Le: Umm...When did you all first come to Ashland?

BH: Actually, can we backtrack just a second? Do you want our names for...

LE: Sure.

MH: Uh, you go first, you’re older.

BH: Ok. I’m Betsy Hodges. This is my sister Martha. And we came...our mother grew up here in Ashland. We grew up in Baltimore, but when my mom got married, she moved to Baltimore, and we came back to visit my grandmother. And we came from when I was born to 1963 when my grandmother passed away. Umm...and so, we’ll get into your questions but I also want to backtrack a little bit, cause actually mom is the one you really should be interviewing except that she passed away at the beginning of the year, so I did bring some of her stuff. I’m going to try and work that into, in the conversation cause that’s really far more, more interesting than anything..

MH: She, she has a lot more memories cause she lived here all of her...growing up here.
BH: Yea, she grew up here and lived here until she was thirty-two, when she got married, so her...she had a much umm, better track on what was going on in town, and memories of that. Ours are all what we learned from her or just from visiting with my grandmother.

MH: She always told us stories when we were little of, what it was, cause we grew up in a big city and she grew up in a small town, so she would always...always pointed out the differences. Umm, and actually, we came back fairly regularly after. Our grandmother died when we were almost seven and almost twelve, so my memories of visiting my grandmother aren’t that good. But, we came back to visit a lot cause even though we didn’t have any real close relatives, we still had lots of mom’s friends who were still here. So, we’ve been coming back, we came back a lot through the rest of our childhood. There’s probably a gap in maybe high school and college, and then Betsy moved back here after, after college, and then I moved back here, I moved to Richmond after college. So, there, there, there will be a gap in there and even in our memories.

LE: Okay. Umm...can I go back to what you were saying about how your mom would tell you stories and your grandma would tell you stories about umm, growing up in Ashland. Do you have like a favorite one that you remember, that sticks out in your mind?

BH: Well, there are lots of, actually there are lots of things that mom...cause mom lived in the house which is now 807 South Center Street, and that is the house that her great grandfather built in 1870. And his family lived in it and then it sort of, it came down through the family umm, and that’s the house that mom grew up in, that her parents moved into after my grandfather came back from World War I. Umm...the house right beside it which is 805 South Center Street, my grandmother’s parents built about 1890, umm...before my grandmother was born but after her brother had been born, and so the two families lived beside each other and the, and the family activities kind of whirled around those two houses. Umm...interestingly enough, when we would come back, we used to sit on, there’s a big, there used to be a big umm porch, I mean a big swing on the porch there at 807, and we would sit there and count the trains going by and the cars and wave to the, to the guys, the guys in the caboose. And mom used to, when she was a little kid, they used to sit out there and count the hobos that were in the train and then yell it to the guy in the caboose, of course he couldn’t hear it, and, but at any rate that was something...

MH: Well, cause that was back there in the depression when people would hop trains to get places, and they’d just hop in the box cars and try to get a free ride, and, but they’d be hanging out, and so mom and all of her little friends would count them, and then try to yell it to the guy in the caboose, but he never heard them.

BH: At any rate, umm..

MH: Another, true small town atmosphere...when mom was a teenager she and her friends were out, there was apparently one of the local gossip ladies lived like straight across the street, and mom’s very close friend, I mean they were really good friends from when they were tiny little
kids, and if they were out in the evening, umm..you know, with their friends, which basically meant going up to the drugstore up here, there used to be a drugstore right…

BH: Suzanne’s, what Suzanne’s is now, it used to be…

MH: Barnes Drugstore and that was there like local hangout I think. Anyway, and umm…they, this woman lived across the street from mom and then mom’s friend lived down the side street, and apparently this woman would watch and keep tabs on when they got home at night and report it to their mothers, as if, I mean, this is back in the day when parents waited up for their kids anyway, but just in case my grandmother missed something, or I guess our grandfather was alive then too but you know, she would always, mom used to tell us about the, the neighborhood gossip who kept tabs on when they got home every night.

BH: Umm…one of the other things that she told us about and I’m trying to find it in umm…why don’t you ask another question while I look, try and find this…

MH: We have these stories that our mother used to write and, and give us. She was kind of our, our connection to the past. She was an only child, and uh, so she would write all these stories for us and give them to us at Christmas.

LE: Aww…that’s really neat.

MH: It is. That’s the way we learned all kinds of things about…

BH: The..

MH: She actually would tell us some of the things they used to do. Oh, I do have a high school story from her. They used to roll…in the old Ashland high school, which is now…I think it’s been rebuilt several times over so now where Henry Clay elementary, where Henry Clay elementary is now used to be the old Ashland high school and they used to…there was a way to roll marbles out of a classroom and bounce them off the walls and have them bounce down the steps, and that, which made this god-awful racket and you know those old wooden buildings, and they used to do that and a few other things.

