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Charlton E. Prather (CP): Let me tell our viewers that we're privileged, today, to have Dr. J. Basil Hall, the original and organizing health officer for the Lake County Health Department, that has a fascinating public health career, a prolific writer, an often recognized writer but an often recognized speaker, highly entertaining person.

We won't tell you his age because he came to Florida in the '30s. He's loaded with historic, important stuff. Dr. Hall, it's a privilege to say thank you for your agreeing to sit with us and to review your very colorful public health history, both in Florida and elsewhere, as I understand. Let me ask you, what brought you to public health [in] Florida?

J. Basil Hall (JH): Thank you for those flattering remarks. I'm happy to be here. My brother was here in Lake County. When I was asked to come to Lake County, [the county] had had nine or ten doctors in eight years. My brother was one that was here when they had three in the same year, that's Frank M. Hall, who is the—I guess the health center is named for him in Alachua County.¹

CP: That's correct.

JH: That's who brought me here, is Frank, because I was in the military and got out of the military and didn't have any place to go. I was training for surgery when I went in, and I

¹The Alachua County branch of the Florida Health Department named its primary unit after Frank M. Hall, who was the county's first health officer.

was in the military five years and ten months. I didn't touch a scalpel while I was in there and here I was, coming back out. So I didn't go back into surgery, changed my life there.

This picture that I'm holding here was a WPA [Work Projects Administration]² building that they built for the health department. That was 1938. That's when I came here. The first trip here, I was with the old Civilian Conservation Corps³. He's [Prather] too young to remember it, I guess.

I had Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina, all the camps, and I was the surgeon for those. We had a camp up here at Ocala, and it had the Ocala National Forest as one of its projects, building roads in there. That's where I first met rabies and health problems in Florida because I had learned that, about five years before, a person in Lake County had died, killed by rabies.

So, that was my beginning there. What I hold in my hand here was: Lake County commissioners voted to establish a health department. WPA agreed to build them a building, and that was the first building. I came here for that.

CP: In 1938?

JH: Nineteen thirty-eight. That is my first, then, went away. With the CCC, I was stationed at Charleston, South Carolina. I had Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. And then when I was ordered into service, I was ordered to General Patton, and then I was ordered out of there, into the school of aviation and medicine. That's what got me being in aviation medicine.

So, my boards are actually in public health. I'm certified in aviation medicine on the professional level there. The thing that got me interested in public health preventative medicine, more so, was the fact that I was responsible for 220 boys, and they had rabies in Florida and in Ocala National Parks, where they were working. Those kids, at that age—the CCC was filled by boys from 18 up to 23.

The interesting part about that were they were paid 30 dollars a month, but they didn't get it. They only got 15 [dollars], and 15 dollars was sent to their parents because they were

²The Work Progress Administration, later renamed the Work Projects Administration, was the largest agency of the American New Deal; it employed millions of people to carry out public works projects.

³The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), one of former president Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs, was a public employment program for unmarried men ranging from ages 18 to 23.

sons of people who were unemployed and were suffering from the Depression. So, we went from there on my interest in public health in Florida. When I came back from the military after five years and ten months, I came down and asked Dr. George Dane if he had a job for me.

And he says, “I don’t know. Who do you know in public health?” I told him Frank M. Hall, who was down in Gainesville. He says, “Well, that’s all the recommendation you need. You’re hired.” And he hired me, and then they appointed me to be director of division of cancer control.

CP: Up in Jacksonville.

JH: In Jacksonville. I was stationed up there in Jacksonville, in [the] division of cancer, and then Dr. Sowder⁴ asked me if I wanted to go get my master’s degree in public health. I said to him, “I certainly did.” He said, “Where do you want to go? You want to go to the University of North Carolina or somewhere?” I said, “No, I want to go to the University of California at Berkeley.”

He says, “We’ve never sent one to the University of California at Berkeley.” I said, “Well, I don’t want to go, if you can’t send me there.” He said, “Well, I’ll see what I can do about it.” I was the first person that they ever sent to the University of California at Berkeley.

CP: There was only one other, too, by the way.

JH: But Hill⁵ went after I did.

CP: Did he go to California?

JH: Dr. Hill went through—

CP: Well, there are three.

⁴Dr. Wilson T. Sowder was a prominent figure in Florida’s public health system for over 30 years. Under his tenure as a Florida state health officer, he developed health departments in each of Florida’s counties. Dr. Sowder was interviewed as part of the Florida Public Health Oral History Project on June 24, 1997.

⁵Dr. Hugh M. Hill had a long and celebrated career in Florida public health, serving in the Alachua County Health Department for many years as well as teaching at the University of Florida, where he received the prestigious Hippocratic Award four times.

JH: Three? Who is the other one?

CP: Saslow.

JH: Oh yeah.

CP: Of Miami.

JH: Yeah. I never knew him, but Hill called me up and asked me how I liked it. I said, “I liked it. That’s the reason I was there, but you can’t go there.” He said, “Yeah, I think I can.” So Dr. Sowder let him go there.

So, I came back there, and the health department director was open because I said they’d had nine, eleven—I believe that, actually, the more I’m thinking about it, in 10 years, they had had 11 different directors.

CP: Here? In Lake County?

JH: In Lake County. The coincidental part about it: one year, they had three. One of those doctors they had was Frank M. Hall, who the health center’s named for up at the University of Florida town.

CP: Yes, in Gainesville.

JH: Incidentally, Frank said, “Don’t you go down there. That is a hard job. You won’t like it.” I said, “I like challenge. I’m going down there.” But Frank advised me not to come here. I had three opportunities. I could have gone to Palm Beach. I could have gone to Highlands County. I could have gone to Lake [County] because I had been in Highlands. I had been to Highlands. During the war, that’s where my primary flight training was taken, down there. But I took Lake over my brother’s—

CP: Objections?

JH: He recommended taking one of those others. He said, “You’ll have a hard time,” because he came down here thinking about being the health director, and he stayed—I think he says he lasted two weeks.

CP: Why were they so tough?

JH: Oh, they weren't tough. The point was they weren't giving much money. Now, I'll tell you about my being hired. Sowder says, "You have to go down there. You have to go before the commissioners, if you want that job." I said, "I like it. I'll go." I went down to the first commission meeting they had after I talked to Dr. Sowder, a nice bunch of men, and I presented my case.

There's a little fellow there, Mr. Harry Stokes, one of the nicest chaps you'll ever meet, but smoked cigarettes, rolled his own. He sat there and listened to me talk about it. When they had to, before they voted—they vote—they had a little meeting.

They broke up the official meeting, and Mr. Stokes came up, and he said, "Doc, how long you going to stay?" We hadn't heard of Khrushchev then, or I'd have said that. I said, "I'm going stay here until you boys are left. Until they're all running for state senator or governor. I'm going to stay here until every one of you are retired or elected governor.

"The first thing, before I'm even hired, I'm going to give you some medical advice. Did you know that you've got a cancer there on that lip?" He said, "Doc, somebody the other day told me that I had better go see a doctor about it." I said, "You had better go see a doctor. Somebody better take you, if you don't go, fella."

We talked a while, and then they came back in. And then the chairman of the board, Mr. Frank Owen, he said, "Well, doctor, you are going be excused now, and the boys will vote on you." That little fellow got up and said, "You don't have to vote on Dr. Hall because I've already hired him." I said, "Thank you, sir." He was one of the best friends I had on that.

But anyway, he went to see the doctor and had his little growth removed. But he never failed to tell that. But he smoked cigarettes, and he rolled his own. He rolled them out of a sheet of paper that they got out of a Sears Roebuck⁶ catalog.

CP: Really?

⁶Sears, Roebuck & Co. is the official name of the Sears department store.

JH: Yeah. That's the way I was hired in public health in there.

CP: What kind of department did you have? How many employees? What was you doing?

JH: That was just it. When this health department was organized, each one of the commissioners reserved the right to put an employee in there. The county commissioner says, "I want my sister."

CP: To be the secretary over there.

JH: Carrie Lee. I know they can cut some of this out, won't they? Carrie Lee was the secretary. I came and stayed 26 or 27 years because I didn't get those commissioners buried or out, but they were all gone. After 26 years, now, I retired. But Carrie Lee was still there.

CP: She was?

JH: She was the first. She was just there when I left. One of other wanted to have her nurse and so forth. But the point was, we had, Ms. O'Bear was the director of nurses, head of sanitarians.

CP: Ms. O'Bear was here when you came?

JH: Yes sir. We had a 50 year reunion. She was at the state 50 years and most of it was with this place right here, all but two years. She had more than 50 years at the state before she retired. They just had four. They had a sanitarian, they had the clerk, and Ms. O'Bear, director of nurses, and they tried to get a health director all the time.

CP: Remind me the year. Was this '45 or '46?

JH: No. This was '49.

CP: Forty-nine, okay.

JH: See, I went to the school in California and was out there for nine months. When I came from there, that's when I came down here in '49. That was June of '49. And then we stayed here, and we built—but the state was only furnishing 25 cents, I think.

