

Virgil Hopkins

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Recording begins after Mr. Hopkins has begun his presentation.

VIRGIL HOPKINS: . . . Cherokee Indian ancestry. In fact, my great-grandfather was in Washington, talking with Washington people, trying to stop the Trail of Tears. But, of course, you know that was to no avail.

So, she [his mother] loved the outdoors, she loved to farm, really. She loved cows, chickens, and flowers. Well, when they moved here, I was born March 26, 1920, in St. Joseph's Hospital. My father decided that his dental practice would be better in Decatur than it would be in Lawrenceville, which was just a little crossroads town then. So, they moved here, and I was born in 1920, Virgil Graham Hopkins, Jr. I've been called Virgil, I've been called Graham, and I've been called [unclear--could be "Hoppy" or "Hopkins"], so you can call me anything you want to; it doesn't really matter. But I was born in 1920, and they were living on Oak Street, which is now Columbia Drive. They moved from Oak Street over to Church Street, and I think the house was where the motel is now. I'm not sure; I don't remember that. Then they moved over on Clairmont Avenue. My father bought a big lot on Clairmont Avenue and moved over there. And that's where my childhood began for me, really. I'm married, as he said. My wife is in the audience; we've been married fifty-one years. We have one child deceased and one child still living and two grandchildren.

When we moved out on Clairmont Avenue--as I said, my mother was crazy about the outdoors. At that time, you could have chickens and cows and whatever you wanted to; because after you passed North Decatur Road, you were in the country. So, my mother had some chicken houses built, and she was raising chickens and selling them to Middleton's Bakery, which was right down here on Clairemont Avenue. She would sell eggs and chickens to Mr. Middleton, because I know, I delivered them.

I decided at one time there, along when I was eleven or twelve years old, I wanted to get into show business. I had an uncle in Lawrenceville, Georgia, who owned a theater. And I said, "Boy, this is the life for me." [Audio interference; about twenty seconds of unintelligible sound] It was escapism, that's what it was, escape from reality. So, I decided I'd open me a theater, but that didn't work too well. Then I started

grammar school, that was Glennwood Grammar School, right over here on Ponce de Leon--Glennwood, Fifth Avenue, Oakhurst, Ponce de Leon--I believe that was all of them--Winnona Park [*in response to prompt from audience member*]. And they were all our enemies in football. We played football in the grammar school then. I'll tell you what equipment we had: it was a pair of knickers--you remember knickers, a pair of Keds, maybe you had a helmet and a pair of shoulder pads, and a shirt of some type. We played football; we were into organized sports, and I'm glad I was in it, really.

I needed a job, because it was during the Depression. So, my father, whose dental office was right over here where the new courthouse stands, got me a job with a friend of his who was his patient, got a job for me delivering groceries on the weekend. Not one time--Decatur schools went to school on Saturday and were out on Monday. Now, that was way back then. But during this period of time, they were open--we were out on Saturday. So, he got me a job, and I think they paid me fifty cents a week. During the summer I worked there fulltime, but the problem was I paid all my money back to that guy that owned the grocery store for the eggs I broke. I'd be carrying eggs in a basket, you know, and I'd go up to a house and say, "Grocery boy!" and then I'd drop the eggs. So, I spent most of my money paying for the eggs. But it was a job for a while. Then I decided, well, I got to do better than that. So, I opened a drink stand out at the corner of North Decatur Road and Clairmont. Now, that was in the country. North Decatur Road was a dirt road, and there was a railroad bridge over the railroad track. Myself and a couple of other boys from the neighborhood, we opened this drink stand. Well, that lasted maybe three months, because we drank up all our profits. So, there I was without a job.

About that time the theater--DeKalb Theater over on Ponce de Leon--this was back in the days of the silent movies--and I was--I mean, I couldn't believe what a wonderful place this was, and I could escape from it all. And I'd go in there and see a movie, you know. Well, they had--in order to entertain the patrons before the picture started, they had a player piano down in front of the stage; and it only played two songs, "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" and "Walking My Baby Back Home." And that's all it knew. But anyway, it was a great chance for escapism, and later sound came in; and this was really something else. When sound came in, everybody could not believe what was happening. So, I got a job--I think I was ten or eleven years old when I went to the manager of the DeKalb Theater and I said, "Can you use a kid like me?" And he says, "I

don't know what for. I'll give you a job answering the telephone. If you'll sit in the box office on Saturday morning and answer the telephone from nine o'clock till we open at one o'clock, I'll give you a dollar and a free ticket to the theater." Boy, a dollar back then was something.

