RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH LEA M. CRAWLEY

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY
NOVEMBER 3, 1994

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Bruce Chadwick: This begins an interview with Lea Crawley on November 3, 1994, in Jersey City, New Jersey, with Bruce Chadwick and Patrick Goodwin. To begin with, were you originally from New Jersey, Lea?

Lea Crawley: No, I was ... originally born in Danville, Virginia, ... on the 30th of August in 1914. I was born ... on (Halbrook?) Street, there, where the school is, and I lived at (Halbrook?) Street until ... [my] first year in grammar school. Then, we moved to a section of Danville which was in the rural section, where they raised cows, hogs, pigs, and other animals, and everything, and ... the name of the place, it was Randolph Street that we lived on, but, they had the old folks home there, and the people used to call that "Poor House Hill."

BC: What were your parents' occupations?

LC: My mother was a housewife and my father ... worked for the Dan River Cotton Mill. That's the best cotton material that you can buy, 'cause you see that advertised all the time, Dan River.

BC: That was in Danville?

LC: In Danville, Virginia. He was a fireman, and ... used to take care of the fire, and it was right on the Dan River. ... The water would come in and that would help, you know, process the cloth, to weave it and everything, and make it into a cloth there. ... Well, you read [about] the different jobs I had when I worked for the Silvermans and I worked for the Silvermans ... just after my first or second year I started in ... grammar school. I began to work for the (Petrics?). They had two little boys. After school, I used to take care of those young fellahs, and then, I had a paper route, ... at the *Busy Bee*, that I used to deliver papers and everything in Danville.

BC: The paper was called the *Busy Bee*?

LC: The *Busy Bee*. Well, that's the *Danville Register* that I think they got on that paper, something about that, but, it was the *Busy Bee*.

BC: Yeah, the *Danville Register and Bee*.

LC: Yeah. So, I ... didn't know anything about entrepreneurs and things like that, at that time, but, my paper route got so large, I had another fellah that helped me with the paper route. [laughter]

BC: You were franchising.

LC: Yeah, and he helped me for awhile. ... We started from the Main Street, downtown, and we were carrying papers all up into the Forest Hills section, where the rich people lived. We were carrying papers up there, and, later on, it was another boy. ... I went home for a family reunion in 1993 and another fellah said he helped me sell papers. I don't remember him, but, he said he did ... help sell papers and everything. [laughter]

BC: You had your own company going. [laughter]

Patrick Goodwin: You were subcontracting.

LC: Yeah.

BC: How many customers did you have on your route?

LC: I don't know. We had up in the hundreds there after we started, I mean. ... I don't know whether I've always been greedy, trying to make some money and everything. So, we had quite a few customers there.

BC: How old were you when you began the paper route?

LC: I think I was about ten or eleven, something like that.

BC: How many people lived in Danville?

LC: I don't have the least idea, but, there's quite a few there now, in Danville. Oh, I would say twenty-five, 30,000, something like that.

BC: That is a lot.

LC: Yeah, it's a large place.

BC: Where is it?

LC: It's near Greensboro. It's forty-eight miles from Greensboro, North Carolina. ...

BC: On the Virginia side?

LC: On the Virginia side. We [are] only forty-eight miles ... from Greensboro, North Carolina.

BC: You mentioned the rich part of town. Was the town separated into a lower, middle and upper class?

LC: Well, yeah, the town was separated, just like the average town here. The poor people lived in one section. ... I just told you, they called where we were living "Poor House Hill," but, it was still a part of Danville, but, at that time, they had no sewerage. It had out houses. You had to dig a cesspool, or whatever, ... and you used the out house there. ... It had no running water or nothing like that, but, when I lived on (Halbrook?) Street, we had running water.

... My father originally ... came from Bedford, ... Pennsylvania and he married my mother. They ... [were] married in Halifax County, Virginia. I got the census on when my mother was thirteen years old. I got a record of her census. Another thing I'm greedy [for], I'm greedy for finding

out things about the family and everything. So, I've got that. I'll show you that later on, but, I didn't know too much about Bedford, PA, but, in 1991, I found my family in Bedford, PA, and I was quite surprised, because they established the first black church in the Methodist Church in 1886. ... I was saving this to show you about the family. ... Maybe I'm going too fast. ...

BC: Oh, not at all. You are doing fine.

LC: ... Because, maybe, you'd like to know [about the] other things I did in Danville, before I got to the Silvermans.

BC: How old were you when you had the paper route?

LC: About ten or eleven, something like that, yeah.

BC: You were in grade school.

LC: In grade school, yeah.

BC: Being Virginia, were the schools segregated?

LC: Yeah, oh, yeah, they were all-black schools and there was Westmoreland Elementary School. It was to my advantage, when I was small, because, when I first started to that school, the first year, I went to the first grade. There was a teacher named Mrs. Ada (Buford?) and you talk about teachers, those were good teachers. She taught the kids as though ... every child belonged to her. I mean, you would learn, and so, then, when we moved to "Poor House Hill," over in the country part of Danville that wasn't paved or anything like that, my father got a larger place. ... She had three bedrooms and we could raise chickens, hogs, and [you] name it. Some people had cows and everything over there.

... One reason he went there [was] because, when he had this job, when he came from Pennsylvania, he caught pneumonia in Pennsylvania, and he came back [when] I think I was about two or three. ... I don't know whether you can contract pneumonia from [someone]. ... I had it, too. We had it. So, my mother ... suggested to him to stay here and get a job, instead of traveling, 'cause they were making a brick yard up there in Bedford, PA. They were making bricks and things up there and they were taking people from all parts of the South and carrying them up there to make those bricks. So, he decided to stay there. So, one of his cousins found him a job at the mill, and that's how he got in the mill, and that's how we moved over.

... The funny part about it, down in Halifax County, and Milton, North Carolina, and (Selma?), North Carolina, and the places like that, the school would only go to the eighth grade, and then, when you were getting ready to finish high school, they would ... all come up to our house. Two or three of my ... female cousins would come, and they would stay, and ... they used to help me, and they'd carry me back and forth to school, because it was quite a distance to go, in those red mud hills and things, and coming out of the country part of Danville. That was back in 1914, '15, even, when I started school, after I was six years old. It was ... around 1920, I imagine,

something like that. ... So, I used to often wonder, after I got a little older, and I said, "Why is it that only (Addie?), (Oller?), or (Sofie?)," or some of my cousins, females ones, "would come and no male cousins of mine would come?" and my father explained it to me, that that's why he only went to the fourth grade, because that's how they start the ... young men, and the boys had to stay there to raise tobacco, cotton, and stuff like that. So, ... only the girls would get an education, in those days. Very few males got an education ... back in those days.

BC: How far did you have to travel to school?

LC: When we moved, it would take us about anywhere from twenty-five to thirty minutes to go, 'cause we're going down the hill and up the hill. You know, it was very hilly in Virginia.

BC: Did you walk?

LC: Yeah, we walked.

BC: You walked to school. [laughter]

LC: It was the only way you could get there, snow, rain, sleet, whatever. You had to walk to school. There was no trolleys and that. The trolleys were used. ... I was telling you about the better sections of the town. The trolleys were going up and down the main streets, and the streets where the rich people were living, and everything, but, otherwise, you had to walk. There was no place [to get a ride], and then, when you got on the trolley, you would go in the back. You would sit in the back. ... One day, after I got a little older, I was going down the street there and one of the fellahs was telling me about [how] they needed a boy to deliver the medicine from the drugstore. So, I began working at the drugstore, and [I] still kept the paper route, and, most of the time, I carried it on Sunday, along with the other fellahs, but, they carried it for me, and I would get my little commission, because we divided the money. So, I mean, nobody was greedy. We divided it. In those days, if you get [in]to fight with a fellah, you fought him, and if he beat you, you'd shake his hand, and, sometimes, ... he'd become your best friend. Ain't ... like they [are] doing today, go back home, and get a gun, and come back, and shoot you, but, ... a lot of times, we'd get in a good fight, and they would urge a fight all right, but, it was all with your fist, no gun, no knife, no nothing. You'd get a bloody eye, bloody nose, a black eye, whatever, you know, then, in a couple of weeks or months there, you and him were buddies, 'cause you got a good guy to help you fight the next guy, if he starts. [laughter]

BC: I guess that, in Danville, everything was segregated, trolleys cars, movie theaters, high school sports, etc.

LC: Oh, trolley cars, movie theaters, everything. We had to have our own school, have our own football team, and everything. ... The bad part about it, you [would] go to a store to buy clothes, you [could] buy the clothes, but, they would guess what you (weighed?), and, ... if you put the clothes on, tried them on, they were yours, regardless. You'd have to have them altered. The white people weren't going to put clothes on after you had them on, so, we'd go have them

altered. Well, that was in Washington. After I finished college, I went to Washington, in the '40s, and the same thing was happening in Washington, DC.

BC: In the 1940s? Jesus.

LC: Yeah, in the '40s

BC: In Danville, did you shop in white stores as well as black stores?

LC: Well, I'm coming to it, 'cause the Silvermans, ... Mrs. Silverman was originally from Fall River, Massachusetts. Her father was very wealthy. At least the Silvermans was very wealthy. People called them millionaires. Well, I think they were, but, I didn't know ... too much about millionaires in those days.

