

**VOICES OF THE CAPE FEAR
INTERVIEW WITH PETER R. DAVIS**

AUGUST 9, 1995

INTRODUCTION

This is Sam Bissette and the date is August the 9th, 1995 and I'm here at home at 1939 South Live Oak Parkway and Peter Davis is with me today and we're going to talk with Peter a little about things that he might have known in the past in relation to his family, in relation to Wilmington, and get his view points on things. He has been very active in some areas and we'll talk about that.

INTERVIEWER: So, Peter let's start off with the fundamentals. Where and when were you born?

DAVIS: I was born in Wilmington at James Walker hospital where everybody else was on January 30, 1942.

INTERVIEWER: In 1942, that puts you at fifty?

DAVIS: Fifty three.

INTERVIEWER: Fifty-three and you don't look it.

DAVIS: I feel it, though.

INTERVIEWER: How early did your schooling start? What is your first memory or recollection that you have?

DAVIS: Well, at the time, we lived on Oleander Drive where my mother lives and has currently just sold the house. They were building a house right in her driveway. My earliest memory is that Oleander at that time, was a two lane road going to Wrightsville Beach. At that time, Winter Park was actually almost a separate community and we would go down to the railroad track to a place called Nanks Lingo City Grill and it was right next to White Milk Company and the Pepsi Plant was just across the road too, but that railroad track was the city limits.

INTERVIEWER: Lingo City.

DAVIS: Lingo City and that dates some of us. If somebody knows what Lingo City is, they've been around here. I think North Fuel Oil and Coal was around the corner and there was maybe a True A bottling company, a 7-Up bottling company.

INTERVIEWER: Now the whole area has changed and with the destruction last week of the Pepsi Cola Building, it's flattening out for a new legacy.

DAVIS: It's all gone now. At one time, the Budweiser Plant was right next to the Pepsi plant and that's where when the Clydesdales came into town and would go to the Azalea Festival, they would all be kept at the Budweiser place there. For my schooling I went to Forest Hills and we walked or rode a bicycle down Country Club Road which turned into Colonial at Wrightsville Avenue, which was right close to my father's mill. I went to Forest Hills grades one through six and then I went to Chestnut Street School which was a junior high. It is now Annie B. Snipes who was then the principal. The vice-principal or assistant principal was Haywood Bellamy who later became superintendent of education. In the ninth

grade, I went off to prep school at Woodberry College and was there ninth and tenth grades. I hated it and was very homesick. I hated to leave Wilmington and came home and went to New Hanover High School the eleventh and twelfth grades and graduated in 1960. I then went to North Carolina State where I later graduated.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of degree did you work for at North Carolina State?

DAVIS: I started out in Engineering and the strict discipline did not work with my demeanor and character and I finished in Economics.

INTERVIEWER: Well that's a good basis for anybody.

DAVIS: It is not as objective, but very subjective, and I could sort of work my way through it.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, I know what kids did during the early days for entertainment in past times and all. What did you folks do?

DAVIS: Well, the sixties were fascinating. Actually, the late fifties in high school, there was still the propriety of dating. Beer sales were cut off at 11:45 and so it normally to go pickup a date at 7 o'clock and go to the drive in movies. There were two on Oleander Drive and the one on Carolina Beach Road. There was also a drive-in restaurant.

INTERVIEWER: What was the place in those days?

DAVIS: The Miljo. There was the Miljo and I cannot remember the one that was at 16th and Dawson Streets.

INTERVIEWER: Peacock Alley.

DAVIS: No, Peacock Alley was at 17th and Queen Streets.

INTERVIEWER: 17th and Queen?

DAVIS: The kids all went to the drive-in that was at 16th and Dawson and it is now a Kentucky Fried Chicken, but and you'd normally go there after drive-in movies and almost always the date had to be home at 11 o'clock pm.

INTERVIEWER: I presume at that time the beach didn't have any significance for you in the summer?