Well, there's always a calamity in everything. Well, when sound first come out in the movies, it was on a platter, which was just like your old 33 1/3 RPM records. It had to be played on a turntable. That's fine, because the sound from the turntable would synchronize with the lip movements on the screen. The only problem, Decatur had a streetcar, and it always come up Ponce de Leon around the square and stopped over here on McDonough Street. Well, every time it went around the corner, the vibration knocked that needle off. So, you'd be hearing one thing in sound and be seeing another thing on the screen. Of course, that all ended, too, when sound was put on the film, but I thought that was really one of the more interesting points in my fabulous career in the theater.

My father's dental office, as I said, was over here on the square. And underneath was Scotts' Decatur pharmacy, and next to that was Panter's barber shop. Well, one day--and this was in the Depression--I mean, I don't care who had money and who didn't have it, was hard to collect. And sometimes a professional man had to resort to unusual tactics to get his money. We were in the barber shop one day, and I was getting a haircut, and a gentleman approached my father, and he says, "Dr. Hopkins, I'm having trouble with my dentures." My dad said, "Let's go upstairs to my office, and I'll look at them." Well, back then, the dentists did it all; they did extractions, they did fillings, they did root canals, and they made dentures. I think you could get a good pair of dentures for twenty-five bucks. So we went upstairs, and I thought I saw that my father was looking at this man in a peculiar way; and I finally decided that he really didn't know who he was. So we went upstairs, and he took the man's dentures and said, "Let me look at them." And he went over and looked in his book where he kept his payments and all, and the man had gotten his dentures a year ago and had never paid him a penny. So he went back over where the patient could see him, and he opened a drawer and put the dentures in there and closed the drawer. And the guy said, "What am I going to do? What am I going to do without my teeth?" And he [my dad] said, "What am I going to do without my money?" So, I don't really remember what happened, but I'm sure my father gave him his dentures back, and he paid him

something, because he wouldn't keep the man's teeth--he had no use for them. But that's some of the things we had to resort to back then to get your money.

Well, in the meantime, I was--my mother decided she was an artist. She decided she wanted me to take art lessons. So right over there, there was a pharmacy. I can't remember whether it was Treadwell's or Taylor's, but one of the two was over that way. And upstairs there was somebody teaching art. And I went up there and started taking art lessons, and to this day I have a picture in charcoal and chalk that I did in 1930, when I was ten years old. It was pretty good. Well, I studied that for a while, and then that faded away.

In 1934 I started to high school, right down the street here at Decatur Boys' High School. I finally got out in 1938; but when I first went down there, after having played football and having an interest in sports in grammar school, one of the boys who was a player for Decatur High School team later became a star at the University of Georgia--he's deceased now, so I won't get into that. But he started the Decatur Bantams football team. [*Next sentence obscured by background noise.*] . . . sandlot team. We won the city championship in 1934. We played teams like the East Lake Flashes, Whitefoord Avenue Bears, Grant Park [*inaudible; background noise*]. But we won, and they gave us--the Coca-Cola Company was more or less the sponsor of it, and they gave us a little-plated football. And you talk about seeing big shots--we were walking around town like we owned the city, because we won the championship.

One of the players on the team--and I told myself I wasn't going to mention a lot of names today--one of the players on the team told me one time, he says, "I'm going to be a movie star." And I said, "I don't believe you." Well, he is: DeForest Kelly, who plays Bones McCoy in the *Star Trek* series, and he was on our team. And he did do what he said he was going to do.

