

Asheville Unitarian Universalist Church
Oral History Interview

Interview with **Herb Ball**, Interviewed by Bob Potter
February 14, 1995

Bob Potter: *Today is the 14th of February in 1995. I'm sitting with Herb Ball, and I'm going to be asking him about his life. Today (this is Bob Potter speaking, in Black Mountain). Herb, what do you think of the weather today?*

Herb Ball: Oh, I think it's a little bit more normal than we have experienced.

POTTER: OK, Herb. Today is Valentine's Day. I want to start on a very romantic subject. Will you tell me the most exciting, most interesting time that convinced you that you and Glenna wanted to live together? What happened there? How did it happen?

BALL: Well, going way back, it seems that after Glenna had spent 2 years at Western College, she then spent her last two years of college at the University of Chicago, where her father was on the faculty.

POTTER: Did you know her at that time?

BALL: Yes. We had gotten acquainted in Wheaton where he had taken the ministry of a Presbyterian Church. I guess the young people's group at the Presbyterian Church was very active, and although she had graduated from Hyde Park High School in Chicago, she spent another year post graduate at Wheaton High School so that's when we got to know each other quite well. And as I say, the young people's group at the Presbyterian Church was very active and carried on quite a program.

POTTER: Were you a highschooler at that time?

BALL: Yes, we were both in high school. As I say, this was in 1920 when I graduated from high school and as I say, she had spent an extra year in high school after graduating from Hyde Park.

POTTER: Well now, that's sort of how you got to know her, but tell me [gap in tape –]
“. . .more about your time together.”

BALL: Well, at the University of Chicago in her junior and senior year, we saw each other quite a lot of the time. Although we didn't have any money to go to dances, we did go to a movie once in a while. So, we saw each other quite a bit there at the University of Chicago during her 2 years there.

POTTER: Did she come to watch you wrestle?

BALL: All the time. (Laughs) She hated it, but she came to the matches regardless.

POTTER: Did it just grow slowly, your love for each other?

BALL: Well, we were both struggling financially no question about that. I didn't have any money and was working my way through school. And uh, although her parents were in Wheaton at that time as I recall, so she was at one of the dormitories there. Of course restrictions were very tight. She had to be home at 10 O'clock. So, that means that we didn't spend much time together in the evening. But as I say, we did see each other quite a bit, off and on. We had friends, former Wheaton people, Alfred Kay and Marjorie Breyer, who were also from Wheaton High School. And that was part of the group that went together. He was in the ministry at the University of Chicago. So we saw them quite a bit, and they had an apartment, and we spent some time in their apartment, off and on.

POTTER: Did you keep contact with the Kays? I notice the name Kay frequently in these records.

BALL: We did. He took a job as a YMCA secretary, in... if I can remember where. .

POTTER: It doesn't matter where.

BALL: Yeah, and we had visited them off and on in the West.

POTTER: I understand that you and Glenna eloped??

BALL: That's right.

POTTER: How did that come about?

BALL: As I say we were both struggling, financially and otherwise, I guess, and I had one more year of college and she had graduated, so we decided we could just as well get married. And she had a job teaching school although she couldn't get the job if she was married, so the marriage was kept a secret, with the exception of our mothers, who both knew that we had gotten married. So, I was supported in large part, my senior year, by Glenna.

POTTER: Were you both involved in going on nature walks and things of that kind?

BALL: Not at that particular time. This was later on, when we were living in Wheaton and went to a state park on the Illinois River, and the leader of the group was a Catholic Priest, Father Link, who was almost a walking encyclopedia. And on a Saturday, every Saturday, we usually went with Father Link in this state park. Birds and flowers and trees and shrubs, and anything, you name it, why he knew all about it. He had some boys who were disadvantaged and in trouble that he took under his wing. So, it was wonderful for the boys, because they developed an interest in nature.

POTTER: Were you adults sort of helping him shepherd those boys around on those walks?

BALL: Yes, three or four boys, but very much interested in snakes and animals of all kinds. One time he had a pet robin, not in captivity, he had petted it and nurtured it, and it was very tame.

POTTER: Now for how many years did you and Glenna live in Wheaton, all together?

BALL: Well, from I guess, from the 1920s I think, when I graduated and when she was spending an extra year there. So from 1920 'til I graduated from the University of Chicago in '25 (she had graduated in '24). I had taken a job in Chicago as a chemist – and gave up the idea of going to med school and becoming a doctor.

POTTER: And you worked in copper chemistry a lot.

BALL: Well, the first job I had was with the Dallas Brass and Copper Company, which was a company that made light fixtures as well as copper tubing for automotive radiators and strip copper and brass. And they were a young company and were developing and expanding tremendously and from a small rolling mill and a four-story building in downtown Chicago on Orleans Street, they built a plant in West Chicago, near Cicero. So that was when it became a much larger plant.

