\*r blouse on," you know. She didn't have any idea whatsoever

what that meant. She lived in Wayne County for crying out loud, there's no black folks down there, she's probably way out, but she had on her n\*\*\*\*r blouse. And she came that day to go with the band and sitting next to me, had no idea of the connection, she just wanted Mr. Hairston to see her n\*\*\*\*r blouse.

EH: Wow.

BH: I didn't say a word other than, "Oh that's nice!" And then I thought, or my friend asked me later on, "What do you think's gonna happen once that child leaves here and goes somewhere and all of a sudden remembers that incident?" I said, "They won't remember it." Well she did. But that's another, that's a whole other story and 15 years later when I got...

EH: I want to hear the story!

10:32

BH: Well all she did was I was in a, let's see Dwight's, Dwight's was the name of it in Huntington. It's a restaurant. Well it was a restaurant, I don't think they exist anymore. And I'm eating and this kid comes in. By now she's out of college and she walks over and she says, "Excuse me, are you Mr. Hairston?" And I said, "yes." And she said, "I'm..." well I've got it written down but I think it Drusilla or whatever her name was. And she says, "I have to apologize to you." I'm not even knowing who she is, much less... I said, "Okay." And she sits down and she says, you know, "You were one of the adults with our band back in high..." and she explained to me and then it came to me, you know, what was. And she just apologized. So she did remember that after. I would think that was 12-15 years later, she literally came up to me. I don't know where she lives, I don't, we didn't get into a deep heart conversation because I had people with me and so did she, but she apologized, so I remember telling my wife, I told her that story at that point in time because I had never told it to anybody and she said "Oh my goodness!"

EH: Yeah right, wow.

BH: I still don't...I'm running, I'm going down these holes and I can't remember the specific question.

EH: Well it was about your mission.

BH: Oh that's right, my mission. And that's part of the mission, is with those kind of experiences and you want to do your--I'm not gonna change the world! I don't want to change the world. I don't even want to change Sutton, West Virginia, for that matter! (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

BH: But if you can influence just a few people and they can influence a few more, who knows, we might be able to do this thing. I don't know, we might... My sense of things these days is that that's harder to do, much harder to do than it would have been a while back because there's so much separation and so much...you know this whole immigration thing drives me absolutely batty. West Virginia sits with almost no immigration whatsoever but yet our senator can get out and tell, just stir up people and if you know the stuff sociologically, they're not coming here. Well two things, first they come, wait a minute, I'm going down another rabbit hole. Never mind, never mind--I don't want to go down that rabbit hole. Well other than to say they come, the migration particularly of South Americans and Mexicans in this country are in areas that have jobs and economic opportunity and so if you follow an interstate highway then you're gonna see off of that interstate highway in all kinds of places, groups of Hispanics particularly. So you'll go through Appalachia for instance and you'll go through Route, Interstate 40, and at certain places where there's jobs and opportunity, that's where they are. Hello! They're not coming here! They haven't even



gotten to Princeton yet, much less--or to Wheeling in the other direction. So it's not like we are a Mecca. Yes, there's a few immigrants. There were immigrants here when I got here, from Union Carbide, etc. They're a very small percentage, and I'm talking about, when I say "they" I'm not talking about Hispanics or...I'm talking about everybody, it's probably less than 1%. So we don't have to worry. Or they don't have to worry but yet there's this hate of these people coming in and taking over our jobs and taking over our...

EH: But don't you think that that comes out of an insecurity and a sort of a feeling of scarcity.

BH: Yes.

EH: I mean I'm definitely not justifying...

BH: No, no, no, but that's what I'm saying. That's what these folks feed on in order to get their power.

EH: Yes.

BH: Is that kind of insecurity and that kind of thing. 'Cause they can fire that off. And once they fire that up, then you've gotta look for a leader and hey, "I'm your man," or "I'm your woman," you know?

15:38

Yeah but it is that insecurity and unfortunately, it's really not...I mean I don't foresee anywhere in the near future, this whole group of people coming into even Charleston, West Virginia and taking up what jobs we have, which are few. Those who have 'em are fortunate, those who don't do like my son and leave the state. (laughs) It's just that simple.

EH: Right, right. So do you think--you think the divisions are getting stronger?

BH: Yes, absolutely. I see that every day. Even here in our little state. It blows my mind sometimes. First, when I start looking at why 60% or more of our population voted for Trump, the first thing you do is say, Well it's not really about race, it's more about coal mining and Hillary saying we're gonna do this or that and Hillary being a woman, and all of those other things. And so you sort of whitewash it off with that. But then if you really start listening to people, that's a part of it too, is that his, and that's him being elected now. He hadn't revealed himself to the extent he's revealed himself now. But there are people who will come right out and say, "He's gonna keep them Mexicans from coming into my state." Like what would a Mexican do here? You hear that if you're Bill Hairston and you're traveling the state and you go into a community and you're sitting there eating with these people and they're chatting back and forth, and they're already for whatever the reason, comfortable with you, then you hear things that are just, should be shocking. Not shocking to me because I think I've sort of explained how I look at things.