... Coming back to the drugstore, I began working in the drugstore and I think I was getting about ten or eleven dollars a week or something in tips. The tips sometimes were pretty good there, [but, I was paid] very little money, then. In those days, you didn't get much money, and so, I kept that job for a while, and I happened to be walking down ... the lower part of Main Street, and I saw a white fellah washing the windows, and I asked him, I said, "Do you need a boy to do that type of work?" He said, "Miss Silverman just fired a boy," said, "You can go in and talk to her. Maybe you'll get the job." So, I went in and talked to Miss Silverman, and she hired me, and they taught me how to do all the work and everything there, and how to put up the stock and all, and I just quit the drugstore. I had this other job, but, I still held on to that paper.

... Miss Silverman had two sons, Alvin and Herbert, and had a daughter, Zelda. The two boys went to Harvard, 'cause she came out of Massachusetts. ... They went to Harvard, in Massachusetts there, and, now, Herbert is a doctor in Danville. ... He was the one [who] called the paper, when I called him, and told them that, "Lea is here. He used to work for us," and he said, "He used to take care of me. He'd take me backwards and forwards home," because I was older than the doctor.

... Here's a strange thing about taking him backwards and forwards home. Now, that store was way downtown. You'd catch a trolley car. If you noticed, in that picture, I told you, when you carried the kids to movies or anything, in that paper there, you'd sit right in the first three or four rows. All the domestic help sit in the three or four rows. Now, if I'd bring Herbert and Zelda, Zelda was much younger, I'd bring them out, Miss Silverman'd say, "Take them up [to the movie theater]." ... I used to fuss, because I'd say, "I wasn't hired for the house," but, whenever she had trouble with her maids and things, she would take me up to the house to work. [laughter] So, I learned how to cook gifelta fish and that. ... I don't know whether I had that in there, about scalding chickens or not.

BC: No.

LC: No. ... My wife and I started writing a book that was about scalding the chickens. She came down in the basement. Herbert and I was [down there]. ... Herbert said, "You gotta pick

these like this. That's where they picked them to fry." So, I said, "We pick them at home this way." So, Herbert and I was down there, picking the chickens, after he got a little older, not when I first started working with him, but, when we're down there, picking the chickens. So, I got some hot water and dipped them in there and Miss Silverman came down there and saw that. She took the broom and run us all over the place. [laughter] ... She said that they couldn't eat them, because the rabbi had blessed the chickens and she done hang them up and let the blood come out of them, you know.

BC: Kosher.

LC: Kosher, yeah, that's kosher. So, she couldn't eat them and, at first, she said she was going to do something. ... Then, she changed her mind and said, "You take them home and I'm going to tell your mother and father," and, in those days, [if] somebody tell[s] your mother and father you did something bad, forget it, you got another whipping, and she's whipping us around the basement with a broom. When I got home, my father said, "You darn fool, don't you know that Jewish people ... don't boil their chicken before they ... [cook them]? They pick them dry." I didn't know anything about it, and then, another thing, they had two sets of dishes. They have the meat and the milk [dishes] and you can't wash them together. ... Well, I learned all that. In another words, she made a cook and a maid out of me. ... [laughter]

BC: Can you go back to when you were taking the kids to the movies?

LC: Well, I'd take them to the movies and I'd sit in the first three rows.

BC: Where did they sit?

LC: Right besides me, 'cause all domestic help with the white children ... sit up there.

BC: Oh, all right.

LC: All right, but, ... if I come back to that theater that night, ... well, I couldn't go to that theater. The one I carried them to was on the main street, but, there was a couple of theaters that was, like, they called it the "buzzard rooms," or something, that you'd go in the side door, and go way up in the thing, and be looking over in the balcony, but, the movie [theater] I carried them to, that was right on the main street. I couldn't even go to that [one]. ...

BC: By yourself?

LC: ... By myself, but, here's another bad thing. It wasn't bad, ... it was the law. Now, I would take them to movies and Miss Silverman'd say, "Now, don't bring them back to the store. Take them on up to the house and I'll have ... Clarence," one of the clerks, ... "take you home." ... I could get off the trolley and go down Randolph Street, which would be about almost a mile to my house. ... I got on that bus with two children and I had to sit right behind the conductor almost. He'd drop me off at their house, and, when I'd come back to go home and go down to where I could get off to go to my house, I had better sense than to try to sit where I just sat,

coming up with the children, and a lot of the kids got in trouble about that, male and female, that the conductor would tell you, "Okay, let's go. Come on." Hey, the kids didn't even say anything to the conductor about [that] I was sitting there before, because they knew that was the law. So, then, you'd go back to the back. That was something.

BC: However, it was okay if you were behind him with the white kids.

LC: With them, yeah. In other words, I couldn't carry the white kids back there, where the blacks sit. You couldn't carry them back there, see, but, I could sit up there with them, as well as I could sit in the movie with them, but, so far as coming back on that trolley ... and coming back to get back [home, I had to sit in the back]. ...

BC: Was the theater on Main Street, the big theater, white only?

LC: Yeah, yeah, white only.

BC: Were there any theaters in town that were black only?

LC: Yeah, on the street called Union Street. They had black theaters and they had, oh, stage shows and things like that. It was all-black.

BC: There were also some theaters that you could enter, but, you had to sit in the balcony.

LC: Some white, but, it was not on that main street, though, and like in the hotel, ... you could forget it. ... My wife and I started to write a book before she passed. I met her at the Christmas holidays. I was living at [the] (Carlton?) Y in Brooklyn, because, once I finished high school, I decided to go to Hampton, and my father cashed in the Metropolitan Insurance polices and different things, and the insurance agent was white, he said, "Oh, why waste the money on that boy, sending him off to school?" said, "You can get him a good job down at the mill with you and you can have money and everything," ... because my father had the house built. He bought some property and they had the house built. So, man, that's where I got, ... you know, the drive from, to do things, because a lot of people [don't have it]. ... He was living in a rented house that my cousin had told him about, but, eventually, he found some land there, and ... he bought that land, and had a house built, like my mother wanted and everything.

So, what happened there, when I finished high school, but, it was a (real cute trick?) about the teachers in school, too. The teachers were very good, 'cause I have another teacher that I can remember, Mrs. Ivory, ... and they taught you with a ruler or a rod. I couldn't spell pneumonia. One day, she said, "Lea Mac, spell pneumonia." I said, "N-E-U-M-O-N-I-A." She said, "What?" "N-E-U-M-O-N-I-A." So, she ... asked somebody else to spell it, and they spelled it, and ... maybe I was a little stubborn, too, I said it again. She said, "Come up here. Hold your hand out." She said, "P, [bam] N, [bam] E, [bam], U," all the way, pneumonia. She spelled the whole thing. I [will] never forget how to spell that. [laughter] She spelled it on my hand, and I wanted to cry, but, I was a little stubborn. I think that was in about the ... fifth grade or something like that.

BC: You should have misspelled a shorter word. [laughter]

LC: You're not kidding. ... [laughter]

BC: Where did you go to high school, in Danville?

LC: Like I said in the beginning, Westmoreland had the elementary and high school, Westmoreland Elementary and Westmoreland High School.

BC: Was that segregated, also?

LC: All schools were, all of them.

PG: What about your teachers?

LC: All black.

PG: All black teachers?

LC: All black teachers. Now, when I went back there in 1993, for the family reunion, you had a mix, at least the principal was a white, young lady, and they gave me stuff from the school and everything, 'cause they saw ... this in the paper. When I went by there, they gave me, I got that in there, somewhere, a cap, and a little hat there for the football team, and all that stuff, but, that was, oh, about seventy years later. [laughter]

BC: When you got out of high school, you went to Hampton.

LC: I went to Hampton. ...

BC: How long were you there for?

LC: I was there for ... three years at Hampton, but, I decided I wanted to go into agriculture, because a cousin of mine, (DeCarter?), Keith (DeCarter?) and myself, we decided we were going into ag and see what we could do in agriculture. So, he was younger than I was, and, when he was talking to me about ag, I said, "Well, I think I'll try that," 'cause I had to learn how to, well, like this ceiling in this house. I dropped all this ceiling. I put all this paneling in. This was two rooms. I divided this room.

BC: You did a nice job.

LC: Thank you. I divided the room. Now, those doors are new. They were put up later, but, I used the old doors, though, but, I did all this, I dropped the ceiling, and my father, when he was here, he used to hold up the metal parts while I was doing [it], with his cane and everything. So,

he helped me, too. So, I learned how to lay bricks and ... do lathering. They don't do that now. They get sheet rock.

BC: Did you learn this at Hampton?

LC: Yeah, I learned that at Hampton.

BC: Okay. You were there for three years.

LC: Yeah. I was there three years for that, and then, ... I went to my Uncle James, ... like we were in Danville, as the kids would finish high school, we would go to Brooklyn, to my Uncle James's house in Brooklyn, and then, we would work in the summer and go back, then, to college in the wintertime. So, I went there. I'm putting something in the book, but, I didn't do it. ... I'm not telling you that. Something happened, and I got booted, but, that's going to be in the book that I'm writing.

BC: Okay.