POTTER: Did that make it easier for you to commute?

BALL: No. It made it more difficult in a way, because I had to ride not only the railroad, but also a street car ride of probably 20 minutes or half an hour on the west side of Chicago.

POTTER: You worked as a metallurgist or a chemist?

BALL: Started out as a chemist, then switched to metallurgy after taking some night school courses.

POTTER: What was the most exciting thing you've done in your lifetime in the way of applying chemistry and metallurgy?

BALL: Well I think it was a fascinating business – rolling mills and casting. My brother was also working for the Dallas Brass & Copper Company and a superintendent of the

casting shop so with electric furnaces and a huge hot rolling mill, why it was a fascinating business, really.

POTTER: Toward the end of your working career, you were engaged in various kind of secret work. Now that the Russians have agreed to share secrets with the United States, regarding these things, can you talk about it?

BALL: Well, most everything is known about the nuclear business, I think now. I was not interested in the nuclear bomb or the atomic bomb, I was interested in the peaceful use of energy. In other words, the reactors to produce electricity and we were making at that time nuclear reactors for the Navy. And a fascinating business with Rickover as a guiding light, and the engineering work was all done by Kappel or Bappel. In other words Knowles Atomic Lab or the Bettis Atomic Lab which were operated by GE and Westinghouse.

POTTER: In Chicago somewhere? No? St .Louis?

BALL: No, the plant that I worked in to begin with was the old Winchester Repeating Arms Plant. And this was a plant that was taken over by Olin. And then later that plant was moved out on the Thames River, above Groton and Uncasville. So that meant that we living in Cheshire, Connecticut, had to travel quite a ways to the plant at Uncasville.

POTTER: So these were all things in the far east.

BALL: Yeah, that's right. All in the east. So I had worked from Chicago and transferred to Baltimore. From Baltimore I left what was then Revere Copper and Brass and went with Olin in East Alton, Illinois which was the former Western Cartridge. So I had moved around quite a bit. From East Alton I was moved to Connecticut, New Haven.

POTTER: East Alton's in Illinois, is that right?

BALL: East Alton, Illinois, which is adjacent to Alton, Illinois, across the river from St. Louis.

POTTER: We have jumped right over the Great Depression. Did that influence you and your wife?

BALL: We were very fortunate. Glenna was teaching school at that time, having started school in Winfield, Illinois, in a one-room school with eight grades. So that was to get experience in teaching. (Laughs) So, she did a real fine job there but that meant that she was living with my mother in Wheaton. Her folks were in the process I guess of separating. So it worked out very nicely that she lived with my mother in Wheaton, and then took a train to Winfield, probably six miles farther west.

POTTER: But that was before the Depression, wasn't it?

BALL: This was before the Depression, that's right.

POTTER: Had you and Glenna began to have children before the Big Crash of '29? No, Jacqueline was born in 1930.

BALL: That's right. So that was during the Depression. Fortunately we both worked during the Depression, so that was a tremendous help. Although we had taken cuts in pay, we still were working and had some income. But we had in the meantime bought a house, with a first and second mortgage. But if the interest payments could be made why they would forgo the principal payments, which was fortunate.

POTTER: Now were the first and second mortgage with the same bank?

BALL: Yeah, that's right. So that was no problem, really. But we were, as I say, we were very fortunate that both of us continued working during the Depression. Which a lot of people, of course, were out of work.

POTTER: And your advantage is that prices are falling, so if you have income it becomes more valuable every month.

BALL: Yeah, but I still remember the poor German grocer, that we bought most of our groceries from had to have a lot of charge accounts, so he lost his business because of people charging and being unable to pay. It was strange that people would buy from the German butcher and charge it, and then at the same time they'd go to the super markets to try to save some money.

POTTER: So we know how the small business grocer went out of business.

BALL: That's right. It was mighty rough. And we also had a good friend who was in charge of the bank at Wheaton, and he was charged with improprieties I guess in closing his bank, but after a trial, well, he was exonerated from any wrong-doing.

POTTER: I notice that your children were spaced very far apart, so you and Glenna would have those children only when she was able to work it in with teaching or take care of the other child or whatever was that?

BALL: That's right.

POTTER: Now did your family behave like Jewish families - the mother comes and lives with you for six months when a child is born? None of that?

BALL: None of that. No. No, when we lived in Wheaton, later on of course, why Glenna was still teaching school and we had two teachers that were living with us, so that helped to spread the expense around.

POTTER: And what was the situation when you moved to East Alton? Was she teaching then or not? Probably not teaching.