But yeah. That's, we need, I see division happening country-wide, but I also see it happening here. I see it happening with the differences, particularly, well I should say, in the schools. I think it's sad that Mary Snow [Elementary] on the West Side of Charleston performs so poorly. And there are reasons for that. There are lots...and the reasons for that isn't because the kids aren't being, or the teachers or what. It goes outside of the school and it goes to all the different things that happen throughout. And the attitudes of the people who say, who don't identify with the people who really need, who they really need to identify with, or at least understand. They're just sort of, it's just for them. It's...and I'm not even necessarily talking politics. I'm not talking Republican against Democrat. It's about people and there are really...what's the word? Selfish. The understanding that they have, it's all about them and they could care less about the kid who needs help here or the mother that needs help here or the...You know, and that's all the way. The drug addict that's on the streets--they don't care as long as they aren't affected. Even when

they're affected, they just disown the person and move on. You know, so. I don't want to get too deep into that because I have all these...I'm still a hippie. The only thing is I don't have the hair and I'm wearing shoes and my pants get longer.

EH: And you're not sleeping under your van.

BH: That's right! (laughs) I'm not sleeping under my van. I drive a Buick for crying out loud, you know. But the other guy is still there.

20:25

EH: How do you record your stories? Do you keep them in your head? Have they been documented?

BH: I am about, as I become 70 years old, I'm about to do something that I wouldn't do before. Do you remember I said that when I, at one point in my life, I was telling the stories that I read and heard? Those were other people's stories. I didn't believe that I had enough stories or whatever to really go out and put them on any kind of a disc or whatever. 'Cause then people would get 'em and then when I showed up, they would have already heard my stories. That has happened, by the way. It's happened to some of my jokes, but that's...

I was sitting at Elkins one day, whatever they call the show there that's more like the Branson kind of show they have? And I'm sitting there having a good time, and I hear one of my jokes! And I'm going (makes shocked face). And I mean I'm devastated! That's one of my funniest ones by the way, but that's neither here nor there. And it took me a year and a half to figure out how it got there. Buddy Griffin, who you may remember is a fiddle player and does all kinds of stuff, when they first open up, Buddy was at Glenville in the Music Dept. and Buddy went up there just to make extra money, and he shared that joke with them, and then of course they thought, "Ah this is funny," and they used it and Buddy is then down in Nashville somewhere. But that's where they got my joke, was from Buddy.

22:13

Now to get back to the point (laughs) at this point I have not done any kind of tapes or recordings, but I'm about to start, because I did not want the few, particularly the things that I thought were really good--some of my--what I call my signatures to be repeated over and over and over. But that was a bad decision. I didn't need the money, so I didn't need to sell them, and I loved the idea of word of mouth, because I was full-time employed, I didn't have a reason to be trying to back myself up on all the stuff. Well I'm retired now and I have time so if other people want to invite me to Florida or wherever, wherever, then I'm really, I can go. So now I'm in a marketing sense. So I will be publishing or doing my first, I don't know what you call it, not recording, but...

EH: Will it be a CD?

BH: Yeah, it'll have to be a CD. I thought about doing other ways, but I won't, but I'm gonna do that. I have an old cassette tape of music that I did. And I think there a couple of stories on there. But I did that when I had hair, back when George Daugherty lived in Elkview and really was the Earl of Elkview and not down in Dunbar, cause we did it in his house. Because he used to--he was a hoarder and he stacked newspapers. He had newspapers back from 1930 and they were just stacked. But what's great about that is that takes care of the room. So, but I have that but I haven't done anything. So I am in the process--in fact I just talked to a couple of guys the other day--and we're gonna try to put together a CD. It will have my stories and a little bit of the music. The music accompaniment. I'll have somebody accompany. But when I say music, it really is a storytelling tape and so I even think I know what's gonna go on it. But at this

point no, and that was strictly on purpose so I wouldn't market myself too heavy. And I wouldn't let my stuff out, because people will literally ask me for copies of things. You know, I'll finish something, "Oh that was a funny...do you have that printed somewhere you could send it to me?" "Ah, no!" (laughs) So it will. I'll let you know. I do things on my own--I think within the next year probably I'll have that done.

EH: And are you gonna put it out on a label?

