RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM TORSIELLO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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MOORESTOWN, NEW JERSEY
DECEMBER 20, 2012

TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Mr. William Torsiello, also known as Billy Terrell, in Moorestown, New Jersey, on December 20, 2012, with Shaun Illingworth. Mr. Torsiello, thank you very much for having me here today and agreeing to be interviewed.

William Torsiello: It's my privilege, sir.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

WT: I was born on November 14, 1944, in Newark, New Jersey, at Columbus Hospital.

SI: What were your parents' names?

WT: My father's name was Bill, or Vito--his legal name was Vito William Torsiello. They called him Bill and Willie his whole life. My mother's maiden name was Eleanor Gimbel.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, what do you know about the family history?

WT: Well, quite a bit, really. My great-grandfather came, brought the family here. They had eight children and came to this country. They left the Port of Naples--on November 5th of 1902 and arrived at Ellis Island on November 18th. They settled in Newark, New Jersey, and the story goes--there's two stories--one is that my great-grandfather didn't like it here and he wanted to just go back to Italy, but my great-grandmother, my father said my great-grandmother said, "If you want to go back to Italy, go ahead, but I want the children in America. I want them to be in this country." So, he packed up and just went back and no one ever heard from him again.

SI: Wow.

WT: There's two versions, two possible realities. Some people say that he never married and he lived upstairs in an attic somewhere. [laughter] There's another story floating around that some people think he went back to Italy, got married and had another eight kids. [laughter] So, I don't know what story works out, but, yes, they came here. Of course, my great-grandmother, she was like a rock, from what they tell me, and very close to my father. My grandmother was born--her mother was French and her father was Southern Italian--she was born here. She was born in Newark, New Jersey, in the mid-1890s, passed away at seventy-nine in 1972. She was born on Eleventh Street in Newark, interestingly, right next-door to Bertha Pesci, Joe Pesci's grandmother. Bertha Pesci and my grandmother were inseparable until they passed. The family was very much together and, when I lived with my grandmother for a while, she used to go to Bertha's house. My grandmother was in church every day, because she lived right across, on Eighth Street, from St. Francis Church. I watched that church being built in Newark in 1951. My grandmother used to take me every day when she had tea with Bertha Pesci in the late '40s. I'm sure--I don't remember--but I used to play with a kid, I'm sure it was Joe Pesci that I played with in the sandbox outside. [laughter] It's crazy. [Editor's Note: Actor Joe Pesci was born on February 9, 1943, in Newark, New Jersey.] So, again, my grandfather didn't speak English, but my grandmother taught him how to speak English. She was a workhorse. He was in construction. Well, they were married in June of 1913.

SI: Okay.

WT: Yes, because my father was on March 13, 1914. The story goes, my grandfather was a great bricklayer and a great guy. I miss him today. He was a wonderful guy. He built up a business and, in the early '20s, he caught on and, on Eleventh Street in Newark, on one side of the street, he built and owned most of the homes and rented them out. He was doing great. When the Depression hit, he lost everything--the home, all the properties. He was such a great guy; the people couldn't afford to pay the rent and the bank couldn't give him any more money to continue the business. So, he was caught. He couldn't develop, he couldn't get enough credit to keep the business going and he wasn't collecting rents. Instead of doing what a lot of people would do, throw the people out, he not only kept them in there, but my father, who was probably twelve years old at the time, he used to have my grandmother give my father these big plates of macaroni and put bread on top of it and tell him to take it to them. So, that's the kind of guy he was. Then, he lost everything and he had a terrible nervous breakdown. My grandmother had to work on the sewing machine all day, sewing stuff and doing all these types of things, to keep things moving along.

SI: You wrote on your survey that your father also went into the same line of work as your grandfather, which was masonry.

WT: Yes. Well, my father actually was a Big Band singer in the '30s, up until World War II.

SI: Okay.

WT: He worked as a singer with a pianist. Then, he had his own band, Bill Tarrell and His Orchestra, and played New York, played on the radio. Then, World War II came along and it broke up the band.

SI: Okay.

WT: And then, he was drafted and he went to the Army, finished basic training, and then, he was medically discharged, because he had a fractured skull as a kid. He was complaining of headaches, which, when we get later in this interview, I'll tell you how that played out later in life for me, which was tough. So, they tested him. His whole unit was moving out to Guadalcanal--there was no bones about it--and they kept testing him, testing him, and they couldn't find anything wrong with him. So, they sent back to Newark, New Jersey, for his medical records. When they saw that he had--he'd helped a guy on a coal truck, when he was, I think, thirteen, and they had an accident and my father went through the windshield and lost a lot of blood and fractured his skull. So, with that in his records, they couldn't disprove that he was having problems. So, they let him out. Then, when he came back, he worked in a defense plant up in Belleville, New Jersey, Wallace and Tiernan, and that's where he met my mother. [Editor's Note: The Wallace and Tiernan Corporation produces a wide range of products, specializing in water chlorination.]

SI: I brought that up because I thought maybe he trained under his father or worked with his father when he was a teenager, but did that come after?

WT: Yes.

SI: Okay.

WT: Well, a little bit before, but, then, he was really intrigued with music and he chased the music and worked the clubs. Then, afterwards, when he married my mother, my mother just was very insecure and hated the music--hated him performing. So, then, I came along and a brother came along, and then, a sister came along and they wound up with five of us. He was demoralized, but, at that point, he went into construction and he worked. In the late '40s, early '50s, with the help of my grandfather, he'd built up a pretty nice business. Then, he got a big contract to build housing units. He had twenty-two employees. Then, we had our own home in Belleville, which my father and grandfather built with their own two hands. I watched them build the whole house. Unfortunately, my mother had a lot of difficulties. My father was offered to go to Las Vegas to build hotels. This is when they started in the early '50s and some interesting characters that he knew through his life in Newark, New Jersey, [laughter] had contacts out there and invested in some of those hotel-casinos. My father had the opportunity to move there and heaven knows what we would have been like, but there's no way my mother would go. That was another big, demoralizing step for my father. He had to get out of Belleville because there were a lot of problems with my mother's family, so, he moved. He gave up that business. The business just crumbled and we moved to Belmar, New Jersey. It was a terrible existence for many years after that.

SI: Before we get to that, it seems like your grandparents got together by proximity--they were in the same area. Is that correct?

WT: Yes. Well, my grandfather came to Newark from Italy. They came to Newark because they had relatives that were already here. I'm not sure who they were. I was able to go on the Ellis Island website and I actually was able to print out the captain's manifest. They came over on a ship called the *Palatia* from the Port of Naples and I was able to print out the captain's manifest. He wrote in my grandfather's name, Pasquale Torsiello--he was twelve years old--and the address in Newark, New Jersey, where the family was headed. [Editor's Note: The MS *Palatia* was a Hamburg-American Line ship built in 1894.] So, apparently, my grandfather, because, back then, in these cities, unlike today, there were certain [ethnic neighborhoods], because of, well, so many immigrants coming in that didn't speak English, so, until they learned English, they had to all live in the same neighborhood. There were Italian neighborhoods and Jewish neighborhoods and Polish neighborhoods and German, which is no secret. So, apparently, in that neighborhood, in the Roseville section of Newark where they settled in, he met my grandmother, probably through another family, or was introduced, and they were married, yes, so, great.

SI: That area was exclusively Italian. It was not a melting pot.

WT: Well, it really wasn't a melting pot, but it was Italian, but there were fringes. There were fringes of Irish and [others], but primarily Italian, in Newark. Then, of course, the other side of South Orange Avenue, what they called the Weequahic Section, was the Jewish section.

Roseville, and then, what they called Down Neck, which is now Portuguese, was pretty much Italian down there.

SI: Okay.

WT: Yes.

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother's side of the family?

WT: Yes, it's an interesting story. My grandfather was born--his name was Walter Gimbel--he was actually born in New York. My wife and I are going to be subscribing to Ancestor.com this coming year, now that I'm slowing down a bit, and we're going to do more research. I'd like to go over there to try to [find more], now that I'm feeling better and my health is improving, go over there. My grandfather was born on West 41st Street, in the same apartment house with James Cagney, the actor. [laughter] [Editor's Note: James Cagney was born in Manhattan on July 17, 1899.] My grandmother, her maiden name was Lillian MacNeil, M-A-C-N-E-I-L. She was Scottish and Irish. My grandfather, Walter Gimbel, he was full German. I'm not sure if they met in New York or if they met on the Jersey side, I'm just not sure, but they settled in Belleville, New Jersey. My grandfather was a really interesting character. He played every instrument. I mean, every musical instrument, he played. He even built his own instruments. He made his own violin. He made a xylophone. He used to play the piano in the silent movies. He used to be in the theater; while the picture was going, he'd add the music. He was also an absolutely marvelous artist, his sketches and paintings. I was able to find a bar in Newark, New Jersey, that--I'm getting ahead of myself. He'd built his own home in Belleville. He did a lot of work for the town doing murals, which are still in the schools up there, and then, the Depression hit and he lost his home. He had eight kids and lost his home, because he couldn't pay seventy dollars in taxes, and it threw him into the bottle. He went so poorly downhill that he was in shelters and stuff. My uncles would have to go find him. Then, ultimately, the story goes, when I was six months old--he saw me, of course, I don't remember him--but, when I was six months old, one time, he disappeared, and then, they never heard from him again and have no idea. There was one story circulating years ago that, because he would wind up in New York, in the Bowery lots of times--you know the guys that wash the windshields? which was sad--one story goes, it's possible that he perished in, there was a big shelter fire in the late '40s and it's [the] early '50s. It's very possible he perished in the shelter. My grandmother, very quiet lady, I didn't know her too well, she used to sit by the window, drink wine and just smoke cigarettes and always pulled the cigarette [like] that, with her fingers down and with the cigarette pointing toward the floor. So, that nicotine, I remember even as a little boy, I asked my mother a few times, "Why is Grandma's fingers so brown and dark?" She said, "Well, it's from the cigarettes," but she never really recovered from my grandfather disappearing. She ended up, she passed away in 1959. I believe she was sixty-nine years old. Yes, so, it was a rough existence.

SI: Did your mother ever talk about having to take on more responsibilities at home or going out and working to support the household?

WT: Well, no, my mother was one of the younger ones.

SI: Okay.

WT: Let me see, there were eight. There was Uncle Walter, and then, after him was Aunt Lillian, and then, Uncle Charles, and then, I believe it was my mother, my aunt behind my mother, and then, the other guys, Robert, Donald. So, she was born in '23. So, when the Crash hit in 1929, she was pretty young. Then, from what I understand, it was a pretty abusive [home]. It was very abusive. I didn't know until after she passed away that it was a very abusive environment, which is very sad, and she carried that guilt with her her whole life. She had a drinking problem. It caused a lot of problems for me growing up in life, obviously, my father. It's interesting--it's sad, really--how both sides of the family, both sets of grandparents, went so far downhill with the Depression. My grandmother on my father's side actually had a heart attack when she was forty-nine. She survived, but she had problems the rest of her life. Yes, so, that's interesting. [Editor's Note: The Great Depression was a worldwide economic depression. In the United States, it lasted from October 29, 1929 to December 7, 1941.]

SI: Yes, that is one of the things we find in the interviews, that the Great Depression was just devastating to families.

WT: Oh, yes.

SI: It had a long-lasting mental impact on the people that suffered in it. Do you know if any of your family members were able to take advantage of any New Deal programs? [Editor's Note: The New Deal was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's plan of government-sponsored social and economic programs.]

WT: I'm pretty sure that my uncles got involved with what they called the WPA, which was the work program, and worked on some of the street projects. I had heard that, but I don't know. I don't have a lot of detail, but I do know that they got involved with--I remember my mother mentioning the WPA. That was a work program that the government, at that time, put together and a lot of people participated in those programs. So, I do think that my older uncles got involved in that, yes. [Editor's Note: The Works Progress Administration employed over eight million Americans during the Great Depression. Jobs varied from public works projects to the employment of artists, writers and musicians.]

SI: Were any of your mother's siblings artists as well?

WT: Yes, my Uncle Walter, who was the first son, the firstborn, and he was named after my grandfather, he was just as great. He was fantastic. There are murals in the City Hall in Newark, New Jersey, until today that he did. Some years ago, when they put out a poster, it was one of the anniversaries of when Newark was established, the city summoned him to do the artwork. It's a marvelous poster; it shows all the airport and everything. He was quite a guy. He was a painter by trade. I mean, he painted buildings and houses, but his artwork is all over Belleville and Newark, New Jersey. I found a bar in Newark [where] my grandfather painted on the plaster walls for drinks in 1933. The place is closed. The building is still there and I'm going to try and track down the owners and see if I can get in there, now that digital photography is so good, get in there and take those photos, take photos of them, so [that] I can preserve them, have them

cleaned up, but my Uncle Walter was [great]. As a matter-of-fact, in the '50s, I remember my Uncle Walter drew me a perfect Peter Pan. It was great. I asked him to draw Peter Pan for me, probably around 1955. He did it and I had it for many years. It was great. Yes, he was quite an artist and he lived the longest of all of them, except my Aunt Doris is still alive, but he lived into his eighties, where most of the family, my mother and two brothers died at sixty-five. My Aunt Viola died in her thirties. My other uncle Charles died [at] forty-nine, but Uncle Walter, I think it was his humor. He was a humorous guy and always [had] a joke, always joked and drew his stuff, and probably kept him going. Yes, it's pretty tough.

SI: It is interesting that your father was a Big Band leader during the 1930s, the heyday of the genre. Did he tell you any stories about what it was like?

WT: Oh, yes, well, interestingly, he worked with a lot of very cool people. I mean, he worked clubs like the Normandy, the Miami Club--these are all North Jersey clubs--the Nineteenth Hole, back then, when the nightclub business was the nightclub business. People dressed up, they went out. He worked with artists like Lou Monte, who was a famous--some of these names, I'm not going to get them, because they are so old--but Phil Brito and Lou Monte. He also was the house singer at the Miami Club when Jackie Gleason was the MC. He told me some great stories about Gleason, because Gleason was not only a big drinker, but he just ate and ate. He wasn't a great comedian, but he had a lot of moxie on stage. My father told me, one night at the Miami Club, people used to heckle Gleason a lot. Then, sometimes, Gleason would invite them out in the alley and he would win these fights. So, this one night, there was a guy in there, in a party, and the guy was drunk and he was really on Gleason. Gleason was fed up with it and he invited him into the alley, not knowing it was Two-Ton Tony Galento, the only fighter up to that time that had knocked down Joe Louis. My father said Gleason--my father couldn't believe it--and he said, obviously, Gleason didn't know what he was doing. My father recognized the guy, but, before he could go to the manager and say, "You better tell Jackie, bag that," he didn't get out the door and Galento hit him with one shot and it took a half-hour to wake him up. Yes, Gleason was a pretty wild guy, always broke, great pool player, always bumming cigarettes. That was a good story. [Editor's Note: Tony Galento, a native of Orange, New Jersey, in a 1939 boxing match at Yankee Stadium, knocked down heavyweight champion Joe Louis in the third round of an eventual fourth-round loss to the champion.] Then, my father became very friendly with Buddy Rich, who was a great drummer, played with Sinatra, played in his own band, a lot of bands, rough guy, tough guy, but my father became very friendly with him. My father played the Roxy and Buddy played the Roxy and my father used to hang out with him. My father was younger, so, he used to go get Buddy's car and go get his clothes and stuff. He liked Buddy Rich and he met Sinatra. Sinatra was back playing the small clubs. He met him once. As a matter-of-fact, Sinatra's car broke down once and my father and a few other guys pushed the car, but he didn't really know Sinatra all that well, but that circuit was quite a deal. Of course, most of those clubs were owned by gangsters. Gyp DeCarlo, my father did a lot of work with Gyp DeCarlo and knew quite a few other really colorful characters. [Editor's Note: Angelo "Gyp" DeCarlo was a loan shark who worked for the Genovese crime family and operated out of New Jersey.] Our family, our immediate family, was pretty cool, especially my grandfather, was really a straight-ahead guy. We had other characters in the family that, back in the '20s and '30s, were not so cool.

SI: Were there other musicians in your father's family or was he the only one?

WI: No, interestingly, he was it. He really wasn't a musician. He just sang, and then, he led the band. No, my father, he had--my three aunts, they're all gone now, everyone, my father and my three aunts are pretty long gone--but he had three sisters and none of them were musically inclined. He was intrigued when he heard Bing Crosby sing, he said. He just really [liked] Bing Crosby and Russ Columbo. Actually, Russ Columbo was the guy that really inspired him. Then, Russ died young, and then, to Bing Crosby, he was at a party and there was a microphone and my father just walked up and started singing into it. He really loved [it]; he really found it fascinating to hear himself on a speaker. That's [what] jumpstarted the whole thing, yes. Then, he went out and started working the small clubs, and then, he built it up to where he was able to get an orchestra together. I still have his banner, Bill Tarrell and His Orchestra, that survived.

SI: Did he spell the name the same way you do?

WT: No, it was T-A-R-R-E-L-L. He put an "A" in it. A friend of his, Phil Biasi, there was Biasi's Restaurant around the corner from where my grandparents live--my grandfather actually worked on the original building, back in the '20s, did some of the brickwork. When my father started, everybody changed their name back then, especially if you had a real ethnic name, you had to change it. So, when he started working, his friend, who I knew, too, Phil Biasi, said, "You need a show business name." He said, "Let me see," and he said, "Tarrell." I think there was a guy named Farrell back then, so, he said, "Why don't you just make it Tarrell? It's a 'T,'" and it stuck. Then, when I got in the business later on, which we'll get to later, I shortened [it]. My first publicity was T-A-R-E-L. I dropped an "R" and dropped an "L." Then, when I got my first manager--it'll be fifty years, as a matter-of-fact--he said, "That sounds like a Big Band singer." I said, "Well, it was." He wanted to make it Torrell and I said, "Well, if you're going to go that far, then, let's put the 'Rs' and 'Ls' back and make it Terrell, like Tammi Terrell," and that was that, yes.

SI: Your father was in the service for a short time, and then, was discharged. Did he ever talk about it being difficult for him to come back to this community? I know there was some prejudice towards men his age that were not in the service. Did he ever talk about that?

WT: No, because he didn't get [into that]. We talked quite a bit about that time, but he never said that he had any problem, because he went to work in the defense plant.

SI: Okay.

WT: He went to work in Wallace and Tiernan. He was medically discharged, so, it wasn't like he dodged the draft. Yes, he got out, and then, he was in there. He was discharged the same day with a guy he hung out [with] in there called Vic Earlson, who was a comedian. When they were discharged, they mustered out and they got their pay, and then, Vic Earlson, who Henny Youngman knew very well--when I met Henny Youngmen in the '80s, and I got to know him pretty well, but rest his soul, he was a marvelous guy--I had spoken to Henny Youngman about it. He says, "Oh, Vic Earlson," and knew him. [Editor's Note: Henry "Henny" Youngman, born in 1906, was a violinist and comedian.] So, Vick said to my father, "Well, let's go down to

Hollywood and spend a couple of days down there." He knew everybody, so, my father got to [meet people], the first night out of the service, and I didn't know this until I spoke to my godmother six months before she passed away, a few years ago. I was down in Florida and I was sitting with her and I was blown away when we were looking at the pictures of my father back then. She says, "Oh, yes, when your father got home, all he would talk about is, the first night out of the service, he spent at Martha Raye's house." That took me right out, because I'm here because of Martha Raye. When we get to that part of it, you'll find it fascinating, the connection. It blew me away. I had no idea he stayed at Martha Raye's house. It's unbelievable. [Editor's Note: Martha Raye was a comedian, singer, and actress who led many USO tours to entertain American troops.]

SI: That was later in your career that Martha Raye comes in.

WT: Well, it comes in Vietnam.

SI: Okay.

WT: Yes, when we get to the 'Nam part. It's quite remarkable, yes.

SI: Your parents were both working in this defense plant. Do you know what they were doing?

WT: Well, my mother was on an assembly line. I don't remember; she probably told me what she was doing. It was an assembly line. I don't know what she was assembling, but my father, he was in charge of the manufacturing demonstration of water purification. He told me that some people from the [military], officers from the service, would come in and he would demonstrate the water [purification systems]. He'd take, like, rainwater or something and put it in there and it ran through the thing, and then, he'd take it and he'd drink it. So, he would demonstrate for them that this is a safe thing, and then, the Army would, or whatever service, would order an "X" number of these purification units.

SI: Wow.

WT: That was his job. Then, he met my mother. She was only nineteen and he was twenty-eight, I think. Yes, well, he was twenty-nine, yes, in 1943. I think he met her earlier than that. I remember exactly when he met her, probably early '43. They went on and he didn't seem all that interested. Then, she came to the house one day and my grandmother said, "Willie, there's a young girl here to see you." One thing led to another and he was, he said--we sat up quite a few nights talking back in the '50s and '60s. He could talk to me because I was in the music thing and he related to me a little bit better. He said to me that everybody was away at war. He had no band--the guys weren't around. He couldn't put the band he wanted back together. He figured he was twenty-nine and my mother was desperate to get out of her situation, which we didn't realize until later, and he asked my mother if she wanted to get married. She said yes. She turned twenty on November 19, 1943. They were married February 10th of 1944. My father turned thirty the following month, on March 31st. My mother, [when] I was born, my mother was still twenty on the 14th of November and she turned twenty-one on the 19th. So, there was that age gap. There was a cultural gap. My father lived in a real peaceful home, even though they didn't

have very much money--they had it before the Depression--great dad, great mother, Italian mother. That was family, church and family and all that. Then, he winds up in this situation where there was a lot of alcohol in that family that he married into. Then, my mother had a lot of emotional trouble. She married too young. They had a really rough time, but they were together right until the end. I mean, it would've never lasted today, in a million years, but they stuck it out. So, he said to me, well, he said he wasn't getting any younger and the war was raging. It didn't look like he was going to be able to make a good run back at music, so, he got married, thinking he could do both. He would work, and then, he'd do his music on weekends, but my mother just--she would have nothing to do with it. He had kids coming and rather than throw the towel in--and thank God that he stuck it out. I feel bad for him, but, at the end of the day, it worked out better for us that he did stick it out, even though it was a terrible existence all through the 1950s, up until the time in the early '60s.

SI: You said you were born in Newark. Did the family set up right away in Belleville?

WT: I believe he built the house in 1950 or '51.

SI: Okay.

WT: We had lived on Sixth Street in Newark, New Jersey. We lived upstairs. As a matter-of-fact, the woman who owned the home was my Uncle Charlie's sister. Uncle Charlie married my father's sister Anita. His sister, Martha, owned a house, lived on the first floor and rented us the top floor, the second floor of the house. That was on North Sixth Street, near Franklin Avenue. We lived there for quite a while, and then, my father's business really took hold. Interestingly, the gentleman, this guy (Einhorn?), I don't know his first name, this fellow (Einhorn?) loved my father's work. He was a big developer. So, he gave my father a very lucrative contract, enough money to hire a bunch of guys. He owned this property in Belleville. He actually gave my father the property. My father got a ten-thousand-dollar loan from the bank and he and my grandfather built the whole house. They brought in an electrician, a plumber, but the rest of the construction, all of the construction, was done by my father and grandfather. They worked together. Yes, it's interesting.

SI: Do you have any early memories from when you were living in Newark, before you moved to that house in Belleville?

WT: Yes, I do. My brother and I were too young. We were very small, crazy kids. I mean, we played, but, well, it was volatile then, too, because my parents, that relationship really deteriorated quickly. It was a very uncomfortable situation, lots of fights. Of course, my mother's sister, Aunt Viola, she had married into a really rough situation and lived in the ghetto. There was a lot of infidelity, which was painful. Infidelity played a terrible role in all of it. So, it was pretty volatile and I always--I realize now, I didn't realize it growing up, but I realize now that I'm sixty-eight years old, I've realized it for quite a few years now--that I felt my father's pain. I didn't understand it and I didn't understand at the time what I was feeling, but, now, I realize that I really felt his pain. I always mentally stuck with him, how ever I could. My one brother had a very volatile relationship with my father and my other brother, who's okay, but he

couldn't buy it, but me, I always had a soft spot for my father, because I felt his pain. I knew he wasn't happy and that bothered me, yes.

SI: You said there were five children in total.

WT: Yes. I'm the oldest, and then, my brother Richie was born in '46. My sister Mary was born in '47. Then, in 1953, in June of '53, June 3rd, my brother Robbie was born, who passed away a few years ago at fifty-five. He was a truck driver, big smoker, had his first heart attack at forty-one and, just, we couldn't get through to him. He just had to drink lakes full of beer every day and drive the truck and smoke gangs of cigarettes and passed. Fortunately, he didn't have a major accident. He held on. He had a massive heart attack, but he was able to pull this big truck over, rather than run anybody [over]. So, I'm happy that he didn't have to [suffer that], some innocent people didn't have to suffer. Then, in 1960--I have all the dates, too, I'm the only one in the family that remembers all the dates--but July 23rd of 1960, my kid sister, Patty, was born and that was the last one. Yes, she is doing very well, lives in Atlanta. She's a great kid.