BALL: No she was not.

POTTER: You were having a more fancy home at that point, right?

BALL: I have to think back. When we left Baltimore to go to East Alton, she was not teaching, no. She was not teaching when we were in East Alton. But we did have her mother , who was having a hard time because she didn't get any compensation from her former husband, Peter Mode. So Glenna's brother and sister were helping some to support her. But the family life was very uncomfortable with her living with a brother and with a sister. So we invited her to come to East Alton and live with us. Which worked out very nicely and gave her a much improved life for her final days I think.

POTTER: Now you and Jacqueline and Donald by then, when she lived with you?

BALL: Yes, I'm quite sure.

POTTER: So that was during the Depression. Tell me again the story about P.G. Mode and the University of Chicago and his divorce. What happened to him? Tell me that story.

BALL: Peter Mode got his doctorate degree from the University of Chicago, and the book that he wrote. . .tell me the name of the book?

POTTER: I can't tell you the name but it's the source book for religious studies in the United States.

BALL: That's right. But when Glenna's brother Douglas was born, the nurse was one that became infatuated with Peter. So he had seen her from time to time, and eventually Glenna's mother got a lawyer, I can't think of the name of the lawyer, a very noted lawyer. . .

POTTER: You mean Clarence Darrow?

BALL: Clarence Darrow. . .

POTTER: Really??!

BALL: . . .who got somebody to follow him in a hotel room, so that was the grounds for the divorce. But Nettie we knew because she had visited the Modes in Wheaton. And so I knew Nettie and of course Glenna because of taking care of his mail when he was away, she found out that they were corresponding. . so

POTTER: I that where the term 'correspondent' arose? (Laughs)

BALL: . . .yeah, but Glenna's mother also knew that he was seeing Nettie. So, as I say, the divorce was uncontested, but he didn't give any support to Glenna's mother at all. And of course he lost his job at the University of Chicago, and did some insurance selling I think. But as I say, we saw him two or three times after the divorce. But I had purchased an insurance policy from him, and when I decided I wanted the money instead of the insurance why he was very upset because I discontinued the insurance.

POTTER: Was that much later?

BALL: This was much later, yes.

POTTER: Oh, and you were still in contact with him because he was your insurance agent.

BALL: That's right, yes.

POTTER: Interesting. Well, let's see. .. Let's go back to.. I caused you to jump from New Jersey or Connecticut to Alton, Illinois. You went to Alton late in your career? Or was that in the middle?

BALL: No. The dates I left Chicago in '36 and went to Baltimore and then left Baltimore in '46, I think, to go back to East Alton. And then after about 10 years there,

why Olin shipped me to Connecticut to start the nuclear fuel business. It was a pilot plant, so I accepted that job instead of keeping the job I had in East Alton.

POTTER: Was your job in that plant to simply run the production, or were you in charge of the metallurgy or what?

BALL: Well, in East Alton I was superintendent of quality control so I gave up that job to become, really, a metallurgist, in charge of the laboratory in Connecticut. So I might have been better off if I'd stayed as quality control manager, but they wanted me to go so well I was very willing to tackle it.

POTTER: And Glenna was willing to go along with or what?

BALL: Yeah, she never objected to any of the changes. And they were difficult in a way, but somehow we put up with it. (laughs)

POTTER: Now her mother had been living with you in East Alton. That was after. ..

BALL: Well she died while she was living with us. She had a heart attack.

POTTER: Was this after WW II? Or was it during the '30s?

BALL: Well no, this was in the '40s that she died. I don't remember the date of her death now, but that can be checked out.

POTTER: Well of course it can. Fine. Now, let's see, what more I want to do. I want to know about what caused you to choose to move to Brevard when you retired in 1969.

BALL: When we retired in '69, I was over the age of 69 but I had stayed on as a consultant, really, because Glenna was still teaching school and she wanted to teach one more year, although she never could get a pension from teaching because she never could have gotten the ten years necessary in order to get a pension. So she did have some

annuities, which meant that we didn't have to pay taxes on the annuity until we took the money. So that worked out fairly well.

POTTER: So some of her pay she had been investing in insurance annuities.

BALL: That's right, yeah.

POTTER: Was that on the advice of Mode or not? Someone else.

BALL: No, we were strictly on our own at that time. But she had taken, when the children were gone, why she decided she'd go back to teaching. But her certificate from Illinois was not any good at that time, of course. So she decided to go back to school and went to the University of Southern Connecticut and got a Master's Degree in Special Education. So that's when she took a job in Southington on the school board there in special education. She had a one-room school with about eight or nine pupils, I think, that were mentally retarded or physically retarded.

POTTER: Did she handle them all?

BALL: She handled them all.

POTTER: Any assistance from parents?