BH: Oh, well the thing that she wrote about that I put in the uh, or submitted to the Ashland yearbook this year was the umm, that the hangout when she was in high school, so when she graduated from Ashland high school in 1935, but there was a place called Bobby Stones which is, was out here on Route 1 below where Wachovia is, and that’s where they used to go in umm if they had a date and either of them could get a car to drive over there, umm, then a quarter would buy two cokes and a package of naps which they split among themselves. And then whatever was left over was put into the nickelodeon.
MH: The, the other story, this was a story kinda that mom told on herself, another small town atmosphere type thing. She umm, she and her mom had walked up to Cross Brother’s Grocery, which is still in existence isn’t it?

BH: Yes.

MH: Okay, she, they had walked up the street to Cross Brother’s and mom had pocketed something, like a piece of penny candy or something, and umm, I don’t think she really intended to steal it, I think it, she figured it was one of those things that the guy would give her anyway. But she umm, she, when she got home her mother realized what she had done and they had to walk back up town and give it back. And I think it really truly was a piece of penny candy or something. So she did occasionally tell stories on herself.

LE: Umm…how do you think that like her childhood, growing up in a small town, differed from ya’lls?

BH: Oh, whoa.

MH: Huge.

BH: Yes, it’s like 180 degrees.

MH: Yeah really. Umm…

BH: Well I’ll tell you one thing she told me, I uh, because we both grew up in Baltimore and went to Baltimore high schools, umm, there were 3,000 in my high school and that was more than the population of Ashland at that time. Uh, and I think she had a really hard time wrapping her head around those, those differences.

MH: The fact that just to go to school, she went to school each day with the number of people in the entire town just boggled mom’s mind. It was like, how can that even happen? Umm…And that you know, basically in Ashland at that point, everybody knew everybody, and everybody knew everyone’s business, umm, and…

BH: Yes, and she could go through town and tell you who lived in what house and when, I mean the, all the houses up and down Center Street don’t have an address, even though we refer to 805 and 807, the two houses that were in our family. Umm…it was always the Huffnockle house which is the one across the street, and it was somebody else’s house, it was, it was that name, whether that family lived in it or not, it was always known by a family name. Umm…and I guess just really the size of everything. Walking into a supermarket in Baltimore is way different, even in 1950 when she got married, from walking into Cross Brother’s.

MH: Yeah.

BH: Just…
MH: Just the sheer size of everything was...umm...But, she, I know she tried, she brought a lot of her small town things. I know whenever we got new neighbors she’d always be the first one to make cookies and take them over. And we used to get some funny looks from people that, you know if they had just moved like from other, either other big cities or other parts of Baltimore is like, people still do this? And this was back in the sixties, you know, so umm...it, although, actually nowadays occasionally people will do that, but still, it’s, it’s there were, there were, some other, there were some small town things. She did, though, get used to the convenience of the big city, and everything kind of right there, even though you had to fight the traffic. Umm, but she, it...

BH: It was very different.

MH: It was just, everything was real different for her. And it took her a while...Luckily, she had gone to Randolph-Macon Women’s College and some of, when she moved to Baltimore, some of the people, some people that she had known from college were living in Baltimore so it wasn’t like she was totally in a strange place. I mean, there were, she was in a strange place, but there were people that she could start, she had instant friends, and then you know, of course made friends when she got there, but, I don’t think my mother knew a stranger.

LE: Umm...what made her move to a big city, and do you think that she preferred a small town or a big city?

BH: Well, she moved to Baltimore because she got married.

MH: Yeah.

BH: Umm...and my dad was living and working in Baltimore and there was never any question that he was going to pick up and move to Ashland.

MH: Yeah, no.

BH: Umm...what was the second part of the question?

LE: Which one do you think she preferred?

BH: Umm...I think there were aspects of both that she liked. There are, umm...I think she liked the smallness, the sense of community that you have in Ashland that you don’t, that you don’t really have in a big city umm...

MH: But she liked the convenience of the big city, cause when she first moved, she moved back here, we moved my parents back here in September of 1999. Our father had Alzheimer’s and not, we were both living in this area and we have a brother who lives in the Outer Banks. And umm, we were kind of checking, calling the neighbors to check on mom and dad and we really convinced them that really you needed to, if somebody was moving it was going to be them. And
umm, she did sometimes make some comments about, well and of course Ashland was different, there were still some of her friends around, but the, the, she did sometimes comment about the fact that she had gotten used to the convenience, convenience of the big city. You didn’t have to, I guess a lot of times she would have to go into Richmond to get things, and well, that’s, that’s fifteen miles now which is not a big deal, but when you’re eighty some years old it becomes a big deal. So, umm, so she did like the convenience of the big city but she, and she had made enough friends in, you know, she had her church and other groups that she was with in Baltimore so that it wasn’t like she was overwhelmed with the gazillions of people.