LC: ... Then, my father said, well, I'll give you a hint, ... "If you're old enough to do that, you're old enough to go and work, 'cause if you're man enough to do that, you're man enough to go and work." So, now, you know what happened. [laughter]

So, I was living ... in the Carlton Y in Brooklyn and all the fellahs was excited about a young lady coming from Boston. ... Mrs. Rock was the head of the Y in Brooklyn, the cafeteria, and her daughter was going to Virginia State College, and they're bringing this young lady from Virginia State College for the Christmas holiday. So, all the fellahs was running up there to see this young lady from Massachusetts [who] was going to stay with Miss Rock's daughter, which was named Eileen Rock. So, Chuck and I, another friend of mine, we decided we wouldn't go the first night, everybody rushing up there to see her, we'd go later on. I got caught. I married the young lady, [laughter] but, she's a beautiful, young lady. She got a Congressional citation. ... In other words, she made a man out of me. ... She also got a citation from the City of Jersey City. There it is, right in back of you. ... You can take it down and look at it. I'll put it back up later.

PG: That is nice.

LC: Thank you. ...

BC: There is something in this article about a job that you were trying to get as a horticulturist in New Jersey.

LC: Yeah. ...

BC: What was that all about?

LC: Well, that was after I majored in ag, agriculture. I'll come to that, yeah.

BC: Okay.

LC: ... I'll come to that later. So, I met her, and, being fresh like I was when I got kicked out of school, her word was, "No," and meant no, [laughter] but, I liked her, and she said, "Well, what happened to you?" and I explained it to her and everything. So, she said, "Well, do you want to go back to school?" and she was, oh, six years younger than me. I said, "Yeah, I want to go back to school," but, Miss Rock was telling her how I was working in New York. I was working for (Friedlin?) Wine and Liquor Store, ... between 142nd Street and 41st Street on Lennox Avenue in New York, Harlem.

BC: Oh, yes, out by the (Charmburg?) Center.

LC: Yeah, up there in Harlem. I was working up there in the liquor store and we talked. We'd correspond. I still tried to make my score, but, I didn't get anywhere, [laughter] but, she kept talking to me. I met her in 1939, because ... I finished the three years at ... Hampton, and I went to, well, now I'll tell you the school that I went to, it was Delaware State College.

BC: Okay.

LC: Yeah. ... I'll show you that later, but, they said, "Remember, bury the dead," in that, one of those smart alecs that was in school with me, but, coming back to that, ... she said, "Well, why don't you go back?" I said, "Well." She said, "Well, I'll tell you what. My brother works for the Great White Fleet," that was ... the banana boat. It went all over, you know, bring back the bananas, and [she] said, "He maybe can get you a job working as a steward on some of the pleasure lines," 'cause he was ... the shop steward for the cooks and things like that. So, she said, "If you're interested, when I get out of school in June, you can try it," but, I was working at the liquor store, so, I didn't think much of it.

So, we'd correspond and everything. ... Well, I don't know, maybe ... her holding out made me more determined, I mean. So, when she came up that summer, she said, "Are you going?" I said, "I don't know. I'll think about it." So, she came to stay, and I carried her to Small's Paradise, and the Apollo Theater, and things like that, and she went on home to Boston. So, I began to think about that. I said, "Now, I'll be working in the liquor store or doing something like that all my life."

I got some money together and I went to the Back Bay station and called her. She gave me a phone number in there to call her and told her I was in Boston. ... You know, it's a small world after all. So, when I got off the train in Boston, yeah, the Back Bay station there, ... a fellah came down there and said, "Hey, Lea Mac, what you doing up here?" a boy from my home. I said, "I'm going to work up here." I said, "I met a young lady that was in college and she told me I could get a job up here, working on the steamships, or waiting tables, or whatever you do up there," you know. So, he said, "Well." So, he and I was talking. After a while, she came down and he looked at her. She had on one of these flower dresses and ... she weighed about a 139 or forty pounds and was she built. He turned around and looked and said, "I don't blame you for

waiting." [laughter] So, we went up to her house and she introduced me to her mother and everything. She told her mother what had happened, that she'd met me and her brothers and all that. So, when Floyd came in, he carried me down to the union hall for the Marine Department, and I had a little money, and I got my sailing papers and all that stuff there. ... Then, after I did that, I don't know. I may have some of those papers here.

BC: Was this after you went to Virginia State?

LC: No. I didn't go to ... Virginia State. She was going to Virginia State.

BC: Where were you going?

LC: I put in for West Virginia State. I didn't want to go to the same school she was going [to].

BC: Did you actually go to West Virginia?

LC: Yeah. ... I majored in ag at West Virginia State.

BC: Did you try for the job as a horticulturist in New Jersey after that?

LC: ... No. Are you coming to the horticultural [job]? ... I was out of school then.

BC: Was this before the war?

LC: Yeah, that was before the war. I was out of school then.

BC: What happened to that horticulturist job in New Jersey?

LC: ... Wait a minute, let's see. No, I had finished school, but, I think that was after, when I came back from the Army. Just a minute, let's see, let me go back.

BC: Okay.

LC: Yeah. That was after ... I came out of the service.

BC: Okay. I do not want to talk about it until later then.

LC: Yeah, no. ...

BC: Were you in school when the war started?

LC: No, no. I was working for the Office of Dependents and Benefits. I was working for the War Department.

BC: Where?

LC: In Newark.

BC: Newark, New Jersey?

LC: In the Prudential Building, yeah, New Jersey, yeah.

BC: Okay. When the war started?

LC: Yeah, when the war started.

BC: How did you wind up in the service from there?

LC: Well, I was drafted in[to] the service. Oh, here's who ... I was working for in the War Department. ... I was recommended for warrant officer ... in the field in France by Captain Hopke. That's some story. That's where they called you, "A nigger." ... I was one of them, "smart niggers," they said.

BC: I think that is in here. We will get to that.

LC: Yeah, that's in there.

BC: Okay. What happened after you were drafted? Where were you then?

LC: ... Well, let's see, where were we now?

BC: You were in Newark when you were drafted.

LC: Yeah, I was in Newark, but, I'm talking [about that] there were a lot of things [that] happened between that, to get back into school, though. ... How do you want to go from there? What do you want to do?

BC: Can we talk about when you went back to school?

LC: Yeah, well, I was going to tell you how I went to work and I worked on the steamships, the SS *New Yorker* and the SS *Yama*. It was running from New York to Boston, from Boston to Yama, Nova Scotia, and the passengers ... would get on in New York. It was an overnight ride from New York to Boston. It was a three or four day's trip, you know, and it was added up [to] about a six ... or seven day trip, and then, they would stay in Boston and leave Boston the next morning, ... 'cause we'd pick up passengers in Boston.

... Then, when I first got hired, all of the young fellahs get hired as bus boys. We worked in the [galley], washed dishes, worked in the pantry, worked in cleaning the lettuce, and peeling the potatoes, and things like that. It was almost like I got a little training for the Army before the Army time, 'cause, when you start off working like that, you never start up. I've got things, if I

can't find them, I'll mail them to you, showing my fingerprints and everything, when ... they put me in the Marine Department for that. ... We'd started working in there. So, I started off as a bus boy in 1939.

I came back in 1940. Well, I made enough money to go to school and everything, and I got back in school, but, I didn't know whether I was going to be able to stay, 'cause my father had said, "What are you going to do?"

... Before, in '40, I came back again and we made more money. I had pawned my suit and everything, trying to get straight, and everything. So, I got my suit and all and everything out. So, Helen said, "Well, I'll go to your house for Christmas," 'cause, September the 11th in 1940, we got married, 'cause I've got her to a point where she was talking, and she was saying something to her older sister, Ruth, [who] said, "If you feel like that, you'd better get married." ... [laughter]

BC: Okay. You got married before the war.

LC: Oh, yeah. I got married in 1940, 'cause I wasn't drafted until 1942.

BC: Where did you live?

LC: Wait, I went back to school, both of us.

BC: Okay.

LC: I was gonna tell you, we got married. Well, in 1940, we got married, 'cause that year, ... when she came home, in '40, 'cause I went back to school on my own that year, in 1939. ... I went back to school after I met her, and then, I worked that year. I went back in 1940. What happened was, when she came to spend the Christmas [holiday], we was married, and, you know, my mother wouldn't let her sleep with me. [laughter] She slept with mother, and I slept in the living room, and my father slept in the other ... guest room. That's just how strict it was in those days, and I was married to the young lady, [laughter] and my mother wouldn't let her [sleep with me]. So, I spoke to my father. So, he said, "Well, I don't know," 'cause, he said, "You got a good girl in there and I'm gonna try to help you through school."

BC: You had been married for about a year when you were drafted.

LC: Yeah. ... So, I was drafted. I'd been married a little over a year.

BC: After you were drafted, where were you sent first, to Fort Dix?

LC: No. ... When I first got drafted, they sent me where the Camp Kilmer was.

BC: Camp Kilmer, okay.

LC: Yeah, and, from Camp Kilmer, ... there's something funny about that. Well, it wasn't funny, but, ... when we left Newark, we had a Pullman. We rode in a Pullman all night. There was twelve of us out of Jersey going to Camp Rucker, Alabama. The next morning, ... [I don't know] what place it was, it was a place in the South, the whites and the blacks all were in [the] Pullman. When we got to that southern state, ... from Jersey, we had to get in another car. They took us out of the Pullman altogether.

BC: You were segregated as you went into the southern states.

LC: Yeah, once we got into the southern states, they put us in a different car.

PG: Was the Pullman mixed when you were in New Jersey?

LC: ... From Jersey. I don't know when we hit [the South]. It could have been in my own state. I don't know whatever state we hit. It was daytime. ... We weren't in no Pullman, no more. ...

BC: Did the white soldiers remain in the Pullman?

LC: Evidently, they did. We didn't see them anymore, 'cause we had changed trains. [They] took the Pullman car off or something.

BC: Okay.

