Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I’m conducting an oral history interview with Future Akins. Future lives here in Lubbock and the date is Monday the twelfth of January 2004. I’m in the Special Collections Library interview room here on the campus of Texas Tech University. Future is at her home here in Lubbock. Future, can you tell me where you were born and when?


LC: Do you have any siblings?

FA: I have one sister, Zanbra. She was born in—where was she born—North Carolina.

LC: Okay. So she’s younger then you?

FA: Yeah, at a base in North Carolina. I can’t remember which one.

LC: How do you spell her name?

FA: Z-A-N-B-R-A and her last name is McClendon. M-C-C-L-E-N-D-O-N.

LC: Where does she live now?

FA: Austin.

LC: How long have you been here in Lubbock?

FA: My parents, my dad retired from Michigan and we moved here in ’67.

LC: Did you go to Texas Tech as an undergraduate?
FA: Yes.
LC: What’s your connection to Tech now?
FA: I’m a visiting professor in the School of Art.
LC: Let’s talk about your dad. Can you tell me where he was born?
FA: He was born in Hillsboro, Texas. That’s in east Texas. He’s the youngest of thirteen.
LC: Of thirteen of kids.
FA: Of thirteen kids.
LC: About when was he born?
FA: 19—let me see, I’m trying to remember. I used to know. 1915.
LC: What did his parents do for a living?
FA: His mother had children.
LC: I can see that.
FA: His father did a variety of jobs. They were usually poor. He was a carpenter during the Depression. He and some of my dad’s older brothers, my dad never did this, would build houses. Mainly they were poor. I mean very dirt poor, like no-crayons-to-go-to-school-with type poor and hand-me-downs. My dad’s the only one that even attended college.
LC: What did some of the older brothers end up doing? Did any of them ever enter the military?
FA: I’m trying to think. Some of their kids did, but not many of them did. I’m trying to remember—my Uncle Wylie who was my dad’s favorite ended up being like president of Purina or something and was on one of the president’s retired councils. He ended up retiring in north Dallas or in the Highland Park of Dallas. He got to be very successful. He was always an outstanding member of that family. Colin was an after dinner speaker sort of for the oil industry around Odessa. Uncle Bill was a sign painter. That’s an old dying art, in Waco, Texas. I don’t remember any of them talking about the service, but my dad was already an uncle by the time he was born. So a number of his, in essence, nephews were his age. They served together or they are the ones who served.
LC: You said your dad did go to college.
FA: Yeah, he came to Tech. He first went to Hill Junior College, where he played football. Then he got a scholarship to Tech to play at Tech, which was the only way he could go to school. It gave him room and board and food and then he helped like coach the freshmen basketball team and stuff like that. He played on the ’38, ’39 Cotton Bowl team for Texas Tech.

LC: What position did he play?
FA: Halfback, quarterback.

LC: That’s incredible.
FA: Yeah, they played offense-defense. At Tech in the athletic building you can see a big picture of that Cotton Bowl team because they were the only team to ever be undefeated and tied.

LC: You’re kidding.
FA: Uh-unh. My dad’s photo is in it. It’s pretty cool. The Southwest Collection has the video, the early film video, it’s now a video, of that game. My dad played most of it with a concussion. He doesn’t remember it.

LC: Is that right?
FA: He didn’t remember it, yeah. He scored the only points. They lost. They lost to St. Mary’s in Florida, but he—you'll see, “And Akins takes the ball down the field.”

He never graduated, though. He was sort of in engineering, but played football. The war came up and he joined and he never graduated.

LC: How is it, do you think, that he ended up going to junior college and then on to a big state school when none of the other kids had done that?

FA: His father hated him, sort of. They didn’t get along. He was very close to his mother. I think my dad just knew he had—what he would tell me, he just had to get the hell out of that little hick town. He even later on when we would have reunions there, he just knew he had to get out. He was smart. They would have contests where you would have to memorize a poem. The teacher would write it on the board and the first one to memorize it would get crayons. Well, my dad would always be the first one to memorize it.

LC: So that he could get the—were the crayons a big incentive?
FA: I mean they were poor, poor. I've seen some of the houses. He just knew that even in the summers when he’d work in the oil field—he said it didn’t take long to figure out that working out in the field was dangerous and hard work. If you were good with books or could do stuff in the office it was a better job.

LC: So he had an incentive to study.

FA: Yeah, and he liked football. He was pretty good at it. He would tell you he wasn’t a natural athlete. Some of the other relatives would tell you he was better than he gave himself credit for, but it was a way out.

LC: Did he have pretty good relationships with his older brothers and sisters?

FA: I think pretty good because he was the baby. It’s kind of funny. I always thought of him as straight, you know, straight arrow. In the family he was the wild adventurous one because he joined the military and traveled the world. He was the baby.

LC: And that was pretty far out for—

FA: Well, my grandfather was a member of the Flatlander Society. He believed the world was flat.

LC: Okay. Do you know anything more about that society?

FA: Only that my grandfather in terms of—he was from Hillsboro, Texas, Church of Christ. The Bible said the four corners of the earth. So when my parents were getting ready to go to Thailand they gave him a globe so he could track our travels. He smashed it with a cane, because it was blasphemy.

LC: You’re kidding.

FA: No, no, no, no it was my grandfather, Uncle Bill. I mean, he was called Uncle Bill by everybody, but he was my grandfather. It was blasphemy. So he hated football, hated it that my dad played football. When my dad was in the Cotton Bowl he wouldn’t even go see him. It was just in Dallas. He stayed in the motel room that my dad got for him and listened to it on the radio, but never acknowledged that Dad did well during that.

LC: How did your grandmother cope with all that? Was she of the same mind?

FA: I don’t think so. She and my dad were extremely close but she—my grandfather was like 6’4” and my grandmother was like 5’. She had thirteen kids. When I asked my aunts how she died they said, “Woman problems.” I said, “What?” What does
that mean? That’s not going to help my doctor. They said, “Thirteen kids.” I said, “That’s still not helping my doctor.”

LC: How long did she live, to what age?

FA: I’m not sure because she died before I was born. I know she died in my dad’s arms. He came home on leave sometime and she died. My grandfather died sometime after we were in Thailand. But I never—I don’t—these are all stories passed down to me. I don’t remember the globe being smashed or anything.

LC: Your grandfather sounds like a real pistol.

FA: Yeah, he was—he dominated the family. We always used to have family reunions on Father’s Day in his honor and my dad would just get livid because he was like, “It’s my mother who did all the work. This man was mean, cantankerous, and poor most of the time.” It was just East Texas patriarchal bullshit.

LC: Was your grandfather born in Texas?

FA: No. He’s actually from Grace, Alabama. We tracked back the family enough. He had traveled to East Texas from Grace, Alabama, with my grandmother.

LC: So they had been married in Alabama?

FA: I guess so. That part of it I can’t really remember. I would have to look it up. I know that before that it was probably through Appalachia and Scotland.

LC: So Scots-Irish background?

FA: Yeah, Akins is of that phenogy.

LC: They had always spelled it the same way that you do?

FA: We’re not sure. We sort of accept anything, A-K-I-N-S, A-T-K-I-N-S, it’s close. It’s all very, very close.

LC: Did your dad maintain an interest in sports after he left Texas Tech?

FA: Oh, hell yeah. We went to every football game Tech ever had, even after his stroke.

LC: Now you’re talking about the late 1960s.

FA: We moved here in 1967. Because he had been a letterman, triple letterman or whatever, he got one free ticket and then he got two tickets for the price of one because he went on to be director of financial aid at Tech.

LC: Oh, he did?
FA: Yeah. There is not much use for retired lieutenant colonels. So he found a
nitch and he loved helping kids go to school because it was so hard for him to go to
school. He was great at it. He was a wonderful—I mean I have letters when he died that
talked about how good he was. So we went to every game, every game. We got there an
hour early.

LC: He took you along. Did he take your sister as well?

FA: Oh, yeah. There was no choice. My mom, my sister, and I. Then later on he
bought tickets for boyfriends that would be involved or husbands. We had to get there an
hour early because he wanted to see the teams work out because he could tell a lot about
how they were by that. He sat with some other old cronies kind of in the same general
area that felt no—no—restrictions when it came to yelling at coaches or refs. They
weren’t obnoxious, drunk fans. They just really knew football and they knew when
people weren’t playing good football. Oh, no. Yes.

LC: How did you dress for going to a football game in the late ’60s?

FA: You wore dresses. You wore outfits. It was a fancy thing. In fact, Mom
would go and just watch how people dress. Often the women kind of had sort of winter
hats on and gloves and hose.

LC: So it was a big ol’ deal.

FA: It was a big ol’ deal. It didn’t work real well for me, but it was a big ol’ deal.

LC: Now do you say that because you’re not a dyed-in-the-wool football fan?

FA: I think because when I was at Tech and in graduate school Saturdays were
the day’s that we went hunting for sheet metal and old metal to use on our art work. So I
would do that till the very last minute before the game and then I would go in. I’d just
have on my jeans and sweatshirt and, you know, what the game was the same, no one
cared. After my dad had a stroke he just went in his jump suit because that’s all he wore.
So it was, I think over time, you just go, “You know, if I am really here to see the game it
doesn’t matter if I have on panty hose or not.”

LC: What jobs—you mentioned that your dad had—did he actually work in the
oil fields when he was younger?

FA: Yeah, just between summers.

LC: What kind of stuff did he do? Do you know?
FA: I know that he did books for them sometimes. He said, you would be in a bar in Odessa or Kermit or somewhere in the oil fields and, you know, a guy would come in swinging a chain. He just didn’t want to be there. He just thought it was horrible work. He had grown up his whole life around poverty and the meanness from poverty. He worked one summer pulling rickshaws at the state fair.

LC: You’re kidding.

FA: No. He and my cousins I guess they are. His nephew’s pulled rickshaws.

LC: Okay.

FA: Yeah. You just did what young men could do.

LC: Right. How did he make the football team at Hill Community—

FA: He had been really good at the high school, at Hillsboro High School.

LC: Hillsboro High School.

FA: Yeah. He was really good.

LC: Was he playing both offense and defense back then, too?

FA: Oh, yeah.

LC: Did he get a scholarship to go to the community college?

FA: He must have because there is no other way he would have gone. I know he never really—he would tell stories about being at Tech. He wouldn’t have money for one class or something and he would sit outside the door. A teacher would say, “You’re not registered.” He goes, “I don’t care if I’m registered or not. I’m going to learn.” He could never buy his books. He would have to check them out at the library. So when he ended up working for financial aid he was great.

LC: He was very empathetic.

FA: Well, what he said is he didn’t pay for fraternities or new cars. And, this is the funny part, he refused to handle any scholarships for athletes.

LC: Really? How come?

FA: He knew they were corrupt.

LC: What do you mean by that?

FA: He knew, I mean, that the whole football, how football had grown from his day had become corrupt with alumni and liars. The kids they were bringing up, they
weren’t getting degrees. They weren’t getting educated. He saw how they misused the
kids. He didn’t want any part of it. He thought it was A, illegal and two, immoral.

LC: So did he kind of pat and just like refuse to handle that paperwork and
someone else did it?

FA: No. It was handled by the athletic department. He just thought it was illegal.
He knew that they’d get busted for it.

LC: Do you think that’s the time when athletic scholarships sort of began to
come under the athletic department as opposed to scholarships?

FA: Yeah, because it’s always sticky stuff. He didn’t want any part of it. My dad
was an extremely ethical, moral person. One of the things that he talked about, which he
was never proud of, was when he pulled rickshaws he did it with two nephews. One,
Billy Tom Akins, who went on to be a pilot with my dad and he was taken on Corregidor,
prisoner of war for fifty-two months, came back, flew with my dad again. Took up a
plane that blew up. He was a test pilot and blew up. Billy Tom was a great pilot, but he’s
also good looking. Then my cousin Larry, Larry would start fights and they would roll
gay guys. Because both Billy Tom and Larry were extremely good looking. My dad
talked about how they did it once. Although he took part in it, it always shamed him.

LC: Really? Did he talk to you about that at one point?

FA: Yeah. Oh, yeah, he did. They were real life lessons where he knew he had
made the wrong decision. As he grew older he wasn’t going to be a part of it. When he
knew it was right he stood up and said “That’s wrong.”

LC: Did he give you any details that you recall about those incidents with that
attacking or hurting gay men, did that happen particularity at the fair?

FA: Yeah, it happened at the fair. Billy Tom and Larry, because even—I mean
Billy Tom died young but Larry only died a few years ago, really good looking,
handsome. Billy Tom looked like Clark Gable. Larry looked like Jimmy Stewart. You
know what I mean? Good looking men, well built, broad shoulders. They would go in a
bar. In those days there were gay bars, but they would just in a mixed bar. They would
start—some guy would hit on them. They would say, “Oh, yeah, come on meet me in the
back alley.” Then the thing was that my dad said, he said, “Half the time Larry just
wanted to fight. Hell, he just wanted to get in a fight.” So they’d pick on some straight
guy because he just wanted to get into a fight. But they would, sometimes, intentionally
pick on a gay guy to either—not so much to take his money but to beat him up. He was
like—he was always ashamed that he took part in any of it. In the whole notion that you
needed to be in a fight or that you needed to take to craps or something like that. He was
never proud of it. He told it in a way to try to let us understand it. Some of the best people
can get you in really bad situations.

LC: But you sensed from him some pain and remorse around that?

FA: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I mean he just—he knew it was wrong. He just knew it
was wrong and it was what everyone did.

LC: Right. It’s interesting that he would tell you about it.

FA: Well, I think it helped that I was the artist. Although my sister was really
wild, I was the artist. When we were stationed in Arkansas his number one assistant,
Lieutenant Palmer, was gay. No one ever openly mentioned it, but he collected antiques
and lived with his mother and raised Weimaraners. My dad could not have done the job
he did without that man. On top of that, when my dad had open-heart surgery he had an
out-of-body experience and says he talked to God. God just told him that it wasn’t his job
to judge.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah, really. Dad had had some strange experiences in the wars. He came
back. One of my women friends was getting married to her partner. Of course, she had
been disowned by her family. My dad just said, “Well, hell, I’ll stand up for you.”

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah. So he had, as he aged he was less afraid, although he was known in
the service as someone who spoke his mind, he was less afraid to speak it on all issues.

LC: Wow.

FA: Yeah. He just knew it was wrong.

LC: Future let’s talk about him being at Tech.

FA: Okay.

LC: He played on the football team. What did he study?

FA: Engineering. Chemical, I think, yeah, chemical engineering. He would have
to do these big blue prints. I mean it was petroleum engineering in those days. The oil
fields and that’s what Tech was known for. He would have to, like, pull up his grades
because he would always mess up on a blueprint or something. He would take a drama
course or an English course and pull it up. So he has like two hundred and something
hours at Tech and no degree.
LC: How did it happen that he did not graduate?
FA: Because there weren’t any counselors in those days telling you what to take.
He transferred courses from Hill College. There was nobody in the state legislature
saying, “You have to leave now.” He played football and coached basketball. Well, he
played basketball but he also coached freshmen basketball.
LC: So he did play on the Tech basketball team as well?
FA: Yeah, I think so. I know more about football.
LC: Because you had to go to football games.
FA: Yeah, just because football was his love. It is sort of what he knew. I know
that my Uncle Pat, my mom’s youngest brother, my dad would leave one door open to
the Tech gym so that Uncle Pat and his buds could sneak in at night and play basketball.
They thought that was pretty cool.
LC: Did he tell you other stories about, for example, where he lived or people
that he knew while he was on campus as a student?
FA: He lived in a place called La Fonda, which was the dorm for the athletes. He
was coached under Pete Cawthon.
LC: How do you spell that last name? Do you know?
FA: No, but Tech would know. It’s a legendary coach of Tech. There were
people like Elmer Tarbox, who developed the tarbox weights that people use now, on his
team. He talked a lot about how Pete Cawthon would teach the boys how to eat, because
they were all a bunch of hicks, and how to act in public.
LC: Really?
FA: Yeah. Oh, yeah. He never got along with Coach Cawthon very well because
my dad would sometimes work summers with one of my uncles selling clothes. So my
dad was always a dude.
LC: Okay. You mean with regards to his dress?
FA: Yeah, and Coach Cawthon thought that he was a dude and just dismissed him. It was just that he was such a fast runner and had such quick hands that he couldn’t—he was on the starting team. Mainly that.

LC: Did he ever talk about traveling with the teams?

FA: On the train and the coach would talk to him about how do you act? He said, “Boys, I don’t mean to offend you, but you’re a bunch of hicks. This is how you eat. These are the utensils you use. You don’t slurp your soup. You don’t chug your milk. You wear your tie,” and stuff like that.

LC: Did the guys kind of fall in with that? Do you know? Or did they resent it?

FA: Oh, yeah, if they didn’t they got kicked off the team.

LC: Really?

FA: Oh, he was a taskmaster. There are books written about Pete Cawthon. It was like he believed two things, either you needed to be Native American or go to Notre Dame to be a great football player, because both of them had God on their side. It was a racist, bigoted thing, didn’t want to have girls around. He knew everybody did, but he didn’t want to have girls around. Old-fashioned, think Knute Rockne football. I mean they had worn leather helmets. It’s hilarious. Oh, and he redesigned their football outfits because I guess Notre Dame had, too. To make them a lot of different, really bright colors, a lot of stripes to distract people when you were running.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah. Yeah.

LC: Did your dad keep any of those uniforms?

FA: He did, but one of my aunts-in-laws, when my dad was overseas in the war, gave them to all her brothers and my dad never got them back. So all of his letterman sweaters and blankets, and yeah they were all given away to her brothers.

LC: Did he affiliate in some way with the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) or find out about the military when he was at Tech?

FA: I don’t think so. Not that I know of. He was either going to be—what was he going to be—submarines, parachutes, or jet pilot, or pilot.

LC: These were the things he was interested in?

FA: Yeah, he wanted the ones that were out there.
Now when did he actually, when did he leave Tech? Do you know, roughly?
I think it must have been about ’39, ’40, around ’40. Actually, it could be looked up in the Tech records. He joined the Army Air Corps and learned to be a pilot.
Now he enlisted?
Yes.
It was before, it was substantially before Pearl Harbor.
I would think so because my mother was already in California in Pearl Harbor. She was on the switchboard when it hit.
Okay. They did not know each other yet?
Yes.
Oh, they did.
They met in Lubbock. She was sitting in a drug store, an old drug store in Lubbock called Broadway Drug. Now, I don’t know what it is now, something else now.
Where is that building?
It used to be on the corner of Broadway and University, on the north corner of Broadway and University. It’s was a place called Broadway Drug, old-time drug store where you got sodas. My dad walked in with some football players and said, “Oh, my God. I’m going to date that woman.” They said, “No, you’re not. She dates the high school football star.” A guy named, I can’t remember what his name was, but anyway.
Dad said, “Not only am I going to date her but I’m going to marry her.” I mean this is the story they tell. He finally asked her out and she said, “Okay, meet me at midnight in front of the phone company.” Well, Dad goes, “Yeah, right.” Well, Mom works nights at the phone company.” So he stood her up for the first date.
Whoops.
Whoops! They started dating and they dated for ten years. It took them ten years to get married.
Ten years.
Well, as Dad said, the war came. Mom moved to California to help with a dying brother. Dad was a pilot. Mom married somebody else for six months. You know.
Now was she born in Lubbock or where is she from?
Technically she was born in Oklahoma, but moved here at three months.
LC: What was her name?
FA: Geraldine Virginia Fulton.
LC: Okay. The Fultons came to Texas when she was a baby?
FA: Yeah, from Oklahoma. They settled in Lubbock because the radiator of my
grandfather’s car went out. He thought, “If my radiator goes out here somebody else’s
will, too.” So he owned a radiator shop in downtown Lubbock. They had a home on 10th
Street. It’s now, of course, destroyed where they rented out the back house to a young
musician named Leonard Slye who would go on to become Roy Rogers.
LC: Roy Rogers lived in their rental unit?
FA: Uh-huh, in the Sons of the Pioneers, yes. When Tim Spencer married Velma
who’s a Lubbock girl, yeah, yeah. My mom had a date with Roy Rogers.
LC: Did she ever tell you about it?
FA: Yes.
LC: What happened?
FA: He kissed her and he had liver lips. It was so disheartening to know that my
mother had dated the person I had a crush on.
LC: Oh, you had a crush on him as well?
FA: Yeah because he was on TV.
LC: When he was on TV did you know that he had lived in your grandparents
place? Did you know he was from Lubbock, or had been through Lubbock?
FA: No. Well, I kind of did because he always sent every album they made, he
sent a copy of it to my grandparents.
LC: No kidding.
FA: Yeah. When Tim Spencer, whenever he came to town he stopped by to see
my parents. I found a picture of my parents with him. Either he was here or they were
there in California. No, my grandmother fed him for a couple of summers. I mean, yeah,
they wrote—he always—they had every Sons of the Pioneers album.
LC: That’s amazing.
FA: I know.
LC: Now the move to Lubbock from Oklahoma, when did that happen? Was that
part of the Depression move or earlier?
FA: I’m not sure. My grandfather never talked about it. The story was he had run
away with my grandmother when she was fourteen. Her brothers came and got her back.
So he had to wait till she was sixteen to come and get her again. By the time they would
have moved here my mom was, what, the second born, the third born. So they would
have already had two kids.

LC: She was born when?

FA: My dad was in ’15. My mom would have been in ’20, yeah ’20.

LC: So it’s well before the Depression that she was born.

FA: I’m trying to get that right. See I think my dad was born ’15 so Mom would
have been born in ’20. Yeah. She lived through the Depression in Lubbock. Yeah, it was
tough. That’s why they rented out their back house to Roy Rogers.

LC: Did she tell you much about or did you ever learn much about what the
Depression was actually like in Lubbock? Did you hear stories?

FA: Yeah, it was horrid. My grandfather had his—a couple of the main stories
they told was there were two radiator shops in town. My granddad saw a lot of his most
loyal customers going to the other radiator shop. He figured out—he had never made it
past the third grade. He had just been a working cowboy. He was going to the third grade
when he was about fifteen, you know, because you go for a day or two and then not go.
He got a crush on the teacher and the teacher kind of had a crush on him. He decided—
see, I come from this really strange moral family—that it wasn’t right for him to be
spooning after the teacher so he quit. So he could barely read and write. I mean he could
sort of cipher stuff, is what he would say, he could cipher it. So he went up to his loyal
customers and he took all their IOUs and tore them up. He said, “I need a little bit of
business, but if you’re going to avoid me because of what you owe, I’m going to tear it
up.”

LC: Did it work?

FA: Yeah, of course it worked.

LC: And people came back?

FA: Yeah, people came back. They survived. It was poor. It wasn’t poor like my
dad’s was poor. My dad was dirt poor. If you don’t catch the fish tonight, we’re not
eating. My grandfather and my grandmother, they always had something, but it was
mainly that my grandmother was much too young to have kids, to be married and all of that and was a bitter, mean, woman. My grandfather worked a lot.

LC: So your grandmother was mean.

FA: Yeah.

LC: Do you remember her?

FA: Oh, yeah, sure. She was mean.

LC: Was she? This just isn’t a story. This is real.

FA: She was mean. She was Baptist. She taught Revelations. She not only was mean, but she had God on her side to be mean.

LC: Now when you say she taught Revelations what do you mean by that?

FA: In Sunday school class. She taught the book of Revelations, which is the one about hell, fire, damnation and you’re going—she needed, as she got older she had had a series of heart attacks. So I remember her as a round little thing with gray hair and lots of jewelry on. She always had, this is so weird, French provincial furniture in this little ranch house. She wanted really fine things that we had to polish every Saturday when we’d come to visit. I have fond memories of polishing everything in sight.

LC: Sounds like it.

FA: Oh, yeah. She just was—she sort of played favorites. She was kind of a righteous, mean-spirited person. She cooked all day long and made jams and jellies. She took a good house, but she would do things, I heard, and I heard this through other relatives and my dad. My mother would have, like, made cheerleader at high school, but she wouldn’t let my mom be cheerleader because she said it would cost too much money. Then she’d go out and buy a new coat for herself. I mean, she was very jealous. She was too young to have kids. My mom was a natural beauty and she was just really jealous of my mom. She would rent out rooms in the house as the kids moved off and let them wear my mom’s clothing. Then mom was expected to iron for them and stuff. Throwing oatmeal—her favorite thing was to throw things, you know. They built a separate bathroom onto the house because she didn’t want my grandfather coming into the house from working in it. He just converted the garage into a den. He called it the doghouse because he could stay out there and never have to see her.

LC: Wow.
FA: I mean they were just—and we just thought it was normal because we only saw—‘til we moved here. We moved here to take care of them.

LC: In the late ’60s.

FA: Yeah, in ’67. We moved here so we could take care of them. When I was married in ’72 I lived in the little rent house behind my grandparents so I could watch them.

LC: How long did they live on?

FA: I was widowed in December of ’73 and my grandmother died in January of ’74.

LC: Wow.

FA: Yeah, yeah, to the day.

LC: You mentioned your mom going to high school and she could have potentially have been a cheerleader, was that Lubbock High then?

FA: Yeah she went to Lubbock High.

LC: What year did she graduate?

FA: She would have graduated in ’38, but she had an appendicitis attack and had to graduate in the summertime.

LC: Where did she get treated for that?

FA: You know, I’m not sure, but it was probably the old St. Mary’s, which is now Café J’s.

LC: Okay. There on 19th Street.

FA: Yeah, that’s the old St. Mary’s Hospital.

LC: St. Mary’s has subsequently become—

FA: Covenant.

LC: Okay. Covenant Hospital.

FA: Yeah, run by Catholic nuns.

LC: Okay. Your mom, was she a good student?

FA: I think she was an okay student. I think my mom was pretty.

LC: She was pretty?

FA: My mom was gorgeous

LC: Really.
FA: Yeah, in a very beautiful, natural way. Very big busted, very thin, brown hair, big brown eyes, just pretty. She was just a pretty, pretty woman. She was kind of a dingbat. I think she was bipolar, went on to become a raging alcoholic. I don’t think she was a good student. I think she was probably a studious student. I think she was—I don’t think she would have ever caused waves. She dated this, just remembered it, the guy she dated was Jim Bo Webster. He was the big football hero. So I think that’s what she did.

LC: Do you think she sort of felt that she needed to get by on her looks kind of thing?

FA: I don’t know. I think it was tough for women to think any other way. She went on during the war to work two jobs. One as a switchboard operator and one, I don’t know what other one she worked, but there were two of them. So women learned to be independent. I think that she was caught in the transition of “What is it I am told I have to be and what is it that I really want to be?” I don’t know if she ever thought about what she wanted to be. I think it was an empty void in her that she could never—the Women’s Movement used to call it, what is it, “the pain with no name.” Well, she was just a prime example of that.

LC: Now she graduated from Lubbock High. Did she get a job here in town?

FA: Yeah, with the phone company and then she transferred with the phone company when one of her older brothers, her favorite brother was out in California diagnosed with rheumatic fever, couldn’t really take care of his family anymore. She went out there to help care for his family, his wife and two girls. She just wanted to get the hell out of Dodge. She went there and worked as a switchboard operator and then worked for an airplane company. She wasn’t a welder, but she was like in the office type thing.

LC: Now where in California did she go?

FA: Huntington Beach.

LC: Okay. She worked for the phone company for a while. You said she was on the switchboard at the time of Pearl Harbor.

FA: Yeah. She said she was there and instantly the entire board lit up.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah. She said it was terrifying, scary. You couldn’t do that many at a time.
LC: Did she know what had happened?
FA: She did within moments.
LC: Okay. Do you remember her telling you anything more about that time?
FA: Just that and that she was terrified of the Japanese invading California. When
we would get into arguments about the internment of Japanese Americans she was just
livid that they were spies and out to get you.
LC: Now this is many years later after the war?
FA: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, but she had never—she would say, “I’m liberal. I’m
liberal.” I would go, “But Mom!” She just talked about rationing stuff and working two
jobs. She had four different boyfriends including my dad. For her it was kind of like hard
times, good parties.
LC: Did she stay in touch, then, with your dad?
FA: Oh, absolutely. He used to fly out to see her and they wrote to each other.
Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.
LC: Her working in the airplane company front office, do you remember what
company that was?
FA: I’ll think of it. It’ll come to me. It’s been bought up by someone a couple of
times since then because of—well, I’ll think of it. It’ll come to me.
LC: What was she doing there?
FA: You know, I have no clue. My Aunt Future went out there to be with her and
she worked an assembly line, but Mom was in the office somehow. I’m sure she was
either, maybe switchboard again.
LC: Now your aunt’s name was Future, as well?
FA: Her real name was Wanda May Fulton. At seventeen and a half she was six
feet tall and a red head. She said, “I’m getting the hell out of Dodge.” She never even
graduated from high school. She went out to live with my mother in California and
changed her name to Future Fulton because she wanted to be an actress or showgirl.
LC: Are you serious?
FA: I’m very serious.
LC: That’s great. Did she ever get a break or anything?
FA: Well, she didn’t get huge breaks but she did go on to do USO (United Services Organization) shows and be in something in Miami in one of those swimming aqua things where you’re a synchronized swimmer and diver. Then she studied on Broadway with Strasberg and modeled some. Then married a millionaire and then divorced him, and then married a playboy and divorced him, and then married an actor, and then died of breast cancer. She didn’t get the break that she wanted but she got the life she wanted.

LC: She sounds great.
FA: She was wild.
LC: Now that’s your mom’s younger sister.
FA: Oh, yeah.
LC: Did she have a yet younger sister?
FA: No, it was my aunt. Future was five years younger then my mother and then my Uncle Pat’s five years younger than Aunt Future. Pat, by the time he ran away from home, he joined the, ah, corps-of-engineer’s type people.
LC: So he was in the Army?
FA: You know it’s not even—it’s somebody who goes—I mean, he was in Brazil building bridges and doing engineering stuff.
LC: So some kind of civilian organization with the government.
FA: Yeah. He does work for the government—I mean they do work for the government, but they are not government.
LC: I see. Like a contractor or something.
FA: Yeah. He’s spent a lot of time in South—I mean all over the world. He’s been all over the world. Everybody wanted to get the hell away from Lubbock, and my grandmother.
LC: Right. Did he go to Lubbock High as well?
FA: Yeah, Pat Fulton.
LC: They stayed in that same house, then, on 10th Street this whole time.
FA: They did until, I guess, Uncle Pat left and then they moved out on 82nd Street.
LC: Oh, that’s a long way out.
FA: Yeah. My grandfather wanted to live in the country. He owned about a block
of property. He just sort of farmed cotton. He wasn’t a great farmer or anything. They
just made ends met, I’m not sure quite how.

LC: Had he sold the shop?

FA: Yes, he had.

LC: Where was that shop located?

FA: It’s now where the parking lot of, I guess it’s Lubbock National Bank. It’s
the drive-in parking lot across from the court house.

LC: Okay. You mentioned that the house on 10th Street had been destroyed.

FA: Yeah, by McDougal.

LC: Can you tell us a little bit about that?

FA: No. I just don’t know. I mean it had—the house he had lived in probably
twenty years ago had been torn down to build an apartment before McDougal. Now it’s
in that area that McDougal is building that whole new—it’s called North Overton. It’s
just all been bulldozed.

LC: That would be Mayor McDougal?

FA: No, it’s his brother.

LC: His brother. Okay. Your dad left Texas Tech—

FA: To join the Air Force.

LC: Okay. Where did he enlist? Do you know whether it was here or was it
somewhere else?

FA: I can’t imagine it—it had to have been here. He was in the first jet flying
school and he became a pilot. I know he was in Arizona. He was mainly stationed in
Virginia.

LC: Did you ever hear how he came to become a pilot? Did you ever hear those
stories?

FA: Yeah. They got paid more money.

LC: Is that what he was interested in?

FA: Yeah. Well, no. He was interested in fighting for America, but it seemed
cool that you got to fly and you got more money for doing it.

LC: Okay. That had been one of the things that he was kind of interested in.
FA: I think he was interested in anything that took him away from Texas.

LC: Okay, wow.

FA: You know, I just think he was a young man who wanted to see more. I mean, he told my mom, “If you hitch your star to my wagon, I’ll take you anywhere.” I mean I just think he was an adventurous young man who, you know—they didn’t get married until after the war because my dad didn’t think he was going to come back. He said he was going to die.

LC: He joined the Army Air Corps.

FA: Correct.

LC: Did he ever consider, do you know, the Navy or another branch of service?

FA: Only if hadn’t have gotten in. He knew he was going to get in one of them.

LC: His initial training, can you tell me what you know about where he did basic?

FA: I think it was mainly in—it must have been in Virginia because that’s where all the stories of him flying to see my mom and my mom coming up to see him were based around Virginia and Newport News around where I was born. About, let me see—one of them is that his nephew, Billy Tom Akins, came. Billy Tom was what my dad called a natural pilot. He was like one of the best pilots he had ever seen.

LC: Was he in the Army Air Corps as well?

FA: Yes.

LC: What was the age difference there?

FA: Probably six months. (laughs) They looked alike. I have a photo of them. They look like two Clark Gables. You know little tiny mustaches, the whole bit there. They’re holding little old planes that are painted and everything. Billy Tom somehow—I can’t remember. The stories get confusing. But they had got in a fight with somebody so he got knocked back a class, which is a big deal, but it’s because he knocked out a guy as he said, “Who deserved to be knocked out.” The service doesn’t really recognize that.

LC: That’s true.

FA: They don’t really honor that. The men in the squadron honor that, but the service doesn’t. So he came up under flying school under someone who had already trained with Billy Tom. He said the thing was, Billy Tom was such an incredible pilot he
out flew the instructors, the first time. He said, “It is a very rare thing in flying that you
see someone who just should always have been flying.”

LC: He somehow had the intuitive capability.

FA: He had the touch. What my dad called it was “the touch.” When he touched
the throttle or whatever, it was an extension of him. So he was one of those guys that flew
under bridges and did, oh, I don’t know whether it’s called a suicide landing where you
come in upside down and then flip at the last minute.

LC: And he could do all of that?

FA: Oh, hell yeah. Well, actually Dad did it, too, but Billy Tom did it better. But
he came in after him because he got knocked back a class. He said that was kind of
rough.

LC: His nephew got through—

FA: No, not that, the fact that the instructors like hated him. They were like, “I
know an Akin.”

LC: Yeah, not another one.

FA: Yeah. Mainly he talked about—he loved it. He loved the learning. He loved
the men he got to know, a camaraderie. He first served in Panama because they thought
that that would be a likely place for an invasion. It would be to come through South
America, Latin America. Then that’s where he was a fighter pilot after he got out of
fighter pilot school. When that didn’t happen he changed—which hurt his career but
helped him as a man—to reconnaissance and went to Europe and fought under Patton.

LC: Now let’s just take that apart a little bit. The assignment to Panama, he was a
jet—well, there weren’t jets yet.

FA: Fighter pilot. They weren’t jets yet.

LC: Fighter pilot. Do you know what he was flying?

FA: The ones with the little tigers painted on them.

LC: He was trained for aerial combat primarily.

FA: Yes.

LC: Was he happy with that posting to Panama?

FA: He was at the time until it became apparent that the war wasn’t going to be
there. He wanted to get into the war.
LC: Did he ever tell you any stories about being down there?
FA: Only that he tried marijuana.
LC: Really?
FA: Yeah, sure. They all did. He said he didn’t really like it.
LC: They all did meaning—
FA: Everybody. He talked about—there was a lot of drinking. My mother asked him to grow a mustache because she thought it would make him less good looking and it made him look better looking. She asked him to shave it off and he wouldn’t.
LC: Oh, boy.
FA: Well, that’s okay. He kept it his whole life. Mainly, just about—he didn’t talk much about it.
LC: The two of them must have been in some pretty detailed correspondence then. Do you have any of those letters?
FA: I did, but I tossed them when they both died. I just couldn’t hold onto them.
LC: But they were writing back and forth?
FA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, all the time.
LC: He was able to fly to see her at some stage.
FA: Whenever he would be in the States and he would have a weekend off, he could sometimes—I don’t know how in the hell he would do this—he would get a plane and he would fly from Virginia to California to see her. The deal was he just had to buzz her house and let her know.
LC: That he was in town?
FA: Yeah. So if she had another date she could get rid of him.
LC: And did she?
FA: Yeah.
LC: She would shove somebody else off because he was—
FA: Sure.
LC: Because she didn’t get to see him that often.
FA: Right and he was a fly boy.
LC: Can you tell me about his transition away from fighter training to reconnaissance? Do you know about that?
FA: Yeah, he said at first, one he just loved to fly. So flying anything was cool.
He wanted to be in the war.

LC: Now when you say it didn’t help his career what’s behind that?

FA: Because you change from fighter pilot to reconnaissance. It’s a whole
different—the elite in the Air Force is fighter pilots, the jet pilots. To change to
reconnaissance is still, I mean it’s honorable, but it’s not the same. It doesn’t have the
prestige. What you want to be is a fighter pilot and an ace. You want to get in those
dogfight things.

LC: You said it helped him as a man though to make that transition.

FA: Because that’s what he wanted to do. He honored Patton. He just thought
Patton was a soldier’s soldier.

LC: Do you know when he first went over to the European theater?

FA: No, but it’s probably in his military record. I mean I know he’s got the little
medals from it. I know that his unit, if not him personally, are the ones that photographed
the Battle of the Bulge.

LC: Which was directed primarily by Patton.

FA: Yeah. He said Patton did things like—because he was independently
wealthy—he gave men hose, silk hose, to give the women when they liberated the town.

LC: Wow.

FA: Or whiskey. They would have whiskey flown in. So he took care—what Dad
said was he just took care. He always said, and this is how it helped Dad as a man
because when he went on to do ground-air—what is it called—coordination, it was Patton
who first said, “We can use these people. They are not a nuisance.” So Dad learned how
reconnaissance is really a vital part of what’s going on. He talked about how you go up
and you have a gun with one bullet in it.

LC: Right. The purpose of that was?

FA: To kill yourself if you were taken.

LC: Did your dad ever fly into enemy fire? Do you know?

FA: Yes.

LC: Did he ever tell you about it?
FA: No, but I mean I saw photos. I do have photos still from that period. You can see where shells have gone off and stuff.

LC: Tell me about what he did in those reconnaissance missions, if you know.

FA: He would go up, there a place to go. He never really talked about it except to say he had photographed it with a flick flick, the camera. That’s what they called the camera was a flick flick, and come back and develop it and see if they needed to go again.

LC: Do you know—?

FA: And then—

LC: Go ahead.

FA: No, that’s it. I mean, he would sing bawdy songs for about, you know, dying in the air.

LC: Do you think he had sort of romanticized this event or was that kind of to make everybody think it wasn’t so dangerous? Do you know?

FA: Hmm, good question. I think that my dad was practical and pragmatic. I think that he believed ‘til his dying day it was his duty, that it was an honor to fight for the country. I think that he loved flying. I think he knew it was dangerous. I think he had an extra amount of testosterone and that he wasn’t going to be a wimp about it. He always told the story, and it’s a legendary story in the service, of somebody being caught in a dogfight, which was very rare by the way. I mean, that hardly ever really happened and like crying over the air, “I’m hit. I’m hit. I’m going down. I’m going down,” or something. Someone else coming back and saying, “Shut up and die like a man.” So he was very stoic in defense of not becoming dramatic about all of that. Although one of the things that I still have is, he told a story of flying after the war, I mean flying over when the concentration camps were liberated and seeing these walking skeletons. He’d just drop down I mean he had just a little plane. There are these photos from concentration camps of bodies.

LC: Now are these photos that you’ve seen?

FA: I have them. You can have them. I’ll let you make copies.

LC: Super.

FA: They’re horrible
LC: I’m sure they’re frightening.

FA: If you haven’t seen them before, they’re (unintelligible). The reason why it’s so important and why—I think it changed him as a man. Once he and I got into an argument about Vietnam. I popped off, I said, “Well, I just don’t know how you could fight in any war,” and blah blah blah. He just got up and went to the garage and brought back this box and then handed me the photos of the concentration camp.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah. He didn’t say another word.

LC: What did you do?

FA: I just looked at him and said, “Yes, sir.” Because I got it. I mean I got it. I got it. That’s what he was doing. Dad never talked much about himself. He would tell you everything about the courage of others. It wasn’t until he died and we were putting on his uniform that I realized that he had medals, good medals.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah. I mean, it was one of my third or fourth cousins who had gotten the Navy star who came up to me and had it on at the funeral. He said, “Do you know that your dad’s like my hero?” I went, “No.” He said, “I wore my Navy star for your dad because your dad has such medals.” I said, “And?” He said, “You have no clue, do you?” I said, “Right,” because Dad didn’t ever talk about it. It was what you did.

LC: Where do you think he got that sense of duty? As the youngest he probably at least had some incentive to kind of get attention. I wonder how that fits. Do you have any ideas?

FA: I think that I have some really—most of them are dead now, but my dad’s aunts who really loved him. I think his mother really loved him ‘cause he was the last. I think that he had some teachers along the way. He had his older brother, Wiley, really took him under his wing. I just think Dad put it all together in a way that it came out to be—he wasn’t impressed with braggarts at all. I think he had seen too many of them within his own family. I mean, we used to have family reunions. There’d be 160 of us. Geez, talk about bullshit. He knew that sometimes—he knew his mother was a very quiet little woman, how much work she did. I think he was always fascinated with learning. I mean, he loved to read. I used to do his charts for him when he would have to give a
presentation in the military because I have good handwriting and can do calligraphy. He
just understood charts. He had the knack for seeing the overall picture. I think from early
on he knew he didn’t want to be a carpenter. He didn’t want to be poor. He didn’t desire
to be super wealthy. His idea of wealth was you pay cash for a car and you have ice
cream every night. It wasn’t about a lot. It was about enough. He just didn’t want to ever
not have enough.

LC: His career in the military sort of parallels that in that he didn’t necessarily
want to stay in the very showy and very well-rewarded fighter pilot category if that meant
he couldn’t contribute.

FA: One, his eyes got bad, but two, he loved SAC (Strategic Air Command)
because it was in the sense it was the behind the scenes work that SAC did. It was the
coordination between ground and air. It was, “Let’s make it the best it can ever be. Let’s
be the premier of it all and let’s do it as a team.” I think he learned team ethics from
sports. I think because he was so involved and had coached a little bit, too, he knew one
great player can’t make a team. When he taught Sunday school he used a lot of parallels
with team sports and the idea that one person can’t do it. You have to do it together and
it’s not about you getting all the headlines.

LC: Did he have particular friends that he made while he was over in Europe that
you know about, people that he kept up with?

FA: I know that—yeah, there were some men that he served with that he kept up
with until my mom got so bad drinking. Then Dad just stopped socializing. I had to write
them and let them know he had died.

LC: Do you know what unit he was assigned to?

FA: No, but I could look it up. I just don’t know.

LC: That’s okay. Do you remember him telling anything about the end of the war
and where he might have been?

FA: No. Isn’t that funny? I don’t.

LC: Did he stay in Europe for any length of time or was he returned back to the
States?

FA: No, he came back to the States.

LC: He had decided that he wanted to stay in the military?
FA: Yes.

LC: Do you know when that kind of decision came?

FA: When the war was over with because you had a chance to stay or to go. He saw a couple of things that—you know when they came back stateside at the end of the war when the war was winding down he became a test pilot. I mean you were still a pilot, but there were so many planes being developed that one of the things that you did was you took them up and tested them. That’s when his nephew Billy Tom was killed because the plane blew up on him.

LC: Can we talk about Billy Tom for a second?

FA: Sure.

LC: He was in the Army Air Corps, as well.

FA: Yes, Corregidor.

LC: Pearl Harbor, was he in—?

FA: No. He would have been stateside and went to Corregidor.

LC: He was captured.

FA: Yes.

LC: Do you know the circumstances of his capture?

FA: Only that if he had ever run into MacArthur he would of killed him.

LC: Was he downed from the air?

FA: No. Well, he must have been because he was a pilot. He must have been. I don’t know how he got there, but he was stuck there. MacArthur, he would of killed MacArthur.

LC: He hated MacArthur.

FA: Hated.

LC: And the reason for that is?

FA: He deserted them and he took officers—he took furniture and personal items instead of men.

LC: Okay. Did that hatred help him survive do you think?

FA: What Billy Tom—the stories I’ve heard about Billy Tom is he said that there are three people who won’t survive. The first of that won’t survive are the ones who think that they’re smart. They think they can figure a way out and there’s not. The second ones
were the religious ones because they pray and they think God is going to save them. That’s not going to happen. The third ones were—I can’t remember what the third ones were. But he had this rule. He knew he was none of the three, anyway. How he survived, one is he quickly figured out that they got the same food that their captors had.

LC: Is that right?

FA: There just wasn’t much food. It was no telling how long it was going to be and they were just going to have to do it. Where they ended up was a place that processed, I guess, rice, but the machinery wasn’t working. So he convinced them he knew how to fix the machinery, which he didn’t know jack shit about, but he had met a man who was a machinist, but was blind.

LC: Now was that someone else who was in the camp?

FA: Yes, someone else in the camp. He said this guy is my partner. We have to do it together. So he would explain things and then they would fix it. He could take a few little handfuls of rice back, not handfuls, but you know. That’s how he got through.

LC: From what was processed in the machine once it was working?

FA: Yeah. That’s how he got through. You know, for fifty-two months.

LC: Fifty-two months. Was he in, do you know, Future, if you don’t know it’s fine, was he in the same camp the whole time? Was he moved?

FA: I don’t know, but I actually, if you’re interested, my Aunt Betty, who would have been his sister-in-law, wrote him—this is the type of women I come from—every week he was captured.

LC: Really?

FA: Yes.

LC: Did he receive those letters?

FA: A couple, not all. A couple. More importantly, the woman he had been engaged to went on to marry someone else and when he was released she divorced the other guy immediately and married him.

LC: No kidding.

FA: Yeah, Betty Counts.

LC: Where did she live?

FA: Hillsboro, Texas.
LC: Okay.

FA: They’re all from around Hillsboro and Ft. Worth and all of that. Betty lives in Odessa.

LC: Is Aunt Betty still around?

FA: Yep, Aunt Betty’s still around.

LC: It would be fascinating to talk with her.

FA: Yeah. Because I mean, this is just the type of woman that she was, is.

LC: He did get a couple of letters.

FA: Yes.

LC: Do you know any stories about his liberation or how he was freed?

FA: No, but Betty would. I just know that Dad said you would talk to him about it and he would just act like he had just gone to the supermarket.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah. He showed up at my dad’s place, the same unit as my dad, asked to be with my dad and said, “Let’s fly.”

LC: Now this is when they were test pilots, the test pilot period.

FA: Yeah.

LC: He came back into or stayed in the Army Air Corps, then becoming the Air Force?

FA: Yes.

LC: He wanted to fly and he did fly.

FA: Yeah.

LC: Can you tell me about his apparently all-too-brief career as a test pilot?

FA: He was great. He was a wonderful, brilliant pilot. The family myth, which I really—my sister thinks she can confirm it, but I haven’t been able to, is that my—they had gone out drinking the night before. My dad had a hangover and Billy Tom said, “I’ll take up the next flight.” Dad said, “I’m scheduled to.” He said, “No, let me.” He took it up and he mentioned seeing a bright light—I mean when they’re talking about how the plane’s working and then it blew. So Dad thinks—Dad always told my sister it was some UFO thing, but all he knew is that he had to take back an empty coffin to his wife in
Hillsboro. Just that, dad said he didn’t talk about it. You would have thought he had just
gone to the drugstore.

LC: That’s amazing. Where did the test flight accident happen?
FA: I think Virginia.
LC: How did your dad feel when that happened, do you know?
FA: Devastated.
LC: I’m sure.
FA: But he was the one. He said, “I’ll take the coffin back.” He’s the one that
met with the family. His eyes had always been bad, but he was tired of faking it. That’s
when he went in to being a commander and stopped flying shortly after that.
LC: Is that right?
FA: Yeah.
LC: What do you think informed that decision to stop sort of getting—?
FA: I think that his eyes were going bad and he missed Billy Tom. He just knew
that they were being reckless with life. It’s one thing to die in the war and it’s another
thing to die because they’re making flight machines that aren’t safe.
LC: Was that hard for your dad?
FA: Yes, because at that time when they were testing those planes, you know
because it was right before Korea, it was like one out of seven pilots’ planes blew up.
That’s bullshit. I mean, it’s just insane. It’s like you’ve seen me—you know, it’s
craziness.
LC: About what year was that?
FA: I would guess it would have to be late ’40s because I was born in ’50. It was
before I was born.
LC: Were your parents still dating or still trying to see each other at this time?
FA: They were married in, I think, ’48.
LC: They got married in ’48?
FA: Yeah.
LC: Where did they get married?
FA: In Virginia in Newport News.
LC: Your mother clearly understood that California then would be behind her?
FA: I don’t think so.
LC: No, okay.
FA: (Laughs) I think my mother thought she had married a wild fighter pilot. She said he picked her up in a station wagon and she should have known there had been a switch. (Laughs) Dad was ready to settle down. Mom was ready to party all night.
LC: So did she miss California, then?
FA: She missed, yeah, she missed California. She missed traveling. She missed parties. She missed working.
LC: How did her brother’s health end up? Was he—?
FA: He died.
LC: Okay.
FA: In fact, my mom and dad pretended to be married because it was my Uncle Russell who told my mom that there were lots of men who would love her, but that my dad was the only one that would—my dad’s nickname all through high school, college, and the service was Sadie.
LC: Sadie?
FA: S-A-D-I-E for “Slick Eyed Sadie” because of the way he shot a basket. What can I tell ya? My dad was the only one that would love her forever. So he said, “My one wish before I die is for the two of you to get married.” He said, “Gerry,” he said, “Gerry, I just want you to be married and taken care of.” So they pretended to be married and then they went ahead and got married. They got married, you know, a military marriage in Newport News.
LC: Do you mean a civil ceremony?
FA: It was at the base chapel with people in uniform.
LC: People she didn’t know, really.
FA: She knew some of them because she had partied with them. One of the people who helped throw it was one of my dad’s ex-girlfriends.
LC: Really?
FA: Yeah. The woman he dated when he wasn’t with my mom.
LC: Did the two of them get along?
FA: Oh, yeah.
LC: So she’s trying to settle down to be—

FA: Be an officer’s wife.

LC: Different life, yeah.

FA: What a joke.

LC: It’s a joke because?

FA: She’s totally ill-equipped to do it emotionally and psychologically.

LC: Now you said she might have wanted to keep working.

FA: I don’t know. I don’t know if she knew. I mean, I know that she had two jobs and been responsible. My mom was a perpetual party girl. She was the first one up with Bloody Marys and the last one to bed with spiked coffee. She wanted everything to be pretty. She wanted to decorate the home so it was pretty. She wanted everyone to be happy. She wanted your attention. I totally believe she was bipolar and would get depressed and would self-medicate with alcohol and wouldn’t talk about it. So she would say, “Oh, let’s take a drive in a convertible.” It would be this sort of dramatic swing. “Let’s have a picnic out on the river” and you’re going, “Okay.” All that’s a lot of fun and then it gets really old. I don’t know if she ever did what she wanted. I know that she would tell me things like the day that my sister and I learned how to read was the worst day of her life.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah.

LC: Why?

FA: Because she thought she wasn’t needed anymore. Just that type of stuff. I mean, it’s just the military can be really hard on women, or I don’t know about male spouses now, but on women it can be really, really hard.

LC: She was moved into officers’ housing then.

FA: Yes.

LC: Did she have much interaction with other officers’ wives? Do you know much about that?

FA: She did, yes, and she hated it.

LC: Really? Why?
FA: Because she didn’t play bridge. She didn’t like the pretentious of it all. She
didn’t like how they pulled the rank when they weren’t supposed to and they weren’t
much fun.

LC: They weren’t much fun?

FA: Well, because there was all this protocol. Protocol is not much fun.

LC: Right. Did she know the protocol or did she kind of had to—?

FA: Yeah, they give you a book. I have the book they give you.

LC: Really?

FA: Yes. It’s a book called How to be an Air Force Officer’s Wife. It tells you,
you’re supposed to leave a business card when you go to visit someone and where you’re
kids are suppose to play, how you’re supposed to decorate your house, the drinks you’re
supposed to serve—everything. She tried, but she knew it was crap. She balked, and
didn’t have the ability to find a healthy outlet. She just drank. We would be the ones that
would—she would have all the kids in the neighborhood at our house ‘cause that was
more fun than being with the adults for her.

LC: How long did they stay in Virginia?

FA: Probably about a year because my sister is sixteen months younger and she
was born in North Carolina.

LC: What base were they at in Virginia? Do you know?

FA: Um, Langley.

LC: Okay. And they went down to North Carolina?

FA: Went down to North Carolina to Charlottesville.

LC: Okay. Was that a new appointment, promotion for your dad?

FA: I think so. He must have been made captain by then. He was a captain when
we were in Thailand.

LC: Now that he’s left the actual piloting, past piloting, what is he doing? Do you
know?

FA: He did ground and air surface coordination.

LC: Now, do you know what that actually means?

FA: Yeah, it means how do you coordinate the use of air power and land power
and how do you get everyone to understand it and be on board. How do you get the
commanders and all the way down to the lowest airmen to get it, that it’s all one thing?
That you are going to be working with other branches of the service, you know, how do you make that happen?
LC: He was in North Carolina for how long?
FA: Let me see. It would have been one and a half—not long because we went to Thailand from North Carolina.
LC: So he was never assigned to the Korean Theater?
FA: That’s what he did in the Korean Theater, was the land-air coordination.
LC: Oh, okay. When did he go out there? Do you know?
FA: No. I don’t know.
LC: Was it brief?
FA: Probably because he would have been coordinating. He wouldn’t have been fighting. He would have been somehow figuring out how they’re going to fight.
LC: But you’re not sure where he might have been based?
FA: Nah, nah.
LC: Okay. The assignment to Bangkok, that came up in 1952?
FA: Yeah, about that.
LC: Do you know how your mom felt about relocating?
FA: She talked about it as a grand adventure and it was going to be harder than hell because she had two little kids under four. We were going to be there for almost three years.
LC: Was it understood that you would be there that long in the beginning?
FA: Yeah, yeah. She thought it was a great opportunity and it was a wild adventure and she packed us up. I mean, we all learned how to pack really well. We went. Got on a plane and left.
LC: You were very young.
FA: Yes. I remember the plane ride, though.
LC: Do you?
FA: Parts of it because we had to have an emergency landing in the Philippines.
LC: Okay, that’s memorable. Do you know why?
FA: Oh, just one engine went out.
LC: Okay. Your dad was flying along with you, the whole family together?

FA: Yeah. Dad went with us. We went from North Carolina, probably stopped off a couple of places to see relatives and then flew out of California.

LC: Okay. Do you know how your father felt about this assignment?

FA: He thought it was great. He thought it was great. He thought less about it when he got there. He loved the Thai Air Force. He admired the men, thought they were wonderful. Didn’t really like living in Bangkok. (Laughs)

LC: Now what was his brief? What was he supposed to do?

FA: Advisor.

LC: To?

FA: The Royal Thai Air Force.

LC: Was his base of operations the U.S. Embassy or was it—?

FA: I have no clue. The house we lived in was owned by the ambassador and it came with five servants.

LC: Really?

FA: Oh, yeah.

LC: Can you describe it?

FA: Only my brief memory in that it was big and that there were these people already living there, which turned out to be the servants. And that it was usually kind of hot and steamy. Then there were people who came by and we could get strange candy from them, which turned out to be sticky rice and mango. It was the first time I knew my mom drank and that Dad was gone a lot. It was kind of cool because we always had a baby ayah, which is a baby sitter, with us. So for me it was a lot of play but just in the back of my mind consciousness of my mom’s drinking.

LC: That meant to you that she wasn’t available to you, or what did that mean?

FA: It meant to me that things were weird.

LC: Things were strange.

FA: Things were strange. Things were just strange. She wasn’t right. I mean, I didn’t know what wrong was, but I knew she wasn’t right. I knew that Dad—we would still be put on alert and stand by every once in a while and everything would get kind
of—I got real used to it if, like, you’re on alert or stand by and you’re a dependent you
know that things are strange.

LC: That’s different.

FA: That’s different than your mom acting weird and having kind of a sloppy-
looking conversation or something.

LC: What do you remember about your dad during this time period? Was he
happy?

FA: I think he was gone a lot. I think he was happy some of the time when he
would come home at night and have a beer. I remember some happy things there and
some adventures that we kind of had. We have films of the Thai Air Force and they’d
dress the helicopters like elephants and the fly-bys and the parades and all of that. He got
sick once because he wouldn’t eat. He insisted on eating the base food and everyone said,
“No, you got to eat some of the native food or you’ll get sick.” He got real sick.

LC: Did he really?

FA: He got dysentery.

LC: Yikes. Were you well while you were there?

FA: Yeah. I didn’t get sick until I got home.

LC: Oh, okay. In general terms do you remember, for example your ayah, do you
remember her name?

FA: My baby ayah?

LC: Yes.

FA: Let me think. Give me a minute. It’ll come to me. My mom wanted to
adopt—Boo. Her name was Boo.

LC: Your mom wanted to adopt her?

FA: Yeah, she was only probably twelve or thirteen. My mom wanted to adopt
the whole damn world. She wouldn’t let the cook cook because she chewed betel nut. I
mean, Mom had all these servants that were being paid, but she wouldn’t let them work.
She let the lawn guy work. That’s about it.

LC: Now she didn’t want them to work because she wasn’t comfortable with it or
what do you think that was about?
FA: Because they weren’t—she didn’t think they were sanitary enough. They didn’t sterilize things very well.

LC: You mentioned the betel nut juice.

FA: Yeah. The main cook was always chewing betel nut and spitting out juice and had black teeth. Mom didn’t think that was real healthy and for someone who did that to be cooking. So she kept her on, but she just cooked.

LC: Your mom did the cooking?

FA: Oh, she talked about it. I’m not really sure. I think that you eat a lot of fruits over there. I don’t think you do a lot of cooking. It’s hot as Hades over there. You still have the klongs and you have the markets are open-air markets with hanging food. What I do remember is seeing the Buddhist temples and being drawn to the color of gold, saffron robes of the monks. The smell of incense mixing with frying chickens hanging from a rack.

LC: Did you start to learn Thai?

FA: Oh, we spoke Thai.

LC: Did you?

FA: Yeah. We just couldn’t keep it up because we came back to the States. We weren’t bright enough to know, “God, this might come in handy fifty years from now.”

LC: But you basically were picking it up.

FA: Oh, sure. You know luat, which is (unintelligible). Mâi dee, which is “bad.” And (unknown), which is “come here,” and (unknown)-“dinner,” (unknown), which is “thank you.” We learned words that kids learned and you don’t even know you’re learning them.

LC: Sure, exactly. It’s very easy. You were there for three years.

FA: Yeah, just about three years.

LC: How did your sister do? Did you guys kind of clump together?

FA: Oh, yeah we were inseparable.

LC: Okay.

FA: We were like little twins. She loved it. She ran around naked all the time. We learned Thai dancing from some of the young girls. For us it was a grand adventure.
because we didn’t have to pack or unpack. We slept in the same big bed. We were
dressed alike and played dolls. She was totally unaware that Mom ever drank or anything.

LC: Yeah, cause she was too young.

FA: Oh, yeah. I protected her. I would never let her know that.

LC: How would you protect her?

FA: I would just distract her attention.

LC: Okay. So that kind of became your role?

FA: Oh, still is. (Laughs)

LC: I hear that family system thing.

FA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

LC: When you had to leave, do you remember leaving?

FA: I remember just the trip home. I don’t remember packing or anything. I
remember we came home by ship, mainly by ship through India. Mom wanted to see
Europe so we made it around the world.

LC: Wow.

FA: I know. I know. It’s pretty amazing that you grow up and know you’ve been
around the world by the time you’re five.

LC: Was that something that your dad wanted to make sure that your mom had
experience with?

FA: I think he wanted it for us, too. I think he wanted it for all of us. I mean, I
think he just knew that’s a once in a life—for most people it’s a once-in-a-lifetime
experience. He didn’t know anybody who had ever done it. Well, I mean we met people
on the boat and all. We were on Queen Elizabeth coming back from Europe. We went up
through—I can remember being in India because we saw different ceremonies around
temples with snake charmers and all parts of Europe. We were just kids seeing stuff. I
want to go back and see it again.

LC: Did you go through the Suez Canal?

FA: Mm-hmm.

LC: Your dad went with you on this whole long trip?

FA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. He was with us the whole time because we had
diplomatic passports. That helped, too. This is the part—I’m not quite sure how a captain
in the Air Force gets diplomatic passports. This is the first clue I had that something else
might have been going on. (Laughs)

LC: Okay. I’m sure it probably was.

FA: And me, too.

LC: When you arrived back in the States what was the next assignment or billet
or posting?

FA: We were South Carolina, Sumter, South Carolina.

LC: Okay. How long were you there?

FA: I guess they first take you actually back to North Carolina, but we were
briefly there. We were in Sumter, South Carolina, until I was in the second grade because
I had rheumatic fever in South Carolina.

LC: You did?

FA: Yeah, yeah. I came back to the States and I promptly tried to cut my toe off
on a bicycle. Later on I developed rheumatic fever in South Carolina. So we must have
been there about two or three years.

LC: How long were you ill?

FA: Technically I still have it, but they put me in the hospital for three months,
but I couldn’t walk for six. So I had a heart murmur. They caught it. Mom caught it
because she knew it was from her brother. She used it to blame me for the reason she was
an alcoholic.

LC: That she was so upset about your illness.

FA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The perfect denial. My sister loved it because it meant we
got a maid for my sister all day long because Mom was at the hospital with me.

LC: So she had like personal attention.

FA: Oh, absolutely, yes, undivided and got somebody to play with her 24/7. I
didn’t go to kindergarten so it must have been right after we got back. I never went to
kindergarten. I went to first grade in South Carolina and then we moved to Arkansas.

Blytheville.

LC: What rank did your dad have this time? Do you know?
FA: He made major. He must have been a major. Maybe he got to be a major in
Thailand because we—he made lieutenant colonel in Arkansas. I remember the party
when he made lieutenant colonel.

LC: So you were in Sumter for a couple of years.

FA: Yeah.

LC: The assignment over to Arkansas was to what base? Do you remember?

FA: It’s now a defunct base called Blytheville Air Force Base. Later on they
changed it to another name, but at the time it was Blytheville Air Force Base. It was to
open up a SAC base. That’s when Dad changed to SAC.

LC: This would have been 1957?

FA: Correct.

LC: Okay. It was a base in the Strategic Air Command. Do you know what your
father’s general assignment was there?

FA: He had to open it up. He was going to be squadron commander of field
maintenance, but he helped open up the base. They picked a handful of men. It had been I
guess some sort of training base during the war. When SAC came into being they picked
a handful of men to open up a base and he was one of them.

LC: He became a lieutenant colonel—?

FA: There.

LC: Okay, at the time roughly that the base opened or was it later on?

FA: Probably about five years after it opened, maybe four years. I was in—he
was one of the acting base commanders at the time. I was just getting my breasts,
probably about twelve. I was twelve, about twelve, eleven or twelve. About ’61.

LC: He was assistant base commander or acting?

FA: Yeah it was—you know, when you’re opening a new base and you’re
waiting for—we didn’t have any generals on base. We only had a few full birds. So for a
brief time we lived in a commander’s, in a full-bird house instead of a lieutenant
colonel’s house. He was just acting base commander, you know like one of the three
acting base commanders. He knew it was a short assignment, but he did it anyway.

LC: Over the time he was there do you remember, for example, race issues being
important?
FA: Oh, duh. Okay, the movie Remember the Titans?

LC: Yes.

FA: That was our base. I mean, not really, but it could have been our base. My mom did volunteer work for the Red Cross. We were threatened. My sister and I had our lives threatened. My mom got crank phone calls threatening her and with threats like, “I know where your girls get off the bus. They had a pretty ribbon in their hair today.” Horrible threats. It turned out to be the lieutenant colonel that lived the next house over.

LC: It was him?

FA: Yeah. They bugged our phones. Even the Air Force knew you can’t be doing that shit. Dad had helped integrate the service. I mean, he had been on one of the panels that helped do that. We had football games. Other teams would threaten to cancel football games because we had black kids on our team. The base is integrated. Guess what? The school’s going to be integrated. The school’s got to go along because the military pays big bucks, big bucks to have their kids go there. We show up one night at a game and it’s even before I’m a little cheerleader, but we’re there and my dad has a station wagon filled with kids. They’re not going to let us in because we have a black kid with us. My dad just—I mean I remember this. I saw this. He just went up to the man in charge, principal of the town, little mayor or whatever the hell it was, little redneck. He said, “I’m Lt. Col. Dudley S. Akins. I’m so and so at Blytheville Air Force Base. If you don’t let us in as of tomorrow your town and every shop in it will be off limits to all the men, women, and personnel.”

LC: That was probably effective.

FA: We got in. I mean, I was there. I heard him say it. I don’t know if he could have pulled it off, but I heard him say it.

LC: Were you frightened at that moment, do you remember, or proud? What feelings did you have watching this confrontation?

FA: Well, I thought it was normal. I mean, my dad did shit like that all the time. It was like, “Of course you did that.” It is very difficult to describe the Deep South to someone who hasn’t lived there because you—which I had my whole life outside of Thailand. I had been raised in the Deep South. You are engulfed in a society that perpetuates the notion that African Americans are happy, that they like it where they are.
So truly until the Civil Rights movement when people go, “Are you blind?” You don’t start to get it. You don’t start to truly understand what a horrible system it was and is. So I think—I would love to say that I never took part in something, a little school taunting that would have been racist. I can remember one in particular like, “Okay would you rather slide down a razor blade”—I mean something horrible—“or be kissed by a black.” They’d use the “N” word. I’m sure that we all said things like that. I mean, I know we did. I think that what I learned from my parents is not to think that way, that that’s wrong. So, yeah, racism was a huge, huge part of it. It was so huge you didn’t talk about it. I mean, probably the biggest gulf between money, was a race, was a class issue. No one stopped to think that you didn’t want to hang out with what was called poor white trash and the blacks were below that. I mean, it had as much to do with class. It’s just that when the color of skin is so different it’s an obvious definer.

LC: Do you think it was because you were a bit older that you remember this particularly about Arkansas or did you have some sense of it before when you had been in South Carolina?

FA: I didn’t have any sense of it in South Carolina because I was a kid. I think it was because I was older. I think I had started thinking. I think that because of my mom started flipping out when we had all these threatening calls, my mom had a total breakdown. We had to commit her to a mental hospital. That became pretty paramount in my mind. I saw how it affected—later on I realized how it affected my dad’s career. I knew how it affected my life. So it’s just been burned into my memory. I mean, it’s part of why when I teach, I teach about tolerance. I mean I know, I know what the kids said in the locker room. I know what they said behind people’s backs. Racism is an evil. Prejudice is an evil. It’s an evil that’s spread by whispers and looks. It’s easy if it’s an organized hatred. It’s not easy when it’s a prevailing, you know, just always there is this thing, just waiting.

LC: The calls that your mom particularly got, you said that they were generated by this lieutenant colonel.

FA: Yeah.

LC: What was the attack about? Was it about your father’s policies, and if so what were they?
FA: It was actually about my mom’s policies. She let a black woman sit in the
front seat of the car.

LC: Of her personal car?
FA: Yeah. When we had maids, everybody always had maids on bases. I don’t
know why, but we always had maids. Women didn’t work, but we had maids. I think it’s
a good idea. I want a maid. I actually do, I think it’s a great idea. I want a maid. She went
out into the country with the Red Cross and gave shots to poor people including blacks
and never hesitated to do it and would touch their skin. Also because of my dad’s
policies. I think it was a combination. I think we were targeted as liberal—if you’re a
redneck, we’re a pretty good target.

LC: Your mom became interested in working with the Red Cross at what point?
FA: Probably about then because Z and I were up in elementary school and she
wanted something to do. It looked like something that would occupy her time.

LC: So she was out doing sort of public health kinds of things?
FA: Yeah. She was a volunteer at the hospital. She would do public health stuff.
She would go with the Red Cross and volunteer to drive people to give shots to little kids.
She was really good with little kids. She would take cookies and give them to them
because no one got vaccines. I mean, we forget how horrible it was. They didn’t have
access to any of that. You had to take it to them. Well, you still do, actually.

LC: Yes. She was interested in doing that?
FA: Yeah, well, yeah. My mother had a great big heart and she had no
boundaries. So that meant that at other times I would come home from school—I mean
this is the final, the first big breakdown. She would have brought a whole family in our
home, of very poor, trashy people—no other way to say it. The kids were in my bedroom,
in my sister’s bedroom—we shared a bedroom—playing with all our toys, trying on our
clothes. The adults were in the living room with my mom all passed out drunk.

LC: Now were these whites?
FA: Yeah, these were white. So I had to call my dad from work. My dad’s acting
base commander. I have to call—I mean, we had the red phone in the bedroom that goes
directly to SAC. I just had to call Dad at his main office, which you did not do.

LC: Right.
FA: Did not—and say, “Dad, you got to get here. Mom’s asleep and there are all these people in the house.”

LC: Do you remember that particular day that your dad came home?

FA: Absolutely.

LC: What happened?

FA: He came in. He woke them up. He got all the people—he said, “Gerry, stay here.” He gathered up all the people, took them home. He probably was gone maybe thirty minutes. Got them off the base, came back. My mom started throwing a fit. Started like hitting him and saying, “How dare you? They’re my friends.” He said, “Gerry, stop it. You know this isn’t right. You’ve been drinking.” She wouldn’t stop hitting him so he coldcocked her. Knocked her out, put her in the car and told me to take care of my sister and he would be back as soon as he could. He drove her straight to Memphis, Tennessee, which is forty-five miles away, and committed her to the military hospital for psychiatry or psychology, whatever.

LC: Do you think he had this plan kind of already in his mind?

FA: No. I think he—

LC: As a possibility?

FA: No, I don’t know. Maybe.

LC: Okay. How long was your mom away?

FA: About five weeks. One of my aunts came out and stayed with us.

LC: Which aunt was that?

FA: My Aunt Helen.

LC: Was that a good thing that she came?

FA: It was okay. She and my dad got along and she was sweet. We went by train once to see my grandparents. We were taken care of. It was better than having drunks in the house.

LC: Was it?

FA: Oh, God, yeah. I mean, these are people—they had lice. I mean, they had boogers all over their face.

LC: And it was chaos in a way.
FA: You didn’t know them. You had never met them. You come in and there are all these strangers and they’re drunk. All the adults are drunk in your living room, kind of laying on each other.

LC: Was it kind of a breather for you in a way when your mom wasn’t there?

FA: Yeah, except for she came back and had to go to outpatient thing, and see a psychiatrist there and had to go on a bus with other men from the service. The military actually tries to help their people. One day she didn’t show up afterwards. So Dad got home and he said, “Where’s your mom?” “She hadn’t come home from the bus yet dad.” You know and I’m taking care of Z. You never lock your doors or anything so there was no problem. He said, “Okay, get in the car. We’ll go find her.” She was behind a little water service box, like a little shed, but it’s made out of brick, with the husband of my fifth grade teacher. They have a bottle between them and they were just back there drunk as skunks, drinking, sitting on the ground. Yeah, that was real fun. But that teacher really was nice to me after that. (Laughs) She really was. She caught me cheating and didn’t turn me in and sent me stuff. You know, she was sort of nice.

LC: Was all of this having an impact on your behavior? You mentioned cheating, were you starting to act out a little bit?

FA: Of course it did. Yeah, but then I turned it around. My sister never really knew about it so she ended up acting out for other reasons, but I just became a super good girl. I mean, I cheated on a spelling test because no one knew I was dyslexic. I didn’t know I was dyslexic. You can’t spell if you’re dyslexic. But an “e” and an “a” are close. What is the big deal? Just switch them. That’s what I would tell my teachers. I would go, “It’s only one letter. You can’t count off the whole word for one letter.”

LC: How did that argument go down?

FA: They laughed and marked it off because no one knew. No one knew that it doesn’t work for me.

LC: Right. There was no such thing then. It wasn’t diagnosed.

FA: Yeah. No, no, no. None of it was. So I just became a super good student. I became class officer, cheerleader. I became a good girl.

LC: You stayed at the base in Arkansas until 1964?

FA: Correct.
LC: Okay. Do you recall any other incidents during that time period? For example, do you remember President Kennedy coming to office?

FA: I remember him being killed.

LC: What happened that day?

FA: Things were shut down. Well, first of all they announced it at school and it was panic. We didn’t know what was going to happen.

LC: Do you mean the students panicked or the teachers?

FA: Everybody. We all just cried. Nobody knew—everybody was in shock. I remember grabbing my pompoms and just sitting and going “What? What?” People grabbed things. I mean, they just held onto things. We were sent home and when we drove up on the bus the flag was at—there was a red flag out, which meant you were on full-blown alert. That meant you couldn’t leave your house. You got off your bus, you went to your house and you couldn’t leave.

LC: So the red flag was out?

FA: Oh, yeah.

LC: Had you ever seen it out before?

FA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

LC: On occasions like—

FA: Yeah, like the Cuban Missile Crisis and other—SAC always had alerts, but you knew. When you’re on full alert it means you don’t leave your house. You don’t make phone calls. You have to be prepared to leave with one phone call because there was a mountain we were supposed to go to because we were number three on the list for being attacked.

LC: Did you know that at the time?

FA: Yes.

LC: Do you know where the secondary base was, the bunker that you were supposed to go to? Do you have any idea?

FA: Yeah. I wouldn’t have known how to get there because I didn’t know how to drive, but I knew it was up in the hills of Missouri. We were three miles from Missouri and six miles from the Mississippi River.
LC: You said that the base was on some kind of ladder chart for having to relocate and they were number three?
FA: Yes.
LC: Did your dad tell you all of this or was it in school or how did you find out?
FA: Yes. No. My dad.
LC: Did he kind of tell you, “Look kids, we may have to move at a—”
FA: Yes.
LC: “So you’ve got to be ready.”
FA: He told me because I made the phone calls for him. When we would have an alert he would get a message. It would be like, “Colonel Akins, this is Lieutenant Brown. Broken Arrow.” Dad would say, “Roger. Broken Arrow.” Click. Then he had a list that he called. While he was getting dressed to go down there, he would say, “Future, make these calls for me,” when I got old enough and he knew he could trust me. I would say, “This is Future Akins calling for Colonel Akins. Broken Arrow.” They would have to confirm. They’d say, “Correct, got you. Thank you.” Click.
LC: And you made these calls?
FA: Absolutely. If one didn’t answer you would call their list. You made sure the list was called. Oh, yeah. That was one of my jobs.
LC: That day that you came home on the bus, the day of the assassination. What happened?
FA: Dad was already at work. We didn’t see him for a week.
LC: The base was basically tightened down?
FA: Yeah, clubs closed, movies were shut down. You didn’t go to a movie. You didn’t leave. We watched TV. Mom served us dinner and got drunk and said, “Eat this. It may be your last meal forever,” you know, crap like that. We were allowed to go to school. I mean, we went to school but the whole base—I mean there were no social activities except for church for a whole week.
LC: Your mom saying this might be your last meal, what effect did that have on you? Did you believe her?
FA: Partly. I also by then knew she was a drunk. I drew. I got out my sketch book and drew.
LC: That was your release?
FA: Mm-hmm.
LC: What about your sister?
FA: She watched TV and watched me draw, played with dolls.
LC: Did you watch the events of that weekend?
FA: No. We watched cartoons and something. I mean, we did see the funeral and all, but we didn’t watch it 24/7 by any means.
LC: Right. You didn’t see your father at all for quite a while?
FA: I don’t remember seeing him for about a week.
LC: Okay. Do you remember when you did finally see him?
FA: Yeah, but everything had sort of calmed down. It’s kind of like you come home from school one day and an hour later he’s there. It’s kind of like it’s all cool.
LC: The red flag is gone?
FA: The red flag’s gone. You got to see your dad. Kids from military grew up, you just know. At five o'clock if you’re out on the base and they lower the flag and they’re playing “Taps,” you have to stop. You have to stop your car, you have to stop moving, and you have to look towards the flag and stop.
LC: How did you do with that kind of discipline?
FA: Excellent.
LC: Did you like it?
FA: I didn’t question it at the time. You grew up with it. You have to get kind of older to even know there’s—I thought everyone did that. You’re kind of like, “Okay.” I mean, it was a big shock to become a civilian and realize not everyone stopped at five o’clock for “Taps.” You just don’t even know anything else exists.
LC: What age were you when you left Arkansas? That would be 19—
FA: ’64. I was fourteen.
LC: You were all of fourteen.
FA: All of fourteen.
LC: When you found out that you were going to move, you had been in Arkansas for quite a while.
FA: Yeah, we had been there longer than you’re usually there.
LC: Were you upset?
FA: No. One, my dad knew it was going to be his last assignment because he had been passed over for full bird three times. So we knew it was going to be a two-and-a-half-year assignment before Dad retired. It was time to move. I hadn’t made homecoming queen, but I was head cheerleader. It was a good way to break up with my little boyfriend. You know, it was a new adventure.

LC: At age fourteen, did you understand or know about your father’s not having been promoted beyond lieutenant colonel?
FA: Yes. I knew it. I didn’t know what an impact that would mean on a person without a job. I didn’t know what it meant to a man supporting a family with a wife who’s dysfunctional and the two kids are in high school and having to start college. I didn’t know what pressure would have been on him.

LC: He had been up for review three times?
FA: Correct.

LC: Did you find out at some stage what the issues were there?
FA: Yes. One is early on he had punched someone out in a bar because of—my dad was always opinionated about how it should be done and never afraid to state it. And some guy who came up and kept pressing him in a bar and said, “Don’t you agree with me? Don’t you agree with me?” My dad—and witnesses, other people told me the story, too. He said, “I don’t want to talk about it in a bar. Let’s leave work at work and this is a bar. Have a drink. I’ll buy you a drink.” The guy wouldn’t leave him alone. Dad finally said, “No, I don’t agree with you. I think you’re a stupid son of a bitch.” The guy says, “Well, how dare you?” and swung at him. Well, Dad punched him out. Well, the guy was ahead of him and ended up in the Pentagon.

LC: Do you know who it is?
FA: Nah, Dad never said. If he did say, he just told it as like, “Well, that was a stupid move.”

LC: But it was somebody who later had a big impact?
FA: Oh, yeah. Well, then he had changed from TAC, tactical air command, to SAC and Mom was an alcoholic. There’s a big gap between making lieutenant colonel and colonel. They don’t want to take on a man who has major problems at home because
they don’t think he can be focused. Plus, Dad never went to the academy and had no
degree. I mean, he was of the school. He could have still made it, but it was getting to the
point where one of those, just one of those factors being off wouldn’t have hurt him, but
four of them? That was too many.

LC: Was the race issue part of it, too?

FA: I don’t think so because by then the service was really getting—the service
sort of lead the way in integration. They would have promoted and championed my dad
for that. The fact that—it was a known fact. My mom, by that time we went to Michigan.
My mom had been committed to a mental institution twice.

LC: Okay. So there was another episode?

FA: Yeah there was another episode after that episode, another one. So you’re
just not going to—

LC: Future, can you tell me a little bit more about Lieutenant Palmer who was
your dad’s assistant?

FA: Yeah, he was wonderful. He was wonderful.

LC: Was he career, as well?

FA: Yes.

LC: As lieutenant, it would seem so.

FA: Yeah.

LC: He was a gay man.

FA: He was gay.

LC: How widely was that known?

FA: I think it was widely known and no one said a word. I can remember a
couple little, like maybe sly remarks about it, but as Dad said he was such an incredible
commander. He was such a gracious host. I mean, he did. His mother lived with him so
the way they thought about it was, “Well, he can’t be doing anything if his mother is with
him.”

LC: He can’t be doing anything with—?

FA: Other men.

LC: Okay.

FA: Nobody said anything. Everybody knew and nobody said.
LC: So there was an assumption kind of that he wasn’t in a relationship.
FA: Correct.
LC: That he was basically a gay man who was not practicing?
FA: Yeah cloistered, not closeted. Cloistered.
LC: He was effective in his job and your dad—
FA: Absolutely. My dad totally relied upon him and until his dying day bragged about him and said he never could have done what he did. They took the field maintenance squadron they inherited it from the bottom to the top in that three-year period.
LC: Now to the top, in terms of efficiency?
FA: Yeah, all the ratings for the Air Force, top of the Air Force.
LC: And within SAC.
FA: Yeah, that’s the top of the top.
LC: Do you know what Palmer’s career path was after you left?
FA: No, I don’t.
LC: Do you think that’s somebody that your dad kept track of?
FA: No, because my mom overshadowed everything.
LC: Was she becoming a big issue for your dad?
FA: Yeah. Just an embarrassment, an issue of concern. He just couldn’t control her anymore and he couldn’t make excuses.
LC: How do you think this affected him personally?
FA: I think it caused him to be overweight, which led to diabetes, which led to triple-heart bypass. I think it affected his health. I think it affected his ability to socialize and be with people because he never wanted to go out because of Mom. I think it just hurt him. It broke his heart.
LC: Could you see that even as a teenager?
FA: Yes. Not so much as a teenager, because I was too pissed off myself.
LC: Okay, but later?
FA: Yeah. He always defended her. It was later when I took care of him, after his stroke and he said, “I was trying to protect you.” I said, “Dad, you think I didn’t know?”
LC: But you guys did get to communicate about this?
FA: Later, yes, in the years I took care of him.

LC: When you lived here in Lubbock?

FA: Oh, yeah. When I came back and took care of him, yeah.

LC: The move to Michigan, was that a good posting or was it kind of a—

FA: No, it was considered a hellhole. (Laughs) Because it was three major—it was SAC, TAC, and ADC (Air Defense Command).

LC: Were all there?

FA: Yeah and that’s never gonna to work. I mean, that’s just like basically, “Okay, who’s in charge? No one’s in charge, what are we doing?” It was cold. It was cold and miserable. It started snowing on Halloween and didn’t stop ‘til Easter.

LC: Now this is in the Upper Peninsula?

FA: Yeah, it’s like Sault Ste.Marie.

LC: And the name of the base was?

FA: Kincheloe.

LC: Okay. Your dad had what position within SAC there?

FA: He was head of a squadron, but it wasn’t field maintenance. It was something else. I don’t know. He was head of a squadron.

LC: But it was a pretty not good posting.

FA: He knew it wasn’t a good posting. He told us it was going to be hard. Mainly because it was grey. It’s dark and grey and miserable. It’s a really depressed—I mean, you have a real morale problem. It’s damn cold. I mean when you have alerts and you have to be out on the field or out on the air strip, it’s twenty below. You’re freezing your buns off. It’s horrible conditions.

LC: At what point in the year did you go up there? This was 1964?

FA: Halloween. We got there Halloween night.

LC: Was it snowing?

FA: Mm-hmm.

LC: Did you go trick-or-treating that night?

FA: No. We just got to officers’ family quarters and then moved into our house that weekend or something. I mean, the good thing about the military is you move fast. I
mean, we were at school by Monday. We left, I think, Arkansas on a—God, we must
have left on a Friday, and we were in school Monday or Tuesday. You don’t miss much.

LC: That relo, wasn’t that tough for you, you said.

FA: It was interesting. I mean, it was always an adventure because you know no
one. The good thing was my sis and I finally had bedrooms, separate bedrooms. I always
had dreams about it before I got there so I was always kind of adventurous and ready. But
you know no one. I came from being head cheerleader, homecoming to nothing. So you
have to make those adjustments. It was an extremely good school, a great academic
school. I had come from a school in Arkansas, which is only below Texas in the ratings.
So I had to sort of do some catch up. It was a bigger school, bigger base. Everybody
dressed differently. They talked differently. They made out more. They were a little bit
wilder. The women cussed and drank. I was used to Southern girls who at least pretended
they didn’t.

LC: This was what year for you?

FA: It would have been my freshman year.

LC: Freshman year. Did you go right to a high school?

FA: Yes. At high school, freshman year was considered part of high school.

LC: What high school was it?

FA: It was called Rudyard High School. I saw it two months ago.

LC: I was going to ask whether you know if it’s still there or not.

FA: It’s still there and thriving and actually much better off without the air base.

LC: Because Kincheloe closed down. Do you know when it closed, roughly?

FA: It closed soon after, within five years of us leaving. So it closed probably in
the early ’70s. It’s now three prisons.

LC: Well, there’s a growth industry.

FA: Yeah. The housing is all owned by the Sault tribe. I didn’t even know there
were Indians up there, but there are.

LC: You lived for three years in the Sault Ste.Marie area and didn’t know there
were Native Americans there?

FA: I lived on the air base and I didn’t know there were Native Americans.

Absolutely, they’re not going to teach you that.
LC: Right. You never met or saw—

FA: No, never met a Native American. They wouldn’t have gone to the school.

LC: Did you go into Sault Ste. Marie?

FA: Yeah, we went about once a month.

LC: Can you describe the town?

FA: When I went there, this is going to be tricky because I just saw it. When I went there I remember it as a small, little sort of, one-street town with some weird little shops in it that served small hamburgers. You had to go to Canada to get really good woolens and to get good food.

LC: Do you remember the locks?

FA: Oh, yeah we saw the locks. I remember tractor pulls with horses. A lot of country kids with thirteen, fourteen kids. They’re big. I mean the kids were big. They’re built big. They’re hearty.

LC: Right. They’re Scandinavian.

FA: Hearty. I mean, they could like—yeah, they could pull a tractor. A lot of just grey. I just remember it being grey. Sure enough it is. (Laughs)

LC: That hasn’t changed.

FA: That hasn’t changed. I think it’s when I went inside myself in my mind, and reading, and art. I just started—I just turned inward.

LC: Did you have some encouragement for that at the high school?

FA: A little bit. I mean, I took an art course, but I was no means the best artist. I was just observing. What I did is I had my first serious boyfriend that was a senior. I just lived in a dream world of kind of that relationship and the books I read, the music I listened to. Doing art—I did silly cartoons and caricatures. It wasn’t serious at all, by any means.

LC: You were just starting out.

FA: Yeah I was just starting out. I probably spent more time learning how to give oral presentations and do research and stuff. I mean, I really liked school. School to me was a safe haven from home.

LC: It was a challenge, too.

FA: It was kind of a challenge.
LC: Because it was different.
FA: Yeah, because it was different. Languages were a little bit harder. Spelling
would always trump me. I was always—I had learned from my dad incredible lessons of
how to study. He really taught me how to study. So even if something didn’t come quick
I knew how to get it eventually. He was very good at helping you with your talk, as I was
a very good presentator and with doing reports. I could write a dynamite report.
LC: So he found time to spend with you?
FA: A little bit. Mainly it was just because I did the charts for him. Yeah. So I
knew how to do one. You know what I mean? Because I had done it for him, I was like,
“Well, this makes sense. I can read this chart.”
LC: How did you actually do in school there academically?
FA: Oh, B’s. Couple of C’s, some A’s.
LC: Were there worries at all in the house when didn’t get all A’s?
FA: Oh, hell no. I don’t even know if they—no. I don’t even know if they—
LC: They didn’t pay attention that much?
FA: Yeah, you were passing. There was never any pressure to be all A’s. I never
got in trouble for any low grades.
LC: How was your mom doing during this period?
FA: Not good.
LC: Worse?
FA: Worse. She steadily would be drunk a month, sober a month. She was just—
she started having grand mal seizures again. It got a little bit more embarrassing because
it was harder to hide.
LC: Was she on medications? Do you know?
FA: Some, but not many. She had been taking off most because they cause—
military doctors can be great and they can be horrid. She mainly had kind of horrid ones
there. She was on some, but then they took her off and they’d cause more grand mal
seizures. She wasn’t a very compliant patient. I just got pissed. I just started ignoring her.
My sister actually became more of a caretaker for her because I just got bored with the
whole thing.
LC: You sort of checked out taking care of her.
FA: Yeah, I was just like, “This isn’t for me.” We would have really good pizza parties for all of our friends or I went to Sunday school every Sunday with my dad. My mom and sister stayed at home. That was kind of the dividing line. Mom and Z stayed at home. Z slept in. Mom cooked fried chicken. Dad and I went to church. He was a great Sunday school teacher. That’s where I learned about philosophy and how to argue and stuff.

LC: What church were you going to?

FA: It was just the base chapel, non-denominational Christian.

LC: So was it pretty much very few rules there at the chapel services?

FA: Rules in terms of organized religion, yes, very few. Our biggest two debates were: Is it sacrilegious to play Jesus Loves Me and dance to it? Was Jesus gay? Was Jesus married to Mary Magdalene, and who cares?

LC: These are quite contemporary sounding to date and this is the mid-’60s.

FA: Yeah, no shit. It was great. One of my best friends in there, who is still a great, a wonderful friend, would always ask, “Blind faith? What the world is blind faith? I want to see it. Show it to me.” I would argue with him all the time about it. So we would go off on topics based on blind faith. Dad loved it. We loved having him for a teacher. It was like freedom for him and freedom for us. We didn’t have to read little books and recite verses and all that crap.

LC: You got to know of a different part of him, maybe.

FA: Yeah. By that point we started going to family reunions. In June we would come down to Texas. I realized he was the rebel of the family. I was like, “Dudley Do Right is the rebel? God, give me a break here.”

LC: But did it make him seem kind of cool in a way?

FA: Yeah. Well, what I found out is that he was probably the most respected member of the whole family, among the men and the women. I mean it’s an interesting process to learn that your dad was a hero in more ways then one. I mean, it really is. He would tell you that I don’t know if it was because of the military or because the military fit him so well, you know what I mean?

LC: Right, which came first?

FA: Yeah, but it was a great match. It was a good match.
LC: Future, let’s take a break now.
FA: Okay.
Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I’m continuing my interview with Future Akins. The date today is Tuesday the thirteenth of January, 2004. I’m in the interview room in the Special Collections building at Texas Tech. Future is at her home here in Lubbock. Future, you were going to tell me something in addition to what you had already said about your aunt whose name was also Future. She was a performer.

Future Akins: Yes.

LC: Can you tell me some more about how she got interested and a little bit more about her career. You said she had been in USO shows?

FA: Well, I think she got interested because she was a show off. I mean, the truth is my grandparents were sort of distant. She was next to the youngest and growing up she was an awkward, overweight, red head and people made fun of her. She was determined to get out from under the shadow of my mom who was always quite pretty. Her way of doing it was sort of acting out and she did. She dropped out of school at seventeen and went to California. My mom was already working for the phone company there. Started working at the phone—not the phone company, but it was a—I still can’t remember. It was an airplane manufacture—Douglas.

LC: Douglas?

FA: Douglas, and started working there and had a growth spurt. She will tell you she was 5’11¼”. She was six feet tall when she wore heels, three- or four-inch heels. She was extremely tall, red headed, big busted. I mean, she stopped traffic.

LC: She was a good looking gal then, just like your mom.

FA: Well, she wasn’t, the truth is my mother was a natural beauty. My mom still wanted everybody to go, “Oh, my word.” My aunt knew how to make herself because of the way she dressed and she got into showbiz. I mean, she got into acting and she could sing and dance. My mom had taught tap dancing in Lubbock so my aunt could do that. So she got into USO shows because you get a lot of attention and you can date.

LC: Was all that in Southern California?
FA: It was there and then, let me see, I have never known the truth about her journey. I know she worked for a while in Miami because there was a connection between Miami and New York City. She eventually went to New York City because that’s where you would go if you were going to study acting. She was a model in New York City, which was really hard because she had to like tape down her breasts and not eat at all to be so skinny. It’s the first time I heard about speed. You took these pills so that you wouldn’t eat. You would be skinny. She and her roommates would walk like Fifth Avenue on Sunday and stop traffic. I mean, their deal was they would get dressed up to the nines, this was their expression. They were all six feet tall and with heels on they were like six and a half feet tall. They would literally get New York cops to stop traffic for them. So she had all these terrible lessons for me about how a real woman never has to buy a meal or pay for a drink. Even if you have to rent a mink stole you do, but you always drag it on the ground behind you like it doesn’t matter.

LC: Okay. Was she an influence in any way? Did you have much contact or know about her?

FA: I’m sure it was an influence in the sense that I never wanted to be like her.

LC: Okay. Did you know what she was up to when you were young, say in the mid-’50s?

FA: Yeah, sort of. She was exotic. Our life was pretty exciting, but she would come, she would sort of fly in for these visits. She had been studying with Strasberg so she would have us do dream interpretations.

LC: By Strasberg, do you mean Lee Strasberg?

FA: Yeah. So she would have, “Tell me what it feels to be a leaf, the last leaf on a tree falling?” We would have to do interpretive dancing to that and tell her our dreams every morning and then act them out. She would dress up like a gypsy and tell fortunes to all of our little kids in the neighborhood. She would bake a cake—she wasn’t a very good cook—and it would come out lop-sided. So she would put blue and green icing on it and call it waterfall.

LC: She sounds wonderful.

FA: She was. She was a great aunt, terrible mother. I mean, she had a son.

Terrible mother, probably not a very good wife, but an insane wild human being who had
her own demons. There were times she was addicted to speed. I spent some time in, a
couple of weeks in Jamaica with her best friend and learned a lot more about the demon
side in her life.

LC: Now when was that trip to Jamaica?

FA: I'm thinking. I'm thinking. Probably six years ago, five years ago, five
summers ago.

LC: You mentioned that she had married a number of times.

FA: She married her first husband, was Francis—Paul Clark. I think Paul Dick
Clark of Coats and Clark, as in the thread.

LC: So he was an heir to the fortune?

FA: Oh, he had money, but he was insanely jealous. So she divorced him because
she couldn't handle and walked away with nothing, but the clothes on her back. She
couldn't handle his jealously. He ended up killing himself in a closet. I mean, literally
going in a closet and shutting the door and killing himself and waiting for someone to
find him. He was crazy. Then she was doing a little bit of acting and some modeling and
married her second husband who was Pierre d'Adesky the son of the French ambassador
in Haiti, in Port-au-Prince. Playboy, they ran a beach in Haiti called Kyona Beach. It's
now owned by the government. It's where my cousin Fulton Pierre d'Adesky was born.
Pierre was a playboy. I mean, he was a playboy when she married him and he was a
playboy after she married him.

LC: Did she live with him in Haiti?

FA: Oh, yeah. She lived in Haiti for probably four or five years. Then they would
come to Lubbock. I mean she had Fulton in the States so that he could be an American
citizen. Then she brought Fulton here and we kept him on the air base in Arkansas for a
while so that his father couldn't kidnap him. Then he came to live here in Lubbock with
my grandparents. Pierre and some of his friends from Haiti came and kidnapped him
because my aunt had kidnapped him out of Haiti, which is in the day it was under Papa
Doc. If she had gotten caught she would have been killed.

LC: Now that's Papa Doc Duvalier?

FA: Yes.

LC: Okay. Was Pierre sort of hooked up with the Duvalier clan?
FA: Oh, in the sense that his parents were the French ambassadors and they were wealthy. I mean, he was French. He was a white diplomat in a black country. Yes, they knew he was horrible. They knew it was terrible. They were all afraid of him and his—oh, what did they call the police?—they had a name for the police, some horrible—Tontons.

LC: Tontons or something.

FA: Yeah, Tontons. But they ran a resort for wealthy people from New York to get quick divorces. They had some of my aunt’s friends, who were show girls, were always invited to be on hand.

LC: I see.

FA: Does that make sense?

LC: Yes. That does make sense.

FA: To console the newly-divorced men.

LC: Did you say that Pierre and company from Haiti—

FA: Came to Lubbock, Texas.

LC: They came to Lubbock, and what year would that be?

FA: Oh, God.

LC: I mean, do you have any idea?

FA: Yeah, let me think. He’s five years younger then me. He was about six. So I would have been about twelve, so about ’62.

LC: They made a flying visit here in—

FA: They made a flying visit. They had my grandparents in the living room, Fulton—I mean Pierre just talked to my grandparents about “I just want to see my son. That’s all I want.”

LC: And Fulton was living here.

FA: He was living here with my grandparents because my dad said, “I’m not going to raise this kid unless you let me adopt him.”

LC: Now this is after he had been with you in Arkansas for awhile?

FA: Yeah, for about a couple of months.

LC: So your dad actually had to say I can not raise this child.
FA: Unless you let me adopt him because you’ll come in and you’ll take him away.

LC: I see. Did he say that to Future?

FA: Oh, yeah, absolutely. He had no—I mean my dad—she may have been six feet tall, but Dad didn’t care. He was like, “These are the rules.” So while they were talking to my grandparents his two henchmen found Fulton in the backyard and got him in a car and took him to the airport and they flew off.

LC: Where did they go? Do you know?

FA: Haiti, Port-au-Prince.

LC: How did they get there? Did they go through Miami?

FA: Yeah. They had family in Miami.

LC: What happened to Fulton?

FA: He was raised in Miami or in Port-au-Prince in Haiti. Then Pierre and my Aunt Future sort of worked it out and he was literally raised between Port-au-Prince, Miami, and New York City until his mother died when he was thirteen.

LC: Then what happened?

FA: He went and lived with his father in Miami.

LC: In Miami?

FA: By that time they had given up the property in Haiti. Although he still has relatives in Haiti. I mean, he goes and he speaks Haitian.

LC: Do you have a relationship with him?

FA: Yeah, I have a really good relationship with him. I’m the closest one to him because he was like a little brother.

LC: He sounds like an interesting man, as well.

FA: It’s been really hard on him. He’s extremely dyslexic. I mean can you imagine coming to Lubbock, Texas, and telling people that you slept with whores in Miami or in Port-au-Prince. They don’t even know where Port-au-Prince is. You speak a language that—

LC: Or Haiti.

FA: Yeah. You speak a language that sounds like Spanish but doesn’t. You’ve seen voodoo ceremonies. Your other side of the family is Catholic diplomats and you’re
in Lubbock, Texas, on a farm. They called him liars. They called him a liar. He would
come down from New York City and talk about going to P.S. 111 or something and they
would call him a liar. It was a horrible life for him.

LC: Yeah. It sounds tough.
FA: It was.
LC: Like a fish out of water, in a way.
FA: Well, and he got to see his mother in Hollywood right before she died of
breast cancer. Her parting gift to him was to get him laid.

LC: That was her parting gift to him?
FA: Yeah. She said, “I’m not going to be around. I want to show you how to
smoke dope, drink booze, and get laid.”
LC: At age, he was how old?
FA: Thirteen. She wasn’t a very good mother. She’s a mother you needed to have
when you turned eighteen. I mean, she’s the type of person you should have gone to visit
when you were eighteen and then learned things like that. Although I would have been in
art museums anyway so it doesn’t matter.
LC: She married again after Pierre.
FA: She married Ed Lauter who’s an actor to this day. He’s a character actor in
movies and on TV all the time.
LC: Can you name some of the films that he has been in?
FA: Well, the one that most people recognize him from, he was one of the guards
in The Longest Yard. He was recently in Seabiscuit. He’s on all the series. He usually
plays a cop or a fireman. He’s been on Third Watch and New York City—you know all
those—
LC: ER?
FA: I don’t know if he’s been on ER.
LC: CSI?
FA: He’s been playing fire chiefs lately and I haven’t seen him. I saw him on
Third Watch and then in another one. I can’t remember.
LC: He’s been acting for many, many years.
FA: Oh, yeah. He was seventeen years younger than her.
LC: Is that right?

FA: Yeah. He had been a stand up comic and they met and they fell in love. He came out here. He had never been in—he never owned a driver’s license, raised in New York City. He thought we were all wealthy because we owned land.

LC: Now when you say he came out here do you mean he came to Lubbock?