DAVIS: The beach was "the" place. We had a beach house that my parents ended up selling after I was in college, but every summer I'd go down there. We'd move down about Memorial Day and mess around at the Yacht Club. Everybody had motorboats. This was before the age of trailers and so if you didn't have a place to keep your boat you stored it. No one had outboards. The trailers of course opened up boating to everybody, but Wrightsville Beach was a sleepy little beach strictly homes for summer use and after Labor Day everybody left and quite frankly, I think we probably went an entire year without even returning. Even though Wrightsville Beach now is considered part of Wilmington, the drive was not a casual drive back then and there was nothing to do. The cottages were not even rented.

INTERVIEWER: I guess you enjoyed the Carolina Yacht Club during that period of time, didn't you?

DAVIS: I Enjoyed the Carolina Yacht Club, went to the Crest, and went to Robert's Market. I would

spend a whole summer in a bathing suit, very often with a T-shirt or shoes and just total freedom.

INTERVIEWER: Robert's Market is still an institution at the beach apparently, because that's still where the Yacht Club gets the chicken salad from for social occasions.

DAVIS: You know, Ms. Cross worked there and she married Mr. Cross who was a meat cutting apprentice for Mr. Roberts. Of course, Mr. Roberts died and then Mrs. Roberts continued to run it until it was sold to the Cross's and another family. I think it's subsequently been sold, but it's still what it's always been.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever realize you'd end up one day being the Commodore for the club?

DAVIS: I never did. It was a pure accident of politics.

INTERVIEWER: I think it was public demand in the Yacht Club. They wanted you and that's why they elected you.

DAVIS: It's very nice of you to say that. The other side would use stronger expletives, but the Yacht Club has probably maintained its character more than anything else in that it is a very casual place to go.

INTERVIEWER: It is the venerable institution of Wrightsville Beach, too.

DAVIS: It is.

INTERVIEWER: It started in 1853. I don't know anything else down there that could sort of match that.

DAVIS: There is an argument about whether it's the second or third oldest. I recently got a dictionary from my grandfather, Dr. Charles Patterson Bowles that my father gave me during our move and it has the flags of the Yacht Clubs in there and there's the Carolina Yacht Club's red star with a white virgin.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, let's get to genealogy for just a minute and let's see if we can establish a little base with your wife and children. Let's back up to your father and mother and back up to your grandfather to establish where the Bowles fit in. Can you give me a little information about that?

DAVIS: I'm married to Katherine Calhoun Russell whose father was Dr. Henry Russell and he was raised in Winededraw, Georgia. He is one of thirteen children, one of whom was Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia, he graduated from Davidson, and then got his Theology degree and was a Presbyterian minister. He died in 1979 and Kay's mother was from Ailey, Georgia outside of Vadallia, Georgia. Kay and I got married in 1967. We have two children, Richard Russell Davis and Matthew Brutton Davis.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DAVIS: My mother was Mary Black Bowles, daughter of Chrissy Black Bowles I believe, and Dr. Charles Addison Bowles. He died of suicide, I think in 1930 when he was 56. He was very depressed I think over the depression and also having lost his daughter in childbirth.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Let's get to your father for minute now. Holmes Davis, Jr.

DAVIS: His father was Holmes Davis, Sr. who had, I think, come from Southport. My blood grandmother died of diphtheria when my father was four or five.

INTERVIEWER: Your family really came here when your grandfather came, is that right?

DAVIS: The Bowles have been here forever.

INTERVIEWER: The Bowles have been here all the time, but I meant the Davis'.

DAVIS: The Davis's came from Southport.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, they came from Southport.

DAVIS: That was in the early 1900's. He went into banking and became president of People's Bank and Trust and in the 1930's, bought Delgado Mills and Spofford Mills I want to say, from Tidewater Power Company.

INTERVIEWER: Well, let's go into that for just a minute. What I had asked you to do is to substitute for your father. If he were living, what he would be able to tell me based upon your memories. While we're talking about the mill, let's go into that just a little. I was wondering about the origin of the names Delgado and Spofford.

DAVIS: As best I know, either Spofford or Delgado, one of them, came from a foreman and I want to say that the mill was originally built and owned by a company out of New England. I think the mill fell on hard times and that's when my grandfather bought it. My father graduated from Carolina in 1932 and he was a bank examiner and then came into the mill in 1933 or 1934. The mill fairly much prospered financially from the start. It took raw cotton and made broadcloth. My grandfather had bought the mill in 1901 and when the war came along, he tried to get a commission but because of a knee injury, was not able. The mill really prospered about that time because there was so much need for cloth. I was born on January 30, 1942.