LC: I don't know what happened to it, but, ... not only was [it] just the twelve of us, we went in with some more draftees [who] were there. So, ... we [went] right on from there to Camp Rucker, Alabama. So, I had a trick shoulder from playing football, 'cause I used to weigh more than this. I used to weigh 160 something. ...

BC: Where did you play football?

LC: In high school.

BC: You did?

LC: Yeah, not in college. ... No. I played tennis in Hampton. I got a sweater, but, I got ... a sweater with a letter on it. They called me (Hook Squire?)

BC: What years were you at Hampton?

LC: '35, '36, something like that. It was three years there, in the trade school.

BC: Your football team must have played against Virginia U?

LC: Oh, yeah, they played against that [team].

BC: Do you remember seeing a running back named Cannonball Cooper play for Virginia Union?

LC: I've heard of him, 'cause, let's see, we had some good football players there. We had Jimmy Griffin, Tom Hart. Do you know where Cannonball is now?

BC: Yes, he is in Richmond. I saw him over the summer.

LC: Well, you ask him about Jimmy Griffin and Tom Hart, 'cause Griffin became the head of the athletic department at Hampton. He was an outstanding football player. ... If you can remember, Jimmy Griffin and Tom Hart. Tom Hart was a five letter man, four letter man, or something. ... I don't know where he was from, but, ... that name sounds familiar.

BC: Yes. He was a Black All-American player.

LC: ... Yeah, but, you can ask him about those two, Tom Hart and Jimmy Griffin. Jimmy Griffin became the athletic director of the whole school there.

BC: I imagine that those games were a lot of fun to go to.

LC: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, what was that? The one in Louisiana was always where the best black college was, though.

BC: Grambling?

LC: Grambling, yeah. ... They were the tops in ... the black league, you know, the (CI?) and everything.

BC: You went to Camp Rucker, Alabama.

LC: Yeah, Camp Rucker.

BC: When you got there, and, also, on the train ride going down, were you with all black soldiers?

LC: Yeah, with white officers.

BC: What happened when you got to Camp Rucker?

LC: At Camp Rucker, well, we were all there and that shoulder came out of place.

BC: Okay.

LC: ... That's when he said I was one of them smart niggers. So, the shoulder came out of place, and they had me and any others in the infirmary, you know, they had the fellahs there, and it was

a place about as large as this, with screened wire around the back part of it. It was the back of the hospital, but, it had screened wire around, like in a chicken coop or something, and it had the beds all out there, and all the black soldiers were out there, and the white soldiers were up on the wards. They were in the wards. That's how ... I had my discharge from the service due to disability.

BC: Right.

LC: ... When I opened my mouth, ... that thing said I always had a big mouth, ... the Captain came around. ...

PC: Hold that thought, please. We need to change tapes.

----------END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE----------

LC: ... We went into Montgomery. We caught a bus out of Montgomery and went into Dotham, Alabama.

BC: Were the passengers on the bus all black soldiers?

LC: All black soldiers, yes.

BC: I am unclear about this. When you got to Camp Rucker, is that where you hurt your shoulder?

LC: Yeah, in basic training. You know, we're going underneath the barbed wire, and pulling the ropes, and doing something

BC: You were supposed to get a disability on your shoulder.

LC: Oh, wait, I'll come to that. ... We were going through our regular basic training, and during the basic training, I don't know, I must have caught on something, that was a trick shoulder and it came out. So, they put me in the hospital and I had my arm in a sling. So, Lieutenant (Tesky?) was from California. Captain Hopke, the one that recommended me for a warrant officer in France, he was our company commander. We had all white officers, a completely black unit, and we were Quartermaster Corps, and so, what happened there, oh, ... the doctor in the hospital, the captain in the hospital, said, "Well, I don't think you'd be of much used to [the Army]." ... I explained that I had that shoulder from football in high school, so forth and so on. So, he was getting ready to write the papers up for me for a discharge. So, he told me, "Crawley, you can get your bag together and everything, because, [if] that shoulder come out, and you'll be lifting some gasoline or food and stuff, you know, to send up to the front, you'd be handicapped to the fellahs on the job," I mean, in the Army there, "on the job," as he said it, that way

So, I sent my duffel bag home, with the clothes and everything, but, then, as I said before, I opened my mouth and asked the Captain, ... "Captain," whatever his name was, "is it the policy

of the United States Army to put all the [blacks in the chicken coop?]" 'Cause I'd been treated so nice by the Silvermans, I almost forgot that I was black, not that ... I'd sit down and eat at the table with them and everything. So, I didn't see where it was necessary to do that.

So, when I asked the Captain that, he said, ... "No, it wasn't an Army thing, but, we figured you boys," and the people in the Army, some of them was in their twenties, at least I was, too, ... "would be more happy there, you talking, enjoying yourself, and everything." I said, "Yeah, but, we all back here and they're up in wards, and nice beds, and everything like that." So, he said, "Well, this is the way it is, so, I don't see any difference." So, about two days later, here comes the Colonel, with the eagles on his shoulder. Well, I had no idea what was the thing. So, he's coming along and the Captain come and said, "Crawley, how you feeling?" I said, "I feel pretty good." ... He was looking at the chart, so, he says, "Well, we're about to get your papers ready and everything, so, looks like you'll be going home," 'cause I already sent the duffel bag.

He put the chart back up on the side of the bed there. The Colonel grabbed that chart and looked at it and he said, "Oh, you're the smart nigger, huh?"

BC: He said that right in front of you?

LC: Right in my face, the Colonel, "So, you're the smart nigger. You trying to start something?" I said, "Sir?" Boy, ... he'd have been better off hitting me. I said, "Sir, no, I just asked him, 'Was it the policy of the United States Army to put the blacks all together out here?'" I didn't say, "Blacks," I said, "Negroes." That's what they called us then, "Negroes." "You put all the Negroes out here?" He said, "You think you're smart," said, "but, I'll see to that." He asked the Captain, ... "What'd you say about his papers or something? He's going?" He said, "Well, he's got a bad shoulder and ... we're processing [him out]. They haven't finished his papers and everything for him to go and I think they sent all of his stuff ... from the company up here. So, when he leaves here, he'll go right from the hospital on home," and ... they all walked out.

About two or three days later, we had an alert to leave. So, they came and everybody who was physically fit ... for duty, they let them all go out the hospital. So, Lieutenant Tesky took them all out and the Captain, you know, most of the time, the Captain is in charge of the hospital, he said, "You've got to take Crawley, too." He said, "I can't take Crawley." ... He said, "He's being discharged." He said, "But, the Colonel said, 'Use that Crawley.'" So, I almost felt like crying, then. ... "So, you're going to have to take him out," but, in between that, my wife, I wrote and told her what had happened and she wrote to Miss Murray Norton. I reckon you've heard of her, Congresswoman Norton, Murray Norton?

BC: Yes.

LC: Yeah, and she wrote [to] Miss Murray Norton, trying to get me out of the service, but, ... I didn't tell her in time. It was too late. ... When he said that, ... I called her the next morning and told [her] what was happening and told her to write Miss Murray Norton, 'cause she was [from] the Fourteenth District here, and so, she wrote a letter to her, but, that was it, too late. So,

Lieutenant Tesky said, "I can't take him. My captain said to leave him." He said, "I can't take him."

... I don't know how they got the Colonel there from somewhere. He must have been in his quarters. So, he came ... and told them, he said, "Well, you have your orders." He said, "You go back and tell Captain Hopke that I said Crawley's gotta go." So, he went back and told Captain Hopke. Captain Hopke, he's from Missouri, you wanted him, you gotta show him. He came up, he said, "What do you mean?" but, see, he's two ranks underneath the Colonel, two ranks under him. He said, "What do you mean?" He said, "What I mean? Just what I said, Crawley's going."

A lot of the fellahs in the hospital were listening. He said, "What are you going to do? You're not going to obey my orders?" ... He said, "No, sir, I'm going to do what you said, but, I don't see how he can ... do his duty. He can't carry the gun, he can't carry the pack, and he's eighty pounds or something." He's telling [him] the poundage and everything. He said, "You haven't figured it out, yet?" He said, "You take that boy. He's got a little education, use him in personnel, on the payroll, see. [Where] you're going, maybe he may have to learn some foreign language or something. ... [If] he's smart enough to try to get all the soldiers [to learn] different things, let him be smart enough to do something in the Army. I'm not letting him go." ... He said, "Well, ... how's he going to carry his stuff?" I don't know what you call that thing that the officers carry over their shoulder, it's a duffel bag like [bag]. ...

BC: I know what you mean.

LC: Yeah, he says, "Give that boy one of those things ... that you all carry," well, he called it a name, "but, don't give him a damn .45, though. Let him go." So, I left there. We left there that night and ... we came back to Kilmer. Two days later, we were leaving New York. It took us thirteen days to go over.

PG: Did that come as a shock to you, when that officer made that remark to you, even knowing that racial segregation was prevalent throughout the South?

LC: Well, that's the first time I had been called a smart nigger. In Danville, they didn't use that word too much.

PG: Not even being in Virginia?

LC: Not even being in Virginia, some parts of Virginia. ... In West Virginia, you never heard it much, ... when I went to school in West Virginia. ... Some parts of West Virginia was never [into] slavery.

PG: Yes.

LC: But, no, and nobody ever called me that to my face.

PG: Was there ever any open racism?