SI: Was this apartment on Sixth Street, you said?

WT: Yes.

SI: Was it still in the Italian neighborhood or was it a different area?

WT: No, I don't know. Actually, we were one block from the black area. That whole other street was black. Then, the house kind of stood by itself, because they put an Acme market near there. Then, across the street was a big yard; some company had a big fenced-in yard. They had trucks parked there, on the [lot]. It was almost like it wasn't really a real residential street. On the street in back of us, those streets up in there, as a matter-of-fact, that street in back of us is where that bar is. I didn't know at the time, but that's where my grandfather's paintings were. A block down was a very, very poor black neighborhood, all in there. Yes, we used to walk down there and we knew everybody, really nice. We used to go down there and play with some of those kids. We were pretty small. There was a big side lot where the house was, and then, the street was there, and then, those, that row of homes. So, in that lot, we couldn't leave the property, but some of the kids would come over and we'd play with them there, but we were pretty crazy, because my brother--there was a bus that used to stop in front of the house. Well, it's actually the side of the house, the entrance was here. People would gather to get the bus and, for some ungodly reason, I mean, I was five years old and my brother was probably three, we were always dumping water out the window on people, throwing stuff out the window. Martha would come up there and say, "What in the world?" The police had come. It's so crazy. I guess we were just goofy. It's hard to figure it out, but it was an interesting, interesting place.

SI: What other things would you do for fun? Did you play pickup sports or anything else?

WT: Well, yes, we loved baseball. My brother and I really loved baseball in the '50s. Then, of course, we moved to Belmar, New Jersey, in 1952. They moved down in the Spring of '52. I stayed with my grandmother to finish the school year in Newark, and then, when the school year was over, I went down. They were bouncing around. They lived in a small apartment in Long

Branch, New Jersey. Then, when I moved down, we moved into the Princess Hotel in Asbury Park on the top floor. We had one room with the bathroom down the hall. We lived in that hotel. My father still had some money from the house--he sold the house. He obviously just went through the money like crazy and that started it. That was just awful and my mother was drinking. It's wild, because I remember the Princess Hotel was a pretty big hotel. I believe there were, like, probably five or six stories and a flat roof. I found a picture of it online--it's not there anymore--and I looked at that picture and it was a flat roof, and then, out the back, there was a lower roof and it was flat. I think, back in 1952, there were three of us. I was seven. I was going to be eight. My brother was probably six, going to be seven. My sister, Mary, she was four, because she would have been five on September 26th. I still get the chills when I think that my mother would go out in the hallway where we lived and there was a door onto the roof and she would sit there and smoke cigarettes. The three of us would be playing ball out on that flat roof. I think back on that and I say, "What was she thinking?" I remember chasing the ball right to the edge of the roof and I was seven years old.

SI: There was no raised wall.

WT: Nothing, no, it was a flat roof. We could've sailed. It freaks me out to think about that. So, we were there for the summer, and then, we moved. Then, the madness really took hold, because we moved like, oh, God, tons of times. So, we moved over a furniture store from there. It was a ratty, really ratty place with some crazy people around and that was 1952.

SI: Still in Asbury Park.

WT: That was in--yes, actually, it was right on the border of Neptune, New Jersey. It was at the edge of Asbury. That might have still been Asbury for another block, because there was a school across the street, but it was a furniture store [and] a rundown apartment up there, and then, there was a factory in the back. There were pretty very poor and really, like, degenerate families living in this row. It was almost like "Tobacco Road" back there. We became friendly with some of those people. This kid we called Boogie, his name was Bobby Napolitano he wound up doing thirty years in prison. He got out, I think, about five years ago and my brother saw him. Interesting story about that place--I thought, for years, it was a dream--I had a dream, for years, that I was playing ball with my brother and Bobby Napolitano in that field. The dream, for years, was that a UFO came down and skimmed the field and we all hit the ground and that was a recurring dream. It was so vivid and I had it I don't know how many times through the years. My brother called me and said, "Guess what? Boogie's out." Boogie got fifteen years, and then, he killed somebody in there and they gave him another fifteen. It was a terrible family, just terrible. The others did a lot of bad things, too. We were good kids. We never got in trouble. So, he said, "Yes, I went over to see Boogie and he's out and he's doing pretty good. He's straightened out." Who wouldn't straighten out after that? My brother says, "Yes, we were talking and Boogie says, 'Remember the UFO? Remember the flying saucer?'" and I said, "What?" He said Boogie said, "Remember the flying saucer? Remember when we all had to lay on the ground?" I said to him, "I thought that was a dream." So, then, about a month or two later, I'm watching *UFO Files* on the History Channel and they did a story on the Summer of 1952, the flying saucer, UFO, that was photographed in Passaic, New Jersey, that was spotted

from Passaic all the way down through Asbury Park, down to Cape May and back. [Editor's Note: The Passaic, New Jersey, UFO incident occurred on July 29, 1952.]

SI: Wow.

WT: The picture was there and that's what it was, freaked me out. [laughter]

SI: Was there any explanation for what it might be or does it remain a mystery?

WT: Well, the UFO files carry it as one of the unexplainable. I watch that stuff a lot. I'm a big history kid. I don't like TV. I watch all that type of thing--Discovery, Smithsonian--I absolutely love it. From what I've read, it's one of those unexplainable deals. I mean, with the thing on the top, it was exactly what we saw. I can understand it being unexplainable, because I watch *Ancient Aliens* now a lot and some of those early paintings that come up from thousands of years ago, some of those great works of art where they have the Virgin Mary in [them] and even some of the Egyptian things and whatever, some of those have these images in the sky. That's what they saw. There's one in there that was really close to that flying saucer, whatever it was. I was freaked out. I thought I dreamed that whole scene. So, anyway, we went from there, and then, we started moving, mainly because my father, he would work, but, then, he'd be out of work. Then, he'd do a job, and then, he'd be looking for another job, did independent jobs, instead of just going and saying--and I discussed it with him at the end of his life, which we'll get to--but he, instead of saying, "Hey, all right, I'm a good bricklayer, I'm a good construction guy--I better get in with the company, because I have three kids. Okay, I lost everything, but, now, I got to step up to the plate," but he didn't. It was like he would work, and then, he wouldn't work. So, starting after the apartment there, we moved to Bradley Beach. We moved to McCabe Avenue in Bradley Beach and that started the every six-month move throughout the '50s. We lived on McCabe Avenue, moved in there right after the Summer of '52. Yes, we moved in there in the fall. I think we were in the apartment for a month or two, and then, we moved out for the balance of that summer and a little [of] September, and then, we moved into McCabe Avenue and we lived there until the Spring of '53. That's when my brother Robby was born. Then, we bounced around. We bounced from back and forth. When it got to be around 1955, in the summertime, we would have to move into the west part of town, away from the beach, because the rents were less out there. You couldn't rent near the ocean, but, then, come the end of September, we would take a very cheap place at the beach, because they would love to have you there, just to watch the place. We were constantly evicted, because my father would always be behind the rent and they would throw us out. So, we kept moving back and forth and those days were really tough, very tough. They were dysfunctional. I mean, they were together, but it was a very dysfunctional situation. In 1956, where did we live? Yes, we lived on Tenth Avenue. My father got involved with this hotel that was purchased by a guy named Joe McCarthy, the Sea Crest, and they made it the Aloha Hotel and my father worked on [it] with some guys. They had to dig out--it was just a crawlspace--but my father and a crew, actually with machines, they dug out and built a bar there. So, they had an annex to the hotel, which was a house next to the hotel. It was half a block from the beach and my father was always broke and we were always living in [poor conditions]. A tragedy was, they didn't buy us toothbrushes and my teeth were very, very bad. It made my life miserable. We didn't have a lot of food, so, I was under weight. I think back to that and it drives me crazy. They said to my father, they said, "Look, Bill, why don't you

do this? We're going to Florida for the winter. Why don't you move your family in the house, free? You can stay in there until next May. In this way, all you pay is the utilities and you'll be able to catch up, because you won't have rent. It's good for us, because you can keep an eye on the hotel. If there's something wrong, a pipe breaks or something, you're there. You can take care of it." Well, unbelievable that, now, we're in this place and that time that we're in that house, with no rent, my father had his worst year, because the less responsibility he had, the less he did. By Christmas, we had no utilities. He put four cement blocks in the living room and a kerosene stove on there. We had an upstairs. We had three or four bedrooms up there. Then, we had a bedroom in the front, a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, and then, the bedroom in the back on the ground floor, where my parents used that room with my brother, Robby, who was only three, just turned three. My sister and brother and I, we slept in one bed in the front of the house, but it got so cold that my father had to take wood, sheetrock, and close up the stairwell, because we couldn't afford to heat it and we wanted to keep the heat down. The winter of 1957 was one of the worst winters I remember. The only one after that was 1977. I remember that was a real bad winter. That's what the Winter of '57 was. I had to walk a mile-and-a-half to school and I had a spring coat. There was a lake, Silver Lake, and it was frozen solid. I used to walk across the frozen lake, because it would cut the time out. I remember freezing. I had no hat. I had this very thin coat. It took me a long time to make my peace with that, because, of course, back then, there wasn't DYFS [Division of Youth and Family Services], human services. It took me a long time to make my peace with the school, because I don't know why they wouldn't call my parents in and say, "What's up with this?" Then, my teeth were terrible. We used to have these exams by the school dentist. This is Belmar Grammar School in New Jersey. I went in there and I was always so embarrassed to have my teeth looked at, because they were so bad. They were awful. I think, for years, I thought back and I said, "How could that dentist do that? How could he be so rude?" and he was rude to me, "How could he look at a young kid like that and not get involved somehow? At least call the parents in and say, 'Hey, there are clinics, dummy, why are you sending this boy [to school in this state]?'" It took me a long time for me to make my peace with it and to come to terms with it.

SI: Were you always in the same school, even though you were moving around so much?

WT: Well, most of the time. Actually, when we moved to the Shore, when I lived on McCabe Avenue in Bradley, I went to the Bradley Beach Grammar School for that one. I entered that late, but I finished that one year, even though we moved over to Belmar. We moved to Belmar in '53, so, I entered Belmar Grammar School in '53. I was there until I graduated in 1959, even though we moved. It was so silly, because we had 17th Avenue near the beach in '53. Then, we moved to Eleventh Avenue near Main Street. Then, we moved to Maplewood Road. Then, we moved to West Belmar, to 17th. Then, from there, we moved to 21st Street, which was really a hilarious story. Then, we started bouncing through town like every four or five months; we would be thrown out and we'd go to another place. I do a lot of stand-up. I've been doing stand-up comedy for quite a few years, for about twenty-seven years. I have a joke in my show that never misses. I talk about the poor days. I say to the audience, I said, "We were evicted fifty-eight times. I used to have to call home after school for directions." [laughter] It's a true story, because, in 1955, in October of '55, I didn't know we were behind the rent again. It was hilarious. It was about ten o'clock at night and my father woke me up and said, "Get up--we're moving." I hold up the shade and it's dark. I says, "What do you mean, 'We're moving?'" He

said, "We got to get out of here." The sheriff was there with the landlord. Today, they'd never be able to do it. We never had a phone, so, my father had to walk to the corner--I guess a gas station, I don't remember--called a friend of his that had a truck and called another friend of his that was a cab driver. We put what we could in the truck and, in the middle of the night, we would move into the next town over and the guy had us sleeping on the floor in sleeping bags. So, the next morning, I get up and the cab driver drove me to school. Before I got out of the car, I said, "Well, how do I get home?" I think he gave me a dime, might've been a nickel--it was either a nickel or a dime. The phones were cheap. He gave me his card and he gave me the coin and he said, "After school, call me and I'll give you directions how to get home." [laughter] You can't make something like that up.

SI: Yes.

WT: So, that was really difficult and the most painful Christmas wasn't even '57. '57, we were like--it was funny, really, because it was funny. I had to make jokes about it, because it was so ridiculous. I laughed through it and I still loved it. Being cold and hungry, I still look back on the Summer of '57 with fond memories, because it was so hilarious, but '55 was very painful. There was a diner for many years in Belmar called Pat's Diner. The owner was a marvelous, marvelous man. In 1955, he got together with the school and he hired a bus and he had the school gather all the underprivileged kids, most of which were blacks and there were some whites. It was us; there was a King Family. Actually, their father was a garbage man, a trash collector, but they had a lot of problems and they were really down on their luck, too. It's difficult. They sent a bus and we all met at the school on Christmas Eve. They took us to Pat's Diner and he had a wonderful meal for us and we all got gifts. They took us in the bus again. We went to the Rivoli Theater and, I'll never forget, they had treated us to the movie *Calamity Jane* [(1953)] with Doris Day. As beautiful as it was, the painful thing was that the more fortunate kids in the north side of Belmar, a lot of their fathers were doctors, a lot of the affluent [folks], and kids are mean--I mean, they can be mean. It was so painful, because it was such a lovely experience for us, because most of us didn't have food and it was such a nice thing. Then quite a few more fortunate kids showed up on their bicycles. They were making fun of us through the window. A couple of them actually spit on the window and that cut deep for many years. It was just horrible, such a nice event and somebody went that far out of their way to do something nice and most of those black boys, I mean, God, we called them colored boys back then. It really wasn't a problem, the colored boys. We played with them. We lived on the same economic level. They had their boards on the windows and no heat, we had boards on the windows and no heat. So, we had real camaraderie there. I didn't only feel sorry for myself, I just felt sorry for the racial remarks and spitting on the window, come on. So, it was very painful.

SI: Do you want to take a break?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: During this period in the 1950s, where you are living down the Shore area, were you able to maintain contact with your grandparents in Newark?

WT: Yes, not as much as I wish we had, because most of the time, we didn't have a car and we didn't really get a telephone until, I think, it was actually into the '60s. I don't think we have--yes, I think we had a phone in '59, but we didn't have a phone most of the time. They were all up in--all the relatives were up near Newark and East Orange, in those areas, North Jersey--but my grandparents were in North Caldwell. When we had a car that would run right, we would go up. We would call. My parents would say, "We're going to go home this weekend." So, we used to drive up and see my grandparents, but we never--I don't remember us, all through the '50s, ever visiting aunts or uncles. Other than my grandfather, I think we had one visit from one aunt and uncle. I think Uncle Charles and Netti came to see us, but nobody came down there. From what I understand now, after talking to my godmother a lot before she passed away, because I was playing Florida a lot as a comedian in the '80s and '90s and I would go see her all the time, from what I understand, the family was just so annoyed with my father for the way we were, our situation. Well, I mean, rest his soul, I mean, he was responsible. I mean, he's the father. He's the provider. My mother, she didn't work until years later. We did maintain a good relationship with my grandparents. I just didn't see them a lot, until--I guess I can move forward, toward the end of the '50s--I lived with my grandmother in '61 for a while. What had happened is, I graduated grammar school in '59 from Belmar Grammar. The sad thing was that in the Summer of '58, I believe '58, my teeth got so bad at the end of my seventh [grade year], I think the last month of the seventh grade, my one tooth just broke off and, oh, they made fun of me, terrible. It was awful. My father couldn't avoid it. He took me to a dentist and the dentist took out the four front teeth because they were just shot. See, I was sick as a baby and they gave me a lot of tetracycline in the hospital. My first teeth came in black. They weren't white teeth, they were black teeth. Then, they fell out, and then, my other teeth came in white, but they were very brittle. So, they took out the four front teeth and I had to go through the eighth grade, graduate, and go through the whole first year of high school at Manasquan High School with no four front teeth. You learn a lot of lessons about human behavior. Then, we moved again. We moved into Shark River Hills and I had to change high schools. I started the tenth grade in Neptune. I had nothing. In Manasquan, they were extremely mean to me and I remember they had--Fridays were dress-up day--and the school colors were blue and gray. The kids--Manasquan was near Brielle and these affluent areas. We had our poor guys, too. I mean, my black friends from Belmar that went to Manasquan, they were with me. We were together. We had nothing. Whenever I had a little milk, I used to share milk, or, if I was lucky enough to have a sandwich, I would share a little food with them, because they looked out for me. I had two pairs of pants. I had black and green and they were, like, very worn out. I used to do a joke, that on dress-up day, I either had to go to Ireland or North Vietnam. The problem was, after a while, if you didn't wear school colors, it made my life even more miserable. Not only did they make fun of me for not having teeth, but, then, I was getting smacked around because I wasn't "with the school." So, I stopped going to school on Fridays. I think it was a guidance counselor or somebody--it might have been the vice principal--called me in the office and said, "How old are you?" I says, "I'm fifteen." He says, "You're not supposed to be working." I says, "I'm not working." [He said], "You're not working? You're not working?" I says, "I'm not working. I wouldn't lie to you--for what?" He said, "Well, then, what are you doing on Fridays? You're not coming to school on Fridays." I said, "Well, the story is, I'm not learning anything on Fridays." I said, "It's dress-up day and I only have two pairs of pants. I have black and green and, when I come to school without these school colors, I have nothing like that, I'm getting smacked. I'm getting ridiculed. I'm getting thrown in the creek," because I had to go across a creek. I ended up having to settle

that. One of my black friends took care of that jerk real good and I got called in on that. It's a good thing he didn't die. I said, "This is so miserable with nothing to wear," and he just stared at me, I guess for ten seconds. It seemed like a lot longer than that. He stared at me for about ten seconds and said, "All right, I'll take this into consideration, but you're going to have to come to school. I'm going to have to talk to the homeroom teacher," or whatever, "and we're going to have to put an end to this." I said, "Well, whatever you can do, but I hope you can understand that this is a miserable existence." Then, shortly after that, I got thrown in the creek and, instead of trying to get the school to help me, a couple of my friends took care of it. Then, after that, nobody would even look at me. They wouldn't bother me. They would walk on the other side of the street--not a proud moment, but you got to survive. The black boys felt bad for me, because I was thin and just picked on. Thank God for them, they stuck up for me. Those are not such great memories. Then, I started in Neptune. I started in Neptune and it was worse, because I couldn't afford--now, their colors are red and black [laughter]--maybe I could go half a day. What had happened there was, the Manasquan High and Neptune High were major rivals. Every time they played basketball, there would be a fight. Football, there'd be a fight. They hated each other. Knucklehead Billy, I show up in my second year of high school and I couldn't afford the gym clothes. I only had my Manasquan gym clothes. I come out the first day in my Manasquan gym clothes and darn near got killed, got dragged in the shower, thrown in there with all my books, my other clothes in the locker. I got kicked and they [almost] drowned [me] and I go down to the principal's office. I was soaking wet. He said, "What happened to you?" [I said], "I don't think I'm going to make it here." We were doing really poorly at that point. As much as I didn't want to go along with it, my father--I turned sixteen in November. My sister, Pat, was just born, so, we had a little baby there and my other brother and sister. My father came to me and said, "You got to leave school," and I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "You got to quit school. You got to go to work." I said, "Well, where am I going to work and, if I quit school, what am I going to do?" [He said], "Well, you got to do it." He basically forced me to quit school. I wasn't learning anything anyway and I was getting beat a lot. I had another school that just did nothing about it. There are many times in Vietnam, I used to say to myself, "When I get back there, am I going to go there and do a job on them." Of course, I didn't do it. I quit and I walked for five miles, a five-mile radius, for months. I knocked on every single business--real estate offices, luncheonettes, the movie theater. No one would hire me. Now, we're getting into the Winter of 1961 and it was a pretty bad winter and I'm walking in waist-high snow. So, to bring money home, I would shovel snow. I was raking leaves. I was cleaning attics. I was scrubbing floors, just as a handy guy. I would just go around and ask if people needed any dirty work done, just to pick up three dollars, five dollars. On my way home, I would stop at this place, the Cracker Barrel, and I would buy milk and groceries and bring them home. My father was very, very difficult on me. I made my peace with it, but he'd come home and, after a few months, I couldn't get a job. No one would hire me. He came home one day and he said, "You know what?" and I forget the business it was. I think it was a donut place or something--it was a little diner. He said, "Do you know that they just hired somebody over there?" I said, "They didn't hire me. I was there two or three times and they wouldn't hire me." [He said], "Well, God dammit, they hired him." I says, "Dad, they turned me down more than once. I've been there. How many times am I going to go knock on a door and they slam it in my face?" He was really tough on me. To move forward, and this is where my grandparents come back on the case, I get through the Summer of '61 and I say to myself, "You know something…" Now, we moved to Bradley Beach again. We moved to Monmouth Avenue in Bradley Beach. We got thrown out

of that place. In Belmar, we didn't have a high school. We had to go to either Manasquan or Asbury Park. When I graduated, I selected Manasquan. Bradley Beach didn't have a high school; they used Asbury Park. In the end of the Summer of '61, I worked at a bingo hall, helping out and delivering and sweeping up, crazy, and I said, "You know what?" I just looked at my future and I said, "You know what? I've got to go to school. If he kills me, he kills me. He'll do me a favor, but I got to go to school." I said to my father, I said, "Look, I'm going to go. In September, I'm going over to Asbury Park High School and I'm going to see if they'll take me. I want to go back to school." I went and I started my second year over again at Asbury Park High School. It was worse than the other two put together, really bad people up there, and, of course, with no teeth, it was even [worse]. It was awful. I don't think I made it two months. I think I made about a month-and-a-half and I went down to the principal's office and I said, "I'm out of here, out. I can't do it. I'm worse now than I was at the other two places. I'm just going to [quit]." My Aunt Laura picked up on it. My Aunt Laura lived with my grandparents. My Aunt Laura, I'm sure she's resting in peace, because she was just absolutely marvelous. She lived home. She never got married, lived with my grandparents, worked at the Prudential Insurance in Newark, New Jersey, as a receptionist. She came down and talked to me and said, "Bill, I want you to move up with us, to Grandma's. I talked to Grandma and Grandpa and I'm going to bring you up to Newark and you're going to live with us. I'm taking you to a dentist and it's going to take time, but I'm going to have a dentist fix these teeth." She took me up and it took a few months.. They had to take out most of my teeth. They left six on the top and six on the bottom. Back then, they put in these clip on [dentures]; the teeth would clip on the other teeth. That's when I got the bug for music, because the day I had my last session with the dentist--and it was painful, because they had to take wisdoms out. Oh, it was awful. Back then, the procedures weren't--oh, I can't tell you, it was awful. I was looking in the mirror, "Wow, that's wild," I remember *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* came on the radio and I remember singing along with it and I was really bitten by that. I just enjoyed singing along with it. I lived with my grandmother and grandfather at that time. It was a great time, because I ate real well and my grandfather would take me for walks. I was sixteen years old, and then, I turned seventeen and my grandfather was still taking me for walks, but I loved my grandfather. He was a wonderful guy. We used to walk down to Branch Brook Park and, every day, we'd take a walk. On the way down there, he used to stop at this bar and he'd have a shot of Four Roses Whiskey and a beer and I'd have a Coke with a cherry in it. Then, we'd go to the park and we'd walk all around, and then, on the way home, he'd stop at the bar at the other side of the street for a shot of Four Roses and a beer. We'd go home and his face would be all red and my grandmother would give him a tough time, but he was a great, great man. I miss him every day. It sounds ridiculous, but, most days, I always think of something that triggers him; so, to move forward.

SI: You did not enroll in school in Newark.

WT: No, that was the end of it. That was the end of it. I came back with teeth and, now, we're into '62. Howard Johnson's was opening in February on the boardwalk in Asbury Park. They were just opening. I went and applied for a job and I was hired. I was hired as a dishwasher and busboy. I remember, I was elated. Somebody gave me a job. I was accepted. I remember that whole feeling. I said, "Wow, that is something else. Somebody finally stepped up to the plate." I was one of the first people hired in that first wave. They hired a lot of people, but I was one of the first group that they brought on board. I mean, it was fifteen dollars a week or some dumb

thing. To me, it was more than fifteen a week; it was I was accepted. I remember the first day. I'm working back in the kitchen. Again, I was at home--I had poor black boys and I had some Puerto Rican boys and I was back in my element. I mean, with that, I could relate to [them] and I was just so happy to have somebody hire me. I worked very hard and I remember a waitress coming in. I'll never forget her. Her name was Nora and she came in. These Greek people own the place and they were pretty mean, too, but they hired me, so, I was happy. She came in after the first day it opened, the opening day of the lunch rush, and she came in and said to Terry the owner, she said, "Terry, whatever you do, don't lose him--that kid works. He works harder than anybody I've ever seen." I wanted to make an impression. I wanted to work hard. I had a job. So, now, it comes time to eat and the owner said, "Billy," in this Greek accent, "Billy, time to eat, time to sit down and eat. What would you like to eat?" He handed me a menu and I looked at the menu and I said, "Wow, yes, I would really love some of this roast beef." [He said], "You can't have roast beef. Dishwashers can't have roast beef. You can have a club sandwich or a halibut steak." I understand today that you can't give the employees the most expensive thing on the menu; economically, it just doesn't work. What offended me was the way he said it. I mean, if I can only have a club sandwich or halibut steak, for crying out loud, why don't you just tell me, "Employees can get one of two choices?" To make matters worse, I says, "Okay, well, no problem, I'll try the halibut. Halibut sounds pretty good." He gives me the plate and I start walking out toward the counter and he said, "Billy, where are you going?" I said, "Well, I'm going to go eat." [He said], "No, you can't go near the customers. You have to sit in the back," the back of the bus in all this. In the back of the kitchen, near the back door, it was very dark. They had a dirty piece of plywood held up by two milk cartons with no tablecloth, nothing, just, it was dirty and the seats were soda bottle boxes, the wooden boxes--back then, soda used to come in a wooden box--and you have to eat in the back. I remember taking the plate in the back and I remember sitting at the table, well, what should have been a table, and I remember it clear as a bell, I said to myself, "I don't know what I'm going to do, but I'm going to figure this out and, somehow, I'm going to get to a point where I'm never going to have myself in a position where somebody can tell me that I'm not worth a piece of roast beef after giving a hard day's work." Lo and behold, that's how my music career kicked in.