Another thing that I remember about my high school days was dances over--I don't think it was actually in the Candler Hotel, but it was in a big room upstairs between the Candler Hotel and the Decatur-DeKalb Theater. And I remember the band played all the old-time songs and Big Band songs, and we all wore ties and coats, and we dressed up, and girls wore dressy dresses, and we danced to the Big Band sounds. One of the bands was Kaiser [*spelling?*] Clark and the Georgettes. Now, she was originally from Decatur. I don't know, I just remember that name, Kaiser [*spelling?*] Clark and the Georgettes. And that was usually after a football game or maybe on

Saturday or during the summertime. I tried to play football, but I wasn't very successful. There's a guy sitting back there right now who knows I wasn't very successful [*laughs*]. Anyway, I tried to play in '36 and '37, and then I finally gave it up in 1938 and decided I was going to be an artist.

But anyway, another thing that I did back then, I could draw pretty good, and the kids would come to me and say, "I need a map" for geography or history or whatever it might be. So, I was charging them a quarter to draw their maps. I had more maps around the classroom than anybody else, but I had my name only on one of them, and that was the [rest of sentence inaudible].

Another thing that was quite interesting back then was what we did when we had dates. There was a place out on Lawrenceville Highway called [spelling? Could be "Beats"?]. It was a drive-in restaurant, and I won't elaborate on what happened out there, but mostly it was to take a girl out there and do a little smooching, as we called it. I don't know what they call it now, but that's what they called it then, smooching.

Well, finally in 1938, I graduated from Decatur Boys' High School and needed a job. So a friend of mine--in fact, he was president of our senior class that year--told me that there was a new theater opening up in Avondale Estates, and if I was interested in getting a job out there, I should apply. So I applied for the job and got it, and the theater opened. It's now a restaurant; the name's been changed from Avondale to the Town Cinema to some eating place. But anyway, we opened it up in 1938. We got three dollars a week in pay, and we split it in shifts. We were popcorn boy, usher, doorman, and whatever. And he would work part-time, and I worked part-time. And during that time--and I hate to get too involved into the film business, because it's so technical, but I have to give you an explanation of a few things.

Now, this man left and went on to college; I decided that I wanted to explore the movie business, because I was so nuts about it in the first place. But back in those days you had to have what they called clearances. And we had to have a clearance--Decatur Theater--DeKalb Theater--I don't think Decatur Theater was built at that time. It might have been; I don't recall. But we had to have what they called clearance. And if we played a picture, we had to wait thirty to forty-five days after it played in Decatur before we could have it. And that was because the DeKalb Theater was owned by a circuit, and this was a theater owned by four men. And it was one of the things that no longer exist now, but it was a law that you had to have clearances. So, the only way

that we could make big money, unless we had a *Gone with the Wind* or a *South of the Border* with Gene Autrey or Jessie James as Tyrone Power was to get some outlaw picture, as I call them, that nobody else wanted. Well, there was a picture in circulation at that time called *The Wages of Sin*. I believe there wasn't anything to it--the sound was bad, the acting was bad, the photography was bad, there was no sex in it, there was no nudity--it could have been a G-rated film today; but the title was *The Wages of Sin*. Well, the Decatur Theater--DeKalb Theater, I keep talking about the Decatur Theater--the DeKalb Theater wouldn't play it. So, we hooked on to it, and we started doing skywriting, we started doing a lot of advertising--of course, there was no television; we did radio advertising and so forth, and we packed it. It was a 550-seat theater, and we had 560 people in there on the average performance. It was so bad that when each performance was over, I'd go upstairs in the office and hide [laughter]. I didn't want to face the public, because I knew they'd feel they were being ripped off. As Phineas T. Barnum said, "There's a sucker born every minute," and the public went for it.

Well, we started to play it the second week, which was unheard of back in '39, '38, and along in there. And all of a sudden, we opened up the second week, and we got the chief of police down to the theater, and he said, "You're under arrest." He said, "I'm going to get the operator and cashier and custodian. We're all going out to city hall." They didn't have jails, so they were going to take us up to city hall.

And I said, "What for?"

And he said, "Because this picture was not reviewed by the Avondale Better Films Committee."

Now, back in those days, you had Better Films Committees. You had one in Decatur, you had one in Chamblee, you had one everywhere. And in Atlanta, you had Christine Smith Gilliam, and she reviewed every picture that was released. Well, we actually had a City of Avondale Better Films Committee, which usually consisted of ladies in the community to review the picture, and they had passed it; they said, "It's awful, but it's nothing dirty" [laughter]. So, they passed it, but the chief didn't know that; and he had us up in city hall. Of course, I called one of the men who was an executive with the company that built the theater, and he was out there shortly; and we were out of city hall and back to running the picture. And I don't know what really ever

happened; the company threatened to sue the city for false arrest, but it kind of died down. Nothing ever really happened to any of us.

Another thing that we did that's--some of you, I know, will remember this--a lot of you probably remember stuff that I'm telling; I'm just telling it from a different angle. Johnny Dillinger, you know, was that well-known gangster from the '20s and '30s. Well, he had a girlfriend named Evelyn Frechette. Now, they have portrayed her in movies as Billie Frechette; I don't know what her name really is. But she was going around the country, making [inaudible] on a tour, speaking against crime. And I have a note that she wrote me; it was dated May 13, 1939. And the picture that she was pushing was a series of newsreel shots and still pictures of gangsters and their demise. And she was speaking against crime; she did a good job. She had one peculiarity, and I never could figure it out: we had two dressing rooms behind the screen, and she would not go out of those dressing rooms except when she went out on the stage to give her spiel. And I never did understand it--I had to bring her meals to her, I had to bring her cigarettes to her--she was a chain smoker. But she was very nice, and she did a good job. And we packed them in then. But I understand later she was deported; I don't know where they sent her. But I thought she was very acceptable and well worthwhile.

While I was there, a friend who lived up near Fifth Avenue called me up and said, "Would you like a job in motion picture distribution?"

I said, "Yeah, I'll take it. How much does it pay, and when do I start?"

He said, "Well, you only have to work five days a week, you're off on Saturday and Sunday, and we'll pay you a few bucks more than you're making now."

Well, I was working seven days a week--six and seven days a week; so, I took the job, and it was with Republic Pictures Corporation down on Walton Street. And they were famous for their Gene Autrey and Roy Rogers Westerns and their serials, their cliff-hangers, as we called them. I stayed there--well, actually World War II, it started when I was still at the theater. And I went to work for Republic in 1941, and in 1943 I got drafted and went into the Army.

I went into the Signal Corps, and after basic and advanced training I was shipped out to California and overseas. We headed for the island of Oahu, and I met up with a fellow from DeKalb County--you'd never believe this. You don't find many of them; usually they're from New York or Brooklyn or New Jersey. Well, I found this fellow from DeKalb County--I'll call him Max, because that was his name. And we were on the *U.S.S.*

President Hayes, which was crowded with troops. I mean, you couldn't hardly breathe. It was built in 1921. And we'd sleep out on the deck at night, because it was so stuffy downstairs you couldn't breathe. So, we put on our overcoats, because we slept on the deck at night. Well, one night Max patted me, and I guess this is where I guess this is where "Hop" started. He said, "Hoppy, I'm sick."

I said, "Max, I'm sick, too." All of a sudden, he upchucked all over me. Well, that made me sick, and I upchucked all over him. So, can you imagine two guys from DeKalb County in the middle of a boat out in the Pacific, upchucking? I thought it was one of the funniest things I'd ever had happen in my life, although it was sad.

After I come out of the Army at the end of World War II, I decided to go to art school. And I enrolled in the High Museum School of Art--it was at that time--it's now called Atlanta College of Art--on the G.I. Bill of Rights. And my wife and I had built a little house out on [inaudible--could be "Covington"?] Road. My father had bought some land out there; I think it he thought my mama was going to be a farmer. But anyway, they bought some land out there, and we built a little house in one corner of it. And she was working for a kindergarten in Decatur, and I was going to art school; I think they paid us \$95 a month. if you were married, and paid the tuition. So, I went to the High Museum School of Art, and there were four other veterans there. And, of course, we were all men, compared to everybody else. I mean, you had eighteen- and nineteen- and twenty-year-olds, and we were twenty-five, twenty-six, and twenty-seven years old. And we really felt out of place.