INTERVIEWER: That was before the synthetics came in?

DAVIS: Yes, long before that. The mill did very well. After the war, the mill made a lot of money as I understand. By that time, my grandfather, his second wife had died of breast cancer in the early 1930's and he had remarried again. He married a divorcee from Baltimore named Elizabeth.

INTERVIEWER: You have a phenomenal memory to remember all those details.

DAVIS: Well, some of it I do. I remember growing up and my father taking me over to the mill. I was one of three children. Actually there were four but I had a brother that died before I was born. He was born with a birth defect and died 18 or 19 months later, which oddly enough, my father never got over it. They knew instantly when the child was born that he would not live.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DAVIS: I used to go over to the mill and my father was very well thought of in the mill. My grandfather, I think was aloof, but my father was a man of the people back then and they had softball teams. There was a lot of mill entertainment. They had one of the first swimming pools actually in the southeastern part of the state. The wages were high for the people that actually worked there and it was considered a good job. They had a mill village where the mill owned all the houses. The mill was one big family. Later in history in the 1960's, the paternalistic method of doing business fell out of vogue and was considered a form of slavery. At that time, it offered a very high standard of living for people who

otherwise had very little opportunities. After the war, the Japanese with the rebuilding of Japan, had started sending cloth in. They could buy American cotton on the open market at war prices, ship it to Japan, process it, send it back, and sell broadcloth actually cheaper than the mill could produce it and sell it. About the same time, vertical integration was coming into the textile industry. In other words, they took cotton and made broadcloth. Broadcloth looks like unfinished canvas and at that point, it is finished and dyed and made into shirts, sheets or whatever. Because this was a single purpose mill, there was no room to expand. My grandfather very astutely saw what was happening to the market in 1955 and merged it with a company called M. Lowenstein & Son, which was a very huge manufacturing firm out of, I think, New York and the family got stock in some of the tax free exchange. My father, I believe, owned 25% of the mill and by that time, my grandfather was retiring and had made a lot of money.

INTERVIEWER: Wasn't the mill one of the mainstays of employment and also the Coast Line of Wilmington?

DAVIS: It was probably the biggest employer in New Hanover County. In the 1940's and early 1950's, my grandfather very likely could have been the wealthiest man. It is kind of ironic and I don't want to sound bitter, but none of that wealth filtered down to any of his grandchildren. He lived long enough to spend a lot of it. He did not invest in real estate, which was of course the thing to invest in if you were to do well and then his widow lived until 1992. I think she had sold off most of the real estate.

INTERVIEWER: Peter, didn't the Beach-line run right across the edge of the mill site?

DAVIS: There was across from the mill road, the trolley line.

INTERVIEWER: The trolley line.

DAVIS: It was the only overpass in Wilmington at that time.

INTERVIEWER: I remember that. The streetcar would pickup speed to get up over the overpass going to the beach.

DAVIS: As a child, I remember going over to that overpass but it was torn down. I'm not even sure when, but I want to say it was leveled. It was a dirt embankment.

INTERVIEWER: That, I guess, was done when the beach-line was abandoned.

DAVIS: No, it was done in the 1960's. It was done at least 20 years after the street car stopped running, but it stayed there over that railroad track for a long time.

INTERVIEWER: I never had occasion to go back there. The beach car stopped running and I never got back there to see it.

DAVIS: Ironically, I purchased 1.4 acres next to the beach car line and built my business Parts and Engine Sales last year in 1994. So everyday when I go to work, I can look at the old mill office where my father's mill was.

INTERVIEWER: Well that's great. Let's go along just a minute and let's get back to you for a second. After you came back, what did you do so far as working is concerned, after you got out of State?