SI: Maybe that is a good breaking point. I wanted to ask some questions about earlier.

WT: Yes.

SI: When you were going to grammar school and all of these various high schools, it was obviously a difficult situation, but, in terms of your dealing with the classwork, did you like learning? Did you do well in school? Was it difficult for you?

WT: It was very difficult for me because [of] the ridicule and it was so frustrating because the teachers, they knew my situation. It was difficult to learn anything because, first of all, I was very embarrassed. I was deeply embarrassed about having to quit school. I was always embarrassed about the way I looked. I mean, I was a smart kid. I mean, I know that now. It took me a very long time to realize that I'm a smart person, I am. I mean, when you're in that environment, it's hard to view yourself as being smart. You're fighting social issues and economic issues. So, I really didn't learn much. In typing class, I just typed like I'd been doing it a thousand years. I just picked it right up, but, of course, I was playing piano, so, I had that

music influence. So, to answer your question, I really wasn't learning anything. I wasn't learning anything of any consequence. I wasn't doing terrible on the tests, but I really wasn't breaking the walls down and I was certainly not getting any breaks. I mean, it was all me. It was all on me. Plus, I had gone to bed cold and hungry many times.

SI: I wanted to ask, you painted this picture in 1957, you were walking across the cold lake.

WT: Yes.

SI: In a thin jacket and going to school. What were you doing the rest of the time? After school and on the weekends, how would you occupy your time?

WT: Interesting. Well, I had one friend, a marvelous friend, Joe Buxbaum, who lived on the next street, a Jewish fellow. I just recently spoke to him after many years. He lives in Las Vegas now. My brother Richie and I, we played ball all the time. We just loved baseball and Joe was my friend. My brother was popular. My brother was a good-looking kid. His teeth held up. He was in the same environment, but his teeth held up and the girls all love Richie. Nobody liked me. I found out later, when I reunited with some of the students, some of the girls found me online and it was nice, because they said, "You were so sweet." I don't remember them. I was buried under all this negativity, but what we did is, we played and we would play games. We didn't have anything. So, I remember, in '57, we used to get these wooden baskets from the fruit store, that the fruit was in, and vegetables, and we used to find them, that were damaged, and we'd ask [for them] and we'd cut the bottom off of it. We had a basketball that never held all the air. You'd have to slam it on the ground. [laughter] We nailed the basket, that wooden basket, to the telephone pole. I can tell you that those games--we'd play into the night, when it was dark--were some of the greatest games you can imagine and we played [baseball]. We had these old, rickety gloves that I think were given to us or we might have found them in the trash--we had no money--and we played the greatest games and Joe was our buddy. Joe was my buddy. Joe stuck by me and he was a guy that was tormented as well. He lived with his mother and his grandmother and his sister. His sister was kind of retarded and nobody liked Joe, either. It was sad. His dad was in World War II, came home and died. He was in the Navy. He came home--he was home about six months--and he passed. [Joe] was raised in this home with all girls and ladies. For some reason, I don't like to think that he got a bad time for hanging out with me, but they didn't like Joe, either, so, Joe and I stuck together and he stuck with me. He had a trust fund and they were doing okay. I remember, many times, Joe would treat me. We'd go to the Sugar Bowl, down by the Rivoli Theater, the luncheonette down there, after school and he would buy ice cream sodas. We talked years later and what it was was, he was so appreciative that he had a friend and I didn't have anything and he felt bad for me, but we had a lot of fun. We played ball and that's how we kept ourselves occupied. It was a survival thing and the baseball was our salvation. In the Summer of '57, it was very interesting, because we had moved. We couldn't stay at the annex anymore, because the hotel opened. So, we moved down the street on Fourth Avenue. At that time, with our four children--yes, because Robbie was four, yes, Robbie had just turned four--we moved into the rooming house down the street. It was a three-story house and, on the top floor, down at the end, in the front, there were two rooms that weren't joined. We lived in those two rooms and way down the other end of the hall was the bathroom that all the other people used--and what a mess. Back then, Belmar, as it is today, but it's even crazier, but,

back then, these college people used to inundate the town and take over these houses. You'd have beer cans all the way to the roof and they rented to a bunch of renegades [who] started a big fight in there one night. My father had to go run downstairs to use the pay phone and call some of his buddies over there. It was a mess, but baseball that summer was everything to us. Joe and Richie and myself, we used to go down to the Fifth Avenue Beach, beyond the Pavilion. We used to go over there and throw the ball. That was not a busy beach, behind the Pavilion, so, some of the professional ballplayers from the Yankees and whoever were playing the Yankees would go down during the day. We got to meet Jimmy Piersall from Boston. We got to hang out with Bill Skowron and Andy Carey from the Yankees. [Editor's Note: Jimmy Piersall played seventeen years for five MLB teams. He was brought up from the minor leagues to the Red Sox in 1950. Bill "Moose" Skowron was a first baseman for the Yankees from the 1954 through 1962. Andy Carey was a third baseman for the New York Yankees from 1952 to 1960.] We'd met Bill Skowron and Andy down there a few times during the summer. They would actually play catch with us. It was about mid-summer and we used to pick up soda bottles on the beach at the end of the day. Back then, garbage and everything used to stay right on the beach and, every night, the plows would come and plow the beach, clean up all the stuff. So, before the plows got there, we would go down there and we would pick up the soda bottles, because we would take them back and we'd get, like, a penny. We picked up twenty or thirty bottles a piece. We had money for a soda and we'd play the games, the arcade games, but, all day, it was baseball, in the rain, no matter what. One day, we were on Fifth Avenue--we went down there because we knew the Yankees were playing the home games. They weren't playing at night back then, but they'd play [and] they'd come down on their dark day. The game would be the day before or the day after. So, Bill Skowron was down there with Andy and Bill said, "Hey, I got a present for you guys," and he took out two baseballs, signed, both signed, by the entire 1957 Yankees. He gave one to my brother and I and he gave one to Joe. From picking up the bottles, I had the whole Topps baseball series from '56 in a cigar box and that was Mantle's best year. That would sell today for close to a million dollars. The ball today would sell for close to a million dollars. We had the ball--it was so great. We were playing and we went to play over near the river on the one lot where we played sandlot ball. My brother fouled our old ball that we played with all summer, fouled it in the water. Now, we have no money and we went for, I think, two or three days. It was toward the end of the summer and I think we went two or three days. We couldn't play baseball and we were going out of our mind and I said to my brother, I said, "Do you know what?" I went up and I got the baseball, the Yankees ball. [laughter] We played the rest of the year with, signed with the whole Yankees, a signed baseball. That's how much we loved baseball. We wore the signatures right off the ball, and then, we played it. We had that ball--even in 1960, we had it. That's pretty crazy stuff.

SI: Yes. Going through this situation, up until that point where you had this epiphany at Howard Johnson's, what did you think the future held for you? Did you just think life would go on like this?

WT: No, I made up my mind. What had happened at that point, right after the roast beef incident, I was starting to do more bussing tables, because I was really quick. They had hired some other dishwashers. The owner's sister, the other owner--him and his brother-in-law and sister, they were all partners in the restaurant--his sister said, "We really ought to put Billy on the floor, because he works very fast and we got to get those tables cleaned out," because it was in

the Summer of '62, a very busy summer. Right next door was Convention Hall and Convention Hall was where all the concerts were, boxing matches, wrestling matches and all the rock 'n' roll shows. I believe it was July of '62 and the show next door was all Cameo-Parkway artists. [Editor's Note: Cameo-Parkway was a Philadelphia-based record company. It was bought out in 1967 by MGM Records.] It was Chubby Checker, Dee Dee Sharp, The Orlons and The Dovells, music that I loved, which I'd bought back then when I had the pennies to buy--records were only, like, thirty-nine cents or something. I took all the money I made and I put it into the house. I didn't keep money for myself. I had to bring every dime home, because, at that time, we were five kids, a mother and a father in a one-bedroom apartment. My mother and father slept in what was the dining room and my sister slept in the living room and my brothers and I used the one bedroom. So, I'm bussing tables and in walk The Dovells in their suits, all dressed alike, and I love The Dovells. I love *Bristol Stomp* [(1961)] and those records. They sat in the station that I was bussing for the waitress. I was just totally taken out by that. I met the guys. I got their autographs. For a long time, I had their placemats. I kept the placemats of The Dovells. Right then and there, I said, "That's what I have to [do], I have to do that." So, I scrounged up a little money here and there. I had to put most of the money in the house or we'd have starved. I couldn't do that to my sisters and brothers. Finally, I was able to scrape together enough to buy a forty-dollar Kay acoustic guitar and I bought a Mel Bay chord book. Every hour I wasn't working, I was working out the guitar bit. There was a band that I knew, two guitars, bass and drums, and they used to rehearse on Saturdays. They were electric guitars and stuff. I asked them if I could sit in the corner when they're rehearsing and play along with them. They wouldn't hear me with an acoustic, "Just tell me the chords of the song and I'll open my book." That's how I got my rhythm established, because I used to go when they would rehearse. I would sit there with an acoustic. They couldn't hear me and I wouldn't be interrupting them, but I would play along with that rhythm. As soon as I was able to play good enough, I started going out on the strip in Asbury Park, playing as a solo and doing MC work. I was making seven dollars a night. I was making seven dollars on Friday, seven on Saturdays, then, I was making fifteen dollars a week as a busboy. [laughter]

SI: What clubs were they?

WT: Oh, it was fascinating. Asbury Park in 1962, '63, was a fascinating time. Well, we had the Living Room, which became the Student Prince, where Springsteen worked; knew him very well, later on. We had the African Room. We had the Albion Hotel, had the Rainbow Room. We had Mrs. Jay's, which is now The Stone Pony. We had the Candy Cane Lounge at the Lincoln Hotel. We had the Pillow Talk on Cookman Avenue, the Chez Charles, the gay place there. In the black section, we had Big Bill's and we had the Orchid Lounge back down in there. Not many people would get along too well down in there, but I got along okay. I understood the culture and they understood me and the music, I really didn't have a problem with it. I started working the strip and I remember, one night, I was at the Candy Cane Lounge and I was the MC. I was opening for Johnny Maestro and the Crests, who had *Sixteen Candles*, before they became Johnny Maestro and the Brooklyn Bridge. In town, at the Convention Hall, was a big wrestling match ticket. The Graham Brothers were twins. They were very famous wrestlers. They were like mountains. They were big, big guys. They were twins, famous. [Editor's Note: In professional wrestling during the 1950s and 1960s, the famous tag team of Eddie and Jerry Graham were not actually brothers; it was only part of their performance. The Grahams had a

third "brother" named Luke as well.] They were staying at the hotel, so, when they came back from the match, they'd come in the lounge. They came in the Candy Cane. I'm up there opening for Johnny Maestro, playing a few songs, doing a few jokes, and they start heckling me. So, I said a dumb thing like, "I could take 'em both." As a joke, the Graham Brothers stood up. We meet on the dance floor and we start wrestling. They're making believe I'm beating them both and the audience was absolutely hysterical. I mean, they were going crazy. They were going crazy. I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Graham Brothers," and they're applauding. I says, "Okay, well, we're going to move this show along right now and one of my favorite acts of all time, and I'm so honored to be on this show, ladies and gentlemen, a nice hand for Johnny Maestro and the Crests." The Crests come out and I'm walking backstage and Johnny's about to come out. Johnny grabs my arm and he says, "How the hell am I going to follow that?" I says, "You're the headliner. Good luck." [laughter] That was a fun thing. I learned a lot about how to walk on and off stage there. Then, to move it forward, I'm still at Howard Johnson's and one of the waitresses, in '63, she wasf dating the bell captain at the Empress Motel. The Empress Motel opened, which was the crème de la crème back then in Asbury Park. It was like the Rat Pack days. So, the bell captain, he used to come in for coffee, to see Jane down in Howard Johnson's, in his uniform. We would talk and, one day, he called me over, he said, "Do you know what? I've been watching you." He says, "You're a really hard worker." He says, "How would you like it if I talked to the Empress and see if I can get you over there for some really good money? I think you'll do great." I says, "I'd really appreciate that." So, he got me a job in the restaurant while still living in Bradley Beach in that one-bedroom place. What I did is, I volunteered for every shift. I would go in the morning and I would bus tables for breakfast. I would hang out and I would do room service for lunch. I'd go home for a few hours in the afternoon to practice my guitar, take the bus, and then, I'd come back and I would bus tables for dinner. I would hang out and I would do room service at night. So, I was working about fourteen hours a day and my only day off was the first Monday of every month. I was bringing every nickel in. I was supporting that entire family. Where I made most of my money, on Sundays, the top two suites on the south end of the building, which had the best view of the ocean, was right on Ocean Avenue, they would rent those two suites out, open the doors going in and there'd be three big round tables in each one. Gangsters and high-rollers would come in from all over the country and they would play high-stakes poker games up there, I mean tens of thousands of dollars, in 1963. I was the kid they trusted to bring sandwiches and drinks, room service. The bell captain that got me the job said, "They like you. They don't want anybody else going up there, so, you're going to bring the food. You're the only guy," and I would make more money that day than I made all week. That kept my father at the racetrack. [laughter] He'd be at the track. I'm breaking my tail and he'd be at the track, but I always stuck by him. To move it forward--yes?

SI: What would happen outside of tourist season? Were the clubs still open then?

WT: Yes.

SI: Was it just less busy?

WT: Well, it would become a weekend business for the local trade. Of course, the restaurant--as a matter-of-fact, I have a *Spotlight Magazine* that, thank God for Aunt Laura, she held on to it. The first publicity I ever got as a performer was in *Spotlight Magazine*. My picture was in there

and I have the book from '63 and it's great to look at all the advertisements in there. There was a place that was advertising steak and tails for a dollar-thirty-nine, some of those prices. So, yes, a lot of them, entertainment-wise, was weekends, but the restaurants pretty much stayed open. They stayed open. The hotel did fine, because they did big events. They did corporate events. The nightclub was sensational. The bar in the nightclub, back then, entertainment was king and a lot of people would come in, and then, whoever played Convention Hall, as far as rock acts, when the Empress opened, that's where they would go. They wouldn't go to the Lincoln and the Albion anymore. They would stay at the Empress, because it was *the* place, the modern place. What had happened, now, I'm working my butt off and the band used to like to get me up on Saturday night, because, by Saturday night, I was really dragging. I finished my last room service and I'd go down in the lounge. I was eighteen at that point, so, I couldn't drink unless I went to New York. Back then, you can go to New York. I really wasn't a drinker until later in life. I went in there one night and the band got me up and I was singing *Pennies from Heaven* and *Walking My Baby Back Home*. Then, I was going into some jokes about room service, because we had a lot of weddings, a lot of bridal suites. I'm doing a joke about, "You know, they order these oysters and they crack the door with the chain on it. You've got to hand stuff through and they're standing and they don't realize that there's a mirror right there. So, they're behind the door and I'm taking my time, because I'm looking at them, staring in the mirror," and the audience is going crazy. I embellished it a little bit. I finished that set that night and the waitress comes over and says, "Hey, Billy, that table would like to say hello to you." At the table was the show in town. It was Clay Cole, who was the Dick Clark of New York. He was the host. He had a big television show in New York [*The Clay Cole Show*]. At that table was Gene Pitney, Clyde McPhatter, Paul and Paula--all had hit records at the time--and a guy named Brad Connelly, who was Clay's roommate at the Bryant Hotel in New York. They said, "You're a really talented kid." I said, "Oh, thanks. I enjoy it." He says, "If you want to come to New York and meet with us, we'd like to introduce you to a manager that I think would really get into what you're doing." I had the hair and I had that Frankie Avalon look. I was a good-looking kid. I said, "Well…" They said, "When's your next day off?" I says, "I only get one day off a month, Mondays." He gave me the number of the Bryant Hotel and said, "Well, the next day you can, let us know a little ahead of time and come up," and I did. I went up to the Bryant Hotel and I met with Clay and Brad. They had a guy named Vic Catala there who was managing the Bill Black Combo. He was also managing Barry Sadler, who had the big hit *The Green Beret*, but, at that time, he hadn't hit yet. He had that hit while I was in the war. [Editor's Note: Barry Sadler, musician, Army Special Forces Green Beret and Vietnam Veteran, sang *Ballad of the Green Berets*, a number one hit in 1966.] Then, there I was and, on July 16th of '63, coming up on fifty years, I signed my first management contract with Vic Catala. We did some demos and walked around. He took me to the New York Institute of Photography and I posed for the students and I got free photos. I got my free photo, my glossy, and that's what really jumpstarted it. Then, we couldn't get a record label interested. I went in and did some demos, my first demos, and we weren't getting anywhere. The big problem was that I didn't have songs. So, I started writing my own songs. Then, Vic got busy and he couldn't move me, so, we ended that. I started pounding the pavement as a songwriter and I was working small clubs and stuff.

SI: The songs you were writing, were they in the same vein as these acts that you had been working with and getting to know in the clubs, like R&B type songs?

WT: Well, no, the R&B thing fell in a little bit later, even though I had that in my blood. I was trying to do the teen idol thing.

SI: Okay.

WT: I was trying to do the teen idol thing. Then, in 1965, which is just before I was drafted, I was putting up television antennas and I was living in an eleven-dollar-a-week motel [laughter] and writing songs. Before then, I got involved with this other guy. We were a team. It was the most ridiculous thing you ever heard in your life, because we were going around playing for tips. I should probably tell you the story of when the Beatles became famous, which will lead up to '65.

SI: Can we pause real quick?

WT: Sure.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: During this whole period, up to the early 1960s, you obviously had a lot to focus on in your personal life, working and all that. Were you aware much of what was happening outside in the larger world? Did you follow the news? Were you aware of things going on?

WT: Yes, I was. I was really watching the Cold War. I was very frightened from a very young age and it affected me all through the '50s in the Cold War. I'm glad you really asked this question, because I remember my father--this was probably, well, it had to be '45, it had to be, yes, it had to be 1945, because we hadn't dropped the bomb yet--I remember being at, I forget whose house we went to, and they had the small television. It might have even been the very first test of the atomic bomb. It was in the desert and it was televised. [Editor's Note: The first televised atomic bomb test occurred in April 1952.]

SI: This is probably later in the 1940s or 1950s.

WT: It was in the '40s. It was in the '40s, I was young. Well, you know what? No, it had to be after.

SI: You would have been about one.

WT: Yes, no, I was older than that. Yes, that's right. Yes, it had to be after, yes, because they did a lot of testing, until they made that, like, end of the atmosphere. Yes, you're correct, I was probably [older]. We were still living on Sixth Street, so, I was probably about five, yes, five or maybe even six, 1950 maybe. That was the first time it was on and nobody was watching it. We're watching and they're talking. I was watching and I looked at the television and it was that little screen. I saw this massive explosion and I was, like, dumbfounded. A few days later, my mother used to put the couch like this, cattycorner, like this way, because you can't see that in the microphone, but where the wall would meet and she'd put it, like, touching both walls. So, there was a lot of room behind the couch. I remember my mother saying to my brother, "Richie,

where did Billy go?" They're looking all over the house for me and Richie said, "He's over there." I was in the back of the couch with one of my sister's dolls, hugging the doll, all hunched over, frightened. It freaked me out. That image stayed in my mind that whole time. Then, the Korean War broke out. [Editor's Note: The Korean War occurred from 1950 to 1953.] I remember, one night in Newark, they used to have blackouts, where the rule was, everything in town had to turn the lights out, in case--I don't know what they were expecting, maybe the Russians, because the Koreans certainly couldn't reach us in Newark--but I remember having to leave all the lights out and sit in the kitchen. That freaked me out, that image, and then, the bomb. All through the '50s, I would pay attention. I would listen to President Eisenhower whenever he would come on. I would be totally freaked out whenever he had a press conference, because I was totally convinced that he's going to declare war, because I knew it was going on. I knew that, the problems of the Soviet Union and, of course, the Space Race, I knew the whole *Sputnik* deal. [Editor's Note: On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik* into orbit. *Sputnik* was the world's first artificial satellite. The United States launched their first satellite, *Explorer I,* in 1958.] I was always very fascinated with astronomy, I mean, on my own, because I wasn't getting much of an education, but I remember I was always fascinated with it. I was fascinated with this Cold War and the whole Nazi business and that. I instinctively--I don't know whether it was another life or what--but I felt a strong connection to World War II and the horrors of it, all the way through to the early '60s. Interestingly, I think maybe it's because my head was in another place, but I don't remember the Cuban Missile Crisis. [laughter] I don't remember it being that big. I don't know why, but I don't remember that. I remember Khrushchev telling Kennedy, "We are going to bury you from within." I remember that, but I don't really have a big, big recollection of the Missile Crisis. [Editor's Note: In 1956, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev told a gathering of Western ambassadors in Moscow, "Whether you like it or not, we are on the right side of history. We will bury you." Later, both Khrushchev and his interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev, advised that the statement was metaphorical and should not to be taken literally. The Cuban Missile Crisis began on October 14, 1962. President John F. Kennedy and Khrushchev avoided war after two weeks of talks and the missiles were removed.]

SI: What about the Civil Rights Movement? You had a lot of ties with the African-American community. Were you aware of what was happening? Were they talking about it?

WT: Well, it was bittersweet for me and it really lapped over--it's really where the war really came into the whole story. It started earlier, obviously. It started really heating up with Alabama or with Mississippi, when President Eisenhower was the first one that sent the 101st Airborne in there to challenge Governor Wallace at the school. I watched it. Of course, a lot of times, we didn't have television, so, I would kind of hear it, a little radio, a little newspaper. [Editor's Note: In 1957, a force from the 101st Airborne Division deployed to Little Rock, Arkansas, to escort nine African-American students into a segregated high school under the order of President Eisenhower to enforce the Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education,* which declared that school segregation was unconstitutional.] I think that's probably why that whole Cuban Missile Crisis issue [did not resonate], plus, I was, like, off in another world with blindly working and blah, blah, blah, but I do remember Marilyn Monroe's death in '62. That was pretty deep. [Editor's Note: Marilyn Monroe died on August 5, 1962.] Then, the Civil Rights thing started to take hold and those marches and stuff in the early '60s and the turmoil, and it was really this--of course, my parents are not here to defend themselves, but the truth is the

truth--my father despised black people, despised them, and my mother was worse with Jews. She just--I don't know why, I don't--and my only friend in school was Jewish [laughter] and I had a really cordial relationship with the colored boys, because we played sports. They looked out for me. They never picked on me. They stood up for me. Look, we didn't live together and I'm sure that they went to their homes and heard how bad I'm supposed to be and I heard how bad they were supposed to be, but it wasn't relevant. So, when all the turmoil started, it was really difficult. I hated the violence. I kind of got it, but I saw very early that there was something radically wrong going on within the message. I instinctively knew that, "Okay, I get this. I get why, because I know what it's like to be treated that way." I used to tan real good in the summers. I'd always be called "Chico" or be called Hispanic slurs, toward me, because I looked Hispanic. I was an Italian kid and I used to tan. I used to spend all the time in the sun and I tanned. I was always being picked on for being Puerto Rican and stuff like that. So, I knew, I knew very well, the pain of prejudice. I understood why anybody would be that pissed, but I also sensed that there was something wrong with the way the message was getting out there. I felt like there was some kind of negative influence that would--it just didn't seem like it was all good, it was all a good thing. It was all the hell people rise and, unfortunately, we're witnessing the results, because, God, it's like--it just boggles my mind today. I don't want to talk about today, but it was tough. I remember one image that always stayed with me and bothered me was, my father always had a lot of black fellows working for him, because they were the laborers. They were the guys, the day laborers, and he treated them good. I mean, my father wasn't rude to them. He wouldn't express it to anybody. He would never call them names. He would never not be fair with them, but, in his gut, he just couldn't stand them. My mother was, like, oh, my god, I was raised with the most anti-Semitic rhetoric, especially when she drank. It was just terrible. One thing that I remember as a kid, which always stayed in my mind and it was on Sixth Street, my father got paid from the company he was doing the construction for. He was late that night. They didn't get it in the afternoon, so, he told one of the black fellows that worked for him to go to the house, "Come by the house about six-thirty," or whatever it was, and my father would give him the money, because he had to go get the money from Einhorn. Einhorn was a developer. So, this black fellow showed up and he was there about twenty minutes before my father got home and my mother offered him a cup of coffee. He had the coffee and he got his money and he left and my mother threw the cup out. I saw her throw the cup in the trash. I don't want to make it up--I don't remember what I said. I might have asked her about it, I might not have said anything, but the image in my mind always felt really strange for me, that she threw the cup out, but, then, later, my father would talk through the years about blacks in Newark and the fact that there was a lot of disease in the community. People were afraid of, like, the syphilis and the other things that were in their [system]. A lot of them were just so poor, and so, the hygiene was not there and there were diseases. I mean, I'm sure it wasn't limited to them, but that's how it came across. Then, whenever I thought about that image, I said, "Well, maybe they're…" but the fact that she wouldn't even wash the cup in the sink, just threw it out, even as a little boy, it just hit me so weird. The impact of that stayed with me for, basically, forever, but, then, when Civil Rights upheaval started taking shape, then, it all kind of became very confusing for me.