BH: I think in Baltimore she umm, the neighborhood became like a little small town for her. The sense of community that you have here in Ashland as a small town gets recreated in neighborhoods in bigger cities, and, and that’s how she…

MH: Yeah. And we always lived in a, in a neighborhood that was pretty family oriented. We basically lived in the same neighborhood for most of our growing up years. We moved once umm, six blocks away because we needed a bigger house, but we stayed in the same neighborhood, so she, we didn’t even have to switch schools or anything. Umm… but I do remember she would, she did comment a couple times after she got back here that it was easier to find stuff in the big city, but she still liked being back here.

LE: Umm…did you have any other siblings?

Betsy and MH: Yeah, we have a brother between us.

MH: Yeah, and he used to come down umm, in the summers like early, six, seven, and eight maybe…

BH: I was going to say seven, eight, and nine, but I’m not sure…ages we’re talking about, to go to a day camp.

MH: A day camp here…

BH: Camp Apache

MH: Camp Apache that was run, actually here on the college campus, it was run by the athletic director I think, or one of the…the football coach or the basketball….anyway…it was this day camp…

BH: I was thinking it was the basketball coach. It wasn’t a basketball camp, it was just an old…

MH: It was just a day camp, you know, kind of almost like a YMCA camp, only that there wasn’t a YMCA out here at that point. Umm…and umm, cause we had some family friends who had five kids who were a little closer in age than the three of us were, but that meant we all had friends to play with. And he would come down and stay with our grandmother and go to camp
with the child out of that, there was, one of the three boys out of that family was his age and they would go to camp together every summer, and that was a big, big thing. Umm, so…

BH: Which, according to mother, worked out great, because it meant that Randy was at camp with his friends all day. By the time he got home and my grandmother had to do anything for him, Randy was too tired and needed a bath. So all she had to really do was make sure he got cleaned up and was fed. But, I’ll tell you one thing that, that is interesting that I remember from coming to visit my grandmother. We did not have a TV, I know this seems really weird, but we did not have a TV until my grandmother died in 1963 and then we got all of hers, but we, but my parents never bought one. Umm…so up until then, whenever we would come down to visit my grandmother, it was really a big deal to sit and watch TV.

MH: Yeah, and she had this little room off of her dining room and it was a TV room. And we would, you know, after dinner we could go watch TV, which was a huge treat because we didn’t get to do that.

BH: Right. And we could sometimes eat lunch and watch TV.

MH: Yes, and our grandmother was really strict, and the fact that she would let us do that is just, just boggles the mind cause, but umm…yeah, that’s true, I had forgotten that. And the other thing we used to do, this just sounds weird now, I know, but we would, if we could hear a train coming, we’d get some pennies and put them out on the tracks and, and then after the train went by we would go get the flattened copper.

LE: People still do that. My friend actually just did that a couple days ago.

MH: Okay, alright. That’s one of the things that I remember. The other thing that I remember, because I look exactly like my mother and my grandmother, I mean, I don’t ever remember not being told how much I look like those two. And umm, I would come down here. Sometimes I would be brought down to visit my grandmother with you know, and just left. And my grandmother would sort of parade me around, and they, no one could remember my name so they just called me little…my mother’s first name was Virginia, so they just called me little Virginia. I was like no, my name’s Martha. So, I, that, that was the one thing, and I swear I was barely walking when people did that to me. And I’m sure I probably wasn’t even out of the hospital yet when people told me how much I looked like my mother, cause you can take our pictures, our baby pictures, and switch them, and unless you can look at the rest of the picture and know that they’re, who’s who, you don’t know.

BH: Yeah. Interestingly enough, at the scholarship dinner the other night, a couple of older Ashland folks came up to Martha and said how much she looked like mom.
MH: Oh yes. I literally, I’ve heard that all my life. And so my grandmother, cause that meant
that I also looked a fair amount like my grandmother, because they look a fair amount alike. So,
my grandmother loved parading me around, show me off just because I looked like the family.

LE: umm…so when you were younger and you would come visit your grandparents, what are
some other things that you would do for fun?

MH: We had a little, we had a little wading pool in the backyard that we played on. We played
on the swing, she had a big swing set in the backyard that we played on. It was, I think that was
even better than the one we had in our own yard maybe.

BH: Umm…I don’t, I mean I remember the swing set in the backyard and I remember there was
a porch swing in the front we used to sit on.

MH: Oh yeah.

BH: Umm..but you know, I don’t remember…I remember going to the post office which is not
the current post office, but the old post office where the, where the…I don’t know, it’s the
building across the street, side by side, but across that street. Umm…but I don’t remember, I
don’t remember you know, doing specific stuff or coming down…

MH: Cause we didn’t have any first cousins. My mom was an only child, and I don’t…I
remember just having to, we sometimes we would have to go visit people.