And I decided I needed some more money. I hate to make this too personal, but I have to do it to get to the main points, which I will later bring out. I needed some more money, so I started drawing gag cartoons. I know you've seen those; they appear in magazines and different places, different things. They're actually an illustrated joke. So, I started doing that, and I tried all the big magazines--*Collier's*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *American Legion Magazine*--I ended up with rejection slips enough to plaster a wall. I gave up. I started looking around in the local telephone directory, and I found all these publications in the Atlanta area, four of them right here in Decatur. And I started contacting them, and they started buying my cartoons. I said, "Boy, I'm on the way now. I'm really on the way." Well, after two years I quit school and decided that I couldn't make it with freelancing; because one week you'd eat caviar, and the next

week you'd eat weenies or whatever you could get. So, I decided, well, this is it. I'm going back in the movie industry. And I did; I spent forty more years in it.

But funny thing happened. Somebody told me that Ed Dodd, who at that time had created *Mark Trail*, was looking for an apprentice artist. Of course, I go tagging out to see Ed. He was living on Penn Avenue in an apartment then. He said, "Sure, I'll hire you, but I won't pay you anything." But he said, "I'll teach you a lot." And I said OK, so I went out there. And I would do the backgrounds, and he would pencil in the entire strip, which is drawn five or six--no, about three times the size that it's reproduced. And he would pencil it in; and another boy, named Tom Hill, would ink in the characters, and I inked in the background. Well, I did that for about four or five months, and I decided well, all I'm doing is going out here and not making any money. So I kept on with my cartoons, but just before I went back to Republic Pictures and asked them for a job, Angus [sic] Perkinson, who was the editor of the *Atlanta Journal* magazine, seen some write-ups about me and some of my work; and he called me and asked me if I would be interested in drawing cartoons for the *Journal* magazine. And I did. And what it was was the old thing they used to have a column in there--a cartoon--called "Ten Dollars for Titles"; and people would write titles for captionless cartoons. And I did that for a while, and then it played out.

And I went back to Republic Pictures, and I stayed there for twelve years; that was in motion picture distribution and sales. Then I went to work for Paramount Pictures, and later I was enticed away from Paramount by a gentleman who told me that American-International Pictures was the next great motion picture company. And I went to work for them, and they were bought out in 1979 by Filmways. And then in 1980, at age sixty, I was dismissed after fourteen years. I was dismissed for a man who was thirty years younger than me and the fact that I'd had a heart attack. But that didn't end the story. It went on from there, which I will not elaborate on.

Right down the street here on Atlanta Avenue was a newspaper called *Decatur-DeKalb News*. And I decided, "Well, if I can get another job in the movie business, and if I can stay in art, I'll be happy. So, I walked in there one day and asked the people in charge if they needed an editorial cartoonist; and they said, "Well, yes, we'll try you out. Well, we'll try you out for a couple of weeks." Well, I've been doing it for thirty-one years, so it must have worked out.

After I was dismissed by American-International Pictures, I went to work for a small company in Tucker, Georgia. It was an independent company. And when I say independent, they distributed motion pictures that will not be distributed by your major companies. There's many reasons: one could be they don't make the pictures good enough for them and another that they can't work out a percentage deal because they have to divide the receipts between them. Anyway, this company was owned by two brothers out of Jacksonville, Florida; and I stayed there from 1981, I think it was, until 1987, when I retired. During that period of time I met two people who influenced my life who were in the business. One of them I met casually when he was making a picture at the time called *The Legend of Bloody Mountain*. He was making it at Stone Mountain here in the city and on the mountain. And me, I said, "Can you give me a part in it?" He said, "Sure, I'll give you a part." So, he made me a deputy sheriff, and I got killed by a troglodyte, which--[*laughing*] a troglodyte is a monster who lives in rocks. But anyway, that was the start.

Then I met another fellow who is a brother of Congressman Ben Jones, who, as you know is in *The Dukes of Hazzard*. I met him, and he was making a picture at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. And he said he needed some help in distribution when he got the picture finished and said, "Will you help me? I know nothing about distribution."

I said, "Yes, I'll be happy to help you."

And we get to talking, and he said, "By the way, I got a part for you in the picture."

I said, "What?"

He said, "Playing the owner of a fishing pier. We're shooting it at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina."