SI: Were you aware, being in all these different places in the shore area, and then, later, when you were working, of any *de facto* segregation, places where African-Americans just could not go?

WT: No, actually not. The truth of the matter is, it was [that] they just didn't go certain places. I didn't see any; of course, I never saw any "Whites Only" signs. I never saw anybody turned away, but the truth is that in the '50s, they pretty much stayed, like, [away]. I remember, in 1953, Springwood Avenue in Asbury Park was known as the worst street in America, because every Saturday night, they had one murder. They had one murder a week, mostly Saturday nights. Today, that's nothing. That's sad, today, it's unbelievable, but I remember my father saying, "Now, that's the worst street in the country." It was in the paper as the worst street in the country, because somebody gets murdered every weekend, one murder, yes. So, a lot of the blacks mostly stayed in their own area. They came to different parts, and then, of course, we met on the ballfield, and then, the school and stuff, but I'm sure there was a lot of prejudice, but, quite frankly, I didn't [see it]. It's hard to say, I mean. Of course, that episode at the diner was just awful, but I didn't relate to them just doing it to black kids, the colored kids--it was [that] they did it to all of us. I think the reason why I didn't see it that way is because we were kind of connected. I didn't separate the two, but, no, fortunately, I didn't have to witness places not letting people eat, I mean, God, come on. So, I didn't see it.

SI: It was also interesting that you mentioned that there was a known gay club in Asbury Park.

WT: Yes.

SI: From my understanding, that was illegal then. They could not have an actual gay club. Was it just known, but it actually was not advertised that way?

WT: Well, it really wasn't advertised. It was just known that that was a gay place. It was a gay hangout. It was just known. The Chez Charles, it was called, on Cookman Avenue. Yes, it wasn't; it certainly wasn't advertised, just we knew that that's what it was and that's where gays congregated. That was the club in town. I think there was one other place that was pretty relevant, but I forget which one it was, but the Chez Charles was the one that everybody knew. It was the place in town, yes. Then, the Big Bill's and the Orchid Lounge [were] in the black section, and then, the rest of it was pretty much open season, the other bars. They had the hole-in-the-wall bars where all the winos went, yes.

SI: Would certain acts only go to the gay bars or the black bars or were there bands that would go to any bar, regardless?

WT: Well, that, I don't remember live entertainment at the gay bars. I don't remember. Well, I didn't go. I had no reason to go there and I don't remember. They probably did, but I don't remember it, but there were a couple of white bands that did play Springwood Avenue, not many, not many. I know that the Jaywalkers played down there and Ray Dahrouge, the guy I wrote a lot of songs with. My earliest successful songs were recorded with Ray in the late '60s and '70s, when I came back from the war. Ray was real R&B. He was a white guy, but he was real R&B. He was R&B to the core, played basketball with all the guys on school teams. I used to look up to him in grammar school, because Ray was a good-looking kid. He had all the girls and he was a great baseball player. I used to go watch him play ball and I wanted to play on the team so bad, but I could never get on it, but I looked up to Ray and he was an R&B guy. He

would get along good over there, but not many, mainly because they weren't soulful. A lot of those surf bands, what are you going to do in a black club, play that music? but the guys that did, like Mickey Holliday, had that real soulful voice, and the Jaywalkers, and they would do Smokey Robinson. Ray sang good, like Smokey Robinson, so, the music resonated, yes.

SI: You have a story about when the Beatles got famous.

WT: It's the craziest thing. So, Larry Oxley--rest his soul, he died pretty young--he was going around as Ricky Leigh. His two favorite performers were Brenda Lee and Ricky Nelson. So, he called himself Ricky Leigh and he spelled it L-E-I-G-H, crazy guy, and he was a guitar player. He would go around to record hops and sing his record. He had a record on Savoy [a record company that specializes in jazz] and I would go around to the record hops and I would use my acetate of *Traveling Man*, my first demo. I had the vocal version and I had them just put the track on it, the music track, and I used to sing live with that music track. I got to sing at those hops with, like, Jimmy Charles, who had *A Million to One*, pretty big acts. So, I became friendly with Larry, or Ricky Leigh, and then, we started writing a little bit in the end of '63. Going into '64, when I actually was done with Vic Catala, we would go around to bars and ask him if we could just sing. They would give us tips. A lot of places would throw us out--they didn't want us. We're trying to find a way to do it and we had some people in New York who were kind of interested in our harmony, because we would sing at the beach. We weren't really getting anywhere, and then, the Beatles come out. Knucklehead Billy here, I come up with a brainstorm. I says, "Wait a minute, you know what? Suppose we let our hair grow a little bit and we call ourselves the Jersey Beatles?" Oh, it was so stupid, but we caught on, because the fad was catching on and everything was Beatles. So, we started going to these clubs as The Jersey Beatles and the clubs put us up. Before you know it, the people are digging it, and then, the kids are digging it. Then, the newspapers picked up on it and we were awful, but the movie theater put us in to open up for *The Greatest Show on Earth*, the Jersey Beatles. We're up there and we were awful, but you never heard a minute of music, because all they would do is scream. We ended up getting put on a show. It was a big rock 'n' roll show in the Convention Hall. They were unknown acts, but it was put together by a good agency in New York and all the acts were real good, like a girls' group, and the band was good. I think a couple of them did go on to record, but, anyway, the show was really good. So, the promoter said, "You know what?" and thousands of people showed, he says, "We ought to get those Jersey cuckoo birds. They draw. The kids love those guys." So, the other performers were sick. So, we go in Convention Hall. I don't want to make it up, but that place held thousands of people. I don't think it held six, but they had huge concerts. So, we were on the bill and we go out there in Convention Hall with two acoustic guitars and one microphone. The bands are looking and saying, "There are thousands of people out there." We go on the stage and the place, the screams were deafening all through the set. We played three songs. We played *All My Loving*, we played *She Loves You*, then, we played one of our own songs, *Who's the Boy?* I think it was, dumb, stupid song, and they went wild. We walked backstage and the groups are saying, "What is that? They're terrible." I walked over to the guy and I said, "They never heard our music." It was like the Beatles at Shea Stadium. [Editor's Note: The Beatles played at Shea Stadium in New York City on August 15, 1965.] I spent time with Paul McCartney, which we could talk about later on, and I was mentioning it--and George Harrison was the greatest guy I ever met in the music business, in London. I spent time with George and Ravi Shankar in '98 and I had him on the floor telling him

about The Jersey Beatles. He went crazy. He went wild. I thought he was going to die. He was a great guy and he was laughing so hard. It was [drummer] Jim Keltner, Ravi Shankar and George. Ravi just died, too, rest his soul. [Editor's Note: Ravi Shankar died in 2012.] I was telling George about it. Both George and Paul, I met Paul later on, we were talking and both of them said the same thing. He says, "Well, that was like Shea Stadium, because nobody heard." He says, "There was no point in even plugging the guitars in, because nobody heard the music. The whole crowd was just screaming the whole time." So, anyway, The Jersey Beatles did fizzle out. We almost got killed. We went into this one Mafia club in Long Branch. Larry had a Puerto Rican girlfriend, a pretty girl. Leona, her name was, nice girl, nice family, and Leona's brother wanted to be our manager. So, he would take us around to clubs. He would go in these clubs and he would say, "Hey, I got The Jersey Beatles." He used to call them The "Yersey" Beatles, "I got The Yersey Beatles out here." So, he goes in this really tough club in Long Branch, New Jersey. I knew it was a mob club. He comes out and he says, "Oh, the band's going to take a break and they'd love to have you play a few songs." So, we go in. The band's going to be taking a break. I knew some of the people there and it was actually the same people that make the real Sopranos, the Pussy Russos [Genovese Crime Family member Anthony "Little Pussy" Russo], and then, they're all in there, the guys that they're mimicking. I remember, we come out with the guitars. I remember the bandleader saying, "Well, ladies and gentlemen, we're going to take a short break, but, while we're on break, we have a guest appearance tonight by The Jersey Beatles. Incidentally, the real Beatles were here last night and they got stretched." So, we're playing two songs and I noticed some milling around in the back and I didn't like it. Between songs, I tuned up a little bit and I said, very quietly, to Rick, I said, "Look, don't worry about the car. After the last song, let's not get friendly with the crowd. Let's go to the door, get out of here and run." He said, "Why?" [I said], "Don't worry, listen to me. Follow me," played the song, we get outside. Sure enough, a whole carload of guys come around the block, screaming, cursing, and they chased us and we're running through houses, under clotheslines. I think, shortly after that, we said, "This Beatle idea isn't going anywhere." It was so funny, because we were running and, now, we come to a railroad track and we're a couple blocks ahead of these guys. It's one of those slow-moving trains with, like, a hundred cars and I said, "Oh, man," I said, "we got to go under the train." He said, "What about the guitars?" I said, "The guitars? They're going to take our thumbs." I says, "We can't. We're not going to make it, man." I says, "Look, put the guitars in those bushes over there and follow me." Because the train was moving so slow--it was, like, creeping--we actually had to time it and scrambled under the train. That's how bad [it was], but we would have gotten killed. We ran in to Tony's Pizzeria, where we knew the guy. We used to play guitars in there. We told Tony and Tony said, "Oh, my God," and I told him the club, which I can't remember the name of it now, but it wasn't the Surf, it was another one. Tony says, "Oh, those guys? Get in the freezer." So, he put us in the freezer and the two stupid Jersey Beatles are in there, freezing. We heard the guys come in and Tony said, "No, I haven't seen them," and then, he opened his trunk and he said, "Okay, you idiots, get in the trunk. I'm going to drive you to Elberon," to the next town, "and let you out."

SI: Why did they come after you?

WT: Oh, they just hated us. They hated The Beatles and they felt that we were jerks and they just didn't like us. Then, the last Beatles story, which is a good story, really, the Ocean Ice

Palace in Brick Township, in early '65--now, we're going into '65--every Tuesday night, the ice rink used to have a rock 'n' roll show. Danny Stiles, the Kat Man, who was on WNJR in Newark, used to put a show on and whoever had the number one record that week in New York was the headliner, and then, they would have some local acts. They always wanted The Jersey Beatles, because the kids absolutely loved us. They used to tear our clothes off. We opened up for The Dixie Cups, when *The Chapel of Love* [(1964)] was number one, and The Platters and [comedian] Soupy Sales, when he had the number one record with *The Mouse*. We opened up for Soupy. We were like--the kids would scream. The girls would rip our shirts. It was so stupid. So, the Ocean Ice Palace called me and they said, "Look, we've got a roadshow coming to town and we're going to have a family night on Wednesday," because the rock 'n' roll thing was Tuesday, "and we're going to have a family night and we were thinking that maybe putting you guys on the bill would entertain the kids, because it's a folk music thing." I said, "Well, I like it. I'd like to make the money, but when were you thinking of putting us on?" He said, "Well, you'll go up and you'll do a short show, and then…" I says, "Yes, but, if you put us on first, it's over. I mean, you see what happens here." They said, "Well, look, we're paying a lot of money. This is a national tour show." They had a young comedian, a young black boy. They had a band called the Hootin' Annies. That was real original. Then, the headliner was Beverly Wright, who was a good singer. So, they said, "You got to go on first." I says, "Okay, but I'm telling you." So, "the Jersey Cuckoo Birds" go up and the place went crazy, screaming. Girls are coming up on the stage. They had me by the foot. I'm trying to play and they're dragging me. Finally, they called the police. The police come, quiet everything down. They took us off to where the dressing room was and they locked us in there and put a policeman in front. Now, the show starts and they had a big crowd and the young comedian comes out and he lasts about six minutes. The kids are all screaming, "Billy, Billy, Ricky, Ricky." It's hard to believe, really. So, he bails after six minutes, because it just was going nowhere. The Hootin' Annies came out and they played, I think, two songs and, finally, they said, "Let's bring Beverly out." They brought Beverly out and she got through the first song fairly good--I felt so bad--and she bailed in tears, because they just were not going to do it. So, now, the crowd lets out and the cop opens the door and he used a very derogatory term. [He said], "Okay, you Jersey ----, out," and there's a big bus outside that the show put all their stuff in. They were touring the country by bus. I went over to this young comedian and I said, "Gee, I am really sorry, man." He slapped me on the back, he said, "Don't worry about it, man. You were great." It was Richard Pryor.

SI: Really?

WT: Yes, before, and he was a skinny kid, with a suit and tie, squeaky clean comedian, great little guy. When I got back from the war, I was about six months home from 'Nam, I was watching *The Dean Martin Show* and this kid comes on. I'm saying, "Oh, my god, that's the kid from the Ice Palace." So, that kind of wraps up the Beatles thing.

SI: Would you dress like The Beatles at all?

WT: No, actually, well, no, actually not. We really weren't. We were working with the image, but, after a while, we started to get more into our own songs. We did have the suits without the collars and throw ties, sometimes, but we really weren't trying to imitate the Beatles. We were doing enough of it, because it was The Jersey Beatles. We combed our hair forward and all that

craziness, which everybody hated, but we felt that we knew it wasn't going to be something that was going to go forever, but we felt that to ride that wave would maybe get us in better doors, and then, we can branch out from it. Then, I started putting up more television antennas and writing more. Rick went to producing and he found this group The Shannons and they were a pretty good girl group. We're coming up on the war now and that leads me to--and I was running to New York every week with my songs. I wrote a song called *When* and I taught the song to The Shannons that Ricky was producing. He ended up marrying one of the girls, later on. The girls learned my song and he was running them around. The Monmouth Mall was opening in the spring of '65. For the opening of the mall, they had a rock 'n' roll show. They had Jay and the Americans and the Shangri-Las, were the headliners, and they were both produced by Kama Sutra Productions, which was before they started the record label. They wanted some local acts, so, they put The Shannons on that bill. The guys from Kama Sutra were there and they heard the song *When* and they asked the girls, "Where did you get that song?" They said, "Our little friend, Billy Terrell, wrote it, who lives in a motel." They said, "Well, we want you to come to the office and meet Artie Ripp." So, they went up and they audition for Kama Sutra and Artie said, "Where did you get that song?" They said, "Well, our friend Billy wrote it," and they gave him the name of the motel. [Editor's Note: Kama Sutra Records existed from 1964 to 1976.] About two or three days after that, I guess, it's about eight o'clock at night, I was home. I was writing, because I'd write every night. I put up antennas; I didn't drive, so, the boss would pick me up. I get a call at eight o'clock at night and it was Artie Ripp at Kama Sutra and he says, "Are you Billy Terrell?" I said, "Yes," and he says, "Well, did you write this song, *When*?" I said, "Yes." So, he said, "We would like you to come up and talk to us, because we would like to hear all your songs. We really think you've got talent." I said, "Well, that's great," because I had been knocking on doors a couple years. So, I went up and they signed me to a fifty-dollar-a-week [contract] as a fifty-dollar-a-week songwriter and they were grooming me. They recorded me. I recorded a single. The first song I had recorded was by The Duprees. The Duprees were recording for Columbia and they needed a B-side for The Duprees and they had a track that was originally cut for the Shangri-Las and Columbia wanted to rush the record out. The A-side was a hit, *Around the Corner*, and they said, "Look," it was five o'clock in the afternoon, they said, "we have a session at seven and we've got to have a B-side. Take this track, write a song to it and meet us at Columbia Studios." I walked in there at seven o'clock; I taught The Duprees the song. They recorded the song and it was *They Said It Couldn't Be Done*, June 1965. That was my first recorded song and that was a top twenty record. They recorded me on a song that I wrote called *Do It My Way*. I was like a Freddy Cannon-type record guy. I remember Frankie Valli, first time I met Frankie Valli, who is a good friend of mine today, he walked into Kama Sutra to meet with the president of the company and I was blown away, because I love Frankie Valli and I asked Frankie Valli for his autograph. Hy Mizrahi said, "Frankie, that kid asked you for your autograph. Truth is, he's the next Phil Spector." Of course, I'm glad they were wrong on that one. [Editor's Note: Rock and Roll Hall of Fame producer Phil Spector was found guilty of murder in 2009 and is currently in prison.] So, they were grooming me as a producer and they recorded me. I was there the day they asked me to come in and listen to a new record that they were being pitched, an unmixed version of *Do You Believe in Magic?* by The Lovin' Spoonful. They asked me what I thought of it and I said, "Well, it's either going to be the biggest thing or it's going to fail. I never heard anything like it. I just loved the record." So, they were ready to start their own label and MGM offered them their own label. [Editor's Note: In 1965, Kama Sutra signed a record distribution deal with MGM Records, which lasted until 1969.] They went

over to MGM and they said, "We think we have the next forces in the music business. We just signed a group called The Lovin' Spoonful and they got a great record and this guy Sebastian writes beautifully. They have a band called The Hassles, but that piano player Billy Joel is killing and we got this kid Billy Terrell that we're grooming as an artist and producer that we think is going to be very important." [Editor's Note: Billy Joel played piano in the band The Hassles and recorded two albums with them. In 1971, Joel released his first solo album.] I was thrilled. Then, a week later, I got a draft notice. They did everything they could to convince me not to go. So, before I had to report for the draft, they called me up, and this is so stupid. In the room that I was writing, because, back then, everybody was writing in the building, we wrote in cubicles. I mean, there was Neil Diamond and Bobby Bloom and all those people. I was the level lower, but I was in there with the Brill Building and 1650 [Broadway], with all of them, Feldman, Goldstein and Gottehrer, *I Want Candy*. [Editor's Note: Bob Feldman, Jerry Goldstein and Richard Gottehrer were a songwriting trio that went by the name The Strangeloves.] We were all writing, Wes Farrell, and so, they ran a séance. They said, "Billy, we don't want you going to the war. You're going to ruin your career." So, they took me in the room. They had a black light in there and they turned out all the lights and they had a guy from the Village, a beatnik, there with a big gong and he's banging on this gong and he's talking in tongues. Monti Rock III was a famous hairdresser, crazy guy, Hispanic hairdresser, was a very flamboyant guy. He had hair all the way to the floor and he had a ribbon in it. They made me sit on the floor and cross my legs and Monti Rock stood over me and pulled the ribbon out. I'm sitting there in a Monti Rock hair tent with this beatnik banging, talking in tongues, and they're telling me, "You can't go." They said, "You're going to put women's bloomers on and you're going to put this dead fish in there. When you go for the physical and you take your clothes off and you're standing there in women's clothes, underwear, with a dead fish, there's no way they're going to put you in the Army." I stood up and I turned the lights on and I said, "Well, let me tell you something, guys." This is exactly what I told them. I said, "Look," I said, "my grandfather, the greatest guy in the world, came here with nothing in 1902 and worked and that afforded me to be born an American. There's no way I could ever live with turning the country down for my service and, if I don't make it, I don't make it, but I got to serve." I said, "I appreciate everything." I says, "If I make it, I come back." I was only twenty years old. I said, "What's going to be is going to be," and I walked out, and then, I went into the Army.

SI: What did you know about what was happening in Southeast Asia at that time?

WT: Well, I really didn't, I didn't, because I was so [busy]. My father tipped me off to it about six months before. He was more in tune with it than I was, obviously, because he said to me, "You know, you're getting at that age." He was nervous about it. I knew he was visibly nervous about it, that I was getting to draft age and something was brewing in '65, and it was, but I really wasn't up on it, because, well, I mean, up to that point, I was living in a doofus motel and I was putting up television antennas, struggling. I was struggling with my music and I was so preoccupied and I really wasn't watching a lot of news. It wasn't like today. You can get news from that [a cellphone], but, back then, if you weren't tuned into it, it was very limited. So, I really didn't know much about it. Then, as it got closer to the spring, and then, the fact that when Johnson escalated, I was in the first wave, I got hit with it all at one time.

[TAPE PAUSED]

WT: Okay.

SI: Ready?

WT: Sure.

SI: You got your draft notice. Tell me about reporting and going through your physical.

WT: Well, actually, I got the draft notice in, I think, the first week of June or the end of May, because they just started to escalate and I was supposed to report on, I believe it was the first week in July. Unfortunately, my grandfather passed, which was absolutely devastating to me. So, I ended up--they changed the date to August 5th, because I was, like, totally wiped out, because no one had died before. My grandfather, I was so close to him and it was, like, the most horrible thing. It just wrecked me. Then, I reported. I had to report August 5th and, I remember, we had to go down to Asbury Park and the draft board was at 620 Bangs Avenue. I went down there and got on a bus, reported to the draft board first, and then, a bus took a bunch of us to Newark, New Jersey. It was interesting, because I was back to the beginning, because we were all "the expendables." It was all the poor kids, all the black boys, we called them colored boys, and it was heartbreaking. I mean, I was proud to serve. I wanted to serve, never gave it a second thought about serving, but I knew right away that, "Here we go again," because, if you were in college, even if you were studying art, you were deferred. There were people, there were guys in the neighborhood, that went and married girls that they didn't even like, because if you're married, you're out. We had people throwing their sons in art school, or some dumb stuff, just to get them in school to get them deferred. We had nowhere to go. I mean, first of all, I wanted to serve. I wouldn't have beat it anyway, regardless. That's just where my head was, so, I had no problem. I wanted to; I was happy to serve. I didn't want to put my family through a war, but that comes with the territory, because I was always a very patriotic guy, instinctively patriotic. It was pretty painful, because those faces, I can still see the faces. It was pretty obvious, right off the bat. That's when the whole Vietnam thing really started sinking in, because I didn't know much about the war, but it all started to sink in that, "You know what? This is different, this is different. This is not World War II, where everybody runs out. This is selective--talk about 'selective service.' They're throwing us to the wolves here." I got that, I got that very early, and it was tough. Then, we get to the induction center and you really got a full dose of it there. You realized that they were going after what they considered the dregs and we didn't matter. We didn't matter and we knew it. We had guys coming up there to beat it, too. Some of the guys who came up there were so [wild]. We had a guy that showed up for the draft, report for induction, and it's August 5th. It was a very, very hot day. I'll never forget it. This guy walks in with two overcoats, a scarf, a hat, and he's got a standup bass. The guy comes in and he stands off to one side, sweating bullets in this big, heavy coat. He just closes his eyes and he's playing this, "Boom, boom, boom." He just sat there and just kept playing the bass and they're coming out and telling him, "Stop it." They're trying and it's like he doesn't even hear them. Finally, they had to let him go. They took him in a room and they realized there's nothing you can do with this guy and they threw him out. There's guys making up all kinds of excuses and blah, blah, blah. I'll tell you, they were taking guys with fractured skulls and everything, unless you were really [in poor health]. We had a guy in basic training that had a bad accident

when he was a kid in basketball and part of his temple never healed right. He should've never been put in there and he almost died. They marched him and, finally, I forget who did it, somebody got to the [leadership], because we had some very mean sergeants in Fort Dix. [Editor's Note: Fort Dix, a military installation in Central New Jersey, during the Vietnam War, conducted basic training and infantry training.] Finally, somebody got a note, somehow, to the company commander. He looked into [it] and, finally, got this kid out, because he was going to die. It was interesting. One time at Fort Dix, and for the first few days, we were in a holding pattern until they assigned us to basic units. I remember, I went in with my friend, Ralph Marra, who I hung out with quite a bit. We got drafted together. Interesting story, I'll move to that, that's just before I went to 'Nam, it's a great story, when I came back for a week, but, yes, so, there were guys that they said, "I want a dishonorable discharge. I want to get out." I remember this one guy, (Pool?), his name was, he says to one of the sergeants, he says, "I'll take a dishonorable discharge." The guy says, "You can't request a dishonorable discharge." So, he was a crazy guy, a big, big guy, too. So, they had us picking up cigarette butts and cutting the grass until they assigned us to units. They had these old lawnmowers with, like, a round thing on top and you can see down there, in the blades. I'm out there cutting the grass and Pool is next to me and he taps me on the shoulder. He says, "I'm getting out of here." I says, "You're going to start that again? They drafted us, man." He said, "Well, what do you think they're going to do with me if I don't have a trigger finger?" and he stuck his finger down there and he cut his finger off. Blood splattered. I was freaked out. I says, "You got to be kidding me." He just took his finger and he stuck it in the lawnmower and chopped it off.