BALL: Really no assistance, no. That proved interesting to her. She was very much interested and the parents were particularly interested too, I think, so she enjoyed the teaching of special education.

POTTER: Did she do that a long while, or just that few years there?

BALL: No, that lasted for several years.

POTTER: Several years. And she was not a young woman at that time.

BALL: No, no. (laughs)

POTTER: Far from it, huh? And she had three grown children.

BALL: We were brushing 65 and were ready to retire.

POTTER: Oh, that's amazing. When did you and Glenna take up this square dancing and round dancing. Was that early in your life?

BALL: Well, not really early. This was in Connecticut, probably around 1965 I would think. And we danced in Connecticut and then when we came down in '69, to Brevard, why we joined the club here. And we had had enough dancing so we could get into another club here. So we continued our dancing – both round dancing and square dancing.

POTTER: Now, you were a wrestler, so you can evaluate dancing as a live exercise. Would you recommend it highly?

BALL: Well, it was moderate exercise, I guess. Nothing strenuous about it really, that we considered strenuous, anyway. Even though we danced for probably three hours, without sitting down hardly.

POTTER: Well, the people in this church always admired you and Glenna and the two Birdsalls, for the way you were spending your retirement. Full of activities and involvement.

BALL: Yeah, that's right. Well the Birdsalls were wonderful, no doubt about that. We were fortunate to know them quite well.

POTTER: Yes, you were. Was there any other couples in the church that you were close to?

BALL: I don't know. The Polks, I guess. Oh, I have to think back, I guess. There were quite a number of folks.

POTTER: Any other dancers?

BALL: No, not really. The Polks at one time did some square dancing, but they gave it up. It turned out to be a little bit too complicated for them. (Laughs)

POTTER: Now, I've known you ever since I've been here, and that's about nine years. What caused you and Glenna to pick out Highland Farms and move to Asheville? What sort of religious experience were you having down there in Brevard?

BALL: Well, when we first got here in 69, we were coming back and forth from Brevard to Asheville to square dance. So we figured we had been Unitarians in Connecticut, and we figured if we can come to Asheville to square dance we can come to Asheville to church. (Laughs) So that's when we decided to come to the church, which was on Vermont Avenue at that time.

POTTER: Were you living in – what was it called? -Forest Woods or Forest Hills or. . .

BALL: Sherwood Forest. It was about a 40 mile trip.

POTTER: And it took you about an hour to do it.

BALL: That's right, yeah. Very lovely drive, in the spring and in the fall.

POTTER: Have you always enjoyed driving an automobile?

BALL: Oh yes.

POTTER: When did you stop commuting to work? By train, I mean. As soon as you left Chicago, I suppose.

BALL: When we moved from Wheaton to Baltimore, we still didn't have a car. Sometime later in Baltimore we did buy a car. So, as I say, we had gotten along without

an automobile, strange as that may seem, even though in Wheaton we were a mile from the church and we walked with a baby buggy back and forth to the church.

POTTER: That would be a great sight to see. Was there anybody else on the street, walking to the church?

BALL: There were others. But of course, we were in the back yard of Wheaton College, so we were close to Wheaton College even though we didn't attend the churches that Wheaton College supported. And our next door neighbor was the vice president of Wheaton College. So we knew Enoch Dyrness quite well, he and his wife. The children played together.

POTTER: The way you speak of it, both Wheaton College and the University of Chicago were very fine places in your life, and you enjoyed them.

BALL: Oh, yes, yes. Very much so.

POTTER: You remained loyal and interested.

BALL: Of course later on when I had the chance to coach wrestling at Wheaton College, shy, there was no difficulty. Most of the faculty had to sign pledges that they wouldn't smoke or drink or play cards or go to the movies. I never had to sign such pledges as the wrestling coach. But it was a real fine bunch of boys, without a doubt.

POTTER: You didn't coach when you were down in Alton or when you were in Connecticut or in Baltimore.

BALL: Oh, no. I hadn't done any wrestling at all, really. But as I say, when we got to Wheaton, a real good friend of mine had the coaching job at Wheaton College. And after getting in a struggle with them on the milk business, why he gave up the wrestling. So that's when I took over the wrestling from him. He was a really good friend of mine.

POTTER: I see. Alright. I had almost got you to come up to date here, to Asheville and Brevard. I want you to talk more about the experience you had at this church. And we can spend more time on this after we turn the tape over. But I want to be sure I haven't missed any great stories out of your family life. What do you think? Is there anything I've missed about your family life that would be a really exciting or grand period or something that was very difficult?