LC: No, no, no, 'cause they called you, "Negroes," or, "Colored," but, they still never [called you, "Nigger."] ... This Afro-American and stuff, now, I don't even address to it myself so much. I don't even wear all that (draft?) that they wear and all that. ...

PG: This was the first time somebody came right out and said that to you?

LC: That was the first time, openly, anybody ever called me that.

PG: That shocked you?

LC: 'Cause, you know, in those days, even if you were a light skinned, [if] a Negro would call you black, ... there'd be a fight, you know, but, no, nobody ever called me that in my life before. ...

PG: Did it shock you that it came from a colonel, a high ranking officer?

LC: It was quite a shock, because, I couldn't [believe it], but, now, once you get in Camp Rucker, you had nigger all the time. Then, they didn't say Negro, it [was] nigger all the time, but, he used to say, "One of them smart niggers." They'd just as soon call you that in Ala[bama]. ... That's the first time I knew. They'd call you that, then, say, "Good morning," ... at the camp. ... I mean, just to call you that, out of the clear blue sky, and you'd stand at attention, talking to him, and you'd have to say, "Sir," and he'd just called you [a nigger], that is pretty rough.

BC: Yes, he was your commanding officer.

LC: Yeah, that's right. [Laughs] You know, he was the head of the whole thing. He was the head of the entire hospital, and that's when he told Captain Hopke, you got his letter there, that he's gotta take me, and he almost asked him, was he gonna be insubordinate toward him? He said, "You mean to tell me you're not gonna [take him]?"

BC: Well, that is the thing. If an officer tells you to do it, you must do it.

LC: You gotta do it. You gotta do that.

BC: What about the chicken coop in the back of the hospital?

LC: That was screened wire, like we used to put our chickens in, say, like, round the back, like that, was chickens, but, now, up in the front part was wards for [the white soldiers]. ... Oh, but, that I forgot to tell you, about three days before the alert, he moved me up ... about two doors from him, where his office was, in the room with a bed by myself.

BC: Did he do that to keep an eye on you?

LC: That's right. [laughter] Not only that, I had to wait 'til I was about forty-five or fifty years old, but, I found it out during the thirteen days we traveled, 'cause we were dodging the German submarines and things there. It took us thirteen days from New York to Scotland. We landed in Scotland. Well, it's on my discharge. ... I'll even send you that, if you need it, if I can't find it now, 'cause I got different stuff, but, it took us thirteen days to go over there. Why, you know, people are smart. I didn't realize just how smart, and what he had done, and what his intentions were. One night, we were sleeping in the bunk, and I was on the top bunk there, and there were about five or six guys from Jersey, some from Newark, some from Orange, one of my best friends was from Orange and everything, just sitting down, talking. So, a corporal said, "You know, Crawley is the officer's pet." So, that's what the Colonel was doing. He's putting the boys against me, ... in a round about way. He says, "Crawley, he's the officer's pet. ... He don't have to do what we do and everything and he doesn't carry his sack." I didn't carry a rifle or nothing. So, I was listening. Now, ordinarily, I would have said something, but, ... I stayed up there and I kept my mouth shut. That's one time I kept my mouth shut, 'cause, ordinarily, if it had been one fellah saying something like that, I would have said something, but, ... it worked out beautiful.

We landed in Scotland. We went from Scotland by train to Liverpool. Somehow, I don't know how they did that, went to Liverpool, and, when we got to Liverpool, it was time for the fellahs to get the pay. So, Lieutenant Tesky ... sent me to [the officer in personnel in charge of] ... the pounds sterling, and the schilling, pence, and things like that. He began to teach me how to do that. That was the first lesson I had, learning how ... to do that.

... We knew we was going to France. They gave everybody a French book to learn ordinary words and ... some of the officers, they knew how to speak French, but, not from our unit, from some other units. They would give you those books and they would teach you [by] doing that. When you got in there, with the francs and things, I learned how to do that. So, being the Quartermaster Corps, ... maybe the Colonel told them what to do, they'd already figured out what they were going to do with me, anyway. So, when we got into France, they set up a supply depot.

PG: To bring you back to when you were transported to Scotland, was that a segregated transport ship?

LC: We were already segregated. We only had white officers, anyway. No, ... we were already segregated.

PG: When you were shipped from Scotland to Liverpool, was the train segregated?

LC: ... I didn't see anybody else but us. Well, you know, when you got a whole Quartermaster Corps, you've got a lot of men.

PG: Yes.

BC: How many men was that, roughly?

LC: I don't remember. ...

BC: Was it a couple of hundred?

LC: Yeah, we got a lot of men. [Do] you realize what we had to do? We had to get the food, we had to get the gas and stuff like that, and had a lot of six-by-six trucks to carry [the material] up [to the front]. They called them the Red Ball Express.

BC: Oh, yes. Did you supply them?

LC: Yeah. ... I was in that, with the Red Ball, and then, they got it so good, they called it the "Black Ball" Express, but, the Red Ball Express and everything, they had all that. So, we were ... in Liverpool for a while. Boy, talking about cold, ... it was in the wintertime, you know, around March or something like that, [you] had your coat on, your long johns and everything, and it was still cold, and, you know, those coats were some nice coats, and they were nice and everything. ... When they got there, they called me up to the thing. He said, "Well, you know, we're going to have to open up a supply depot. We're going to have to open up a PX along there. Set it up," said, "but, we'll have to give you some stripes," and I thought they were trying to keep me in the Army. I thought, maybe, that letter that my wife wrote to Ms. Norton would get me out of there.

He said, "I'll make you a sergeant and I'll give you some men and tell you what we've got to do. We've got to get these supplies in, 'cause we've got to take care of the soldiers on the front, take care of the Air Force and all that stuff." So, we got it and they showed us how to [make] do with the francs and everything. Then, we had to get the stockings and stuff for the WACs and all that stuff, you know. ... Oh, they set up a big supply depot there. ... Oh, boy, it was like all of Greenville, almost. [Do] you know about Greenville? It starts down on (Communipaw?) and go all the way out to Bayonne.

BC: A big area.

LC: Big area there, 'cause you had your six-by-six trucks, you had your small trucks and everything there.

BC: Was this in Liverpool?

LC: No, that was in France.

BC: Is this after D-Day?

LC: No, no, that was before D-Day. ... D-Day plus six, ... we were on the Cliffs of Dover.

BC: Okay.

LC: ... No, wait a minute, I'm ahead of myself. ... The first place we set it up was in Cardiff, Wales. Yeah, that was the first place we set that up, in Cardiff, Wales. So, we set up everything,

then, ... was bringing all the stuff in, and we'd go down in Cardiff, Wales. It was in Neath, Wales. ... I think that's where Liz Taylor's husband was [from], in one of those places there.

BC: Oh, yes, that is right, Richard Burton.

LC: Yeah, Richard Burton came from one of those places. I think it was Neath or (Cardiff?).

BC: I think it was.

LC: Yeah, Neath, Wales. We were up in there, ... yeah, because we were in (Cardiff?), Wales and everything. ... We used to go down in (Cardiff?), it was like a seaport, and get the stuff that would come in on the ship. Then, we'd set up the supplies and everything there. Then, we used to go up into Neath. I was married, but, I was still going to see some of the girls, 'cause you had some black girls there left from World War I in Wales. There were some black girls there.

BC: From World War I?

LC: Yeah. I mean the daughters and things of the soldiers that were there, yeah.

BC: Okay.

LC: ... World War I, 1917.

BC: Right, okay.

LC: ... When they fought the Kaiser, then, they were over in that same part of the country.

BC: Some of those soldiers stayed there.

LC: Some of those soldiers stayed, or left babies there, or whatever, and they were grown women then, but, they were some beautiful women. ... I don't know how, but, they were there.

BC: Okay. Can I go back just a bit?

LC: ... Yeah, go ahead.

BC: When you came over on the ship, did you mean that the entire ship was segregated?

LC: ... Oh, no, no, the entire ship? No, no, the ship was integrated.

BC: The ship was integrated.

LC: No, the ship was integrated, but, I mean ...

BC: However, the units were together.

LC: The units were together.

BC: Okay.

LC: ... No, no, the ships were integrated.

BC: That is how my father went to England. He was in the war. He went over on the *Queen Mary*.

LC: Yeah, yeah.

BC: He told me that the *Queen Mary* normally takes about 3,000 people and they had about 20,000 soldiers.

LC: That's right. ... Oh, they packed them in like sardines.

BC: Yes. Was it like that on your ship, too?

LC: Yeah. ... That's why I said, "They were down there talking about me." I wasn't going to get down there and say anything. [laughter] I was keeping my mouth shut. I opened it on the ground, but, [not] up there, but, he had put the fellahs against me, that's what he did. ...

BC: That guy had it in for you.

LC: Yeah. ... You know, a lot of guys got killed over there 'cause they didn't like the sergeant, ... especially in the infantry. ... You'd go up to the front and sergeant, oh, ... I didn't see anybody do that, but, I've heard them say that a lot of guys got killed that way.

BC: Lea, back at Camp Rucker, did the black soldiers live in separate barracks?

LC: Yeah.

BC: Did the white soldiers live in separate barracks?

LC: Separate, oh, yeah.

BC: Were other areas of the base also segregated, like the mess hall, the movie theater, and places like that?

LC: Yes, ... until Truman integrated the Army.

BC: Yes, that was in 1949, but, when you were there, everything was segregated?

LC: Yeah, yeah.

BC: At Rucker?

LC: Yeah.

BC: What did you do when you saw movies?