SI: How far into training were you?

WT: We weren't--we were just there. What they did was, they just put us in these barracks.

SI: Oh, it was all during the holding period.

WT: Yes, there's a little holding period and, for a few days, they just gave us these stupid jobs, and then, they assigned us to basic training units. The guy stuck his finger down there and chopped his trigger finger off. I couldn't believe it. I says, "What's wrong with you?" Then, they had to tap his vein off and run him over [to the hospital]. Then, we never saw him again. Then, we went through basic for eight weeks. Then, I did a second eight weeks at Fort Dix, advanced infantry training. Then, after the second eight, me and some other guys were sent down to Fort Lee, Virginia, to quartermaster school down there. We did a quartermaster course and we were supposed to--let me see, that's eight and that took me to October, yes, right, then, the end of January, I think the course down there was six, eight weeks, let me see. It was August to October, so, that's eight, October to December, yes. So, it was probably a six-week course, whatever it was. At the end of the course, at the end of January, they let everyone know where we were going, obviously 'Nam. We were supposed to ship out on this--we had a date to ship out. Then, the night before, about midnight, two sergeants and an MP came in the barracks and they woke [us] up. They woke me up, (Reed?) from Conshohocken and a couple of other guys and said, "Get your stuff. We're moving on." I says, "Well, we're not leaving until tomorrow." [He said], "You guys are leaving now. Come on." So, we didn't leave with everybody. They put us on a train and they would not tell us where we were going. They put us on a train,

because, a day-and-a-half later, we wind up in Kansas and we joined the 96th Quartermaster in Fort Riley. That was a battalion.

SI: Before we pick up there, I want to ask a few questions about training and getting in the military.

WT: Sure, sure.

SI: How did you adjust from the relative freedoms of civilian life to having to take orders and the discipline of the military?

WT: I didn't have a problem with it. I never really had a disciplinary problem. I always respected authority. Even if I didn't like them, I showed them the respect as authority. I wasn't a bad kid. Of course, it wasn't fun going through that business at the Howard Johnson restaurant and being pushed around and being rejected at the movie theater. The only reason they rejected me was because they didn't have a jacket that fit me. They didn't want to give me a jacket that fit me because they didn't want a kid seating people with no teeth in his head. I was annoyed with it, but I never [acted out]. So, when I got in the Army, I really didn't have a problem with the discipline. I didn't like it. I didn't like unnecessary nastiness. I didn't like to see people picked on for very little reason. That was tough. There were some real jerks in there, like there were anywhere, and this one sergeant, (Roland?), he was just a nasty guy.

SI: Was that in basic?

WT: Yes. Basic was--and like I say, we were all [draftees]. There were a few guys, there were some volunteers, some people that joined the Army, but the majority of us in basic, God, the vast majority of us were all uneducated, drafted kids and we were treated like that.

SI: What kind of things would the sergeants in training, like this man (Roland?), do to you?

WT: Force march, and, if you got real tired out, you'd get kicked or you'd get smacked or, then, you'd have to go and run in circles. He would always torment people, and then, he'd always say, "You guys will never make it. You'll die. I can tell. I can always tell." He was in Korea. He was a Korean War guy, real jerk. It's interesting, because he said, "You guys will never last." I had heard while I was in Vietnam, in the hospital--I ran into a guy that was in basic with us, we were all separated after that--and I remember him saying, "Yes, guess who stepped on a mine? (Roland?)." Yes, I wasn't happy about that, but they would intimidate you pretty bad. There was a lot of friction between the black and white sergeants. That was in the middle of that whole bit and the black guys had real bad chips on their shoulder at that point. A lot of the white sergeants, the Southerners, they didn't have much sympathy for them. They would get into big battles about, "Well, that's my platoon. Don't you talk to my platoon. That guy's in my platoon," and then, they would have to get separated. On top of everything else, you had to go through that. Then, we had some of the draftees. The other problem we ran into, poorly, was, back then, they were giving people an ultimatum--long prison sentences or you can go to Vietnam. That was a problem, because it was very difficult. I mean, you're talking one guy was convicted of attempted murder in the Watts Riots. He was going to do a long time and they gave

him the Army. Well, you're saddled with a bunch of criminals. That, in Vietnam, was a big, big, problem in the garrison units, the supply, ordnance in Vietnam. Everything was location, location. It didn't matter what your job was. If you had an American uniform on in Vietnam, you're just as vulnerable as if you're out on the line, if you're out on a search-and-destroy, but the problems, I think, it's my take on it, I don't know for sure, but it seemed like an overwhelming number of the guys that were given "prison or Vietnam" wound up in these units. I imagine the reason is because [of] how you're going to discipline them. You get a criminal out there on the line, you're not going to discipline him, and it's a lot more critical out there than it is in a supply base. That end of it was really nasty. It was relevant in basic training and the AIT [advanced individual training] with a lot of guys from Harlem and some of these real bad areas. At that point, there was the uprising, so, they took on a whole--it was hard for me, because I was relating to these people so well throughout my life up to that point, on the same economic level. We played ball and we never called each other names and I had empathy for them when they didn't have food and they had empathy for me when I got smacked around for no reason. Now, I'm in there with these people with these major prejudice chips on their shoulders, just hating whites, and it was really tough. I just couldn't relate to that. "Come on, this is what you're arguing about? That doesn't make any sense to me." So, it was tough. It was very difficult. Then, we went to Fort Riley and I got in with this 96th. All during the winter in Kansas, we did advanced training with the First Infantry Division. We did a lot of fieldwork, war games, with the First, different weapons. They trained us how to protect ourselves on convoys, what we could look for, how to defend ourselves, because they're always going to be knocking the supply routes off. So, the First Division, we trained with them in the field.

SI: What did they train you in in quartermaster school? Was it just general quartermaster school or was it specialized?

WT: Well, it was supply, it was a supply MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], 76E20, 76A10. We were basically trained as supply clerks. Then, at Fort Riley, I became the mail guy in addition to those other duties, which was pretty cool. Then, we trained in different weapons and [it was] very cold, too. It's really wild that we were sleeping in sleeping bags on the ground out there. It was, like, eighteen degrees in the morning when you got out of that sleeping bag and, my God, you were freezing to death. We used to do these guard posts and I remember I was on this one guard post on the road. I was out there for about fourteen hours and I was freezing. So, finally, trucks come by and they said, "The games are over. Come on, we've done enough for today, come back." So, I went back there and I was shivering. The first sergeant came over to me with another guy and said, "Where were you?" I said, "I'm freezing. I was out on the road post a few miles down. I've been out there fourteen hours." He says, "Well, why so long?" I said, "Well, nobody relieved me. I wasn't going to walk off guard." The other sergeant said, "That's a good man." He said, "Yes, a frozen man." So, we trained there. [An] interesting [thing] about Fort Riley was that we were right near Kansas State University. Then, I think, forty-five minutes the other way was Junction City. Junction City was where all the bad stuff went on--all the prostitution and all the girls that are trying to get soldiers to marry them before they go to Vietnam, so [that] they get the allotments. I didn't get involved in that. That just wasn't me. I used to hang out in Manhattan, Kansas, on the weekends, which is a nice, little town. Then, on Kansas State, they had a little town called Aggieville. It was like a little college town pretty much on the campus. They had coffeehouses there with the peanuts on the floor, in

the shells. I used to go there and play guitar and write. Then, I'd go to Tuttle Creek and there was a place called Delmonico's in Ogden, Kansas, right outside the base, which I used to go there and play with the band all the time. My thing was the music. Then, we got orders to ship out.

SI: How were servicemen treated in these towns around the bases?

WT: Pretty good.

SI: Okay.

WT: Yes, I mean, I didn't go to Junction City, so, I don't know what happened there. I mean, there were guys that got stabbed down there and everything, but that was like, if you ever saw the [(1953)] movie *From Here to Eternity*, it was like Hotel Street. I took R&R and went to Hawaii. I didn't go to Hotel Street. I stayed up in Waikiki and I ended up playing in the Sandpiper Bar all week. I went in there and played songs and drank a lot of milk and [ate] hamburgers, because I was drinking all that crazy water and eating rainwater in my food. In Kansas, especially in Manhattan, it was okay. It was 1966, so, the country hadn't quite turned yet. So, it wasn't a question of they're going to start going crazy with the soldiers then; that started taking shape when I got home in '67. Of course, in '68, it really exploded after Tet. Tet was a mean lesson for everybody. [Editor's Note: The Tet Offensive, a series of offensives conducted from January 30, 1968, to September 30, 1968, by the Viet Cong against every major city in South Vietnam, is seen as the point when American public opinion began turning against the war.] So, we finally got orders for Vietnam. I remember the last night. They gave us this big orientation. I get a big orientation and they said, "We're not telling you exactly where you're going. You can't talk to anybody about any of this and nobody can leave the base." Well, I snuck off the base. I was a good discipline guy, but I had to go to Delmonico's and play one more time. So, I snuck off the base and worked my way down to Delmonico's. I was in there playing and one of the sergeants that wasn't supposed to be off the base, either, he walked in. He said, "You're not supposed to be here." I says, "Sergeant, I thought about it and I said to myself, 'What are you going to do, send me to Vietnam?'" He says, "Well, I'm not telling, if you're not." I says, "No, if you tell on me or if I tell on you, that means we're both here, doesn't it?" I said, "We better just enjoy the music and sneak back on the base and be done with it," which we did. So, I forget what airport, I guess they took us to Kansas City by bus. I think we flew a commercial. I don't remember, but we flew the whole battalion to Oakland, California. I remember the Red Cross was there with donuts and everything at the pier. We got on the troopship called the USS *Walker*. I found out, later on, that the *Walker* went back and forth, dumping troops, bringing home, dumping troops, bringing home, but we were one of the earlier guys that went there. We got on as a battalion and we sailed from Oakland to Tacoma, Washington, and picked up, I think, two thousand more people--probably about three or four thousand guys on that ship. [Editor's Note: Built in 1944, the USS *Walker* had originally been named USNS *Alfred T. Mayo*. The ship was transferred to the Army Transport Service in 1946.] I remember, my buddy (Reed?), I was with him pretty much through the whole thing, from basic into Lee, Riley. I remember being on the deck of the ship going under the Golden Gate Bridge and somebody had a small transistor radio and *Groovy Kind of Love* was playing, "Wouldn't you agree, baby, you and me?" I said to (Reed?), I said, "Take a good look, (Reed?), because we

might not see this ever again." I just kept looking back at America. [Editor's Note: *Groovy Kind of Love* was a song written in 1965 and popularized by The Mindbenders.]

SI: You had been doing all this training at Fort Riley; how was it integrating yourself into this battalion? Had the battalion already been operating when you had been brought in?

WT: Yes.

SI: Was everyone brought together?

WT: No, the 96th was an existing battalion and we came in, six of us, from Fort Lee--Bobby (Reed?), myself and four other guys. I don't really remember if (Barrett?) came with us, but the other guys, I didn't know that well. We joined the company, and then, we stayed with the company until the end of May, and then, we shipped out. We trained with them. We got comfortable with them, all the officers and the company commander, then, we moved out. Then, we went up to Tacoma, Washington, picked up a few more thousand guys. Then, we started to zig-zag across the Pacific. It was pretty crazy on that ship, because, oh, God, we ran out of water and the food was just awful, god-awful food. They have a big, big thing in the morning of these powdered eggs and the milk went sour. You used to stand in line and, by the time you got your breakfast, you'd have to go stand in line again for lunch. The food was so bad and we had to do something out there. I got together with a bunch of guys and I came up with the brainstorm. I was always the guy who would come up with the schemes. I said, "You know what?" I was the mail guy. It got so bad that they had armed guards downstairs near the pantries and where the cooks were down there. They would put everything on a dumbwaiter and it would come up to the big dining area on the ship. So, I said to (Reed?), I said, "Look, I got an idea. You go in the dining room by the dumbwaiter and take that mailbag." So, stupid, we were in the middle of the ocean. "I'm going to take a mailbag and I'm going to go down below and I'm going to ask the armed guards if they have any mail to go out and tell them I'd like to go down into the kitchen and pantry area and [see if there is] anybody that has any mail down there." They're writing letters. They're all writing quick letters to put in the bag and I'm dying, because I'm saying, "What do they think I'm going to do with the mail? We're in the middle of the freaking ocean," but what it did is, it allowed me time alone in the pantry. I was putting food on the dumbwaiter and banging on it and (Reed?) was taking it upstairs. I collected all the mail and said, "Thanks, guys." (Reed?) and I went back to our cabin, and we had rows of these hammocks, three. We slept practically on top of each other. What a drag that was, because the food made you pass a lot of gas and I don't want to tell you how horrible that was, sleeping under one of those maniacs. I went down there and (Reed?) and I dumped that food out and the guys went crazy. We had a feast down in there. We could've gotten in a lot of trouble. The other one which was great was, we noticed that the officers all ate on an upper deck. They had their dinners up there and that food was much better than our food, much better than our food. I was friendly with a few of the officers. On the ship, they had some music instruments in there. Most of the guys that were running the ship were, like, Merchant Marines. I went to Lieutenant Scheer and I said, "Lieutenant Scheer," I said, "I'm hooking up some entertainment. There's some guys on the ship also that play instruments," terrible, just horrendous. I say, "We're going to work up some songs and we were thinking maybe the officers up there one night would like to hear some music. We can come up there and, while we're up there, maybe we could get something decent to eat." He

said, "Well, you know what? That's a fair trade-off. Why don't you see what you can do?" It was awful, oh, my God. It was so bad. We go up to play and we were awful. The Beatles had a big song called *Nowhere Man*, so, I called the band The Nowhere Men. We're up there and we're playing awful, just terrible. We're eating the whole time. We're putting food also in our pockets to take back to our buddies. One of the officers, we're on a short break and one of the officers got up from one of the other companies and came over. He said, "Hey, what's the name of that band?" I said, "We're The Nowhere Men." He said, "Oh, yes, you're right on that one," and he walked away. We ate like kings. After about twenty-some days zig-zagging, we finally see the outline of the shore of Vietnam. Our first place was Quy Nho'n, where I was in the hospital later on. [Editor's Note: Quy Nho'n was a large port and airbase for the US.] We pulled into the Quy Nho'n area and we had these Vietnamese and these sampans coming up and we were well armed. [Editor's Note: A sampan is a flat-bottomed wooden boat, usually found in Asian nations.] They told us to stand away from the edge, in case there were bad guys who would pick somebody off or maybe throw a grenade or something on top of the ship. We were there and we let off one whole battalion at Quy Nho'n. Then, we sailed to Cam Ranh Bay. We got off in Cam Ranh Bay. They didn't tell us anything about [it]. All we knew was that we were going into a war zone. They didn't tell us that Cam Ranh Bay, at that time, was a very, very safe place. It was actually an island. There wasn't a lot of water between that and the mainland, but it was isolated and it was a relatively safe base. There were mountains at the beach and the base was beyond those mountains, but we didn't know. They put us on LSUs [Landing Ship Utility], these boats that come ashore and the thing falls down and you jump off, like in World War II. They didn't tell us that it was a safe area. We're all loaded up. The M-14 was eleven pounds. I was 117 [pounds] and had ammo and all this stuff and a guy jumped in the water and almost drowned in the water. We're standing on the beach and we're in formation. They didn't tell us that they were working on putting a communication tower on one of the hills. They didn't tell us anything about the area. We're standing out there waiting for trucks to come pick us up. All of a sudden, a massive explosion takes place. They blew the top off one of the mountains to build a pad up there, but no one told us. Now, what are we going to think? We ran back in the water, like dummies. It was terrible. After we got over that fiasco, we were in Cam Ranh Bay a couple of days. It was safe and the food wasn't bad there. Then, what they did was, they broke up the 96th into smaller units, re-designated the 226th Supply and Service, and they put us on the trucks and we went to Phan Rang, which was south of Cam Ranh Bay, between Cam Ranh and Saigon. We were there about a month, I guess, and that was a pretty bad place. That was a pretty bad place.

SI: What were the facilities like when you got there?

WT: There weren't.

SI: Okay.

WT: No, there weren't--tents. I think one of the Airborne units was in there, maybe the Marines, maybe one of the Airborne units before us, but it was a tough place. It was tough. We had tents. We had one little building that they built on the perimeter, which was like a little service club with the beer and stuff, but it was right on where the heavy bush was. They had these big lights going out in the bush. We used to hang in there at night and, when we finally left there, we started our base camp in Tuy Hoa, which was up farther north. Somebody came up from Phan

Rang and said, "You guys will never guess--they blew that club up." The VC got close enough to blow that club up with all those guys. We were in there. If it happened a month earlier, we would have been finished. That was a tough pill to swallow, but Phan Rang was pretty tough and the grass was high. You had to put a tent [up], put their little cot [in], and then, I had a mosquito net and I'd tug it around, because the bugs--one morning, there was a scorpion right here, a big scorpion.

SI: Right over your face.

WT: Right over my face. I had to lay very still. I slept with my M-14 here, with a round in the chamber and the safety on. All I would have to do is click the safety off and let her go. A couple guys got around and they said, "Just lay still." They started this little fire, and then, they grabbed the net and, "Shoop," and then, through the whole net and burned the net and the scorpion, but, well, that was weird. We had some rough times down in there, and then, they decided to move us to Tuy Hoa.

SI: What were your daily activities in Phan Rang? What was a typical day like?

WT: Well, we did a variety of things. We did process supplies. There wasn't much mail. I was the mail guy, but there wasn't much mail. Then, we had perimeter guard, everybody. No matter what your job was, you pulled a certain perimeter guard to protect the perimeter, mostly at night. You're out there, hopefully not going to get picked off. There were some pretty nasty times on perimeter guard. Convoys, taking stuff from one place to another, that was no walk in the park, because you never knew what was going to happen. We had one lieutenant that had such a bad nervous breakdown they sent him home, one of the ROTC guys. We had a lot of ROTC guys. He just had a nervous breakdown and they sent him home, so, lucky him. It was kind of confusing, the day-to-day activity, because it just never seemed like we were getting anywhere. Even in the early days, it just never seemed like--I used to say to myself, "Okay, well, that's another day, live for that other day. You'll live for that sunrise." All you think about is getting to that one and seeing another sunrise. It was a day at a time. There were a lot of unnecessary accidents and there were a lot of fragging and a lot of illegal killings that were very painful to know about. The racial tension was, like, astronomical.

SI: Was the fragging within your own unit or in other units?

WT: It was all around.

SI: Okay.

WT: It was all around, yes. I don't want to exaggerate it. It wasn't an everyday occurrence. A lot of times, it wasn't really substantiated definitely that that's what happened, but knowing the characters and knowing the inside scoop in these units and how certain ones didn't get along and how a lot of whites hated the blacks and all the blacks hated the whites at that time. It's not nice to say all--there were a few guys that were pretty cool, but the vast majority, they were in the Army because they were in these riot areas and they were convicted of serious crimes and they related all of that to the struggle. So, if you were a white guy, you represented their problem. I

didn't have a problem with them because, two things, one, I stayed isolated. I was very friendly with the officers. In time, I was able to isolate myself more. The other thing is that I kind of understood them. I was kind of a jokester, [in] a way, and I had a personality, that performer personality, and I had my guitar. I think they sensed that I was just a pretty cool guy. I didn't have any bad feeling. I had bad feelings, but I didn't have any feelings that I'm going to just pick on you because of what you look like. If you're a jerk, you're a jerk, but I never made a color issue. It was obvious that it wasn't a color thing with me. I didn't feel that way. I certainly didn't see any--I kept myself at bay and, even after the war, even until this day, I start getting a little on the redneck side and I say, "The one lesson that I did learn in Vietnam was all mothers cry the same color tears." It's our mothers that suffered the worst. It didn't matter what your job was, it was all location. More importantly, it was no comfort to any one of the mothers, because all they knew was their son was in a war. You walked out the door. Unlike today, God bless these soldiers today, with the technology, I mean, my nephew graduated West Point, my young sister's son, and he was in Iraq and Afghanistan, 101st Airborne, captain. He's going up the ranks like crazy. Once a week, he was talking to my sister on Skype, but, in our war, you walked out that door, you hugged your mother and you either walked back in a year later or they gave her a flag. In the meantime, except for occasional mail, which didn't get through lots of times on time, it took a while, nobody knew, night after night, day after day, and that was the glue. That was the glue, because if it was (Reed?), if it was (Green?), the black guy--we had a lot of Puerto Ricans that didn't even speak English and they were thrown in that [group]. The thing that I resented, really did resent the black fellows for, is the way they treated the Puerto Ricans. They were very, very mean to the Puerto Ricans and I just didn't get that. That, I hated. I used to even say to some of the other guys, I'd say, "What are they doing? They're tearing America apart for doing this to them and these poor souls, they're treating them worse and they can't speak English. They're thrown to the wolves. They don't mean anything to the government. We're all expendable. If they gave two damns about us…" It just boggled my mind. It was painful. Then, I used to think of it like that. Of course, when I was in the hospital, I used to say, "You know what? It's the mothers. It's the mothers." It was really difficult, the year. Then, finally, it got so bad in the camp that I convinced the company commander to let me make my own dwelling. Well, I created a mailroom out of a Conex container. I have photos of it. I put up these tin cans. I wrote to Monmouth College and, [as] a matter-of-fact, the letter that I wrote to them is in the archives. I just found out. I'm going to be meeting with them up there. I wrote to Monmouth College because a lot of guys weren't getting mail. I wrote to Monmouth College in September of '66 and I told them who I was and blah, blah, blah. I asked them to ask students if they would be kind enough to write letters addressed to the boys of the 226th Supply and Service. I started getting tons of letters and I made sure that everybody got mail. When I used to go on these helicopter missions up to firebases, I'd bring some supplies--dry socks were a commodity. I used to bring mail up to their base and I used to barter sometimes for soda and ice was a delicacy. You could never drink the ice, because the ice was contaminated, but it would keep the cans [cold]. You had to wash the cans or, if you leave that ice water there, you can get malaria and everything else, which I did. I used to scrounge up some ice from some of the locals and put it in and put some Cokes in there and I'd go to a firebase. These 105s, they'd be firing off. They'd be sweating the salt, it was so hot. I used to have to take salt pills, because I used to take my bayonet and scrape my uniform and I'd have a pile of salt that high, coming through my pores.

SI: Couple of inches?

WT: Yes. I'd go up there and they love seeing me come, because I'd come with the supply guys, and then, I'd say, "Hey, guys, I got some mail from college students." I used to give the guys the mail and I'd say, "And, now, for an added bonus…" They're all telling me, "Get back in that chopper and get out of here." I'd say, "Wait a minute." I'd bring the bucket and I'd say, "Cold sodas." Oh, they used to go nuts. Like, I'd give them cold sodas, it was a delicacy. They loved me for that, because the canteen water, first of all, it tasted terrible. It was hot and they'd pour it on their head, but they got those Cokes and those sodas and, I'm telling you, they would've given up a million dollars. It was worth a million dollars to be able to provide them some relief and it was worth a million bucks to be able to handle mail. I often wondered if any of those guys ever stayed in touch with the students. From there, I was able to get a shack that I lived in away from everybody, because, in the tents, they were putting their flak jackets up with hand grenades hanging off them. It wasn't a good idea to squeal on people, so, I went to the company commander and I said, "I'm not going to mention any names, but I'm going to ask you if I can create my own dwelling, a bedroom-mailroom, and I'll just put a cot in there and I'll live there, because there are hand-grenades hanging off flak jackets in the tent. Nobody can throw a hand-grenade that far to the perimeter and where are you going to throw it in the base camp? It's windy and the monsoon and all we need is one of those to fall down and go off and four or five of us are going to go home." He let me do that and for the rest of the tour. Then, the race issue really got out of control at that point. There were guys being beat up in the dark and it was really terrible.

SI: What month did you arrive in Vietnam?

WT: I got there at the end of May of '66 and I left May 29th, '67, so, one year.

SI: You said you were very friendly with your officers, but did you also think that they were good officers and competent?

WT: Yes, well, I was, yes. Well, Captain (Mon?) was just a straight-up guy. I am in touch with him today. He lives in Satellite Beach, Florida. I visited him once, very friendly with him. Lieutenant Scheer, who I've reunited with, is in Waldorf, Maryland. He's a real square guy. I served with him. They were in Fort Riley. They went over with us. He was a friend. I taught him how to play guitar over there. He was friendly. Jordan Klempner, who's like a brother, he joined us in January of '67. I met him when I got out of the hospital. We bonded, played guitars together and we reunited some time ago. In '66, in September of '66, Catholic nuns came to our base camp. Tuy Hoa was nothing at the time. I mean, we were literally dug in. We had to dig holes and put the tents over them. Then, eventually, the airbase came and they put the airbase there and it got a lot safer, but explosives, charges being put in there in the night--it was awful. Then, of course, the Korean White Horse Division joined us. Koreans were great, mean but great. They joined us, [the] Fifth [Battalion] of the 27th Artillery, 606th Ordnance. The camp got bigger and it got stronger, especially with the Koreans and the airbase. [Editor's Note: Starting in 1964, South Korea sent units to South Vietnam in order to assist the United States. South Korea's Ninth Infantry Division or White Horse Division entered Vietnam in 1966.]

