

17¢ Away from Charlottesville: Interviews with James E. Payne in Proffit Virginia

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Life Story

The nature of a life story, according to Charlotte Linde (1993:4) is that it is told over the course of a lifetime by the person whose life is being recounted. As an oral unit, Linde claims the life story is “an entity that is so fluid, and so subject to constant reinterpretation and revision, that it can never be completed” (p. 35-36). What will follow here is not a life story. It is something approaching Martin-Perdue and Perdue’s definition of a life *History* (1996:11) in that it showcases “a single frame at a particular moment in the larger production—as it is told to or written down by the other party to the story.”

However, I hesitate to use even *this* term. In my presentation of James E. Payne’s life history, you will not find a chronological account. The story does not begin on June 13th, 1913—when Mr. Payne was born—nor does it end with the most recent recollections of his life. Over the course of two Saturdays and one extended telephone conversation I got to learn something of his life. Before we began I explained to him the nature of the project. I asked him to tell me about his life, and this is the story he chose to tell.

I had the choice of rearranging the story based on my own desire for a neat, linear, chronological telling, but changed my mind when the woman who cleans his house arrived and Mr. Payne announced to her, “She’s taking my history, Karen!” (See page 9). As much as is possible for a relative stranger to present an emic view of a person’s life, I try to stay true to Mr. Payne’s own representations and interpretations of his life experiences. Anything else would be *my* story, not his.

The life history presented here is taken primarily from the second of our two meetings. I chose this meeting as the axis of my paper because I feel that during this meeting I was less leading in my questions and more willing to let Mr. Payne choose the direction of the conversation. However, because many of the stories repeat in all three of our meetings (two in person and one over the phone), I organize life story into two columns. The second meeting is presented in the left column, while variations to certain stories that were told during the previous meeting are included on the right. I include these because I feel that there is certain significance to stories that are repeated. For one, they clue us in to events that seem to be significant to the teller. Additionally, the different details and emphases that surface in the telling of stories in different contexts provide a study of how ‘thick’ an event can be, and it is my hope that a variety of ‘versions’ will allow for a more meaningful understanding of Mr. Payne’s experiences.

It should be understood that I do not include the entire recorded conversation, which lasted for approximately two hours. Rather, I edited out parts that seemed to tangential. I realize that in doing this I am imposing my own judgment of what is ‘important’ on the narrative, but (in my defense) I do this based on my sense of what Mr. Payne felt were important moments and elements in his life. A full transcript of the first meeting (November 25, 2000), and a rough transcript of the second (December 2, 2000) are appended to the end of this paper, along with various maps and related materials.

Proffit, Virginia

But we are not yet ready to begin: this somewhat extensive introduction is given because I believe it is important to provide a discussion about how I came about meeting Mr. Payne and why it is that I chose to write about his life. I first met James (Jim) Payne in a focus group in Proffit, Virginia. The group met on May 28, 2000 to discuss the history of the town. Proffit had recently been

listed in both the State and the National Registers of Historic Places, it had been included as a landmark on the African American Heritage Trail (a project being developed by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the Virginia Tourism Corporation) and had received a grant to develop an online archive for people interested in researching various aspects of Proffit. The reason for this attention is that the town had been established in the 1870s by African Americans “shortly after the Civil War, and reflects a history of perhaps many such communities that were founded in the South after the war” (Wuellner 1991:1). Melinda Frierson (1998:4) writes that “by today’s standards, the transaction [which established the town of Proffit] was an unusual one, with freedmen Ben Brown and John Coles receiving land from W. G. Carr, then the owner of Bentivar, in exchange for the labor of their sons.”

The participants in the meeting were Mary Tinsley, Marion Martin and Pauline Johnson and James Payne (all born, raised and continue to live in Proffit), Scot French (of the Carter Woodson Institute), Larnell Flannagan (a descendant of one of the early Proffit residents), and myself (in the capacity of ‘graduate research assistant’ for the online archive project).

Our meeting on a warm Sunday afternoon was fascinating to me: the four ‘old-timers’ were asked to tell us something of ‘the way things were,’ and we found that bringing the four together allowed them to reminisce, trigger memories in one another, negotiate the details of particular events, and display something of the nature of their friendships, which had been developing over some seventy years. They all had an extraordinary wealth of knowledge, memories, stories about growing up in Proffit in the early part of the 20th century. In the next few days Larnell Flannagan and I partook in two tours. The first was a tour of Proffit provided by Ms. Tinsley, who is often touted Proffit’s ‘local historian’. Ms. Martin provided us with another in which she showed us the remains of the old

Gale Hill manor¹. In June I had the opportunity to interview Ms. Pauline Johnson. I had also attended the annual Proffit Community Association picnic in September, where I had a chance to speak to other residents about Proffit's past.

Mr. Payne

The only old-timer I had not met with individually was James Payne, who incidentally is also the oldest of the four elders we had met. In part, I was avoiding meeting him because I was nervous about interviewing someone who spoke in a dialect that was unfamiliar to me and I was worried that would be embarrassed for not understanding him. Conquering my fear, I called Mr. Payne to set up an interview for Saturday morning, November 25th, 2000, three days after Thanksgiving. Our telephone transaction made me feel better: there were no (significant) misunderstandings, and Mr. Payne sounded like he was quite willing to share his recollections with me. The hours we spent in interviews demonstrated that while my fears were not completely unfounded (I frequently misunderstand words or expressions he says), they were also quite exaggerated. Mr. Payne, I found, is incredibly good-humored and kind, so even when I did *not* understand him, his responses were patient and congenial and he was often able to turn awkward moments into light-hearted ones.

I arrive at Mr. Payne's home at 11 am on Saturday morning (November 25, 2000) and he begins talking before I even had a chance to close the door — "Come on in, honey. Have a seat, I remember when..." I rush to set up the Marantz PMD 201 recorder and flyswatter microphone so I wouldn't miss anything, but Mr. Payne is unstoppable. If I had any doubts about how the interview would go—any worries about awkwardness or silences—they immediately dissipated.

As I set up the equipment, I notice there are many photographs (of family members I later learn) around the room. At an arms' length from his chair Mr. Payne is able to reach his paperwork,

¹ Gale Hill is the name of the 19th-century plantation where Coles and Brown had possibly been slaves. The plantation

the television, television remote-control, medicine, and a variety of other useful objects. This is thanks to a round tabletop resting in a giant crochet-holder, which serves as rotating table—an ingenious solution for providing access to a large surface to someone whose mobility is limited.

At 87, Mr. Payne towers to the height of 6'4". He walks gingerly, but you do not get a sense that he is frail. From my own meetings with him, and from observing him in interactions with others (his daughter, stepson, the woman who cleans his house, and her son) it is evident that he loves to entertain, loves to be in the company of others, and loves to tell stories. He sets himself in his spot, puts his feet up on the neighboring chair, and he is off...

Life History

[Extracted from December 2, 2000 meeting]

JP: Yeah, the Joker's Barbershop is named after the Joker's Club.

MB: So you belong to the Joker's club?

JP: No they wouldn't let me join. Say someone had to die before I could join. They had 30-something members at that time. See, the barbershop was named after the Joker's club. But they wouldn't let nobody join. That was back in the 40s or 50s. Charlottesville is a small place. You know there were 30-something social clubs in Charlottesville?

MB: So everyone belonged to something?

JP: Something, that's right. Even had some club called the Blue Mints. I think my wife belonged to four of them. But I wasn't a member of the Joker club.

MB: Did you belong to any?

JP: Nothing but Blue Cross Insurance! That's what kills me. Blue cross – they cost 225 dollars a month.

MB: A month?

JP: A month. Went up last year: two hundred and twenty five dollars a month. I had to get social services – get some money back on my medicine.

MB: What do they pay for, everything?

JP: They don't pay for nothing but 80% and hospital. Don't pay but 10% on medicine. Course I didn't pay them when I had both

[Extracted from November 25th meeting]

house had burned down in 1932 or 1933. (Martin, 2000)

surgeries. I had surgery in '96 and '97.

MB: On each knee.

JP: Yeah, both knees: One in '96, one in '97. Cause you know, my neck – that's what hurts now. Doctor says he ain't got no extra necks. Can't do much with the neck business, I guess.

Tighten up so that you can't turn your head, hardly.

[Our conversation turns to health issues until, after several moments, I say:]

M: I was thinking—since I'll give you a copy of the tape—[you should tell] whatever you want to tell about your life. That way it will be something your grandkids will appreciate

JP: Oh, yeah!

MB: And great-grandkids

JP: That's right, got two of them too. I got two grandchildren and two great grandchildren. They might be here for Christmas I hope.

MB: You must have more than two grandchildren, though

JP: Why?

MB: Because Marcia has two kids

JP: She raises those. Those are adopted But these [points at a woman in a picture over the television] – that's me.

MB: Flesh and blood.

JP: Yeah. Ronnie is the only one of my children that had any children – he had two children, a boy and a girl. And my brother had one child. He had a daughter. My brother's daughter—I told you my brother died in '45. His daughter's name is Dire. She lives in Portsmouth. She's retired now... She's been a clerk for the coast guard for 30 years. She retired. Stayed on the boat, I think! Dire—She was named after her grandma. Her mother's name is Eola, her grandmother's name Dire. She was a Thomas on her mother's side.

JP: My brother's name Roscoe. We used to call him Tooky.

[Laughs] That was his nickname.

MB: Who made that one up?

JP: I don't know—probably all of us did.

MB: For any particular reason?

JP: Nope, not that I remember. That was a long time ago. He had two years and four months younger than me.

MB: Yeah.

JP: That's a long time ago.

MB: Was she related to – there was a Thomas in Proffit, wasn't there?

JP: Oh, yeah! A whole lot of 'em. There was a whole nest of them down the railroad tracks! I remember one time they had nine children. I don't know how many boys and girls, but I know

they had 9 children. That was down where the road goes under the railroad, like you're going down by the polo grounds.

MB: You know, at the Proffit Association Picnic, the people who live in the old farmhouse [at Bentivar], they came to the picnic. They said they live on the original house of the farm.

JP: I know where that was. They had a well in that house—I told you Canadian people bought it, the Clarks?

MB: Yeah

JP: J. H. Clark. Well, I went down there in '26. They had a hand-dug well on that place. 86 feet down deep and walled up with rock all the way up. You'd see vines and moss. They'd let us down in order to clean it out. I'd be scared to go down with all that slick in there. Went on down in a bucket!

MB: That's how you'd go down?? You stand on a bucket?

JP: Yeah! A bucket and a rope.

MB: And they lower you down?

JP: Two men, one on each side of the well.

MB: Oh, boy. You gotta have a lot of faith.

JP: You gotta have faith. I don't go down there—I'd been to one well in my life. The guy was digging one, I went down one time just to know what its like. You know you can't breath [laughs] I don't like it down there. I couldn't take it.

MB: Who dug it?

JP: Somebody, honey. I don't know—that's all dug by hand back in then, that one was probably done in slavery time, cause that was in '26 and they bought that farm. See, at the time I went down it, all that farm belonged to one man, that was Tony Clark. 700 acres. It was a 700-acre farm one time. [after some pause, Mr. Payne resumes:] They had Clydesdale horses. Didn't have no tractors.

MB: Clydesdale? What kind are those?

JP: They're big horses, the kinds they have in Williamsburg, where you need a ladder to get on. Clydesdale and Belgian are big horses. Largest horses that grow!

MB: What are they good for?

JP: Work horse. Both of them are large workhorses. Some of them—you need to get on them a ladder, almost! [Mr. Payne pauses again, and then:] Yeah, old Bentivar farm... that was in the day you were walking down Proffit road, and you didn't see no cars. Weren't no cars. Horse and buggy, or walk where you're going. People walking down the road, they'd have a lantern, you know, one of those oil things. You ever seen a oil lantern?

MB: I've seen some, but not being used.

JP: That's what a while ago. Now, in 1926. I went to work down there in Bentivar farm. It was a farm there, with about 300 sheep, that weren't nothing but work.

MB: Hmm. What kind of work?

JP: (Sealing) corn, chopping corn... 10 cent an hour. Something to do. [chuckles]

JP: 1926. I was 14 years old. That's the same year they built this rock store. See the rock store down across the bridge? J. H. Clark. That store was built in '26. That was a big rock store. He was the man who built it, was on that farm at that time. J. H. Clark had a 700-acre farm down there.

They were Canadian people.

MB: They were Canadian?

JP: Seven-hundred-acres.

MB: Wow.

JP: Seven hundred acres, honey. Sheep and cattle. That's when I went to work down there, 1926.

MB: So that was that your first job?

JP: I guess that *was* my first job. I guess it was.

JP: Oh yeah, hanging up somewhere on display. I've used many a-one. Used kerosene. Yeah, time marches on... One thing, I can remember stuff way back then, and I can't remember what happened last week! I was trying to think about that place where I worked at CC Camp. It took me a half hour to think of Halifax! I couldn't think of Halifax, couldn't get it to come... It was Halifax County, where we built the lookout tower for forest fires. I was scared the whole time I was on that thing.

MB: Why?

JP: I was 114 feet high, honey! I put all the steps in that tower. And dig the base for the foundation! Its nine steps to a deck, its 114 feet high—ain't nothing but a telephone and field glasses and the cot. Looking for forest fires. Right on a hill going to Halifax. I gotta find out what road that was, though. You know, in 1934 it was nothing but trees. I'd like to see what it look like there right now. We'll I'll get the map, cause I know it changed. All the places we used to go down there. And most of them in Mecklenburg County, and Halifax County. That was between Farmville and South Boston. But I know things have changed since 1934. If I were to go down there now I'd get lost.

MB: There might still be some stuff over there.

JP: I'm gonna get me a map—if I get me a map I know where to go. When I went down there, you didn't see no horses, people plowing with oxen. Two steers, didn't see no horses. See persons plowing the oxen, picking cotton... and tobacco. That's the only place I've seen cotton grow in Virginia, before you get to Danville.

MB: I thought they grew a lot of cotton in Virginia.

JP: No, they grow tobacco, not cotton. In the Eastern Shore. A lot of tobacco grown in Louisa county. Fluvanna county, tobacco. The only cotton I've seen was in Danville. [After a long pause he asks:] You want to think of something else, don't you?

MB: Well, I was gonna say – if you wanna... whatever it is that you want to tell about your life or something that you can give to your grandkids and great-grandkids.

JP: Oh. I guess they probably would enjoy something like that.

[Mr. Payne talks about the man who brought me over in the taxi—his grandmother was from Proffit and grew up with Mr. Payne. He tries to figure out their genealogy. After some moments Karen, the cleaning woman arrives with her son:]

K: Hi, how are you doing?

MB: Hey.

JP: Hey, Karen!

K: Hey, babe.

JP: [to me] Tell 'em your name.

M: Mieka

MB: You were going to school before?

JP: Yeah, a little while. Didn't have school here much. Where our school at about 2-3 years. Then after that, we just, we didn't have a *teachers*. Didn't have enough black children to teach. We walked to school three years. Off where the airport at.

MB: *Wait!* I thought there was a school right next to the church!

JP: Yeah, I *said* we went there a couple of years! After that they didn't have no teachers

MB: So they sent you by the airport.

JP: we had to walk!

MB: You walked to the *airport*?

JP: We walked six miles a day.

JP: Three miles each way.

JP: Mieka

K: Hi, Mieka

M: nice to meet you.

JP: She's taking my history, Karen!

MB: yeah.

K: well, you go ahead, boy.

[Some discussion about the weather, about Karen's son, about cleaning...]

JP: Let me think of I want... I have to think about where to start at. [Mr. Payne gets lost in thought. After a while he says:] I can start at when I quit school, alright?

MB: Alright.

JP: That's 1926. The state didn't have no money for teaching for black children. So we walked 6 miles a day from Proffit to Pleasant Grove Elementary School. That's where the airport is now. That was torn down. That was a beautiful school, too. It had two room and three teachers, I believe. The teachers were Betty Minor and Rosa Lott, Alice Carter and Reverend J. L. Carter. I think his first name was James, but I can't remember what his name was, I'll tell you that. But we walked six miles a day, so you put that down?

MB: Yeah—walked 6 miles a day.

JP: Six miles. Three up and three back. And that was in '26.

And the next thing, I went to work at Bentivar farm... let me see... I don't know how long I worked down there. That's when they built the Rock Store that they're tearing down now. Ok, let me see... I gotta skip some parts cause I don't remember. The next farm I worked on called H. W. Greenhough. That was on [Route] 20. We worked there for a dollar a day and meals. We cut ice off the ice pond by the Rivanna River—it was a pond right beside the river—put in a 30 foot ice house at the house and hauled by noon in the wagon to the house and put it in the ice house, which is 30 feet. Put it up in straw, covered the ice with straw.

MB: Covered it with straw—why d'you do that?

JP: Keep it for the summer.

MB: Oh, that's how you would keep it?

JP: Yeah, in the ground. You got straw by the freight loads, bales of straw. That's what kept the ice. Go down when it start to melt, you go down on the ladder. If you didn't take care you might fall and break your neck—when the ice melt, be holes in it, see?

MB: Sure.

JP: It had a 30-foot ladder to go down there, though.

MB: What was the ladder made of?

JP: Wood. It was made of wood. They've metalized it now, but back on then they made it of wooden rounds. And that was a

MB: How many children were at *that* school?

JP: I don't know... but the board said there wasn't enough of *us*, for to bring a teacher.

MB: but there must have been enough, cause there nine kids for the Browns, and nine kids for the Flannagans.

JP: Yeah, the *school* board didn't think so. We walked to Pleasant Grove three years. Till it got that the weather was bad and *couldn't* walk.

MB: So who was the teacher for the first three years in Proffit?

JP: Oh, I don't know, who taught down there. Ms. Minor, I believe. Ms. Minor and ... uh. I know, but I can't remember what her name was. But I know at Pleasant Grove, who taught over up that road. Ms. Minor and Mrs. Alice Carr, too. She used to go to Pleasant Grove School. It's a two-room school. Its been torn down now. Its right where the south end of the runway is. It was a nice school for a two-room school.