BH: But I just remember coming down and playing in the backyard or…

MH: Yeah, we usually, yeah, playing in the backyard because we did have the little wading
pool. We have some interesting pictures of us in that. Umm…there was, there was a…the family
that moved, our family sold the 805 house and that house actually was an upstairs and a
downstairs apartment. And there was a family in there that had a little girl about my age, so I
had, I had sort of a playmate. And then we, then after our grandmother died, our grandfather died
before any of us were born so we never got to meet him, but after our grandmother died, we
frequently came down and stayed, this family with the five children lived out on a farm out right
across from Patrick Henry High School, we stayed out there a lot and we did a lot of stuff with
them, on the farm with them or went swimming at Hanover Country Club with somebody,
somebody would get us in there and we’d go swimming up there cause I know I was out there a
bunch of times as a little kid. Umm…some, sometimes, did grandmother ever take us to like
sightseeing places around here?

BH: I’m sure that we did go visit stuff.

MH: She was, our grandmother was real big into history, and I think she probably took us to…

BH: places in Richmond
MH: places in Richmond

BH: But I don’t remember that as a, as a big, standout memory. Mostly it’s just we would come down in the summertime, except Randy that came for day camp, more often than not we came, you know, mom would bring us down for a visit.

MH: Yeah, but it was usually only for a couple of days.

BH: days…you know, and then we’d go back. It was, 95 was not built, but traveling up and down 301 was probably just as quick as 95 is now, and umm, so we would come down regularly but not for long chunks of time.

MH: Right, and actually, cause our grandmother would usually come up to us for Christmas.

BH: Yes. She drove as opposed to our grandmother Hodges who lived in Baltimore who did not drive, our grandmother Sidner here had a car, drove everywhere, she took lots of trips. She always came to Baltimore for Christmas and when we would come here she would, if we went places, she would take us. I just remember swinging on the porch.

MH: Yeah, the big porch swing was a big thing.

BH: And watching television, I mean I know that sounds really weird but that was really a big treat, that was really a big treat when you’re eight, nine, ten.

MH: Yes, yeah. Well, and, and, when…she died in the summer and I remember we, my parents were down here a lot cleaning out the house actually, I was young enough when she died that my biggest memories were cleaning, coming down here and cleaning out the house and we just had to occupy ourselves while mom and dad did that. And our father was the one that was the, the no TV fan, and he, my, my great uncle, my grandmother’s brother had gotten the TV, if you wanted a TV in your hospital room you had to provide it yourself and he had bought her one for her hospital room cause she was in there for a while. And then she had this big, you know, console you know, off the floor, you’ve probably never even seen one like this and so he, dad had to figure out how to get rid of these two TVs and he couldn’t figure out any way to get rid of them so he finally had to bring them home, and it was the last, last trip home that he brought those up. And I, this I do remember, I was only going to be in the second grade the next morning, he said, yes we have TVs, but there will be no TV on school nights and if you get caught, you will not watch TV for two weeks. And my dumb brother and I got caught one day. My uh, I don’t remember how old I was, but it couldn’t have been, I couldn’t have been any more than third grade cause it was in the house that we lived in until the summer after my third grade year. Mom had, mom had gone out to run an errand and she wasn’t gone so long that she, you know, she left us alone, and we didn’t hear the car pull up and she walked in the door and caught us red-handed. And sure enough, we didn’t watch TV for two weeks. But uh, yeah that, so watching TV that was a big deal for us. Our friends were like, I mean even then, our friends were like what do
you mean you don’t have a TV? So, and the Amos and Andy show was a big one, the big thing, and some weird things, but you know…

BH: and I Love Lucy was…

MH: Oh yeah…and I Love Lucy, that was definitely…I Love Lucy and Leave it to Beaver, but I Love Lucy was a biggie.

LE: Umm…did you or your parents or your grandparents ever, or take the train a lot, or not really?

BH: Yes, actually they did. That’s the way my parents courted for the nine months that they, between when they met and umm…this is probably, this story is probably more interesting than anything….during World War II when the soldiers were stationed down at, it’s now Fort Lee but it was Camp Lee then down in Petersburg, they were encouraging families up and down I guess the railroad line, to take, to take some of the soldiers in for special events. And so umm, mom actually had, she was living at home with her parents, and this was in 1941 in there…

MH: 42…yeah, well 41 was Pearl Harbor, and actually there were people, I know somebody was at her house…

BH: Yeah, that’s another interesting story…

MH: the day of Pearl Harbor, because they went to the movies to hide, so he wouldn’t have to get called back.

BH: Yeah that story’s here, and we’ll come back to that in a minute, but at any rate, one of the soldiers that they had for Christmas dinner…

MH: Yeah, they had three soldiers one year for Christmas dinner, that’s right.