BALL: Well, I have to tell you a little bit about my mother, who was a widow. Father was killed in a railroad accident when I was five years old, and she had three boys – I had an older brother and a younger brother. So she worked at the courthouse and still, taking care of three boys was quite some job. To keep three boys going and to work at the same time.

POTTER: What was her work again?

BALL: She worked at the courthouse, in the tax office, distributing taxes. So it was, I guess, a job with mathematical skills. And so at first she worked in the tax office, and then later was the secretary for the superintendent of schools for the county. So, as I say, we all, the three of us, all became very independent and could do most anything around the house. So that's the reason I don't find it difficult, living here now by myself. (Laughs) But she married later on, and this didn't prove out to be a good marriage. But never the less, she married a farmer who had an insurance business. I think they probably spent her money. She sold the house she had in Wheaton, and they went on a honeymoon and I think it was her money that paid for the honeymoon. So later on he died. And of course she got the house back that she had originally sold, because the people couldn't keep up the mortgage payments, I guess.

POTTER: So she was holding the mortgage?

BALL: So she had a really hard time. And she was very active, even up to 85, but was very much partial, I guess I should say, to a grandson. And so she helped them out.

POTTER: Your son or not?

BALL: No, another grandson. Grandson of my younger brother. And so when they decided to go to Colorado, why she went with them and then she was later in a nursing home in Colorado. But we had visited her a few times and she was really – arthritis in her knees, I'm sure. And she had had a cataract. She was a Christian Scientist in the final stages. The cataract apparently disappeared because we noticed from the one time we visited her and later we visited her and the eyesight was much better. She had lost the sight in one eye and a cataract in the other, but the cataract, as I say, whether to do with Christian Science or something else, so her vision was much better in her last few years. And she died at about 102.

POTTER: Oh my goodness! You were once the president of the Lion's Club. I wonder if you've had any offices in church organizations in the course of your life. Or in the Audubon Society, which has been important to you.

BALL: Well, the only elective office I ever held was the school board in Roxanna (in) Wood River, Illinois. So I wound up as president of the school board in that system, which was very nice. And our son was in school there at the same time. So I did have a few years in the school board.

POTTER: Now it's clear from what you've told me already that education has been very important in your lives. Living by your skills and the role of knowledge life.

BALL: Well, yep. At one point I got interested in Toastmasters, which was a small club in Wood River, Illinois. And that proved very interesting. And strange as it may seem, at one time when several of the Toastmasters Clubs got together for a contest, one of the

members of a Toastmasters Club farther north from Alton, Wood River, was Paul Simon who later was a senator from Illinois. So we knew him very briefly at that time.

POTTER: There's an awful lot of people here at Highland Farms who are very active in our church. Can you explain how that has happened? You've been here for most of it.

BALL: No, I really don't know why that's true.

POTTER: Do they provide transportation, or do you provide your own?

BALL: Well, they have a policy of trying to arrange rides so that everybody doesn't have to drive. So that has worked out fairly well. At one time they rented a bus, but that was too expensive, so that's when they decided to try and pool rides to go to church. So that's worked out fairly well, I think.

POTTER: Do the people split up after they get to town, to go to the various churches they go to?

BALL: No, this is all Unitarian.

POTTER: Is that right? And so the Unitarians are doing that among themselves.

BALL: That's right, yes.

POTTER: I see. And that makes them quite self-conscious of each other. Weekly.

BALL: And usually, some of them, the ones that have meal tickets for Sunday here, like to get back for the meal on Sunday. But otherwise, they're content to eat out together. It works out quite well.

POTTER: And how much time do you have, from noon time, until you have to be here for that noon meal?

BALL: I think they have to be here by 1:15, I think, for the noon meal. Which is a dinner meal of course.

POTTER: Highland Farms is a rather low-key community. If you don't know it's here, you wouldn't find it. The signs are very small. You have to go behind a lumber yard and down a railroad track and all sorts of things to find it.

BALL: That's right. Well, we were interested in it from the very start, and we knew when it started and then we actually came out to visit when they opened up the health care center. From Brevard. And so we didn't sign up right away, but we did sign up later for an apartment. And, of course, an apartment wasn't busy after we sold our house so that's why we wound up, the cluster house was available, so we bought the cluster house.

POTTER: Which you had already participated a share, here.

BALL: Oh, yes. And we had been on the list, and they said well, we'll wait until you sell your house and then you can come. So that's what happened, actually. When we were ready to come, why we had sold the house, why they said well, sorry no apartment available, so here's a cluster house. So we were very fortunate, I guess.

POTTER: Yeah. You've been quite pleased with it. The extra space is quite welcome, for someone who's lived in big houses.

BALL: Yeah, because I like to be outside.

POTTER: Yes, yes. How did it happen that they named a nature trail for Herb Ball here?

BALL: Well, it was my idea that the little space down here by the little stream would be a good place for a nature trail. So I asked the management if it was OK if I started to develop a nature trail, so they said, "Sure, go ahead." So I got some help in building a

path from Highland Farms. And one of our good friends here, Goolsby, had a mountainside east of Black Mountain, so Clay Goolsby told me “anything you want there, just help yourself.” So that was wonderful. So here was 90 acres of virgin property, really. He had a very ancient, old home there, a stone house, but he couldn’t get any insurance on it. But he had fixed it up beautifully. So they had this home there, and it improved the property around the house tremendously, with all kinds of native plants and azaleas and rhododendrons and what not. But back in the side of the mountain why they had done very little, really. So there was a stream there – an ideal place for wild flowers and ferns and everything. So, as I say, Clay told me that he and his wife said, “Why, anything you want, just help yourself.”

POTTER: So, that’s how you got the plants. I’m going to end this tape because we’re almost to the half way point here. Well take a little break. OK, Herb?

BALL: OK.

POTTER: And we’re going to fast forward to the end of this tape.

SECOND SIDE OF TAPE STARTS WITH A CONVERSATION ALREADY UNDERWAY:

BALL: . . .well we saw them and they were crazy. They were outside of Hendersonville, where they bought property. And so we visited them and they said oh, they loved it here. So that’s when we decided well we’d buy a couple of lots and later sign a contract to build a house. So, that’s how we got involved down here. We had already bought a piece of property in Connecticut, in Mount Washington, and so we decided to sell that, to give that up. It was still too much suburban life, which we didn’t want. (laughs)

POTTER: You did not?

BALL: Had enough of suburban life.

POTTER: But you were naturalists, all the same, but you could go to the forests.

BALL: Oh yeah. But anyway, as I say, when we visited Sherwood Forest we eventually bought two lots, and then a year later signed a contract to build a house. But the house was one that we had seen advertised in Connecticut, so we brought those plans down. Not full plans, but just a basic plan you might say. So the builder here said OK, he'd build house for us, so it worked out for us. The only problem was it was too big, but we enjoyed it anyway.

POTTER: Yeah, I remembered you told me it was too big. Well, that's a dream house, isn't it?

BALL: Well, I guess so. So it worked out beautifully. As I say, in the basement we had square dancing.

POTTER: You had square dancing in your own house? What, three or four couples, something like that?

BALL: Well, yeah, we had a caller from Brevard who came and called for us. And so it was mostly teaching people to square dance. Lessons is really all it was. I think they paid a dollar a piece to give to the caller.

POTTER: Have you ever done square dancing to a taped caller?

BALL: Oh sure, Yeah, we taped quite a few round dances and square dances both.

POTTER: Callers have quite a bit of personality, don't they?

BALL: Oh yes. Very much so.

POTTER: They add to the life of the thing.

BALL: Yup. Yeah, we had two or three favorite callers. Both here and in Connecticut, so it was quite a part of our lives, really.

POTTER: After you learned to do it. How many nights a week would you say you and Glenna went out to dance? Once, two times?

BALL: Well, two and three times. Occasionally four times but not very often. Mostly two or three times.

POTTER: And it never wore you out so you couldn't get up the next day?

BALL: Oh, not at all. It wakes you up, really. (Laughs) No, not that strenuous really, at least we didn't think it was that strenuous.

POTTER: Well a person can go about it in his own way. You don't have necessarily to leave the floor.

BALL: That's right. Really, very relaxed.

POTTER: Did any of the callers that you had have names that were interesting names? Were they Appalachian mountain-type people?

BALL: Not really, no.

POTTER: Nothing like "Tennessee Mountain Landis?"

BALL: No. Nothing at all. No. But very good caller, really. Some callers were very simple, very easy. Others more of a challenge.

POTTER: Because they would elaborate. You'd wonder, "What is he saying now?" Yes.

BALL: It was very interesting. We really enjoyed it.

POTTER: I know that you have been members of Audubon for a long time.

BALL: We're not members any more.

POTTER: You're not anymore? But were you for a long time, and did you go on Audubon trips or things like that in the '20s or '30s?

BALL: We always went on a Christmas bird count, which was very good. And in Illinois, as I say, a full day from day break to dawn. And counting different varieties and the number of birds. So, of course, along the Mississippi and Illinois River, water birds like crazy; ducks and geese and eagles. It was very much enjoyed by ourselves.

POTTER: Do you think all of this derived from Father Link, and that group you were in when you were so young?

BALL: Pretty much. Yeah.

POTTER: Do you know what has happened to that man?