SI: Were those other two units that you mentioned, the 606th and the Fifth of the 27th Artillery, Korean or American?

WT: 606th Ordnance was American. Fifth of the 27th Artillery was American. There was a Transportation Company in there, I forget [the name]. We didn't have much to do with them. Then, it was 226th, and then, of course, the Korean White Horse Division. They were all combat troops. We supported 101st Airborne and Fourth Division came over after and we supported operations there.

SI: That was when you were in Tuy Hoa.

WT: Yes, Tuy Hoa. Then, we did operations from Tuy Hoa.

SI: Do you know the units that you were supporting at Phan Rang?

WT: I think it was the 101st Airborne, if I'm not mistaken.

SI: Okay.

WT: I think they were pulling out. I think it was 101st Airborne. We weren't there that long. We were there about a month and most of this stuff was moving stuff between there and Cam Ranh Bay. I never made it to Saigon. I was never down there. I was always pretty much up north, lived outside the whole time. There were no houses or anything. Then, when I had the shack, when I had the tin shack, that was a little bit better, but it was still a tin shack.

SI: Do you remember your first convoy? What was it like going on a convoy?

WT: Well, the first convoy was from Cam Ranh to Phan Rang. We were on the back of the two-and-a-half-ton trucks. There was a lead jeep, lieutenant in the lead jeep. It was pretty much like the scene in *Good Morning, Vietnam* [(1987 film)], when those two-and-a-half-ton trucks were going to Nha Trang. I remember, we pulled out and we were on a road and we're on the road and that was our first taste of Vietnam. I remember the guy sitting next to me. We all had our flak jackets and steel pots and our weapons and we were loaded, locked and loaded, ready for anything, and I remember the young fellow sitting next to me said, "Suddenly, Vietnam becomes Vietnam." I said, "I'm afraid so." Fortunately, we didn't have trouble on that convoy, but that was the first one. It was pretty creepy, because it was the first taste of it. We had been in Cam Ranh a couple of days and it was like a safe [area]. We were walking around at night, walking around in our shorts and there was ice cream down there and stuff. That mess hall was a built mess hall, so, it was pretty cool. Then, all of a sudden, we got the orders and we load on these trucks and, now, we're going into jungles and down these roads. We're looking in the trees for snipers and hoping we're not going to hit these mines, because a big problem with the mines, the explosives, [was] if they knew where the claymores were set, they would sneak and they'd turn the claymores the other way, so [that] when they went off, they came back at the Americans. That was a problem. It was pretty crazy, that first convoy. Then, we got down in Phan Rang and it was scary. It was real scary, because we were very, very vulnerable down there.

SI: Were there attacks on the base?

WT: There were some perimeter problems on there. I remember, one night was pretty weird, when night got real weird down there. It was so dark that [you] just start shooting at stuff. God, you didn't see anything. I think there was some enemy that was running through there at the time, but I found a quiet spot and just laid in it, hoping nobody would step on me on the way by, because I couldn't. I said, "We're in the middle of this camp. Well, how do I know, shoot somebody?" Oh, it drove me crazy.

SI: You were afraid you might shoot another American.

WT: Absolutely, because you couldn't see what was going on. It was a problem. It was an obvious problem. I didn't know if it was another big fight amongst ourselves, because there were two wars going on--one with them and one with ourselves. Fortunately, I lucked out, I didn't have that problem, but a lot of guys had a lot of problems with it and they hated each other--hurt this guy and this guy. It was a pretty weird experience. Then, fortunately, we got out of Phan Rang. We went by ship, which was great. We went down the shore and we loaded everything on this Navy ship, because Highway 1 was too dangerous to go from Phan Rang all the way to Tuy Hoa, the convoy, because they had gotten word it's too far to go. They had plenty of opportunities to cause us a big, big problem. They could have had plenty of time to dig in up along the way and we probably would've lost a substantial number of people.

SI: When you were doing an average convoy run, how long would it be? How far would it be? How long would it take?

WT: Well, most of them were an hour-and-a-half, two hours, maybe less, some a little less. A lot of them were between Tuy Hoa and Cam Ranh. Most of my stuff was shorter, because it was North Field, north of Tuy Hoa. There was an LZ, a landing zone, up there, where they used to drop mail in there and drop supplies in there. We used to take guys that were sick or that were hurt, we used to take them up there and help them get to a chopper that was coming and take them out. Then, there was (563rd Evac?) up there. That's where I went when I was evac-ed [medevacked] from there, down on to Qui Noh'n, up to Qui Noh'n, and then, Nha Trang. The run in North Field was pretty hairy, because when you got to the rice paddies, the road was like a one-lane road, so, you can see the other end. So, somebody would have to wait while you went through or you waited while they went through, but lots of times, you'd get on the other side of the water, of the paddy there, outside the base, going toward Tuy Hoa, and that would be a hotspot where you'd run into trouble. Then, going to North Field, it got really crazy at times. There's a big resort there now. I went online and saw a five-star resort built right there, about ten floors with swimming pools and a French restaurant and a wine cellar. It blew me away. If you Google, "Tuy Hoa Hotels," or, "Vietnam Hotels," you wouldn't believe the results. We're getting ready to go back for a reunion, for PBS next year, to the orphanage. I got a little off the track, but we established Mang Lang orphanage in '66 and cared for the nuns and lots of children.

SI: I want you to tell that whole story.

WT: Oh, great.

SI: You went from Phan Rang down to Tuy Hoa by boat, you said.

WT: Up to Tuy Hoa, that's right; I got off the track. I'm sorry.

SI: No, that is okay.

WT: We got on a Navy ship and the Navy ship took us up there and we stayed one night on the ship, which was heaven, because we were eating junk. The Navy ship, oh, it was a warm bed and the mess hall was open twenty-four hours. We went down there and I got up in the middle of the night and went down there and had more ice cream. They had ice cream. They had cold milk. Oh, I didn't want to get off the ship. I didn't want to get off. Then, we got to Tuy Hoa and we got off and I saw how desolate it was. There was a big C-130 plane that was crashed in there and all the debris. We got there, it was very interesting. Yes, we had a lot of problems in there, a lot of problems. We had a great guy, Major (Pruitt?), who was there overseeing everything. Major (Pruitt?) was a straight-up guy, a real standup guy, really for the guys. We really liked Major (Pruitt?). Then, he almost died. He was in a chopper that was shot down. Then, we didn't see him anymore, but he survived, but we didn't see him anymore. He was a wonderful guy. We dug in up there and it took a while and we were just in tents outside. Then, when the monsoon season came in, that was a mess, because you were just wet all the time, all the time.

SI: How long did the monsoon season last?

WT: Oh, God, it felt like--it's forty-five years--it felt like three or four months to me, yes. It was wind and rain and just rain and rain. It just never got comfortable. Your feet were soaking wet all the time. Then, I got really, really sick and that really threw me into a tailspin. The orphanage came about the one day some nuns came on the base camp, Catholic nuns. We used to have to burn the contaminated foods. A lot of times, the canned foods, if the cans were damaged, the food was contaminated. So, we used to burn it in these pits. I don't remember this, but, when we started talking about the orphanage and we reunited to talk about, when I found out online that Mang Lang was still there, it freaked me out. As we did our research and Lieutenant Scheer told the story--I forgot how it started--they came along and the nuns were scavenging the contaminated food. They were caring for about a hundred displaced orphans and some adults in a dirty wing of a hospital, one big wing, all crammed into one wing of the hospital in Tuy Hoa. Lieutenant Scheer got the point across that they can't have the food. "It's bad, you can't eat it." He gave them ten dollars in military script. The story goes, about an hour later, the nuns came back with a Catholic priest that spoke enough English so that Lieutenant Scheer could communicate with him. He told Lieutenant Scheer of this hospital and what they needed. Lieutenant Scheer went down there and, when he saw all these people piled on each other and the living conditions, the priest said, "We need our own place." We took up a collection a few paydays in a row. We took up a collection and we came up with some money, and then, Lieutenant Scheer wrote to his parish in Chicago. They took up a collection and we were able to give them enough money to buy a piece of land outside Tuy Hoa and build an orphanage, which still exists. It's still there.

SI: Were these Vietnamese clergy or French clergy?

WT: Vietnamese.

SI: Okay.

WT: They were Vietnamese. We got very attached to the children and we were their safety net. I remember going down there one day after a really rough time on the road. I took the picture. Well, the orphanage was just being built and it was these just flat-board beds, no mattresses. A little girl there, about probably all of maybe three years old, and her little brother was about maybe six, seven months old, he's on his stomach and she was holding a bottle in his mouth and she was like this. Both of their parents had been killed. I captured that picture. I never let it out of my sight. I didn't even look at it for forty years. Once we get the documentary going, when we go back, we've been in contact with some of the nuns that are in their eighties. We found there was a company, a nonprofit, Airline Ambassadors, that's been going back there for several years to orphanages. We found out that they have a relationship and we were able to find out that six of our then babies are still living with the nuns as cripples. They're displaced and we've gotten pictures of them and I sent some pictures back to Vietnam. It was the first time they saw them do anything about themselves. I went there, we brought food, I fed the babies and I taught a lot of the boys to play baseball. They loved baseball. Once, I got them into baseball. My little buddy (Tong?), a little guy, they wanted to be held and they were so affectionate. When I had to leave, it was devastating, because (Tong?) would hold on. They had to pry him off me, so [that] I could leave, and he would scream. For years, I would hear.

SI: Do you want to take a break?

WT: I would hear. No, it's okay. For years, I would hear those screams and I'd often wonder how they made out after the South fell, but they used to scream bloody murder. We'd come there, oh, they were just wonderful. He would just want to be held all the time and play, but leaving was awful. He would grab my leg and I'd kind of almost like kind of drag him and say, "It's okay, it's okay." He'd hyperventilate. Oh, it was awful. It was just awful. I hated it, but we did a lot of good, we did a lot of good, cared for a lot of children. I fed a lot of children by hand. That was the good stuff.

SI: How many children were in this orphanage once it was built?

WT: About a hundred, yes. They would come in all the time, maybe a little less than a hundred; well, it started out about 110, yes, when they were all crammed in that hospital, all sizes, mostly little ones. They really appreciated us. We came down there, Lieutenant Scheer, myself, and we were always asking for extra money from the guys and we would bring the nuns more money to buy more supplies. Then, we'd bring food and those were the good memories, to be able to do something good. It's what helped keep the sanity. It offset the atrocities, because a lot of guys were very mean to the village people, the villagers, very mean, unnecessary, beating people for no reason and it really was awful. It was awful.

SI: From your unit?

WT: Oh, yes. Well, the 606th Ordnance was the worst. I hate to keep ragging on black folks, but they were ninety-eight percent blacks, with a black CO, with a company commander, rather, CO, and first sergeant. For some reason, they were just extremely nasty. I just didn't understand it. I didn't understand it. There were some guys in there, obviously, that were criminals that would just go out of their way to hurt people. It drove me up the wall. They were always ganging up on the other guys and it was just stupid. It was like being in prison. It really was what you see of prison and how they pair off, how the ethnic groups pair off, and there's rivalries and gangs and that was the other war. That was the war that people didn't really know much about. All they saw [was] what was on television, but that was even in 1966, '67. In those logistics camps, there were a lot of problems. That's my primary reason why I didn't want to get too close to too many people, because when you lose them, it was devastating, but I got close to a few people, especially Lieutenant Klempner, was like my brother today. He was a wonderful, wonderful guy.

SI: Were there any casualties in your unit?

WT: Not directly in the unit, but, in our unit, we lost (Whittle?) and one of the tanker boats blew up and (Whittle?) died. It wasn't so much the unit, but there were a lot of guys in that camp from different units that [died]. Of course, the Fourth Division, when they first get over there, I don't understand why, but they weren't really prepared. Fourth Division casualties, early on, were pretty rough. I witnessed a lot, because I would go to the 101st Airborne base up there where they had a landing zone. I'd be up there bringing whether it be mail, bringing them other supplies or riding shotgun lots of times. We'd have to go to water points and drag a trailer up where they had their water unit going in the ground and fill up. Those roads got real bad and I would ride shotgun and, sometimes, I would drive. I didn't drive a car until I was twenty-seven--I was home from the war five years--but, over there, they needed drivers, so, they [said], "Well, you got to drive." [I said], "I don't drive." [They said], "Well, drive anyway, that's okay." I drove and I'm not very good at it, but it got bad on Highway 1. It got bad on those off roads. The Ordnance lost people because they were defusing munitions and they weren't careful and you'd hear that go off and, oh, boy. We had two refrigeration units--one for frozen foods and stuff, and then, the other one was bodies. That was the post-traumatic stress. You talk about that, I'm being compensated now. Well, I have Agent Orange issues. I have coronary artery disease, prostate cancer. I've been compensated for jungle rot in my feet since the war and post-traumatic stress disorder. Fifty percent of my disability is for post-traumatic stress. I'm in counseling groups twice a week. It's an interesting thing about PTSD, because I didn't realize all those years that I was suffering from it. I've only gone to the VA [Veterans Affairs] since I've got prostate cancer and found out that they're recognizing that as dioxin. Then, I had a stent in my heart from '05 and that's coronary artery disease. So, they started rating that, recognizing. Then, I had the big operation in July with intestines taken out and all that crap. I realize, now that I'm getting a handle on it, now that I can talk about Vietnam, which I could never do before, I'm starting to get a real handle on everything, I realize post-traumatic stress, it doesn't matter what triggers it. I realize that a lot of my problems were survivor guilt and seeing some of those boys taken in, especially the 101st Airborne. I'd be up there and those medevac choppers would be coming in. That one place where I used to go, they had a small outpost there and that's where they brought in the guys that they didn't bring to the hospital. They brought them there for Graves Registration. That stayed, that never really left, those ponchos. I remember a guy, one of

the guys at that post, were in a sandbag [shelter] and the chopper landed and they'd take the casualty off in a poncho. This one guy wasn't dead yet and I guess you had to be hardened, but the guy came out from underneath to look in the poncho and said, "Nah, he's over." He wasn't dead yet, because, over the side of the poncho, every time his heart beat, the blood was squirting over the side and it just seemed so cold when he looked at it and just--I understand now that he had to be hardened. He had to be hardened to it because [of] what he saw every minute. Guys are coming in left and right in those ponchos, all torn to pieces, but it hit me weird and I didn't sleep very well for a long time after that, because it just seemed like that boy, "Oh, he's gone, let's get to the next one, put him in there. He'll never make it." It was--oh, man, it never leaves you. Then, moving forward, I got separated from the unit on a convoy and I became very ill. I forget if one of the Korean jeeps took me up. I think it was the Koreans that took me up to the LZ where the (563rd Medevac?) was. It was a tent where casualties went first and choppers would come in and take them to one of the field hospitals or take them to Nha Trang, Eighth Field, or Qui Nho'n, (67th Evac?). I was in really, really bad shape. I laid in the water. It was really rainy and bad. The tent was full, so, they had me and a couple of the other guys wrapped up in a poncho. We're laying in the rain overnight. The chopper picked me up, took me first to (67th Evac?). I was there for a few days. Then, they sent me down to Eighth Field Hospital in Nha Trang. [Editor's Note: The US Army's Eighth Field Hospital in Nha Trang was the only operating hospital in South Vietnam at the beginning of 1965 with a one-hundred-bed capacity.] (67th Evac?) was a hospital with a building, where in Nha Trang, Green Beret Headquarters was what they called Tent City, it was sandbags and tents, but they had much larger [teams of] medical doctors and stuff in there, because it was a heavy casualty hospital, being Special Forces and where it was. By the time I got there, I was running a 105 fever and I was totally delirious. [Editor's Note: Headquarters of the Fifth Special Forces Group was located in Nha Trang, South Vietnam.]

SI: You had malaria, you said.

WT: Well, I had malaria, but I had gone out. I didn't know I had malaria and I had gotten double pneumonia.

SI: Okay.

WT: I remember when they first brought me in, before they brought me over to the ICU, the next chopper that came in, the doctors left me for a minute and they, four guys, brought up a poncho right next to my bed and it's a young boy that had stepped on a landmine. It was awful. It was awful. I was in ICU and it was tough with six other guys, a Green Beret guy, a sergeant, and that's when I first heard about the Montagnards. That's the first time that I heard that we were in Laos. [Editor's Note: Montagnard is a French term meaning "mountain people." French colonialists applied the term to the inhabitants of the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The correct term is the Degar. The Degar are ethnically distinct from the majority Vietnamese. Due to their location during the war, they were recruited by the US to fight the Vietcong and NVA.] That's the first time I heard of the toughest fighters over there were the Turks. The Turks were working with knives there and I never knew that. I heard a lot of great stories once I was a little more coherent and got to talk with the guy. I was in real bad shape and they had to throw me in a bin of ice because I was going to die. When they took my boot off and my pants off, they saw that

my skin was rotting off and my foot was so bad that there was a hole between my small toe on the right and the second one in. Between those toes, they were using wax suppositories with medication and they were sticking it all inside my foot. My foot was literally rotting off.

SI: Wow.

WT: They came by and they gave me a shot. The doctor made them put me in ice right away. My face was all swollen up and I was a disaster. I was pitiful. I was delirious, totally delirious. I heard the doctor say, "I want you to check this guy's vitals every thirty minutes. I want you to give him a shot every hour, another shot. I want you to keep him cooled down and, if he makes it to the morning, I think we'll probably have a chance." I fought like crazy not to fall asleep. It was coming up on the holidays, and, in that ICU tent, Red Cross has a small row of Christmas lights along the border. I was laying there, my eyes were slits almost. I was just so miserable. All I could hear was the doctor saying, "Oh, shit." I guess he thought I was sleeping or something or totally out of it. I fought like crazy to stay awake. I must've said at least a hundred times, probably sounds exaggerated, but I just kept saying, over and over and over, "What's my mother going to do if I don't make it? It'll kill her." I said, "I can't do it. I just can't do it." Finally, I guess I passed out and I remember, the next day, I saw a bright light right under the tent, and then, there were sandbags and the sun was coming up. In my eyes was this bright light. I thought it was the light that you see, because I had heard the stories. I thought I was out of here. I'm struggling, and then, finally, it opens up and it was the sun. It was coming up on the holidays and Martha Raye was there as a colonel. She would do little bits and she was helping out the hospital. In comes Cardinal Spellman of New York and [evangelist minister] Reverend Billy Graham to visit the hospital around the holidays. At my bedside was Cardinal Spellman, Billy Graham was holding my right hand and Martha Raye was holding my feet. Cardinal Spelman gave me [last] rites and put a crucifix on a chain around my neck for me as a gift, which, when I was totally in the gutter after the war, I hocked for the price of a drink. [Editor's Note: Cardinal Francis Joseph Spellman was the Archbishop of New York and Vicar of the US Armed Forces.] I'd love to get that back, but they did prayers for me and Billy Graham was really great, Cardinal Spelman was interesting and Martha Raye was great. Then, I went down to eighty-nine pounds, skin and bones. I couldn't move my bowels. They used to have to force me to move my bowels. I had no muscle tone at all. I couldn't lift a spoon. I struggled to lift a spoon on the side of my bed. They were trying to get me out of bed. I just couldn't do it. One day, Martha Raye came in and she rubbed my head and she said, "Troop, if you don't walk, you're going to die." She had a mouth on her--I won't repeat the words--and she said, "You little so-and-so, you're not going to die on my watch." She went around the back and she put her arms underneath my arms and around here, like a bear hug, and she slid me out of bed and I was literally like Gumby. Of course, I didn't know who Gumby was at the time. Knowing Gumby now, that's what I was. I was just, like, flapping in the wind. I couldn't control anything and she said, "Now, dammit, stand on my feet," and she walked me back and forth. She came in another day and another day, a couple days in a row, "Well, you're going for a walk." Apparently, it got my blood flowing, and then, I started to recover. If it wasn't for her, I probably wouldn't have made it. That's why I found it so interesting when my godmother told me, out of the blue, that my father had spent the night in Martha Raye's house, but I mentioned to Martha Raye, my father, not knowing that that had happened--it was many years after--I told her that he was with Vincent Lopez at the Hotel Taft in New York. "Oh, we're in the Hotel Taft in New York." She

says, "Was he with Vincent Lopez?" I says, "Yes, I think he played with Vincent Lopez, and then, he also had his own bit there with a guy named Joe Pica." So, anyway, to carry the Martha Raye story, and then, if you want to ask questions further, I'm sure you will, the ironic thing about the Martha Raye story is, back in the '80s, I was writing songs with a woman named Gloria Nissenson, who did a lot of Broadway stuff, and Ritchie Adams, who wrote *Tossin' and Turnin'*, a big hit back in the '60s. We had to cut one of our writing sessions short because Gloria said she had a show that was closing that night. Martha Raye was in the show and she hadn't told me and I wasn't aware. It was an off-Broadway deal, so, it wasn't anything that I was hip to. I said, "Martha Raye, she's in town?" She says, "Yes, but she's leaving tonight." I says, "Oh, man." So, I wrote a letter. I wrote a letter explaining to her exactly what it was and that I'm alive today and I don't think I would've been alive if it hadn't been for Martha Raye. A couple weeks passed and Gloria came up to write again and, at that session, I said to her, "Oh, by the way, were you able to give the letter to Martha Raye?" She says, "Oh, yes." She says, "I gave it to her at the theater and she handed it to her manager," or whoever, "and said, 'Hang on to that. I want to read it in private.'" The story goes that, after the performance, she read the letter and she went up to wherever the dressing room was with a bottle of scotch and turned the lights out, drank the whole bottle. They practically had to carry her to the airport. She was completely devastated. Then, years later, as a member of the Friars Club, early 2000s, some people at the bar knew Mark Harris, that young guy that she married, that real goofy guy, and they put me in touch with him. He's a very flamboyant guy, forget the fact that he was gay, it's here or there, but he's really, like, a kooky guy. He wanted me to come stay at the house and all that in Bel Air and he said he's sure he had pictures there, a lot of pictures there, he might even have one of my father. I never got a chance to do it. I wasn't going to stay there anyways--a very, very weird cat, a very strange guy. Then, he disappeared. I don't know what ever happened to him, but, yes, that was a strange thing. All through that time, I mean, my family didn't know where I was, didn't know what was going on. My unit didn't know what was going on. Finally, they started putting the word out what happened to him.

SI: You had just been on a convoy and you succumbed to this illness and you went off.

WT: I became very ill.

SI: Yes.

WT: I had to get up to the aid station. It was obvious that I was very ill. What I was, I was walking around with malaria, but I didn't know it. I felt weak, but it was just the whole thing. On guard at night, you're out there all night, two on, two or four on, two off, and a lot of times, unfortunately, you couldn't trust the guys that you were on that post with, because you couldn't trust them if they were going to fall asleep or if they were going to leave. At one point, I was very, very short to come home and a violent, violent lightning storm [developed]. [Editor's Note: In this context, "short" and "short-timer" are American military slang signifying one whose tour of duty is close to ending, usually within two months.] I had a guard post out by the beach, because they would come in on sampans and they would sneak in and lay traps or cut into the ammo dump to steal ammo, set mines or set improvised devices in the forklifts. Guys that go out there with a forklift and pick up a load of supplies get blown up, which was another awful thing. Being on the perimeter guard was a very, very important responsibility. That's where I had most

of my problems out there. I had a couple of guys up there, they said, "Man, we're going to *đi đi*." I says, "What are you talking about?" I mean, the lightning was hitting. I'm in knee-high water. I'm holding on to an M-14 and I'm in a poncho and I got these two guys, black fellows--two of the more militant guys--got stuck with me that I never really had a problem with. They said, "Man, we got to *đi đi*." I says, "What are you talking about?" [They said], "We have to *đi đi*, man, this is nuts." I says, "You're going to walk off guard?" He says, "We got to go, man, you're crazy." I said, "Well, do what you have to do. I'm not walking off guard." I can tell you that I was never more frightened in my whole life. When I got back, I could never take fireworks. We lived in Asbury Park, so, the first few years I was back, when they had fireworks, if I couldn't leave town, I would go in the closet and I'd wrap a pillow around my head and I'd close the door and I'd just go to sleep in the closet with pillows--and any real bad thunderstorms, because being in that lightning storm was the most frightening thing. Plus, I couldn't see a thing in front of me. I just got left all by myself and I'm afraid, deadly afraid, I'm going to be hit by lightning. I'm also afraid that I'm going to get picked off or I'm going to get stabbed in the back. I was never more frightened in my whole life and that stayed with me. It stays with me. Do you have something that you want to ask specific?

SI: What did *đi đi* stand for?