BH: Oh yeah. And well, right now it's an independent group out of Nashville, why am I not thinking of the name of them? I was gonna do it myself but I really don't have the equipment and all that. I could get together some guys around here, in fact I may end up doing that because I just found out that there are some people here that just have everything right here, right there in their house and they could do it, send it down to be copied and bring it back. I'm thinking, "Oh wow!" So, but like I'm in the first stages and that might work for me, just to have them do it. And of course they don't do everything, they have to send it away and have it, but they do the master tape and then send it away. But I will do that, why not? I've got enough stuff in my head. And some of the stuff, it's worth hearing again, or hearing me do it over somebody else, you know, so.

EH: Do you have a website? How do people find out about you?

BH: Well! That's the other thing I'm working on. What I did, none of this stuff was on the top of my mind. As far as I was concerned, I was the pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church and I was the Director of Social Services for RCCR and storytelling was something I did on the side because I loved it, enjoyed it, and yes it was a little extra money, because I had to put a price, a decent price on what I did or people were, everybody was wanting me to come for nothing or a little of nothing. So, but, and it did become a substantial money-making thing, but I wasn't interested in really marketing myself that way. Those that knew about me, knew about me, those that didn't, didn't and those others found or heard me and invited me and it just worked. But now I am. So my, if you go to any of the things like, National Storytelling Network and you look up West Virginia and you look up Bill Hairston, you'll see everything about me, except where it says...

EH: Oh okay.

BH: ...Well you'll see the basics--not everything. But you'll see the basics and then what you'll see is "webpage under development." (laughs) But that's, that's NSN Network, or NSN. Now let's see--Adam [Booth] has taken me out of the West Virginia one to update it cause they didn't like it. I don't know when that will be back, but he's pretty busy himself.

EH: Is that Adam Booth?

BH: Adam Booth, yes. So he'll get me back in. And I told him I wasn't in any hurry. So I'll be back there soon. There are these little bits and pieces. I have searched "Bill Hairston," "William Hairston," and "W.I. Bill Hairston" and there are things out there, believe it or not. Some weird stuff!

EH: (laughs)

BH: I even found something that I had done on Camp Washington Carver. An interview years ago. That used to be the African-American camp and at that time I was there. I'm a part of the folks that, the kids that went into integration into the overall program. And somebody had interviewed me about being a, and I was in shock! There it was! But it was way down in, I mean it wasn't something "Bill Hairston" and boom! There it was. I just kept looking and it was other people and other things and other things, and it was just one of those days I had time and about maybe the 30th or 40th entry, there it was, and I went

(makes surprised expression). So, and I don't... but so there's stuff about me on the net. I don't have any criminal records or anything, so there's nothing gonna show up there. But and I meant to bring you a card, but you've got my information anyway, so.

EH: Yeah. Well, is there anything else you'd like to share right now?

30:20

BH: I don't think so. Like I said, I tend to get on a subject and go down, and I do call 'em rabbit holes, 'cause they're just--and finally the rabbit gets away.

EH: Right.

BH: And you just go back and start again.

EH: I thought it was pretty coherent!

BH: Oh okay! Well if you think so.

EH: I mean usually these are pretty all over the place.

BH: Well you're right, the people that you would be interviewing, yeah. You're exactly right, I keep forgetting who you're interviewing and what you're doing.

EH: (laughs)

BH: It's gonna be just that same thing.

EH: Well you're a storyteller so you can construct a narrative, and I'm not always used to that when I interview folks.

BH: Oh, okay (laughs). Yeah, I can. I didn't know I was doing it, but I guess I naturally do some of that, you know, so (laughs). In fact I got one little idea being here, the whole Uncle Homer thing. I think I can turn that into a story, a funny story actually. Yeah, I think I can do--so I'm gonna be working on that. I gotta figure out the interest point so that people, you know, 'cause I don't think it's the little girl even though that was our interest point. I'm gonna work on that and we'll see what happens.

EH: That would be cool. Nice. Well thanks so much, this was really great.

BH: Well thank you!

EH: I'm glad I finally got to meet you.

BH: Well yeah, 'cause we--I knew you and I was on my way and I can't even remember--Was I, during that time I was sick?

EH: Yeah, that's when you had a migraine.

BH: Oh yes, about 3 or 4 times a year, I'm down. I'm out. Yeah.

EH: I get 'em too so I can understand.

BH: Yeah. I was down in Alabama doing something and I thought I could get to Atlanta, get on a plane and get home. I couldn't do that.

EH: Wow.

BH: I literally had to--and I didn't have anybody. My sister lives in Atlanta, but she was on a trip. Everybody was gone, so I ended up in a Hampton Inn, or Hilton near the airport suffering through it by myself.

EH: Oof. Sounds bad.

BH: It was, I just couldn't. Yeah, so. I presume I need to sign something.

EH: Yeah this is...

32:48

END OF TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW