



Berkshire Historical Society at Herman Melville's Arrowhead
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Invisible Community Project
in partnership with
Housatonic Heritage Oral History

Wray Gunn
Recorded: March 12, 1998
0:00:00 to 1:00:26

Zed Pyne: It's the Hidden Community project for the Berkshire County Historical Society. The date is March 12th, 1998, in the home of Wray Gunn. This is tape number 1. Interviewer is [0:00:26 Zed Pyne?]. OK, we're rolling. Were you born here?

Wray Gunn: No, I was born in Atlanta, Georgia.

Zed Pyne: Oh. When did you come here?

Wray Gunn: I think my family moved into the Berkshire County area back in about 1938. We moved into October Mountain in Lee.

0:01:05

Zed Pyne: OK. So, you came here in '38. How old were you?

Wray Gunn: I was 8 years old when we came up here from Henderson, North Carolina. That's where my family was living then, and I came up here as a young boy.

Zed Pyne: OK. And then your family was returning here from—?

Wray Gunn: Yeah, my family has its—my family on my father's side has its roots in Stockbridge, Mass., where they lived on East Main Street for many years. They can trace my roots back into the 1700s. In fact [0:01:53] in the Stockbridge library [0:01:57]. (A picture of Agrippa Hull?)

0:01:59

Zed Pyne: You want to go through briefly what that is?

Wray Gunn: I don't really have the facts down perfect. I do have a historian right here with me who could probably give you the facts a lot better than me.

- Zed Pyne:** Well, maybe we come back and interview Mrs. Gunn.
[laugh]
- Wray Gunn:** [laugh] Yeah.
- Zed Pyne:** So, what was it like coming back or arriving for you as a child, Wray?
- Wray Gunn:** Oh, let's see. We were living on the mountain in Lee, and we were attending, or at least I was attending the Lee Central School. This was grade 6 and 7. And as far as being in school at that time, there were my two brothers and myself going to Lee.
- 0:02:55 And there was one other Black family going—attending schools at that time, and that was Fowler—the Fowlers—and they lived in Stockbridge also. Well, they lived on the line between Stockbridge and Lee. And we used to go to school together over in Lee. And, believe it or not, I had one brother. My middle brother's name was Saint Clair. He was a guy that was into everything. He was in a fight a day. He was in a fight a day, and he loved it. He loved—
- Zed Pyne:** [laugh]
- Wray Gunn:** He just had to have that contact. And a lot of the time, some of the fights he had was with the Fowler boy, which was unusual because there weren't too many Black families around at that time. But as far as my schooling went, it went OK. I was in the top portion of the class. I was very shy and quiet.
- 0:03:59 I just did my work; didn't do anything outside of that. And coming from a southern school to a northern school, people thought that I should probably be put back a class. But we were—we weren't put back a class. We went into the classes we were supposed to. It took us about a week to get adjusted, but we seemed to have held our own in the classrooms.
- Zed Pyne:** You were in a segregated school in the South?
- Wray Gunn:** In the South, oh, yeah.
- Zed Pyne:** So, what was that like for you, coming up here, being in an integrated school?

Wray Gunn:

It was intimidating; something that we weren't accustomed to. But we weren't—it wasn't totally a new reality for us because back in Henderson, North Carolina, where we lived, the family lived, we lived on a street that was next to a cotton gin and a tobacco warehouse.

0:05:05

And on the corner, there was a Black funeral parlor, and we were the second house on the street. And the first house on the street was a white family. This is in Henderson, North Carolina, back in the '30s. And the kids in the white family, and me and my brothers, and the kid from the funeral parlor, whose name was Walter Eugene Jordan, we had our own little gang, and we all played together. And my brother Saint Clair was head of the gang. He sort of courted us all around. And, so, when we came up here, we had already had contact with white families, but not in schools.

0:05:59

We used to go to the movies on Saturday. And the two white kids would get their 10 cents. We'd travel over the railroad tracks, and get our dime apiece by picking up metal, metal spikes, selling the iron, so that we can make that 10 cent and we could go to the movies on Saturday afternoon and watch the serials. And there were two boys in the white family. They would go to the movies, and they'd come upstairs, and we'd all sit. We'd all sit upstairs in the balcony right next to the dividing line there, and stay all afternoon on that 10 cents. Very nice. So, when we moved up here, we'd already had contact with white families. And it was just a matter—as my brother Saint always put it—it's just a matter of letting them know that you weren't going to be run over.