BALL: Well, as I told you before, I think that at one time he came to the house, just to visit, and we invited him to stay for dinner, which he decided, but he wanted to take a bath. So he ran every bit of hot water out of the hot water tank. (Laughs) He was a wonderful character, and he never should have been a priest. He should have had a family, but his mother wanted him to wear the robes of a priest, I guess. So he was stuck with a job as a priest. Later on, they took his parish away from him and he joined the Franciscan monks and was shipped up to Wisconsin, I think. And we visited him when he was up there in Wisconsin in this Franciscan order, and he looked terrible. He was so social and everything, and this was complete celibacy and everything, so, it just about killed him I think.

POTTER: It was almost as if they were trying to make a person the opposite of what he was.

BALL: Yeah.

POTTER: Well, that's what happens when you think discipline is crucial to character or whatever, or salvation. You don't happen to believe that yourself, do you? But you're not against discipline, I would take it?

BALL: No (Laughs).

POTTER: What would you mix discipline with? Something else that isn't discipline?

BALL: Well, I don't know. My philosophy of life, I guess I'm trying to keep it as simple as I can, but it doesn't always work out simply, I guess.

POTTER: Tell me about your simplified philosophy of life.

BALL: Well, I don't know. I think everything goes back to nature, really. So rather than the exotic and that sort of thing, I think you have to appreciate the wonders of nature, really. The modern version, right now, in the latest article I've seen, they're making life out of non-life. In other words, they're taking some gasses – hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen – and subjecting it to electric lightening, and they're producing life.

POTTER: A molecule of some kind, right?

BALL: That's right, yeah.

POTTER: Now is this a molecule that can reproduce itself?

BALL: Well, that's it. You're here with water and hydrogen, nitrogen and with the lightening, why that's the beginning of life.

POTTER: (Laughs) That's about as simple as it can get.

BALL: That's right, yeah.

POTTER: What place is there in your thinking, in your feelings about life, for some kind of aesthetic or spiritual thing? That's what I hear a lot about these days. What do you think of that?

BALL: Well, my simple philosophy, if you wanna go to heaven why you just go right here, that's it. (Laughs) And there is no heaven except what's right here, now.

POTTER: What about maintaining a kind of even keel in life. Have you never been dealt any harsh blow?

BALL: Oh sure.

POTTER: You've read the book of Job I assume?

BALL: No, I don't think so. (Laughs)

POTTER: You don't think so. You said you were lucky, but luck goes two ways. What about bad luck in your life?

BALL: Well, as I say, I think my bad luck was when I lost my father. Never knew a father. So that's contributed some, without my knowing it, I'm sure, to my style of life. In other words, what happens so that's it. It's just too bad. (Laughs) So you put up with whatever.

POTTER: And it does no good, you would say, to think about it and mull it over and revise it? You don't look back at all. You **do** look back – you have a good memory, you do look back.

BALL: Well, I don't know. I look back and we wondered if we had done the right thing in bringing up the children, because here's our son on a third marriage. So you have no

control over it. What did we do wrong? I don't think we did anything wrong. It's just, that's the way things happen, so. . .

POTTER: How come you got so lucky?

BALL: Well, I don't know.

POTTER: You were careful to pick Glenna, or she was careful to pick you, what?

BALL: Well, I think, as I say, somehow, we were both in hard times you might say, and had to make the best of everything.

POTTER: You couldn't rush into it.

BALL: No. So, as I say, things just fell into place, more or less naturally, I think. We could support one another and get along together fine. So, as I say, why. . .

POTTER: But that developed very gradually, Herb, did it not? Over a couple years in Chicago and more in Wheaton.

BALL: That's right, yeah.

POTTER: Very slowly, compared to modern times. It's obvious to me, from talking to you only two hours, that you and Glenna were marvelous organizers of your lives. And by that I mean simple management of time. Tell me how she managed to have two children and be teaching; how did she manage to have three children and still be very busy outside the home.

BALL: I really don't know. As I say, she was very efficient in everything she did. She had a lot of interests and somehow everything just fell into place. As I say, she was very much interested in a couple of outside organizations.

POTTER: That sorority she belonged to was one? Or was that just back in Wheaton.

BALL: That was in Wheaton, but in Connecticut she was very active in AAUW. She was president of the group there. As I say, she had an extreme interest for people and organizations like that.

POTTER: What other organizations was she involved in besides AAUW?

BALL: Well, I guess when the children were younger, why we were both very active in scouting – Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.

POTTER: Is that right? Along with the girls? Both of you?

BALL: Yeah. That's right.

POTTER: They accept men as scout masters? Or were you with the boys?

BALL: No, I was scout master.

POTTER: Of a Girl Scout troop?