WT: Oh, "We're going to go," *đi đi*.

SI: Was that a Vietnamese word?

WT: Yes, you'd say, "*Đi đi*, let's *đi đi*." They'd go, "*Đi đi mau*," or, "*Lại đây*," like, "Come here, *lại đây*," or, "*đi đi mau*," and that was, "Go away." So, I got through the hospital bit.

SI: That was in December.

WT: That was in December.

SI: Okay, for how long were you actually in the hospital?

WT: Between the two, it was the better part of a month.

SI: Okay.

WT: Yes, because I did (563rd?), I did Qui Nho'n, and then, Nha Trang was the better part of a month that I was out in the hospital. Then, I thought they were going to send me home or send me to Okinawa, and then, on home. They would've, but they kept me there on a technicality, because I wasn't in one hospital for more than thirty days. I was in three places, so, they wouldn't combine it. "Well, you weren't in one place more than thirty days, so, back out." I got out to the field, I was eighty-nine pounds. I have pictures. I look like I was in a concentration camp. I went through that. I went down again. I got real sick again in April. Then, I was only nineteen days from coming home and one of the worst times, Lieutenant Klempner and I had to go advance party up to Duc Pho, below Chu Lai. I rode as his bodyguard. We got on a chopper up there. We had to bring pay up there because there were some replacements were coming in

and they were going to establish, outside Duc Pho, another place to bring supplies below Da Nang. We flew in there. They dropped us off. We almost got shot down on the way up, which was awful, that was terrible. We were flying like this and I'm looking down like this.

SI: Sideways.

WT: I'm saying, "Oh, please, I'm too short for this." When you're short, you were a short-timer, "This is for an FNG [fucking new guy], man." We get up and, right at the firebase, 105s, they're just pumping those 105s out there, a lot of enemy movement. We joined a convoy that was going to take us on this bad road through these hamlets and the beach and Lieutenant Klempner, who's a great guy, he was standing up in that jeep and, instinctively, I put a round in the chamber. I clicked off the safety. We're in a two-and-a-half-ton truck and I laid flat on the floor of the truck and Lieutenant said, "What are you doing?" I says, "Sir, I think you better get down here. There's no birds." [He said], "What are you talking about?" I says, "Listen, there's no sounds. This isn't right," because you always heard, even over the trucks, you always heard these sounds--nothing. I says, "Something's not right. I think something bad is going to happen." Oh, they nailed the whole front of the convoy. They killed that boy, that eighteen-year-old was driving. It was awful. They killed him and the Lieutenant got hit in the arm. They called in some support, air support. We finally made it to the beach and we stayed down there, underground, obviously. We did what we had to do and it was time to go back out, back to the LZ. It was so bad, they brought--they had a tank in the front and a tank in the back and we had a helicopter gunship over top with two sixties, or we would have never made it out alive; got back to base camp and I went in to see Captain (Bon?). About a week later, I had, I guess, less than a week and he called me in again and he said, "You know what?" He says, "Your orders came in to leave 'Nam the 29th, but what I want you to do, I'm going to give you a special order. I want you to go down to Cam Ranh Bay a few days early and just hang around and get out of here, man." I says, "And I appreciate it. I can't do it anymore." It was sad, because Lieutenant Klempner and I were such good friends. We played guitars and we had that. We played in the bunkers and the mess tent and, actually, you weren't supposed to. Enlisted guys weren't supposed to really socialize with the officers, but I was very popular with the officers. Later on, when I talked to them after, many years later, they said, "You know what?" because most of us were uneducated and the officers were educated, most of them, they says, "We loved you, because we could talk to you about music and you could talk--you had stuff to say--but a lot of these guys…" They resented us anyway, being officers. I said, "Well, I understand that." It was sad, because Klempner volunteered to drive me over to the airbase and we saluted each other. It was tough leaving. I went down there and just hung out a couple of days. They had buildings at that point. They had built wooden buildings with the tin roofs and screen, so, it was really nice to get in on a cot with a warm--we actually had a sheet and a pillow. That's all I wanted to do, was sleep out of the elements. I ate pretty good. They had a good mess hall there. Sure enough, in came a Northwest Orient jumbo jet and, interestingly, (Reed?) from Conshohocken, when we got to Vietnam, we were on the same LSU off the *Walker* and (Reed?) said, "Hold up, we're going to step in Vietnam together." I held his arm, he held my arm and we both put our feet in the water in Vietnam at the same time. (Reed?) was on that flight. So, interestingly, the flight, we all get on the flight, there's probably, I don't know, 150 people, maybe a hundred people, however many there were--it was a full flight--all the guys, all ranks and all units, and we all sat down and you could hear a pin drop--not a sound. We start taxiing and, as we're taxiing, as we're

picking up speed, instinctively, everybody was holding hands, instinctively, as we lifted off, because I looked, most of us, our eyes were closed and we got up and up and up and up. The pilot came on and said, "If you look out to the left, you'll see your last of Vietnam." Once we got far out enough over the water, until we knew we were out of range of a missile or--they didn't have missiles down there, the SAMs [surface-to-air missile] up North, but they certainly had weapons that could have reached us--as soon as we were out of range, the plane erupted, a lot of tears.

SI: Why don't we take a break?

WT: All right.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: I just have a few questions. First, you talked about using the M-14 rifle.

WT: Yes.

SI: Were you ever switched over to the M-16?

WT: No, we were in a supply outfit and it just never got to us.

SI: You talked about being on the line frequently. How frequently would you go out on guard duty? Was it a set schedule, like every other night or every third night?

WT: It varied, but you were out there a few times a week, yes. It varied, but everybody had to do it. I mean, it didn't matter, cooks. The interesting thing about Vietnam was, it was all location, location, location. Now, I often said that, especially in 1966, if our unit was sent to Saigon in our job descriptions and we stayed true to our supply stuff and mail stuff, five o'clock, we'd be at the bars and, weekends, we'd be down in Vung Tau surfing, but Charlie didn't care if you were sent there to be a clerk. You had a uniform on and you're in his territory--he's coming for you. That was difficult. We had cooks that went out on the road to get water and came back and they had to pick glass all out of their face and shot up. At nighttime, it was deadly out there, deadly on those roads. So, it didn't matter.

SI: Yes. How often were you in situations where you had to fire your rifle?

WT: Not as much as some guys, fortunately. Oh, I'd say less than a dozen, yes, mostly on the guard, sometimes on a supply run, but, mostly, most of the time, the trouble was on perimeter guard. That was the trouble and it was very vital to keep them off the pipeline. They had a pipeline running from the beach to pump the gas up to these LZs to keep the choppers in the air. Late at night, you'd hear that tapping along the pipeline. You'd hear them tapping in to take the oil and stuff. Then, once in a while, you would see these silhouettes and you'd get so scared that [you] let them have it. You just don't know what end is up.

SI: Would it just be rifle fire that you could direct or would you call in any kind of artillery?

WT: Well, they would--I didn't call it in, because that wasn't my thing--but there were times when the jets would come in with phosphorus and napalm out on the perimeter, not real close to me, but they would do it. There would be heavy troop movement outside the airbase at Tuy Hoa, because I used to sit there in the nighttime and (Green?), the guy from Watts, Watts Riots, he was a company clerk and he would pull guard with me a lot. I used to wake him up and say, "(Green?), I think we're going to have a light show," because we used to see that napalm. Then, the other thing we'd see, the gunship's out there and they used to shoot tracers, red tracers. I used to keep all tracers in my rifle, because I didn't smoke cigarettes, so, I used to trade my cigarettes at the ordnance over there. I'd say, "Here, I'll give you, take these, this clip, and just give me all tracers," because it was 7.62 full metal jacket rounds. Normally, every fifth round, it was a twenty-round clip, every fifth round was a tracer, so, you'd see where you were going. I wanted all tracers. I said, "No, I want my light show," like a nut, but, when we used to sit there and watch off to the side of the hill in these holes, you would see--you would hear--the gunships out there, and then, I'd say, "(Green?), wake up, we're going to see a light show." The tracers would, the rounds would, just shower into the ground where the troop movement was out there. Then, the jets would fly and, in daytime, you'd see those jets and see these massive amounts of napalm just rolling in and just incinerating everything. It was unbelievable. I hated when the children were burned. I hated it. I just hated it. When I was in the hospital a second time, they just built a little field hospital in Tuy Hoa. Then, when we left, a dust off unit came in, in there. I was in the hospital and, after I came to, a couple days I was in there, they had a little boy in there that was pretty badly burned with napalm. They used to come and put him on my lap. He used to sit there and I used to hold him and his legs were bad. They had a lot of ointment and mesh. I used to sit there and bounce him and, "How you doing?" When they'd have to take him away, it was awful, because, again, he would just hold on. I was it. I was his affection. He had nothing left in his life and I hated it. He's another one--I hear him cry all the time. I hear him cry all the time. So, it was all of that. A lot of it, like I say, was all connected to the location and you were just surrounded. You were in a spot which was a strategic spot, Tuy Hoa, where we can get stuff into needed areas quickly and it was on their hit list. We were on their hit list. One night, I'll never forget this, on guard, (Green?) was sleeping, I saw--it was a pretty clear night, the stars were out, it was a very clear night--a couple miles down the road, I can see the silhouette of those hills and there was a white light, which I thought was a helicopter. It was acting weird and I woke (Green?) up. I said, "(Green?), light show." I said, "Check it out, but I want you to look at this guy, because I think that guy's in trouble," this little white light and it was like this, and then, this and this. Then, it was moving this way and this way, real jerky, quick like lightning, and then, it stopped. I says, "I don't believe it." I said, "That guy is going to crash," and then, it stopped. Then, it went zoom. It was in the stars like that. I said to (Green?), I said, "That's not from this Earth. We don't have anything that could move like that." It was a UFO. It went from a stop position and it was a clear night. I'm saying, in a matter of a few seconds, it disappeared in the stars, it was gone. I never saw anything move so fast in my life. That was another anecdote from the war. We got through all that and flew to Okinawa, then, stopped in Japan, in Tokyo, to refuel, I guess. I don't know what we did there. We stopped; that was one of the stops. Then, we flew right from Tokyo right to Fort Lewis, Washington. We landed there and (Reed?) was up toward the front of the plane and I was in the back. Guys were standing up and I hollered, "(Reed?)," and he said, "I know." [laughter] So, he waited. (Reed?) and I stepped off the plane together and we both stepped on the ground. So, we both stepped off the ground in

America together. We put our feet in Vietnam at the same time and we got home, we put our--I kissed the ground. I kissed the ground. We didn't have a phone, so, there was nowhere to call. That was probably the 31st, because we left the 29th and with the time difference and all of this. My discharge date was supposed to be August 4th, but, because I had thirty days' leave accumulated and I'd have gone and come back and I'd have maybe less than a month, so, they just let me out of the Army at Fort Lewis. I caught a redeye flight to JFK. That's when I first got my first taste of how unpopular I was. Just the looks, it was just--it just didn't feel right. I took a taxi into Manhattan, to Port Authority. Then, I took a bus from Port Authority to Newark. Where my parents had moved to, Wanamassa, outside of Asbury Park, I went to my grandmother's house and my Aunt Laura was there and it was pretty deep. They had gotten a message to a neighbor--they called the neighbor down by my mother's and said that Billy's home--so, my father's sister, my two aunts, Aunt Laura and Aunt (Netty?), drove me from Newark home. I pull up; I had never seen the place before. It was an apartment, a long apartment building that, in the '20s, was a speakeasy. It was right across from a pond that was connected to the ocean and all the illegal booze used to come in there and there was gambling and Al Capone used to go there. [laughter] They lived there, only our family--pull up and I get out, I'm in my uniform and my mother is at the curb with my brother, Rob, who had passed away, and my sister Patty. She was six. She was going to be seven in July. When I went away, she was five. Yes, she just turned five. I remember having her on my knee and, when I left, she said to me, "You're going to come home, aren't you?" I said, "I'm going to do my damnedest." I got out of the car and they're at the curb. I hug my mother and she had a very concerned look on her face. It wasn't like this big, elated deal. She said, "Take it easy--your father isn't well." I didn't know anything about it. My father had had a massive heart attack in March, just before his fifty-third birthday, and he was in the hospital a couple of months. I didn't know and the doctor said, "Don't bring your son home," because my father couldn't take the shock of it. I didn't know what it meant. She said, "Take it easy--your father's not well." I said, "Where is he?" She said, "Well, he's upstairs and there's a nurse there." I walked in and my father was a construction guy, a short guy, but he was a pretty muscular guy, never affectionate, never abused us. He was mean to me when he wanted me to work at sixteen, but he wouldn't hit me. He was just verbally frustrated and mean. I don't think he really meant it. I made my peace with it. I walk in and there is this thin, gray-tone, ash-tone, with a nurse by his side. I walked over and I said, "Hi, Dad," and I put my hand out. Here, the guy that probably kissed me when I was an infant, but I don't ever remember him telling me he loved me and I never remember him hugging me and never kissed me, that I can remember, the nurse helped him to his feet and he turned into this crying, screaming, mass of humanity, screaming, "My son, my son." He just kept kissing me and squeezing me and I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to make of it. I was completely devastated. He calmed down a bit and I went in the kitchen and I got a glass of water. My mother was in there and said she was going to make coffee. The nurse helped my father out of the chair and walked him in the kitchen to sit. Before he sat down, the whole routine over again--it just threw me right in the toilet. I was completely spent. I was never more devastated in my whole life. Then, I found out what had happened, that he had had the heart attack. Now, we're going to get to the music, but I didn't know until twenty years later. In 1987, my kid sister had gotten married and moved to St. Louis. In 1987, I got divorced from my second wife and sold the house and blah, blah, blah. I decided to take a trip to see my sister. I went out and spent a few days and, one day, my sister and I went to a park and we were just talking, because she was so young when I was away. Then, when I got back, my head was so screwed up. Within three

months, I was like a drunk in the street. They were bringing me home dead drunk. I'd walk in bars and bars with these truckers and stuff and, like a jerk, I'd stand there--I was 119 pounds--and I'd stand there and I'd say, "You want to know something? There isn't a man in this place, there's not. You're not men, you're not men. Anybody here ever serve? Anybody been to war? Anybody? Well, then, you're not a man, don't talk to me." The owners knew me and they used to come over and say, "Billy, for God's sake." My head was just totally screwed up. I sat with my sister out there and I talked to her. I didn't know until then, that she told me the story. See, they were always broke. I had my money sent home from the war. Most of my money was sent direct. While I was in Vietnam, my brother was drafted and he was serving in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. My sister said that, one night, just before my father's heart attack, one night, the doorbell rang and it was Western Union. Now, back then, I don't know about today, I think it's still there, unless you live near a base, back then, families were notified. They didn't get calls. They got Western Union saying, "We regret to inform you that your son is gone." My sister said that my parents turned into ghost white, shaken, like she had never seen anything before. She was six years old at the time. They said, "Go downstairs and get," the nurse had lived downstairs in the other apartment, Mrs. (Rowan?), "Go down and get Nurse (Rowan?)." My sister said the nurse came up and sat between my parents and opened the Western Union. When she told my parents it was a money-gram from my brother in Leonard Wood, she said they both fell on the floor screaming, crying. She said it was awful. Then, I think either the next day, or I don't think the next day, but within two mornings, my father had a massive heart attack. Knowing that, I carried that. Within a week from being home from the war, I was in the emergency room. For years, I was constantly in fear that I was going to have to pay back for my father's illness, that I was going to have a heart attack. To move on, naïvely, I felt that while it's only two years, no big deal, I'll go back to New York. Now, they had no money, so, I was torn. It's a terrible situation here and he's sick now, he's disabled, but I got to give this a shot. For the first few weeks, I was walking around in my uniform, because I didn't know how to be a civilian. I went down to Asbury Park and walked around. I went to Steinbach's Department Store and a friend of mine's mother, I knew her, I walk in, I said, "Mrs. (Harten?), Billy, I'm home." She says, "I know," and walked away. Like, what? didn't want anything to do with me and I knew her when I was a kid, but I was a soldier in a war that she didn't agree with, I guess. I was devastated and it happened all over town. Now, they just wouldn't want to deal with me and I felt so isolated. So, I took the bus back to New York. I was raised with John Wayne movies and I go back in my uniform. I figured it's only two years and I go back to Kama Sutra and, at that time, by then, they had exploded. They were a major company. I walked in and they wouldn't see me. Finally, I got through. I went back again and I got through to this guy Frankie Mel. He met with me for a few minutes, again in my uniform, and he says, "Well, our roster's strong and there's nothing we can do for you." I felt my life was over. So, I got on the bus and went back to Asbury Park. I went to Jack's Bar and that started the downturn. I started drinking. In light of that, I felt, "Well, I got to do something to help the family." That first week that I was home, I was down in Asbury Park and I stopped in to see an old black fellow that had a shoeshine stand, but he was really a bookmaker. He was a gangster, but his shoeshine stand was the front. He used to book horses and he was a nice guy. I knew him before I went to the war. I went over there and I got a shine and I was talking to him and telling him, yes, the town really changed quite a bit. He was asking me, "How you doing? How'd you make out?" I said, "Pretty rough, and it's real rough now with the family the way it is." A businessman came in and sat in the chair next to me and cracked up a conversation with me while he was waiting for a shine. He

said, "You're a soldier?" I said, "Yes, I just got out. I just came back from Vietnam." He said, "Well, what are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I'm in the music business. I'm planning on just going back and to start over again, but I'm about to go back to New York and try to get back in the business." He was kind enough to give me his card and he said, "Well, if it doesn't work out, soldier, I own a company down the block. Just come over and I'll find work for you. I'll hire you." It was a collection agency. I put in my pocket. At that point, I started hitting Jack's pretty hard. The family was doing worse and worse and I wasn't getting anywhere, because I was so detached from music, the way music had evolved. I'm at Jack's one day and I'm pretty lit and I reached in and pulled some money out and the card fell out. I picked it up and I said, "You know what? I have to go there." The next morning, I think it was the next morning, I went down and he hired me. It was a collection agency. I was miserable, I was miserable. I was there a few weeks and they had a radio on in there and it was coming up on lunchtime. I was struggling, because I'm [working for] a collection agency and I was calling my relatives. [laughter] I had to disguise my voice, because I saw that, "Oh, that's my cousin," crazy, crazy people, whole family is nuts. All of a sudden, it was just before lunch and, up to then, I was pretty roughed up in the head, because on one end of the dial it was Jimi Hendrix and Doors, at the other end, it's Fifth Dimension. Anyway, on the radio comes *Windy* by The Association, "Who is creeping down the streets of the city?" I listened to that record, I went out to lunch and I walked up to the bus terminal and I got on the bus to New York and I never looked back and I've been in the business ever since. I just went up and roughed it, slept in the hallways, started paying attention, and that's how I found R&B, because I couldn't relate to a lot of the music. I rented a real small, dippy office in Asbury Park, which I hardly ever paid for, but they felt sorry for me, because I was a messed up vet. I bought a twenty-five-dollar, broken-down piano and I sat there and taught myself how to play it again and I started focusing on R&B. I was so bad with the alcohol that, in June of '68, I was home a year already and I was the best damn worst man at my brother's wedding. I was so screwed up. I was drunk at nine o'clock in the morning. I wore clothes that didn't fit me. I'm swaying back and forth, trying to get the ring out in the church. People wanted to kill me. He married into a family that were, like, wise guys, but not big wise guys. They were on that lower level, make-believe wise guys, and they hated me to begin with and I gave, like, a black toast. I acted like a street guy. Oh, it was just, oh, so stupid, just to intimidate people. I got so drunk, they took me home, put me in bed and I slept about a day-and-a-half. I didn't wake up. They thought I was dying. I got up and my hair was stuck and I let my hair start growing. I started growing hair right away and I just wouldn't tell anybody I was a Vietnam vet for many years. I looked worse than Manson, but I wouldn't talk about anything like that. Nobody for years knew my legal name, Torsiello, and no one knew I was even in the Army, let alone a Vietnam vet. I wasn't going through that again--except one guy, I told him, that was Jim Morrison, which I'll get to. So, I woke up after a day-and-a-half and I felt terrible and I looked worse. I stumbled in my mother's bathroom and I leaned over the sink and I looked in the mirror and I just stared at myself for a good few minutes. Then, it hit me, I said, "Do you know what? This is a disgrace. Your mother got her son back and you walked in on your own two legs. You owe it to those guys and you owe it to their mothers. You got to fix this." So, I stopped everything. I had my friend Ray Dahrouge, he was a good R&B writer. He wanted to write with me anyway and I focused on R&B, stopped drinking. I went up to the office twenty-two hours a day, starting the first week in July, and I listened to Jerry Butler's *The Iceman Cometh* by Gamble and Huff, all the way through, both sides, every day, and then, start writing. I made that commitment in July of '68. [Editor's Note: *The Iceman Cometh* was the eleventh album of R&B

singer Jerry Butler. Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff were a writing and production team that worked with Jerry Butler on the album.] In November of '68, I was at The Hit Factory with George Kerr producing, Jerry Ragovoy engineering, who's a big songwriter, wrote *Piece of My Heart* for Joplin and everything, and Debbie Taylor, listening to my first top five record being recorded, number five on the R&B chart, made it to *Bandstand*, and then, I found a home in R&B and I stayed there, and then, recorded with Ray as a duo.

SI: What was the song?

WT: It was *Never Gonna Let Him Know* by Debbie Taylor. It was all over the radio. It's interesting, because my father had gotten fed up because I wasn't doing much and I was having trouble breaking in. He didn't want to be hard on me, but he had struggled in the music business. He didn't like the idea that I might not make it and be as unhappy as he was. In early '69, it's very funny, he felt that if he put me out, I would wake up. So, he said, "You know what?" Plus, he hated blacks, so, he hated the fact that I was playing, that I was doing the music in the house, and I would have some of these people come to the house, because I was intermittent at the office. He told me--it was a Saturday--that he wanted me out, "Live in your office, do what you want to do, but I can't put up with it anymore." I said, "Okay." Now, I knew the record had come out and I knew it was building momentum, so, it was funny, it was great. I put all my little I had, I put it out on the porch on Saturday. I said to him, "Well, if you don't mind, I want to watch *American Bandstand* before I go, because I'm not going to have a television at the office. I'm going to have to live at the office. I'd like to see *Bandstand*, see what's going on. I'll have a coffee." "All right, go ahead." He's sitting there with the pipe and I already knew that my record was going to be on there. They used to rate the record, play a new record, kids would dance to it, and then, the two couples, they'd have them rate the record. So, I'm sitting there and my father's sitting there with the pipe and, now, they come to rate the record and they're playing the record and he was a classic--he took the pipe out of his mouth and he went, "Isn't that your song?" I said, "Yes, it's *Never Gonna Let Him Know*." Well, I don't think Neil Simon could have written a better scene. My father was always kind of a hustler. He takes the pipe out of his mouth and he said, "Bill, I saw this car and it's only a hundred dollars." [laughter] It was like right out of *The Honeymooners*. I couldn't help but laugh. I said, "Well, we'd probably work it out, no problem." He goes out on the porch and he starts carrying my stuff back in. We got to BMI. Broadcast Music Incorporated was a performing rights society that collects your royalties from getting airplay performances. It was obvious that we had a hit, so, they gave us an advance. I think it was a couple thousand bucks, no big deal. I got a hold of my brother. I didn't drive and I got a hold of my brother Richie and I said, "Look, I want you to take me down to this place. There's a '61 Dodge that Dad told me about over there." I went and I bought it. I told the guy, "Just give me the keys, leave it here and I'll have my brother bring my father down here." I went home and my father was sitting there and I went, "Here are these keys." He says, "What's this?" I said, "Richie's going to come over and you're going to go get that Dodge. I bought that Dodge for you." It was a great moment, because I was still able to do something for him. I'm glad I did that. Then, it kind of rolled along. '68 was an interesting year, because we were working with the music publisher in the Brill Building and we were preparing our own album. We later signed with Metromedia Records and recorded in '69, but, prior to that, in '68, even before we had the hit, we were working with this publisher. His former partner, they were Feldman, Goldstein and Gottehrer produced, they wrote, "My boyfriend's back and [you're] going to be in trouble."