0:07:01

And he never let anybody run over him, you know. In fact, he went out of his way to let you know [laugh] that you weren't going to run over him. Too bad he never played football. [laugh] He would've been great, yeah. So, I think we took that change in stride and, you know, just acted like normal people. And my brother played sports at Lee. He was in high school. My brother David played—my brother David, who lives in Stockbridge now, he played sports at Lee High School. He was a—I guess he was the first Black athlete they had there. But he was a standout in basketball. And my brother Saint and I, we played sports at Williams High School in Stockbridge, and my brother Saint was an outstanding basketball player and baseball player.

- 0:08:02 In fact, he was a natural at whatever he did. And then I just came along in the rear, and I played—I was the smallest. But I'd say, overall, we made out pretty good.
- Zed Pyne:** So, you didn't have any problems making friends up here?
- Wray Gunn:** Oh, I can't say that. We had problems in making some friends, but you either made a friend or you didn't make a friend. I mean, you just gave it the first shot. If it was going to be a friendly association, you went with it. If it wasn't, forget about it. We didn't really go out of our way to try and make somebody be a friend of ours, you know. In fact, as far as my brother—if my brother David and my brother Saint were together, it was a different story. They would not let these things pass.
- 0:09:01 Anything that would be considered as you putting them down, they would let you know that that wasn't the way it was going to be, the two of them together, yeah. And they were always my protectors too, so.
- Zed Pyne:** You're the youngest?
- Wray Gunn:** I'm the youngest, yeah. So, they took care of me, and they loved doing that, yeah.
- Zed Pyne:** What brought your family—did your parents move from here to North Carolina?
- Wray Gunn:** My dad was born in Stockbridge, Mass. His name was David L. Gunn, Snr. And we have our roots in Stockbridge going way back. So, he was one of a large family that grew up on East Main Street in Stockbridge.
- 0:09:59 And, of course, he went south to get an education. He went to Tuskegee Institute, and he went to Hampstead Institute where he met my mother, whose name was Sinclair Hicks. And they were married. They were married up here in Hillsdale, New York. My mother had a job up here, summer job. And they were married in Hillsdale, New York, by a justice of the peace back in 1926. But that was when they first graduated from college, and then they went back to get degrees.
- 0:10:54 But my father's sister, whose name was [0:10:59 Maude Van Allen?], had married a gentleman who owned and ran a rubbish disposal business in Lenox, Mass. And, so, he became ill, and she wanted someone to run the business.

They used—while my father was in school, they used some of the other relatives that were up here in New England. And, finally, when Dad got out of school, and he'd settled down a little bit, he decided to come back up and run the business for my aunt, his sister [0:11:41 Maude?]. And, so, that's when we moved back up here. And she had—she owned the house in Lee, and so we moved there, right. So, we didn't go into Stock...we didn't—Dad and Mother didn't purchase a house in Stockbridge until I believe it was 1940.

0:12:06

I'm not sure of that year. And that house is still in Stockbridge. We still own it. Well, I own it. It's at 2 East Street in Stockbridge—not the homestead, which was on East Main Street. But, anyway, he came back up. He brought the family back up so that he could run my aunt's garbage business in Lenox, and that's what he did.

Zed Pyne:

What did they do in North Carolina in Henderson?

Wray Gunn:

My father was—he was a chef. I can remember that he did a lot of cooking. He traveled around from camp to camp. Some of the other jobs he had down there—that was camp to camp in the summertime. He was also a principal.

0:12:59

So, he was in the education system down there. And he used to be a principal in [pause]—ooh, I can't remember the name of the town. Maybe I'll think of it. But he used to be a principal, and he used to be a coach, and he used to be a teacher down in different towns down in North Carolina. He used to teach at Benedict College also in Columbia, South Carolina. So, we sort of moved around a little bit down there, and I can't remember all the places we went to or stayed in. Of course, my mother had two aunts down there that were very good to her. They were her sisters [0:13:56 Belle and Katie?], and they sort of help my folks out and watch the kids while they worked.

0:14:05

I'm not sure what work my mother did during those years.

Zed Pyne:

But then when you came up here, you lived with your aunt for a while?

Wray Gunn:

Yes, we lived with my aunt for about two or three years until, with the help of my aunt, they were able to purchase a home, this home in Stockbridge. And we've owned that

since about 1940. I don't know where the—I might have those papers somewhere. I'll have to look them up and see.

Zed Pyne: OK.

Wray Gunn: So...

Zed Pyne: Then you lived with both your parents and your two brothers? Was that the extent of your family after you moved to Stockbridge?