MB: How many kids went there?

JP: I don't remember. 'Cause the children came down from Earlysville, too. But I don't know how many there were.

MB: Did they divide you by age?

JP: I don't remember now. There's so many in a room together. Was nothing but two rooms. That was a long time ago.

MB: So Ms. Alice Carr taught at Pleasant Grove school.

JP: Yeah, her and her husband, Reverend Carr did, too. And also, Rosa Lott.

JP: I used to be so cold when we worked down in Greenhough farm. We cut ice off the ice pond, put it in the icehouse. They had icehouses, they didn't have no refrigerators.

MB: Where was the icehouse?

JP: Icehouse up at the house, 'bout 30 feet deep.

MB: Every house had a ice house?

JP: No, no, no... People who had money had it. We cut ice off the pond, the pond was down by the river. In order for ice to grow in a pond you have to have a cold spell last about two-three weeks. For the ice to get thick enough to cut. You know, it just keep freezing over and over. We didn't ride no wagon [back then]. And you just see nobody in that wagon. It gets that cold all day! You walk everywhere, you

farm work. Cutting hays and hauling hays. Cutting and hauling hay... and corn. Cutting corn on the river...

I think [one time] from 1 o'clock in the evening to 6 o'clock I've killed as much as four moccasins. Snakes! With a corn knife. They go into the river looking for water! See, the cornfield right beside the cliff, and the cliff was right by the river. Them snakes come down the cliff wanted nothing but water. Every time I see one its just go into the water. (I don't think they care more than a little). Just don't step on one of them or he will hang you. They're poison. Black snakes are nothing but garden snakes. Moccasin's poisonous.

MB: Black Snakes aren't poisonous?

JP: Not unless they're crossed up with something. Never heard of a black snake being poisonous. Moccasin's are poison, Gardens is poison, and the Black Diamond we have here in the back of the mountain—we got the Black Diamond in the Blue Ridge.

'Course he would always let you know—he gives you a warning: t-t-t-t [makes the sound of a rattle snake and shakes his hand like the tail of a snake]. He lets you know when he's going to hang you.

MB: Oh, so it's a rattle snake?

JP: Yeah – rattle snakes in the mountains of the Blue Ridge! Up at Shenandoah Valley at the lake, up on the mountains. All around White Hall and Brown (schools), too!

JP: Uh, let's see. Yeah, we built rail fences, too at H. W. Greenhough.

MB: Oh.

JP: Of course, I know you don't know what a rail fence is. [I laugh] I saw your face. What do you think is a rail fence?

MB: What is a rail fence?

JP: They were made out of chestnut oak, honey. They don't chip at their old age, no notches, no nothing. Chestnut oak do not have knots. Its easy to split, and it don't leave messes. You just split it, and then you put it in... You put the pencil like that [Mr. Payne holds two pencils in an X], and you put the rail right down the middle. No nails or nothing. You see like this [show with his fingers again]. Two posts. See, they're two posts in an X. Two more posts down about eight feet. Then the rail goes in the middle of them.

MB: So no nails.

JP: No nails, no.... don't need no nails. That was a long time ago. I (drove rails) in '31. Yeah, that's what they used to have all around here—didn't have nothing but rail fences. They used dogwood, or some of them used hickory—different things. But see the reason they used chestnut oak is because it didn't have no

didn't want to ride a wagon. I been feeding horses and walk.

MB: So you put the ice and the wagon, then you walk next to the wagon?

JP: Yeah! Walk and ride or walk and drive. Too cold I don't want to ride no wagon! The wind blowing, too. When you ride and the temperature about zero, you don't *want* to ride.

MB: When were you cutting ice?

JP: '31. We had to haul ice from the ice pond to Ms. Greenhough's house. That was on Stony Point Road. That was another farm I worked. She owned land on both sides of the river. Had about three barns in that place. She owned land on both *sides* of the Rivanna river! She had Black Angus cattle.

see, the reason they used chestnut oak is because it didn't have no knots in it. It split easy. You can't split wood that's got knots in it. It chip out any kind of way. You take a gum tree, a dogwood tree, a sycamore tree—you can't split them. The grain's crossed. All of those trees, it just chips off. Take a split with a wedge and a hammer and it'll chip off in little pieces. It's hard to split pine, because pine chips off, too. But the problem with pine is that it's about the easiest thing to rot—decays so quick.

I remember when my daughter got that place—when mama and I gave her that place—when we got married, we had but two acres. The pines were so thick in there... look at my hand. [he holds both hands together with the back of one facing me. His fingers are interlaced like a trellis]. You couldn't walk in there. Pines. Her husband and I worked on that place every Wednesday for one month with a chainsaw. Cut those pine trees until we could walk through there.

MB: What did you do with all the wood?

JP: Divided it up! I was doing the sawing, my son-in-law was doing the dragging. He was the pack-mule. He dragged it down hill and burned the stuff up. Cleared up a whole lot—enough to build a house! Mother had just got that land, too.

MB: Where did she get it from?

JP: From my—let me so, how do I put that?—my uncle's son. They had 10 acres. He sold it all, but Marcia and Eddie [his daughter and son-in-law] got the first two acres. It was 8 or 10 acres. There's four houses on it now. Each house about 2 acres.

MB: What was your wife's name?

JP: Catherine.

MB: So Marcia is your daughter?

JP: Yeah. Catherine Elizabeth and Marcia Elizabeth.

MB: They have the same middle name.

JP: A-ha.

[Mr. Payne goes into a discussion about Lydia Leake and her family. Mrs. Leake lived down the road for her entire life (she lived until she was over 100 years old). Mr. Payne discusses her genealogy. She had four sons, Preston, Keith, Milton and Norman and one daughter, Naomi. Mr. Payne identifies each by name, by where they lived and their profession]

JP: Now, Ms. Leake's mother, Ms. Cox – she's the one that ran the store. They had a boardwalk down there where the little house is now, back in the field almost to the river, by the railroad. That's where the big store was. Get gingersnaps 5 for a penny. So hard you'd take a hammer to break'em! [Starts laughing]. You used to get them in a keg, like a 20-gallon keg or something. Sugar, 2 cents a pound...

JP: Yeah, I used to help the guys load

MB: When was that?

JP: That was in the '20s. [He pauses] That's the day before yesterday, isn't it?

MB: Something like that.

JP: And down in the bottom—where Ms. Tinsley lives—that was C. D. Lewis's store. The building is still there now.

MB: When was that?

JP: That was in the '20s, too.

MB: So there were two stores at the same time.

JP: Oh, yeah. And the railroad station. The railroad station was far from the house—the one I'm talking about now. The station was torn down, but house is still there. It was two rooms for passengers, a baggage room, and an operator's room—Morse code. Five trains a day. I think, 3 going south and two going north. 17¢ fare to Charlottesville. Double track then, though. Ain't but one track down there now. Sidetrack and everything. We used to work on Saturday loading with pulpwood and stuff in it. People go into the mountains, bring pulpwood—you know, to make paper out of. Down there working all Saturday trying to make a couple of quarters.

MB: A couple of quarters?

JP: [Laughs] trying to make a couple of quarters. You didn't get nothing but for working!

JP: I told you I worked in 1932 for 25¢ an hour running an air drill.

MB: No, you didn't tell me that!

JP: I didn't tell you?? Yeah. 25¢ an hour running an air drill on [Route] 29. That's when they built the first lane: the southbound lane. I ran an air drill out there. You know, when it stops shaking—you know, its kinda hard to ease the shaking [demonstrates to me how his whole body shook]. You ever seen one?

MB: Yeah, sure I've seen one.

JP: That's what I used to run. Its run by air. That's why it shakes you so. And on 29, when I was working up there, we had to count the dynamite go off.

MB: You had to what?

JP: Count the shots go off—using dynamite. In CC Camp I used to do the same thing. We had batteries, you didn't have to run... Count it till it go off... two three people lighting the dynamite; you put a two-foot fuse on it, burn a foot to the minute. There's about 2-3 people lighting them. You give yourself time to get away from it. Get away about 150 feet from it.

MB: Wow.

pulpwood on Saturday. But that wasn't no job, that's getting what you can do it. We gotta [load] a little pulpwood—you know, you know pulpwood, you make paper.

JP: We would load it on cars.

MB: Where were they getting it from?

JP: People bring it down to the station, the railroad station.

JP: We go down and load it on the train.

Cause we don't have no school on Saturday.

MB: So you did that on Saturdays.

JP: Yeah, we'd go down work on Saturday, try to make something.

MB: And they'd pay you for that?

JP: Pay about 10 cent an hour, won't making that much. That good money, that 10 cent an hour.

MB: You go to the store with that?

JP: Ginger snap was 5 for a penny, you'd get a whole lot of cakes!

JP: Ginger snap was 5 for a penny, you'd get a whole lot of cakes! So hard to figure how I'm gonna bring them all (home).

You know, ginger snaps used to come to the store in a barrel. It comes from, like, a small barrel and they take 'em out and sell them in bags.

JP: There was a railroad station there, too. With two rooms: one for passengers, one room for baggage, and a Western Union telegram. That was in the '20s.

MB: That's when the station started? In the '20s?

JP: No, it was in operation then. We done have 5 train stop here a day. 17 cents gonna get you to Charlottesville. Could ride fare 17 cents.

MB: 17 cents each way?

JP: That's right. 5 trains a day. It had double tracks, they take off one of the tracks now. But we had double tracks then. That was the Maine-Southern!

JP: Dynamite shoots down. But it will come up sometimes.

MB: So you just light it up and run as fast as you can?

JP: That's right. There are a lot of fuses. You're supposed to give yourself time. About 2 or 3 minutes. See, the cap in the dynamite puts it off.

MB: The what?

JP: The cap in the dynamite... I can't describe to you to see how it works. Say you got a stick of dynamite that's about... 12-14 inches long. Its soft powder, but its wrapped in paper.

MB: a-ha.

JP: The cap is about that long [shows about one inch with his hand]. The cap goes inside the dynamite; the fuse goes inside the cap; and that's what you light—the fuse. You got 40% dynamite, 60%, or 80%. If it's a big job—say a mountain—they'd use kegs of powder. Blow a whole mountain down. But its all done by battery about 500 feet away. They don't take no chance on it.

MB: That's what they did at CC Camp?

JP: We had batteries, yeah. Didn't have to worry about not going off. Cause each cap was tested by a tester. Didn't take no chances on blowing somebody up.

MB: I'm sure there were accidents, though.

JP: Oh yeah! I imagine there was! As far as I know where I worked it didn't, but its lucky it didn't.

MB: You mean on 29.

JP: Yeah

MB: What about CC Camp?

JP: Nope. Not that I know of. I went to CC Camp after I left my work on 29. In '32 I was [working on] 29, and I went to CC Camp in '33. I went to CC Camp from October in '33 to January in '35. Stayed there 15 months.

MB: How long did you work on 29 North?

JP: I don't remember how long it was. I just worked on the bridge mostly. I was drilling the bridge. Bridge Force.

MB: The bridge over Rivanna?

JP: North Rivanna, yeah. That was down in the ground, drilling a hole for dynamite—before they put the bridge on.

MB: But you didn't do the dynamite yourself, did you?

JP: Not at that particular place, but I have did it. You see, I worked on the bridge down in the ground, and on the outside a distance not far [shows me the distance(?)]. It wasn't nothing but the bridge people. Dynamite is something dangerous, though. The way that guy used to drive that truck, oh, I was scared the truck was going to blow while he's driving (he was so) crazy. This is in CC Camp. Carving all that dynamite honey we'd

This is in CC Camp. Carrying all that dynamite, honey, we'd drive a pickup truck – he driving that thing, jumping all over the place. I said, 'man that thing might go off!'. And he, 'man, it ain't gonna hurt you.' I don't know what's gone in him.

MB: Who said that?

JP: The guy who was driving the truck. Him and I were carrying the dynamite going to work. That was in CC Camp.

MB: Was that a friend of yours?