DAVIS: After I got out of State, I went to work for Chatham Hosiery and my uncle J. Chatham Bowles in Charlotte. I worked in the mill for a year in a training program and they sent me to Little Rock,

Arkansas in sales and I became extremely homesick. I told my wife, "I'm going back to North Carolina even if it's on the back of a garbage truck" and I went to work for Xerox Corporation in Charlotte in sales and had a wonderful time and made a decent living. She graduated from college and became a teacher and in 1970 to 1971, and I said, "I've gotta go all the way back home." We moved to Wilmington and at that time, I went into the building business.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know why you came back?

DAVIS: I couldn't leave.

INTERVIEWER: You had Wrightsville Beach sand in your shoes.

DAVIS: I can't imagine living anywhere else but here and I've been a lot of places and loved other places, but I just...

INTERVIEWER: I hear people tell me that have been around a long time that coming to Wilmington and the beaches was magnetic.

DAVIS: It is.

INTERVIEWER: It pulls at you.

DAVIS: Unfortunately, it's brought more people here. I went into the building business and went into politics with the belief, naive however it is, that you can change and make things better and we did. I was on the County Commission from December 1972 to December of 1976.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to get to that in a minute, but before we leave the business aspect of it, tell me what your current business interests are. Let's bring it up to date.

DAVIS: I have some rental property, homes and commercial, and I have a parts business called Parts and Engines that we distribute in southeastern North Carolina and sell retail parts that fit on hydro power equipment, construction equipment and the like. We have names such as Briggs and Stratton and Dempsey Power Tools.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you in the building business?

DAVIS: I'm still general contracting and still occasionally, renovate houses for myself. I'm currently building a house, but primarily, I built from May of 1971 through 1980.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, was that mostly spec building?

DAVIS: Spec and contract.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DAVIS: I really believe there's nothing a person can do and get any more joy out of than constructing a house and seeing it used as a home. It's quite wonderful but it is no longer easy because of regulations, labor problems, financing problems, and everything else. There is nothing any better than seeing a house become a home and knowing that you did it. You ride by it for the rest of your life and see it there.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I know what you mean. I did a little spec building myself one time for a period of

time. The man that built the house you're in was the seventeenth house he'd built for me. That was Dick Williams.

DAVIS: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Peter, let's talk about your political experience just a little bit. I gather from what you've said that you furthered your education when you went into politics.

DAVIS: I did.

INTERVIEWER: For want of a better way to say it?

DAVIS: I ran for county commissioner when I was 30 years old and I was the youngest one elected. I was the youngest chairman elected two years ago and I was probably the youngest one not reelected. I lost in the election in 1976 lost by 290 votes out of 30,000. It hurt a great deal, but after about five or six weeks, I realized I didn't have to go to meetings on the first and third Monday and since then have been very politically active for certain individuals, but primarily causes many would call liberal like sign control, the environmental issues, and now the preservation of Wrightsville Beach as a family beach. I get a lot of joy out of politics, but being in politics, there is a price to pay socially and financially and you have to accept it.

INTERVIEWER: Would you explain the social price just a little? Actions that offend certain people; is that it?

DAVIS: Exactly.

INTERVIEWER: When you take a stand on an issue, the people who are for it like you and the people who don't, hold it against you? Is that what you are speaking about?

DAVIS: We live in probably the most conservative county in North Carolina and I have voted across the party lines. Most of the time, I'm a Democrat, but they seem to take it too seriously when you support a candidate that they don't like and it's very unfortunate that we cannot accept each individual's opinions and belief as their own. Unfortunately, this transfers into religion and things such as that.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DAVIS: A closed mind is a dangerous mind.

INTERVIEWER: Well, out of your political experiences, I guess that you learned a good deal about how the inside of the system works. It isn't what's right, it isn't what's wrong, it may be what is the politically expedient thing for the moment. Can you sum up a little bit of it? How would you sum up your political experience as to what you have learned?

DAVIS: Mainly what I learned is that every individual has a value, a belief, a soul and view, and that regardless of how a person appears until you get there and meet them. Once you get to meet someone, there's good in everyone and I think given a chance, every person will do good.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Who are some of the ones who served on the county commissions with you?

DAVIS: Mike Vaughn, a Republican, and Vivian Wright, Republican, both of them extremely intelligent and interesting people. They are totally different in opinions but people that I really respect and continue

to like. I served with Dr. Hall.

INTERVIEWER: Mike Hall.