Wray Gunn: Yes, yes. My brothers were David and Saint Clair, and myself—David Junior.

0:14:59

Zed Pyne: Then where are they now?

Wray Gunn: Oh, David is still in Stockbridge, on East Main Street. My brother Saint Clair's in Washington, D.C., with his own family.

Zed Pyne: And then when did you marry, or what happened to you? You went to Lee High School?

Wray Gunn: I went to Lee High School. No, I went to Lee Central School. And when I sort of like graduated out of Central School, for one year, I did the bus trip back and forth to Lee from Stockbridge to finish out that year. And then the next year, I was a freshman at Williams High School in Stockbridge because we were there. And, so, then I started—that was back in '44, yeah, 1944.

0:16:00

Then I was a freshman at Williams High School. Then I—my marks were always good. I was in the top five of the class each year while at Williams High School, and I had quite a few honors. I was president of the class several years. I was treasurer. I was student council representative. I was editor of the newspaper. Then, being on the student council, I was the—I was president of the State Student Councils of High School in Massachusetts, and I had to preside over meetings in Lee that were held in different cities, towns.

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That was in my senior year. And I won the school oratorical contest, and I was number one on that. And then they had a statewide oratorical contest, and I came in third. I was one of the speakers at my graduation. I wasn't first or

second, but I was chosen to give a special speech at graduation, so I did that, yeah. Quite a few honors. They just came to me, I guess. I was in the right place at the right time, yeah. That was about it.

Zed Pyne: [laugh] And what year did you graduate?

0:17:59

Wray Gunn: '48, 1948.

Zed Pyne: And then what?

Wray Gunn: Then I went to—well, in 1948 when I graduated, my brothers and I, we went up to a tryout school, one of these baseball tryout schools. We went up to one of those in Fort Henry, New York. My brother Saint Clair had been invited up there. So, we all jumped into his convertible, and we rode up there, and we were going to spend a weekend and tryout. And while we were up there, we all played and tried out. It just so happens they wanted to offer me a scho...a contract to play Class D ball in Class D baseball for the St. Louis Browns. And I had to make my choice whether or not I wanted to do or go to school. So, I decided to go to school because I had been accepted at UMass.

0:19:02 And that's what I did. I went to UMass for four years, and graduated with a degree in chemistry, and minors in physics and math, yeah.

Zed Pyne: And, so, you graduated in '52?

Wray Gunn: '52, 1952.

Zed Pyne: And what did you do after that, after graduation?

Wray Gunn: Well, I got married in September 13th in 1952 to a lady from Pittsfield. Her name was Dolores Oakley—Oakley family. And on June 22nd, 1952, I got a job with New England Lime Company in Canaan, Connecticut, as a lab technician.

0:20:06

Zed Pyne: It was New England Lime?

Wray Gunn: New England—NELCO—New England Lime Company down in Canaan, Connecticut. And that name changed from

New England Lime Co. to NELCO, N-E-L-C-O, capital letters, NELCO Incorporated. And it changed to NELCO Incorporated when the US government came in and put them under contract to produce calcium metal, which was a high-priority material for the United States government, using the Manhattan Project.

Zed Pyne: Oh.

Wray Gunn: Oh, yeah. So, we all had to get clearance and all that sort of stuff.

Zed Pyne: And what did you do for them?

Wray Gunn: I was a chemist.

Zed Pyne: Oh, you were a chemist.

Wray Gunn: Lab tech.

0:20:58 In fact, at the time I went in, I was the—the chemist at the plant was sick. It later turned out to be tuberculosis, and then he died. So, I never really met him. So, when I went in the lab, there was nobody there. So, I just went in, and they said, “Here’s the lab, you know. There’s some tests you have to do.” And [laugh] it was kind of scary in the beginning because I didn’t have a mentor, you know, somebody saying, “This is how we run a test, and this is what we do.” It’s just go in. And, so, I guess I handled that all right. I stayed there for 44 years. I just retired completely here about a year and a half ago.

Zed Pyne: Oh.

Wray Gunn: Yeah, two years this fall. So, I had a—so, it was first—

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Zed Pyne: So, you continued working as a chemist for them for—

Wray Gunn: Oh, yes, they offered me two other position...three other positions, which I turned down after I looked at them. One was to be the chief chemist at a plant in Californian apple in Apple Ballard. That plant has since shut down. Then there was to be a quality assurance manager at a plant in Ohio, and that one has shut down. And then I had a chance to go to Victorville, and that one has since turned down. I turned them all down because I didn’t like the area, and I’m

sort of glad I did. I liked where I was and the job I was doing, yeah. But I went from lab tech. Then the chemist died, so they made me chemist.

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Then they moved me up to chief chemist. And then back in about 19...back in 1962, Pfizer bought the plant out. When Pfizer bought us out, then they had a different level of organization. So, I was made chief chemist, then I was moved up to quality assurance personnel, then quality assurance manager. And that's what I retired as, quality assurance manager, which was a nice job. I liked it.

Zed Pyne:

Have you been in—in what way have you been involved in the community—

Wray Gunn:

In the community?

Zed Pyne:

—here? Yeah. Was there church involvement, for instance?

Wray Gunn:

Oh, yes, I belonged—I've belonged to the Clinton AME Zion Church in Great Barrington—Clinton AMEZ Church in Great Barrington—located on Elm Court.

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I've held—in my tenure time, I have held all the offices except being minister. So, somewhere along the line, I was chairman of all the boards, been on all the boards, choir, and—let's see, what else? I used to be on the Board of Antidiscrimination here in Berkshire County, and I used to be heavily involved in an NAACP branch out of Pittsfield for Berkshire County. I used to be on the Mental Health Board, Berkshire County.

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And I've been a member of the local Lions Club, Great Barrington Lions Club since—I've been on that for about 25 years now. And I've also been on the Sheffield Planning Board, and I'm running for my third term, fourth term, which is interesting.

Zed Pyne:

How so?

Wray Gunn:

Yeah.

Zed Pyne:

How is it interesting?

Wray Gunn:

Because we're trying to get in some new zoning regulations—rules and regulations. And where we're running into a lot of problems is trying to satisfy those people that have either lots and want to use lots that were

nonconforming last year, were nonconforming many years ago, and now they want to do something else with them.

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We have a lot of interesting cases coming up before the board. And we only put in the zoning, new zoning bylaws about two years ago, and that's been tested quite a few times. So, the Board of Appeals has had work to do too, yeah. And, right now, one of the things we have to address is people as they get elderly and they find that being elderly, some of them want to come back and live with their siblings in their house with them. And our laws permit that as long as you don't make a separate unit in the house for them. And you can do most anything as long as you don't put in a second kitchen, and that's where the stickler is.

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We have regular rules governing that. So, now, there's a petition out to put something on the docket at the next town meeting whereby there can be a new ruling for this [0:27:16] people whatever they want. I mean, I don't really have anything to do with it but listen to the pros and cons, and then make an honest opinion of what I think. So, that's where we are right now.

Zed Pyne:

So, what is your interest as far as how you make your decisions, for instance, in the matter of making a separate unit?

Wray Gunn:

It's too early for me to say. I haven't heard all the pros and cons yet. I mean, that's my job: to listen. They want to do it, they come in and they tell us what they want.

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They write up the bylaw that they would like to see presented, and then we evaluate that. We've got a hearing. Yeah. No, we don't have a hearing set on this one yet, but, because the wording wasn't proper on the initial petition that came in.

Zed Pyne:

I guess what I wanted to ask was how do you make your decisions? How do you weigh the information that you're given so that—?

Wray Gunn:

Well, it's hard to say. It depends on—that's why you have hearings. You go to the hearings, and you sit back and listen to get what the people are talking about. But the one thing you have to keep in mind is, basically, you can't deny people from doing things—basically. You have to go

through and look at all the laws, and make sure no laws are being broken.

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Now, in order to do this thing that they want to do now, there are other laws on the books that say you can't do it. So, right now, if their wording does not take into effect the other laws that say you can't do it, then we have to consider that, or at least I have to consider that.

Zed Pyne:

So, is part of your job on the Planning Board is to protect community interest? Is that accurate to say that?

Wray Gunn:

Yes, that's true.

Zed Pyne:

So, what do you see is the community's interest?

Wray Gunn:

I say they want to have it done, but they need to write up. They need to write the pros and cons up, and then we go through, and see if the pros outweigh the cons, as far as I can see. And that's about all I can tell you now because we haven't gone into it that much.

Zed Pyne:

OK.

0:29:59

Wray Gunn:

We had a long meeting the other night, and that was about the gist of it. But, basically, it wasn't worded properly.

Zed Pyne:

Going back to when you were growing up here, do you have any memories of—?

[End of Recording]

[Begin Recording]

Wray Gunn:

Church picnics? Oh, sure, we used to have church picnics. We used to have church picnics. We used to have church dinners. We used to have church affairs where we tried to get the community come in and help us. We had fundraisers at the church. Things that I can remember vividly, well, things that I was in quite deeply, I can remember starting a building fund at the church whereby what I wanted to do was—what I wanted to get the people to do was to take the church and expand it and make it bigger because the church has got a cellar that always gets wet.

0:00:59 So, I wanted to expand the church, and go from—expand it out to the sidewalk, which if you’ve got a variance, you could do. And the project looked like a real big one for such a small church, but it would’ve given them access to bringing the bathrooms upstairs, and giving them a sizeable meeting room upstairs, because most of the members of the church are elderly, and it’s kind of difficult to maneuver on steps and things like that. Some people fall. But then we got a minister in there that didn’t want to be patient to raise the money so that we could do the whole job. And, so, they used the money for some other things, and I didn’t particularly go along with that. In fact, I kept going against it, and then pretty soon—in fact, we had the support of the town too because I made speeches at different churches, you know, to try to get them, bring them in.

0:02:05 And I was upset with that. And then they got a new minister in there, and he told me I didn’t have any control on that, and I was doing too much, so I left at that time. Yeah. I said, “OK, do it.”

Zed Pyne: So, was that the church you were involved with when you were growing up?

Wray Gunn: Up here?

Zed Pyne: Yeah.

Wray Gunn: Yeah. Family’s always been associated with the church. My mother was a churchgoer, and we went to church even when we were down South. We went to church every Sunday, yeah. But other things, in the Lions Club, I’m president and treasurer, and I try to run projects.

0:03:00 I’ve held an office for about all my 25 years, except the first three. I’ve either been president or secretary or treasurer all the time. And, basically, my main interest there is seeing that the club runs and makes some money so that we can give, help out people that are nearing—care for their eyes. We supply glasses, eyecare, and now we’ve moved into the area of hearing aids, and things like that. And it’s stimulating to do these things, and help people out. I like that.

Zed Pyne: When you were growing up, did anything noteworthy, did anything stick out in your memory? Big snow storms?

Wray Gunn: Oh, sure.

- Zed Pyne:** Floods?
- Wray Gunn:** Storms aren't like they are now.
- 0:03:59 In fact, just speaking of floods, just the other day, I was looking at some old pictures I had back of the flood in Stockbridge, Mass., back in 1949. I have some pictures of those, and it shows the water. I took pictures in certain areas on the water covering the golf course and side verge and covering the railroad station in Stockbridge. And by "covering," I mean up to the windows. And of my—the old homestead in Stockbridge having the water completely filled with backlot fires. Had a big fire at a lumber company down on East Main Street just before you get to South Lee there, a big fire back in about 1950. I took a couple of pictures of those. I don't know where those pictures are.
- 0:05:01 But this lumber yard burned down; took all day. I mean, the fire department could do nothing with it because of the lumber and timber that were burning, yeah.
- Zed Pyne:** So, the flood in '49 reached to your house?
- Wray Gunn:** The one in—yeah.
- Zed Pyne:** So, you looked out, and you saw all this water—
- Wray Gunn:** Water.
- Zed Pyne:** —in your backyard. How did that affect your family's life?
- Wray Gunn:** Well, that was where my aunt was living. Our house was on—
- Zed Pyne:** Oh, I see.
- Wray Gunn:** —East St. This is East Main Street. East Street, as you come out of Stockbridge, goes up towards Pittsfield towards Lenox. Route 7, that's East Street. East Main Street continues on towards South Lee and the pike. So, they were actually sort of like stymied there.
- 0:05:58 They were isolated for a little bit, but not too long because it didn't stay at that level too long, yeah. What are some of the other things standing out?