BALL: No, Boy Scouts. She was in the Girl Scouts. But I went on some of the camps with 'em, the girls. I remember one time when we killed a Copperhead. And got a chance for everybody to get a good look at it, know what it was, know what the fangs were. So, as I say, with the Boy Scouts, why I had a troop that went to Philmont Park in New Mexico and then I went with the Scouts to Northern Wisconsin on a canoe trip, with 12 boys and myself, which was wonderful. And we were out for 10 days and we didn't see anybody, completely by ourselves you might say, and lakes and portages. So, as I say, we both enjoyed outside living.

POTTER: And you would use what vacation time you had in that way, is that right?

BALL: Pretty much, yes.

POTTER: Sometimes together, but other times with groups that you were working with.

BALL: But most of the time with my Scout troop or Explorer post, and she with the Girl Scout. But as I say, there were times I went on the outings with the girls too.

POTTER: My understanding of AAUW is that they have been very politically active, in certain civic causes.

BALL: I really don't know.

POTTER: I don't think of Glenna as being involved in that kind of thing when I knew her.

BALL: That's right. That wasn't part of it, I know.

POTTER: So it's not really political involvement, it's more just the life of the educated woman.

BALL: That's right. Glenna was a great reader, I'm not. So she was much more literary than I am.

POTTER: You really do keep it simple.

BALL: I like to read *U.S. News and World Report*, *Smithsonian* and *National Geographic*.

POTTER: That's not light reading. Not at all. Well, I think this is a marvelous interview and I think I've worn you out. And I've got to the point where I had to do something I didn't want to do here, and I'm glad I did it. (Both laugh).

BALL: Well, very fine.

POTTER: It's a pleasure to get to know you, Herb.

BALL: I've enjoyed it.

POTTER: I'm going to think about this, and listen to the tape, and I'll call you to let you know whether I think I've got enough. All right?

BALL: OK.

POTTER: If I want some particular story, you'd be willing to come and tell it to me, wouldn't you?

BALL: I guess one other thing I want to tell you. On the church and the interest there, I got to know Bill Moore pretty well, and he wanted to know if I would make a piece of furniture for the narthex there. So I'm the one that made that desk that sits in the narthex, there. And I also made a couple of small pieces, one to hold the four collection plates, which is about yay square and about yay high. They don't use that for collection plates but they use it in other ways. And then Bill Hamlin wanted, I guess, the chalice, and he wanted me to make a again a small piece about yay square and yay high and his plan was to have a bottled gas cylinder in the base, yeah, so you could just turn it on and you'd have a flame, see? But that never worked out.

POTTER: That's difficult. Because I notice this propane does not give a very good flame, like oils do.

BALL: Is that right?

POTTER: Yeah. They tried to use it at the Special Olympics for the handicapped kids, and they have an awful time with that.

BALL: Isn't that something? So anyway, I was trying to think of the name, Wayger, that made a couple of wonderful. ..

POTTER: Wes Wayger.

BALL: Yeah. . . .wonderful pieces of I guess china, not china but sculptor's work, but it never worked out, I think.

POTTER: He's a member of the church? Wager, is a member of the church, or was. I don't know that name at all.

BALL: Well, I've seen him at the Folk Art Center, and he has some gorgeous pieces there. I've seen him there on two, two or three different occasions when we visited there. So he's still very active in his pottery work, I know.

POTTER: Where did you make these pieces of furniture? Did you do it here at Highland Farms?

BALL: No, that was in Sherwood Forests. I had a workshop there.

POTTER: OK, now I when that happened. Are those pieces labeled with a plaque or a plate with your name?

BALL: No.

POTTER: Well, I think that ought to be done. You notice that Paul Harder has his name on his pieces.

BALL: Oh, does he? Wonderful.

POTTER: Let's don't get too natural about these things.

BALL: But another thing that I did when they had that library table with no drawer in it, so I made the drawer for the library table, and put the little brass plate on it.

POTTER: Right. Didn't you make the card box for the library?

BALL: No.

POTTER: Who made that card box – I gotta think about that. It's painted black.

BALL: I haven't any idea.

POTTER: I'll remember it. Because I was here when that happened.

BALL: A couple other things that I made. When they made the addition to the church, and these cubby holes in the wall for the different people's mail, I made those things.

POTTER: All right. All right, we got those things pinned down, Herb, good enough. I think that does it for this morning. I better go off, I've got to turn in a library book this morning. So here we're gonna stop. You got another Valentine's tale about your wife? This is Valentine's Day, you know.

BALL: That's right. Well, nothing in the way of Valentines. I did receive a couple of Valentines from the grandchildren, I guess. But that's all. Valentine's Day is not that important to me, really.

POTTER: You're too much of a naturalist for that. Well, Herb, it's a pleasure. Absolutely.

BALL: Very good.