FA: Yeah. He came once with my Aunt Future on their way to California to Lubbock. He bought—this is the funniest thing. For his first audition for a movie, I can’t even remember which movie it was, he bought his western clothes at Jack Davis Western Wear here in town and went around taking a little recording of people’s accents.

LC: Is that right?

FA: Yeah.

LC: He went around with a tape recorder?

FA: Uh-huh. Whenever he plays a colonel he always emulates my dad.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah. Oh, yeah. He’s an actor. That’s what he did.

LC: Did he tell you that? That he’s emulating your dad?

FA: Oh, yeah.

LC: Do you have any kind of relationship with him at this point?

FA: No. He’s came once after my Aunt Future died because it was shortly after that both my husband died and my grandmother died and it was just too hard for him. I mean, I’ve written him a couple of times. Fulton has talked to him a couple times, but he’s remarried to another actress and has another family. It was too hard. He can’t do it.

LC: Your aunt, did she—as you grew older, did she continue to see you?

FA: Oh, yeah. She would fly in and see us. She was crazy. I mean, she was wonderful. She would send Christmas gifts with no names on them because you had to find them by the vibration.

LC: Okay. Can you explain what you mean by that?

FA: As best as she did. She would just wrap them all differently and she would say, “Find the one that you like. I mean, find the gift that looks like it’s yours.” They were all sort of weird little gifts like candles that floated in water. I mean, none of them
were specific for anyone, but she would just say—she knew they were all silly gifts. She
would just say, “Find a package that looks good to you and that’s yours.”

LC: So you were supposed to key in on some level to what was inside.

FA: Oh, she would just—I don’t know. Either that or she didn’t want to be
accused of making a decision. I mean, she was great fun. My friends loved her because
she could out-drink and out-smoke all of them. She would sing beautiful Broadway
songs. Oh, at some point my cousin Fulton, I guess he was about twelve, because this was
before she had breast cancer, decided that he wanted to be baptized, wanted to be like his
buds. So he went to a little tiny Baptist church and they were singing some hymn in, I
think, crackly little voices. My Aunt Future starts bellowing it out as if it were a
Broadway production.

LC: Was that here in Lubbock or in New York?

FA: Oh, yeah.

LC: That was here?

FA: Uh-huh. It’s—I can’t remember. It’s on 50th Street. A little Baptist Church.

LC: 50th Street and—?

FA: Next to—close to Q. I would have to look it up. Some little—Tabernacle
Baptist Church. She just, like, belted it out.

LC: Would you say that was again her some kind of attention getting thing for
her?

FA: Oh, yeah. Well, I think one, she hated people who couldn’t sing for shit. She
could sing. She could really sing. She was—okay, this is the other story that is like one of
my favorite Aunt Future stories. When my mom and dad were first married and they were
in Langley my aunt would come down from New York City to visit. What she would do,
she would put on a leopard-skin bikini. She would go to the highest diving board. Of
course, she gets every one’s attention. She’s six feet tall, leopard-skin bikini, red hair.
Well, they think, “Oh, she’s just going jump in and act silly.” They didn’t know she was
a diver. She would do a swan dive.

LC: How did she learn to do that? She grew up in Lubbock. Was it out in
California?
FA: Yeah, out in California and when she worked in Miami because she was a synchronized swim person.

LC: Oh, right. That’s right.

FA: She didn’t know all the dives, but she could do a couple of dives. A jack knife and a swan dive.

LC: So that got attention.

FA: Oh, duh. Huge boobs, bikini. She would come out of the water like some vision. Dad said literally she had the pick of any officer on the base. She would pick one, one single little pilot person and have a grand weekend with him and then would fly home. Periodically the different officers would come to him and say, “Isn’t it time for your sister-in-law to come?” She would get—she’s the only person I know that could get my dad singing bawdy Air Force songs.

LC: Which he knew a few of.

FA: Oh, yeah. But he was always so straight around us but she would get him—and he would recite Rupert Brooke poetry.

LC: Really?

FA: Yeah.

LC: What do you think she brought out in your dad?

FA: His younger days before he had to worry about my mom. I think he—by the time I was conscious of what all was going on in your past and things as a kid. He was so worried about Mom and her acting out and her drinking he didn’t have time to have fun. I mean, he really didn’t. So what my Aunt Future brought out of him was a couple of hours of, “Hey, Sadie, used to be a fighter pilot and we had a grand time.”

LC: Let’s talk about your dad for a few minutes.

FA: Sure.

LC: How did he get the moniker of Sadie, do you know?

FA: Yeah, playing basketball because he had one really good shot and they called him a Slick-eyed Sadie.

LC: Do you know what the origin of that phrase is?

FA: Nope, just a Texas thing.

LC: A Texas thing, okay.
FA: Just some Slick-eyed Sadie. I’m sure it probably has to do—I don’t know. I actually don’t know.

LC: Okay. That will be one for the—for someone else to think of.

FA: Yeah. I didn’t even know his name was Dudley until we went to family reunions. I mean, because they all called him Dudley. I was like, “Who are they talking to.”

LC: So you knew in some way that his first name was Sadie, not really Dudley.

FA: Well, his initials were DS. I technically knew, but all the people on the base called him Sadie. Well, they actually called him colonel.

LC: Right. I’m sure. What was his middle name?

FA: Stephenson.

LC: Okay. Was that a family name?

FA: Not that I know of. I mean, his dad was William. I can’t remember his middle name. William something Akins. I think William Wylie Akins, but William Akins and his mother was Wylie Duranta.

LC: Duranta?

FA: Uh-huh, Duranta.

LC: How do you spell that?


LC: And Stephenson—

FA: I just think they heard it somewhere because it was spelled “ph.” I mean he was the thirteenth kid.

LC: Is that right? It was spelled “ph”? 

FA: Yeah. S-T-E—yeah. So I mean that’s twenty-six names they had to come up with. That’s a lot of names. They had Wylie and Colin and Edna, let’s see, Addie, Headie, Edna, Helen, Gladys, William, Colin, George.

LC: They were kind of scraping the bottom.

FA: I think they were scraping the bottom when they came to Dudley.

LC: When you were talking yesterday about your dad’s having had an assignment when he was fighter, we talked about him as having been in Panama.

FA: Yeah, but he’s was actually in Guatemala.
LC: He was in Guatemala. Have you recalled anything more about that assignment that you might’ve heard?

FA: I don’t know except for that he actually loved to travel then outside of that. He was anxious. They really thought the war was coming there. They think that when it didn’t come there that’s why he changed to reconnaissance. I mean, he wanted to be somewhere where you could be, where you were in the action. He’s just a cool young man that thought that he could do anything.

LC: Right. Skipping forward to when your dad was up at Kincheloe Air Force Base in Northern Michigan up in the Upper Peninsula. That assignment was his final one within the Air Force and that was from 1964 to 1967?

FA: Correct.

LC: During that time—although you were very young still.

FA: I was in high school, yeah.

LC: You were pretty remote. Do you remember much about the escalation of the Vietnam conflict and any opinions that your dad might have had about that?

FA: Well, there were two ongoing opinions. First of all, it was a really tough time for base kids.

LC: Why was that?

FA: Well, it was our dad’s who were going to go to war. Okay.

FA: You were old enough to know what that meant. It also meant your boyfriends were going to go to war. So there were guys graduating and it was before Tet. There were guys graduating and going to war. So you had friends, I mean base kids, you may have one class, but you’re really all mixed because you’re the base kids against the town kids. So you knew of people who were going to war already. You knew fathers who went. That’s how it was. Dad had two opinions. One, it’s the only war we got, which is the service standard military bravo type crap. And he knew it says peace is our profession and it talks about fighting. Anyway, I don’t want to go into all that. The other one was, he just kept saying “This is a stupid war.”

LC: What do you think he meant by that?
FA: I think that he thought that Korea hadn’t ended well. He saw it as a remake of Korea and that it was going to get us nowhere because he didn’t believe in demilitarized zones. He didn’t believe in lines you couldn’t cross. He believed if you were fighting you fought ‘til it was over, but you didn’t have these rules about you can’t go here. If the enemy is there, that’s where you go and you kill them or you take them, capture them, or whatever. You don’t have these stupid rules about—he just thought it was killing people.

LC: Do you remember your dad as having opinions for example about the firing of MacArthur when he posited the idea of putting U.S. troops into China and entering—?

FA: Oh, my dad hated MacArthur because of Corregidor and Billy Tom. He had heard from Billy Tom, his cousin, Billy Tom Akins, how MacArthur had deserted the men. The only thing that Dad said Billy Tom ever got livid about was MacArthur.

LC: So when Truman fired MacArthur in 1951 there was no love lost there. Your father didn’t feel sadly.

FA: Probably not. I was only one years old, but I can’t imagine he would have because he had already knew what Billy Tom told him and that was his first—he was going to believe Billy Tom over any politician.

LC: Sure. So in terms of the Vietnam conflict, your father felt that the kind of political constraints on the prosecution was a problem?

FA: Yeah. He didn’t think that wars should be fought by politicians. I mean, he just thought that they didn’t know what they were doing. He didn’t understand why we were doing it. On one hand, he would say “It’s the only war we have.” He could spout we’re stopping the communist tide, but by then he had seen enough war. What he would say is “The only people who want to go war are those who have never been.”

LC: Right, which did not include him. He had seen service.

FA: Right. He had seen service and his family had seen service. He was like, “The only people who want to go to war are the ones who have never been.” So he thought it was bullshit, but he knew it was his duty to do it, but he also knew he wasn’t going to be called because he knew he was retiring.

LC: Right. But he did know people who were going to be called?

FA: Absolutely he knew people who were called.
LC: And probably from Kincheloe Base.
FA: Absolutely.
LC: Did you know anyone in your high school who became part of the military service and went to Vietnam?
FA: It was a strange mixture. It’s like some of the kids—I guess this may be a pretty normal mixture. Most of us were going to go to college. A couple wanted to go the Air Force Academy. I mean, they wanted to be career officers. Most people didn’t. We wanted other opportunities than just being in the military.
LC: Now this is speaking of the kids of—?
FA: Dependents.
LC: Okay, the kids of military servicemen.
FA: We did know that if you went in you didn’t really want to be an enlisted person because rank has its privilege. Although some people did because they couldn’t make it in college. You didn’t have deferments or they thought it was their patriotic duty. Most, with the encouragement of their fathers, it was to avoid Vietnam. I mean they weren’t going to be conscientious objectors nor desert. It was—I think fathers took the time to explain how really shitty war can be. We were at first more concerned with our dads. We really were. I know I did because I’ve seen the names, but mainly it was about avoiding all that, going to college.
LC: For example, you said earlier that you were dating someone in the last years that you were there at Kincheloe. Do you remember that guy’s name?
FA: Yeah. His name is Bill Blazer He’s a lawyer in Arizona.
LC: Was Bill concerned about going to Vietnam?
FA: No, because he knew, A, he had really hurt his knees playing football. So he would never—even though he was a great football player went on to play college football at San Francisco State, he wasn’t going to be drafted. They wouldn’t have drafted him because of his knees. He knew he was going to college. I mean, everyone I knew was going to college. That was your college deferment.
LC: How did you feel?
FA: It changed. I was raised to be a Republican. When we first moved to Lubbock, which would have been, this would have been the summer of ’67, there was a
pro-war, not pro-war, but pro-America march. I can remember making signs, picket signs with my sister and we marched down Broadway in a pro-America march.

LC: Was that inspired by the events in Vietnam that March?
FA: It was the Fourth of July, a Fourth of July thing. It was probably within a year. What changed me was Kent State.

LC: Okay. Before we get to Kent State let me ask you about that march. Did you participate in that willingly or was it kind of your dad’s idea? How did that come about?
FA: Actually, I don’t know. I think it was my sister and I. She had a little boyfriend that wanted to do it.

LC: You had not been back in Lubbock very long?
FA: No. It was new friends. Actually, her boyfriend is now the head of the food bank.

LC: That would be the South Plains Food Bank?
FA: Yeah. David Weaver. It was his idea.
LC: Okay.
FA: I can blame him. So I think we just wanted to do something. We still had ties to the air base here, although dad had never been stationed here. We went to Sunday school at the air base. We shopped at the commissary. It’s really, really hard going to civilian life.

LC: Had you graduated high school?
FA: No, I finished up high school here. I went a year and a half here. I went half way through my junior year and my senior year—with kids who had been together since kindergarten it was really hard, who had never been out of Texas. Hell, they’d never even been out of Lubbock, most of them.

LC: How was that adjustment for you?
FA: It was hideous. It was horrible.
LC: And why?
FA: Because they were idiots. Well, I mean the school system was so much—Texas doesn’t have a good education system. I came from one of the best in the nation. Michigan has excellent education. I came to Texas that doesn’t. So they were redneck.
They were prejudiced. They didn’t know how to transfer my grades. They didn’t know how to look at my grades and figure out what was going on. I mean, they couldn’t—I ended up taking a lot of art courses, government and art.

LC: Now when you say the kids were kind of idiots and prejudiced, did you see much racial division amongst kids in Lubbock then?

FA: Yes.

LC: Can you describe some of it?

FA: I went to Coronado High School. We had one black student out of three thousand.

LC: Do you remember that student’s name?

FA: It was a young girl. No, because she was in a class two grades behind me. I barely knew people in my classrooms. But I remember that they wanted to put on Snow White as the school play and have her be Snow White and everyone freaked.

LC: Everyone thought that was hilarious or outrageous or bizarre?

FA: I don’t know. They weren’t going to let us do it. I got called in for putting daisies—I did a lot of posters for different sports events and stuff. Even though I had come in here late I ended up making student council because they put me in the thug, druggie home room because I had a northern accent. They didn’t know what to do with me.

LC: So they put you in the druggie home room?

FA: Uh-huh, and because they were all so drugged up they voted me for student council. So I got to be on student council. So I did all these posters and I put daisies on them. They decided that was hippie communist stuff so I had to take them all down. I got called in once because my hair was too long.

LC: Your hair was too long?

FA: My hair was too long. I had the word “bit**hing” on my notebook, the surfer term bitching, got in trouble for that.

LC: You were just way different.

FA: Oh, yeah.

LC: Similarly, the young African American girl that you’re talking about was also probably—
FA: Oh, yeah. They had barely started letting blacks live past Avenue A.

LC: Now what do you mean by that?

FA: Avenue A was the demarcation line for African Americans. Literally, you could not live past Avenue A.

LC: Now do you mean west of Avenue A?

FA: Correct, if you were African American.

LC: This was some kind of unofficial ordinance or was it actually a—

FA: Actually, I think it was an official ordinance in Lubbock.

LC: The period that we’re talking about, 1967, ’68.

FA: I don’t know when they actually got rid of the law, but people—look at the population today. You know, it’s still east Lubbock.

LC: And that means African American?

FA: Yeah.

LC: What high school was over on that side?

FA: Dunbar.

LC: Did Coronado ever play Dunbar in sports?

FA: No, because Dunbar was a grade less. You know like we were 4-A and they were 3-A. Also, they were afraid to play Dunbar. They didn’t want to play Dunbar. They were terrified.

LC: Because?

FA: They were black and bigger.

LC: They might win?

FA: Yeah. (Laughs)

LC: Okay. Was there also some kind of underlying, sort of racial tension that might explode if black and white teams in the same city confronted each other?

FA: You know, I don’t know. Coronado was at that time the wealthy school. It was just the day that new cars come out and there would be half a dozen of them in the parking lot. Our annuals were late one year so a girl had her daddy take his private plane and go and pick them up for us. I mean, there was some poverty there but what you saw was the newest school in town and a lot of money. For all that money there were a couple of people who really tried to be nice, but most of them—I was so different. They had
known each other so long. Nobody was equipped to deal with someone—they didn’t
know what to do with me.

LC: You, on the other hand, had adapted through several changes.

FA: Oh, yeah. This was my third high school. I was like “Okay, it takes me about
two days to figure out what the local style is.” I noticed boys wore a lot of white socks.
That was kind of weird. I didn’t know it was like—God, white socks. Okay I can deal
with that. They just dressed differently up north. Girls didn’t wear knee socks down here
because it wasn’t cold enough.

LC: Was there within the high school a kind of—I don’t know—a socioeconomic
pecking order where you had—

FA: Absolutely.

LC: Can you describe some of that?

FA: Yeah, people who lived in the Rush district which is north of 19<sup>th</sup> and south
of 4<sup>th</sup> Street who have homes that look like mini-mansions were cheerleaders and student
council. They ran the school. They were the ones who were class favorites and had been
since junior high. They were the same cheerleaders since junior high. They were the same
ones voted for whatever, teen of the month. They got the classes that now would be
called advanced placement. I mean, yeah, it was all geared for them.

LC: Was there any awareness in this fairly insular group of young people that
you’re describing about the escalation of the war?

FA: They were probably all pro. I would say that. It didn’t take me long in art
classes to meet people who would have not been for Vietnam. If you have money you
weren’t going to go to war.

LC: What do you mean by that?

FA: You were going to go to college and you were going to get a college
deferment. If you came from a lower-middle class or a poor family you probably couldn’t
go to college.

LC: So your chances of—

FA: It depended upon your draft number, but, yeah, that was a real fear. So, yeah,
I had a number—I can remember a number of young men, Jim Sholtz. Well, he just
moved out of Lubbock, went to Vietnam and did his whole tour. People who had to go
and just sort of doe-eyed. All the stories about, “Tell them you’re gay. Eat this. Be real drunk. Take this drug. This will work I promise you.” It will get you out. Wealthy kids didn’t have to worry about it.

LC: Was there kind of a grape vine of advice like that of how to get out of physicals?

FA: Yeah. Oh, sure.

LC: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

FA: I didn’t pay much attention because as a girl I didn’t have to worry about it. But it would be if you would just hear about mainly you could tell them you were gay or you had to act like you were really crazy or you had to be underweight. So don’t eat anything for like the week ahead of time. Or tell them you do drugs, but then you were worried because they might send you to jail. In those days, in Texas, you might get forty years for a joint.

LC: For a joint of marijuana?

FA: Yeah.

LC: What about the “tell them you’re gay.” What would be the impact of that?

FA: They wouldn’t accept you. All your friends would know you weren’t gay so you didn’t care. You just didn’t want to be in the Army.

LC: Did you ever know of anybody who tried that?

FA: No, I just heard them talking about it. I never even knew anyone who tried not to. I mean, when it finally came you were terrified. There was a whole bunch of other guys who were just as terrified. They didn’t lie well.

LC: What year did you graduate?


LC: At what point in the year? Was it in the spring like normal?

FA: In May and then I started Tech in June.

LC: 1968, as you’ve already said was a very important year with regard to the war and apparently with regard to your thinking about it. When you heard about the shootings at Kent State where were you? Do you remember?

FA: I don’t remember where I was. I probably just heard it on the nightly news. The conversation I remember was sitting again at the table with my dad. It’s also when I
knew that he had totally changed his mind and we were talking about it again. I mean, we talked about Vietnam at the table. It’s Saturday afternoon having hamburgers. He would make hamburgers for all our friends and stuff. I can remember looking across the table from him and saying, “Dad, that was just a girl walking to class. That could have been me walking across—she wasn’t a protestor. She was going to class. She was doing what she was supposed to do and she was killed.” Dad got it. He got that things were out of hand when you have National Guard with live bullets and was on a campus. From that moment on he just didn’t speak about Vietnam the same way.

LC: How did it change?

FA: He would just say “It’s not a good war. It’s not right. What they’re doing is not right.” He wouldn’t really get in big debates about it. The most he could say was “It’s not right.”

LC: But he didn’t want to pour forth in detail, in front of you or do you think in general?

FA: I think in general. I’m not sure what he did at work and all. He was working for Tech then.

LC: Now how did he get that job at Tech? Do you remember?

FA: He came back to Lubbock because one of my grandparents, my mother’s parents were here. He just knew that wherever we ended up we were going to end up taking care of my grandmother, my grandparents. So we might as well come here. He thought he had some connections here. My dad hadn’t really been one of those—most people when they know they’re going to retire, they start lining up a job, but my dad just never really knew how to do that. I mean, he just wasn’t that type of person. So we came back here and at first he just interviewed for a lot of jobs. I never knew how hard that must have been.