- Zed Pyne:** Yeah. But they don't have to be disasters; just things like picnics or [0:06:16].
- Wray Gunn:** Well, let's see, I got married in '52. Had a problem finding a place to live because nobody wanted to rent to me, you know, one of these things. You can call it discrimination if you like. Couldn't get a rental.
- Zed Pyne:** Where did you try to get rentals?
- Wray Gunn:** Locally, Berkshire County.
- Zed Pyne:** In the Stockbridge—
- Wray Gunn:** Great Barrington area.
- Zed Pyne:** —Great Barrington area?
- Wray Gunn:** Yeah, we—I'd call about a place, and then I'd go look at it.
- 0:06:57
- And then after I looked at it, and then called back, it was either already taken or someone had put a down payment on it or something like that, you know, one of these suspicious like answers.
- Zed Pyne:** How did you feel about that?
- Wray Gunn:** [laugh] Upset. Yes. That wasn't good at all. But at that time, that was happening quite a bit, and you couldn't prove anything. That was it. You couldn't really prove anything. And at that particular time, I wasn't on the Discrimination Board. We didn't have—they weren't that involved with those things at that particular time. They came later on. So, there really wasn't too much that we could do.
- 0:07:58
- But we finally found this place. Bought this place, moved in here 1953, yeah, January 1st, 1953. And done a lot of work on it, and renovated it quite a bit.
- Zed Pyne:** Was that the first time you'd run into over discrimination in looking for housing?
- Wray Gunn:** No, there were other little subtle things that happened. I can't remember all of them. Like being not waited on in restaurants. Go out to eat, and you wondered why it took so long to get waited on. That was one thing. Being bypassed in line for—this didn't really happen to me but it happened

to one of my sons—being bypassed in his effort to do a job, you know, a little job.

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That was upsetting. Things like that. There were probably quite a few others I don't recall right now. I'd really like to forget them because I don't harbor a grudge if we are making progress [0:09:26]. Keep bringing those things up again and again and again, it doesn't help. It doesn't help you to move forward, I feel. You got to work with and deal with people, and some people are going to have the type of feeling they've got forever. So, you have to find a way to work with them.

0:09:59

Zed Pyne:

What was—how would you describe the values that your parents gave you as you were growing up?

Wray Gunn:

Well, my mother always said, "Don't expect people to give something for nothing, and everybody should go out and work for an honest dollar." My mother was always hardworking, and my father was always hardworking. And she said, "Go out and work first, and then have a good time." And they both liked to travel, entertain, and I always felt [0:10:44]. If I wanted something, first of all, have the money to buy it, and don't expect someone to just give you the money. Go out there and earn it. So, I've worked all my life.

0:10:58

My brothers have worked all their lives. They've all had a job since as long as I can remember. Now, whether or not your life—you live a lifestyle that's within your means, that might be a different story [laugh], which is a problem quite a few people have. But my mother was—Mother and Father were always outgoing, friendly with people. I tried to be the same way. I try not to judge a person by hearsay and all this other stuff. I have to meet them and talk with them. In fact, I might even like a person that nobody else likes. That's just me though. I can't say that that's—it's a—my mother used to be the same—my mother and father were the same way.

0:11:54

When we were living in Stockbridge there, we made more friends because anyone—when a new Black family came into town, my mother and father were the first pers...first people to visit them. I don't know how they found out so much about who was coming in, but there were a lot of

Black families coming in every summer to work. And my mother and father always had those people over to the house or something, you know, right off the bat. And she made a lot of friends that way. And even today, people are asking me about, “Mrs. Gunn, you’re talking about Mrs. Gunn, Mr. Gunn,” which is just a great legacy, I think. They were outstanding people, and I try to be the same way. My brother David is the same way but he just doesn’t get out. He doesn’t get out to get involved.

0:12:56

But when he has people—when he meets people, he’s a friendly person, and give you his shirt off his back, yeah. Same with my brother Saint. So, we’re good that way. So, we learned from my folks to be that type of person, yeah, and I appreciate it.

Zed Pyne:

So, you’re very community oriented?

Wray Gunn:

Quite so.

Zed Pyne:

And did you pass that along to your children?

Wray Gunn:

I tried to but all four of them are different. It’s tough to know really what you passed on to your children because they all didn’t turn out the same. So, I’m just hoping that, basically, good things pass...were passed on to them. I can’t—even to this day, I’m not sure what got passed on. I can’t answer that.

0:14:02

Zed Pyne:

Kind of out of our control. [laugh]

Wray Gunn:

Once they walk out that door.

Zed Pyne:

[laugh] What kind of discipline did your parents use with you?

Wray Gunn:

My mother was the disciplinarian. She dealt out the punishment, and she tried to be strict, but of course that didn’t work. But then—

Zed Pyne:

Why didn’t it work?

Wray Gunn:

Because my two brothers were always getting spankings, so I don’t believe it worked all that well. If it was working, she wouldn’t have had to give that many spankings.

0:14:58 But spankings were—you knew—when you knew you were going to get a spanking, and you knew who was going to give it, and when you got ready to go to bed, you knew how to prepare yourself. First of all, you had to go out and get a switch for your own spanking. And then later on after you got ready for bed, you got in your pajamas, Ma comes in, and she does the dirty work. She, you know, take off your bottoms, and then she'd clamp your head between her knees, and she'd let you have a few whacks. [laugh]

Zed Pyne: How did you discipline your children then?