LC: [The] only movie we saw was pertaining to your duties and things, what you do. [Those were] the only movies.

BC: Okay.

LC: ... We went to [the] movies in Dotham, Alabama, or in Montgomery, and went to a black movie [theater]. It was all black there, too.

BC: Okay.

LC: ... Now, we saw the movies pertaining to Quartermaster [Corps the] most, and then, the other parts, and they'd show you how to try to protect yourselves and everything, but, ... I didn't have no gun. I couldn't do it anyway.

BC: When you were in those towns in Alabama, did the whites in those towns give you a hard time?

LC: No. ... They didn't bother you, 'cause, being black, you knew where you belonged. That was worse ... than Virginia.

BC: I imagine it must have been worse in Alabama.

LC: Yeah, worse than Virginia.

PG: What about the relationship between black and white soldiers at the same base? Was there any tension between the two groups?

LC: No, because, you know, ... the way [the] Army had things arranged, the whites from the North, or from the East, or something like [that], some of the men were from Ohio, ... where there was no segregation, they sent us down [there]. Maybe they were trying to teach us a lesson. They sent most of those fellahs down in Alabama and they sent most of the Southerners in[to] the North. If you check with some of those [men], they'll tell you that.

BC: That is true.

LC: ... That's what they did. The whole thing was staged. ... They probably didn't realize that I was originally from the South, ... 'cause I was coming out of Jersey.

BC: That is right.

LC: But, they sent all the Northerners [to the] South. I think they were trying to educate them as well. They sent all the Southerners, black and white, [to the] North. That's the way the Army did that. That's the way it was done.

BC: To jump forward, you had set up the supply depot in Wales.

LC: We set up the supply depot.

BC: Okay. What happened after that?

LC: Well, we worked in that supply depot. We'd go down and get cigarettes. Oh, that was quite a job, too, 'cause you had to keep track of all that. ... We didn't get no cartons, we got the whole case of cigarettes. We even got Kotex for the girls [laughter] and all that stuff. We had to get all that stuff for the thing, 'cause we had to supply them. ... Some of the girls had nerve enough to ask for Modess and other ones, asked for some other kind and all that. We didn't know. We'd just order what they said, 'cause they'd send in their requisition, too, and we ordered stockings for them and all that stuff. We had to order all the stuff for them.

PG: Once you got over to England, how did the way you interacted with other soldiers and people change?

LC: Well, the English soldiers were better to us ... than the American soldiers, but, then, they began to put out tales, because some of the things were happening there, and they said that the black soldiers had tails, like monkeys. They actually said that. If you ever interview some of the guys, they'd tell you that, too.

BC: I have read that.

PG: Were the English soldiers or the white, American soldiers saying that?

LC: No, the American soldiers. The English soldiers didn't say nothing like that. The English soldiers ... [were] very good. They were nice. I don't know whether it was just being polite or not, but, they didn't [say things like that], ... but, the American soldiers had already built up [the idea] that we had tails before we got there.

BC: I read a book for this course called *The Good War*, by Studs Terkel, and there was a story in there about American soldiers saying that blacks soldiers had tails. The book also notes that many black soldiers were falsely accused of sex crimes in England.

LC: It didn't have to be in England. In Dotham, Alabama, we had to go and get two boys out for whistling at some girls there.

BC: For whistling?

LC: For whistling at them, [Mr. Crawley whistles] and some old sheriff or something heard them, and they put both of them in jail, and a couple of nights before we got ready to leave, ammunition came. I didn't go with them, 'cause, you know, with that bad shoulder, ... but, [once the] ammunition came, man, (right away?), they went up there and took those boys out of that jail up there. You don't have to be in some other place to do that. ... They did that right there in Dotham, Alabama, and the boys ... only whistled, and the guy said that, "You had no business whistling at them."

Well, they killed this young fellah about during Martin Luther King's time. ... I forgot his name and everything, but, I remember [that it was] ... about the same thing. He didn't bother nobody, but, he just made a remark and they killed the young fellah about that.

PG: Was that the five Scottsboro Boys?

LC: Oh, no, the Scottsboro Boys is a different thing.

BC: That was much earlier.

LC: That's much earlier. That's a different thing and they didn't do anything, either. They just happened to be on the same train where the women were on, and they were all hobos, and ... two of the women, before one of them died, she told the truth. They didn't do anything. They didn't bother them, but, they caught them all on there, and the guy called them "poor white trash," 'cause she was bonding with these niggers.

PG: You said earlier that when you were down in Alabama, you did not have a problem with the townsfolk, because blacks always knew their place. Did that change once you got over to England and saw how the English troops were treating you? Did that create more problems?

LC: ... The American soldiers didn't change. They were trying to poison the English soldiers and things against us.

PG: Yes, but, did that change the black attitude toward whites? Did that increase tensions or lead to any fights? You were not in Alabama anymore and you did not "know your place," because the English were treating you like fellow human beings.

LC: Well, I'll give you an instance that happened over there. ... They were eating at a certain place and a white fellah came in. ... In their pubs and things, they didn't segregate nobody. ... A white fellah came in and somebody ... told the fellah that he could sit down. Now, he said, "I ain't gonna sit with no nigger." That was in England, but, that was an American soldier. Now, don't get me wrong, it wasn't an English soldier. ... The English guy looked at him, 'cause he just told him, "Sit down," 'cause he's going to serve him food and whatever, fish and chips, or something. ... He turned around and said, "I ain't gonna sit with no nigger."

That was over there. I mean, so far as segregation, they carried that there. Some people are gonna die with it, even today.

PG: That is for sure.

LC: No, so, I mean, ... some people are going to still die with it

BC: In England, were the pubs and restaurants segregated?

LC: No, no.

BC: What about the movie theaters?

LC: I didn't go to the movie theaters.

BC: You had much more freedom in that country than you had in your own country.

LC: That's for sure. That's for sure. ... Coming back, ... we was in Neath and (Cardiff?), Wales, and everything, so, when we got ready to [move out], I don't know, ... they got an alert. You don't know nothing no way until [the alert]. So, they moved the whole unit over to the Cliffs of Dover. June 6, 1944, we heard these planes that morning coming over, and you'd look up, and you'd see smoke and stuff. They'd been over into France, getting the Germans out of France, and we didn't know what was happening, but, we knew the planes weren't looking like they usually looked, you know, some smoking, and it's coming back, and then, it came over that the invasion had started. Six days after the invasion, we went over, one night. The sixth day after the invasion, ... we landed in ... Chartres or Le Mans, one of those places there. I don't know which one, one of the French places. It wasn't far from ... La Havre, 'cause, see, La Havre is on the waterfront, too. ... We landed in Chartres, but, we didn't go near the Utah Beachhead, 'cause the Utah Beachhead, they hadn't finished taking the dead out of there and everything. They tell me that was something.

... We got over to set up and they were setting up the quarters in one of those places out from there. We went up as far as Rouen before I got hurt again. My shoulder came out and they started sending my butt back. They sent me all the way back to England, from England to Augusta, Georgia, at the hospital down there, Oliver General Hospital, in Augusta, Georgia. That's where I was discharged in 1945, but, we saw enough over there.

... You're talking about the Red Ball Express? Yeah, we had ... to supply them. ... You know, I used to get angry, although we ate pretty good food, because we had the supplies, and I was mess sergeant with, you know, [the job of] get[ting the] food, but, the Air Force always got the best food. ... They had fresh vegetables and stuff like that. ... When you see something and the thing called for the Air Force men, you knew they're gonna get the best, and, well, we got the best, 'cause we handled it, but, I used to feel [angry], and then, I said, "Boy, that's kind of selfish," 'cause they go up there. They can't walk up there when something hits [them]. If you even get shot down on the ground, you can crawl in the bushes or something, or get out of the way, but,

you'd get it up there, [you were dead]. ... Then, I stopped. I said, "That's kind of selfish," the way I was feeling. ...

PG: They always give the Air Force the best, because they have less of a chance of coming back.

LC: ... You know, I'll tell you something [that] happened. They had to give me a rank. They wanted to give me sergeant. I told them, "No." So, he said, "Well, we'll have to give you," if you noticed on my discharge, it's PFC, and then, I just knew they wanted to keep me in the Army when Captain Hopke recommended me for warrant officer, 'cause that's what a warrant officer does. ... He is his own man. If he's handling the PX or whatever he is handling, he's his own man. He only answers to the company commander and ... soldiers have to salute him, junior warrant officers and senior warrant officers. If I'd have made those ranks, I'd have had some good money there.

... I had to sit up all night long to keep those records straight and everything, and we were a little bit shady there, because we were selling [to] the English soldiers and the French soldiers a little bit higher than we'd sell to American soldiers, [laughter] 'cause some of the officers, ... delete that, [laughter] ... would tell us, you know, "They're not us," you know, and that was the white officers that told us that. ... After I got home, I got a letter from the Finance Department. They were X amount of dollars over. They wanted to know where that money come from. What I'd like to know, when they found out I didn't know where it come from, what did they do with it? [laughter] 'cause some of my figures must have been wrong. ...

BC: When you went over to France, were you in combat at all? Were you close to combat?

LC: We weren't far from combat. We could hear it and I'll tell you another thing, if anybody tells you that they weren't frightened and fretting over there, they're lying, 'cause you'd hear those .105s going off, ... and then, you'd hear the, "Dat, dat, dat, dat." ... Oh, it was horrible. A lot of people went berserk and they weren't even in the fighting part, 'cause you were so close to it. You didn't know where it was. So, some people just couldn't take that noise and stuff that was there. ...