DAVIS: Mike Hall, he was interesting and really a man of the people who loved everybody. I wish he was here to speak. He got a brain tumor when he was running for state Senate and died before he could have been elected. He was a very dedicated person and he was wonderful to serve with. I served with Buck O. Shields who did a beautiful job and later, in my opinion, got burned out and got extremely cynical. Generally, when people stay in office more than about 7-8 years, they become cynical because every issue has two sides and it doesn't take but about six months in any job, to make everybody mad once.

INTERVIEWER: I have heard it described that it's a very abrasive and abusive position to hold. Any position in politics, I've heard people say that. It wears on you.

DAVIS: It's interesting Sam, that the powerful people that I ran across were the ones that had the most open mind and could realize that you might have been on opposite sides today, but tomorrow, you could be pulling the same wagon.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any brief recollections of any experiences that were humorous in connection with politics? Was there any one that you might recall?

DAVIS: I got in trouble with the sheriff. I had a study done that showed that expenses here were 40% higher per capita than any other place and he had a big public hearing where they almost lynched me. Vivian Wright gave me a plaque that followed the meeting that showed a fish and a float that said, "Even a fish wouldn't get in trouble if he'd kept his mouth shut." I had a lot of fun and I learned how to take the flack and met a lot of interesting people.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get into politics beyond the local level?

DAVIS: I try to forget this, but I did run for Congress in 1974 against Charlie Rose. I knew I didn't have a chance, but I was, as they say in the business, posturing for a later run. The main thing I learned was that if I had won and didn't want the job, that it took too much money, too much time, and too much compromise. So after that, I pretty much worked on only issues that were important.

INTERVIEWER: It's really a shame that our country has gotten into a position where the representatives in Congress, the House, the Senate, and the other positions, that so much is required of those campaigns that it weakens the position of the person to serve. They have to serve the special interest groups that pay for the break and the advertising that helps them get there.

DAVIS: At the time I ran for county commission, you could run a race for three or four thousand dollars. The School Board took a thousand dollars, the State House took five or six thousand, but nowadays, they run fifty thousand dollars and up and the paybacks are tough in the campaigns. The parties are much more dominant now in that they fund campaigns and they don't get the quality of person. I'm not talking about myself, but if you look back historically on the people who used to run, they were more or less elected on respect. Nowadays, we have the dirt campaigns and people are being told why not to vote for somebody rather than why to vote for somebody, but there are still good people that run. There are also still good people that get elected and I truly believe and maybe it's a hope, that when people get into an office, many times they rise to the position and find out that they do things because they're right rather than because of special interests. It's not always true, but I still believe in the system. I can't imagine anything otherwise.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it looks like the system has certainly made this country in spite of our shortcomings, probably the greatest country on earth. It certainly is surviving. Were you around and on hand when the controversy arose about the law enforcement center's design?

DAVIS: My name is on the plaque down there as chairman and we bought Bill Rainey's property. Actually, I think we had to condemn it but the first thought was to put it out of town where it would be more accessible with more room. Then, the attorneys, law enforcement, and the Sheriff's Department said, "No, it's got to be downtown and it has to be next to the courthouse," so it was pretty much put there. We did a search all over the country to find a good architectural firm that could place one in the center of the city and came up with a firm out of Washington that had done some beautiful work. The building is a beautiful building if you look at it in its entirety but I remember that stone hinge part on 4th and Market Streets that has received all the criticism justifiably, and I keep thinking that one day somebody is going to finish it. I do remember vividly when it was being built they just about tore down Mr. Huggins house because it jarred all the plaster off his walls. Of course the library, which was the the stone building next to it...

INTERVIEWER: The Taylor House?

DAVIS: No, it's now a city office, but when they were driving the pylons...

INTERVIEWER: The Light Infantry Building?

DAVIS: Yes, the Wilmington Light Infantry Building, they almost split its foundation, but it was quite an interesting period.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, let's move on just a little now and bring ourselves more up to date. You had quite a campaign in connection with trying to get rid of billboards. I would like for you to tell us what the story of that was.