CP: On the dollar.

JH: The population was 29,300 and something, I think. The county commissioners, the amount they gave was 25 cents. You figure that's about, I want to say, that's between 5,000 [dollars] and 10,000 [dollars], I guess that's what it would be, between 5,000 and 10,000.

But this fellow asked me, "Doc, why can't we keep a health officers?" I said, "It's just one reason, because you don't pay them enough. You fellas deserve a health officer as good as the health officer in Dade County."

He said, "How much they pay him?" I said, "I don't know exactly how much they pay him. But if you want to keep a health officer, that's what you going to have to pay me."

Then I told Dr. Sowder. Dr. Sowder said, "We can't pay you that." I said, "I know you can't." He said, "We can't pay but a second. That county only calls for a health officer two, that's all we can pay." I said, "If Mr. Stokes and the boys want to pay me more, what about it?" He said, "I have no questions. I'm not going to ask any questions about that."

CP: Just don't tell me about it.

JH: No, I told him about it. I told him. He said, "Just don't put it on your record." Then we had a problem. I had to tell him about it. On my retirement, all I had built on my retirement was—

CP: What was the official record?

JH: The official record. I said, "We've got to get that changed," and that was changed. What they paid me, I got credit on my retirement, but it took about a year or two to get that. I don't guess you ever knew that, I wasn't supposed to tell that—

CP: No, I really do.

JH: You did? Did you hear about it?

CP: Yeah, I have some stuff about that.

JH: Because he asked me, “Why?”—he wasn’t saying just, why—“Why in the hell can’t we keep a doctor here?” That’s what he said, and he’s a rough talker. I plainly told him. If you paid him enough, he would keep on.

CP: What were your major public health issues in those early days?

JH: I’ll tell you what my brother told me it was: the social diseases. He said, “All you’re going to do is you’re going to be running a filling station down there for syphilis.” My brother told me that. He used every argument he could to keep me from coming here because he thought I’d flop, I guess. I was going to stay a week or two just like he did or three weeks.

CP: Was that true you got here?

JH: Yeah, venereal disease. Oh my, we had—

CP: In the vernacular, you ran a clap house. Did you?

JH: What?

CP: You ran a clap house.

JH: No, I didn’t take it that way. I gave a lot emphasis on that. J. C. Steel was head of the venereal disease control. He represented you, didn’t he?

CP: Yes, he did, down in Jacksonville.

JH: You remember J. C. Steel? J. C. came down and I told him what my brother told me. He said, “Well, I’ll help you,” and he did. It was easy on me. Incidentally, is J. C. [still] living?

CP: No.

JH: No, I was afraid he died.

CP: He died a number of years ago.

JH: Oh, I was afraid he wasn't because he was—now, my brother was a bigger problem when I came here, telling me not to come. I had no real problem. It was so easy. The commissioner that day said, "What do you think you have to have to make us a good health department and stay with us?"

I said, "I think you've got to put in your mind, you've got to have a dollar per capita in your health department." I said, "I'm not going to ask you for that this year because you only got 25 cents in there now. I'm probably going to ask you for 75 the first year, and then we'll probably go to a dollar on that, if you like me." That's the way it went. I always got what I wanted on my list.

CP: They liked you. Of course, everyone else liked you too.

JH: Anyway, I never had any trouble. I got everything. I built that health department in Leesburg over there, built the one we've got over here now. I didn't ask for a building fund. I used my own budget to get federal funds, matching. I never asked him to give me money to build a building.

CP: That's marvelous. That's rare in Florida.

JH: But I don't know what happened there. That's on the record, I wouldn't be telling you. Now, where are we going from here? I had my speech memorized when I had—that table. I was going to reach and get it, but I haven't got it.

CP: Well, we can get some of that.

JH: No, you can't read it like I've got it written.

CP: Yeah, we can bring some in.

JH: I was answering a question, what were my problems. One of the problems was taking care of my speaking engagements. That was my big problem. One day, I made to have five talks, five talks. That's why I wanted this thing [referring to his written speech]. That

is what caused me to develop a speaker's bureau. I wanted somebody to help me. This article—

CP: This is for the health department?

JH: No. It's the Chamber of Commerce, Lake County, public speaking bureau, the chamber of commerce because I was going to work film on it because he's the one that's going to have to give speeches.

I'd get call, after call, after call, and they wouldn't tell me days ahead. I remember I had one call. He said, "Over here at the Kiwanis, I'm program chairman. I'd like to have you make a talk."

CP: Today at noon.

JH: No, he didn't say today at noon. He said, "I'd like to have you talk." I said, "I'd be glad to make it. How much time do I have?" He said, "Well, you don't have very much time." I said, "Well, how much time do I have?" He said, "What time is it?" I said, "It's 11."

He said, "Well, you have one hour. I want you over here to make a talk," and I went. I had problems like that all the time. The school science teacher, he always wanted the public health officer to talk to his science class. Not just once, he'd like to have me there to talk because he could go off, go down, or he could not be there that day. He could get the health officer to teach his class that day.

And so, that is why this came on. I developed a speaker's bureau. In there, I tell you how well it worked because I got to where I didn't have to make any. They'd call me, and I said, "Now, I can't." I'd ask them what day it was, and I said, "I'm full up on that, but you call the chairman of commerce. They've got a speaker's bureau, and they'd have a speaker on there to take care of all of them."

CP: You were speaking to public health subjects?

JH: No, I was speaking on anything. No, that was it. Dr. Ochsner and I were the original cigarette—

CP: Anti-cigarette—

JH: Nuts, you know. When they called Dr. Ochsner or me, and you asked them, “Well, what you want us to talk about?” It’s, Talk about anything except cigarettes. We don’t want to hear anything about cigarettes. I imagine I had some say, Talk to us about anything except public health.

CP: But it was useful to your health department and your relationship—

JH: To get an advertise—

CP: Oh yes, good PR.

JH: If I told them I wasn’t going to talk on public health, I could start out on the Air Force or Charles Lindbergh⁷ and talk about two minutes, and then, like the preacher, that reminds me of. You should be tithing.

They told him to never preach on tithing. He said, “I’m not going to talk about tithing today. I’m going to talk about something else.” He’d talk about there, and then, in about two minutes, he’d be right down—

CP: Oh, that reminds me of tithing.

JH: I can’t talk on that without mentioning tithing.

CP: This was excellent PR for the health department.

JH: Good public relations. In fact, this article—am I being filmed?

CP: Yes, you are.

⁷Charles Lindbergh (1902- 1974), often referred to as The Lone Eagle, was an American author, aviator, inventor, military officer, and activist. In 1927, Lindbergh famously completed the first-ever continuous flight from New York to Paris in *The Spirit of St. Louis*.

JH: This is the best, one of the best, public relations things that I ever did.

CP: I have a reprint of that somewhere, that article.

JH: Yeah. I didn't get that many requests for it. I had a 100 on that. But that didn't cost but ten, five or ten—that cost about 10 cents.

CP: That was published in the *Florida Medical Journal*⁸, wasn't it?

JH: Oh no. Nursing outlet bought that. Nursing outlet paid money for that. Paid their top price. That was probably 10 dollars. *Florida Medical Journal* didn't pay anything. Now, the American Academy of General Practice kind of changed that professional articles being paid for. They paid so well for it, that they got some of the others to pay. That was the big problem, and I'm glad you had that in there. I wouldn't have thought about it.

CP: You've mentioned rabies a number of times.

JH: Oh, I mentioned on the rabies, and I was talking about—you had an old joke to put in there. We had a good joke came out of that. We had one lady that was in her third trimester. That's about sixth, seventh month. We were disturbed about giving her shots at all. Of course, we weren't going to give it to her in her stomach. She was a little skinny girl and she had little old arms—

CP: She had been exposed to rabies?

JH: She had been bitten by her own—

CP: Pet raccoon?

JH: No, three-month old puppy, on the nose, bit on the nose. The incubation period on rabies is the distance it is from the brain. That's not very far from the brain.

CP: That's very close.

⁸The *Florida Medical Journal* is the primary publication of the Florida Medical Association.

JH: We had never treated and no doctor in the state had ever treated one, a pregnant mother, for rabies. We didn't know what that vaccine—it was a harsh vaccine. We didn't have that good one you boys have got now. We couldn't find anybody that had ever treated one.

US Public Health Service⁹ didn't have a record of ever having treated one. England had never—I went as far as that to find out. We were the first ones. We went ahead and treated her anyway, with our fingers crossed. She got along fine, except she did develop temperature, like quite a few of them developed temperatures.

CP: Yeah, they did with that vaccine.

JH: We followed her. Her husband was a marine. He was a marine engineer, and he was transferred from here to Mobile after the baby was born. And, of course, we wanted to follow it. I followed it, and she had two other children.

I followed her up. There were six months, at least, to ask how the baby was doing. After about two years, I called her, and this was my last call. I told her I wouldn't be following her anymore, I just wanted to know if that baby was normal as its other siblings.

She said, "No, it's not really, not really." I said, "What's the difference in it and the other two children?" She said, "With the other two kids of mine, they fuss. They get mad and they stomp. This child doesn't do any of that." I said, "You mean that child never gets mad?"

"Oh yes," she said, "He gets mad. He gets mad more than the others, I guess, but he doesn't—" I said, "He still doesn't cry or stomp the floor?" She said, "No, he runs and jumps up on the bed and gets on his all fours and barks. That's the only thing he does." Now, that mother told me that. She wanted something—

CP: Now, Dr. Hall. But the mother said that.

JH: His mother said that. Of course, she just had a sense of humor, and she had heard me tell some stories too, I guess.

⁹The US Public Health Service (PHS) is the primary division of the US Department of Health and Human Services. Its mission is to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the nation.

CP: I bet you she had.

JH: Now, that threw me off.

CP: What else did you do about rabies because Lake County was kind of a fester of rabies in your early days?

JH: We got a state law passed immediately. I got the veterinarians to change their rules. The veterinarians would not immunize a puppy until it was 12 months old because the immunization wasn't as effective until they got that old. It didn't interfere.

So I got them to start giving it at three months old because that pup was three months old, and I started doing that. That's the first thing. I got the state legislature to pass a law that all dogs had to be immunized.

We're the one that got that law passed. We did not eradicate is that article that I want to show them. It says we did not eradicate rabies, and we'll never eradicate rabies. We got it to an irreducible minimum.

CP: This article that you're referring to, about the rabies problem in Lake County, tell me about that.

JH: We're off track now. The article was the story of a stray dog, is what it started out by. It starts out as a stray dog that went up and down [U.S. Route] 441 for about 12 miles biting and fighting ever dog it met and whipping them all. The rabies that developed, developed within a mile on either side of that road.

I never had a rabid animal more than a mile away from that strip. The reason we couldn't eradicate it was that we had rabid animals appearing all the time in Ocala National Forest. We couldn't do it. But we got to an irreducible minimum, and that's what it is today.

CP: It's still there. You still have some.

JH: It's still there. We still have rabid animals right here in Mount Dora. When I see a raccoon that's friendly, it scares me to death. It scares me to death because I use a

walking stick. They say, Oh, you carry a walking stick because you're crippled or to fight the ladies off.

And I say, "No, it's to keep dogs at their distance." I will not let any dog or friendly animal get within walking stick distance. I hit it. I say, "I'm going to have some fights with dog owners, but I can't help it because Mount Dora has rabies, and we'll have rabies forever because it's got the Ocala National Forest up there."

We got it, now, to an irreducible minimum. The plans we put in, we reduced it so we didn't have any cases of rabies in cats or dogs for 20 years. I wrote an article on that on—see that's all gone now. I'm just now thinking about it. It makes you wonder. So are we.

It looked like we had eradicated it, but I told them that we hadn't eradicated it, and we weren't claiming it because it would never be any lower than we had it. We had it just to the irreducible minimum, we thought.

CP: Can I refocus on the venereal diseases? What sort of program did you mount? You commented that was your major problem when you first came.

JH: I started—that's another thing, my letter's in there. I want you to read it, my last letter. I wrote a weekly newsletter for 25 years, and I wanted you to see that. I wish I'd have thought of it.

CP: You had a copy of your newsletter here, the one with the health department picture on the front.

JH: No, no, no. But they're just mimeograph sheets. My letters were on two or three sheets. I had one sheet of it. The last page of my final article after 25 years is in yonder. On that, I made a report of any disease I had diagnosed that week. The first thing on there was gonorrhea¹⁰.

For 25 years, I got a letter from the doctors telling me, a case of gonorrhea and so forth and so on and, confidentially, the names of somebody that somebody should check with because they had been exposed to their patient. That is the main thing that I did, weekly reporting to doctors. And my weekly write back because I would write them a letter every week to tell them I wanted that. I wanted that. That's because the weekly disease—

¹⁰Gonorrhea is a common sexually transmitted disease in both men and women and is caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*.

CP: Morbidity report. Yeah, weekly morbidity report.

JH: But it wasn't morbidity. I said infectious disease or—it wasn't catching diseases, disease that can be transmitted, influenza, but I can't think of the word. Oh hell, I want to tell Jane, there, that I had that disease that you lose your memory. I can't remember the name of the disease. She could tell me the name of the disease that causes you to lose your memory. What's the name of it?

CP: Parkin—

JH: No, not Parkinson's—

CP: Alzheimer's?

JH: Alzheimer's. Thank you. See?

CP: Alzheimer's.

JH: Yeah. Most of the time, they think I'm serious, but I've forgotten the name of it. They'll say, Alzheimer's, just like that, no problem. Even you couldn't think of it there.

CP: Address some of the other early public health problems that you found yourself in the midst of in a new health department in a relatively small and, at that time, rural—

JH: First, they didn't have enough personnel. First, they didn't have half enough sanitarians and shortage of personnel. That was the first problem.

CP: That was an issue, yes.

JH: The other thing was that the people, and I hate to say this now, but I guess it's all right, they know that it is true. The big problem was that the Lake County Medical Society did not fully appreciate what the health department was doing.

Some of them thought it was a sly way of introducing socialized medicine. Some of them thought they were going to introduce something like Medicare, something like that.

CP: How did you overcome that, because you did? You ultimately became a friend of the medical establishment. You were president of the medical society, too.

JH: I want to tell you a little more about it before I tell you how because I never overcame it 100 percent, I don't think. In keeping with what Mr. Stokes said, "Why can't we keep you doctors here?" one of the doctors came to me. I had been here a little, probably two or three months.

He said, "The medical society doesn't really want a health department." I said, "How personal is that?" He said, "Personally, I don't want a director of the health department of the county either." A doctor told me that, and that's the first time I've ever publicly told that.

But there was a, not a collateral, the stuff that follows up on that story because that doctor didn't stay here too long because he got in trouble with two of the grand old doctors here. I won't use their names necessarily because of what I'm going to tell about it.

He stayed gone about five or six years. He quit paying his dues. The county he was practicing in, he apparently never joined. He never asked to join, never paid his dues. And then his wife, at that time, was a nurse, and she came back up here and was working in the county, and so he moved back up here and went into practice. He applied for membership in the society.

The same one who had told me that he personally—that the county medical society, didn't want it. Now, that is why they didn't, the doctors, didn't stay, basically. Of course, I put the emphasis on salary. But I don't owe this as much to salary because there's some of them there that went other places and stayed 10 to 15 years on the same salary.

CP: Yes, yes, yes. The local physicians didn't accept them, ran them out of town.

JH: What people thought about it, people thought that they should get up at midnight and come see them.

CP: Take care of the sick.

JH: Take care of the sick. And their social status had nothing to do with it. That was a real problem. But this doctor came back, and he applied to be admitted to the Lake County Medical Society.

No—he wrote in, “My membership reinstated.” And, boy, the doctors that he had insulted when he left here and so forth and so on, boy, they jumped on it. They said, “If that fellow is ever let in this society, we will never come back to the society.”

And so, he didn’t get in. And then he had the secretary wrote him a letter that said, You are not qualified for a membership in the Lake County—you do not qualify. It was a very nice letter. I signed it.

“You do not qualify for it,” and he came to me. I don’t exaggerate: not the first time, but the second or third or fourth time he came to me, you could see tears go down his check.

CP: Was he repentant for the way he talked to you?

JH: No, he never did apologize. In fact, if he remembered what he said to me, he never admitted it.

CP: But you served a number of terms as president of this medical society?

JH: Only one time, but I was secretary [for] nine years. Secretary [for] nine years, and then secretary [for] one year, and then I was state delegate from then on—

CP: Delegate to the FMA¹¹, Florida Medical Association.

JH: And was national delegate to—

CP: AMA [American Medical Association]¹²?

¹¹The Florida Medical Association, or FMA, is a professional organization dedicated to the service and assistance of Florida physicians.

¹²The American Medical Association is a national professional association for physicians and medical students across the United States.

JH: No, to APHA [American Public Health Association]¹³.

CP: Oh, APHA.

JH: And so, I didn't serve anything after. I served in those offices a long time, but I was delegate until I retired, before they elected the new delegate on that, because the president of the society came [to me and said], "How do you feel about being delegate? They want to send you [to] keep on it."

I said, "I can't represent the society anymore because I will not know your problems." They elected, the first year after I was—'73, I think, they elected another delegate. A lot of things came up after that, but I don't want to go and get on that because it had nothing to do with public health.

There were three problems: the attitude of the medical society, what they would pay the director, and the attitude of the people in [Lake County] because they thought—I've actually have had to bring a woman in labor, and—

CP: Deposit her in the health department.

JH: We had tried to tell them to take them somewhere else. And then, finally, the husband came to me, and he said, "If we leave her—" she was then sitting out on the front steps, full crying, and that she's out there having some labor pains. They'd already told them that—

CP: They needed to go to the hospital.

JH: Yeah. So then I tried to get him to take her to the hospital, but there wasn't anybody to call then; all they could call was a funeral home. They'd already called the funeral home and asked them if they'd use their ambulance to take her to the hospital and wouldn't do it.

They wouldn't do it, then, because there is liability, insurance, and things that they didn't covered. So he came and asked me. He said, "Tonight, when you go out the front door,

¹³The American Public Health Association (APHA) is a professional organization for public health workers in the United States. It is dedicated to the promotion of public health.

and they close this place, she's going to be sitting on the front steps. What are you going to do?"

I said, "I don't go out the front door. Only the nurses and clerks go out the front door. In two minutes, I'll probably be going out this back door to make some inspections or something." That's the way we left that. I don't remember what the details were, but I know how bad it got before, that she was still there.

What the problem was, he had been on welfare, and he had been in Birmingham, and he could take her to the place or direction that the county told him to take her for delivery. He thought we had the same thing. We tried to explain everything and we couldn't.

It was one of the most difficult problems that I was ever engaged in. It is the most risky, too, because if she had had the child out on the front there and the baby had died, would they gone to sue the county? There was a lot of things.

Ms. Oberet and I shedded blood all the time because, after we did that, it didn't last much longer, we're telling you. Because we worked very fast and tried to get him. We finally got him to take her out of there, or we told him that we were going to—

CP: But your speechmaking and PR activities overcame that and the community finally understood what a health department was about.

JH: That's right.

CP: It's not a medical care center.

JH: We tried to—oh, yeah, I guess you [have] seen the films and stuff that we produced. We had one of those projecting machines that ran all the time. You could put it in the post office. You could put it in the drug store, and it ran all the time.

I got the idea at the county fair. When they wanted us to put a booth at the county fair we got one of those projection machines that ran all the time, over and over. We put a booth out there, Lake County Health Department, and we tried to keep a nurse or a sanitarian in there all during the week, but we kept that machine there all the time.

CP: You produced the film?

JH: Yeah. Stills. We produced stills. It was stills. It was just—

CP: It was just pictures.

JH: It wasn't projection, it was still-films, and they would run through there. We'd just take films and tell stories on the film there. That probably helped sell the health department. I don't know whether it was really sold or not, but I suppose it was. I suppose Lake County has a good health department now.

CP: It does, and it has for years.

JH: When I go over there and I want to see the head of the Lake County Health Department, they send me a 23-year-old boy. I said, "You're the head of the county health department? I'm glad to meet you."

And, of course, then he explains to me, "I guess you want to see the medical director or something." I said, "I guess I didn't know what I wanted to see," because the boy that I recommended and put in there is there is there. You know Pelousie [sic]? Do you know Dr. Pelousie?

CP: No, I don't.

JH: He was my vice—you see, I built the—for the reserves to protect the original (unintelligible). I was there when we built that reserve building over there. That's a two-story, nice building for the reserve Air Force. He was my vice commander, and then he wanted this place over here. And so then I went to bat for him, and he got it. You know what he did do? He resigned from the Air Force, so he'll have no retirement, now, from the Air Force.

CP: Too bad. But he's [a] full-time medical director?

JH: Yeah. He came over here, and been the medical director ever since. I guess he took June Adkins, Dr. Adkins' place, didn't he?

CP: That's right.

JH: He didn't take the place when I retired.

CP: Yeah, June came.

JH: No. What was the chap's name? He died, and wanted it. I actually put him in there to take it. But I believe this was to fulfill June Adkins' place. But anyway, he was my vice commander over at Cocoa Beach.

CP: Over at the [Kennedy] Space Center?

JH: The space center.

CP: The space center. What was your relationship to the space center? Tell us about that. I happen to be aware that your personal friends are people like John Glenn and folks like that.

JH: Seven original astronauts.¹⁴ Gus Grissom, we lost him. See, the Patrick Air Force Base was the backup for the seven original astronauts and so forth. My group was to put an organization there, would release the entire setup in the Patrick Air Force Base station hospital, and we'd take over.

So that's what I was. I was the ranking flight surgeon for the astronauts. That's who I was there. The man who was there and who was attached to—no, he was director of the hospital—was actually the person who was between me and the astronauts because I would replace him when the astronauts came.

CP: So you were an integral part of the Mercury Project¹⁵, were you not?

JH: I had the responsibility of it. On Saturdays, sometimes we'd go in and be a backup crew for the flight surgeons. Our outfit only was responsible for the launching, the first 70 seconds. And, incidentally, they'd be interested to know, the one that, the—what was the one the schoolteacher was on?

CP: *Challenger*.

¹⁴The seven original astronauts were Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, Gus Grissom, Wally Schirra, John Glenn, Alan Shepard, and Deke Clayton.

¹⁵Project Mercury was an early American space exploration program that began in 1958; its goal was to put a man into Earth's orbit and return him to Earth safely.

JH: *Challenger*. The *Challenger* blew up in the 74th [second]. The downwind boys took over that responsibility. We had already lit our cigars when it happened. It went so perfectly up, the first 70 seconds.

CP: Yeah, it did.

JH: No problem. It was about the 72nd second that the commander said, “Oh—” I forget what he said, “—oh, look out.” It was something like that he said. That was the only word he ever said. We think that’s when the seal broke.

And then, somebody in our front yard—I still have my home over at the Cape [Canaveral]—somebody in my front yard got pictures, and they got a perfect picture of the capsule when the crew was still in it. I’ve got a couple snapshots enlarged of everything else. I’ll just turn them over to my whatchamacallit, the—

CP: Your—

JH: My unpublished—

CP: Memoirs?

JH: Yeah. No, no. It’s my unpublished biography.

CP: Oh, your biography, yeah.

JH: My never to be published biography. I’ll just turn those pictures over to it. I’m having it printed on for my son and grandchildren. I think of three things there, answers your question. One, two, three. It’s the attitude of your medical society, what you paid them, and educating the public. I think that would be enough.

CP: You’re famous for your public education and your speaking. You are known—

JH: I don’t know about that.

CP: You are. I'll tell you that. You are [famous] for your public relations activities and your county health department.

JH: I didn't know what I was famous for. I knew Lindbergh was famous for flying. I knew what (unintelligible) was famous for, singing. Everybody knew what father Dionne¹⁶ was famous for, but I didn't know what I was famous for.

CP: You're famous for a lot of things, one of which is your PR campaign for the county health department.

JH: I don't know whether you knew what father Dionne was famous for.

CP: No, I don't.

JH: He was the father of the Dionne quintuplets. That's where he got his fame.

CP: That's right.

JH: Boy, I had to stop and explain some of my stories I tell him.

CP: It's because I got that Alzheimer's disease or whatever you was talking about. I'm developing the early signs.

JH: Now, let's see, what else—

Tape 1 ends; Tape 2 begins

CP: I want to ask you a question about these issues that you've faced as the health officer here. I want to recall that you got all involved with the mobile home industry some way.

JH: I got so involved that I think the people were ready for me to retire a little earlier than I retired. I know this. Perfectly willing for me to age fast and get going. There's two things I got concerned with: mobile homes and what they call drainage wells. I call them sewage sumps. Our neighbor, over here, they had over 300. I think they had 360 drainage wells.

¹⁶On May 28, 1934, the Dionne quintuplets were born to Oliva-Edouard, father, and Elzire, mother. The quintuplets were the first recorded case of quintuplets surviving their infancy. The Dionne quintuplets became a tourist attraction for several years.

They're going out and draining this swampland that my engineers had ruled, in Lake County, would never be fit for human habitation, and they put in 360. And what they did, they polluted the water. Lake County is going to run into a water shortage problem for two reasons: one is it's growing so fast, and the other is they've allowed the people to pollute it.

Lake County would never allow drainage wells, and we had some serious trouble with the state road department. The state road department was putting a road up there, and I observed it was going to be close to flood level at some times, in high water, and they shouldn't put it there.

But the director of highway—there's initials to it. I wish I could think of them—said to me, "Oh, we're going to put a drainage well in there." I said, "You know you're in Lake County. You don't put drainage wells in Lake County. It's Orange County where you're polluting the water with the drainage wells. You don't put them in there."

They said, You don't have any control over the right of way. The health officer cannot control the right of way. I said, "I think I control drainage wells." To make a long story short, we had the great Willis McCall¹⁷ here, then. These two people don't know it, but we were never a county for integration.

We never did fight for integration. Willis McCall was always blamed for being a segregationist. He was our sheriff for 28 years. I asked him why he got defeated. He said, "When you've been in your office or my office for 28 years, you're going to make enough of the voters mad that they'll kick you out," and they kicked him out.

But this man said that, as a health director, I didn't have any right to control or say who puts in drainage wells. He said that's up to the state road department, somebody, I don't who it was, what the rules were.

So, to make a long story short, one Saturday afternoon, somebody had called me and told me. He said, "The state road department is moving in a well-digging rig. They're going to put in a drainage well between those two roads up here at Fruitland Park."

I said, "They just think they're going to do that," because I had already gone to Willis McCall and issued a warrant for anybody that started to do something that endangered public health, that I had a right to stop it. I said, "Go up there, and talk to this man."

¹⁷Willis McCall was a sheriff of Lake County for seven consecutive terms, serving from 1944 to 1972.

He was up there, and they hadn't started digging. They had it set up and was ready to start digging and Willis came up. I wasn't there. Of course, I didn't know Willis went over there. Willis went up to him and he said, "You're not supposed to dig this drainage well in Lake County."

He said, "Oh, yes I am. Dr. Hall has no control over that." I don't know if you know him or not, but he was just as rugged as Mable Norris Reese¹⁸ said he was, that communist editor, as quoted by some people. I don't know whether she was communist or not and I'm not saying she was.

He said, "I don't know what rules Dr. Hall has. I don't know what permissions you have to do, but there is just one thing. Today, this is Saturday afternoon. Dr. Hall is not in his office. The judge is not in his office, and Dr. Hall has got a warrant here. If you hit that well one lick, then I'm supposed to arrest you and put you in, not the well digger. Arrest you and tell you to stop that." I heard that he said, "Where do you get that kind of authority?"

He said, "Dr. Hall has authority from the old English law [that] America still operates under. Anything that he seriously thinks is going to endanger the health of his people, he can stop it. Now, I don't know whether he can or not. But this is Saturday afternoon, and I'm going to have to put you in jail until Sunday morning before a judge can even rule on this. If you hit one lick with that drill, I'm taking you in."

I heard no more about it, but I never heard any sound from a drill. Thump. Thump. You know when I heard about that next? A state senator called me. He and I are good friends. I'm not going to tell his name. He said, "Basil, you've kind of stopped the state road department down there, haven't you?"

I said, "No, I didn't stop them. I understand the popular Willis McCall stopped them." He said, "No, you're the one that stopped. What has to be done, or what do we have to do, to get to dig that well?" I called him his first name and I said, "It's simple. You can do it. It's very simple."

He said, "What's that?" I said, "Get my job. As long as I'm health officer, until I'm fired, there's not going to be a drill—" I called them sewage wells, "—sump well put in Lake

¹⁸Mable Norris Reese was the editor of the *Mount Dora Topic* for several years, starting in 1947.

County.” And that stopped it. Then, about Tuesday morning, he came and moved the drill and took it out. They didn’t build it.

CP: And nobody shot you or nothing?

JH: No, nobody shot me. It didn’t affect my budget a bit on that.

CP: Tell me about mobile homes.

JH: Now, that was a big problem on that and mobile homes. I tried to get the county commission to pass a rule that they would not permit but 500 mobile home sites per year in the county. I said, “You are—” and it’s in the article in that paper in there. “—getting a tin can county here. You ought to stop it.

“You can’t do that. You ought to make the mobile homes charge 100 dollars more for the home site than they’re charging and take that 100 dollars and limit it to 500 sites, and build a storm shelter there—” We call them fallout shelters now. “—call them fallout shelters if you want to, it’s a fallout shelter or hurricane shelter or storm shelter or whatever you want to, and put that in. And then, when you get these hurricanes, tornado warnings, these people can all go be saved.”

We didn’t do it. But I’ll tell you the result of that: ABC called the other day and they said when two tower—planes were flown into it—

CP: The twin towers [September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks].

JH: —he suggested that, in that time, in one of his statements or articles, that [the shelter] could be used for cases like this. We know for tornados they can use it for, even though it’s being built to avoid atomic disaster. But he indicated in there that [shelters can be used for] this and said, “We want to do a story on that,” and that’s when they sent their team. Next thing, they got a team on that.

When they detect or suspect that these people can begin to do [a terrorist attack], a lot of people may want to use a fallout shelter because they don’t know where they’re going to fly those planes to and things like that. That’s what that was about.

But I don't think we could ever stretch it that far. We could have stretched it to protect them against tornados. It wouldn't have—that big, bad tornado, what was it, in Dade County killed so many? What was that?

CP: Andrew, Hurricane Andrew.

JH: Andrew. I don't know whether—yes, it would, but a tie-down would have not protected those because that wind was so strong, but it would not protect any building above the level of the ground. If they would have had [a shelter] to go into, the people would have been protected.

CP: Yes, if they'd have gone.

JH: Yeah. But if they'd have gone, I don't know. Oh yeah, they'd have gone that day. That bunch was scared. They didn't get out, but they didn't have any place to really go to that was safe.

CP: That's right. What was the upshot of your concern about mobile homes? Didn't you get some local ordinances passed?

JH: Oh yeah. I got the commission to make all mobile homes put a tie-down that would protect against—

CP: Let me just remind you—

JH: To tie down and protect against 125 mile per hour winds. This one would not protect against a 125 mile per hour wind because it would hold the foundation. But the mobile homes weren't built sufficient. It just blew the top off and left the foundation there.

The county had that in effect, and then the simple tie down, then we put in effect steel or aluminum bands intended to replace the tie-downs. The aluminum band became the tie-down. It protected up to 100, 125 miles per hour. I think the state uses that pretty well, now, the tie-downs on them.

CP Tie-downs are now required all over Florida.

JH: They don't know where the first tie-down was written, I don't imagine.

CP: I think we've just set the record straight.

JH: I'll tell you, who helped me on that was the Florida Power [& Light]¹⁹. We had trouble getting them, when they put the tie-down, to put the stake in properly. If you drive a stake in at an angle and put the tie-down on it, it'll work loose and come out. The Florida Power Company taught me the principle, it'll stay a lot longer if you'll drive it in straight. So what we did was—

CP: At the angle of the pull.

JH: At the angle of the pull. But you can't keep a tie on a tie-down stake that's pointing the same way, so, we had to adopt an auger-type²⁰ tie-down. I think they're doing that now. The auger downs could go this way, and the auger will just pull it at that angle and holds it nicely on.

CP: Like the telephone or something like that.

JH: Somebody ought to give some engineer credit for that because I didn't figure that out. He taught me that.

CP: Yeah, the electric company's been using those for holding their poles for years and years. They have an auger that screws in.

JH: That's right. That's what we had to do because, the law we original passed, they'd just put a stake down, straight down, and that gave it a—

CP: Little bit of wiggle. Yeah, that would come right out.

JH: —and the wind would just finally pull it right out. Now, but it won't pull it out if you had a steel one or a wood one with a big loop on it, and it was straight. It doesn't work it.

¹⁹Florida Power & Light is a considerably large, Florida-based power utility company.

²⁰An auger is a tool with a helical bit used for boring holes, typically into wood or into the ground. Its helical design prevents it from being easily removed from the ground.

It just pulls hard, and the wood would hold. One was a six-foot long post at the right angle would—

CP: Stays down there. I want to read our listeners something from *General Practitioner*, periodical, the medical publication, *General Practitioner*. And Dr.—

JH: Put that on. He's a Lake County man.

CP: He is? No, no. This is out of *General Practitioner*.

JH: You want to read those?

CP: Yeah, I want to read that.

JH: You're going to read that last letter I wrote if you can find it. I wish you could—

CP: Well, if I find it, we'll read that too.

JH: It's on top of the table up here.

CP: Okay, we'll get it. The editor of the medical publication, *General Practitioner*, wrote: "James Basil Hall, who has written for many medical publications, bows into GP with rabies control. A doctor of many parts, this Floridian belongs to the American Medical Association, is certified in American medicine, as well as by the American Board of Preventative Medicine, is a fellow of the American Public Health Association, directs the Lake County, Florida Health Department, is president of his local medical society, and served as first director of the Florida State [Comprehensive] Cancer Control Program²¹."

JH: I might add there that this wasn't on there. He didn't put that I was a founding member of the American Academy of Preventive [Medicine]. That's one I'm really proud of.

CP: Oh, you are?

²¹The Florida Comprehensive Cancer Control Program is an effort funded by the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention that seeks to provide support and coordination among public and private partners in cancer treatment.

JH: There's only 33 of us that founded that. When they showed who the founding members was, some of the other politicians got on in, and they moved me up to 74th.

CP: Oh no. I know that George Dames, Cy Sharp—

JH: George Dame and Cy was there and Frank, Bob Higgins—

CP: Frank, your brother?

JH: Yeah, but a bunch of them, to the next meeting, got in there, and I didn't make the last meeting. I had a speaking engagement somewhere, and I didn't get to go, and they moved me up to 74th. I was about number 9 or 10.

CP: Cy Sharp is number one. He's got the certificate, number one.

JH: Yeah, I know it, but you know why? Cy was at both meetings. You know who was the secretary of the second meeting? He's the one that moved me up. He was the health officer at Tulsa, and he came here and was the health officer over in Brevard County. He's about 75 years old and—

CP: I don't remember his name.

JH: You remember Jerry, he's a nice fellow. But I'm never did let him get over doing it that way, and he put himself in. He was about 33rd. He wasn't even there at the founding meeting. The members from—I believe Cy was there, but I wouldn't forswear it.

CP: I bet he was.

JH: I believe Cy was there. He, George Dame, Frank, myself, Bob Higgins, Elam Cato²², and this other good one, over here at your county. He's dead now. He was the nicest man I've ever knew.

²²Dr. Turner Elam Cato served as the director of the Dade County Department of Public Health for 27 years, from 1942 to 1969.

CP: Oh yeah, Frank—

JH: Chappell. Frank Chappell²³. That's one of the nicest men. He and Elam Cato are two of the nicest men I ever met.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, they were.

JH: It's not because they were Tennessee graduates either.

CP: Oh, it didn't have anything to do with that?

JH: I didn't know they had—

CP: For our listeners—

JH: But I don't remember if Cy was there, but Cy was very good, and he attended all the meetings. I guess Cy was there.

CP: He does have certificate number one from the American Society—

JH: But that was decided on by this chap from Oklahoma who was elected secretary treasurer of the meeting that night. I don't know who was acting secretary. I believe, George Higgins wrote down or George Dame might've written him. Of course, he is the moving one. He was the headman.

George should have had the first one, but I'll bet you that Cy Sharp and that bird who was—he was at Tulsa, Oklahoma Health Department when Frank died. When Frank was president of the APHA southern branch, that fellow was head of it out there. Frank talked him into taking the place where I was over there in Brevard County.

CP: For our listeners, I think it's notable that the American Academy of Preventive Medicine—

²³Dr. Frank V. Chappell was the director of the Hillsborough County Health Department and also served as the president of the Florida Public Health Association.

JH: He's from Ole Miss. He's from Mississippi, and he wrote their alma mater. He's the fellow that wrote the alma mater for the University of Mississippi.

CP: I think it's important for our listeners to know—

JH: Know how those things are written—well, I should have been—Lord, I'm not really belly aching about it because I don't belly ache, but if I were to belly ache, I would belly ache. He moved me in '74, moved me up. Here's Cy, one. Moved me from about 10th up to 74.

CP: I don't know how that happened.

JH: I know how it happened. It was those politicians did me that way.

CP: I'm sorry.

JH: Doesn't make any difference.

CP: But I think it's important for the record, Dr. Hall, that the American Academy of Preventive Medicine had its organizing thoughts in Florida at the Florida State Board of Health and Dr. George Dame.

JH: I'm officially recognized as a founding member.

CP: Yes, you are.

JH: I'm a founding member.

CP: Yes, you are.

JH: Actually, there was only 33 founding members and now they have about 100 on there, I guess.

CP: Oh really? That's too bad.

JH: I don't blame them. I wish I would've been politically ambitious. I wouldn't be here talking to you all today if I had been politically ambitious. I would have been up here as George Bush's surgeon general or something like that.

CP: Well, I'd have voted for you.

JH: You wouldn't have had to vote for me on that. The funny thing about it, I told you about that, since you're on that. George Bush, Sr., after he was president, he came to my university that I used to teach, coach, and played there. They put a feature of me in an article. I sent them a bunch of pictures, and the picture I sent was the one I made with Miss America.

Miss America had just died. Her apartment is still up there. They haven't sold it. They wrote an article in there about me and gave us it. Now, I felt Miss America didn't know anything about it. She didn't know they were going to use her pictures, didn't even know I sent it. They were going to give us the cover, what do they call that? The magazine?

CP: Yeah, the cover.

JH: The cover. They were going to give us the cover, but George Bush went in there. They got him to speak to the baccalaureate. It's just a small university, about 7 or 8,000 students. He went in there and gave a nice baccalaureate address, and they put his picture on there because that was issued when—

CP: —shortly after you was there.

JH: —and they kicked us. They gave us two pages of the centerfold. What I'm telling this about was, I helped his son get elected in Florida a little bit, Jeb [Bush]. The last letter I wrote Jeb, I sent him a little donation.

I said, "Jeb, I shouldn't send you this. You wonder why, but I shouldn't send you a penny. Your old man kicked me off of the cover picture of my university magazine and kicked me in that all I got was the cover page."

Governor Bush wrote back. He said, "I'm sorry about that. I'm sorry Dad did you like that. But, sir, let me tell you something, if you had to be kicked off of something, you couldn't have gotten a nicer fellow to have done it." I have that personal letter among my files of the Lindberghs and the Reagan administration.

CP: Now, you've mentioned NBC a number of times, why were they here filming you?

JH: Now, that's an interesting story. Over in my county, you could tell my disposition. I don't hesitate to call up somebody and say, "This is the president's secretary, and he wanted me to ask you a question, if you didn't have time to talk to him," and things like that. We do that all time.

We've got four or five fellows down there. One day, I was sitting there on a telephone and the phone rang, and I didn't answer, but it'd keep on happening. I don't know who they had on there, but he called on it and he got it, and he kind of laughed. He said, "I'm the program chairman/announcer for NBC in New York," and I picked it up then.

I was sitting there. I was working the desk. I picked it up [and] I said, "Boy, you got a job today, haven't you, kid? Are you sure that you're not president's—" whoever who was president, "—secretary?" He said, "What are you talking about?"

I said, "You're one of my buddies that's kidding me." He said, "No, I'm not." I said, "Can you identify yourself? You're going to have to identify yourself, boy, before you talk to me." It turned out he was only 25 years old, but he's a sharp kid. He got another laugh. He said, "Now, wait a minute. That's a short notice. I can't identify."

I said, "How did you have my telephone number? You had my telephone number, and I want to congratulate you. You pronounced my name properly. Most people mispronounce that word. They've been mispronouncing that word for 200 years, and I been working on it 95." He said, "Wait a minute, I'll tell you." I could tell where he was from—

He said, "You know what we did here in our office? About six months ago, we decided to do a biography on Lindbergh and some famous people. We asked 50 of the leading newspapers in the United States to send us every copy of anything they had on this character in the last two years. You have the best article on Charles Lindbergh that we got from the *Orlando Sentinel*."

I said, "Tell me, who else's name is on it?" and they told me who else was on there with me. Ramsey Campbell²⁴ had been with the Orlando—Ormund Powers²⁵ was already been sick. I said, "Okay, you got it on the desk, there. Read me the second paragraph. Second paragraph. Don't read me the first, read the second." I knew what the second paragraph was. He read it.

²⁴Ramsey Campbell was a veteran of the *Orlando Sentinel*.

²⁵Ormund Powers was a Florida journalist and writer whose career with the *Orlando Sentinel* lasted nearly 70 years.

I said, “Oh, you got it. Okay, what do you want?” He said, “I want to know if I can send my crew down there for a day’s filming—” no, he’s says for two. I said, “How long?” And he said, “Oh—” he first said, talked about an hour, “—two hours. It will only take two hours.” I said, “Give me the date, and let me see if I can figure it out.” He said two hours.

But I told you, they come in before one o’clock, and it got dark at 5:30 or 6:00, and they quit then. But that’s not why they quit. I was kidding them. I said, “Why you quitting?” They said, We only brought seven roles of thirty-minute film. They had used three and a half hours on me.

And then that Lindbergh picture I’ve got in there, she’ll see it. I’ll bet I haven’t got five cameo shots on it because it wasn’t for him. He just got hold of it, I think, put it in his— what was it?

CP: I don’t know.

JH: He said *Headliners and Legends*²⁶. He has a ten o’clock *Headliners and Legends* program for one hour every night, and that’s the only place it has ever appeared on. Jane Pauley had some of it. That’s my experience with you people.

CP: Well, tell us how is it that you know Charles Lindbergh?

JH: How I know Charles Lindbergh?

CP: That NBC wanted you to talk about him?

JH: One afternoon I was sitting in New Guinea and my telephone hanging on a post there. They have those the field telephones. My phone rang and they said, my commanding general, he was younger than I was. He always called me Doc. He said, “Doc, do you got an extra cot or bed, something in your shack there?”

I said, “Sure, but I’d have to ask for my field officers when they come and—” See, I was command surgeon. I had five to seven surgeons under me, with their units out in the field.

²⁶*Headliners and Legends* is an MSNBC documentary series hosted by Matt Lauer.

When they'd come in to see me, talk to me up some and if they wanted to spend the night, I had a bed for them.

I said, "Oh yeah. You can have it if you want it," and he started to hang up. I said, "By the way, you didn't tell me who it was?" He said, "Doc, don't worry. You'll know when he gets there." In about five minutes, here was this tall drink of water, Charles Lindbergh.

He was taller than I was, and I was six foot three [inches] before I started getting old. I'm about six foot now, I guess, little over six foot. He's about six foot three, then. He was only forty-two years old. He came in and dropped his gear down and he said, "I'm Mr. Lindbergh." Of course, he had just had a fuss with my ex-friend, FDR. You don't know who FDR is. You're too young.

And he said, "I'm Mr. Lindbergh." That had me flopped because I had been in the reserve unit with Captain Lindbergh, and I was Captain Hall or Lieutenant Hall. I didn't know him, but we had both been in there. He was actually Colonel in that outfit, but he didn't use Colonel Lindbergh because he got insulted when Roosevelt said he was not patriotic.