JP: No, no—there were 240 of us in CC Camp. 240 people. Forty people were local, from around Farmville and Drakes Branch and (Charlotte's quarter) and (Kembridge) and all them places round there. It was local people. Had nine squads; I think about 20-something people to a squad. Everybody did different works. Some set up trees, some blow up trees and blast trees, some built roads... but we were under army supervision, though. We had a gray and green uniform. We were under army regulations. Had bugle tapping and all that stuff; bunk beds, army mess kits—them aluminum things... I can tell you the name of the camp, too: Camp Gallion. 1390. Camp Gallion, Green Bay, Virginia. That's where it was. I'll never forget that.

[Mr. Payne tells about a recent trip he took with William Tinsley to a church in Cumberland County. He then talks about having a hard time hearing certain people in his own church.]

JP: My hearing got mighty bad in the past year or so. I got my ears cleaned up last Tuesday.

MB: Did it help?

JP: Helped some. It don't help with them soft voices. [In church] – I don't get the words! And that really hurts when you go to church meetings. You don't want to miss that, you want to hear every word of that cause, you know, [laughs] cause somebody might break bad! We get along pretty good now, though. There's too many hard heads. You gotta agree with somebody. You can't have your way all the time. Well, I've been to church meetings [got] so mad I could blow it up. I made sure I didn't open my mouth. I swallowed my pride... You ain't never gonna get everything you like. Some people think that! People hollering in church, going: 'where my seat?' 'where my seat?'. You ain't got no seat in church—wherever you find! My wife and all of them bought pews in the church 40 years ago—[but] I don't look for my pew to sit in! I remember when mama and I bought them – all of the members bought them.

MB: What do you mean 'bought them'? People pay for them?

JP: Yeah. You bought them and put your name on them—a little plate just goes on the back of them.

MB: So do they do that now?

JP: In 1934 I was at CC Camp—Civilian Conservation Core. President Roosevelt [started that] for poor people. It was a dollar day. Run by the army. And we get 30 dollars a month, and 25 come home, you get five of it. 240 guys in camp. It was all supervised by the army. One or two would build parks, and build roads, driveways, sell trees... sell *shrubbery*, sell out a lot of trees. 'Course I worked dynamite in there. We was in camp Gay in Green Bay, Virginia.

MB: a-ha.

JP: Camp Gay in Green Bay, Virginia. 1390. 1390 was the number of the camp.

MB: Wow. You remember all that.

JP: Greenbay, Virginia. That's 18 miles south of Farmville.

MB: What were you doing at the CC Camp?

JP: Selling shrubbery, like a forest. Build four-five buildings, [watch] the forest. Build the driveways. I worked with dynamite. I worked blowing up trees, built private roads.

MB: How many years were you there?

JP: 13 months, yeah. You could have stayed about 15 months. After Hoover they got a Democrat president Roosevelt. He got a job for everybody, that what it was.

JP: No, not necessarily. I think we had to do it. I think. I don't remember—been so long. That was 20 years ago. Lord, mama been dead... Mama died in '86. That was long before she died. I don't remember why we bought them, now. I wouldn't say we had to do it. But we got it so that most of our old members are dead. We don't have many old members. I told you I was the oldest member of the church!

MB: yeah.

JP: I'm the oldest member of that church. But we got a lot of young people in that church.

MB: Is that good or bad?

JP: Its good. They need to be in church. Better to be in church then to be in jail. We got a young pastor, that's what did it, see?

[Talks about how the new pastor is good with the kids. "he's just 40 years old—he's got 2 of his own!" Eventually he gets into a discussion about how the young kids today don't have good manners and can get away with anything.]

JP: But I know what would have happen if you'd say something to mama! [Laughs] She'd be up on the table, I expect! Boy, my wife was rough [laughing]. Her grandmother raised her. She didn't play. But mama was as tough as she was! No, Catherine didn't play. Cause Catherine's grandmamma, grandma Emma raised her. [Laughs] Take something upside your head in a minute! You know that now you'd be in jail. You know, something good about mama, she'd say: if they did something while I was at work—mama went to work—she'd tell me when I got home... if she hadn't already beat 'em. Yeah, she didn't play. Old Ronnie—I remember one time—set the field on fire—I had the whole field burning!

MB: Ronnie did??

JP: Yeah, smoking! ...He got the beating bad with them! That was the second time! He did it with me one time! I went down there back there to where they wash the clothes—to get water from the spring to burned up all that broomsage. You know how broomsage is, it dries out and there's a danger of setting on fire. Well, I went down and was gonna burn up all around the spring to the get the water away from it. Man come down here from the fire department say, 'if you don't put that fire out you're gonna pay for it!' Burned over half of my place! See, its supposed to burn a certain time of year, and a certain time a day: after 4 and before 12 at night. But what happened: the minute I lit that match down at the spring, the wind rose. That was it! Couldn't stop it. The only way I stopped that fire was to put a fire in front of it. Back fire. I learned that in CC Camp. Fire burned away down there everywhere, burning acres and acres of land. They gonna put a fire in front of it and then put that fire out, and let the one

burn up to it, that will cut it off.

JP: We fought a fire in CC Camp for ten days one time. All the way down in Drake's Branch (in Charlotte quarter). By air, by water tanks on your backs, and rigs. They use a tank of water on your back and spray them tree stumps. A tree stump like that would burn for months and days and days. See, its burning underground, but there's a danger of sparks flying out. Yeah, we fought fire for ten days down there.

MB: So you would just go all over?

JP: Yeah! You had certain camps.

MB: So everything in that area was in your charge.

JP: That's right. It was 1390. We had a camp set up from all the way back in Green Bay back in Buckingham. Say, probably about 20 or 30 miles apart, 40 miles apart. But we had a lot of different counties.

[the discussion turns to White Hall and a resort that a different CC Camp had built there in the 1940s. After a while:]

JP: Where was I now?

MB: Let's see, we were talking a while back about when you were working on the farm down on 20.

JP: Down at Ms. Greenhough's.

MB: Yeah.