DAVIS: There was a billboard across the Cape Fear River Bridge that showed a man dropping his pants and said that the owner of some mobile home company would drop his pants if you'd come to Whiteville to buy a mobile home from him. I, for one, said that something is wrong. People leaving Wilmington were having to look at a sign with a man dropping his pants around his ankles and showing polka dotted underwear. That was supposed to be humorous obviously, but I wrote a letter to the editor, got a lot of calls, and found out that there was a group across the entire country that was in favor of billboard control. I got involved with them and a group of us were able to enact a city and county sign control ordinance and out of that came a tree ordinance also, which has served to protect a lot of the development quality in Wilmington. A billboard has not been built in New Hanover County since 1987. We have been less successful on the state level in that they are placing them on the interstates, but this is a beautiful area.

INTERVIEWER: What is the situation regarding the bill boards on the interstate sections that were put in, in recent times on interstate 40?

DAVIS: The billboard industry is quite good when it comes to being able to buy their way into the legislature and they have been able to protect their turf especially when it comes to federal highways. They do very well and they have been able to put a lot of signs across the state especially on interstates. Public interest has kept it somewhat intact, but on the state level, a group called Scenic North Carolina has helped some.

INTERVIEWER: Well that's interesting. It certainly is a subject that I have been interested in and I have

been in favor of getting rid of the billboards because they have gotten in such profusion and such size to the point where they are traffic hazards at various intersections. They detract from people watching what they should be watching in the way of moving automobiles by reading the advertisements.

DAVIS: You can't help looking at a billboard when you are driving.

INTERVIEWER: We have one that has just been put up at 17th and Wooster Streets that is a little bit off color in what it says. I won't put it on the tape, but I think the thing ought to be gotten down quickly.

DAVIS: Well, the biggest user of billboards generally is the tobacco industry and banks tend to use them. They are not used for tourism very much and when they're used for a motel, it tells you to stay at this motel rather than another one. The people of this community are very conscious of the beauty and the tourist industry, which unfortunately has grown more than it should. Some people come here for beauty, but they tend to like billboards. My hope for the future of this community is that it will continue to grow in a proper manner. By that, I mean in a family way and I would like to see the dominant industry become the University as an unbelievable asset. The community is lucky to have it and it brings the right type of people in. I am very proud of it but I have no involvement in it. I have never been on the board and I have never been there other than going to sports events. My wife just got her masters degree in May from UNCW, but that's where the money should be spent in this community.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, let's ask you about this. What other interests do you have in the community and have had here in Wilmington whether they have been church interests, civic interests, or other types of interests?

DAVIS: I've been a deacon at the First Presbyterian Church. I don't go very much now and have not been a deacon for a while. I was on the airport commission and I was on the board of the hospital one time for two years and another time for five years. I got a great deal out of it and I've been a member of the Rotary Club, but like my father, I was asked to drop out for failing to attend meetings.

INTERVIEWER: They really enforce the attendance requirements.

DAVIS: Yes, they like for you to attend. I am getting ready to become a member of a group called Quiet Birdmen and I love to fly and I have soloed since I was 16 in 1958. I currently own two airplanes, a 1941 Illustrium and a 1950 Cessna. I love to sail and love to boat and have been active in the Carolina Yacht Club as you mentioned having served on the board for four or five years. I have been involved in a group called SAFE, which Frank Cherry, an attorney, and I funded through donations from other people. Mainly the biggest donation we got was from the Richardson Corporation and the generosity of Smith Richardson, funding college tuition to go to UNCW and for public housing students who could get into UNCW.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DAVIS: That gave me a lot of joy and I guess we were able to fund close to twenty-five to thirty thousand dollars.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me this. I had great admiration for your mother and for your father, having known them a long time. What are some of your memories in connection with your family that you think speak well for the father and mother that you were blessed with?

DAVIS: My father was very well-educated and I never heard him say a curse word in his entire life. I heard my mother use very few, but my father never did. My father wore a coat and tie Monday through

Friday and even when he played golf on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons. He was very well-read, very well-mannered, very quiet, never tooted his own horn, and consequently, I don't know as much about his family as I do about my mother's side. She would share with us all of her family and I think there was a friendly competition between who had the best family and my father chose not to compete. Both of them have been good parents. I think you have the normal problems you have with parents. They valued education, honor, dignity, and doing what was right.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live in the house on Oleander Drive?