Wray Gunn: I tried to give them a spanking when they were supposed to, and I tried to talk to them when I thought that they were wrong, but that was only in the early days. Most of the time, I chastised them or punished them some other way, taking something from them.

0:15:57 But we didn't give beatings after, you know, after the spankings, I mean, after they were about 5 or 6. We tried to talk, we tried to explain, and we did other things without physically abusing them. That was about it.

Zed Pyne: So, you changed your method of operation a little bit from what your parents—?

Wray Gunn: Yeah, not unless it was something major, and you were present at the moment it happened. Because I can remember being—something happening at a store once like, “Come on, it's time to go,” and the kid pulling away from me, telling me he wasn't going to go, and all this, you know, just the [0:16:53 one-on-one?]. So, I grabbed him in the store, and I know I gave him a spanking with my hand, which isn't quite as bad.

0:17:01 But it's just to let him know that I was boss, yeah.

Zed Pyne: And you said your parents were—had very high ethic...work ethics.

Wray Gunn: Yes.

Zed Pyne: So, I guess you had chores to do?

Wray Gunn: We had chores to do.

Zed Pyne: What did you do?

Wray Gunn:

Well, back in when we were in the South, of course, you didn't need much heat there. But in the wintertime, when it got a little bit cool, you did need heat. So, we had—I can remember—we had this big stove right in the middle of the living room. And that stove needed wood every day, and had to have the ashes taken out. And we'd get a bath every Saturday night. OK? Fill the tub up, and all three boys would get a bath.

0:17:59

I was the first one. I was in clean water. [laugh] And if the wood wasn't there, then the heat went down. And since Dad was working, and not there all the time, it was up to us to keep it going. And since Dad wasn't there too, Mother—my Mother became very good at doing a lot of things on her own. Like, she canned goods. Like, she made soda pop. She made ice cream. She was really great. But when—and also the ashes, you had to clean the ashes out of the pan before you made a stove. So, if you skipped doing your chore, which is what—I didn't have any heavy chores; not real heavy. But my two brothers had to clean the ashes out.

0:18:58

And sometime, they'd ask me to do it, I remember, and I'd do it. But it seemed like they forgot quite a few times—

Zed Pyne:

[laugh]

Wray Gunn:

—and it created a little problem for me. So, I can remember that quite vividly. Now, once we got up here, we used to live on sort of like a farm up in Lee on October Mountain, and we had pigs and chickens. That was the main thing, and so you had to clean the pig pens out, and you had to clean the chicken coop out. And we were all involved in that in the same way. Of course, I was a little older then. I was getting up around 8. And even there, sometimes, everything wasn't in proper order, especially during the fall when we killed the pigs. There were certain things we had to do to get ready.

0:19:56

And we were all sports-minded, so we more or less wanted to go play baseball, or go play something else. But up on the mountain, we didn't have that many facilities available. So, we were usually home. And, so, I found that if it were today, it would really be a hard time keeping us there. But back then, it wasn't quite as bad. But we did help out in killing the pigs, and we did help out with the chicken coop.

Zed Pyne:

What was the difference between then and now?

Wray Gunn: Then and now? Living in a town, and there's so much to do at the schools, we'd be off and gone most of the time. Back there, we were on the mountain, and the only way to get there was to catch the transit bus and then walk that mile and a half to get home. So, we weren't—

0:20:56

Zed Pyne: So, I'd be interested to hear what it was like, since I'm a city boy, both like—you said there was a long preparation and things for the slaughtering.

Wray Gunn: Oh, yeah.

Zed Pyne: What was that like?

Wray Gunn: Oh, yeah. First of all, you had to keep the—since we had the garbage business, we were making out like gangbusters for feeding the pigs because when we went to markets, and picked up the vegetables and stuff they were throwing out, we just brought it home, and gave it to the hogs. But the hogs are kind of sloppy in eating, so it would get all over the pen, so we had to go in and clean them out, OK, so that you could deliver more stuff in. And one of our jobs was to get in and clean it out. We'd move the hogs into another pen, and clean the old stuff out that they wouldn't eat probably because it was covered in mud or something like that. And, of course, we had a lot of fun here, you know. You'd get all in, and you'd get all covered with mud, and you play in it—

Zed Pyne: [laugh]

0:21:59

Wray Gunn: —wrestle in it, you know, and then Mother wouldn't let you in the house. [laugh] And up there on the mountain, we had all sorts of animals running through. We had a garden that was—the animals pilfered the best stuff, woodchucks, foxes. So, then we said, well, you know, we got to protect what you're growing out there. So, we sort of had some 22 rifles that we tried to kill the woodchucks with, or whatever came down in there to—we weren't too good at that. But, yeah, it was a lot of fun. We used to collect eggs, and we'd sell them, with our chickens. And we kept chickens until, one day, we had an Irish Setter dog, and one day, he got in the chicken coop.