BH: And umm….

MH: He was an, he was in officer school.

BH: Yeah, that was in Christmas of 42, they had three soldiers come up. One of them was from Bel-Air, Maryland, which is outside Baltimore, and they, his name was Jack Record, and mom and umm her parents had struck up a really nice friendship with him, and so he had his sister and his mother come down and stay with mom and her parents at various times for special occasions. And then mom and Jack’s sister, Betty Record, went traveling quite a bit through the 40’s until, until Betty got married in Baltimore. And Betty then had a cousin, Anne O’Connell, and mom got to know Anne through Betty Record, and the three of them actually did a lot of traveling together also. And then actually, when Anne got married, mom went up for the wedding and…
MH: Anne set her up with our dad. Cause, Anne’s, Anne’s cousin on the other side is our father. So that’s kind of a funny way there but…..

BH: Right, and so that was in September, November of 1949, and so from then until…

MH: September of 1950…

BH: then the way they traveled back and forth was, I mean the way they got, got up on the weekends was by train. And interest…and so, dad would hop in the train in Baltimore and come down here or mom would take the train up to Baltimore, and interestingly enough after they, before they moved down here, but one of us was already, one of them was already here staying with me at the time and dad came down on the train and we picked him up at the train station and the first thing he said was whoa, we haven’t had this kind of meeting in a long time. But so yes, they used the train quite a bit.

MH: And then our great grandfather was the conductor on the little commuter train that went from Ashland to Richmond and Richmond to Ashland umm….

BH: The accommodation train.

MH: They called it the accommodation train, cause basically it was people who, they went down in the morning and they took you know, people to work or people, ladies who were going shopping or whatever then they brought them back in the afternoon.

BH: Right, they made, the trip umm…the accommodation train left Ashland in the morning, went into Richmond, and then came back. And then, and then kind of where your brick walkway, your brick sign out there on the corner, it wasn’t that, it was a little side track and they pulled the train off into there. And then in the afternoon it made another trip and went into Richmond and picked everybody up and brought them back home.

MH: Yeah.

BH: This is another thing I did for the yearbook. It was, he had, he did that umm, he was the conductor on the accommodation train for so long that it became known…. 

MH: His name was Blakey, so they called it, they called it Captain Blakey’s train.

BH: Right, his name was Charlie Blakey. He uh, he actually started as the conductor on the particular accommodation train on March 21st of 1885 and he retired on January 25th 1925.

MH: That’s forty years.

BH: Yeah, so for forty years he was the conductor, he was, and he was about to turn, oh well shoot I forgot…never mind. He was, I think I want to say he was seventy, yeah I think that’s right, seventy. Uh, yes, he was seventy. Umm…So he, he was, actually the train was a big part of
the family going back several generations. The, mom’s great grandparents, the ones, Rice was their last name, and they had been, Samuel Rice had been building umm, working on bridge repairs in the Richmond area at the close of the Civil War and stayed on and took a job with the RFMP. And, and actually, pretty much right down through the family, the RFMP is a big part of how they worked. Samuel Rice and several of his sons worked for the RFMP and then umm….on the Blakey side, although my great grandfather grew up in Richmond, he went to work almost immediately for the RFMP and then came out as the conductor of the accommodation train, and did that for, for forty years.

MH: Yeah, so the railroad was, actually, without a railroad, there probably wouldn’t be Ashland.

BH: Interesting given in light of the discussion that’s going on now about AmTrak cutting services.

MH: Oh yeah, and like completely cutting out any stops in Ashland, or something.

BH: Yeah, but the railroad is a big part I think. The railroad has provided jobs for family members and also generally…

MH: Yeah, we’ve used it.

BH: Yes, that’s how, that is how mom and dad court, courted, that sounds like real dated, I don’t know, I think they courted in 1949.

MH: I think if our grandmother, if, if our grandmother had anything to do with it they were courting. She was pretty, she was pretty straight-laced.

BH: Umm…I have taken the train home to Baltimore once since I’ve been here.

MH: I was…I’ve taken it down, I’ve taken it, I’ve used it a couple of times when, I know one year I was in graduate school and my car was in Colorado and mom and dad were in Baltimore and you were here, so, and actually I was living here but I had sublet my apartment in Richmond, so I came back, I came down on a train, so yeah, I’ve used it a couple times.

LE: umm…can we go back to when you were talking about World War II and Pearl Harbor?

MH: Oh, that was the other thing, there was, the, the one story that we sort of alluded to, I know my umm......my, they, they often would invite the soldiers out just for Sunday, you know, go to church and then have dinner, this was back when they ate dinner right after church, and I know my mother had a, kind of, I think she sort of had a date with some guy on umm…I guess it would have been December 8th.