BC: You were there for a number of months.

LC: Yeah, 'cause I was discharged in '45. I didn't stay in the hospital long here, 'cause D-Day was June 6th, '44, yeah. I was there for a few months there, but, see, we were moving some (dundees?) and stuff. You know, when you get all this food and stuff, it's on the pallets. We called them (dundees?). We were moving them and something happened. It was wintertime, and I slipped and something, went to catch [it], and threw it out. So, that was my way out. I didn't intend to do that, though. ...

BC: Was the Quartermaster Corps segregated?

LC: Yeah, as I said before, all except [for] the officers.

BC: Were all of the men that you worked with black?

LC: All the people, yeah. ... All were black, but, we supplied the white soldiers and everybody else. We supplied everybody.

BC: What about the Red Ball Express?

LC: That was mixed. Most of the drivers were black, though.

BC: Okay. They were the people that supplied the soldiers at the front.

LC: ... At the front. They went all the way up and they were right in the middle of it.

BC: They were in the middle of everything.

LC: They were in the middle of everything, 'cause they had to carry that hard type stuff for the tanks and everything else. Yes, they were in the middle of everything. ...

BC: I think there were a couple of movies made about the Red Ball Express.

LC: I don't know. Somebody did something about the Red Ball Express.

BC: What was your connection to the Red Ball Express? Did you load the stuff onto the trucks?

LC: My men loaded [them]. I didn't do no loading.

BC: Your men loaded it on and they took it to the front.

LC: They took it to the front, yeah.

BC: Okay. Were the Red Ball Express drivers mostly black?

LC: [They] were mostly black. You had some white drivers, too.

BC: The other drivers were white?

LC: Yeah. You had some white drivers, too.

BC: They had hazardous duty.

LC: Yeah, because they couldn't defend themselves, 'cause they were driving, but, they traveled mostly at night.

BC: Did they carry ammunition as well as food?

LC: That part I don't know, 'cause ... we didn't handle ammunition. We handled the food, and food supplies, and the clothing, and stuff like that, watches and stuff, you know. ...

BC: You said before that some people were calling them the "Black Ball" Express?

LC: Yeah, at one time, they ... [were] called the "Black Ball" Express, because they were going at night. They were doing night duty and everything.

BC: Oh, I see.

PG: The Red Ball Express was pretty much integrated.

LC: Yeah, well, they had white and black drivers there. ...

PG: It was integrated without officially being integrated.

LC: No, it wasn't officially integrated, 'cause Truman was the one ... that eventually put them together.

I was telling you about my father working up in Pennsylvania there, and here's [an article] about this black church, and you can see all [of] the Crawleys on there. ...

BC: Oh, you are on the cover of the *New York Times*.

LC: Yeah, the family was.

PG: That is interesting.

LC: That's the Crawley family.

BC: Are you in this picture?

LC: No, no, no. ... That's my Aunt Lula, there. There's Reverend Crawley, that's a cousin. ... That's Claudia, that's his wife, though. That's Shirley. That's one of my cousins, yeah. See, somebody sent them and complimented [me]. They heard about me writing a book there. There's another cousin. ... Well, that's Pat, there, and there's Aunt Leila, there.

PG: You come from a mixed race family?

LC: They're not white. [laughter]

PG: Oh, they look white.

LC: Oh, I know they did. Well, they're just as white as a white. Now, I'll tell you ...

PG: Like her.

LC: Yeah. ...

PG: Look at her.

LC: ... They're not white. Where's Aunt Lula? [I] showed you that. ...

BC: One side of the family is light skinned.

LC: Yeah. Here she is, right here. She looks white, too

BC: Yes.

LC: Well, we're mixed up from (service?). ... When I went to look for them, this little girl, ... there's history there, too, she was in a cleaning store, and ... I had all the information about going to find them, and I'd called them and let them know I was coming. She said, "Oh, I'm in that picture." She said, "My mother and father, [also.]" So, I said, "Where do you live?" 'cause we'd been asking everybody in Bedford about the Crawleys, and she told us where she lived. She said, "I'll take you up to the house." So, my friend said, "No, we'd better find out," you know, not just take the child up there, 'cause you don't know how people feel. So, the lady in the cleaning store called up and ... told them that we were down there and here's the church. ... Right here, you read this article, you'll see they're not white. They got the Sunday school there and the black church and there was only one white kid in the Sunday school. Read that article.

BC: It is a nice article.

LC: Yeah, all through here. That's why I had it laminated. ...

PG: In France, you had contact with French soldiers, as well as English and American troops.

LC: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, the soldiers mostly bought from us up there. ...

PG: Did you have any contact with the French villagers?

LC: Oh, they were very nice. They were nice

PG: They were more like the English?

LC: Yeah. They were more hospitable than the English.

PG: Oh, really?

LC: They were, yeah, the French people. I don't know [that] they were more hospitable than the English people. They were very nice. Now, when you went to movies in France, ... everybody

go to the same bathroom and they were talking about that. They said, "The American people [are] always hollering about this and we have less rape than the American people." They were talking to some of the people. It's nothing for them to go to the bathroom if a woman was over there, a man was over here, something like that. Nobody paid no attention to each other. I don't know whether they still do that now or not, but, they was doing it in those days, and they had less rape. That's the way that was over there. That's something to think about.

There's my wife. When I married her, ... she was a freshman. ... Yeah, that's her. After she had the child, she got larger. There's my two boys up there, right here, right behind that picture, there. ... That's my granddaughter you just saw. ...

BC: That is a nice picture.

LC: Yeah, and there's my daughter over there, and there's one of the boys, ... on that same picture, there, the little one, over here. ...

BC: You recently got married again.

LC: Yeah.

BC: How long have you been married?

LC: I married in August, on my eightieth birthday.

BC: Oh, that is nice.

PG: Congratulations.

BC: Congratulations.

LC: Who said I got married again?

BC: The professor that talked to you the first time, Professor Piehler.

LC: Oh, yeah.

BC: He said, "Watch out for him, he is a newlywed." [laughter]

LC: Yeah. [laughter]

BC: That is wonderful.

LC: Yeah, I got married at eighty. ... She's a deaconess in church, and I was talking to the minister, and the minister said, "Well, you know, you're well thought of and everything." ... I'm the chairman of the scholarship program for the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade for the

Veterans of Foreign Wars, and, also, the chairman of the Widows and Orphans, the National Home for the post. This is my tenth year. I've had winners to go as far as Trenton, but, it's always in Northern [Jersey], that we don't get anybody to go to Washington. In my ten years, South Jersey has always sent that one student to Washington for that 20,000 dollar scholarship, although they didn't get it, yet, but, that's the way they did it.

... I always show what my wife did. There's a couple of things I've got from the Veterans of Foreign Wars. There's one on the top there and there's another one right here from the VFW, right there. ... Oh, no, that's from the Masonics, from forty some years as a Mason. ...

PG: I am going to change tapes.

----------END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE----------

BC: What are your feelings about segregation in the Army?

LC: What is my feeling about it?

BC: Yes, looking back on it.

LC: I think it was ... very stupid, because a lot of fellahs that ... were fighting in the Army, they had to save each other's lives and everything, but, that was the policy at that time. ... I don't know. You didn't like it, but, that's the way it was.

BC: Right. There was nothing that you could do about it.

LC: Yeah. No, you didn't like it, but, that's the way it was.

PG: Did you ever think of trying to do something to change it?

LC: ... I got sent overseas trying to do something to change it. [laughter]

BC: All you did was open your mouth.

LC: Here's part of what I'm writing in the book, "Pearl Harbor Changed My Life." That's going to be in the [book]. ... My granddaughter is helping me to write some of the stuff for the book there. I got somebody trying to edit it, and fix it up, and everything.

BC: I wrote a book on Negro League Baseball, and I interviewed all those guys about segregation in the 1930s, and they all said the same thing, that it was stupid, but, there was nothing you could do about it.

LC: Yeah, I think it was. No, not a thing, not a thing. ...

BC: How did you feel when the Armed Forces were integrated by Truman?

LC: I thought it was a good thing, but, I'll tell you what, with that soldier saying that in England, he wasn't going to sit with a nigger, I said, "That's going to be a hard thing to enforce," and I think it was, but, I wasn't around then, but, that's just part of the book I'm writing. That's some rough copies.

BC: How long have you been working on this?

LC: Oh, before my wife died. She died in 1989. We've been working on that. See, I worked in the agricultural department, too. I just jotted down some things, here. That's what we're getting on, different topics on the book there.

BC: Okay. What did you do after the war?

LC: ... Under the GI Bill, I took an architectural drafting and building [and] construction [course] in Newark, there, on Morris Avenue. They had that over there in Newark. It was a three year course. I took that up, too, over there.

PG: Was this in conjunction with a college?

LC: No. That was some set up there, ... under the GI Bill. They was teaching you drafting and architectural [drawing]. ... I was out of the Army when I applied for that job. You were talking about down ...

BC: Oh, yes, please, tell me about that.

LC: Oh, yeah. I took architectural drafting, building and construction, ... 'cause I'd also had, ... you know, carpentry, and masonry, and stuff at Hampton. Now, I sent down to, whatchamacallit, agricultural and horticultural, down there at Flemington, and, when they found out it was a Negro college, the job was taken, and up in Hanover, New Jersey, I went up there and [saw] a fellah named Drake. They told me he was the son of Drake's Bakery. So, I went up there and he was a man. He told the truth. He said, "If you imagine horticulture and everything, ... we've got flower clubs up here and women in the flower clubs. It just wouldn't work."