DAVIS: My entire life. Yes, they built it in 1937 and it was just sold to Ann and Bruce Mott Bunting in June and they are moving in next week. Mother is going to move into my house on Greenville Loop Road and we're at the beach house.

INTERVIEWER: Where is the beautiful portrait of your mother that hung in the living room?

DAVIS: She's having it boxed up right now and it will be stored until she can put it in the new house.

INTERVIEWER: I remember that portrait well. We are to the point here now that we have about three or four minutes left and I wondered if there was anything perhaps that we have overlooked or that I have queried you about that you think would be interesting. Are there any significant events that maybe you can think of in your life or in the life of Wilmington that you'd like to comment on?

DAVIS: The thing I see in the future of Wilmington is the growth and the spirit here that I think is not in a lot of places. I know in 1959 when the Coast Line was leaving, I had a lot of friends when I was in high school whose families were leaving and there was a feeling that Wilmington was dead and gone. Since a lot of families were involved in the Savings and Loans, like the Camerons and the Trasks, a lot of people pushed to get Wilmington reborn. They brought in Wilmington College, which became UNCW, and made it grow. They brought in a lot of good industry and I think the future of this community is going to be even stronger. There is a lot to do here and there are a lot of good people here, but the spirit is based more on families and the joy of daily life. This is going to come across wrong, but in larger cities like Charlotte, it is which Country Club and how much money you have in the bank. Around here, it's how many blue fish you caught and the joy of just being alive. I had a brother, Holmes, who died on July 7, 1992 and maybe that gave me a different outlook on life. I see a lot of people around here that work is not one of the top ten values. Family, friends, religion, fishing, hunting and just being with friends is a lot more important.

INTERVIEWER: I believe you made a valiant effort to save your brother, too. Didn't you do a bone marrow transplant?

DAVIS: We did a bone marrow transplant and that worked, but the cancer came back. That was probably the defining moment in my life, spending the time with him and seeing his valiant fight for life and the ultimate loss. I learned a lot of values and maybe that's what made me feel so good about Wilmington. It's nice to see somebody with a johnboat riding down the road with their children and I know the future looks good.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I've enjoyed particularly the philosophical comments, I think a great many of them go with thoughts of mine and I hope you will keep using any means at your disposal whether it is writing letters to the editor of the paper or growing organizations akin to what you're working for to make this a better place in which to live. As we solve some problems, we have others such as medical and traffic. I hope someday or another that we can solve those things to the satisfaction of the community because we've got to be able to do that to keep up the quality of life in this area.

DAVIS: You are very right, Sam. The biggest worry right now is the hog growth of population and what it could do to the river because the river pollution is such that it threatens the water supply. Wilmington currently has to go twenty something miles up the river to get the water and...

INTERVIEWER: All the way above Elizabethtown.

DAVIS: Yes and the industry, if the water pollution is such, could threaten Dupont, Federal Paper, and Takeda in that they would no longer be able to discharge any of their waste.

INTERVIEWER: Have you read this mornings newspaper, yet?

DAVIS: About the two million gallon hog spill?

INTERVIEWER: About the hog spill over in Brunswick County?

DAVIS: It's very scary and it's going to be interesting to see what happens.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I'm moving along here because tomorrow I've got a birthday and I'm not celebrating those birthdays very much because they've begun to have too many numbers to them. I want to thank you for coming out here to my home this morning and recording these thoughts that we have. I am under the understanding that the county library that these and the other tapes that people have been talking with me will be combined into a one version of an oral history of New Hanover County for this century. Some of them go back to the turn of the century and therefore we have pretty well everything covered. Did you know that they blinked the streetlights three times on the night that the Armistice was signed as a means of communication to the people since they had no radios or televisions or any way to let people know that the Armistice celebration had begun. It was one of the longest one-day celebrations Wilmington has ever seen.

DAVIS: I never heard that.

INTERVIEWER: I found that out the other day.

DAVIS: I never heard that.

INTERVIEWER: I think we'll use that as a closing note. Thank you, Peter, for coming out.

DAVIS: Thank you.