JP: That's who owned it. Walter Kimball was the foreman down there. He lived there. She stayed overseas most of the time. Ms. Greenhough's husband was dead. She was lonely. I don't know if she was (lazy) or what she was. But she'd go over in September and stay all the winter. Go to England, France, somewhere. Leave all that house to us. All that work. She had land on both sides of the river. I don't know how much land she had. But she didn't do nothing but... She bred Black Angus cattle. I think Ms. Greenhough had... Heck, she had three barns, I believe. Where I used to go to the barn to feed, it was so cold I'd rather walk the horse and lead him. I wouldn't even ride the horse then. Its too cold!

Lead him?

JP: Too cold to ride a horse then, honey!

MB: Because the wind?

JP: Yeah, its cold! I'd walk and lead the horse to keep warm!

MB: Must have been pretty cold.

JP: It was cold! Any time its cold enough to cut ice off the river, you know its cold. Around 0 all day. Get up to maybe 10 above, something like that. We'd haul ice from that ice pond and get up to the hill—to the icehouse in the hill—and you didn't see a drop of water in the wind. There's no ice melting. It was that cold!

We walked. Didn't ride no wagon [laughs] its about a block of ice around you. Too cold to ride a wagon. Walk beside the wagon.

[Laughs] Yeah, people say 'them the good old days'—I don't want to see them no more! 'The good old days'...

MB: You don't?

JP: Nope! Hard times. I don't want to see 'em no more. Let's see, nineteen forty... see that tree by the fence right there?

MB: yeah

JP: I saw snow up that high. Drift. In '48.

MB: Snow up to the top of the fence?

JP: That's right.

MB: So what's that? About... four feet?

JP: That's right. That snow drifts like that [indexes a slope with his hand]

MB: Wow...

JP: Yeah, honey. I seen it. I seen a snow plow come here, a truck, and the snow so deep in the road he couldn't budge it. He went back and got an old machine and leaned it on the side—run about 5 miles an hour. That moved it, though. Yeah, snow drifted into that field back there. 1948 is that last big one I remember.

People's water and things freezing up in the house, now. Sure, if it stays cold that long—at least two weeks—everything in the house freezes up. I killed a hog back in them days and we killed a hog and hang him up to stiffen him up to cut him up the next day. Hog almost freeze. Too cold to cut out. You can get them chitlins and cut 'em out, but it get so hard you can't. your hand be aching trying to cut the hogs up. Ice killed 4-5 hogs every year.

MB: How big are the hogs?

JP: Oh, about 200 on up. Each. Or more

MB: So how much meat do you get out of a 200 pound hog?

JP: You get all of it, soon as you're finished cutting it up. You cut it out and then you trim it up. You trim the ham, you trim the shoulders up; you put it down in salt for six weeks and draw all the blood out of it. So when you take it out and hang it up its cured. Then you got to wash it... You don't want no skippers or something to get in there.

MB: Skippers?

JP: Yeah, bugs will get in it if you don't put it in a bag or something. Like, if you got it hanging up and you don't put in a bag or something, the skippers will get in it. ...Yeah, you put that meat for six weeks. That way—people always raise so much saying about 'sugar cured ham' and 'country ham'. You salt them, that's the way you cook'em. That meat stays in salt six weeks! Then you take it out and grease'em. You need to brush the salt off before you cook it. That's why you need to soak it so

the salt off before you cook it. That's why you need to soak it so much. But if they don't soak it enough, that's why its salty. You're supposed to boil it in water before you cook it. Then put it in another water. Boil it in two different waters.

MB: Why you do that?

JP: To get the salt out, honey! Its still gonna be salty. I told you it stays in salt six weeks. I've been in Church to get some country ham—so salty it'll lock your jaws. Couldn't eat it.

MB: So when d'you have hogs?

JP: Oh Lord, I haven't raised hogs since mama taken sick. After mama taken sick I stopped raising the hogs. Then it got to a part that it gotten so stricken and the feed was so high... See, when was raising a lot of hogs, I'd work at the barber all the time, but I would pick up garbage at the Midway School and at the Venable school up on 14th street. Picked up a lot of garbage to feed the hogs. But the hog feed got up so high, got to a point I couldn't make nothing. Then I carried the medicine to get them killed, and they got so stricken by the medicine, they was killing the hogs – skinning them.

So I stopped doing it after mama taken sick. I carried her to the hospital. She was on a kidney machine for two years before she died. She was on dialysis three times a week. And I carried her back and forth to the hospital. I used to carry her all around, she didn't drive around. I carried her myself. She worked at night anyway. Yeah, I used to carry her around all the time. She didn't drive. I carried her when she was working! Worked at night 25 years.

MB: At the hospital, right?

JP: I told you her and Ms. Tinsley work together? South 3 / North 3 [floor at UVA hospital]

MB: Which one was south, which one was north?

JP: My wife on South 3. Ms. Tinsley on North 3.

MB: What department was that?

JP: I don't know what... I think mama worked in... the department where you change your skin? Change your face or something, I don't know what department. I know one was south 3, one was north 3. Both of them LPN—Licensed Practical Nurse.

MB: Did they go to school for that?

JP: Yeah, they went to school in town. They were at Piedmont College. But there were two ladies around here teaching it, too. One was a Ms. Johnson, she taught nursing. And another lady taught mama, too. They were licensed. Taught at their home. One taught mama, one taught Mary (Patty?). I don't know Mary (Patty?) went to Piedmont or not, but I know these women were old nurses they taught at their home. They teach nursing at the

JP: I used to sell pigs. I used to get garbage at public schools—pick up garbage at school, for to feed the hogs. See, I couldn't afford to raise them hogs, you know. For the 28 hogs – you know, a whole lot of hogs. I killed 4-5 hogs a year, but I didn't eat all that meat, I'd raise them to kill.

MB: Where d'you sell them?

JP: Different people

MB: In Proffit?

JP: I sold them when they were 8 weeks old.

MB: Oh, the babies.

JP: Yeah, after they get 8-weeks old you can sell them.

MB: You sold them in inside of Proffit?

JP: No, people come and got them.

MB: How'd they know?

JP: They'd call you. They'd know we were selling hog.

MB: they know?

JP: People in the hog business tell each other, honey. Get on the phone, tell you who got pigs.