So anyway, we worked it out, and I had a part, and the picture's out on tape, and I mean, it's a cute picture and everything. Me, I didn't have that big a part of in it, but it was a start. And since that time, while I was doing that, his wife, who used to be a theatrical agent, asked me if I'd ever done TV commercials. And I said, "Lady, no, I haven't." She said, "I'm going to tell you who to call in Atlanta, and we're going to get you started." So, I called this agency, and they took me on. And since then I've been in TV commercials, I've done print work, I've worked in *Heat of the Night*, I've worked in *Paris Trout* right up here in this courthouse. That's how I happened to be up here today, because Mrs. Parks took a picture of me walking up the walk toward the

courthouse, and I saw it in *DeKalb News-Sun*, and I asked her for it, and she gave it to me. We got to talking, and I found out her husband had written an article about me in his column, "Around Town." And she said, "Will you speak to the Historical Society?" I said, "Maybe, if you put me way over."

So, she put me way over, and here I am. I worked in *Traveling Man Unsolved Mysteries*, and I did a tape for DeKalb Medical Center called *The Clinical Challenge*. It's strictly for doctors to look at it, and it portrays a man who goes into the emergency room, thinking he's having a heart attack, and he's really having prostate problems. And it's a very good tape, and it's in the library at DeKalb Medical Center.

And that was my career up to right now and everything I know about DeKalb County. If you have any questions, I'll try to answer them. If I can't, I won't. That's it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: How much was admission to the movies when you started at the Avondale Theater?

VH: Ten and fifteen cents in the afternoon and ten and twenty at night.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: How much was the popcorn? Do you remember?

VH: A nickel a bag. I used to eat half of it up. If you didn't eat too much and drank a lot of water, you were full.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Do you remember any of the cold drinks you sold [rest inaudible]?

VH: Yes, sir. I remember one of them was named Mavis. It was a chocolate drink, and I loved that thing. Mavis and Nu-Grape and something called Orange Crush and Coca-Cola, I remember those. Mavis.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Not Cherry Cola or Nehi?

VH: Yeah, Nehi--you're bringing back memories. I don't remember Cherry Cola, though. But I do remember Nehi. That was probably--but our problem was we drank up all the profits [*laughter*]. See, the Coca-Cola Company sets you up with these things, and you buy the drinks from them or whoever, and you're supposed to make a profit. But it always turned out that when we got ready to make our profit, we drank it all up, because we did--the summertime was hot.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Tell us a bit about your drawing for the *DeKalb News-Sun*. Did you pick your own subjects, or--?

VH: I picked a lot of subjects that they won't use. Now, let me say now that I don't always come up with the idea. I work with the editor, Spencer Ragsdale, and I

worked with somebody before that. But we try to come up with--everything has to pertain to DeKalb County, or it would be useless. They could use anything, see, but we try to keep it pertaining to DeKalb County. Some ideas I'd come up with, they could turn down completely, because they say they're not in good taste. I say it's just good journalism; but then, they pay me, and I can't argue about that. But the ideas come from various sources. In fact, the one I'm doing for next week is about this one-cent option tax that they're talking about. But I'll wait and let you see it; I'm not going to tell you. I haven't even drawn it yet. But I usually talk to the editor once a week, and we get up an idea, and then I draw it on the weekend, and I take it over to him. And I draw it the actual size that it's reproduced, and I draw it on [inaudible] board, and I use grease pencil with the [inaudible].

A lot of people have said, "Well, why didn't you try to get on with the *Journal* or *Constitution*? Well, when I was getting into it, Cliff Baldowski was with the *Constitution*, and I forgot--either Lou Erickson or somebody else was at the *Journal*. And I couldn't compete with those guys, so I decided I'll go where I can do my best and have a regular job; and it's been going on for thirty-one years. The nurses at DeKalb Medical Center got mad at me one time because I portrayed a nurse as being overweight. And another time I had a house for sale, and I had it drawn like an ark. And this guy was talking to another one, and he said, "This is our flood plane model" [*laughter*]. And the realtors' association wrote a hot letter in [*laughter*]. Then I had another one with a boy sitting up on fence, looking at two girls, and his eyes were out like on stems, you know? I forgot what it was about, but anyway, somebody wrote me and said it was out of taste, it was completely vulgar, and they thought that the paper should apologize for printing such a cartoon.