Lindbergh said, "If my commander in chief thinks I'm not patriotic, he can have it." He wanted to go into the oval office and throw it, but they won't let him. He put it that the closest he'd get to writing it down. And then, when war was declared, Lindbergh heard immediately because he'd volunteered to be there. The day Pearl Harbor came he volunteered. President Roosevelt said, "Don't let that bird in under any circumstances."

Now, that's the exact language that I was told. So that's why he said, "Mister." He never mentioned Franklin Roosevelt's name, and I never mentioned Colonel Lindbergh to him. We never mentioned, never mentioned. So, that's why he came up and introduced himself as mister. Of course, I knew about it. He didn't know how we felt, and how did he get there?

He knew Henry Ford, and Henry Ford was building B-24s²⁷. He and Henry Ford were good friends because Henry Ford didn't want us to get into it. Well, that's nothing—my daddy didn't want him to get in there. He said, "The King of England is mad that the Kaiser's cousin or sister." They were brother-in-laws or something.²⁸

²⁷The Consolidated B-24 Liberator is an American heavy bomber aircraft.

²⁸King Edward VII of the United Kingdom was the uncle of Kaiser Wilhelm of the former German Empire. The two had a contentious relationship because King Edward VII snubbed Wilhelm's authority as an emperor by treating him like simply a nephew.

He said, “It’s just a family squabble. Son, I don’t want you to have to go settle a family squabble.” So my dad is against it. So the fact that they were against it didn’t bother me at all. Still doesn’t, still doesn’t.

But anyway, he got up there and he told Henry, “Henry, I—” Now, this is what I’ve heard. Charles Lindbergh didn’t tell me neither, and I never saw Henry Ford. He said, “I’ll go over there and inspect your battlefield B-24s for you, free, if you’ll let me.” And, of course, Henry Ford jumped at it, so Henry hired him. Lindbergh never accepted a check because he wasn’t going to work for Henry.

He had been there two days, and he found out how he could get to the fighter squadron headquarters where we had 38s²⁹, that’s what he wanted to fly. He found out how to get there. The second day, Henry Ford, he told him, “I’ve got to go down to the 5th fighter headquarters in New Guinea³⁰.” That’s the way he appeared at my door. They didn’t know he was there.

The newspaper people weren’t allowed to write a word about him. They weren’t allowed to take a picture. Charles Lindbergh and I were never allowed to have a camera when we were together, and I have only one picture with Charles Lindbergh.

I don’t know who took it because the chap who took it, took the picture, would have been court-martialed. In New Guinea, and that’s how our mail service read, in an envelope, just one word written, printed, not in his handwriting. It said, “This is a picture I thought you would like to see.” You know who it is? The only picture I have with Charles Lindbergh.

People say, “If you knew Charles Lindbergh so well, why didn’t you have more pictures?” That’s all I know. They weren’t allowed to take them, but several people stole them. I know he was in one of my outfits, Charles McDonald. He and Charles McDonald had a good picture, life-size picture, and one of the boys wrote a book that I had got a page in it. He’s in there standing as big as all get out with Charlie.

²⁹[Lockheed P-38 Lightning](#) is a World War II fighter aircraft.

Tommy McGuire³¹—McGuire Air Force Base is named for Tommy. His mother died in Sebring. He and Tommy McGuire got a good picture there at my headquarters, where nobody ever knew about it. I don't know if it was my headquarters or where it was. I don't know what headquarters it was.

But he and Tommy McGuire in those two pictures are on that. Tommy had shot down 38. He was one of the 103 military aces that he flew with and Dick Bong³² was 40. This boy here was trying to break—and Charles knew it—this kid was trying to break that record.

So, I was on that. But anyway, he came in and dropped his gear and stayed with me three or four months, and he was writing the book. One of the books he was working on when he was there was *Spirit of Saint Louis*³³. He got the Pulitzer Prize for that, for that one.

He was also writing war journals. I don't know if you've seen his war journals? That's a five-hundred big book war journal. See it up there? It's in my library up there. In fact, I'm going to have an interviewer here tomorrow, and I've got that book to offer them. You'll see that picture.

They're going to have me in there with that picture. But that is the story of how I knew Lindbergh. But, from then on, it's history, I guess, isn't it? Is there anything else you want to know about him? That's the way we met. He came in, and I said—oh yeah, one thing: I didn't say, Mr. Lindbergh. I never said anything. I didn't know what to call him.

He never called me colonel or major, whichever I was. I think I got promoted to colonel while he was there. He never called me major. He was always Dr. Hall. Do you know why? Charles Lindbergh had more respect and thought doctor was greater than major general.

That's what one person told me. I don't know it. He never told me that, but he would not use general, whether I was colonel or general, in my presence, or a doctor's general. It

³¹Thomas B. McGuire (1920 – 1945) was a United States Army major who was killed in action during World War II.

³²Major Richard Ira Bong (1920 – 1945), commonly called “Dick,” was a United States Army major who fought in World War II and received a Medal of Honor for his service.

³³*The Spirit of St. Louis* is an autobiographical account of Charles Lindbergh's infamous 1927 solo trans-Atlantic flight in the custom built, single seat plane of the same name. The book won the Pulitzer Award in 1954.

was always doctor. We had the head doctor there with us a time or two, and he was a major general. Charles Lindbergh didn't call him general at all.

He said, "Doctor, doctor, doctor," and somebody told me that, I don't know. They said, "If you'd have gotten to know Charles Lindbergh like some people know him, he would have told you Army rank can never be as high as—" And I think he did that on account of President Roosevelt, the way he and President Roosevelt had their trouble.³⁴

To me, that has always been a very interesting thing about him. When I introduced him, I had to watch that. I'd introduce this fellow, "This is Charlie Jones. You don't have to be introduced to him, do you?" They'd say no. But what I wanted to tell you about Charles, and then I'll get off of that because it's a really personal subject, very personal.

But he'd come in—he didn't get inside the tent, but he got his head in. I didn't say, "Mr. Lindbergh." I didn't say anything. If I couldn't call him General Lindbergh or Colonel Lindbergh, I wasn't going to say anything. I said, "I've been wanting to meet you for a long time." He said, "Why have you been wanting to meet me?" I said, "You have put me through medical school."

Boy, that stopped him. He said, "I didn't know that I had put anybody through school, let alone medical school." I didn't know it was going affect him then. I said, "You did, and I'll tell you how I did it. Do you remember that book you wrote in 65 days? Your first book you published?"

He said, "Sure, I remember that." I said, "You know it came out first on July?" He said, "Sure, I remember that." I said, "I sold that book, and I made a dollar and something every time I sold that book on you. I paid my way through medical school selling books on the field." That's it. That's true.

CP: That's a good story.

JH: That's not a story, boy.

CP: That's a good narrative.

³⁴After being publicly rebuked by President Roosevelt for his isolationist views, Lindbergh resigned as colonel in US Army Air Force in April 1941. The two had conflicted over Lindbergh's views and Roosevelt's administration's policies regarding World War I several times before Lindbergh's resignation.

JH: That's life.

CP: That's good memories, good memories. But I happen to be aware that you're—

JH: I'm sorry.

CP: What are you sorry about? You don't need to be sorry. If I'm remembering correct, you're 37 or 36 years old.

JH: Thirty-six years old?

CP: Yeah.

JH: He's an old country boy, this chap that just got me in on this—I'm coming out on a magazine next week from Memphis, and he's from Cookeville, Tennessee. Twenty-five miles from my home of Gainesboro, Tennessee, but he was born in Jackson County.

When he was calling me up, he couldn't get over it. You're going to throw me off on that. It's gone now. I'll tell you something about the book on Lindbergh. That book, I never did think to ask him—I think about so many things that I should have talked to him about. I never thought, but I knew how many books his wife sold. *Gift from the Sea*, she sold eight million.

The thing that hurts me every time I hear it from the newspaper people. They say that Charles and Anne [Morrow Lindbergh], Anne was jealous of Charles or something, but things like that. There wasn't a little piece of jealousy between those two people as far as I knew them. But the thing I want to mention was that they talk about that he didn't love Anne. He was gone so much.

His career, his avocation, takes him away from her, unless she's a flier and wants to go with him. Somebody says, Why didn't she go? She was eight months pregnant when she and he set the record from California to New York. I don't know how long the record stood. It may still stand, for prop job. I believe it still stands. But she was his navigator across on that trip, and she was eight months pregnant.

I guess it's a 12 hour nonstop flight, and Anne and Charles set the record on it. What leads me up to that, in the book on he won the Pulitzer Prize—pardon me, I can't say it right—Pulitzer Prize on it, Anne never won the Pulitzer Prize, and she sold over eight million of one book.

They said Charles was jealous of that. But what I want to say was, he was over there, 10,000 miles from his wife and the dedication of the Pulitzer Prize book. I don't know whether you know what it is or not, but I've got the book up there with his autograph in it and so forth.

I want you all to see what the brag room is. I would like for them to see that. The dedication that he put on that prize-winning book is just two lines: AML—it wasn't her name, just two lines on the flyleaf—AML will never know how much of this book she wrote³⁵. Yet, there's still people that say he didn't love her.