[Editor's Note: Released in 1963, *My Boyfriend's Back* was written by Bob Feldman, Jerry Goldstein and Richard Gottehrer.] They produced *Hang On, Sloopy*. They were the Strangeloves, *I Want Candy*. Feldman broke out on his own as a publisher and producer along with Gary Katz, who went on to produce Steely Dan. His partner, Jerry Goldstein, had a company called Poster Ways and they had the rights for the Summer of '68 to manufacture posters of all the big touring rock acts and sell them at the concerts and pay the artist a royalty. They were making posters of Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Doors, Chambers Brothers, Soft Machine, Cream, Donovan. I was the only guy in the operation that didn't do drugs. I had just gotten off the alcohol kick that summer, so, I was pretty clearheaded. They said to me, "How would you like to make extra money? You can go on a Thursday and take posters on the flight, go to the shows, recruit some buyers, and you manage the sales and bring the money back. We can trust you with the money." I said, "Okay." Luck would have it, I got to travel with Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Cream. I used to sit in a small plane with Jack Bruce. It was pretty remarkable, but the thing that was really nuts about it was, here I was and, at that time, I really looked freaked out. Clothes didn't fit--who cared? There I was, a veteran of the war, smack in the middle of the Chicago Convention Riot, just took place, and Abbie Hoffman and all those guys were tearing everything to shreds. I'm weeding my way through demonstrations in New York to get into the building to write songs, wanting to pull the pin out of a grenade and lob it back over my shoulder, I was so angry, but I couldn't--I had to keep my mouth shut. [Editor's Note: In August of 1968, there was a large anti-Vietnam War demonstration outside of the Democratic Convention. One of the leaders of this demonstration was Abbie Hoffman.] What interested me, and it was disgusting at the same time, is that these people that were going to these shows were completely bombed out of their heads. Everything was "free love" and "do your own thing today," and "peace" and all this happy stuff. I couldn't believe the number of those people that went out of their way to insult me because my feet were so terrible. The VA gave me ointment to put on my feet and I had to wear white socks because my feet were in bad shape. In the summer, when it was humid, the dye from the socks, I wouldn't be able to walk. I had the hair, I had a raggedy mustache, I had the stovepipe pants, I had a Nehru that was three sizes too big, all flowers, I was wearing sandals with white socks, because I needed it. I can't tell you the number of people that went out of their way with homophobic slurs toward me for wearing white socks with sandals. I turned to Dahrouge, came with me to Bridgeport, Connecticut, to Hendrix and Soft Machine, and I said to Ray, "Do you know what? This is going to backfire, this whole movement, and I have news for you--I don't think Janice and Jimi are going to ever see forty years old, not carrying on like this," and I was right. Hendrix was an interesting guy, a very interesting man. One Doors concert was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at the arena out there. I flew in, got set up, I was staying in the same hotel, saw it, was an incredible show. The next day, I was up, out at the airport and I was ready to get a flight back to New York and Morrison was in the gift shop and I really talked to the guys. Hendrix, I talked to. I talked to Hendrix out there, when you can talk to him, when he was relatively coherent. Of course, Jack Bruce was a straight guy. I never really got a chance to talk to Clapton. He was always very off by himself and Baker was out of his mind, Ginger Baker, a great story on him here. So, I'm in the coffee shop and we get talking and, for some strange reason, as whacked out as Morrison was on stage, to talk to him, he was like a child. He was kind of soft-spoken, very bright guy. I told him, "Yes, I'm doing the poster thing here, but I'm writing." I said, "Yes, I was signed to Kama Sutra, and then, I got a draft notice and had to go to Vietnam, got back and start over again." For some reason, I felt comfortable doing that with Jim. He said, "Really?" He says, "That must have

been a hoot." I said, "It was a pretty rough time, but, to be honest with you, it's a pretty rough adjustment. It's a rough adjustment anyway, Jim, but adjusting back into the entertainment business is really one for the books." We talked a bit, but he was the only guy I kind of felt comfortable with to talk about it, a little bit, and then, I got right off it. Then, he had to catch another plane. So, that was one. Then, I can move on more towards how this all worked out with the music and all of that.

SI: Did your own views towards the war change at all? What were your views towards the war at that point?

WT: Well, I often ask myself that question. I think the honest answer for you is, for the first few years, especially the first year, I was so bombed out of my head, I rarely thought about it, except if I made a mistake and was in the room when the newscast was on, and then, I'd go out of my mind. It made me sick. If I saw someone coming home from the area, that was terrible and I'm still doing my thing. It's almost like I went back in the shell before I got drafted for a while where I didn't know much about it. Then, I went through it and I came home and I think a lot of it got doused with the alcohol, then, the fact that you weren't going to talk to anybody anyway about it, because all you were going to do is open up a can of worms. It wasn't until a few years later, after--well, the Tet thing was terrible and, of course, I was at my low point during Tet--when it got more towards '70 and I started opening my mind up to it, and then, I saw lots of different viewpoints and demonstrations, that I was still supportive of it, but I hated [it]. I can see if you--I resented the demonstrations, because I was well aware that there was a core group that really believed what they were opposing. They really believed it. It was their conviction that they were against this. They didn't agree, but they were committed to--it was honest, whether I liked it or not. What I really resented, when I came to realize that the size of those demonstrations, it was obvious to me that a lot of people, it was like going to a concert. You go to concerts with all that screaming, I don't know how anybody can really enjoy it. They do, but I mean, it's not all about the music, it's about the moment. It's about being there. It's about being part of something. That's the feeling that I got from a lot of the demonstrations, especially in New York. I understood the sentiment of people that were really sincere. Maybe they had lost friends or lost family or they came out of an educational institution which put it all in their head from that viewpoint, because educators were planting a lot of negative seeds, but I did realize, also, when it came to me, that a lot of these people are just there and they're the troublemakers. They're not the ones really trying to get a change going and make a point. These are the knuckleheads that are throwing the cold water on the whole thing. It was just like this recent Occupy Movement. I mean, most of those knuckleheads were just there for the publicity and causing trouble. So, it just diluted that. I can't even talk about that; certainly if you had an issue, there's certainly a more intelligent way to go about it than that. That was a struggle for me, because, now, you're double insulting me. You're not only insulting me by rubbing in my face that my service didn't matter and that I shouldn't have done it, but, now, you're rubbing in my face that you're a knucklehead and you're just part of a movement and it's not really a conviction. You're there just to join in because that's a place to smoke pot and act like an idiot. That was a double whammy for me and it bothered me a lot. It took a while to just realize. Then, I realize the busier I got and I started putting more records on the charts. Then, we ran into a big snag as artists, because we had a good run of R&B hits. We were recording and writing under our names, Terrell and Dahrouge, and Terrell could sound like a black name, so, our music was

amazingly received on radio. We put records on the charts and the stations played our music, and then, we got signed by Metromedia Records. We played three songs on the piano and they said, "You're in." They put a Terrell and Dahrouge record out. The first weekend the record came out, it was the most played record from New York to Atlanta, in every town, on all of the R&B stations, most picked and played. *Billboard Magazine* did a review. They predicted we would win a Grammy. The record company called the producer, the producer calls us up on a Sunday night. We had sold two thousand records the first weekend in Philadelphia. They sent down to Universal Distributors and they went through the records at retail, actual customers. The record was on the radio less than a week, on all three stations in that market, R&B. The record, you couldn't find a record in the stores. They hauled us up to New York and they hired a guy named Benno Friedman. Benno Friedman, who went on to be a pretty famous rock photographer, but he was a very good photographer who was getting started and he was recommended by another guy, he said, "This guy is going to be huge, you ought to use him." Oh, God, they followed us around New York all day, took pictures of Terrell and Dahrouge sitting on a park bench, all these different pictures. They took one with graffiti on the wall and that following week, when *Cashbox Magazine* came out and you opened it, the inside cover was Terrell and Dahrouge. It said, "Some of the words on this wall are unprintable, but the message is simple, that *Baby, Now There's Two of You* by Terrell and Dahrouge is heavy. These guys are the next force in the music business." We were where Hall and Oates leveled off, years later. We never heard of them back then, but we were like Hall and Oates. Even our beat and everything was like Hall and Oates. The magazine comes out and, now, we're preparing to do the album because the record's going like a house on fire. Len Levy, the president of the company, sent us a message to come to the office and we went in the office and he said, "I don't know how to tell you gentlemen this, but we just got word that we have to cancel your album deal." I said, "What?" He said, "We can't invest in the album." I says, "Well, the record is flying." He says, "No," he says, "you don't understand." He says, "Our promotion men called from the field and every station playing your record dropped it. Once they saw you were white, you were done." There was one DJ that opened his show on a Sunday morning and actually apologized to his audience and he let the audience hear him smash our record in a million pieces on the desk and that was painful. It ruined Terrell and Dahrouge, because we were writing great songs. We wanted *Watching the Children* out first, which was a song about unifying little white hands and black hands, form a circle in a schoolyard, and one of the lines was, "They have a grip that's so strong, if they can learn to hang on, a whole lot of things have to change." We were ahead of all of them with that message. We had a song called *Simple Black and White*, which just laid it out there, that, "Enough is enough. Let's get with the music." It was like the *Ebony and Ivory* before the *Ebony and Ivory,* but they insisted on *Baby, Now There's Two of You*, because it had a pop thing. [Editor's Note: *Ebony and Ivory,* written by Paul McCartney, was recorded as a duet featuring McCartney and Stevie Wonder.] It had a real pop beat and a real pop melody; it was a great record. I sounded awful, but that doesn't matter. A lot of people sounded awful. We got out of the deal and it just took the wind out of our sales. We went over to Paramount Records. We wrote two pop songs. Actually, Ray was really the lead writer on those songs. We sat at the piano for the vice president of Paramount Records in the Gulf + Western Building in Columbus Circle and we played two songs live and he said, "Welcome to Paramount." We were so distraught that we decided that we wanted to produce our own records, which was a big mistake, because we hadn't come along. We needed that producer, but we didn't trust anybody and we were writing poppy songs. After two of them, we got a lot of airplay, but,

then, the company wanted to do an album and we didn't get a hit yet. We had a lot of airplay, because I was a good salesman out there on the road. I'd get that airplay.

SI: What were the two songs that you were working on?

WT: Well, the first record on Paramount was *You Got to Me, Stephanie*. It was a bubble-gummy song. It was like something the Partridge Family would do, but here we were, two R&B guys. We were writing our best. Some of our strongest songs were almost like Southern R&B gospel songs, those R&B ballads. We were kings of R&B ballads and those lyric ideas we had, *He Knows My Keys Are Always in the Mailbox* and great songs, here, now, we're writing like we're The Monkeys or something. The second record was more of a pop country, a little more middle-of-the-road, a couple of really good songs and we started to get airplay. The company called us in and said, "We think maybe what we want to do is, we're getting some traction, so, why don't we do an album, and then, we can justify putting money into it, because we can sell albums for a lot more than we can sell these singles." I said, "No." I said, "I don't think we should do the album." It's one of those times I look back and say that was probably a mistake, but, at the time, I said to myself, "You know what? We're going to do all this and it's not Terrell and Dahrouge. That's not what we do." We're not performing. Ray didn't like to perform. I would've gone on the road, he wouldn't. I said, "You know, just to have another record out there…" We weren't getting along real good and he had a lot of pressure. He had children and his wife had another baby. They were up to three already. He went and signed with Cashman and West. I went on to start producing and I caught on in the mid-'70s as a producer and I've been doing it ever since. So, it's been a run. I've done over two thousand records. I've had fifty-nine on the charts, including Larry Carlton, who's been on the charts now about two years, his record. [Editor's Note: Larry Carlton is a Grammy Award-winning jazz and rock guitarist.] I broke through as a producer. I was very intrigued in the late '50s. I loved the song *Venus* by Frankie Avalon when I was in eighth grade in 1959, loved it. Matter-of-fact, in my autograph book, when I graduated, everybody signed your book and, in there, it had a page of my favorites. My favorite was Lloyd Bridges, because I liked that show *Sea Hunt*, my favorite book was *Shadow in the Pines* and I wrote in there my favorite song was *Venus* by Frankie Avalon, 1959. I was doing some records and I was playing in a band, The Spice of Life, at that time, in the '70s. I finally got a car, got a driver's license when I was twenty-seven. I got in a band and I was playing organ five nights a week. I get a call one day from a record company that I had put some songs with and they said--it was a pretty colorful company. Guys were connected, guys out of New York. They're all gone now, so, I could talk about it. There was a lot of underworld money in the music business back then, especially with the indie companies. You had to deal with them, because those are the companies that were giving you the shots. You had to start somewhere. I wasn't involved in any illegal activity, but I knew it went on. I just kept my mouth shut and made my music. I get a call one day and the guy says, "Billy, some friends of ours asked us to help Frankie Avalon. We want to know what we should do from your perspective." He didn't use words like perspective, by the way. "We want to know what you want to do." I said, "Sign him." They thought I'd say no, because they were ready to go back and say, "We talked to our producer and he can't do anything." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Sign him." I said, "You asked me--I would sign him." They said, "What the hell are you going to do?" I said, "I'll figure it out. Let's have a meeting with him and, if he likes it, I would sign him." I wrote a song they loved called *Somewhere Over Arizona*. It was a really good song, got

a lot of airplay, too. Frankie came in with a song a friend of his in Texas wrote. It was like a Bobby Vinton song. It was dumb. It was like a polka beat and I'm saying, "What am I going to do?" but I had in my head, a few months before, I stumbled on this disco beat, people were dancing to it. I'm considered, worldwide, one of the pioneers of disco--I mean, not that that's a big deal when I try to get coffee at the diner--but I was one of the early guys that worked that genre successfully. I came up with an arrangement in my head of *Venus*. The record company didn't want to do it, because they couldn't get the publishing, and Frankie said, "I don't want to touch that song." I said, "Okay, guys, I'll tell you what. I have a great rapport with the musicians. Let's cut your song and we'll cut my song." I was giving the musicians quite a bit of work, because I was also doing stuff for Mercury Records. [I said], "I'm going to ask the musicians to play my arrangement and, if you guys like it, you pay for it. If you don't like it, we throw it away. The musicians will do me the favor." They were great, I mean, they were the greatest--Bob (Babbitt?) played at Motown and Allan Schwartzberg. These guys were like the cream of the crop in the heyday of studio recording. I worked with them all and they liked me. Record the record, Frankie puts his voice on it and it just went like a rocket. I mean, it was almost like you hooked it up with the space shuttle and launched the thing, I mean, in twenty percent a week up to the chart, number one, Billboard Adult Contemporary, which was huge. All of a sudden, he was off to the races and he's never looked back. That's what inspired him. That's what inspired Allan Carr to call him, because, in one week, we did *Bandstand*, Dinah Shore, *Midnight Special*, Johnny Carson, *Bandstand*, Merv Griffin, five, six, seven national shows in one week, and it was a phenomenon. That's what attracted Allan Carr to put Avalon in the movie *Grease* and he's never looked back. I was able to build from there. [Editor's Note: Theater and movie producer Allan Carr produced the 1978 film adaptation of *Grease*.]

SI: Did you continue making disco records?

WT: Yes, I wrote and produced *Rio de Janeiro*, which is considered one of the iconic underground songs, still being played all over Europe. My music is much more popular in Europe--England, France, Germany--than it is here, although my jazz stuff of the last seven years, all my records I've done the last seven years, have charted. I've been somewhere on the jazz charts for seven years without falling off, because records overlapped. [Editor's Note: In 1978, artist Gary Criss worked with Mr. Torsiello on his album *Rio de Janeiro*.]

SI: You have gotten into so many different genres of music; why do you think you keep moving into so many different areas?

WT: Well, after we left Paramount Records in 1971, I made an appointment to go back up there to go talk to a guy named Chuck Gregory, who was the A&R [Artists and Repertoire] guy. He was a pretty cool guy and he was from, most of those guys at Paramount were--that company was bought by Gulf + Western back when the music business was starting to [decline]. Kinney Parking bought Atlantic Records and it was the demise of the business, believe me, when those knuckleheads got in it. [Editor's Note: The Kinney Parking Company began as a New Jersey-based business specializing in parking lot management. Over the years, the original company merged and expanded its business, including the 1969 takeover of Warner Communications, the parent company of Atlantic Records.] Chuck came from Columbia Records and he was a very well-schooled, old-school recordman and he liked me and I liked him and I didn't go up there

looking for any deals, because I walked out on him, but Chuck understood. I went up and I said, "Chuck, I'm starting out on my own. My success came as part of a team and, now, I'm going to attack this alone and I'm a little nervous." The advice he gave me, he said, "Billy, look, this is how it is." These are the statistics back then. He says, "On average, twenty-one people a year get hit by lightning. On average, seventeen people a year get in some entertainment and go to the top out of the gate the first time. So, you have a better chance of getting hit by lightning than making it that first time. The answer is diversity. Learn all areas of the business, learn the craft and learn it from different [angles]. You're a good writer, so, learn the publishing business. You're going to develop as a producer, there's no question about it, so, pay attention, learn the technical side as well as the music side. Just diversify, learn so that you could switch gears." That's what kept me independent, because I've been independent the entire time--I never worked for anybody--but I was able to make the switch. People have always ragged on me for not listening enough. Well, you don't listen enough.

SI: Your artists?

WT: Of music, of what was going on.

SI: Okay, all right.

WT: R&B, I did, but it also paid off for me, because some of my biggest records were so different that they established a direction. You know how many artists came out of the woodwork and took their hits from the '50s and redid them in dance beats? Al Martino and Bobby Rydell and all these people came out of the woodwork taking their hits, doing it like me, and then, *Rio de Janeiro* was a very unique record, broke the mold. Then, it started to get more underground-oriented, not that I'm some hot dog, but, I mean, I wouldn't listen to that advice. I'd say I listen, I mean, I listen technically to a lot of stuff, and I was always in the studio when my songs would be recorded and I always paid attention. Then, when I got the opportunity, after years on the road as a comedian in the '90s, things started to slow down. I became partners with Sigma Sound in Philadelphia, with Joe Tarsia, who did all the Teddy Pendergrass and O'Jays, and we started a production company with them. We were partners. Sitting next to Joe Tarsia for five years at that, we did about fifty albums next to him. That just technically took me to a level that was invaluable. [Editor's Note: Joe Tarsia is a recording engineer who has worked on over on hundred gold and platinum albums.] So, that's really the story. I had a lot of experiences with a lot of artists, a lot of well-known acts, started a lot of acts off. I've always--I probably had a lot more money. Of course, like everybody else, we made a lot of music we never got paid for, but my reward was always the process. I always focused on the process. If I was working, nothing made me happier. I can live in a small place off a road somewhere, doesn't matter to me, if I'm in New York, if I'm in there with those iconic musicians and I'm hearing my songs being played properly and I'm hearing my stuff on the radio and I'm rehearsing artists. I went on to make records with artists I looked up to, like *Blood, Sweat and Tears* was one of my favorite albums and I produced David Clayton Thomas many times. [Editor's Note: *Blood, Sweat and Tears* is the second album of the jazz-rock group of the same name. It was released in 1968. David Clayton Thomas was the lead singer for their second album.] I always wanted to get Helen Reddy. I always loved Helen Reddy's voice. I produced and own her only Christmas album of her career and I wrote two songs on that album, and Maria Muldaur and,

obviously, Avalon, Rydell. I got to work with a lot of people that I came up idolizing. The Dovells, I ended up working [with], opening for them as a comedian. How cool is that? So, that's where it came to today and it all kind of--it almost like centers around, it all played into it, the poor childhood, the being rejected so poorly, trying to get a job, being put through the roast beef story on the job where I was treated so disrespectfully--it all played into it, then, the idea that I survived the war. Everything was gravy; nobody got it. I couldn't watch war films at all. It wasn't until I finally brought myself--it was after my second divorce and I made a mistake. My head was all messed up, because I really didn't want to get divorced and I had a stepdaughter that I adored and they took her away from me. I think I wanted to punish myself, so, I went and watched *Platoon*. It devastated me to the point where I almost got into a major car accident, but two things out of that film that I had lived, other than a lot of the war stuff yet--when his friend got on the helicopter, just before that big fight up in A Shau, the black fellow, and the orders came down for him, it was his time to go home and he told Sheen's character, "Listen, man, all you got to do is make it to the world, man, and it's all gravy." That was the way I felt, after all the tough stuff and the rejection and when I got really down low and I'd be sleeping in the hallway and run out of money and take a bus to New York with a one-way ticket, not knowing if I'm going to be able to place a song or not, and, if don't, how am I going to live? but it was still all gravy. I used to say that to myself. "You know what?" People used to say to me--I remember, one time, a friend of mine had a pretty good job, saw me really having a tough time, and he said to me one night, over a drink, he said, "Billy, you're a smart guy. What if you go through all of this and you don't make it?" I said, "Well, I'll never know, because I'll die trying, because, to me, what's bad after what I lived through?" More importantly, I have such deep respect for the opportunity to go on with my arms and legs and the opportunity to go to bed at night knowing that no matter what I accomplish, nothing would be as important to me as sparing my mother a broken heart. The other scene was the one at the end, when Charlie Sheen was in the chopper leaving and he did that recitation at the end where he said he felt that it was his responsibility to go on and make something of himself, out of respect for the people he left behind. That happened to me at my mother's bathroom, exactly. Those two scenes kind of made that film a little more tolerable for me. The rest of it just threw my head, terrible, and I can't watch it anymore. I won't watch it anymore. So, it's come full circle and, now, I have to say that today, only since I got sick--I started getting sick seven years ago, between the heart, and then, the cancer--then, I never bothered the VA for anything, because they treated me so poorly after the war, but I heard that they were compensating Vietnam vets. They made a clear connection with Agent Orange to prostate cancer and a guy I used to see at 7-11, who was a VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] member, said, "You ought to join the VFW and you've got to go over to see--you need a veteran's officer." I went and looked into it and, sure enough, the VA stepped up to the plate and compensated me. They just rated me one hundred percent unemployable. They're compensating me very well and they've treated me well, because I didn't want anything for years. Even the service officer said, "Look." I says, "No, I've always felt guilty--I've made it home and there's so many boys that need [it], coming home maimed." They said, "You've earned it." It took me a while to get comfortable with the fact that I did earn it. I didn't feel worthy of it and I felt like it was a slap in the face. They called me in 1980. I've been a member of Disabled American Veterans for forty-five years and I got a call in the '80s. I got a call in the '80s and my former wife went nuts, because we weren't doing that well. Business changed, I ran into some money trouble and wasn't really doing that great. I got a call from the Disabled American Veterans and they said, "We see in your service records that you served in areas where dioxin,

Agent Orange, was sprayed and want you to know that we just got a big settlement from Dow Chemical. We want to send you the form, so that you could apply for your share of the settlement." I said, "Okay." I said, "Can I ask you a simple question?" I think it must've been '84, because the Vietnam Memorial was about two years old. I hadn't been there yet, but I said to him, "Have you been to the Memorial in Washington?" He said, "Yes, I have." I says, "Well, do me a favor, the next time you go over there, take any name off the wall and send his mother my money, because my mother got her son back. When I went to serve the country, I didn't go to serve the country to sue. As far as your parades go, I got my parade being born an American. That was my parade. I'm supposed to serve. I was supposed to serve. I owed the country. The country didn't owe me, I owed them and, if Agent Orange was part of war, it was a part of war and I accept it. I accept the responsibility for it and I'm not going to take money, knowing my mother was spared. So, you give it to a mother that wasn't spared," and I hung up. It took a lot to go and try to get compensation, because I just--but, to come to the end here, what it's done for me, it's amazing and it helped me get well, too. It's helping me, of course, taking good care of myself. My wife's retired. We're very health conscious with foods and supplements and I'm bouncing back well, knock wood. It kind of put everything in perspective, so that I could--it's almost like coming out of the closet. Like, now, I've come to terms with a lot of stuff. I found the orphanage, which now I can deal with Vietnam, because I have a tangible positive. The other stuff will never go away and I still have extremely violent dreams and I'm still bothered by a lot of it. Stuff like Benghazi and some of this other stuff drives me crazy, to see these youngsters suffer like that, knowing firsthand what it is, but I'm able to [deal with it], through my illnesses and through the contact with the VA, and then, I was just awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, honored by the State of New Jersey, with a lot of other vets, but much appreciated with the citations from the Governor honoring my distinguished service and my patriotism, which is good. I did a lecture at the New Jersey Vietnam Memorial and I did an educational forum and that's what gave me the idea to pursue the lectures. That's why doing these oral histories is so important for me, because it's going to build the credibility. I'm still going to keep my hand [in music], I got a publishing catalog, but my focus now, going forward, is going to be getting the story out for the generations and getting the story out for today's vets about how, with time and focus, you can kind of latch on to whatever good was there, whether it's in Iraq with southern Iraq, the wonderful things they did with the schools or helping some of these villagers in these other areas, like we did with the children. I have the orphanage and I have my comrades and I have PBS. So, to come full circle, at sixty-eight years old, I'm extremely blessed to have it in perspective and I'm extremely grateful to you and Rutgers, as I was to West Point. On January 3rd, I'm doing an on-camera for the Library of Congress.

SI: Good.

WT: I'm probably going to do something at Monmouth University and I'm going to make myself available for lectures, participate in programs, educational programs, because I know this younger generation is very intrigued and I believe I've got a lot to bring to the table, because my music career and how I was in the trenches in the '60s through it and how I can talk about the music and the war and how that all wound up. I think it's very interesting and I really want to share it as much as I can. So, on that note …

SI: Yes, that is a good note to end on. We appreciate you sharing your story and all your service.

WT: My privilege.

SI: Thank you very much.

WT: Thank you very much.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

Reviewed by Jesse Braddell 4/15/2014
Reviewed by William Buie 2/18/2016
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 3/4/2016
Reviewed by William Torsiello 4/7/2016
Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/22/2016