BH: Yeah, that’s what she’s got here.
MH: Yeah, it would have been the day after Pearl Harbor hit by the time the news got back here or something. And so umm, the guy says let’s go to the movies because they can’t find me in the movies, cause he knew he was going to get called up to active duty. So, he got to delay his being called up for like two hours while they went to a movie. And she’s got the full story, but that’s in there somewhere.

BH: Umm…well, she says here, “Aunt Lil was staying with us at the time…” and Aunt Lil would have been her grandmother’s sister. Umm…She says, “Aunt Lil was staying with us at the time and she was the first one to hear the news. She had gone up to her room after dinner and was listening to the radio when a program was interrupted with the horrifying announcement that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese. She came downstairs immediately and we all sat there listening in stunned silence. After a while, Willy….” And earlier in this she says that’s her friend from Winchester who was stationed at Camp Lee that she was dating, I use that term loosely.

MH: Yeah, he was, he was a friend of a college friend of hers or something…Yeah, and he yeah…

BH: At any rate…. “After a while, Willy and I went uptown to Barnes Drugstore and found Sarah Jones,” who’s Sarah Wright now and I’m sure somebody’s interviewing her…. Umm… “found Sarah Jones and Arthur Tuttle. Sarah and Tut had been married in October, and he was in the Army Air Corps stationed at Langley Field and was home for the weekend. He and Willy were both out of uniform and they looked at each other as the radio blared the announcement all servicemen report to your unit immediately. Sarah and Tut left to go home, Willy said let’s go to the movies, then I won’t know I’m should to be reporting. We went to the Bird Theater in Richmond. Afterwards we had something to eat. He took me back to Ashland and then returned to camp. I didn’t hear from him for several weeks. When he checked in I learned that his unit had been assigned to guard a bridge in Petersburg, and by early the next morning they had set up a temporary camp at the site. Later he told me that he didn’t change his clothes for two weeks. Umm….with President’s Roosevelt’s announcement the next day, the whole world seemed turned upside down.” Okay, and that’s all that she said about Pearl Harbor.

LE: Umm…and did you say that your grandfather fought in the war?

Betsy and MH: He was in World War I.

LE: Okay.

BH: He, uh, he volunteered umm, to be in an ambulance company. He did not want to carry a gun.

MH: Or walk to his dinner or something.
BH: Or walk to his meals. Those were his two requirements, but he felt that, he knew, he knew umm….

MH: Yeah, so he drove an ambulance.

BH: He, he volunteered. He was actually thirty at the time umm…oh, okay, umm… July 1917, he went and volunteered for the service and the ambulance company. He had actually planned to marry my grandmother then, but they umm, they put those wedding plans on hold. And he reported to Camp Lee, and then he traded with his, with other people in his company for Christmas leave and the first one that he actually drew was for May of 1918, but he felt sure that they would already have been shipped to France by then, so he kept trading with his buddies till he finally got, and I think he traded three or four times the way mom tells the story, until he got a January leave date. And so, he came home in January of 1919…

MH: 1918

BH: 1918. And he and my grandmother got married, umm, actually in 805. And because Captain Blakey was, who was now his father in law, was such a big wig, or such a big influence on the train, that he actually got the Washington train, the train down from Washington, to stop and pick up my grandparents to go to Washington for their honeymoon, right in front of the…

MH: Which was like two days long…

BH: Right, and then they came, then they came back and then umm…actually my grandmother took an apartment or a small room down in Petersburg while my grandfather was stationed at Camp Lee, but then he was actually shipped, sent to France.

MH: Yeah, cause he was actually in France when our mother was born. Our mother was born in November of 1918, like four days after Armistice Day. And, but he was in France then and he didn’t get home to see her cause you know then they had to send them home on ships and he was…

BH: He was another, another six months getting home.

MH: Yeah, he didn’t get home till like…

BH: But my parents, but, when he left in May of umm 1918, then my grandmother, actually she went down to Norfolk to see him off and then came back to Ashland, and for the year that he was overseas…But, once the armistice, Martha’s right, once the armistice was signed then they had to ship all these guys home, but it was by ship, it wasn’t by an airplane. And it took him six months, before his group or company got sent home.

MH: Yeah, got sent home. Cause he, he apparently had, like I said we never got to meet him, but apparently he had a really good singing voice and he was in some entertainment crew.
BH: They made a quartet out of four of the guys and they shipped them around, kind of like the USO. They were…

MH: to entertain all these soldiers waiting to come home.

BH: Right, and so that’s what he did until his name came up.

MH: until he finally got to come home, yeah. So he got home about April or May or something.

BH: He, he, yeah, he came home in May 1919 and then he came back.

MH: back to Ashland, and he was a fertilizer salesman.

BH: He went traveling around the state, before southern states and the co-ops.