LC: Yes. When you say it must have been hard what’s it mean?

FA: He didn’t have a college degree. He was a lieutenant colonel, in the Air Force for twenty-eight years. Are you going to want to hire someone who’s been through two wars and is a commander? You’re going to be terrified of that man.

LC: Right, the assumption is he’s not going to be able to take direction.
FA: The assumption is he’s going to run rings around you and you’re going to look like an idiot. So at first he thought he was going to work for Preston Smith in doing his campaign.

LC: Now Preston Smith was?

FA: Running for governor of Texas, but then I think he very honestly analyzed my mom’s condition. So there was a job as assistant director, just one of the people, a counselor at Tech for financial aid. He actually went to work. He worked the first month without pay, or the first two weeks without pay, because he said, “Give me the chance and I’ll show you how good I am.” The guy did and he ended up being great. That man, I think his name is Tom Stover, when he retired he recommended my dad get it even though Dad didn’t have a degree or anything. Dad went on to be director of financial aid.

He worked for Tech for ten years.

LC: For ten years from 1960—would you say 8?

FA: Probably ‘68, yeah to ’78.

LC: Now Tom Stover is the one who gave him the opportunity. Sounds like he might have been a little bit reluctant, as well.

FA: I think so, but Dad also—he knew some of the old timers at Tech. He knew former president of the university, Grover Murray. There was some people that had played on the football team with Dad. The thing was about Tech, they remembered him from the Cotton Bowl.

LC: Right and he had been the only one to score. That was a big deal.

FA: It’s a really big deal. Everybody knows that when they went to the second Cotton Bowl it was bull shit.

LC: Now what do you mean by that?

FA: Well, it was the last year for the Southwest Conference. Tech had never gone to the Cotton Bowl and they really had a pathetic record but because they had never been they kind of like let them go.

LC: So it was sort of a mercy thing.

FA: Yes, a mercy thing. In fact, Dad got up and walked out of a conference about it.

LC: Really?
FA: Yeah. It was after a, pretty soon after his stroke. We went to this meeting at the Southwest Collection about “We’re going to honor the players from ’38, ’39. Here are the contemporary players.” The people they had talking was “Dub” Rushing, who was nothing more than a fan. My dad was like, “Why in the hell is he talking?” But he was being polite. Then they went on to talk about how the current team was just like the old team. It was gallant and all that. Dad just stood up and said, “Bullshit. We’re out of here.” We got up and walked out.

LC: He was offended?
FA: Yeah, absolutely.
LC: He was offended because why?
FA: His team had been undefeated and untied and no one else has ever done that.
LC: He didn’t like the kind of, what he maybe saw as a false analogy.
FA: Yeah. He thought it was bullshit. He had no tolerance for lies and bullshit.
LC: He made that known.
FA: He made that known. He was like, “We’re out of here.” I said, “Yes, sir.”
LC: Now you started as a student at Tech in the fall of 1968.
FA: The summer.
LC: Oh, summer.
FA: Yeah, I was out of high school about three days and started Tech.
LC: Started at Tech in the summer. Why was that instead of taking summer off?
FA: I was bored. Why? School was too—I breathed—my grades—I just found my report card actually from that time. Outside of French, which I just didn’t pay attention to, I took art courses and government. I was so bored with high school I couldn’t wait to start college.
LC: So you started right away in the summer. What was it like having your dad be a Tech employee as you were a student, or did that not affect you?
FA: Oh, it was great. It meant I had a ride to school. It meant when things got jammed up in registration he walked two doors down, knocked on the door of Pete Peterson, who was the director of registration at the time, registrar, and I got it taken care of. Got me summer jobs or jobs every registration from then on, working registration.
You didn’t do it online, obviously. If you were a worker you got to register first so you got your classes.

LC: So you actually worked registration?
FA: Yeah. It use to be in the coliseum and all the departments would have their cards lined up and you would stand in line and ask for a card. When the cards ran out kids would have to get out of line, figure out a new schedule and you know.

LC: The cards were what, how you got into a class?
FA: Yeah. You would bring your card with you and show it to the teacher.
LC: You had to have that card in order to be enrolled in the class?
FA: Yeah. It was a real hands-on—in some ways it was better than—
LC: Now why do you say that? You mean better than registering online?
FA: Yeah, well because things get jammed now. I just had a friend who, at her school the entire computer system went down during registration. So it was fun. It was kind of an ordeal, but it was fun. It was great having Dad work there because he knew the system. When things got jammed I had help.

LC: He was on your side.
FA: Absolutely on my side.
LC: What about your sister?
FA: Oh, she partied.
LC: Now was she still going to—was she going to Coronado?
FA: Yes. She went to Coronado. She gave the graduation speech. She was in drama and oral interp. She started Tech and majored in theatre and parties. She’ll tell you that. She had a 1.0 or 1.4 her first two and a half years of college.
LC: What happened after two and a half years?
FA: Or three years. Well, she got married. I got married right after college, after I graduated. Actually, I liked three hours. Got married and came back and got the three hours. She got married right after I did to a man who had not been in Vietnam, but had been in Thailand as a demolitions expert. Then—when did she get serious? Then after I was widowed, which was less then two years later, she got a divorce and came back to Lubbock. They had already moved back to Lubbock and she started to school and she got serious about getting a degree and ended up with a four point.
LC: What did she end up studying?
FA: Human development, early childhood development and specialty in female sexual dysfunction.
LC: She lives where?
FA: She lives in Austin. She’s a benefits analysis officer.
LC: Did you stay with art as an undergrad?
FA: It was sort of this general art degree with a specialty in art history, but they didn’t have a degree in art history. My dad wasn’t quite liberal enough or supportive enough to let me get a degree in art. I had to have something that looked like I could fall back on or something.
LC: That was supposed to be art history?
FA: Oh, I don’t know what it was supposed to be, but it wasn’t supposed to be studio art. But he did keep—he asked me to buy all my supplies or as many as I could at the book store on campus so that he could keep—well, he kept tabs of what I spent on art supplies. I lived at home all through college. Because he could then change the amount of money given to art students when they got loans.
LC: Based on his information as to how much it cost to actually be an art student?
FA: Yeah. That it cost much more to be an art student, architect, and music student than their formulas had allocated it.
LC: So you were kind of providing a source of kind of secret information about how much it actually cost.
FA: Oh, yeah.
LC: He utilized that in developing financials.
FA: He changed the rules.
LC: Did he really?
FA: He changed two rules. Yeah, he changed that rule because he found out that architects spend a lot of money on art supplies. Artists do. Music students have to buy all their own music and stuff and it cost. I mean he just didn’t know that. He said, “We’re not allocating that. I mean, we allocate books. We know what books cost and lab fees and all of this in our financial aid packet, but we’re not really allowing for supplies that are
necessary.” The other thing he did is he started formulating. He figured out that kids
borrow a lot of money and they didn’t know what trouble they were getting into. So he
said, “Okay, there’s a point where if you’ve borrowed, let’s say $10,000, we will let
every student whose borrowed that much money know that the month after they graduate
they will have to start paying back X amount of dollars.”

LC: And tell them how much that’s going to be.
FA: And tell them how much that’s going to be. Then he would suggest if you
know you’re going to get a job then that’s okay, you’ve got it covered. It’s fine, but what
you may want to do is take off a semester, start paying back some of this loan now so that
it will be lower later.

LC: Did students tend of take that up?
FA: Yeah. He actually did that state wide and then maybe nationally it was done.
Kids were getting in serious debt problems.

LC: Right, borrowing for their tuition and fees.
FA: Yeah. Yeah.
LC: You lived at home this whole time.
FA: Yeah, I lived at home.
LC: How were things going at home?
FA: Horrid. (Laughs) Well, Mom was a raging alcoholic by then, but it’s
amazing. It’s amazing how you can not notice that. I would grab a ride with Dad in the
morning. I would spend most of time in the library just reading. Then I’d come home
with him at night. Then I had a boyfriend. Two things: I don’t think I ever appreciated
how good it was to be able to live at home because it was just safe. In those days the
dorms had rules about when girls had to be in and stuff. So I had a lot more freedom, plus
I just had safety. I had food cooked for me, my laundry done.

LC: Now was your mom doing that kind of stuff at home?
FA: Oh, yeah, when she was sober. Sure.
LC: During those years at Tech, did you stay there all four years?
FA: Yeah, I got my first degree from there in ’72 got my masters in ’77.
LC: During those years as an undergraduate at Tech, do you remember much
about the political climate on campus?
FA: It was not as intense as elsewhere. One of the neat things was they were building onto what’s now the Science Quadrangle. They were doing some construction in there, around the chemistry building. They had a big fence up, a construction fence. People would do political slogans on that fence.

LC: Really?

FA: Oh, yeah, it was a great fence. It was a wonderful fence. I can remember one in particular that a guy from down the street wrote. Richard Holton wrote this one. He had painted it black and this was during Biafra, too. He painted a little starving black kid. He just—what he wrote on it was, “Give a damn, please give a damn.” But there would be anti-war and then there would be pro-war things. They had an anti-war demonstration on campus and the police came. Tech students were really polite. They lined it up in a line and turned in their IDs.

LC: They turned in their IDs to whom?

FA: Mm-hmm, so that they could be identified.

LC: To whom did they give their IDs?

FA: The university police so they could be identified.

LC: As having been at this demonstration?

FA: Yeah. There weren’t any great—there would always be someone around the student union. John Denver went to school here. There would be musicians who would come through. We had a peace concert out in a big cotton field on the edge of town somewhere out by The Strip on a spring day that turned bitterly cold, blowing dust. Some of the local churches, Episcopalian and Methodist, Presbyterian churches took everybody in. It was after Woodstock. It was supposed to be like a peace festival, but it ended up being a horrible, sand-blowing terrible mess.

LC: So when you said they took you in, what happened?

FA: Well, they took—I lived at home. They took the people who were going to camp out in because it got down to freezing. They just let them sleep in the sanctuary and gave them a meal.

LC: So were there a lot of people who attended that who were not from Lubbock then?
FA: Oh, yeah, probably three or four hundred, but that was a lot for Lubbock. They were freaking out over that. So I think that—I don’t think anybody by that time was for the war except for the ROTC guys. I just think that nobody—they were all in college. It was an abstract thing. They weren’t going to speak out against America. Although there were big—I mean this is the interesting part. As an undergraduate, because I had two different boyfriends. When I was with one of them I was a Democrat. When I was with the other one I was Republican. I mean, I was not political. I probably joined the Young Republicans because my boyfriend was president and because Texas had always been such a Democratic Party that I thought you should have a choice. I mean, to me it was about that. I didn’t know enough to know the difference between the two parties.

LC: Were there particular feelings about Richard Nixon that you remember?

FA: Yeah, they were all pro-Nixon. I mean, yeah, we were young Republicans. They thought he was great. We were idiots.

LC: You were not one of the participants in the anti-war demonstration that you talked about?

FA: No. No.

LC: What kind of kids were? Do you remember?

FA: Philosophy and art majors.

LC: Okay.

FA: Yeah, nice kids. I mean, we had one guy on campus, I can’t remember his name who was trying to start an SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) chapter here and that didn’t work.

LC: That didn’t work?

FA: That didn’t work.

LC: It died for lack of interest?

FA: Yeah.

LC: Was he ever targeted in any way because he had—

FA: Oh, yeah. He was photographed a lot.

LC: By whom?

FA: I would assume city police.

LC: Do you remember his name?
FA: I’ll try to think of it. It’s been a long time.
LC: Oh, sure. I know.
FA: I mean a long, long time. He was real good looking, real charismatic. It was also when transcendental meditation was brought to campus, and taught free. What else happened? The women’s movement. By my senior year I had stopped wearing bras.
LC: Was that pretty radical?
FA: It was pretty radical.
LC: At Texas Tech?
FA: It was pretty radical at Texas Tech. Birth control became available. There was one doctor in town. He would probably feel you up, I mean literally. He accosted me when I got my pills.
LC: Really?
FA: Oh, yeah. It was sleazy. There was a lawyer in town that if you got busted for marijuana and you were a good looking girl you could trade. The things came, but they came in what I always just called the “Lubbock shuffle way.”
LC: What do you mean by that, the Lubbock shuffle?
FA: This is defined, actually I’m stealing the words from Deborah Milosevich, an artist in town. You want to do a piece of art and you want neon, but it’s Lubbock so you have to use Christmas lights.
LC: That’s because why?
FA: We just don’t have the resources of a big town. We don’t have the money. We don’t have the support system so we make do.
LC: How did that fit with this idea there was corruption around getting pills or—
FA: If there had been enough, if there had been enough doctors here that just cared about patients there would be more then one doctor that you could get a pill from.
LC: Right. So you wouldn’t have to put up with—
FA: Yeah. If there had been more then one lawyer even willing to take on cases about marijuana you wouldn’t have to put out.
LC: Did either of these—I assume they’re men—ever get reported to the police?
FA: Shit no.
LC: Would anything have been done if they had been?
FA: No. (Laughs) In fact, one went on to be very famous.
LC: Really?
FA: Yeah, but I’m not going to mention his name. I’m not going to be—
LC: I’m with you. That’s fine. That’s totally fine, but you’re talking about a particular time of extreme change, really.
FA: Well, Lubbock, this is—when the rest of the country—like I was out in San Francisco in the summer of ’69 with a boyfriend who went to San Francisco State, who was a football player. Okay. He was a football player at San Francisco State so he was part of the group that retook back the buildings after the sit in. He lived in a fraternity. He wasn’t a member of the fraternity, but he lived in a fraternity right off the tip of Golden Gate Park, which means he was off of Haight and Ashbury. So if like—and he was a military brat. So it was like everybody—I mean, I was more than aware of what was going on. Did I understand it? I didn’t do drugs. There were drugs in Lubbock. There were people doing drugs in Lubbock. Lubbock wasn’t as political. It sort of came down to “I’m going to school. Is it going to help me get an A in algebra,” you know?
LC: Right. Okay.
FA: I think that that’s—Lubbock has just—I think Lubbock—I like how Molly Ivins talks about Lubbock. It’s one of her favorite places because you know where you stand with everybody. It was never a hot bed. We were never—there were so many great universities doing wonderful work. We didn’t have professors. I mean my Latin teacher on the Moratorium Day.
LC: Moratorium Day meaning?
FA: It would be a day of—usually the beginning and the fall semester. They call for a national moratorium where you didn’t have to honor all that had died in Vietnam. Everyone was supposed to boycott class. He had been taken prisoner in Lithuania.
LC: He being the professor?
FA: Yeah, the professor. He said—Dr. Jergin—no what is his name? I can’t remember. He’s dead now. Anyway he said, “I can’t tell you what to do, but I’m not taking roll that day.” He wore a black arm band all day. He was one of only a handful that would have ever—I mean, people just wouldn’t speak out about it.
LC: Even that was a fairly radical gesture.
FA: It was a pretty radical thing. The fence around the construction site was the most radical thing that happened.

LC: Did you ever take pictures or see that as an inspiration for art? Did you see it that way?

FA: No. Oh, as an expression of art? I’ve never forgotten it. I think it’s what helped—I mean, I do work that always has words in it. I became a feminist. I became a feminist my senior year. I read Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. That was it and I had a click.

LC: That was hugely influential?

FA: Absolutely. It changed my mind. I should say it was the straw that changed my mind. I had other readings. My Aunt Future talked to me about being independent and stuff. I was married at the time. Actually it was after I had graduated so it was that summer. Hank was an economics major. I said, “Look at what I read. Look at what I read.” He said, “Well, how silly is that? We can’t under employ fifty-one percent of the population. That makes no economic sense.” (Laughs)

LC: Hank was your husband?

FA: My first husband.

LC: He had attended Tech as well?

FA: Yeah. He graduated from Tech in business, economics major, international trade. He was getting ready to go to law school when he was killed.

LC: Okay. Was that an accidental death?

FA: Yeah, he was killed by a drunk driver on his motorcycle.

LC: That was in December of ’73, I think you had told me?

FA: Correct. Yes.

LC: Your sort of personal evolution, did it in any way do you think sort of parallel to what was happening in the rest of the country or did you kind of think you were on your own sort of path and Lubbock was a special place?

FA: I just thought I was behind the curve. I mean, I think that when other people were going to SDS meetings or going to sit-ins or dropping acid. I mean, I never dropped acid. All of that, I just think that I missed it. I think I got involved in art and I just missed it. It took me a long time to catch up in terms of what were the real issues, not what were
the emotional knee-jerk issues. I can remember the summer of ’72 after graduating Hank
and I went to New Jersey to sell advertising in college telephone directories. His
stepfather owned company that printed them. We were in Trenton, New Jersey, and in
Newark. I mean, holy shit, they were the hot beds.

LC: Yes, it was a completely environment.

FA: Yeah. I’m a little white girl with a Texas accent and not even smart enough
to read the name. I can remember going into a Black Panther head shop type place, you
know, and knowing instantly that my life was in danger. The only thing that got me out
was that obviously everybody knew I was stupid.

LC: That you were naive?

FA: Oh, beyond naive. I was stupid.

LC: Okay

FA: I mean, here is a Black Panther head shop and I’m asking if they want to buy
advertising in an all white school telephone directory.

LC: How did you actually wonder into that place?

FA: We were told to do it. We were given a list of places to go.

LC: Was this in Newark?

FA: Yeah, or Trenton, one of the two. I can’t remember. So you’re given a list of
cards. In the Deep South you make great money doing it because everybody wants to be
in the college phonebook. I mean, Texas you can make a year’s wage in a month,
literally. All you had to do was like go up to them and go “Hey, it’s for the Tech
phonebook.” “Oh, yeah you’re right, give me a full page.” Well, up there there’s A,
there’s a million little colleges. We were foreigners. I mean, it was really scary. We drove
into either Trenton or Newark, one of them. I can’t remember now, probably Trenton.
One o’clock in the morning, pulling a motorcycle and ended up on the black side of town.
I don’t know how we didn’t get shot or killed.

LC: When you said it was—this place that you walked into was a head shop, can
you say what that is?

FA: Yeah, there were—you could buy papers. There were bongs everywhere.

LC: By papers you mean?
FA: Papers for marijuana. There were marijuana posters on the wall. There were Black Panther posters on the wall. It was all black people in there with afros. Most of the slogans and stuff on the wall were about the Black Panthers and Black Power. Hello! (Laughs)

LC: You knew when you walked in that you were somewhere that you weren’t supposed to be in some way?

FA: Yeah.

LC: What happened when you walked out of there? You were with Hank, I take it?

FA: No, I was alone.

LC: Oh, you were alone.

FA: He would go do his set of cards and I”d go do mine. We would meet up at night. I would have the car and he would have the motorcycle.

LC: You walked out of there thinking what? Do you remember?

FA: This was stupid. I was angry at my father-in-law because he had set us up. He knew damn good and well that this was a hell hole. They had screwed up the telephone directories the last two years. He was sending us to the worst place on his list. Always the summers before Hank had worked in the Deep South and made good money, really good money. He would say, “Well, it was my wedding gift to you. I”m going to give you this job. I”m going to give you a job.” Well, he sent us to the worst, screwed up mess and he knew he was sending us to places where we couldn”t make money.

LC: Why do you think he did that?

FA: Because I think he was a jerk. I mean, he was an alcoholic jerk and he was always jealous because Hank was the child by the first marriage that had died. Hank”s father had been a Navy pilot and died when Hank was two months old of brain cancer. He had always been envious of that relationship that his wife had with her first Navy pilot husband.

LC: I see. What year was Hank born? Do you remember?

FA: He was born in ’51.

LC: The Navy pilot who was this father, do you remember his name?