MB: [so your wife] knew Ms. Tinsley?

JP: Oh, yeah! She worked with Mary! I told you Mama worked on South 3, and Mary worked on North 3.

MB: She worked on what?

JP: South 3 and North 3. At the University hospital.

MB: Oh! South 3 and North 3 wards. So they knew each other for a long time.

JP: Yeah! On the same floor, just one north, one south.

old nurses, they taught at their home. They teach nursing at the Vo-Tech on Rio Road, too, I think. I know they teach barbering in there. I imagine they teaching nursing there. I know Piedmont do.

MB: And that's where your wife went.

JP: I can't tell you. She went to where the woman taught at her home. I can't think of her name now, but she was an old nurse. She was from Piedmont, though.

MB: She lived in Proffit?

JP: No, I don't know where she lived at.

MB: Ms. Johnson—her husband taught masonry at Burley school.
[at the point Karen comes and we discuss health issues.
Marcia Howard arrives, we are introduced and Marcia hands some medicine over to Mr. Payne]

JP: Thank you, babe! I thought I told you to bring me some bourbon!

MH: You said you had a headache. I brought you ibuprofen.

JP: I sure would like to have a chug of bourbon!

[Laughter]

JP: Thank you, babe!

MH: Your welcome. That one won't be so bad on your stomach.

JP: What.

MH: You should take a couple of those.

JP: Bourbon ain't bad on my stomach either!

MH: I know, daddy, but you said you had the headache.

JP: I didn't say I was gonna keep the headache, honey!

MH: Alright...

[We talk about project]

JP: I told her a while ago I can remember something that happened 30-40 years ago better than I can what happened last week! I remember in 1935 I got my first car. Got out of CC Camp, bought me an Oldsmobile Blue. Could see it all the way to Crozet. Got right down the road and couldn't get to the house. The ruts were that deep. Couldn't get it to the house! The road ain't nothing but a gutter down there! 1935. Driver's license wasn't but 50 cents. 50 cents drive it where you want.

[... After Marcia leaves, Mr. Payne looks on:]

JP: that's my baby

MB: she's your youngest one?

JP: No, she's the middle child. She's 53. Jimmy 55 and Ronnie 51. [And later:] Marcia call me every day. And the boy I raised live up the hill, John Jackson. He lives in the white bungalow up there. He built it.

MB: That's not a bungalow, that's a big house!

JP: It's a bungalow—its one floor. He's been here ever since he was 8 years old, he almost 50 now.

MB: Right.

JP: Both of them practical nurses. And both of them work at night.

JP: I came home [from CC Camp] in 1935. January 11th. I'll never forget that. I bought me a car, see? You could see that car shining from here to Ivy, almost.

MB: What kind of car?

JP: A Oldsmobile

MB: Alright!

MB: Where'd he come from?

JP: His mother lived in town, mother was giving her children away. A whole lot of children. His mother died last year I think. Had a whole lot of children up in Pittsburgh, he hadn't even known hardly. Its one of them unfortunate things. His sister died last winter. She died last December, I think. We raised her, too.

John howard Jackson. I call him John-boy. [Laughs] He the only one stayed. The rest of 'em stayed a while. A whole lot had been here, but they didn't stay long. They didn't have a lot of places for him to go. Some of them stayed just about 2-3 weeks before they get transferred somewhere else. You know, in the length of 25 or 30 years, I guess we had 25 or 30 children. We had 6 at one time: four boys and two girls. You couldn't do it now, though. I had trouble with one of the guys getting up on Sunday morning. He wouldn't get up on Sunday morning. You know what I did?

MB: What.

JP: Turned the bed over.

MB: No!

JP: Like heck, I didn't! This is in the basement. See all the boys in the basement. Turned the bed over and he got up. Everybody going to church but him.

MB: So the boys were down in the basement including yours?

[Mr. Payne nods]

JP: And then the girls were where?

MB: Up here. Only 2 girls. She got 3 bedrooms up here. And we made 3 downstairs. Ain't nobody down there now. Nobody here but me. So what do you do with a big house when you get old? [laughs] I can't clean it. You see, all the children got old, they got their own work to do. They're working. I'm not working. I ain't work for at least 6-7 years. I worked at the Joker's barbershop for 50 something years. From 1938 to about 6-7 years ago.

MB: That's about 50 years.

JP: Did I tell you at the barbershop a haircut was 35 cents?

Haircut was 35 cents and shave 15 cents. I thought I told you that.

MB: Yeah, you did. You told me last time. When was that?

JP: 1938. Its been 6 years now. Ain't but 2 there now. Ain't but one boy working part time. One work regular, two work part time. Ronnie works there sometimes on weekends. He works at Hampton Inn most of the time. And the other boy who works there is sick. He's been on a dialysis machine for the past year. Massie boy. Never seen anybody have so much bad luck as him. We worked together for 25 years. He don't have but one leg...

[Mr. Payne goes on about the bad luck 'the Massie Boy' encountered in his life]

JP: Got it and couldn't get to the house.

MB: How come?

JP: The ruts were so deep down there! [points to the where Payne Jackson Drive meets Proffit road] And we were down the road. Couldn't even get my car up here to the house.

JP: We had six [fostered] children one time, and we don't have but three of our own. We had four boys and two girls. We kept them all day. Some had been in foster home somewhere else and had to be transferred, and come here and stay until they'd be replaced. But he [John] came here at eight years old, stayed till he got 24. We kept him and his sister. I let him have about 2 acres of land. He built a house up there. He and his sister was still here, but his sister passed away last year.

MB: huh.

JP: But he's the only one that stayed close to me.

MB: Right.

JP: He ain't go no where. He stayed over here [and he's almost forty]. But some of them just stay six months, or a year until they are replaced.

MB: Oh, that's a shame.

JP: But at one time we had six children.

Four boys and two girls. All of them, and we got three of our own children.

JP: So what you're gonna ask me now?

MB: Well, I was gonna ask how you're doing.

JP: I'm feel alright so far. You tired? You getting stiff.

MB: I guess. We could go on, though, if you want.

JP: I can't think of no more right now.

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