0:23:00

One night, he got in the chicken coop, and he killed all the chickens we had. I can't remember how many, but it had to be up around 30 or so. And he even killed my favorite chicken. I used to have a chicken. I'd walk in, the chicken would fly to me, you know, and sit on my shoulder, sit on my head, and all this sort of stuff. That dog killed it. Didn't eat them; just killed them. If they moved, he killed them. And he killed them all. So, we were going to get rid of the dog. My father was going to shoot him. And he did. The dog was sitting out there, I remember, and Dad got the 22, and went out and shot at him. Missed him four times. I couldn't see how he missed a big dog like that four times. And then we finally got rid of the dog. I thought we should've shot him with one. Maybe we could've buried him on the farm. But we didn't.

0:24:00

Zed Pyne: Did you do any work outside the home?

Wray Gunn: What do you mean "outside the home"?

Zed Pyne: Did you have part-time jobs or things [0:24:07]?

Wray Gunn: No.

Zed Pyne: No.

Wray Gunn: No. We didn't have part-time jobs there. It seemed like we had too much to do on the farm. First of all, my oldest brother was big enough so that he could help Dad on the truck. So, he was tied up there. And with everything else going on, we didn't have any part-time jobs there. Helped Mother can stuff. We used to make root beer, you know. Ma had the recipe, and we made root beer, and we'd bottle it, and put it down in the root cellar or whatever you want to call it. And she used to make dandelion wine. My mother used to make dandelion wine.

0:25:01

But for some unknown reason, it always used to disappear. [laugh]

Zed Pyne: It sounds like you knew where it disappeared to. [laugh]

Wray Gunn: [laugh] Yeah. Well, my second-oldest brother had an affinity for drinking, for tasting the wine. Like, he was Ma's wine sampler before it was time. And sometime, he'd go in and drain a bottle, and then fill it back up with water.

Zed Pyne: [laugh]

Wray Gunn: And, actually, he was the only one that was drinking about that time. And my other brother, he wasn't—there was one other time that he wasn't actively involved in [laugh] a problem. [laugh] Yeah. But even later on in life, when he used to come visit, Ma used to have special bottles of wine. We called him Saint. "Saint, I got something you might like in the refrigerator."

0:26:00 It was like that, yeah.

Zed Pyne: Who do you remember from this area when you were growing up? Who were the people that made an impression on you?

Wray Gunn: My coaches in high school. I can't remember all their names. Well, I remember Coach John Consolati in Lee, and Coach [pause]—a fella from Stockbridge, Tracy, J. Murray Tracy.

0:27:06 And I remember J. Murray Tracy used to say, "Are you going to college?" And I said, "Well, I don't think my folks can afford it." And he said, "Well, you need to go." And, so, my junior year, he was my coach. In my senior year, I had another coach. I can't remember his name. But he said I should go, and so he helped me get into UMass. So, I owe him a lot. And growing up, a couple of my other teachers—I can't remember their names. [pause]

0:27:54 But then in some of my community activities, [0:27:58 Dr. Guillotine?] in Great Barrington, he was a family doctor for over 50 years. But I served on several committees with him, and he was very strong and—this is the Mental Health Committee. He and I used to go to meetings, and he was very strong. He carried a lot of weight. John. B. Hull in Great Barrington owned the oil company. He and I became involved in setting up Construct Incorporated in Great Barrington, which is the nonprofit housing organization. I'm one of the chartered members of that, along with John B. and several other people. So, we started that out at—we started that—had meetings out at Simon's Rock before it became a school.

0:28:59 And Mrs. Hall, Blodgett Hall, founder of Simon's Rock. [0:29:12 Robin Nevers?] of Pittsfield, he's deceased now. He was a minister at [0:29:18]. He used to be minister at

Second Congregational Church. I respected him. He gave me a lot of insight. He was my wife's minister. There's probably some other people I should name but I can't think of them right now.

Zed Pyne:

OK. Well, this has been very helpful. [0:29:45]

1:00:26

Recording ends