CP: I think he did.

JH: When I get myself collected, at the same time he was writing that in this little hut, he had—there was a little partition between us, and we'd talk over it all the time. One evening, we were working on a parachute. If you've ever ridden on a parachute before, in a plane, for a seat, they are the most uncomfortable seats in the world.

Anything you can take out of them is hard on your muscles, you're going to take it and throw it away. We were repacking, not our chutes but some things that went in the chute. I didn't know what he was on, but he was on the first aid kit. In the first aid kit, it had a snakebite kit.

He said, "Doctor," he didn't say—he never called me Basil, and he never called me Major, or he never call my name. He didn't say Basil. He said, "Doctor, why do you all have these snake things in the kit? There are no poisonous snakes up here." I said, "Thank you so much, throw it out."

He said, "Oh, by the way, there's a little scarifying—" See, if you got snake bit, you got a little scarifying knife, you cut it, then you had a square rubber piece to put over it. Then you'd sucked all the venom out. That was battlefield treatment.

³⁵Actual dedication reads: To A.M.L. Who will never realize how much of this book she has written.

To show you how unassuming—he was the most unassuming individual I ever saw. He said, “Doctor, I’m going to throw this scarifying knife out. Would you like to have it?” Would anybody like to have anything out of a parachute that Charles Lindbergh flew with? It’s worth 5,000 dollars.

It’s worth 5,000 dollars. The museum of the—when I wrote this article, incidentally, they don’t know about that article, but that article, that was a record then. When you write an article, if you get nine requests: Oh, that was a good article, fella. Send me a reprint of that. If you get eight requests from the best article you think you ever wrote, you’re flying on cloud nine.

When you go from eight requests, cloud nine, you’ve been highly complimented. That’s the reason I wanted to hold that up, but that won’t make any difference either. I want to hold that up. This is an article I was going to hold up.

Rabies control, as you’ve read some about that. I bought 100 reprints, and they charged me 25 cents a piece, 25 dollars for 100 pieces. So I didn’t expect to get five requests for it. But you know what? I got more than 100 requests.

As I told him, I could only honor 97 of them because they wouldn’t give me a cut price on it. Twenty-five cents, it’s not worth 25 cents. I said, “Most of the time, if you order them, they do them for you for five or six cents each. If I ordered another 100, would you charge me?”

“Twenty-five dollars.” I said, “If I ordered 1000, what would you charge me?” “Twenty-five dollars.” I said, “If I had it reprinted—” it’s copyrighted. I just signed my life away on your thing. It’s copyrighted. I said, “If I had reprints made of it, what would you charge for them?”

Said, “You’ll have to pay 25 cents for every reprint you made of your own copy that you bought from me copyright on it.” Now, why did I tell you that? I didn’t get 100 requests for reprints. I didn’t get requests for 1,000 reprints. I still hate to say this. I didn’t get 5,000 requests for this. But what I got, I got over 10,000—no, wait a minute, I’m going to say this right—I got over 10,000 requests for reprints. Now, you get the difference?

Now, if I say I got 10,000 requests, you think there’s a 34 cent stamp on it, and there’s an individual letter, that that’s not all they got. I could have given away well over 10,000 reprints. Now, does that—

CP: And paid the postage on them, too.

JH: I would have paid it.

CP: You would have paid the postage to mail them out.

JH: For instance, the editor and the publishers of the Veterans Association of America³⁶, they wanted a reprint to put in every issue. And they had, I imagine that they've got 35,000 subscribers, I guess. I called the state president of the Veterans Association. I said, "How many subscribers does the state have? Do you know how many your national—" like AMA they have the V.

He said, "I think it's over 30,000." So, I could've given away over 30—I might have had a request. He was requesting, but they never got them. The closest thing we got, they looked up on their copyright. I don't know what a copyright means. But, see, I'm giving you all two pages from my—you ought to remember that word, my—

CP: Your biography.

JH: Yeah, but I got a word in front of it.

CP: Autobiography.

JH: My autobiography. And as you finish today, you'll have at least two pictures that are already nailed down on the autobiographer publisher and—

CP: But you aren't in the picture.

JH: If these two had been copyrighted by you all, how would that have affected this? That's the reason I took them out.

CP: That's right.

³⁶Veterans Association of America (VA) is an organization that assists and advocates for the rights of service members, disabled veterans, and their dependents.

JH: I didn't know how that might affect that. I don't know whether if you've ever faced something like that before, but I thought there's something in there that told me that if you all took those two pictures, then you could own it.

CP: I want to come to your age. I want to know, what do you attribute your 96 years to. Is it straight living?

JH: There are two important things that contribute to me being here today.

CP: Please share that with us.

JH: Well, I've got that disease that I can't remember the name of.

CP: It's Alzheimer's.

JH: You tell them the four things right quick that I just told you. That's half of what I attribute it to, then I'll tell the other.

CP: Oh, the four things, one [is] drinking water.

JH: Drinking water.

CP: Drinking water. He starts with 12 ounces first thing in the morning, warm water. Second, is diet. Third, is exercise regularly without giving the details that he's given to me. And fourth, are genes, the genetic makeup. Those are important to longevity, but there is a fifth—

JH: That's half.

CP: Oh, that's just half. That's 50 percent of longevity. Now, what's the other half?

JH: The other 50 percent of longevity is—should I tell them what it's based on or tell them what it is, and then tell them what it's based on?

CP: Tell them what it is.

JH: What it is. Well, that is, that on my 60th birthday—what is retirement age in most people?

CP: Sixty-five.

JH: On my 65th birthday, it probably was New Years [Day]. It might have been a New Years resolution, I don't know. But anyway, about that, I decided never to fall and break a bone and I haven't.

CP: And you're still living.

JH: That is where I get half of my longevity. I've refused or I've carefully avoided falling. Because, in my feeble estimation—now, I have no scientific and any expert out there that wants to disagree with me or wants to make a study of it, I'm putting this out believing that somebody will make a study of it.

I'm making this statement and telling the example that I'm a member of a local club. Somebody came up one day; three of us were standing there. They said something like, Congratulations. They said, This fella has been an active member here for over 50 years. He said, "This fellow here has been an active member for over 42 years, paid his dues every year and did what he's supposed to do."

He said, "Basil, do you know you completed 40 years yesterday?" I said, "No, I hadn't thought about it." Now, why does this go in this story about Florida and public health? About six weeks ago, I'm going to tell this in reverse, this part. About six weeks ago—no, I haven't told them yet about the three people, did I?

CP: No.

JH: No, but on that. One of those people was 87 years old this year. I don't remember when this took place, and another person was 97 years old this year. This person, I'll tell you the name, Basil, he was 95, this year, but he's been assured by the Supreme Court at midnight, on March the 4th, that I will have been on planet earth for 96 years.

I was born in Tennessee. I had no birth certificate. My two brothers had no birth certificates. A lot of folks had birth certificates over there, but I was really in the country. I was from Appalachia. You all call it—I call it Appalachia [apple-latch-a], you call it Appalachia [apple-lay-cha]. Once that poverty up in there has latched on to you, you're poor the rest of your life.

So I pronounce it Appalachia [apple-latch-a]. The Harvard class—I attended Harvard, you know, I went to Harvard. I took my basic in ophthalmology at Harvard. They say, Appalachia [apple-lay-cha], Appalachia, I think.

CP: Yeah, they do.

JH: So, now you have the ages of those, and they were the three members of the yacht club. About three weeks ago, I was called that one of them had fallen and broken a shoulder and rib. And then the other was 96—did I say 96? He was 97, he is. He was 97.

While I was at the hospital visiting this 87 year old that had fallen, I learned the 97 year old had flipped over in the chair, hit his head, and broke his arm. You want to know what I immediately did then? I went and called my son and told him I was being very careful. I wasn't going to fall.

Did you know that both of those died in the same week? What that was convincing me of, and I have no scientific evidence that 80 to 85 percent of the people who die that are over 80 years old, their terminal illness is produced by a fall. Both of them—

CP: I think you're probably correct.

JH: The reason I'm saying this is I think that will stimulate some scientist out there to make a study and see what is the cause, organism or activity, that produces death in people who live to be 85, 90, or 95. I predict that mine will be stimulated by a fall. But, I've been awfully careful. I try not to fall.

CP: Statistically, for both of us.

JH: Now, is there anything else I need to say about that?

CP: No, I think you've made us a good pearl. And we've been signaled—

JH: Do you think that's something printable?

CP: I think it's very critical. But the videographer said we've been signaled that our tape is running out. So with that, Dr. Hall—

JH: I haven't answered for any video photographer or anyone else in—I say, “Don't tell me how much time you want, I control that.”

CP: Let me tell you, though, on behalf of the University of South Florida and its library system and the college of public health at the University of South Florida, we just sincerely thank you for sharing with us what's been a marvelous career.

JH: It's been a pleasure. I know you've probably filmed some things I wish I hadn't have said or I shouldn't have said. I don't do that I didn't say that, did I?

CP: No, you haven't said anything I think is bad, no.

End of Interview