BC: Because you were black?

LC: That's right. He didn't say that. He didn't have to say no more. He said, "It wouldn't work." He said, "But, I know where you can get a job." He said, "I'll give you a letter." As I said, I can send you some information, if you give me an address, 'cause I got the letter. ... He gave me a job, [by sending me] to a Mr. Flynn at the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad, and I worked two jobs for thirteen years.

BC: What did you do there?

LC: I worked as a trucker, and, you know, unloading the mail and everything, for thirteen years, 'cause, in 1949, I bought this house and I was working down there. ... In 1950, I got a job working for the Erie Railroad ... as a trucker and I was going to school at the same time.

... From 1950 to '65, that's when I worked two jobs for thirteen years, 1950 to 1965. I thought I had worked enough time. ... If you worked, you know, it was thirty years, or fifteen years, or something like that, [you got a gold pass], but, I'd only worked thirteen years, so, I couldn't get a gold pass, but, I could get a pass to ride the train to anywhere I wanted to ride, but, if I had known, I was short [by] about five or six months, I would have worked a little longer.

BC: What did you do after that?

LC: What did I do after that? Well, I was working over at the (BF?) until 1945. Let's see, ... I think you got it on that letter, 'cause, see, they were recommending me when I went in. ... Oh, I came back in 1947.

BC: What did you do after you worked for the Erie-Lackawanna Railroad?

LC: What did I do after that? Oh, I went into business for myself. Before then, let's see, I got it down here, let's see, I was in business for myself, building houses. We built one house. Oh, that was something unusual, too. That's in the book. We built a house in Verona, I got the pictures of that house in Verona, New Jersey, from ground up. Architect (Tempkins?) was the architect. He lives in Caldwell. ... [There] was about thirty-five or forty fellahs in that class that I was taking up [in Newark], that architectural drafting and building and construction [course], and [there were] only two blacks in that class, and it was ... Burton and Crawley. This is where we started our own company, Burton and Crawley Contractors.

PG: There were only two black guys in your class.

LC: In a class out of about thirty-five or forty, there was.

PG: Was that due to quotas?

LC: No, no, no. ... We was all soldiers. I mean, there was no segregation there. We had teachers and everything. ...

PG: Did they restrict the classes to maintain more of a white presence?

LC: ... No, no, they didn't do any restricting there at all. What happened there, it was just [that] only two of us wanted to take it. So, we were the only two left, but, what happened in that, we had no finance [capital]. So, we went ... to the bank in Belleville. I'd like to find out who that president was in that time. ... I know (Undertaker Holcombe?), in Montclair, ... and he knew this lady that wanted to build this house, her name was Mrs. Harrison, and we told him that we could do it. So, he said [that] he would back us, if we thought we could do the house, if we could read the blueprints and everything.

So, we went ... [to] Belleville, to the bank. I don't know [why] we're going back there, 'cause ... I'm backtracking a lot of my steps. Anyway, ... the president of the bank, with the recommendation of Mr. (Pascuzi?), our teacher, [who] told him that we could do it, [gave us the money]. ... So, we went out and hired a professional carpenter and everything. So, the bank, on the basis of this Undertaker, said they would loan us the money, but, by me being in charge of that, I could draw no salary at all from that money that they were using for that. So, Burton and I worked at night, doing piece jobs, doing jobs that could get the money, but, the people that were doing the work [continued to work], and he sent up to the lumber yard in Montclair, and we got the bricks and everything we needed, and we built the whole house.

... I carry people up there now to see that. We built that whole house, and, from there, ... if you know anything about Wallington and Hasbrouck Heights, ... we did masonry work [in that area]. At least I did that ... masonry work, 'cause I started my own company after that. [I] started my own company, 'cause Burton and I kind of had a little falling out, 'cause he lived in Montclair, and that wasn't far from Verona, and some of the people were telling me that he was using some of the material at night, to do other jobs, you know, but, ... that was irrelevant. I didn't go too much about that, but, we built that whole house. Even my wife had to pawn her Persian Lamb coat to get [the] money, until she got a job teaching. She got a job teaching, and things were a little better for us, but, we built the whole house, and I didn't get no real money until the house was finished. ...

Then, I wrote back to Hampton Institute. I've got the recommendations from the schools and all. I wrote back to Hampton Institute and ... asked them to send me some fellahs that majored in that. ... Four fellahs came the first year and ... three fellahs came [over] the ... next two years and we built, ... as you go into Wallington, you see all that brick work done there and those houses going into Wallington, the fellahs from Hampton and myself, we did that and we finished that building. ... If you ever go to Saddle Brook, you'd see that box lunch place. We did all the blocks up there. Oh, here's the letter from Hampton. ... Oh, here's when ... I was working as a seaman and, ... you'll notice, it says, "Busboy." That's what I started out with. ...

BC: You do not look a day older. [laughter]

LC: I'm eighty, though. [laughter] Here's a letter from West Virginia State College. I always liked to work with the young people. I had the Boy Scouts there. You see what the head of the department asked me, what [did] I want him to do with the boys there? That's the letter from Hampton. You saw that. That's from the Captain.

BC: Is this from this?

LC: No, that's from West Virginia State College.

BC: I saw that.

LC: Here's when ... I left the War Department, in 1947. I think that's when that was, isn't it?

BC: 1946.

LC: '46, yeah. I was making big money then, [laughter] right there.

BC: Two thousand and six hundred dollars a year.

LC: Hey, you know, you lived good on that.

BC: That was not bad back then.

LC: Here's when I was helping my wife, when she made the first ... I got a plaque for volunteer work and everything, was invited to the dinner and everything. Here's a letter I was telling you about, when I went up there and Drake sent me down to get a job. I went for that job. He recommended me to go get this job there and this fellah, I worked with him.

PG: Going back, during the Depression, from 1929 to 1934, were you working for the Silvermans then?

LC: From what?

PG: From 1929 to 1934.

LC: ... No. Let's see, I must have been working for them. ... I'm just trying to think.

BC: You were fifteen then, right?

LC: Something like that.

PG: Yes, fifteen.

LC: Yeah. ... When I was fifteen, the census was taken. I was telling you about [that]. A lot of people have never seen that.

BC: The census was taken in 1930.

LC: On the back, it tells you all that. Now, my mother left some money in Virginia and I can't get it, because, somehow, somewhere, I changed my name. ... In 1938, Franklin Roosevelt made Social Security, so, I changed my name somewhere in there. Oh, here's where. ... Senator Case. The flag I got in there flew over the White House for a day.

BC: Wow.

LC: Now, I sent all of this to Virginia and the guy said I wasn't the right person. I sent my mother's marriage certificate, her death certificate, and everything.

BC: You never got the money?

LC: Not yet. It's still in litigation. ... Here's Franklin, signing the Social Security Bill. Look on the back, it tells you about who was there with him and everything. ... Is it on the back there?

BC: No.

LC: On the back of here. Oh, maybe you've got [a copy]. ... [On] the regular copy, it's got the names on the back.

BC: Okay. This is a Xerox copy.

LC: That's Xerox, yeah.

PG: Did the Depression dramatically alter your life with the Silvermans?

LC: No. As I told you before, ... I didn't notice anything about the Depression, 'cause my father was working all the time, and I don't know exactly when he built his home, but, he was working and we raised all our food. ... In the wintertime, the fellahs would get together and they killed hogs. They killed them right in ... our backyard. We had apple trees and things like that. Only thing they had to buy was the staples, like sugar and stuff like that, things they didn't raise. ... As I was telling you about starting my own company, I started my own company.

PG: You suffered no ill effects from the Great Depression?

LC: No, really, I didn't even feel it. I didn't know too much about it, to tell you the truth. ...

BC: How many years were you in the service, all together?

LC: ... I'm trying to find the discharge now, so I can have it. There's so many dates. I thought I had it. ... Yeah, a seaman, a watch, and a letter from my job. I got the watch on now. ... I retired at sixty. I've been retired twenty years now.

BC: Which job did you retire from?

LC: That's the Post Office. ... That's when I worked two jobs for thirteen years. Oh, there's some of my winners from the scholarships. ... I got this from the President. There's the mayor of Jersey City. Those are my winners my first year, '83-'84. There's a white girl there. She was the first female governor for the day, ... the first female in twenty-eight years, I think, and she also won the first place in the Veterans of Foreign Wars contest. The other girl, Patrice (Larett?), she played on Broadway in *Momma, I Wanna Sing*. In the first year, I had some smart girls, smart people.

BC: I will say.

LC: There she is with her mother and father, and I think they got me in there, too, this time.

BC: There you are.

LC: The next year, I got this Spanish young lady. She did very good, too, and I was glad when I got a boy. I got this fellah, the young fellah there. I've been successful. The only year I didn't do too much was the year my wife was sick. Here's Eisenhower. My sister-in-law used to call me a "rat packer." I save everything.

BC: It is nice that you save things.

LC: Yeah. She'd say, "You're a regular rat packer. You just save everything." ...

BC: Do we have it covered or what?

PG: I cannot think of anything else.

BC: I think that we have talked your ear off, Lea.

LC: Well, I hope you got something. ...

BC: It was good. It was really interesting. I think that just about wraps it up.

PG: Okay. This concludes an interview with Lea Crawley.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

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