MH: Yeah, he literally….but he was mostly day travels, I mean I don’t think he was gone overnight much, he was mostly…

BH: Oh, I think he was.

MH: Oh, okay. Anyway…

BH: Well, he did a lot of day travels but I think, he covered a good chunk of the state.

MH: Back then you could get a driver’s license at fourteen, but you couldn’t drive, I know, imagine that now….you couldn’t drive into big cities, so our mother had her driver’s license when she was fourteen and so, he, she would drive him around.

BH: Yeah, one summer he had…

MH: He had her just drive him around.

BH: He had an operation on his foot and couldn’t drive.

MH: Yeah, so she drove him around and he bought her lunch.

BH: Bought her lunch. That was her pay.

MH: Her pay was lunch and a coke in the morning and a coke in the afternoon. That’s why I didn’t think they…I thought those were all day trips, though.

BH: That could be, but I also know that he covered Lynchburg, down that way, so I have a feeling that some of those, some of those were overnight stays. He had a huge territory for umm…at the time, when he first started out in the early nineteen hundreds, it was Old Buck Guano, it was bought and became Richmond Guano. But anyway, he did sell fertilizer to the farms.
LE: Umm…earlier you were talking about how they would house the soldiers for like Christmas or on Sundays umm…was church like a big part of your family life.

MH: Oh yeah, especially in a small town. Like there was, even though Duncan Memorial has the name Duncan Memorial, it was the Methodist church, and then there’s the Baptist church, which is First, Ashland Baptist Church, First Baptist Church.

BH: Right, but the Baptist church when they were growing up was the arts and activities center now. My grandfather went to that church and he was choir director for about twenty-five years. My grandmother, my Rice, her Rice great grandparents had actually sort of been in the organizing stages of Duncan Memorial, and umm….which is what they call the old chapel, it’s your, your, what do they call that building over there?

LE: Umm…are you talking about the old chapel?

MH: Yeah, the old chapel, I think it’s still just the old chapel.

BH: Alright, well, Samuel Rice was a part of the umm, the group that was working, that was organizing and building that.

MH: Right, because they were going to have, one floor was the church and one floor was the college chapel. And they were trying to decide which to put where. And he kept saying, well the college students are younger, they can walk up the steps and the church should be on the first floor. But, and, and he, plus he said, and this ends up being kind of funny, he said and plus the fact that when the old folks start dying you don’t want to be carrying the caskets down the steps. He, and he, he didn’t convince anybody. They ended up putting the, originally the church was on the second floor and the chapel was the bottom, the college chapel was the bottom floor. And he was the first person to die; his was the first casket they had to lug down the steps. But then, I don’t know when they built the actual Duncan Memorial Church now.

BH: Oh, I’m sure…it’s either 52 or 53, it’s been since mom and dad were married.

MH: Yeah, cause they, our parents were married in the upstairs of the old chapel. Umm…but yeah, there was you know, it was the Methodist church and the Baptist church and the Episcopal, you know, people lived in Ashland, you went to one. And not that anyone care, but Sunday morning you went to church. Whether you went, whichever, the Catholic Church, the Episcopal church, the Baptist church, the Methodist church, but yeah, church was a big, big thing.

BH: You know, it’s interesting, because even though they went, I know that they had an influence on the beginning of the church and that mom and grandmother and my grandfather with the Baptist church, it was an important part of her life of all the things she wrote down, there’s no, she didn’t, she didn’t write…

MH: She didn’t make a lot of mention of...
BH: And actually what I’ve found out is by reading umm…this Aunt Lil that I referenced in the, in the Pearl Harbor story, who was my grandmother’s aunt, she wrote a little bit about it. Apparently, umm mom’s grandmother was very active in the stuff that went on at Duncan. But, umm I think mother probably just came because it was expected of her, I’m not sure…

MH: And I don’t think that they had like the youth group, I don’t know if you all are active in church youth groups, but kids talk about youth group and stuff like that, I don’t that there was that kind of…you just went to Sunday school and went to church in the morning, and went home and did your stuff for the week and went back the next Sunday. It wasn’t like where kids are real active in their church youth groups these days, so I don’t think it was that kind of, I don’t think it was that kind of activity. I mean, I don’t know that they ever talked about stuff like that. I mean, even when we were growing up, and we’re kind of in between, youth group was sort of, somewhat of a bigger thing. It was a bigger thing for us than what it’s been for our mother.

LE: Umm…How do you think that like having a college, pretty much in the center of the town, affects umm…I guess the people that live here?

BH: Well, it made a big difference in mom’s life. For one thing, it sounds really funny, but at fourteen, fifteen, she dated college kids. It was perfectly, and I mean again, we’re talking early thirties, it was perfectly acceptable and not a problem and I don’t know, she dated college kids for a long time.

MH: Yeah. Umm…it, a lot of things that she would talk about you know were kind of centered around, the town kind of, the town and the college were, are very connected you know. There was a lot of….