FA: Mm-hmm. His name was Henry Grady Brewer, II.
LC: How do you spell this last name?
FA: B-R-E-W-E-R.
LC: And the first name was?
FA: Henry.
LC: Okay. He had served in the Pacific Theatre?
FA: I guess so. I don’t really know.
LC: Did Hank know much about him?
FA: Just that he had been a Navy pilot. He was from Clarksdale, Mississippi. His grandmother still lives in Clarksdale.
LC: Did Hank have any feelings about the Vietnam War particularly that you remember?
FA: At once he was going to join ROTC and then he decided not to. He went on to just not believe in it. He was getting ready to go to law school. He just didn’t believe in it.
LC: Let’s talk about your dad again for a little while. The end of his career at Texas Tech, do you remember, did he join any veterans’ organizations? Did he have any affiliations around town that were connected to his having had this amazing career?
FA: The only thing he joined was the Letterman’s Association at Tech.
LC: What was that?
FA: It’s for men who have lettered in sports at Tech.
LC: That was kind of his social group?
FA: Yeah. They met on the morning sometimes for breakfast before homecoming day. They would have a big breakfast for all returning football players on homecoming day.
LC: Kind of like once a year?
FA: Yeah, that was it.
LC: But he didn’t sort of have in friends in town that he hung around with?
FA: No.
LC: Because he was very busy at home trying to handle things at home?
FA: Yeah. He told me when he retired from Tech, he could have stayed on. I mean, it wasn’t a forced retirement. It was just by then he was vested in it and he could do it. He knew he could either do his job or he could do Mom, but he couldn’t do both.

LC: Your mother was becoming less and less well over time, would you say?

FA: Yeah.

LC: Her health generally was deteriorating?

FA: Well, how can you tell? She was a binge drinker. She would start drinking and be drunk for a month. She would be passed out on the couch, I mean passed out throwing up, going to the bathroom on herself. Like combing her hair and just drinking out of a bottle for two weeks at a time. Then it would take her about a week to get to that condition and then it would take her a week to get sober. She would go through massive DTs (delirium tremens). ’79 I had a blood clot. I was in the hospital and my dad came to see me. Then he didn’t come the next day, but he called because he had left Mom alone just for forty-five minutes to come and see me. She had fallen going to get a bottle and cracked her head open. Another time she set her hair on fire, her face on fire. So I mean he just couldn’t leave her alone. Even if his oldest daughter is in the hospital with a blood clot, he couldn’t come and see me because my mom was too bad off.

LC: Did she go into the hospital again anytime in this period?

FA: Yeah, we committed her again. We committed her again.

LC: When did your dad actually retire from Tech? Do you remember?

FA: I’m going to have to think back. I was—I graduated, I think he did it ’78.

LC: How did he feel about retiring?

FA: He really didn’t like it. He had already developed diabetes. He just thought that the pressure was getting to him. Between Mom and the job and then taking care of diabetes.

LC: Because at that time he had become director, by that time director of financial aid.

FA: Yeah.

LC: So he was reluctant to retire?

FA: Yeah, because he couldn’t go to meetings. I mean he just couldn’t do what he needed. He knew how the job needed to be done.
LC: He didn’t feel well enough to do it.
FA: He felt well enough. He just didn’t feel like he could concentrate enough because of Mom. By then Z and I were both moved out of the house.
LC: So he was alone with it.
FA: Yeah, he was alone with it.
LC: Your dad had a stroke at some stage.
FA: Yeah, he had a stroke in probably twelve years later. I’m trying to think. I have to think back, but about twelve years later.
LC: Did you move back to Lubbock around that time?
FA: Yeah, I had been living in Dallas, doing my art and working for the Natural Science, the Science Place in Dallas in Fair Park. Dad had a stroke. Mom had called and told me Dad had had a stroke and not to come home for a while. I was scheduled to come home in three weeks anyway. So I came home in three weeks and realized it was much worse than I had thought. Dad was already home, but it was really very bizarre. Then that summer, it was like in winter, probably around March or April, but in June I was scheduled to come here and do a workshop for Shake Hands with Your Future, an art workshop. I went the first day. Then the next morning Dad woke me up. He could kind of talk and walk and said that Mom had fallen and could I help him get her up? She was dead. She had had a massive coronary. So I stayed here three weeks, hired someone to take care of Dad for two weeks. Went back to Dallas, packed up and settled up affairs in Dallas and moved back here.
LC: Was there ever any question in your mind about what it was you were going to do once your mother had died and your father was alone?
FA: Well, I had to first get through the funeral. Once we got through the funeral, I mean, my sister was in Canada and her son was here with us. Once we sort of overcame that, I knew that I was going to stay here for three weeks, to just see and then hire someone. I think what I didn’t know—I thought that it would only take a year to get my dad well and then I’d be back in Dallas. It was after the first year and a half, two years and I realized he wasn’t going to get any better. I mean, he did great as a stroke survivor. I mean, he still was able to give himself injections and do his pills. I mean, he was great. Someone was going to have to live with him. So at the end of a year we literally—we had
made a deal and it was sort of a verbal deal. I just said, “Well, Dad I’d really like to stay on if you don’t mind.” We agreed to that and I was here until he died.

LC: Which was when?
FA: Okay. It was the twenty-eighth of February nine years ago. I guess it will be ten years this February.

LC: This February. Did your dad express any particular wishes about whether he wanted to be buried here in Lubbock or somewhere else?
FA: Oh, yeah. He had had open-heart surgery before his stroke, a number of years before. He brought me into the hospital room when nobody else was there. He told me exactly what he wanted. He mainly said “Call the base. They’ll handle everything. It’s paid for. I want to be buried here in Lubbock next to where my grandparents are,” because he knew that’s where my mom wanted to be buried. We didn’t know that my mom would die first, but they were going to have a joint headstone. I said, “Well, Dad you can be buried in Arlington. I mean, you’ve got the medals.” He said, “I don’t want to be buried there. I want to be buried here.” I said, “What do you want?” He said, “I don’t want a service. Just tell them to play “Taps,” that’s it.”

LC: Is that what happened?
FA: Oh, yeah.
LC: So he is lying here in Lubbock?
FA: Yeah. He’s out at the—I don’t know what it’s called now. It’s the old City of Lubbock.

LC: The City of Lubbock, the big one.
FA: The big one. He’s out there next to my grandparents and my mom. We played “Taps.” We had the twenty-one gun salute.

LC: Did you have Air Force representation there?
FA: Yes. My sister has the flag. I wanted a fly by, but they told us you had to be on active duty to get a fly by.

LC: So you compromised and said “Okay.”
FA: Well, it’s either that or it would cost five hundred thousand dollars or something.

LC: I’m sure.
FA: I was like, “Oh, yeah right. We’re going to do that.”

LC: So you still live in the house that you came to live in?

FA: Yeah still live in the house. Both my parents died in this house.

LC: What street is that on?

FA: 27th Street.

LC: Future, earlier you had told me that there was an additional story that you had recalled about the filming by your father during World War II of the concentration camps.

FA: Yeah. The story comes to me from my sister. He was—it was after the concentration camps were liberated. He was doing regular reconnaissance flying and saw some walking skeletons. He said that’s what it looked like. He just set down and went in and there was this concentration camp. What I know is that I have a whole series of photographs of a concentration camp. Now whether—the story was that someone else did this or that he shot them, all I know is that I have the original photos and they’re horrible. They’re horrible, horrible, horrible. If anyone ever doubted evil, that evil exists these photos can prove that men can commit evil. I mean just whole bodies in ovens.

LC: Why do you think your father kept those photographs?

FA: To remind him. He knew that they were important documents and that that’s what it was about.

LC: He spoke to you about them on one occasion.

FA: We got into a typical—I mean, for my mom being an alcoholic, when she was sober things were so cool. I mean she was like a great mom and that’s what made it so hard. It was just like Jekyll and Hyde. On Saturdays the tradition was we would either go eat pizza at some pizza place or my dad would make these incredible hamburgers. He would put all these spices, really bad spices in it. They made them great. They were really big and melted cheese. Oh, God it was just too much fun. Any little boyfriend we had or girlfriends would come over because everybody knew my dad. My dad loved doing it. I mean, our little boyfriends or even male friends could eat two or three hamburgers. They loved it. It was just too cool. Part of the deal was we had—it is very typical for my age group and military families you ate dinner together, period, no questions. Breakfast might be a little bit chaotic, lunch you did at school, dinner
everybody was at home. Husbands were there. Kids were there, one table eating dinner.
Okay. We never stopped that. We always did that even when mom was drunk. I mean,
she might be drinking in the living room, but we would eat dinner together. Well, on
Saturday dinner ended up meaning lunch. We would sit around the table and talk about
things going on. It was not unusual to argue about Vietnam. This is pre-Kent State. So
I’m arguing about Vietnam. Dad has just had enough of it because obviously I didn’t
know what the shit I was talking about. I mean, you could just see he was tired of it. He
got up and went into the garage and rumbled around for awhile and came back and just
handed me this stack of photos. My smart aleck comment had been, “I don’t know why
anybody ever fought in any war.” I was just being a smart aleck. Anyway, you got to
be—you’re new in college you got to be a smart aleck. He just looked at me and he said,
“This is the reason.” That’s it. That’s all he would ever say about it. He never told me
another thing about it. He just showed them to me.

LC: You sat there with the photos that day?
FA: Yeah, at the dinner table.
LC: What effect did that have on you, Future?
FA: I wanted to throw up. It totally silenced me. I was shocked. That’s why I still
keep, by hiding them from myself. I got it. I mean, I was like, “Oh my God this is what
people can do to each other.” I suddenly realized my dad was one of thousands of heroes
who said “We’re not going to let that happen. We’re not going to let that happen” and
that they would risk their lives to stop something that was more evil than I could ever
comprehend. All my fantasies about “You could have negotiated something,” but the
Nazi régime was killing people for no other reason then they were Jewish, Gypsy,
homosexual, whatever. Whatever they wanted to make up. Whatever—
LC: Whatever group.
FA: Whatever group. From that moment on my theory was “If they’re coming for
me you better believe they’re coming for you tomorrow.” It just changed. It changed my
life.
LC: Future, is there anything else you would like to tell us about your dad that we
haven’t covered yet?
I think probably for me this was, when he died, the biggest honor, it was an amazing—it wasn’t a large funeral. I mean I’ve been to funerals where there is a million dignitaries and lots of people, standing room only, whatever that’s about. What amazed me is that people came who had been in the service with my dad—well, actually I’ll tell you the short story because I’ll cry. After he had a stoke I got a call from one of the men who had been his sergeant in Arkansas, Sergeant Bircham. He said, “We’re coming through and just want to say hi to the colonel.” I said, “Well, you can come on by, but Dad’s had a stroke. I’ll try to get his memory up.” He said, “No problem. We only got thirty minutes.” I knew that meant thirty minutes. I had coffee ready. I also knew that.

I’ve been trained in the military, have coffee, had a little cake ready, got to do that. They talked. My dad remembered and they remembered a few things. They wouldn’t stay for dinner, truly was only thirty minutes. Then Sergeant Bircham, whose daughter had been one of my best friends that I still talk too, actually, said, “Well, sir I stopped by,” because they had just moved to Florida. He said, “When I first moved to Florida,” he said, “I’ve only had two good commanders in thirty years of service, you and this other colonel. We moved to the same town with this colonel and I kept telling the wife that I was going to go by and say hi and never did. Then he died and I just swore I was going to come and see you.” He said, “Because”—I get—

LC: It’s okay. You can take your time.

FA: “I just had to salute you one more time because of the type of commander you were and the type of man you are.” He stood up and my dad stood up and he saluted my daddy. My dad saluted him back. I was just bawling. I was still bawling.

LC: What a wonderful thing that he made the effort to do that.

FA: And drove cross-country to do it.

LC: What an incredible thing.

FA: Yeah.

LC: That’s quite a statement about your dad.

FA: Yeah. I walked him out to the car and I said, just bawling, I mean I’m just bawling then, I’m bawling now. I bawl every time I tell the damn story. Everyone called him Birches. I said, “Sergeant Bircham, thank you that was so much.” He said, “No. You have no idea what type of commander your father was.” He said, “You just don’t know.”
I just, like I got it. I just got it. Well, one of his other sergeants’ sons came to Dad’s
funeral. My nephew came with his Navy medal cross, whatever is right under the Medal
of Honor, he got. He got the next one down.

LC: Okay. This is your nephew?

FA: Yeah. My nephew, oh God, his last name is Akins. It’s not—it’s Fred. Fred
Akins.

LC: He came to the funeral?

FA: Came to the funeral and then—who came? The secretaries he had had when
he was director of financial aid, they came. This is long after he had retired. Some of the
students he had given loans to came. One of them wrote a ten-page letter to me, I don’t
still have it, just telling me how he had given her back her dignity and didn’t make her
feel like she was nothing for asking for money. Then some of the men he had and women
he had been in rehab with at the Y (YMCA, Young Men’s Christian Association) and the
pool—

LC: After his stroke.

FA: Came. I thought—oh and then somebody he played football with. So it was
like his whole career. I thought that’s the true value of man, is that it wasn’t that he just
played football, it was that he went on to be a fighter pilot. Then he went on to be a base
commander. I mean for some people after the war was over with they didn’t know what
to do. They dissolved. It was horrible for them. Dad went on to be a better base
commander. Then he was a financial aid director and he helped people, helped the kids.

LC: He touched a lot of lives.

FA: He touched a lot of lives, not in a glorious, showboat way but just in a real
way.

LC: Yes, in a real way.

FA: In a real way and then for me the most courage he ever showed is when he
had to learn how to talk and walk again. That’s what took courage. That’s when the
people from rehab came, I just lost it. Because it was like all the other, you know about it.
It’s bad. That was fun. For the seven and a half, eight years that I took care of him he
never failed to thank me every day.

LC: To thank you?
FA: Yes, for taking care of him, for giving him his meals, for being there.

LC: Well, I think he had, it seems, developed this very special relationship with you all the way back at some of his earliest SAC postings.

FA: Oh, absolutely, yeah. Oh, yeah we were—I was always his daughter. I mean it was never—yeah, that was always really obvious. It was also because he was truly an officer and a gentleman. I mean he really—he opened doors for people. I mean, he really was a gentleman. And he was a man’s man. I mean, that was—and those are old-fashioned terms and can be interpreted sexist, but he probably was a little bit of a sexist, but with the best of intentions. His mother died in his arms. His mother-in-law had died in his arms. He really had an incredible gentle side.

LC: A certain kind of quiet nobility, it sounds like.

FA: Yeah. Just a year ago I went on militarybrats.com and found someone who had been in our Sunday school class. He taught Sunday school up at Kincheloe and contacted him and said, “You’re the one student my dad always asked about.” This man, who’s now my age, wrote back immediately and said, “Oh my God, I can’t believe. Your father was the one who helped change my life and set me on this path.” We’ve kept up a friendship now based on that.

LC: It’s wonderful that you can find out some of those sort of changed trajectories that your dad was responsible for. Those are just the ones that you’ve kind of been able to find out about.

FA: Well, then at the same time I found a stash of girlie magazines. My sister got kind of freaked when I did that, but I said I love the fact that he was a human being. I mean, I think that’s real important for people to know. I think it made him even more. Yeah. That’s what I remember, is all that. Oh and the cat walked with him everyday. We had a cat that would go for walks with him. I didn’t know cats—

LC: This was during his rehab time?

FA: Yeah. Cat would slink along in the shadows.

LC: I never asked you about pets or anything.

FA: Dad wasn’t raised with pets because they were too poor, but Mom, when they were first married they had a little terrier named Flick Flick for the camera. Then
when we went to Thailand we had to give her to my Aunt Helen. When we came back
Mom always had French poodles. Our first one was named Mr. Nùat.
LC: Mr. Nùat.
FA: Yeah, for “mustache” because it’s Thai for “mustache.” Then we would have
canaries and would Siamese cats. We always had poodles, but we eventually ended up
with stray cats and no birds. We got tired of the birds. When my dad died they had a little
Shitzu-Lhasa Apso mix and this cat that would follow him.
LC: Do you think the cat and/or the dog were a source of comfort for him during
his rehab? Do you remember that?
FA: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, they just adored him. They would sit on his lap and let
him pet them and just be a comfort. They were just there.
LC: That was good for him, do you think?
FA: I think so. I think the hardest thing for him was having Mom die. I mean that
was the love of his life and he just—I knew that once he lived the first year we were
okay. I thought he was going to die of a broken heart, but it also had gotten pretty bad
with Mom.
LC: Well, I remember the story that you told yesterday about him walking into
the soda shop.
FA: And seeing her. It’s true, Broadway Drug.
LC: He made up his mind right then, sounds like.
FA: Yeah. He did. He did. I have no reason to doubt that story. I heard it my
whole life.
LC: Yeah, it sounds true.
FA: Yeah, it does. My mom’s theory was “Yeah, it took him ten years to do it.”
He was like “Yeah and you got me”—they would banter back and forth, but it really was.
They did. It makes it kind of tough growing up under that. Those archetype stories you
know.
LC: Yeah because that really didn’t happen in the ’70s
FA: For me. Not quite. (Laughs)
LC: Not that I remember.
FA: Not happening in the ’04s, either. (Laughs)
LC: Right, I’m with you.

FA: So I mean I think one of the interesting things about just this life, this lifetime is that at his funeral I found out he had these medals that were kind of important. I mean, I still don’t know what they are. We have a list somewhere. My sister has them all and the flag, but I don’t know. I really don’t know. I should know, but none of that ever mattered to me because it never really mattered to him. But I found out he was like a hero, a real life, got medals for it, been there hero. Had been an influence on all these people. I’m like, “Well, that’s a pretty high standard that when I require of my friends and of myself, my friends and my lovers, the standard I’m requiring is not make believe. It’s one I’ve lived with.” That’s the hard part for people to get because they, one, don’t believe in it and they can’t understand my commitment to it because they’ve never seen it.

LC: Right. People with completely different backgrounds—

FA: Can’t see it. They don’t understand what it’s like to have a—that’s what it is.

LC: Yet it’s very essential of who you are, who he was is essential to who you are.

FA: Well, yeah it’s kind of like—his favorite expression was, “You’ve got to be able to look at yourself in the mirror.” That was it. It was like whatever you do, can you look at yourself in the mirror?

LC: What did he mean by that?

FA: Can you look yourself in the eye? You can lie to everybody else, but can you lie to yourself. Like, you know, if you make a decision, it may not be popular, but can you live with it?

LC: That has to do with morality and ethics.

FA: Absolutely. It had to do with decisions he made on line. I can remember him telling stories of he had to make a decision on line and the sergeant would argue with him or something. He would say, “Sergeant, I’ll put it in writing, but the buck stops here. I’ll take it. It’s mine.”

LC: Meaning the responsibility?

FA: Absolutely. That’s what he would say. He would just say, “Walk your talk.”

It was very simple for him. If you say it, do it and if you do it you don’t have to say it.
you’re in charge, in fact, I found a plaque he had that was like said turn right. Then it’s
just this little saying that he had, which was, “If I tell you to turn right, turn right. Don’t
ask questions. I don’t like giving these orders, but sometimes they’re necessary because
they might save your life. So when I tell you to turn right, by God, turn right. Don’t argue
with me.” He just thought that you had a responsibility—I mean, he was a very
responsible person. That’s why he never left my mom. So when you take on a job you do
it to the best of your ability. If you fuck up, you take the responsibility. If it goes well,
you give the credit to everybody. He would tell you the old military stories, but especially
in field maintence, who’s enlisted for it, the pilot who flies up high, the engineer who
designed the plane, the maintenance guy who keeps it up, the cook who feeds the
maintenance guy and the pilot? The family that’s—who’s the most important? You can’t
take any of them out. Those are incredible lifetime lessons.

LC: He sounds like a great guy.

FA: He was, still is. I mean, he still hangs around here. Yeah, but those were,
those were some of the lessons that when I talk to my other friends who were raised in
the military. All those surveys that were done about how horrible it is for being raised in
the military are done by people who weren’t raised in the military. They don’t know what
we got from it.

LC: The good stuff, the important things.

FA: Well, the hard thing about moving, I can make friends pretty damn quick. I
know how to pack real well and quickly, and travel and sort of fly by the seats of my
pants.

LC: Right. Adapt and trust yourself.

FA: Yeah. I’ve read a lot of books on military dependents and it talks about how
hard our life was. I’m like, “You weren’t there. How do you know?”

LC: Right.

FA: That’s what I like. He really did pass on lessons that I think he always had in
him, but were reaffirmed by the time period. He was in the military.

LC: Well, thank you very much for participating.

FA: Oh, thank you.