

3-20-1996

## Interview no. 923

Constance N. White

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Interview with Constance N. White by Michelle G. Benavides, 1996, "Interview no. 923," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact [lweber@utep.edu](mailto:lweber@utep.edu).

Constance White  
By Michelle G. Benavides

March 12, 20, 1996

B: I'd like to start the interview, Mrs. White, by asking you to share some biographical information with us. Perhaps we can begin by you telling us when and where you were born, please.

W: All right. I can't tell you much about the date I was born. I don't recall very much (laughs) about that, but I was born in Tacoma, Washington, on October 22, 1917. I don't recall a thing about Tacoma, but just a few years ago I was driving back from Washington and I passed Tacoma. I thought, "Oh, that's where I was born! I've never been back there. I must just cut in and drive through a block, or two, so I will say I've been to Tacoma." I turned off the highway, went down a couple of blocks and looked up and there were the Ansonia Apartments where I had my first picture taken; my grandmother holding me in front of an apartment house with the sign 'Ansonia' above it. So I saw my birth place. That was quite an experience.

B: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

W: My mother grew up in San Francisco. Her parents had come to California in the early mining days. Originally, they were from Massachusetts, but she grew up there in San Francisco and my daddy was born in Denver, Colorado. His father died when he was just starting college. He had two younger brothers and

they didn't have any way to go to college after the father died. His mother was left with practically nothing. So Daddy came back from college, from the University of Michigan, and he went to work for AS&R [American Smelting and Refining] Company, in Mexico. He worked in the mines in various parts of Mexico and he made enough money to send his brothers, one through Harvard and one through Yale. They became very prominent businessmen; one the president of the electric company in New York and another a very prominent architect, Revel Rickard, who designed many of the big beautiful homes in New York. When the Depression came he refused to work on apartment houses and those places where they herded all the people together, (laughs) so he just retired and drove around, traveled every year to Europe and sketched and illustrated books. He did that sort of thing.

But Daddy never finished college. While he was in Mexico he came up to visit some friends in either Utah or California and he met my mother. They fell in love. He proposed to her and she was going to think about it. Meanwhile, he went back to Mexico and that was at the time Pancho Villa was causing so much trouble. He was raiding the ore train that brought the ore up from the mines to the smelter here in El Paso. And when Mother read about that and heard about it she thought, "Oh, no, something may happen to Brent." And she wrote to him immediately and said, "Yes, I will! (laughs) I will marry you." So they were married soon after that. They were

married in 1916 and the American Smelting and Refining Company never sent Daddy back to Mexico again. They were very nice. They sent him to Tacoma, Washington and that's where I was born.

B: What was your father's position with ASARCO [American Smelting And Refining Company]?

W: In Tacoma, I'm not sure. He wasn't a superintendent or manager at that stage. He was, maybe, one or two steps down. From Tacoma they sent him to Murray, Utah. There was a smelter there and then he was sent to Salt Lake City. And he must have been in the office there. I don't remember exactly what his position was, but my brother was born in Salt Lake City, my brother Brent Neville Rickard Junior. And for years he used to tell people he was a Mormon (laughs) because he was born in a Mormon hospital. And he didn't know the difference. My mother and dad weren't affiliated with any church. Both of their parents were Christian Scientist and they did not go along with it, so they didn't have any connection with any church. My poor brother told lots of people he was a Mormon and when we came down here that was very popular. There were lots of Mormons here. (laughs)

From Salt Lake City he was sent to Montana, the smelter in East Helena. Up there he was the superintendent or manager, I'm not sure which, but he was the head man. We loved it in Montana. East Helena was a very, very small little town. We lived just over the railroad tracks from the

little tiny town. I can't think of anything in El Paso now that compares with it, but it was sort of like Canutillo [Texas] might have been a long time ago. They had a little school house, a little tiny church, and a few people lived there. It was about maybe twenty miles from Helena, Montana, the big city. We used to walk to school. We'd cross the railroad tracks. If there was a train there we'd go underneath the train or we'd crawl over the cars. (laughs) Of course, our parents didn't know about this. That was very dangerous.

One year Queen Maria of Romania came through. She came across the country with her two children and what they did was to ask people every place the train stopped, they'd ask prominent citizens, two or three, to get on the train and ride with her to the next city. When the train stopped at East Helena, the place it stopped was right outside our pasture of our house. That was the usual stopping place, so they asked my father and mother to ride with her. We were so excited they agreed that the two children could ride on the train and meet the queen and her children and then they'd get off and Mother and Daddy would ride to Missoula, Montana. I could not wait to see the princess. That was the most exciting (chuckles) thing that had ever happened to me, was to meet a princess. I had visions of her in this beautiful dress with maybe a little crown on her head. We got on the train. There was no sign of a princess. I saw a little old brother sort of

hanging around. He looked just like my brother. He didn't look like a prince. But all of a sudden the little door opened into the little tiny bathroom that they had on those trains and out came this young girl in a bathrobe with a towel wrapped around her hair. We had caught her unawares and that was the princess, Princess Ilianna. I was just crushed. I was so disappointed. (laughs)

B: You forgot all the protocol that you were taught.

W: I forgot everything. (chuckles) I thought, "Oh, no, she looks just like I do when I come out of the bathtub." That disillusioned me forever about kings and queens and princesses. They're just people like ourselves. That was one of my best memories of Montana.

Another was in the winter time when it snowed so much we would wait for the milk. The milk was delivered by a wagon with horses. We'd wait for it to go back up the hill and we'd attach our sleds to it. It was a very steep hill where it went up. When we got to the top we'd take them off and slide down in it. It was very exciting. We'd hear the wolves at night. We were out in the country and there were just two or three houses around there. I hated to leave Montana when we were sent to El Paso. That was in 1927.

B: Why?

W: I just didn't want to leave Montana. I came down here with a very disagreeable attitude. I wasn't going to like El Paso (chuckles) I didn't think. My mother could not believe the

heat. She had never lived in a warm place before. We came in the winter time, but to me it was summer after Montana. I would wear my little cotton dresses to school with the short sleeves and no sweaters or jackets. The other girls would look at me and think I was crazy, but to us that was summer time. Then the summer came and my mother thought we were all going to die of heat exhaustion. (chuckles) She would make us lie down on the floor from noon until about four o'clock. She'd spread a sheet on the living room floor. We'd have to lie there. The beds were too warm to lie on and she would get fans and put them behind tubs of ice. We had iceboxes then and we had big cubes of ice that were delivered by the iceman. She'd put those in the tubs and put the fans behind them and blow nice cool air on us. We would lie there and watch the radio all afternoon. We had a big cabinet radio and we'd watch it just like the children watch T.V. now. We'd focus our eyes on it and hear the radio.

B: Where did you live when you moved to El Paso?

W: When we moved to El Paso we lived at 800 West Yandell. Florence Melby lived there afterwards for years. That had belonged to one of the smelter men before us. That was in a wonderful place. The streetcar tracks ran downtown right past our house. As we got older, we could get on the streetcar and go down to the movies at the Wigwam Theater or the L & A or the Palace [Theater]. I think the Palace wasn't permitted. I think they had kind of naughty movies. (laughs)

I forgot to say this about Salt Lake City. One of my happiest memories was going to school at Roland Hall. It was a little private school and I used to walk there. This was after Murray when we lived in Salt Lake City where my brother thought he was born Mormon because he was born in the Morman hospital. That's where my daddy taught me how to skate. They had tennis courts there and in the winter time it would freeze over and they had a skating rink. That's where I learned to ice skate before I ever learned to roller skate. That's one of my good memories of Salt Lake City. But I soon came to love El Paso. We have so many memories here. I just don't know where to begin.

B: Well, tell me about elementary school. That's probably a good place to start.

W: I was living up there with mostly Jewish children in Sunset Heights. There were the Schwartz', the Moyes', and oh, I can't remember all of the names. Eddie Berliner lived up the street from us. There were so many and they all went to Dudley School. They all had a driver. Mrs. Schwartz sort of ran everything in the neighborhood and they had a driver with a great big cab. It had lots of room in it. One of those great huge automobiles. They would come around and pick us all up and take us up to Dudley School in Kern Place. At that time Kern Place was on the edge of town. It was the very last bit of civilization in El Paso on that side. They would take us up and bring us home and at times our parents would drive



us too. But they didn't have automobiles large enough to hold us all.

While we were growing up, the years we spent there I was a member of the Sunset Heights Reading Club. Mrs. Schwartz started a reading club at her house down on Prospect Avenue. There was Herbert and Albert, that we called Sunshine and Sister. I think her name was Francis. (chuckles) We were included. My brother and I were included in the reading club. It turned out we were the only gentiles that belonged to it and I was the president of it for several years. We would meet there on Saturday nights while our parents would go out partying with the Schwartz' and any others in the neighborhood. The McMichaels' lived up there and the Moyes'. Eleanor Cotton lived there too. They would all go out to dinner and dancing. Meanwhile, we'd be taken care of. We weren't out on the streets causing trouble. (chuckles) We weren't in gangs. They had a wonderful woman, Olga. They called Olga. She was from Germany, I believe, and she would sort of direct us. Mrs. Schwartz would order wonderful books...very good books for young people. We would take turns reading them. I think that helped our reading, the reading for all of us, more than anything. We would take turns reading the books and then after an hour or so we would break for refreshments. We'd have something good to eat and then we'd play games. We had so much fun. About that time, about ten o'clock or eleven, the parents would come to get us and

we'd go home.

B: Well, that was an early night for them, wasn't it?

W: That was early. I'm beginning to wonder. They couldn't have come home that early or we couldn't have stayed that late. I don't know just how we managed it. Maybe they had a housekeeper at my house and someone took us home. I don't remember.

B: When they went out on the weekends would they cross the border? Or would they stay here in El Paso and have dinner somewhere?

W: I think they would stay here and go to each other's home for dinner. I don't believe they crossed the border very much because I remember them coming to our house for dinner. I would sneak down the stairs and watch them. I would decide who I liked and which dresses I liked. Then I'd write my mother little notes (chuckles) telling her how pretty she looked and how much I liked her, her dress and so forth. I'd write my daddy a note and say that he was the handsomest man in the whole living room. We did this until we got up into our teens and then, I think, Mrs. Schwartz began to worry a little bit because our games began to turn to Post Office (laughter) and games like that. I think she was a little worried about her son, Herbert, because Herbert and I kind of wore each others rings. I had to give his back at a certain stage. His was a beautiful gold signet ring. I didn't have a ring that I could give him, so I had one of my

grandmother's, a little tortoise shell ring, and he broke that. I never got that back.

B: So you were sweet on each other?

W: We were. We had a crush on each other. But Mrs. Schwartz, she was being very careful.

Meanwhile I went from Dudley to Radford because I'd had an emergency appendectomy. My mother thought it would be more restful out there. I could rest after lunch and in between classes. I was very upset and said I did not want to leave Dudley. She said I could go back and be in El Paso High next year. I could do that if I wanted to, but I liked it so much out at Radford. They had such wonderful teachers.

B: Do you remember the names of some of your teachers?

W: Oh, dear. There was Miss Latimer our Spanish teacher, Miss McMenemy- she was the first one to teach me how to cook- and Edna Browning Cook, my English teacher. She was fantastic. I still remember where she lived on Montana Street. She lived right across the side street from where Martha Jane Latham lived, right out near Five Points. Miss Cook was such a perfectionist and she taught me to write. She inspired me to write beautifully and I think that was the reason I did well in college. I wrote a thesis for graduation and my professor said it was the equivalent of a master's thesis for a bachelor of arts. I credit Miss Cook for all of that. She was just wonderful. Oh, there were so many good teachers. Dr. Templin...Lucinda de Leftwich came to Radford. You had to

behave if you sat in the dining room at lunch. (laughs) If you sat at her table you could not put your elbows on the table and you had to do everything properly. It was a very wonderful experience and I loved it.

B: What type of subjects did you take, besides English and Math?

W: At Radford? Well, the ones that were required. I studied Spanish. Miss Latimer taught us Spanish, (pause) just the normal things that we had to take. And, of course, we played basketball. They had a girl's basketball team and I played on that. We played other girl's teams at other high schools. That was fun. So I've always been interested in basketball. I still go to the UTEP basketball games, but it was quite different then.

B: Were you involved in any clubs there?

W: No, we didn't have any clubs. It was a very small school. This was during the Depression and it almost closed at the time Dr. Templin came. My father became involved. He was interested in it and he got the businessmen in El Paso to support the school and to contribute, like Mr. Bassett and Mr. McAfee. A lot of prominent businessmen helped the school out until Dr. Templin got the Radfords back in St. Louis to take it over and they supported the school from then on. But it was dwindling and we had one boarder, Bernadine McKay, from Zacatecas. She's now Bernie Thomas, Mrs. Remus Thomas. She spent lots of time with us because she was the only boarding student, so she was alone. The school managed to stay alive.

There were seven in our graduating class. We had May Fate and all of those. I just loved it all.

B: Who was your best friend in those years while you were at Radford?

W: Well, I guess it had to be Bernie Thomas. She was a very close friend. She spent lots of time at our house. I will say I missed all of the others in the neighborhood that went to El Paso High. We got a little bit apart then. And then it was not long before we all went off to college, but now when we all get back together it's just as if we'd never been apart.

B: The same reading club?

W: Yes. The same reading club. And Adelaide Moye is now Mrs. Al Ratner and we just have so much to remember when we see each other it's as if we were part of the same family. We have so many memories. (long pause)

Oh, I wanted to say what a wonderful influence my father was in my life. He did so much for me. I remember the first time when we were down here. I was about ten years old. We used to go out to La Jolla in the summer time. My mother just thought we were all going to die of heat. She could not stand to be here the entire summer, so we would go out to La Jolla and rent a little house on the coast. It was all very quiet. There weren't very many people out there. We had fun and made friends. Then we'd come home. One time something hit me and I began to think about dying. I don't what it was, whether it

was something at school or maybe it was when my grandmother died. My grandmother lived with us there, my mother's mother, for a number of years. I was so worried about it and I talked to my dad. I could always talk to Daddy. I was afraid to mention it to anyone else. I remember we had two bathrooms. Mother and Daddy's bathroom had a bathtub in it with a shower. That was a brand new things in those days, (laughs) the little shower. The bathroom that my brother and I shared on the other side of the hallway didn't have a bathtub. It just had a little shower. So, I remembered taking a bath one night in Mother and Daddy's bathroom and I sat there and I began to cry. Daddy heard me. He came in and sat down on the one seat available (laughs) and he asked me what was bothering me. And I said, "Oh, Daddy what is going to happen? I don't want to die. I don't want you to die or my brother." He said to me, "Connie, do you remember all those people you played with at the La Jolla beach last summer and all the fun you had with them? You know all those people are going to be in the same place that we are. We all go at different times, but we're all going to be together." That completely cheered me. I never worried about it again. I'll never forget that, how with just a few words he managed to reach me and to do away with that worry and anxiety about us being separated and never seeing each other. From then on I just never forgot that.

**End of Tape 1, Side A**

### Beginning of Tape 1, Side B

W: I remember another time sitting at the foot of a stairway in Salt Lake City and Daddy talking to me about something that was bothering me. He never waited for the proper time and just sat me down in the living room or something. He always managed to get me at just exactly the time something was bothering me and talk to me very simply about it and straighten everything out. He was such a help, a wonderful influence. People often ask me why I don't like women's organizations and why I avoid luncheons and things like that with lots of women. I say I'm much more comfortable around men. And when I stop and think of all the boards that I've served on and all the things I've done here in El Paso they've all been mixed groups. I was forced into the Junior League when I got out of college (chuckles) and I went through that. That was a very good learning experience. It taught me a lot about serving on committees and working for organizations and being a volunteer and how to work well in the community. I appreciate that more than I can say, but I never enjoyed just palling around with girls and women. I always preferred mixed groups. I even felt very comfortable just around boys or men. I've decided, years later, it must have been because of my father because he did so much with us. I had just one brother, my younger brother. Daddy taught us to do everything. He taught us to skate, to ride bicycles, and to

ride horses. He took us hiking. I think that was it; I just became accustomed to doing things with my brother and my dad. To this day I feel more comfortable in mixed company than I do with a lot of women. I sort of freeze up and don't talk much. I want to get out of there. I feel like I'm in a chicken coop or something. (laughs)

B: Mrs. White, could you describe your father to me? What was his physical appearance?

W: Well, I used to think of him as being tall, but I think he was sort of medium height and very good looking, very handsome. You'd have to see a picture of him. He's just wonderful looking.

B: Who do you get the coloring of your eyes from, your father or your mother?

W: You know, I don't remember.

B: They're a pretty blue.

W: I just don't remember. Well, maybe I should admit that they're store bought eyes. (laughter)

B: Are they?

W: No, when I was about forty years old I developed cataracts and had to have surgery. At that time they had no implants. I had to wear contacts and I'm still wearing the darn contacts.

B: They're a beautiful color!

W: I found the most wonderful optometrist who fitted them beautifully. At first I had a hard time. I'd get out on the tennis court and miss the tennis ball completely. They just



weren't right for everything. This Doctor Ray Emory managed to get a perfect, just a perfect, fit for me. He's been doing it ever since and I don't know what I'm going to do when he retires. (chuckles) I've ordered two extra pair hoping they'll last me the rest of my life, but he has managed to fit them so that I have twenty-twenty vision distance wise and I can now read the paper without putting on reading glasses.

B: That's wonderful.

W: So I don't know how he managed that, but he was able to do it. So that's why I have such pretty blue eyes. They're tinted just slightly. I found that I lost them when I would go on trips and be in strange bathrooms. I would drop one and I couldn't find it if it was clear. It would just disappear and I'd have to find another one. They have to be tinted slightly for me to find them when I drop them. (laughs)

B: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother?

W: My dad was a very outdoors sort of person. He loved to do things out of doors and my mother was a dainty ladylike little housewife. She was very happy staying at home taking care of the house and making the clothes and cooking the meals while Daddy took us off on jaunts in the country. Mother grew up in San Francisco and it was during a very hard time. Her father was a, I believe you would call him a grain merchant. He had a business and his wife was a sort of a stay-at-home mother, too. My mother was just very, very beautiful and she looked elegant when she dressed up. She always did the right thing

and taught us the right manners. I know she expected me to be the same sort of person and I turned out to be a tomboy. (chuckles) They were both just wonderful. My father died about 1951. He had developed cancer and, I guess, that must have been from his work around the mines and the smelter. I can't think of anything else. It started in his mouth. He smoked pipes and cigars, so that must have started it. Then it just went all through him. He was very stoic about it all. He endured it. He never complained. After we were married in 1938 I haven't gone through all that.

B: We'll have to back up.

W: We'll have to back up and do it. After we married he was transferred from the smelter here to Tucson, Arizona. He stayed there until (pause) he died in [19]51.

B: I didn't ask you to tell me his name.

W: His name was Brent Nevel Rickard. My mother was Edith Cutter Rickard. The Cutter family had been in San Francisco for a number of years. They had originally come from the east, from Massachusetts. My father had a distant cousin who has written quite a few books on mining and metallurgy. I can't think of his first name now. His name was Rickard and very well known. But that was a long time ago in the early 1900s.

B: Well, let's back up a bit. You were telling me about attending school at Radford.

W: Yes. Radford managed to stay open with the Radfords' from St. Louis backing it. I met a young girl, Jacqueline Brown, whose

father was working here. I think he was with the Border Tobacco Company. They were just here a year or so and then they moved back to their home in Pasadena [California]. She talked me into coming out to Scripps College in Claremont, which was a brand new women's college, a part of the Claremont College system. There was Pomona College and Claremont Men's College and maybe one or two others. So I said, "Well, fine. I'd love to do that." I applied and was accepted. Meanwhile Jackie decided she wanted to go to Stanford and she went. Stanford was my first choice. I wanted to go to Stanford. So I went to Scripps and didn't know one single soul, but I loved it out there.

B: What did you study?

W: They had the most wonderful professors. I majored in humanities. I don't know if that's still possible in this day and age to major in such a thing as that. I loved it. We had Dr. Wilber K. Jordan, who had just come back from Oxford and we had Dr. Dar, who was, I believe, a Presbyterian minister. He taught all the religion courses. Oh, I was just fascinated with everything I studied.

B: Were the classes co-ed?

W: No. It was a women's college and we had four dormitories. They all had around forty girls in them. It was a very small college. I had the feeling that things were kind of rough with my parents. It was during the Depression years. Meanwhile, my mother and dad had moved to the smelter from 800

West Yandell. They had moved out to the manager's house at the smelter. It never occurred to me that there were financial difficulties because Daddy never ever told us. He never complained about anything.

B: So he moved to the smelter because the company...

W: I found out years later that his salary had been just sliced to nothing.

B: So he moved in to a company-owned home?

W: He moved in to a company-owned home. The manager's house at the smelter.

B: I wonder how he felt about that?

W: Well, you know those things did not bother Daddy. He didn't tell us. He didn't complain about it. He was happy and positive. He made us feel the same way. He made us feel that it was just great to go out there to the smelter out in the country. We looked out across the river, the Rio Grande. We had a lake there. There were a lot of other people living there. The Watzkes', that family is still here. Their boys grew up with us there. We had our dogs out there. We had a lake. We'd all go swimming with the dogs in the lake. We just thought it was great.

B: I wonder what your mom's sentiments were?

W: I don't know how (chuckles) Mother felt about it. I still hear from some of the boys, the old men, that used to date me. One was Tom McKnight. They still tease me about how hard it was to find me. They'd have to go under the bridge, turn off

Paisano there, and wind around in the railroad yards between the railroad cars and the ore cars and the ore piles and the dumps. Then they finally found their way to our little settlement there. There were about six or eight little houses out there. Ours was the two-story house. We had the big house.

B: Did the settlement have a name?

W: Yes, we lived at 202 Smelter Terrace. That sounds very elegant doesn't it?

B: Yes, it does.

W: That's better than Smeltertown.

B: Yes.

W: Now Smeltertown was down below us and that was right along the river for several miles. They were little old adobe houses, beautiful little houses, that had been there for generations with lovely flowers and plants and hollyhocks. I remember the hollyhocks outside them. One year the mayor decided that those people were being polluted by the lead from the smelter and he ordered the whole place demolished. All those poor people that worked in the smelter had to leave there and go up to the condominiums up on the hill there up above the smelter. The children and all moved into apartments. That's when all the crime and the problems started with the young people. They were fine as long as they were down there in their own little homes. Some of them had been there for several generations. It was terrible! I was devastated when I heard

about that. The lead hadn't bothered me. I'm still here and I've lived under lead smokestacks all my life. I still look out of my bedroom window and still see a smokestack. (chuckles) I was born under one and I'm probably going to die under this one.

B: What was the community like? Could you describe the community to me?

W: You mean El Paso or out there?

B: When you were living on Smelter Terrace.

W: There weren't very many families. There were just, actually, five or six families living there.

B: On Smelter Terrace?

W: On Smelter Terrace. I can't remember the names of the others. The Watzkes' lived across from us and they had lived with us in Montana at East Helena. They had been moved down here. We were all very close. I enjoyed it out there. I thought it was fun.

B: You lived there before you went away to college then, correct?

W: They moved out there while I was in college.

B: So you came back home and they were there?

W: Yes, so I came back home and they were there.

B: When your mom had any shopping to do would she come into El Paso?

W: Well, they would have to come. There wasn't anything up there. I was trying to remember where she shopped. I think it was at a store in Sunset Heights and then there was Kern

Place. There was a grocery up here in Kern Place on Cincinnati Street. I think where the Dolce Vita is now. We'd go down by the courthouse. There was a market down there in central El Paso, we called it, right around where all the big courthouses are now and we would shop there. Of course, the milkman brought us milk. We didn't have to shop for milk, but I didn't pay much attention to that. I was away most of that time in college.

B: Did you attend church?

W: I came here in 1927 when I was ten. And at about twelve years old Mother and Daddy decided to join Saint Clements Episcopal Church there on Campbell and Montana. We lived just a block away from Mr. Horner, who was the minister there. He lived down on Prospect Avenue just below us. They had made friends with him. They had looked around and they had decided they liked Saint Clements. So all four of us were baptized and confirmed at the same time (laughs) at Saint Clements. I remember that. And they were regular members from then on. We always went to church. We started when we were up in Sunset Heights.

Oh, another thing we did...here I've moved to the smelter and I forgot to mention the Perenots' Christmas Party. That was one of the big events of the year. She had a wonderful Christmas Day open house. We would all walk down there and they still do that now. The El Paso County Historical Society is trying to keep that up. They still have an open house. It

may not be on Christmas day, but it's around Christmas time. Mrs. Perenot was always so pleasant and so hospitable. The Spears lived down there. There were so many old, old families. A girl who went to Radford with me, Nancy Kitson, lived there on West Yandell. There were so many people. Eddy Berliner lived up above us. I have to tell a story on him, although I shouldn't, about Judge Berliner. One time he got caught in our laundry chute. We had a laundry chute that went from the second floor down to the basement and Eddie was being very smart. He thought he would climb down. He was trying to get away from my brother (chuckles) and he got stuck in the middle. We had a terrible time getting him out. I can't remember now how we got him out, but we must have because he turned out to be a judge. (laughter)

One time when they had an open house there, they asked me to be a hostess. I had to sit up at the top of the stairs right next to that laundry chute. The Hoover boys came in, John and Bob Hoover. They said, "Oh, I remember this! There was Buddy's room and there's the tree he used to climb down when he was supposed to be taking a nap." And I said, "What?" They said, "Yes, remember when you thought he was delicate or your mother thought he might develop TB?" Everyone was scared to death of tuberculosis in those days. She thought he might be developing it. She kept him out of school for about six months one year and she would make him stay in his room and rest. Well, I find out...how many years later, fifty, sixty,



or (chuckles) seventy years later that he did not stay in his room and rest, but he climbed out the Fall window and climbed down the tree and played with the Hoover boys who lived across the street. Then he would sneak back in time for my mother to come and get him up. Oh, my, we had so many funny things happen. That house brought back many memories. But I've already moved to the smelter (laughs) and I keep going back to 800 West Yandell. My brother and Eddie used to put firecrackers on the streetcar tracks. Oh, and the Fryer boy lived down on Prospect. Wasn't there a Judge Fryer? Yes, he was a judge. His son and my brother got into lots of trouble. They'd open up fire hydrants when they shouldn't have and put firecrackers on the streetcar tracks. He was always known as Fryer. (laughs) I don't know whatever happened to him. It was so handy having that streetcar there because we could ride on it and go down to the movies without any chaperons. We could go by ourselves.

B: How long were you at Scripps?

W: I was at Scripps for four years. I graduated in 1938. I was so impressed with the professors there and I wanted to go on and do some graduate work. I wanted to go to Oxford. Dr. Jordan was trying to convince me to go. When I got home my parents said, "Well... ." I knew afterwards, years later, they couldn't possibly afford it, but they just said, "Let's just wait a year and then we'll talk about it. You stay home for a year." Meanwhile, I found out that someone had

convinced my mother to get me into the Junior League. I didn't know I was being manipulated. The first thing I knew I was a provisional member of the Junior League. I hadn't been here very long. I had just graduated from college. It seems much longer when I think back then, but they were planning a follies for that fall and they ordered me to go with a certain young man here who was the best dancer in El Paso. They said, "We have to get him into the follies. He's been in them before and he's an excellent dancer. The only way to get him is to have you bring him to the dinner when the director will be here." I said, "But, I already have a date with Bates Belk. I can't (chuckles) stand him up." They said, "You break it. You're going with Wyndham White." Well, I had to agree. So he came out to get me and the first thing he did was tease me about a scab I had on my knee. He saw it when I got into the car or out of the car. We used to get gigantic scabs from roller-skating. We'd wait and see how big they could get. We used to compete with (laughs) each other to see who had the biggest scab. He teased me about that and I didn't like that very much, but we had dinner. The time came to organize the follies and dances. Wyndham announced that his uncle, Maury Kemp, did not think it was proper for a member of the law firm to be dancing in the follies, so he was not going to dance this year. There I was without a partner. I finally did have a partner, but I went home very miffed at this young man. That was in the fall of 1938. On Christmas

Day we announced our engagement and we were married in 1939.

B: What happened to the courtship?

W: I don't know. I decided years later that he, being seven years older, had gone with all these glamorous girls in El Paso. I can't think of all their names now, but I have a book with all their pictures in it. He had been looking for just the right wife and he had investigated me thoroughly. I had met his horses I had ridden. I knew how to jump a little, but I rode his mare. I did nothing bad when I rode her. (laughs) I didn't abuse her. And what else was in my favor? I did not play bridge. Every other girl in town played bridge.

B: So those were points in your favor?

W: Those were points in my favor. He did not play bridge either and at that time *everyone played*. He did not want to marry someone who was going to play bridge all the time. And I'd never learned; I didn't want to play. I did not smoke and he didn't smoke. At that time all the women were smoking. It was the thing to do.

B: Did he take you home to meet his mother? Was that another test?

W: Yes, I met his mother.

B: And you passed that test?

W: (laughs) I passed that test. I think that's what he was looking for and that's why it went so quickly. He had dated all of the glamorous girls around here, but I was the one he proposed to. We were very, very happy. We had so much fun

together. We didn't depend on other people or other groups. We would go out with people to parties or double date or something, but he never wanted to belong to a group. We could never join a Sunday night group or a this or that or the other. He wanted to be independent.

B: Where did he propose to you? Do you remember?

**End of Tape 1, Side B**

**Beginning of Tape 2, Side A**

W: You wanted to know when Wyndham proposed? I'm sure it must have been on one of our outings. We used to spend every Sunday together and that wasn't for very long after we met. We'd go out to the Helms Ranch or the Bassett Ranch and we'd hike around. We'd go up in the Huecos and hike. We'd go out and watch the horses and the cattle. One time Wyndham just asked me if I'd marry him and I said yes.

B: Right away?

W: Yes, and I forgot about all of these old boyfriends that would occasionally write. Boys I knew in college still wrote and looked me up. I was very interested in one of them until I met Wyndham. One poor guy came through one time and I just had to say, "No, I'm sorry." (laughs)

B: I'm taken.

W: "But I'm taken." When we were sure we announced our

engagement. I think it was Christmas Eve of 1938. I remember walking by Warner's Drugstore downtown across from the post office and picking up an evening paper and it was in there about our engagement.

B: What did your parents think of Wyndham?

W: Well, they approved of him. They thought it was great. I think my mother was always nice. They were always very nice in that they never pushed me on anyone, but they let me know if they thought someone wasn't quite proper. I had been dating older boys for a long time. Going to Radford you didn't meet boys that were just in your same grade. I knew a lot of young men that were older than I, so I was accustomed to that and Wyndham was seven years older. His mother announced that if we did not get married by the first week in June she would not come to the wedding. And she wasn't like that. She was a very sweet kind person, but she could not stand the heat and her thought of having a party and going to all these festivities in the heat of the summer was just too much. She was suffering already from it. So we had planned to be married in early Spring and then I developed pneumonia for some reason or other. I don't know why. I'd never had anything. Oh, I'd had diphtheria. I was in the hospital for quite a while and I couldn't...we had to postpone it. So we were married the third of June, which was the first week in June.

B: So you missed the deadline?

W: So Mrs. White and Dr. White came to the wedding. It wasn't a large elegant wedding. I don't know how we planned it or, knowing everyone in El Paso, how my family managed. It didn't seem to me it was too large. I just don't remember much about it, actually. We had the reception at the Paso del Norte Hotel. I remember the picture of us. I think it was Bates Belk who had been the first in line. He reached around to give me a kiss and pulled my veil half-way off. In all the pictures it's lop-sided on my head. But we had a very small reception. It was very quiet. I realize, well, Mother and Daddy couldn't afford anything huge. If you did in El Paso you just knew everyone in El Paso. It would just be a gigantic affair. I don't know how they kept it the way they did, but it was nice and small.

B: Who stood in your wedding? Do you remember the witnesses?

W: Gretchin Reinemand was one. Gretchin Reinemand and Grace, I think, Grace Ferrier. Isn't that awful? I can't remember now. Wyndham's best man was Guyler Magruder. I should get out my book and see. He had the honeymoon all planned. Guess where we were going?

B: Where?

W: VMI. Virginia Military Institute was celebrating the 100th anniversary of its founding. That's where we were going. Well, that was fine with me. I didn't object.

B: Did it sound romantic in any way whatsoever?

W: No, but it sounded like fun. So we got on the train the next

day. Oh, we spent the night at the Paso del Norte and we had the great big bridal suite. We couldn't (laughs) decide which room to take. It had several bedrooms it seemed like.

B: In one suite?

W: In one suite. It had more than one bedroom and we couldn't decide (laughs) which one we should be in.

B: You don't think a bit of nervousness came into play there?

W: I think maybe so, yes, because I was a very innocent young lady. (laughs) I don't know about Wyndham, but I don't think he was too sophisticated. I don't think he was too accustomed to hotel rooms. Anyway, we finally decided on a place to stay. Well, the next morning instead of ordering our breakfast we got dressed. We were leaving the next day on the train for Washington. So we got dressed and went downstairs into the coffee shop and there were all our friends. All the businessmen were having coffee and breakfast everybody teased us. (laughs) It was really a lot of fun. When we went to the station to catch the train and we were about to get on the train, along comes Guyler Magruder, Wyndham's best man. He was walking down toward where we were like this. (demonstrates walk) He had a big grapefruit in each hand and he was walking along like this. Oh, he was terrible! (laughs) But it was so much fun on the train. What is that song about how they turn the lights down low? What is that old song? I remember it was just such fun going on the train to Washington. Then his aunt who lived there in D.C., she

loaned us her car and we drove from there down to Lexington, Virginia, through that beautiful country. I'd never seen it before. I'd never been back there. It was just beautiful country. I'd always seen the West and the desert and the mountains and I'd never seen anything like that at that time of year...all the beautiful green trees and the flowers. We drove to Lexington and we stayed in the little tiny hotel there.

They were celebrating their 100th anniversary. They had all of the big bands. They had Ben Bernie and I can't remember the names of the rest of them, but they had dances every night and things going on all day. It couldn't have been a better honeymoon. It was so much fun. Wyndham saw all of his friends. We just loved it. It was great. Ever since then we'd remember those wonderful dances and the bands. We saw lots of his old time friends who lived around there and reestablished contacts with all of them.

B: Where did he grow up?

W: Well, he grew up here, but his father had come from Lexington. His father's old, old home was right on the edge of VMI. It is now part of VMI. I think they (laughs) have tanks right close by, but it's still a beautiful old home. They turned it into a kind of a bed and breakfast home. I stayed there one time when I went back for a reunion. His father just loved Lexington and he had many old time friends there. Wyndham would go back every year every summer to stay with his



grandparents, so he had many connections there and he just loved it.

B: It's beautiful country.

W: Yes. And I was willing to go along and do what he wanted to do. It was fun. So that's how we started. Then we came back and lived at the Eleven Forty Apartments. We had an apartment. There were quite a few other young couples. I think Jackie Borrett was there then and a few other couples that we knew. We couldn't stay with Wyndham's mother. She had taken in boarders, I think. She had a big house on Montana at 1428 Montana. We lived at the Eleven Forty, so we were right close by and we could have dinner with them and lunch and breakfast at different times. We had one car and Wyndham would drive out early in the morning to see about the horses. Sometimes I'd go with him and help him ride them.

B: Were you prepared to be a housewife/wife?

W: I really wasn't interested in that. What I was interested in was just having fun with Wyndham (laughs) with the horses and the hiking and the camping trips.

B: Did you have any help at home?

W: No. No, I did everything and I had taken a course or two at Scripps in cooking. I was pretty good. I wasn't too bad. We had lots of company for dinner and I did all the cooking. I guess I was a pretty good cook, come to think of it. About that time Wyndham was in the Reserves and the general out at Fort Bliss had told him, "If you want to get a good job you'd

better become active again because we are going to be involved in the war." He was sure we were. So Wyndham became active in the Reserves. He was sent to Washington to study Spanish. Here he spoke Spanish fluently, but he was sent back there for some training because he thought he was being sent to Mexico. He was sent there with another man who had been a Border Patrolman and they came back and Wyndham was sent to Ecuador as Assistant Military Attaché. The poor other guy who had been a Border Patrolman was sent to Mexico.

B: Not as glamorous.

W: (laughs) He said, "Oh, I'm not going to get out of there alive. They're going to kill me. They're going to hate me down there." I'm trying to think if anything happened in between those times. That was a very short time. We went to New York. I'd never been to New York City and I was so impressed with all the sights and the Statue of Liberty. We took a ship and went down through the [Panama] Canal to, I guess, Columbia and then went from there to Quito, [Ecuador]. I was just amazed at the railroad trip up from Guayaquil, [Ecuador] to Quito. The people all standing by selling those little animals. I can't think (laughs) of the names of them.

B: Well, before your trip down to Quito were you given any type of help? Was there any preparation for the move down there because, surely, you wouldn't have known what to take?

W: We did. We had no idea what to take. We had been given a Chevrolet. My dad and mother gave us a Chevrolet for our

wedding present. We thought, "We can't take the Chevrolet and live up there at the top of the Andes." We sold the Chevrolet. We packed up all of the furniture that we had in our apartment and took it down. We just did everything the wrong way. We should have left all the furniture at home because all of our friends down there in the ligation- not an embassy- they all rented houses with these elegant rooms and elegant furniture great big beautiful homes. We had this crumby little apartment furniture and we had to move into a horrible little modern house that was just not very good at all. It was because we had that furniture. What we could have used was the car. We could have sold that for a fortune down there. We did all the wrong things. Here we had to entertain in this little house with a little, tiny dining room. It couldn't seat more than ten or twelve people and Wyndham hired a cook, a *mayordomo*, an upstairs cleaning woman, and a houseboy. I didn't know how to take care of help. I was used to doing things for myself. Wyndham hired a *mayordomo* that knew about horses. He was (laughs) in the cavalry, or something. He had no manners whatsoever.

B: But he knew about horses?

W: But he knew about horses and that was the first thing we got. Wyndham liked the house. It was perfectly level with a backyard. There were some little shelters there for horses. So Wyndham got two horses some way and this man was able to take care of them.

Meanwhile, we would have elegant dinner parties and Segundo would come in to serve the dinner and he would come in loaded down with platters and things. He couldn't open the doorway, which was a swinging door, so he'd kick it and then go through. (laughs) I knew exactly how to do the table and all the different courses. We had to have all these formal dinners with different courses. The time would come for desert and we would have the place plate to begin with. Then you had to remove the cocktail from that and put it on the side. He would come around and if somebody was too busy talking and didn't remove that he'd reach over and snatch it away. (laughs) Oh, dear, it was so funny. We had the wildest house down there. I think people must have been very amused...proper people, that is.

B: How did you spend your days?

W: Well, I'm trying to remember now. I can't think how I spent them.

B: Were there community organizations or activities for the people that lived there?

W: No, there were things that the women did, I guess. But, Wyndham's time was off and on all the time. We always had out-of-town people coming in and we would put them up at our house. We had only one double bed, which was ours, and which is one I still have in there. We had twin beds, my brother and I, and so when we had divided the furniture I got one and he got the other one, which had been lengthened to fit him.

So we had one little single bed and all the people who visited slept in that single bed, even the couples. Can you believe it with the king size beds now and the queen size beds?

B: They just got to snuggle real good.

W: Yes! We put up the Air Attaché and his wife, but they had just gotten married. They didn't mind. (laughs)

B: They were still in love.

W: Yeah, it was funny. I don't recall for certain. I know I was busy everyday, but I rode the horses. I helped Wyndham with that. Then it seemed to me that we always had out-of-town guests. There were a lot of bachelors down there and they all hung around the house. They were all kind of lonesome.

B: Did you ever play matchmaker?

W: Well, I think I tried. (laughs) This Jackie Brown that had talked me into going to Scripps and then went to Stanford, she came down for a while. She cruised around and met all of the young bachelors. Then Pearl Harbor happened and we were told we would be down there for the duration of the war. One of our friends in the State Department, he was the- I can't think of his position- but he and his wife decided to start a family since they were going to be there. I felt like I helped her deliver her baby. I was around when she was pregnant. I thought, "Well, if they can do this we should start a family now." This was in 1942. So I made the decision, I guess. Meanwhile, I did not know Wyndham was trying to get out. He felt he had been trained for active duty. He did not want to

stay down there and entertain ambassadors and generals and so forth. He wanted, he needed, active duty. He was pulling all the strings he could to get out and I didn't realize it.

So we started the family. One morning at four o'clock I woke up. I had pains and Wyndham was running around and up and down stairs and bringing water and all of this. I had decided not to go to a hospital because I had been there to see my friend's baby be delivered. When I walked in this Indian woman was scrubbing the floor, which was filthy dirty. She got up went over to the crib and picked up the baby. I thought, "Oh, no!" Because my mother had been sending all this information about cleanliness. She was trying to educate me on having a baby. I didn't know anything about this. She'd sent me all this stuff and I realized how clean you had to be. I said to Wyndham, "I can't go to that hospital. We'll have to have the baby here." So, I spent from four o'clock in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon with these terrible pains. There was no relief, no doctor. The doctor wouldn't come there when I said I wouldn't go to his hospital.

B: So were you going to have a midwife deliver you?

W: So I had a midwife. And my help, she took the part of a nurse. And, of course, Wyndham. He was running up and down the stairs and I was leaning over the railing just screeching and hollering and bellowing. Finally the baby arrived. She was only a little over four pounds. She was a tiny little

thing and she was full-term. I never went to the hospital. I had to nurse her and my milk was terrible. I never was able to nurse any of the other children. There was no formula down there. We couldn't give her milk. I had to keep on nursing her. Poor thing, it's a wonder she survived. We couldn't give her milk because the only milk we had was from the cow that they brought around every day to the front gate. And the *mayordomo* would go out and milk the cow; I knew that wasn't sanitary. I just didn't know what to do, so I nursed her. Meanwhile, orders had come. She was born in January and orders had come for him to leave. We had to go to all these parties that were given for us. I'd go out and party and drink cocktails. I never quit drinking anything and then come home to nurse (laughs) the baby.

B: She probably went to sleep real quick.

W: Yeah, I think she did. (laughs) Oh, it was wild. She was three months old when we flew out of there.

B: So how long had you been in Quito?

W: We'd been there from 1940 to 1943.

B: Were you ready to leave?

W: Well, it was sad, kind of. We left a lot of old friends, good old friends, but I didn't know what I was doing with this new baby and everything. I felt I must have some help with this. We came up with Bolivia. We had an old friend down there, a girl from Quito. She had married a young American army officer. I think at that time he had been killed in a plane

crash. She came up with us. I think there's a picture of her in that back bedroom at Louise Kemp's house. We were all there together. Wyndham went with her to Washington. She was going to stay with his family in Maine. She was pregnant. Wyndham went with (laughs) her on the train and had to take care of this great big pregnant gal. I don't know if he went all the way up to Maine or if they met her. I think maybe he did help her get up to her husband's family. Within a few months she was back in Ecuador. She couldn't stand it. A woman from Ecuador and a family from Maine...they were so different. So she couldn't stand it and went back.

Meanwhile, Wyndham went to Washington and then he was sent overseas in time for the invasion in 1944. He got there in D+2. He went into Normandy [France]. He spent the whole war over there in Germany and going all through there. Meanwhile, I took the baby to Tucson [Arizona]. My parents had gone over there by then. I stayed with them. One time we were listening to the radio and she was on the bed while I was laying on a chaise lounge listening to it. They said, "The bridge at such and such a place in Germany has been taken...Captain Wyndham White." (laughs) So he was very active.

**End of Tape 2, Side B**



**Beginning of Tape 2, Side A**

**March 20, 1996**

W: I found this in my files and I thought maybe it would fill in some things I might have left out. I wrote this for my children in case they had to use it for an obituary. (reading) "Constance Neville Rickard was born in Tacoma, Washington, on October 22, 1917. The daughter of Brent Neville Rickard and Edith Cutter formerly of Denver [Colorado] and San Francisco [California]. As her father was a metallurgical engineer, Constance spent her early years under many an ASARCO smokestack moving from Tacoma to Salt Lake City, Utah and East Helena, Montana, before coming to El Paso in 1927 when she was ten years old. Constance and younger brother Brent, Junior, lived at 800 West Yandell Boulevard in Sunset Heights before moving out to the smelter during the Depression years, where their father was plant manager. She attended the old Dudley School in Kern Place and was graduated from Radford School for Girls in 1934. Following her graduation from Scripps College in Claremont, California in 1938, she returned to El Paso where she met Wyndham Kemp White, the son of Doctor Hugh Spotswood White and Anne Perin Kemp White. They were married in 1939 and lived in the popular Eleven Forty Apartments while Wyndham practiced law in the firm of Kemp, Smith, Goggin, and White in the old State

National Bank Building. Connie did volunteer work for the Junior League, Saint Clements Altar Guild, and the Lighthouse for the Blind learning braille." The Eleven Forty Apartments, by the way, were on Rio Grande Street. We just called them the Eleven Forty. They're right across from the museum.

B: Is the building still there?

W: The building is still there. They're still the Eleven Forty and there were lots of young newlyweds in there. That was a very popular place to go.

(reading) "In her spare time she played tennis at the El Paso Tennis Club on Arizona Street, the present site of the First Christian Church. She and Wyndham rode horseback every morning at 5:30 a.m. at Mr. Bassett's stable on Reynolds just off of Trowbridge. With the acceleration of the war in Europe Wyndham was called to active duty in the Army Reserve Corps. In 1941 he and Connie were sent to Quito, Ecuador, where he served as Military Attaché for two years. Connie had a crash course in diplomatic entertaining and instant drawing room Spanish. Following his request for active duty, Wyndham was ordered to the European Theater in 1944, where he participated in the D-Day invasion of Normandy. Meanwhile, Connie and three-month old daughter, Edita, returned to Tucson to live with her parents for the duration of the war." Did you want me to read the whole thing?

B: Or you can stop if you want and sort of fill in. I know at the conclusion of the last interview you were talking about

your husband returning from the war.

W: Yes. Did I tell you about Doctor White wanting so badly to have grandchildren? I hadn't known them very long. I'd just known them as long as I'd known Wyndham. He wanted instant grandchildren, I think. (laughs) He used to get me to come to his office and take vitamin shots. It was funny because he had his office full of rabbits. I wondered if this had anything to do with it. He was working on the elimination of rabies. He gave me all these vitamin shots, but nothing happened suddenly. Wyndham and I had decided we would wait a little while. Then we were suddenly sent to Ecuador. I really didn't know Doctor White that long. He was such a wonderful person. After we were down there and when we thought we'd be there for the duration we decided to start the family. We had Edita in 1943 and Doctor White died about ten days after she was born.

B: Oh, so he never did see her then?

W: He never saw her. I think he knew that he had a granddaughter. I hope he did. I felt so badly about that because he wanted grandchildren so badly and we didn't have any. His son had waited too long to get (laughs) married. Then when Wyndham came back I was in Tucson living with my mother and dad. Edita and I had this little spare room. There was an old, old fashioned double bed in there. It was a great, big, wide, heavy bed on little tiny legs. I don't know how it ever lasted this long. It had belonged to my

mother's parents. Edita used to love to jump on it. She would jump and my mother would say, "Be careful! Be careful, Edita! Be careful! Don't break that! Be careful!" So I'll never forget the first night Wyndham came home. I met him at the airport. He flew in. He had come back from Europe through El Paso and then had come to Tucson. We went out to dinner. We came back and crept into the room. Edita was asleep in her little crib behind a screen we had put up. We got into bed (laughs) and the bed began to squeak a little. Then there was this little baby's voice, "Mother, be careful! Be careful, Mother!" (laughs) That was certainly a welcome home for Wyndham.

B: I'm sure you both had a good laugh about that.

W: We had a big laugh! We never forgot that. Oh, dear! (laughs) Let's see. (reading) "We returned to El Paso in 1946. The family lived with Mrs. Hugh White at 1428 Montana Street until their move to the Upper Valley in 1957 just one month before the birth of their fourth child, Wyndham, Junior. Other children include Hugh White who now lives in Petaluma, California, Anne White Airy of Seattle- Bellevue- Washington, and Aquitaña Edita White Simmons of El Paso. She married Dr. Jerry Simmons, a veterinarian, in El Paso. In addition to the family's equine activities, tennis, swimming, and four separate and strenuous stints in PTA [Parent Teacher Association], Connie managed to serve as president or board member of various organizations including Pan American Round

Table of El Paso, Auxiliary to the El Paso Bar Association, Lighthouse For The Blind, El Paso Public Library Association, Librarian for the Church of Saint Clements, El Paso Riding and Driving Club, Ditch Riders International Hunter-Jumper Club, and National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State Of Texas- I keep adding things to this- she's also served as USTA [United States Tennis Association] Umpire, ESL [English as a Second Language] Instructor." I work for Drive-A-Meal, the UTEP [The University of Texas at El Paso] Studio Theater, and the Community Theater here in El Paso. I just keep adding things.

B: It almost reads like an impressive résumé.

W: I'm now with the Good Time Singers. We go around to the nursing homes. I don't have much of a voice, but I think they like my body in there because the old ladies can relate. They say, "Oh, there's Connie White! (laughs) If she can do that I guess maybe we can keep going."

B: Let's back up to the early days of your marriage. You had mentioned to me that your family was very involved in horseback riding, et cetera, et cetera. You had mentioned to me that your husband used to play polo with the Bermúdez family across the border. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

W: Well, that was sort of off and on when they would come over here. They had games in the early days out at Fort Bliss below the Officer's Club right off of Pershing Drive. They

called it Pershing Field, I believe. There were Mexican teams that came up from different parts of Mexico and played. The Bermúdez' had a wonderful horse farm over in Juárez. They'd play over there and then the Juárez people would come over here. Wyndham enjoyed that, but he didn't have time to do too much polo. He was an excellent horseman. I think when he was at VMI he competed in a lot of shows and jumping things. He went to the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1932, I think, possibly. I can't remember now for sure.

B: That's okay. I was unaware of that.

W: He went with Colonel Terry Allen. I think he rode in the Olympics and Wyndham went with him and helped take care of the horses. I can't remember exactly the year of that. It must have been in the early [19]30s. It must have 1932 because Wyndham graduated from VMI in 1931.

B: Can you remember any memorable vacations that the family took together?

W: Oh, we grew up during the Depression and we didn't have a lot of money, so we didn't travel very far, but we used to drive back and forth to California. The one I remember was through the Grand Canyon. That was just beautiful.

B: Was this before you married or after?

W: Yes, this was when I was in high school. There's a picture of me in the other room with my brother standing at the top of the canyon. That was quite an experience for us. Our only other trips were made to San Francisco to see my grandmother

and my uncles. We didn't do much of anything else after we came to El Paso. We'd go to Cloudcroft [New Mexico] for the summer, or part of the summer...just a few weeks to get out of the heat. Mother thought we were all going to get heatstroke or get- what do the dogs get- rabies, or (laughs) something like that, some terrible thing from the heat. She had never seen anything like that.

B: And after you were married did you take any vacations with the family?

W: Well, after we were married it was a long time before we were able to. After the war I remember coming back here and living with Miss Anne on Montana Street. And Louise Kemp had brought me home from something and we were standing out in front of the house. I had gotten out of her car. I said, "I don't know what to do. Wyndham doesn't know whether to go back to stay in the army or get out of the army. Edita's three years old. We'd like to have more children. If he stays here..." Louise Kemp said to me, "Connie, just don't try to plan when you're going to have another one. Just do it! If you want a family just go on." After those words of wisdom our second child was born about four years later, Edita. So she came along and then it was another four or five years before Hugh. We all lived there on Montana Street. I taught them all to roller-skate. Some people still remember that. Jerry Gilmer used to tease me about it. They lived across the street near Colonial Terrace Hotel. He said he remembered seeing me

skating up and down Montana with all these little children behind me.

B: They probably had fun with you.

W: Yes. That's how they learned to skate. The last one never did learn to skate because we moved after Wyndham Junior was born. There just wasn't room in that house for all of us. We had one bathroom for everybody and the three children: Wyndham, Miss Anne, and I. It was wonderful being there because Wyndham and I could go out to dinner. We could go to dances. We used to go parties at the Country Club and the Officer's Club with friends. We didn't have to worry about the children. Miss Anne loved to take care of them. One time she called us home from a New Year's Eve party right at twelve just when all the excitement was beginning...when everybody kissed everybody, you know. She called us about a quarter to twelve and said, "Come home. I can't manage the girls." We found out that they'd been chasing each other through the bed. They'd go down the top covers, come out the bottom, and then go back. She couldn't stop them, but when we got home they were sound asleep. (laughs) We didn't have to come home at all.

B: There went that New Year's Eve.

W: There went the New Year's Eve. But just a month before the fourth one was born we finally found a house in the Upper Valley. We didn't know where we would move. We looked at houses all over El Paso. We did have horses that were boarded



at Tom Burchell's Stable in the Upper Valley and different places. We decided to find a house up there. We found the perfect place at the end of Yucca Place. It was a dead-end street off of Country Club Road. There were three acres connected with it so we had lots of room. We moved out there a month before Wyndham Junior was born. The poor boy got the name 'Breezy' because after he started to school he came home one day and said, "Oh, Mother! You call me Windy and the kids at school say that's a girl's name." They were pronouncing it "Wendy." I told Monica Hunter that and she said, "Well, call him Breezy. He's just a little windy."

B: Did that name stick?

W: The name stuck and he's still (chuckles) Breezy.

B: Where did your children attend school?

W: Well, the girls went to Radford and the boys went to Zach White. That was up on Doniphan then...the old Zach White. I've forgotten what it is now. I think they store school buses there now. I was very active in the PTA. We put on a wild play one time. (laughs) I think the PTA was quite disturbed by it. We did a take-off on some of the TV programs we had seen. You know, like the old lady that used to sit on the bench in the park. We had a lot of fun there at Zach White. I used to take Breezy over on the back of my horse if the car wasn't working or if someone was using it. He was very embarrassed about that. The other kids thought it was wonderful. They all said, "Gee, I wish could ride a horse."

I wish my mom would bring me on a horse." (laughs) I guess he didn't like to be singled out.

B: Well, he already had that different name. So that just made it even more.

W: After Zach White they both went to Coronado High School. Hugh was in the first graduating class at Coronado. They sent them up there in the sixth grade, I think, then they added a year each year to the school.

B: Did they go on to college from there?

W: We sent Breezy to NMMI [New Mexico Military Institute] the last two years. When Hugh got out of Coronado in 1969 he gave me a lecture. He said, "Ma, we're the last straight class up here. From now on they're into pot and everything. They're all too well-to-do. They all drive cars." Our children never drove cars until they were able to get one of their own after college. He just announced this. He was very wise. He said, "You just wait and see. They're going to be in all kinds of trouble." And sure enough Breezy was up there just in time to get into it all. The kids were growing marijuana in the valley along the ditch bank where we used to ride our horses. There'd be these little plots. It was pretty bad, so we sent Breezy up to NMMI and he liked it. He told me, "Mother, I needed that discipline. That's what I needed. I love it." He joined the National Guard later on. He was in the color guard. He rode the horse and carried the flag. He liked it very much.

B: Well, looking back...do you think that you were very strict when it came to child rearing?

W: I don't know. We tried to be. I tried to be, but in those later years it was difficult. The children were so far apart. All the others were gone by the time the youngest one reached an age where he needed someone to kneel on him. He needed an older brother or sister to kind of direct him. I think (laughs) he got away with murder with us. I don't know. Edita went to Randolph Macon. Then I said to Wyndham, "Well, Edita went back east to the college of your choice, so now let's send Anne to Scripps, to my college." Well, she went at the time everything was falling apart in California and she had a wild time. She graduated and Hugh went back to VMI in Virginia. He wasn't at all interested in the military, but he said, "I'm going to put up with it. I'm going to put up with all this stuff here, like the way they treat the cadets and all this Mickey Mouse stuff. I'll put up with it because they have the best English Department on the east coast." He had investigated several colleges up and down the coast. He was interested in writing. He wrote beautifully. He wrote some wonderful poetry and awfully good things. They had a marvelous professor, I can't think of his name right now, but he was very well known. Hugh spent four years there just to be in the English Department at VMI. When he came back here he took graduate courses at UTEP in English. I'd hoped he would go on further. He had wanted to teach. He was working

on his master's, but the horses took over. He was trying to do both. He was trying to teach riding, train horses, jump horses in horse shows...all of that and still do his graduate work. He just couldn't do it all. His dad told me to leave him alone. He said I was pressuring him to go on and finish his degree. His dad said, "He's doing everything I always wanted to do, but couldn't make a living at it. If he can make a living at it then leave him alone." So I did and that's what he's doing now. He's a very talented young man and he writes beautifully.

B: Does he still write?

W: I don't think he does now. He's been out there for six or eight years...maybe ten years. I don't think he has time, but he could always go back to that, I guess. He's very talented. Breezy just went his own way. He ended up in the oil fields over in the Odessa and Midland [Texas] area. He's still over there. He's learned to do everything. He's worked for construction companies. He can put on roofs. He used to come back here and friends up in the valley would have problems with their roofs. In that case he could go and put on a new roof for someone. He'd just do it perfectly. He's very good at that. So he's gone his own way.

B: Edita's still here in El Paso?

W: Edita came back and worked for the *El Paso Times* for a while. Then she worked a public relations firm. Then she applied for a job in the Upper Valley. She was living at home. A

veterinarian had come to town and was looking for a receptionist. Then she went to work for Dr. Simmons in a very tiny little veterinary clinic on Country Club Road off of Mesa. And, by golly, they were married later on. (laughs) So she stayed with him and she's still working for him after all these years. They have three children of which two are in college and one is a freshman at Coronado and plays soccer on the team. Then Anne came along in the years when all the college students were becoming liberated and she made trips to Europe with her class.

**End of Tape 2, Side B**

**Beginning of Tape 3, Side A**

B: You were telling me about Anne going to Washington.

W: Well, Anne decided to get away and work on her own. She went up to Washington. I think she must have gone with a friend or a classmate who lived up there in Seattle. She got a job in the English Department at the University of Washington and that's where she met her husband, Jim Airy. He was getting his Master's in English. I don't think he has a Ph.D., just a Master's. They were married up there and she's been living up there ever since. They live in Bellevue. It's overlooking Lake Washington. It's a beautiful spot. They have one boy. She thought she better not have any more after she turned

thirty. She thought she was too old, so they only have one. He's the same age as our grandson here, Edita's youngest.

B: Did your husband retire from practicing law?

W: He just loved what he did. He was a trial lawyer, a defense attorney. He also represented the Electric Company and the Southern Pacific and the Greyhound Bus. I used to go and listen to all of his trials because I was fascinated. I'd sit on the back row and hoped nobody saw me. I enjoyed that. He loved that work and as he got older he developed heart problems. His doctor advised him to let up, to semi-retire, and to give up the trial work. Well, that was terrible. He would rather die than do that, I think, because he loved the trial work. They said that you can help the young lawyers in the law firm, but he had no interest in that. He wanted to be active.

B: He didn't want to be put out to pasture.

W: He didn't want to be put out. He continued with the trial work as long as he could. Then he had a couple of heart attacks in the late [19]70s. About 1981 he had to really cut back. He wasn't interested in going in to the office and just doing desk work. He finally retired, but kept up with the riding as long as he could. His doctor was very understanding about it. He kept riding and spent his spare time helping young people learn to ride. He would help some of Hugh's students when Hugh was busy or out of town. He would go to Las Cruces and he had riders up there that rode with him. He

would just give his time to all these people who were interested in learning to jump horses and ride hunters and jumpers because this was a western town. Then there was the English riding and the driving and all that. But the hunter and jumper group was kind of small. He was very interested in promoting that, so he helped people up until the very last. He finally had a very bad heart attack in 1985 and just died very suddenly. It was very difficult because he had such a damaged heart that they couldn't do much. He would have been kept alive on a machine. This was hard. All the children were there and I'll never forget when they said, "We're taking him in here for some studies and so forth and the doctor's coming." I said, "Well, I've got to go feed the horses. Daddy would want me to go feed the horses." They looked at me like, "Mother!" But that's what I did.

B: That's what he would have wanted you to do.

W: That's what Wyndham would have said: "Go feed the horses." They came before anything else. We had a wonderful life up there with the horses all around. I've skipped over those early years where they were all learning to ride up there. I think the children learned all about having babies and so forth from looking out the window. We had a wonderful stallion. Every once in a while he would bring in a mare. We'd have a mare and we'd be up early in the morning and be down in the backyard. We'd get the mare and the stallion together. (laughs) And one time I looked up and here were

the children all looking out the window.

B: How did you explain that?

W: They had watched it all. I said that's how babies are made. That's how little horses are made. We didn't have to go into any more detail on having babies. It was funny.

B: When did you move to Hillcrest?

W: Oh, goodness. Well, after Wyndham died I stayed out on Yucca and I made an Elder Hostel trip to Scandinavia. Just before I came home I slipped down a grassy slope, in Denmark I think it was. I broke my ankle. I called it my "Danish Roll". (laughs) They sent me to a wonderful hospital there. It was very good. I thought, "How can they get it together? I can't possibly stay here and go home by myself on crutches with my leg in a cast." So they got it together. They said, "It isn't exactly perfect, but we've done the best we can." They took wonderful care of me. They were just marvelous and I got home with the group. They had a seat in front of me on the planes everywhere so I could put my leg up. I'm sure the people next to me loved that, but I got home with that. But after I got home they examined me and the doctor that took care of me knew that I played tennis. He said, "If you're going to want to continue playing tennis and be active you're going to have to have it reset. Otherwise, if you're just going to sit in a chair for the rest of your life it's all right the way it is." He had to redo it.

B: That must have been painful.



W: That was terrible to have to rebreak the whole thing. When my foot was broken everything was bad. I was laid up a long time with that. I had to lie around. I had to have help there all the time. I had to have people drive me to do the shopping. As I lay around I began to think, "This is ridiculous to have this big place." Also, it was expensive to keep up with all these horses, dogs, and cats around. "Things are not going to get better." I tend to think everything is going to stay the same or, if not, then get better as time goes on. I just cannot look at the sad side of things. I decided it was better if I got rid of it. The first person that looked at the house loved it and they bought it. I moved into the first house I was shown. I have a friend, Mary Hoover, who just mentioned the fact that Georgie Schwartz' house was going to be sold and she'd like me to see it before she showed me all these other places. She took me around to apartments and condominiums and all these things. I just didn't want to be cooped up with a lot of other people and a lot of other old ladies that I'd be obligated to. I guess I'm not being very nice about that, but I wanted to be on my own and do what I wanted to do. I didn't want to be cornered into doing things I didn't want to do. I guess that was sort of a crazy thing to do at my age, to get another house, but because the house up in the valley sold so quickly, I didn't have time to dispose of the furniture and none of the children could take anything at that time. Their houses were too small or the

boys weren't married and they just didn't have room for things. So I got everything I could into the house and this is where I am now and hopefully, someday, maybe one of the children will be able to move in and use it. It's in a wonderful place. I'm within five minutes of everything I do.

B: It's very quiet, too.

W: Yes, it's the best kept secret in El Paso. It's a cul-de-sac. They don't call it a dead-end. (laughs) It's more expensive than that; it's a cul-de-sac. It's very difficult to find. People don't go up and down the street a lot. But, I'm within five to ten minutes of everything I'm involved in.

B: And you're so active.

W: The tennis club, swimming club, and the college and just everything I do is within a short distance. I love being here. When the children do come to visit there is plenty of room for all of them.

B: Let me just ask you one final question. Looking back would you have changed anything in your life if you could have?

W: Oh, I've never thought of that. I think I could have improved myself in ways. I don't know that I always made the right decisions when it came to the children. I tried to do what was right, but I've never really examined myself that thoroughly. I don't know. Wyndham and I had a wonderful life. I don't know if I could have taken better care of him and prevented this heart condition because I miss him terribly. I needed a companion and I miss that, but I hang

out at the tennis club and there are people around who share the same activities. And it's fun.

B: I'm sorry I never had the opportunity to meet your husband. He sounded as if he was a wonderful person.

W: Oh, he was. He was.

B: Thank you for your time, Mrs. White. It's been wonderful.

W: Well, I feel that I haven't thought of enough things today.

B: You've told me many, many wonderful stories. Perhaps at a later date... .

W: Maybe if I think of some more I could give you a call. You've been awfully nice.

B: Well, I've had a wonderful time visiting with you.

**End of Interview**