BH: A lot of her umm, she talked a lot about Dr. Lipscomb. And I don’t know whether he taught here, whether his family was involved here, but there was some connection. And he was her Latin teacher at Randolph-Macon Women’s College, but I think he had actually…

MH: He had connections here somehow or another.

BH: So there was, there was a pretty good tie between her family and the college. And actually, Samuel Rice, who brought his family here in 1871, came, he had one son that was already grown and actually working with the RFMP, and then he had my, my great grandmother, who at that time was, I’ll say a young woman of twenty, and then he had three boys, all of whom he was figuring to educate. And that’s why he brought his family here, because the college was here. And actually all of them, they didn’t all stay, but, but they all took classes, at least one graduated. And then my grandmother’s brother…

MH: Yeah, our great uncle went here.

BH: ….graduated from here. So, the college is very much intertwined in our family.
MH: And back, back when I think mom was growing up, a lot of the professors lived here, lived here in the town.

BH: probably more so…

MH: Yeah, I think, I don’t think, I think probably fewer of them live here now than back then, but back, back then, I would probably say a huge majority of them lived here in the town. So that was a big, the college was a big part of the town.

LE: Umm..so after growing up in Baltimore, what made you want to come back here?

BH: Well, I was transferred into a job in Richmond in the mid-seventies, and actually I was working for a very small company in Charlotte, North Carolina and they sent me up here to their Richmond office. And the housing arrangements that had been made for me umm were not going to work out. And that’s, that’s a whole other separate story, it wasn’t because they did anything wrong, it’s just at this end there were some problems. So, I called up…

MH: I thought you showed up…

BH: No, I called, well…

MH: We did have, we didn’t have any first cousins, but we had more distant cousins, but since it’s such a small town we had known them all of our lives so…

BH: Actually, the man that I worked for in Charlotte told me that I could stay with his daughter, but when I got up here it turned out that his daughter’s boyfriend was here from New York. And the boss in Charlotte absolutely hated the guy, so I couldn’t tell him that I couldn’t really stay there. So, I called up umm…Blantan cousins, again, I’m sure that you’ll be, somebody will be interview Blantans, but Pat and Mutt, Mutt and my mom are second cousins on the Rice side, and so I called up Pat and Mutt and I said I’m here in Richmond and I need a place to stay. So I went out, came out to their farm and stayed with them for a week until the boyfriend left. And then, umm…and then I lived in Richmond for twelve years, and then actually when Pat, Pat and Mutt’s son was getting ready to build on the farm, and he and his wife were living in a house outside of town and I said I’m really interested in buying it when you get ready to sell it, call me. So they did, and I’ve lived out here since 1987.

MH: Yeah, she, she was living in Richmond, paying Richmond taxes for no services, so she was ready to get out.

BH: Umm…no, actually, I moved out here because I wanted a rural environment.

MH: I’ve actually never lived out here, but umm….when I, let’s see, when I graduated from college, I graduated in the middle of my senior year, and I, my first teaching job was in this little town in South Carolina, and I was, I taught, I got the job in the middle of the year and I was
miserable, I hated it. So, I had put in a bunch of job applications all around Virginia. I really didn’t want to go back to Baltimore, it was, I mean I liked it, but it was too big and I really had no interest in going back. And I had visited around here enough that I was, anywhere around here would have been nice, but I had applications all over Virginia. Umm….and, cause I had gone to college out in Indiana, so I was ready to get back to the East Coast. And umm….my, so after that one semester in South Carolina, I kept following up on all these places where I had interviews, and I actually got a job in Richmond. So, I came here then and umm…it’ll be thirty years in August. Umm…I taught in Richmond for five years and I’ve been in, I teach in Henrico now and I’ve been there ever since. So, I don’t, I’ve never actually lived in Ashland, but back, well, when I had my parents and my sister here I would go out here a lot. Now I just, well, we’re still cleaning out our mother’s house, so…

LE: Umm…I guess for one last question, what’s your favorite thing about Ashland.

BH: I think my favorite thing as a kid would be going to sleep with the sound of the freight train going down, because with the house being right on Center Street, actually I’m two and a half miles outside of town and on a really quiet night I can hear the trains, but when you live right by the track, and even though you tune them out, it was really nice to go to sleep at night to the sound of the freight train running down. That was…and probably swinging on the porch.

MH: Yeah, I’d say sitting on that big front porch swing, waving to the trains and stuff. Umm…yeah, our father said, used to say that the first time he came down to visit, and he, he went to bed the very first night and the train came through, he thought it was coming down the middle of this bed. But yeah, I would say swinging on the, you know, the old house with the big front, the big porch swing, that was probably my favorite thing.

LE: Well, thank you for letting us interview you.

MH: Sure.