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## Interview no. 309

Dr. Judson F. Williams

Mrs. Judson F. Williams

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Dr. and Mrs. Judson F. Williams (1913- ; 1918- )  
INTERVIEWER: Jean Hocking  
PROJECT: History of Sunset Heights  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: February 23, 1977  
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted  
  
TAPE NO.: 309  
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TRANSCRIBER: Jean Hocking  
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Dr. and Mrs. Williams were both faculty members at Texas Western College; Dr. Williams was mayor of El Paso from 1963-1969.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Family backgrounds; school and school activities; early employment; Sunset Heights during the 1940s; El Paso during World War II; Mr. Williams as Mayor of El Paso; respective civic involvements; changes in Sunset Heights during the 1950s; homes and occupants of Sunset Heights; impact of Sunset Heights on the development of El Paso; the future of Sunset Heights.

1 1/2 hours; 48 pages.

This is an interview with Dr. and Mrs. Judson Williams, by Jean Hocking, at 4200 O'Keefe in El Paso, on 23 February 1977, at 2:00 in the afternoon.

J: Mrs. Williams, would you tell me where you were born?

MW: I was born in Hillsboro, Texas. [ June 11, 1918. ]

J: A native gal.

MW: Yes. So is my husband.

J: And what were your parents' backgrounds?

MW: My father had been in the citrus business. One of the pioneers down in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas; down in South Texas. When the citrus industry first came to Texas. I would say he was one of the earlier pioneers of this. And at the time of his death, he was President of the Alamo Packing Industry there--the citrus packing industry there. And he had a partner. My father's part of the business was the buying of the fruit, and his partner was the skilled one in processing. Before that, we had a background of....his father and grandfather, and also my husband's people, were railroad people.

J: What about your mother's background?

MW: It's strange. I know much less about mother's family. Really, well my grandfather worked for the railroad also. [Phone rings.] Would you excuse me? I have to answer the telephone.

J: Surely

\* \* \* \* \*

J: We'll pick it up right here now.

MW: Mother's father worked for the railroad. His father....my only knowledge of him is that he was a Colonel for the Confederacy in the Civil War, and they lived in Hillsboro. I remember that old home. Grandmother, mother's mother, was

from Georgia, and had a Southern background. So I presume you can say my side of the family is pretty Southern. Judson's parentage were from Kentucky and Pennsylvania. His father's people were Kentuckians. His mother's people were Pennsylvanians.

J: Did you grow up in Hillsboro, then?

MW: No, we moved away very shortly--oh, when I was about a year old--and moved to Kansas, where my father had the Ford agency there. And then he learned about the citrus, and decided to go South and try that. So then we lived in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Alamo, Texas. Well, my mother's home was there until the time of her death.

J: Do you recall any significant things that happened during your childhood?

MW: Of world-wide importance?

J: Or to you, even.

MW: One of the things I shall never forget was having been in a hurricane. In South Texas. One of those rare ones that does hit the Texas Coast, hit then. At the time, I was a Sophomore in high school. I remember it very well. It occurred on Labor Day Evening, and school was cancelled for two weeks until they could get the building put back into order. So dreadfully much wind and water damage. The water! You can't believe how fast it came down, and all of the windows were blown out of the high school, and particularly on the library side. So that's one of the things I remember. Also, I do remember what a lovely place that is to live. If you're accustomed to the humidity and sea level.

J: And you went to grade school and high school there?

MW: Yes, I went to grade school and high school there, and then I went to school at Texas A & I at Kingsville. It was a long way from home at that time.

J: What about any significant school events. Is there anything that stands out in your mind?

MW: Yes. I enjoyed my high school because I had the opportunity to be the accompanist for the Boys' Chorus, and I sang in the mixed chorus, and I won the Interscholastic League Championship--State Championship--for Soprano Solo when I was a Senior in high school. Most of my pleasant recollections are of my musical activities.

J: What kind of games did you play as a child?

MW: Well, I lived two miles out of town, and had a horse, and I did that sort of thing. I was a Girl Scout, and--oh, I think I was pretty tomboy-ish. I just played the usual things, I think.

J: Do you remember any particular birthday parties, or that sort of thing, that you had or went to?

MW: Well, I think my most favorite party....I must have been about, oh, about eleven I think. Mother had a scavenger hunt birthday party for me, and it was such an exciting party. I never had had one like that before. That was a fun one.

J: What was your favorite Christmas?

MW: As a child, they were all fun. I think my very favorite Christmas up until very recently, I would say, was the first year that Judson and I were married. No, it wasn't then. It

was a couple of years later. My mother had us all down at her house for Christmas--and that meant my sister, and her family from Dallas; and her husband's mother; and Judson and I and our two children; and his mother; and my mother and my grandmother. Now that was our complete family, and we were all there together for Christmas, and we all had just a wonderful time. And that's the only Christmas where our entire family has been all together at the same time.

J: You have just the one sister, then?

MW: Yes. And my husband has one sister, also.

J: What about your social activities in school? You said you were involved musically--what about any other organizations?

MW: As a child?

J: In high school.

MW: High school? No, nearly everything I did was music-oriented. Come in.

\* \* \* \* \*

J: Dr. Williams has just entered the room, and this is a short test to see if the recorder will pick up his voice.

DW: All right. The weather outside is anything but real pleasant, but it's much better than it was yesterday.

J: Amen! All right, let's just go right on. What about any high school dances, or proms?

MW: There were not too many high school dance functions that I can recall, and yet it seems to me that one of my favorite things that I did was to go dancing. I'm not sure that my high school had too many sponsored dances. In fact, I don't think they did. There was a Junior-Senior Banquet and dance, and that was just about it.

J: Dr. Williams, would you like to tell me where you were born?

DW: Born in Ft. Worth, Texas. [June 19, 1913.]

J: And your parents' backgrounds?

DW: My father was a Baptist Minister. He was originally from Kentucky, and my mother was a Yankee from Pennsylvania. They met in school in Nyack, New York. She was planning to be a missionary, so it was logical that their interests were similar. So they got married, and they lived in San Francisco, and then moved to Houston where they went to the Seminary in Ft. Worth, and that's where I was born. My sister and I, both. From Houston, they were in El Paso for about six years, and then to Abilene, Texas. In essence, I grew up in Abilene. Went to high school in Abilene, and went to Hardin-Simmons University.

J: In what years were your parents here in El Paso? Do you recall?

DW: It was about 1922 or 3. It was about 1922 to 1928. I think that's when we moved to Abilene.

J: Where in El Paso did you live?

DW: It was on Pershing Drive. Cumberland. I guess those were the two places.

J: Do you recall any specific significant events in your childhood? Of a national level, or just significant to yourself. Anything that stands out?

DW: No, I think I had a very normal childhood without any outstanding accomplishments or significance. We were all church related, and my father--being a minister--we went to church every time it opened. My father went into evangelistic work

from El Paso with the then pastor of Trinity Methodist Church, whose name was Hogg. They were in evangelistic work for the next fifteen years. I think that's one reason we moved to Abilene. It was a good school town, and with Hardin-Simmons there, why that was part of the plan.

J: What kind of games did you play as a boy?

DW: All of them, I suppose. I played football in high school, and basketball and football in college, and then I was involved-- my interest was in the field of literary work and publications, and I was the editor of the paper, and editor of a magazine, and editor of the annual. Those things were of particular interest to me. Not that athletics were not, but I was not large enough to really be outstanding in those athletic events at the University level. And yet I found it a very satisfying area of competition. I went from Hardin-Simmons to the University of Texas, and then there was a short period of time after the University when I taught in the public school system. I went to the University of Missouri to get my Master's Degree, and my Bachelor's in Journalism. And I came from there to El Paso. That's the reason I came. Dr. Wiggins was President of the College. He'd been my Dean at Hardin-Simmons. He sent word, and said he wanted me to come out, and that's the way I got to El Paso.

J: At what point in time did you [two] meet each other, and how?

DW: The first year I was here....this is an interesting thing. Dr. Wiggins employed Jackie, and I suppose she was the



youngest instructor, because she started teaching at the college when she was twenty. When I came here from Missouri, she was on the faculty, so she preceded me by a year. And this is where we met. We had a lot of similar interests, and after a year, we decided the idea suited us, so we were married in her home town and came back to El Paso where I continued, and she then went her way in musical activities, and not in teaching. Direct teaching.

J: In what year did you begin to teach here?

DW: In 1940.

J: And at that point did you live in Sunset Heights?

DW: We lived in Kern Place, and from there....well, there was a short period when we lived in an apartment on Mesa. Then we moved to Kern Place where we rented a house. Now we bought a house on Kansas Street; on North Kansas, and lived there for, I guess two years, and then we bought the Nagle home on Hawthorne Street. That's when we went to Sunset Heights.

J: That was 1419 [Hawthorne] ?

DW: 1419 Hawthorne.

J: And you bought this from a Nagle family?

DW: That's right. Judge Nagle was deceased, but he had built the house, and it was evident he had built it very much to his liking. Fine, fine house. Well built. And it appealed to us because of its architecture. Also, it was a fine neighborhood. It was close to the college, and the people in that area were not necessarily our age, but somewhere in that category. They had little children, and we had one at that time and another on the way, and we liked the neighborhood.

And we liked the house. In fact, our children, when we built this house, were a little bit sad because it was a large house; it had two stories, and they liked it. But there were things we felt we needed at that time, such as a larger area for the kids to have more activities--such as a den--which that house did not lend itself to. We lived there fifteen years.

J: From when to when?

DW: 1944 to 1958. That's about right.

MW: Mmmm-hmmm.

J: So your reason for leaving Sunset Heights was not external pressures, really, it was an internal decision.

DW: That's right. No, we just decided we wanted to build, and this area was developing.

MW: We just needed some more space. There was no practical way to enlarge or remodel the house that would have been nice at all. So we just had to move.

J: So you then, in turn, sold the home to....?

DW: Well, actually, I don't know who bought the home, because the builder who built this house said he would take our house at a stated price. So, in essence, that's what he did, and I really don't know who he sold it to. But it was sold some time after we left there. After we'd built this house and moved into it. He was the builder of this house, so he took that house and put it on the market and sold it. It was satisfactory to us, and I'm sure it was to him.

J: I'm trying to think.... I don't think DeLa Fuentes have been there long enough to have....

MW: I had the impression that it was sold originally to a career Army man who was retiring.

DW: Could be. But I know it sold at least twice. So whoever bought it first, then sold it, and maybe it was sold again even after that.

J: This means, then, that you moved to that particular part of town during the latter part of Second World War.

DW: That's right.

J: What do you recall about World War II?

DW: Oh, many things. Any particular thing you're talking about? It was one of those times when....I wouldn't say there was instability, but there was a lot of indecision, and difficult planning times. I was going into the service, and had already gotten my commission and my uniforms. And about that time, they decided to set up the Army Specialized Training at the college. That was an accelerated program on an 18-hour basis, and they were sending us like 600 young men to train on an accelerated basis. A tremendous program. We took....if you're familiar with those little dormitories, we had four to a room. Today, people wouldn't even tolerate that. So we had, then, a full military contingent, and they asked me to stay in administration. So they're the ones who handled the deferment, and stationed me there with the rank of Captain, but non-military. Just so I would have some authority over those who were in the program. And we had that program for about two years. This was a good thing for the college, and I think it was a good thing for the young men that we had. It was a tremendous,

accelerated college-level teaching program. That's one thing. And then the others were those relationships with the military in El Paso, and our friends who were in the military.

J: How would you assess the general feeling of El Paso at that time, or during those times?

DW: I think a rather optimistic view. El Paso was in the midst of a great growing period, both from the standpoint of individuals coming here, and annexation. Annexation played a great role in the growth of El Paso, because for it to grow satisfactorily, many areas had to be annexed in order to have the facilities for the services. I don't know exactly what the square miles were at that time, but they were substantially increased with the acquisition of various areas. The Lower Valley, the Upper Valley; then the extensions to both of those. Until today, we have probably close to thirty square miles, and I'm sure that's twice what it was along about the early 1940's.

J: What about you, Mrs. Williams, and the supportive-type things? Did you roll bandages? Did you have a Victory Garden?

MW: We had a Victory Garden. Mine [involvement], again, was music-oriented. Through music groups, I did a great deal of entertaining at William Beaumont, at Ft. Bliss, for convalescent soldiers, and so on. A great deal of that kind of thing. Also, I--at the time--was choir director at First Presbyterian Church. We had a tremendous program oriented to the soldiers, with many activities for them, and I was involved in all of that.

J: There was a great deal of transient sort of thing going on at that time, I suppose.

MW: Yes.

J: A lot of troops coming and going for short periods of time.

DW: That's right, and we worked at the USO....

MW: Yes, we did.

DW: ....with three other couples, and we would take our tour down there from about 8:00 to midnight, three nights a week. And the transient part explains it, because we had all sorts of fellows who were just off the train and coming in. It was located down on San Francisco Street. I guess we made a million sandwiches, more or less. It was very interesting because we made lots of interesting acquaintances. Many of them didn't endure, but they were interesting at the time. But we worked at the USO for over two years.

J: What about the German prisoners-of-war?

DW: Well, I don't know too much about it except in terms of some of the people here. There weren't too many. That we knew. I would say that it was reasonably satisfactory to both the prisoner, and to.... You know, you don't uproot somebody. There was a doctor in El Paso who was put into this internment area for a while because there were some suspicions about his activities. I'm sure they were not....later they were not justified, but the same thing was true for all the Japanese that they interned in California. You just didn't take any chances. We didn't have much....we had no direct relationship with the prisoner-of-war activity.

J: Can you tell me where the internment area was?

DW: Yes, it was out at the Coliseum. There was an area there that they sort of barricaded over, and that's where they had them for a good bit of the time. They set up facilities to feed them, and take care of them.

J: Can you guess as to the numbers?

DW: I'd say.... I don't think they ever had over a hundred. And they were transferring them pretty rapidly, because those were not permanent facilities. At one time, they may have had some facility that they used of the old County: what used to be the County Poor Farm, many many years ago in the Lower Valley. That's now the Sheriff's Training Ground. Their pistol practice, and other practice areas that they use now. But they did have some down there.

J: You said you had a Victory Garden. Where did you have your Garden?

MW: That was on North Florence Street, in our back yard.

J: You did have it in your yard?

MW: Yes. Just a small plot, but everyone was doing it, and we did too. We enjoyed the fruits of it.

DW: Highly successful.

MW: Oh, yes.

J: Did the city provide any large spaces for those who didn't....

DW: No. I don't think there was ever any demand for it. There didn't seem to be. Many people put them in, but they were somewhat less ambitious than what we call a truck operation. But they grew the things that were seasonable, and with a good bit of help that was put out by various and sundry programs; how to condition your soil, and what you should plant, and so on. We grew in a small plot. Not much bigger than half this room. Everything we could eat, such as corn, and

squash, and tomatoes, and onions, and carrots, lettuce....

It was a real fine experience. I think it would be good for anybody.

MW: The only other thing I can remember about helping with that effort....I do remember going to what is now the Museum every week, and helping in the kitchen with Bundles for Britain. That was a big thing, and I did do that, too. Plus some of the work at the church.

J: I'm sure Bundles for Britain is very familiar to most people, but just for the purposes of the tape, would you explain what that is?

MW: Well, at the time England was being bombed just constantly, and the ladies in El Paso formed an organization to give regular assistance to Bundles for Britain. They had specific things that they wanted to have to send to England. Clothing, food stuffs, things of this kind. And as far as my weekly stint at the Museum, this was a luncheon which....

DW: For the workers.

MW: Well, also, it made money. People could go and purchase tickets, and of course there was a good profit on the luncheon. And the money went to get the things to England, and also to buy things that they needed. It was a very....well, it was certainly a highly successful endeavor. Everyone wanted to help with Bundles for Britain, and our problem was space. Just trying to manage all those people. They did a lot of good. I recall that Mrs. Schwartz was very active in it. Mrs. Maurice Schwartz. Mrs. D. M. Williams--I remember

helping her many times. Well, it was just a complete, community effort. Of the women.

J: Let's go back a little bit--back to high school, I guess, or college--and tell me how you spent a typical weekend.

MW: Well in high school, it was just like the rest of the week. I don't think that we ever felt that the weekend was such a terribly special thing. It was just part of the week. Except, of course, for Sunday activities. Sunday School and Church; and I enjoyed the meetings in the evening. But that's....but weekend during school year didn't mean particularly that much, except just no school. In the summertime, of course, we did do fun things. I lived fifty miles from the beach--the Gulf of Mexico--and we did go down to the beach frequently in the summertime, and had a vacation to the mountains most summers. But weekends really didn't impress me, I guess.

J: How about you, Dr. Williams?

DW: My weekends were pretty lively in high school. I worked on the weekends in most cases on various types of things. One of the most profitable things I did was selling Bibles door-to-door, and it was great. And a weekend was a good time to do it. I sold a large, print leaf.... I'd set up an account with the American Bible Society, and they consigned the Bibles, and I sold them. That, and clubs, and the usual activities of teen-age boys, which were not always in the best interests of the neighbors, but we whiled ourselves in good things as well as some of those things that might be a little bit questionable. I don't know of anything really illegal, but it was sometimes

END of Tape 1  
Side A



things that were interfering with some of the neighborhood activity. We did things such as wiring up little fine wires and putting things out that people would pick up, and would get shocked. And I say this because there were no real organized playgrounds. We had swimming pools around, but nothing else, and most of ours [activities] was self-generated, and I think we were a little bit more imaginative. Not that anybody got hurt, but it was sure fun to watch some of their reactions. We did the same thing in stringing up these little fine wires across the street, then when the cars would hit it--if it were properly done--then there would be a little, light shock. Anyway, these are some of the things I recall as a lot of fun. The college activities, on the weekends, were much different because in the fall, most of the time, it involved athletics on the weekends, and social activities, and the college pranks sort of thing.

J: What was your first job? Was it the selling of the Bibles?

DW: No, the first job I had was.... I guess the first job I really had was selling newspapers on the street. That's when I was about eleven. And that was when you used to sell newspapers on the street. Many people bought them. And Extras were something of considerable significance. We sold lots of papers, and made a dollar or two, which was very important in values at that time. So I think the first job I actually had was selling newspapers. From that, other things such as fire-work stands, soda-pop stands, and such things that were a lot of fun.

MW: Didn't you work at the Popular?

DW: Yes. I guess I worked at the Popular as one of the youngest people down there. I was ten. And I was a cash boy. Maurice Schwartz hired me, and I worked on Saturdays for a year before we moved to Abilene. I got my first letter of recommendation from Mr. Maurice Schwartz when I left. I wouldn't [take] anything for it.

J: I wanted to ask you about being Mayor of El Paso, and how you happened to get into that.

DW: Well, you get into things because you're compulsive, I guess. Having been raised in a minister's family where you are all things to a lot of people, you get involved. Well, I was compulsive about wanting to be involved in a lot of activities. When I came to El Paso, I joined the 20-30 Club; became very active in their programs. I handled the publicity for the Red Cross for about four years; and then when I found some slack, I became involved in the Sun Carnival in 1941, and handled many of the chores within it on the basis of pure satisfaction, because they didn't pay anybody. And I did that for a number of years with Dr. Hendricks and some others. So then, it just went from there to the Junior Chamber of Commerce. And I was challenged. I became the President of every organization I ever joined. Purely because of either my interest, or my demands. And so, compulsively, I got involved in everything--from Junior Chamber of Commerce, to Kiwanis Club, to the Chamber of Commerce; the then Community Chest--all of those things. Then when I left the college through a long-time friendship with Dick Miller.... He had talked to me a long

time about coming into business with him. He came out and spent about two or three months, every morning at 7:00 for a long time.... He had then become president of the White House. His father had died, so I decided that was the thing that I would do. And I did. And enjoyed it. Then I began to look at the things--and these are the parts that I think were important: El Paso was growing very rapidly, was fragmenting very rapidly. This area was one area; another area was another; the Lower Valley was another; and nobody felt a part of El Paso. And it was difficult to get good people to run, because the job of mayor--by the very nature of it--is a full-time job, and he is the chief executive officer, and it didn't pay enough to cause people to really afford to do it. And I looked at the situation. I had been approached a few times to think about it, and I said, "Nope." I felt I was too new in the business community, and the things I needed to do. Then I got to looking at it--and I won't mention any names, but we were electing people, and bond issues were being turned down every time we proposed them--and I looked over the store. I was in charge of all personnel, and all service departments, and all management departments. I looked at the caliber of the people we were electing, and I wouldn't have put them in charge of our basement shoe department. And here was the biggest job in El Paso. I found out then, that if I really meant that, I ought to be willing to do what I was asking others to do. So, I decided one day to run for

mayor. There was no ground swell for me. It was something that needed to be done. And I spent about six months picking people who had strengths in areas that I felt less than familiar--flood control, engineering, law enforcement; these things, and I picked people I felt had those strengths. So I ran for mayor. And the only reason I could do it was because of the compulsive nature I had to get involved in whatever it was: the YMCA, Red Cross, Community Chest, Kiwanis, or the Chamber of Commerce. I might as well do this, so I did. And good or bad, I was elected for three terms. I accomplished everything I set out to do. The only thing I didn't do, was do it in four years, which is what I set out to do. Four years is what I planned to spend. It took six. They were very satisfying, and very difficult years: emotionally, physically, financially. But I wouldn't take for them, nor would I get back, directly, into politics again.

J: Just in general, do either one of you recall any humorous or outstanding experiences that you had--let's say during the time you lived in Sunset Heights. Was there anything particularly tragic, or funny, or unusual that happened?

DW: Well I suppose if you sat down and reminisced, you could find some. A lot of interesting things happened, because it was an interesting street. It was a very narrow street. The buses still went on Hawthorne, and it was just about the width of a good alley. Aside from our house, there was only one other house that had a driveway where you could get off the

street. Our house, and the Ralph Sanders' house next door to us.

MW: Excuse me. They didn't have one at first. Remember? They borrowed ours.

DW: Was that it?

MW: To get Mr. Sanders' mother into the house.

DW: That's right. They put it in later. They had enough room so that they could. And the people had garages from the alley, but the alleys were so difficult to get to they didn't use them except for storage. Everybody parked their car on the street, and when you had cars parked on both sides of the street, there was only room for about one car going one way or the other--and then the bus on top of that. We had some interesting little situations in regard to this. People would complain about the fact that you are using up too much of the street. We talked to each other about it, and I would suggest to them they find some way to get their cars off the street, because I had a driveway--which was great. You could pull right up to the side of the porch. And there were some accidents that were unfortunate. That was one of the things I said needed to be done, and when I got into the mayor's office, it was done. We widened that street. And not without some arguments from the very same homeowners, because we had to take some of their property. I guess the thing that I think was the most humorous, and yet somewhat less than humorous.... We had very little water pressure in Sunset Heights. The water pressure was.... If you had your sprinklers on, your water pressure inside was like nothing. And if you had an

upstairs, which everybody did, you probably couldn't take a bath at certain times. So I went down to the Public Service Board, and asked them how we could get our water pressure increased. And they said, "We can do it." They had the lines. "If you can get the people in your block to sign a petition for it." So this I set out to do, and most everybody agreed to it. Not everybody, but most everybody. Because they had the problem, and it was serious. So one day Harlan Hugg, who was head of the PSB, called me and said, "We're going to turn your new pressure in," like a Saturday, or Monday--I've forgotten which--"and I would suggest that everybody up there get a stand-by plumber." Because those houses up there were old--are old--and the plumbing was what had been there. And I'm telling you. Some people said, "Oh, no. We won't have any problem." Well after they turned that water in there, it looked like geyser area. Pipes were breaking in the basements, in the front yards, everywhere. And I got, really, they said at that time, "You're the guy who did this." And I said, "No, we all did this." And I guess I had a plumber for three days, because they were having to dig up the pipe; find out what had to be replaced; and where it was.... Those pipes rust and corrode, and when that pressure hits it, it breaks. We had a several hundred dollar plumbing bill, and some of them had slightly less, and some of them had substantially more. There were plumbing trucks at every house in that area for a couple of days. And it was really funny. And yet, not really funny because the basements were flooded with water, and some

bathrooms upstairs were leaking through the ceilings, and so on. That really was funny. But after that, we had the finest water pressure in town. It was great.

J: You also probably had the finest plumbing in town!

DW: But that was a funny thing.... And that section of Hawthorne, from Yandell toward the college....

MW: The end of the housing area was the 1600 block. Then there wasn't anything until you got to the college.

DW: I guess that's right. It was one of the funnier things, and yet it was an improvement that needed to be done, and, uh....

J: Well, you might as well laugh about something like that. There isn't much else you can do.

MW: Yes. When it quit hurting, it was just great.

J: I'm just curious. We're living in the house now that I guess the Sanders lived in.

DW: Next door to us?

J: Yes, and I....

DW: Beautiful house.

J: Oh, it's gorgeous. I walked in that front door and fell in love with it immediately.

MW: It's just a lovely house.

J: We knew that the basement had been flooded at one time. I was wondering if that was when it happened.

DW: Could be. There was never any flood externally. Water ran off if we had rains of any kind.

MW: It goes down the hill.

DW: Right. So it had to be....it could well have been at that time. We had to replace a whole big area in our basement. It just broke everywhere.



J: We also understand the Master Bathroom upstairs, at one time, fell into the dining room. But I think that was not at the same time. I think that was later than the time you are talking about.

DW: No, it wasn't then, because nothing of that nature occurred. There was a lot of flooding, you know. Water got through the ceilings and came down through, and the basements got a lot of it, and the yards. Tremendous amounts. But I don't recall any of that. It could be related to whatever happened at that time. The joists and things.... So that it came on through.

J: We have some structural work to do. My husband is trying to figure out what.

DW: Fine houses. You talk to Mrs. Foster about that Trost House.

J: I interviewed her a couple of weeks ago.

DW: That's a beautiful house. And that one across the street where the Jake Millers lived was.... And the house you are in--the Sanders'. And then the Turner's house, just at the other side of our house.

MW: And the Squires, across the street. That's an awfully nice house, too.

DW: Well, it is, but those houses were not built with the same care. They are just like this. (Gestures.) You know, they didn't have a lot of personality to them. The houses on the odd-numbered side, and the Trost house. It was a real architectural beauty.

J: Well who else were some of the people living there at that time?

DW: The Turners lived next door to us. He was a jeweler.



MW: I told her about them, but that's as far as I got.

DW: Well, the Turners; and then I've forgotten who lived next to them. Then the....

MW: Lizarragas.

DW: Lizarragas, yes. They're Mexicans. I'm speaking now of native Mexicans, and the Lizarragas are a wonderful family in Juarez. They have one or two of the automobile agencies, and one or two other things. They lived over here, I guess, because they wanted their kids to go to school over here. A wonderful family. We enjoyed them very much. And then there were the Loyas....

MW: No, the Howard Maxons, first.

DW: Yes, the Howard Maxons.

MW: At 1427.

DW: Yes, where the Loyas moved to. They lived there and had three boys the same age as our three girls. The Ratners, they lived next, and they had a son and a daughter at that time who were the same age as two of ours; and then Fernandez Blancos who lived at the next one. The Blancos--they're now the Fernandez. At that time, the Blanco name was the senior Blanco, but for some reason or another they changed their name to Fernandez. Maybe that's what it was. They just emphasized it. Dick Mithoff lived across the street, and....

MW: And the William Squires.

DW: Oh the Squires lived there until, oh, the last couple of years. They moved. They were sort of catty-corner from you over there. Martinez lived directly in front of us there.

MW: Did they sell to Strauss, or did Strauss buy....

DW: They sold to Strauss. I think that was it.

MW: Yes. Martinez sold to Strauss.

DW: Martinez. Mario Martinez is a lawyer in town, and one of them has a fine advertising agency. Anyway, we go back and look at all the kids who grew up in that block, and they're all doing well. Ratner's got one Ph.D. and two M.D.'s out of their kids. You know, that doesn't come by accident.

J: Sure doesn't.

DW: And the Maxon boys are doing fine.

J: I understand that Mr. Maxon committed suicide.

DW: Yes. Very, very tragic. Another incident that....the Turners who lived next door to us. He was blind. He had gone blind, and still went down to the jewelry shop some, but.... Many of us converted to gas. Those furnaces originally were coal, as I'm sure you know. Had the places to shovel it in downstairs. And then they converted to oil. And oil was fine, except it just wasn't as satisfactory as gas. And it was easy to convert to gas, so we did. And the Turners converted to gas after we did. We used to check....he would get up very early and, being blind, time meant nothing, and he would play his radio, and he always knew that I could hear it. I didn't hear anything this particular morning. No activity. And the maid came and went in, and Mrs. Turner had had a stroke, or something, and had fallen; and the gas had not ignited. Mr. Turner had been overcome by the fumes. So when I went in, this is what I found. The maid was just hysterical. I went

in, and here was Mrs. Turner. She was a rather heavy woman, and she had fallen in the bathroom. And he was just out.

MW: And he was a large man, also.

DW: Yes. So we got doctors, and ambulances, and things up here, and both of them.... She was really never very strong after that because she hurt herself. But that was an unusual thing. As an old neighborhood begins to modernize, these things happen. Like the plumbing; like the gas furnaces. And I asked about that, and they said what they should have done was to blow out all the flues, and all the other things that accumulate the soot. Sometimes when you don't get the air properly the gas doesn't ignite, and the gas--a lot of it--escapes into the house. And this is what happened in their case. It could have been much more serious if it had exploded. But it didn't. It was just one of those things where the people became overcome with the fumes.

J: Being the new kid on the block myself, I always like to ask people about being the new kid on the block in Sunset Heights, but I suppose with your heavy civic involvements you never really had to go through that. You were already well-known and accepted.

DW: I have to say yes, because my position at the college was such that I was involved with a lot of people: parents, students, faculty, administration, and so on. And then other areas in which I involved myself, and Jackie through her music activities, so we did know a lot of people. And we did lots of entertaining. You know, even though there was no parking.

MW: We used it all up.

DW: We had 25 or 30 couples, and we just spaced them out around. And where they parked, I don't know. It was just a lot of fun.

MW: I will say this. We never felt strange over there. One of the first people I met was Adelaide Ratner, who came knocking at my door asking for....what was it? Red Cross. At that time, volunteers still went door to door for Red Cross, and she came, and we just got acquainted immediately and were friends from then on. And it seemed to me to be that way pretty much with the rest of the neighbors.

DW: They were all friendly, and I will say this. I don't know that I would say now; I don't think it's ever as bad as it's portrayed to be. But we never had any vandalism, or break-ins, or anything of that nature. The only thing we had was the thing I was talking about. The street was too narrow, and somebody would get a little bit rambunctious and hit somebody's car.

MW: Speaking of that, one of the funny things that I remember was that George was our paper boy. He was just an institution. He was, I would say, in his twenties, but like a young boy. But very reliable, and I do think.... Occasionally--and I cannot say why, whether it was inclement weather or what--but sometimes you'd be sitting in your living room and you'd look up, and there was George with your paper.

DW: Yes, he'd come in.

MW: He was an institution.

DW: He was a very much retarded chap. His father wrote for the El Paso Times and did a column for many, many years.

MW: Oh, that's right.

DW: He had twin sons, and they were both....well, about a six-year old level. But he delivered the paper on foot. And I mean, he didn't put it in your yard, he brought it up to the door. If your door was open, he put it inside. And he could tell you in his own way, which was like a kid, what was going on. Very interesting. Everybody looked for George, and there were days when he didn't come, and we'd check to see if he had a bad cold, or something else.

J: What happened to George?

DW: He died. He kept delivering papers....I guess he delivered them for 25 years, and I don't know what happened, but something.

MW: It seems to me that he did have a problem. He began to be not as coherent as he had been, and his mother had to go with him some, and her health failed, and I think he really had a very sad situation.

DW: Do you think he just regressed?

MW: Yes. But everyone in the block would help him figure.

DW: When he'd come to collect.

J: When do you think Sunset Heights started to go downhill?

DW: I think it's like anything. Neighborhoods tend to change, and when they change, people change. I guess it began to go down when we had a severe housing shortage, and the people then began to turn so many of those fine old homes up there into apartments and things of that nature that they were never

intended to be. But they would put as many as four and five families--I'm speaking of Sunset Heights, not Hawthorne; Sunset Heights area--you go in there, and all of a sudden there were four apartments, or five apartments, and it began to change the general atmosphere, because you brought a transient family in who could care less, and whose kids are not particularly well-disciplined. I think that was part of it. And the other--because of that or other things, too--they began to let them run down. Didn't keep their sidewalks and yards. And it was very bad because on Hawthorne Street, the yards weren't big, but they were always beautifully taken care of. In fact, we'd get on someone because he wasn't watering, or cutting, or something. It was beautiful. Flowers and.... I think when it starts, one family doesn't care, and you don't know them, and you can't do much about it, and then somebody says I guess the only thing to do is to move. Some of the old-timers, like the Melbys, Mrs. Perrenot, and some of those--those are gorgeous houses. They have stayed. And Mrs. Schwartz and her home. But some of the others.... I think it was a change in the type of person it attracted. And they'd come and go and leave things in pretty bad shape. Now as to the problem of law enforcement, I really doubt it is any worse than any other area in El Paso. I don't know whether people fear walking around up there at night or not, but I guess you would if you just read the newspaper now. You would involuntarily think it was bad. But for break-ins, muggings, and all the rest, I doubt that Sunset Heights is any worse than

any other place in El Paso.

End of Side B  
Tape 1

J: This is what a policeman told me, too. And I haven't seen any statistics. I haven't looked at any numbers. Of course, statistics in themselves can be misleading.

Beginning  
Tape 2

DW: Very misleading.

J: As a long-time experienced law officer, he said, "I can guarantee you that it's not any worse than any place else."

DW: You know, I don't think it is, but people can convince themselves it is by taking things out of context. The attempted rape of Ruth Kern up there. Who knows whether that is symbolic of the nature of Sunset Heights, or was she just being careless, or what happened? Obviously, the illegal alien can come across down through there, and drift up through that area, but I don't know of anything except some of these cases that have been brought to light where somebody was killed, and somebody was mugged, and other things. I doubt that the statistics are any worse there than they are in almost any other area in El Paso. You've got more walking traffic in terms of some of the people who live down in the old Upson area who don't have as much transportation as they do in Coronado, but Coronado's probably got more real serious problems up there in drug-related issues than some of these others in Sunset Heights have.

J: What do you foresee for Sunset Heights?

DW: Well, a lot depends upon how the planners want it to be, and how much the people in Sunset Heights would like for it to be. I think there are some areas that lend themselves to some real fine apartment developments, and when I speak of

that I'm talking about something as nice as anything we have here because it is so close to downtown. It's in an area that's high enough to build and look at Mexico, or other areas. If they would do that instead of just letting them improvise on old structures that have lost any historical significance because they've allowed them to go to rack and ruin, that would be very helpful. It would increase the property values in the areas I'm speaking of. Older places that have been pretty much, well they're pretty much in disarray, to be torn down. And then some of the finer homes, I think the trend now is to re-establish them. To put them back into the grandeur with modernization because people are going to have that now. They won't live without it. And most of those homes can be done. The air conditioning is just as good, and the insulation, I would say, is far better in those homes up there. Well, I just think some areas in Sunset Heights can regain, and probably will regain, some of the old grandeur it used to have. There never will be any great rash of building new homes up there because most lots are too small. Unless you could get several of them. But the part coming up to Sunset Heights to the little part and area back over toward the college in there, all that part, I think, has hope.

J: Do you think the restoration concept and commercial concept are in conflict with each other?

DW: Not if you put them in their proper perspectives. You can't put commercial and residential....like, you know, one block of commercial and one block of residential. I think there



needs to be residential, and then certain areas that can well be defined as that which is development for the apartment type, but require the type of apartment building that will be conducive to investment.

J: Do you feel that Sunset Heights warrants restoration and preservation? If so, why? If not, why not?

DW: I guess it's like anything else. Does any area of the town justify it? Can you justify the restoration of historical buildings anywhere? I think you can. I don't think you should just because--the example I'm using is the little, narrow building down across from the City Hall that Mrs. Burlingame refused to do anything with, and the City wanted to buy it. Has bought everything else around it. There isn't anything significant about the building. It is plain vanilla. It was never anything except at one time there was a....some Mexican Consul, or something, there. But I've been all through that building, and if you're talking about restoring it, restoring it to what? It is just a two-story, barn-like thing there that has no grandeur. Never had it, and yet somebody worked on making it a historical monument, and on that basis it may continue to exist. It will if monies are available to maintain it. But if you did it as good as it ever was, it would be incongruous to that area. But you take those old homes up there. There is a reason. People can enjoy living in those, and be real proud of them.

J: It takes a lot of money, though, and there don't seem to be any tax incentives for people to tackle that sort of thing.

DW: I don't know, really, what can be done in the way of incentives. But the Federal Government is talking about incentives to get people to properly insulate their houses, and so on, and it could be. The advalorem tax is now being looked at very, very carefully by the Texas Legislature, and the bills that have been introduced.... At least one is to take the pressure off the advalorem tax and put it on something else to support the schools. The advalorem tax, then, would be a base to pay off the indebtedness on bond issues. So what I'm saying is, it's possible that advalorem tax will not be the work horse it has been in the past, and primarily this is what you're talking about. If you substantially improve your property, your taxes go up. And there may be ways for this to have a negative effect. If you take care of your property and improve it, your appreciation goes up, and the tax then would be on the time you sold it as opposed to what you got, and what you invested in it which, I suppose, is justifiable. But I think the pressure is going off the advalorem. It's not a good thing, because it doesn't rise and fall with recession and inflation, and so on. It's sort of there, and unimproved property stays with no increase in taxes; and you go in and take an old house and spend a lot of money on it, and your taxes immediately go up. I think there are possibilities that that might be. One possibility for encouragement--incentive. I think the other factor is some people like big, high-ceilinged houses of the early part of the century. And they always will.

J: I think it takes a particular type of person.

MW: Oh I think so.

J: It takes a lot of dedication.

DW: Sure does. You've got to....

MW: Also, with a large family--we had four children--if you have a place for things, and room to turn around, you have a whole lot better chance of having an organized household than if you live in little rooms with inadequate closet space. Then your house is going to look a mess all the time.

J: I agree.

DW: Let me give you one idea. In my opinion, El Paso High School is still the best high school in El Paso. When we moved here, our two daughters went to El Paso High, and graduated from El Paso High. Then they said, when they built Coronado, you may have your choice. You can go to El Paso High, or you can go to Coronado. Well, all the kids thought, "Gosh. A new school," and so here they went. And I, personally, was disappointed. But if the kids have the choice, you can't tell them they can't do it. So our next two children graduated from Coronado High School. I was sorry they did. But our oldest daughter is now teaching back at El Paso High School. Then when they changed the law back that where the line goes, you can't go to Coronado--you've got to go to El Paso High--and now they're going back to El Paso High. I talk to parents all the time who are delighted. It's one of those things you have to get used to--the same old thing. As ethnic groups move in and take over, you decide well, it's no longer desirable. That isn't true.

J: You are one hundred percent, and I'm so glad to hear you say it.

DW: Well, what I'm saying is neighbors are neighbors, and some of the best friends we've had--and neighbors--have been Mexican-Americans. El Paso High has a good teaching staff; the product of the institution is good; and we get back the same thing. What about the great group of Latin-Americans who just never progress very much? Well, everybody's got them. The neighborhoods have them, and the schools have them. They may more in one area than another, but I'll bet you the rate of effective application and training and learning is not less. And the product of El Paso High, I think, is great.

J: Our son goes to El Paso High, and we are very pleased.

DW: Well we sure were, and are now. Our daughter is just as defensive about El Paso High as she can be.

J: Did your children go to elementary school during that time period?

DW: We had.... Well, actually, do you know where Jesus and Mary is?

J: Yes.

DW: Well we're Protestant, but I liked the school and we sent our Jeanne, our second daughter, to Jesus and Mary for about two years before she started,...

MW: From fourth to sixth.

DW: From four to six. Because we wanted her to feel comfortable with them and then, of course, we wanted our children to be proficient in Spanish. And they are. And the reason they are is not what they learned necessarily in classes, but it's

what they had to learn with Mexican maids and their friends, who speak more Spanish than anything else. It was very, very good. So then when Mesita was opened, they gave the same option. Let me see now. Jeanne went to....

MW: Judy went to Dudley.

DW: That's right.

MW: Do you know where Dudley is?

J: No.

DW: Well, it doesn't exist anymore.

J: That's probably why I don't know where it is!

MW: Well, it was built on a fault, and the building cracked and was condemned. And that's when they built Mesita.

DW: That's right. But we had one go to Vilas, and then they went to Mesita. I don't know about Vilas. I don't know how good or bad it is.

MW: Jeanne did not go to Vilas. She taught there.

DW: Oh, taught at Vilas. That was it. Yes.

MW: All our children went to Mesita. Let's see. Dudley--which was condemned.... Did Judy and Linda go to Dudley two years, or one?

DW: I think just one.

MW: Just one.

DW: One year, and then they closed it.

MW: Yes, and then they closed it, and then they moved to Mesita. So all our children graduated from Mesita. Then Jeri, our third daughter, went to eighth grade at El Paso High. And right after that, well soon after, they closed out eighth grade at El Paso High and built Morehead. So our son had to

go to Morehead for eighth grade, which is a strange thing. To go to a school just for one year. But that's the way it was, and is. There still is no provision for Mesita children, except one year at Morehead, and then on to either El Paso or Coronado.

DW: Well they can't do that anymore, unless they live in the Coronado area.

MW: Well what do these children do? They still have to go to Morehead.

J: Several of our neighbors send their children to Mesita. We chose, after some investigating and talking, to send our children to Vilas. For a number of reasons. I'm sort of interested in the families who came from Mexico during the Revolution, or as a result of the Revolution, and subsequently settled in El Paso. And a number of them settled in Sunset Heights. Were you familiar with any of the families that might have come here for that reason?

DW: I can't say that I am. I don't know any who.... You're speaking of those who sort of escaped, and I don't. Most of those I know came from Mexico came over here because they wanted their kids to go to school. And they're Mexican citizens. The Lizarragas, and the Blancos, and--oh, there were three or four other families right in the same area. But they were purely by choice and, in most cases, they had a home over there, too. But I don't know much of that background.

J: Mrs. Williams, were you a member of the Sunset Heights Garden Club?

MW: I've never belonged to a Garden Club. Sometimes I've been sorry, because I know they've had good times and learning times. I knew most of those ladies in other areas.

J: You were involved civically--in other ways.

MW: Yes. Well, I've been a member of the Women's Club for many years; I've been a member of the women's department of the Chamber of Commerce; a member of the Auxiliary of UTEP, and I've....

DW: Hundreds of years in PTA.

MW: Yes. And way back, in the Jaycee-ettes, and then much church work.

J: Were Mr. Schwartz and Mr. Miller alive during the period you lived in Sunset Heights?

MW: Yes, oh yes. Mr. Jake Miller was still alive, and Mr. Maurice Schwartz was still alive.

DW: Oh, yes. In fact, Jake Miller used to walk down the sidewalk and visit along. And Dick Miller lived there until he married. Dick and I have been friends for many, many years.

MW: Well, and then the Murchisons, around the corner.

DW: Yes, Mac Murchison, right around the corner there.

MW: Between the Jake Millers and Mrs. Schwartz.

DW: He was quite a powerhouse in this community; in developments, and so on.

J: When did Mr. Schwartz die? I don't really know.

DW: He died about.... Well, it's been within the last....

MW: While you were at the White House, were you not?

DW: Oh sure. He was still around.

MW: Was he alive while you were mayor?

DW: No, I don't think so.

MW: I think he had died shortly before you became mayor.

DW: He had cancer, and just....

MW: I think he died around 1955. Something like that. And Mr. Jake Miller died after Mr. Maurice.

DW: No, Jake Miller died long before I went to the White House. Several years before.

MW: Oh that's right. That's right. I'm sorry.

DW: That's the reason why Dick finally prevailed upon me. He said, "Look, I've got this all myself, and I need some help."

J: Why did the Miller house sit empty for so long before the Casas bought it?

DW: I don't know. Maybe the price. It was a lovely house--is a lovely house, I suppose. The Casas are the type of people I would think would keep it right up to snuff. But I don't know, unless it was price. It certainly is a lovely home.

J: Let me go back and ask you. Did you put yourself through college?

DW: Yes. High school, too.

J: Did you work a variety of jobs?

DW: Yes, well I did most everything. In college I had....well, I had a business when I was a senior in high school. And this you may find amusing, but it was a good business, because I did participate in athletics, and this eliminated some of the demands on my time. Crazy Water is a mineral water. You've probably never heard of it, but it's produced in Mineral Wells, Texas. And it was the product. It had



different strengths, and it was very mild, and a good laxative. People drank it for the therapeutic values, and so on.

MW: And it tasted terrible.

DW: Well most mineral waters do. And then they made Crazy Water crystals and that was just like, you know, like buying whatever you buy to keep yourself regular and things like this.

MW: Like Epsom Salts.

DW: Yes, similar. The guy who had that business in Abilene, Texas, ....it had gotten too much for him. The five-gallon bottles had to be man-handled, and so he wanted to sell it. I managed with some help to get enough money together to.... It didn't cost much, but we had two trucks that had to be purchased. So I built a place next to our house in Abilene, and I would make two trips a night to Mineral Wells. That was about 160 miles. And I'd go down there and load up the mineral water. On the way down, I would leave early enough to stop at places where I had outlets, like the grocery store and a drugstore, and so on. And I'd pick up the empties, and go on. Then I'd come back every other trip, and re-supply them. You could get the gallon bottles, or the five-gallon bottles of 1, 2, 3, and 4 strengths, and the crystals. People would buy this like they do pure water now to drink. And I did that from the time....the latter part of my junior year in high school through my sophomore year in college. I more than made my way, and it was a good way to do it because it was sort of the thing I could do and still participate in the activities, too. In my junior and senior years I had a little more experience in various and sundry things, and so I took up other activities.

I got about \$60 a month, I think, being the editor of the newspaper. Things of this nature that made up the difference. And that's the way I went through graduate school. Same nip and tuck.

J: Tell me, Mrs. Williams, about your first beau.

MW: Hmmm. Well, naturally, he was a musician. We were pretty young, I remember. We had a dancing class....well, not a class, just a dancing club, and we would go to each other's houses on Saturday night. And the mothers would fix refreshments, and we had a victrola, and we had about, oh, there must have been sixteen or twenty of us. That's just about all the young people in that town. We had dances, and I liked this boy because he could dance. And his mother made the most wonderful gingerbread.

DW: Oh no.

MW: Yes. Now that's exactly why. And then as time went on, he did take up the coronet, and I played his accompaniments. That was my first beau.

J: Did you date very much in high school?

MW: Yes. I think I dated early, and I think it's because I lived in a small town. Well, maybe it was the time that I grew up. All my contemporaries dated early. Not like going to a movie, but to go to a party. Since there was so little to do, we had many parties. Anything was an excuse for a party. And in our town, you didn't go to a party unless you had a date. So, I dated early.

J: Now, Dr. Williams, you can tell me about your first girlfriend.

DW: Gosh, I don't remember my first girlfriend. By that, I don't suppose I had a serious first girlfriend, so I don't recall. I know I had lots of girlfriends in high school and college, and the last thing I had in mind was getting married. Heck, we didn't have any money to risk thinking about anything like that.

MW: I don't think any of us did. The last thing on my mind was doing anything but getting my college education, and being out on my own. Not settling down, in quotes.

J: It wasn't the great husband race like it was after World War II

MW: No, it certainly was not.

DW: Oh, after World War II the whole mood changed. Nobody felt any reason to consider that they couldn't get along. From '37 on, we were in a pretty good depression. You thought about those things. But today, our kids, they never worried about it, and their friends, and the rest of them. So when they decided to get married, they couldn't see any reason why not.

J: I think the whole atmosphere, the ambience, was very different then. I think after the Second World War there was a lot of panic and insecurity, nationally, and people were just grasping for something.

DW: That's right. The mood changed. Then, there was a different type of independence young people were expressing. The War had a lot to do with it.

J: Were you required by your parents to do a lot for the church and for their work?

DW: No. I was expected to participate, but required? I was never pushed. Some ministerial parents would try to direct their

children into that type of work. My mother and dad never did. They just said, "You find your place." He always encouraged me in things that I had a serious interest in. Aside from going to the.... You know, when I was small, there were no baby sitters. You just took your kids to church. And I guess I slept in church more.... I put it down, and I think I probably slept during that period about two years in church. I've always had a strong feeling of needing the church-related activities. We go to church. We like church. But it was never expected other than, "Here it is. We hope you enjoy it." But I was never pushed to be a Sunday School teacher, or anything like that.

J: That's interesting. My mother's father was a minister, and her story is very much different than yours.

DW: Well, I know many of our friends were that way. They were expected to do whatever was being done in the leadership roles and other things. But my parents never did push me into that.

J: Do you know anything about the history of Sunset Heights at all? The legends? The Pancho Villa stories?

DW: I really don't. No. We liked Sunset Heights because we met it as we were looking for a larger home, and it was close to the college, and we just fell in love with it. We didn't know anything about it of any consequence other than it was there, and a fine neighborhood. But I don't know the history. It's too bad Mrs. Nagle isn't still alive, because she was

still alive.... We bought the house from her. She knew it in its greatest heyday when everybody who was anybody lived in Sunset Heights. That was the sort of that attitude. She would have been a great source of material to you. And others, too, Mrs. Melby would be, too. She's been there for many years. I really don't know how the name Sunset Heights came about.

J: That's one of my questions. Who named it Sunset Heights? It was started by a Colonel Satterthwaite. And then at one time, it was known as the Mundy Addition. Why did they settle on the name Sunset Heights?

MW: Well I think it very appropos.

J: Yes, it is.

MW: It's on that West side with beautiful sunsets. And at that time, it was the highest place in El Paso.

DW: Back when it was named it was.

MW: Probably someone very poetic.

J: At one time, as I understand it, on the corner of Utah and Yandell was a sort of disreputable part of town. Do you know anything about that at all?

DW: No. I haven't even heard the story.

J: I guess at one time there was a lot of gambling and prostitution.

DW: Well, El Paso used to have those sort of things. Of course that was a long time ago. One area that should have been restored, probably, is the old Red Light District off of Santa Fe Street, downtown. Chris Fox--and he's probably one that you ought to talk to, because that guy knows everything about El Paso--he's the one that told me about some of the madame houses down

there. And it was better controlled then, than it ever has been since. And he was Sheriff, so he had some reason to know those things. Some of those old houses that were madame houses down there should have been maintained. I think it has a lot of historical interest in a number of ways.

J: Well it is interesting, and I can just picture the whole thing. Everybody coming through here on cattle drives, and the lumber men, and the miners.

DW: That's right. There was a time when there was a lot of gambling around here. But I'm not familiar with any location.

J: Someone in a previous interview mentioned to me that there always has been--I hate to use this term, but I haven't been able to think of a different one--the other side of the tracks, even up in Sunset Heights, which was supposed to have been the silk-stocking district.

DW: I think that's right, because as you go down Upson and over toward that area, I think that deteriorated early, and I think that's what you'd call it, if you call it that.

MW: Do you mean from Vandell back down toward Scottish Rite?

DW: No, I'm talking about down toward Doniphan from Upson. Areas in there.

MW: Toward Hart's Mill.

DW: Yes, that's right.

J: Okay. I guess we just quite naturally covered a lot of the things that I wanted to ask about. One question I had was, what do you suppose made people leave, and what makes some of them stay? And I'm talking about older families.

MW: Oh, I think it's sheer comfort. They just enjoy their homes.

DW: I think it's more than that. I think it's a pride. You know, some of those women who are widows have moved into the Fairmont and other places, because they like the association, and lack of responsibility, and security, and other things. But I think the Perrenots, Melbys, Schwartz', and some of those--they've been a part of this. A definite part. And I think they just hang on out of, almost defiance as much as anything else. Because they are able to do whatever they want to do.

J: Just how much of an impact did Sunset Heights have on the development of El Paso? Can it be assessed?

DW: I think you could go back and find the great pioneers--business, the professions, and all--that those people lived in Sunset Heights. And built their homes there. Raised their families there. The Blocker House, I don't know who lives there now....

MW: I don't know either. That beautiful house that takes about a half a block.

DW: Close to Mrs. Melby.

MW: Well, and I was also thinking in this light. Old....wasn't it old Providence Hospital?

DW: Yes, Providence was there. Sure it was there.

MW: Right down the hill there. And it seems to me the Schusters lived in Sunset Heights.

DW: They did.

MW: It was just the place to be. I think there's so much pride in the area. From people who have lived there.

J: When you lived there, did you feel as though there was a special feeling, a special atmosphere, about Sunset Heights?

MW: I did. I always said....

DW: Yes. It was Hawthorne Place, it wasn't Hawthorne Street. I mean, these were the sort of carry-overs. This is different from the rest of El Paso.

MW: And I always said, "I live in Sunset Heights."

DW: It had certain distinguishing things, and it was very comfortable. And it's the same thing. You go into those houses. Ours was hardwood floors throughout. And that Blocker House down there had that narrow hardwood flooring. Miles of it, because it's a huge house. When they built houses then, they built them on the basis of, "All these things are here to endure."

J: Well, they were built with skilled craftsmen, which you can't find anymore.

DW: That's right. They don't take the pride in their work. But, I guess everybody moves for various and sundry reasons, and in our case there were some things that we felt we needed. One was that we had virtually no back yard. There was no way to do anything with it in that regard. We had done to the house the things that we felt we could, and there was no place to sort of lose the kids. To build a den. We thought we needed that. Then the house, as large as it was, still didn't have an adequate number of bathrooms and bedrooms. So we wanted that. Judy, our eldest, has said many times that she's sorry we ever moved away from Hawthorne. The memories that she had of it.

J: I had the same feeling when my parents sold our family home.



DW: Well I think that's natural. Particularly if it has been a happy memory.

MW: Both Judy and Jeanne were old enough to have those associations, and Jeri also to a certain extent. She was younger, but the two older girls, particularly, wanted to be "shown" that this was going to be better.

J: Do you think there still is a particular quality to Sunset Heights, or is it just riding along on legacy?

DW: I think that's unfortunately true. I think if there weren't some of the old-timers there who maintained those homes, and that have taken that very intense pride in it, I'm afraid it would have changed much more. Whenever there is any hearing down there concerning Sunset Heights, Mrs. Melby is there. Oh, there are five or six of them who are there. And they are protesting, or they are getting information to determine what they think about it. They have had their effect.

J: I know that Malcolm McGregor is very interested, too.

DW: Malcolm, you know, lived in that Trost house.

J: He still does.

DW: Does he? Oh sure, he still does. But they thoroughly enjoyed it. At least when his wife was alive.... She was very active doing things. Adding to the aesthetic value of the area. There was an old house that was never finished. The guy, then, was the editor of the El Paso Times. This was a long time ago. You know the house I am talking about?

J: Yes, I do.

MW: That's the Carr house.

DW: That couple went in there and did it themselves. They finished a magnificent house.

MW: Have you been in it?

J: No I have not, but I've heard about it.

MW: It is a treat.

DW: You ought to, because they've done a lot of research and all. They fell in love with that house and decided they would finish it. At the time we looked at it, it was still in such a state of unfinished-ness; newspapers on the walls, and things like that.

J: It was reputed to be haunted.

DW: Oh, yes.

J: At least the children got deliciously scared out of spreading that story. Rod Davenport has done a lot with his house, too.

DW: Mark Howell, too. He's another one. There are some younger ones.

J: Well, I thank you both very, very much.

DW: Well you're welcome. It's been nice visiting with you.