It don't bother me. When I was working with Ed Dodd--bless his heart, he's dead now. But I learned one thing: he said, "If they write about it, whether it's good or bad, they're reading it." He said, "That's all that counts. You know [voice trails off]." So that's how we do it. I mean, it's just one of those things.

Audience member addressed as "Walter" addresses VH.

VH: Walter! How are you?

WALTER, *off-camera*: Did you mention that your cartoon was also in *Two Bells on the Trolley Car*?

VH: Oh, well, that was the years I was freelancing.

WALTER, *off-camera*: Did you also bring up that in the motion picture union you were the business agent? We all went to school together. You were the business agent; Christian Hobson was the president--he's now [inaudible] at the Stone Mountain--

VH: Well, see I can't get it all in there.

WALTER, *off-camera*: [Inaudible name] was the secretary, and I was the vice president.

VH: That's right. We're all from DeKalb County. Now, I've been working on this for three weeks, trying to put it--I've somehow used up five pads [*laughter*] trying to follow this thing [inaudible], so I would maybe present it in a reasonable length of time. But you're right, Walter. We were all in the same business together.

Boy, I've had cartoons in a lot things--some of them I don't even want to mention [*laughter*]. I used to be--when D. R. McCleary was with *Parts Pups*, now, he lived in DeKalb County, over somewhere off of Candler Street or somewhere. He was editor of *Parts Pups*, which was a company publication, and I used to draw for him, a lot of them. And they were very risqué. And I had a girl that I worked with--and you know her, Walter--and I'm not going to tell you who she was--that I worked with at Republic Pictures. And I drew her a cartoon of a bubble dancer waiting in front of an office to be interviewed, and she had nothing but the bubble in her lap. And I used that girl's name, and she wouldn't speak to me for three months [*laughter*]. So, you can get in trouble with this stuff, and I'm just small time as far as circulation's concerned. But those are some of the things that happened, really.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: [Inaudible], have you kept a scrapbook of your drawings?

VH: I've got four scrapbooks about this big and that wide of all of them. I've got--some of them have been in there so long, the pages are turning yellow. [Inaudible sentence]

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: But I've got every one. [inaudible name] and I started drawing about the same time.

VH: Right

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: He stuck with it; I didn't. But I did have a few things published.

VH: Well, I didn't get into my song-writing career, so we'll--I did write couple of songs; and they were recorded by DeKalb County artists. Well, one of them was. One of

them was recorded by a guy who was at WEAS television, radio station. It was [inaudible] Texas Bill Strength, and he went on to Memphis, and he carried a song that I had written with a boy in Tucker.

And he called me one night in California and said, "I recorded your song."

I said, "Well, send me a contract."

And he sent me a contract, and didn't have anybody's name on it but just his and mine as coauthors. And called him up in Memphis and said right back to him, I said, "You didn't write a word. You didn't change a note in that song." And he apologized. Now, what he was doing was cutting himself in for a third of the royalties, so I finally cut him in, but the other boy got in on it, too.

And then I did another one with a boy in Tucker. I don't know why everything I do is in Tucker, but it just happened to be that these guys were in Tucker. And I met this boy, and we did a song, and we went around to all the radio stations, and I couldn't get it played to save my life. And then all of a sudden a girl that had a theater in Alcoa, Tennessee--her husband worked for Acuff-Rose; and I know you know who they are, one of the biggest music publishers in Nashville. And he called me up one day when I was working for Paramount Pictures, and he was down here when WEAS was on Ponce de Leon, down there--I don't know exactly where it was. But he called me up, and he said, "You [rest inaudible]. I'm going to make this disc jockey wear 'em out." And he did. That thing was played--they played it on every show. And we were going to Knoxville one time; my wife's brother lives in Knoxville. And we were on the way up there, and I turned on the station up there; and it was the Pick Hit of the Week. But I didn't get rich--I'm still drawing cartoons [*laughter*]. Anything else?

HOST: We have some light refreshments, and we'll take a few minutes and [rest inaudible]. *Audience applause*

END OF RECORDING

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