

**GRTC**

**Interview: Bruce Korsek**

Bruce Korsek: ...And today is the 28th.

Laura Browder: Yes. And could you please put in the city and zip as well.

BK: Alright, I don't know how this is going as far as what's you're doing as far as talking to me. Um, I don't have a script to read. Um, I'm liable to say things off the cuff. Or, uh, things that might be considered inappropriate. So... I take it that this all will be -- what's the word to use, edited?

LB: Yes!

BK: Ok.

LB: Absolutely.

BK: Because before we get started, let me tell you about my background. Uh, just--ok. I grew up in the city of Richmond and went to Richmond public schools. My parents divorced when I was two years old. My mother and grandparents never learned to drive. So we didn't have a car. Now that seems very odd in this twenty-first century. But at the time, the buses ran twenty-four hours a day. They went an--anywhere you needed to go. Uh, and I grew up riding the buses. There

were no school buses, so if you went to school, you either walked or you rode a city bus. Or your parents took you. But even the... the families that had cars, it was usually one car. So either Papa rode the bus to work or, uh... he took the car and the mother took the children on the bus where they wanted to go. And of course you all are so young, you don't remember downtown Richmond when it was a thriving place. Everyone went downtown. Everyone rode the bus. It was just a different world. So I grew up interested in buses because they were my key to going anywhere. And, uh, soon as I was old enough I came up here and got the job, and, uh... it was fun driving buses, some of which were older than I was. And buses that I had grown up on. And at the time, the pay was two-eighty-nine an hour, which was very good pay for 1970. Uh, gas was a quarter, you know. New car was twenty-five-hundred, three-thousand dollars. So, uh, I had a grand time. And unfortunately, as time went by, the service was reduced, downtown went away. And, uh... you know, the system's only a shadow of what it was when I came here. When I came here, we carried thirty-four-million people that year. I think we do ten or eleven now. And that's quite--quite a drastic thing. And there is no twenty-four-hour service. Um... it's just--not the bus company's fault so much, it's just things change. You know, uh... and I wish they'd form a transit authority when the private company left because then there would be the ability to ask for a, uh, quarter percent gas or sales tax to bring in income... to help us provide good service. But when we get just what the city gives and the county will give, you know, we don't have any, uh, dedicated funding. So we can't provide the service we would like to provide. And, let's face it, a lot of people ride the bus because they have to. A lot of them ride it because of the convenience. But the convenience gets knocked out of the way when, you know, let's say the bus runs once an hour, and you see it pulling away. You know, and there is no downtown to go into a store or anything and waste an hour, kill an hour. So, you know, we--we--we're fighting a

difficult battle. But anyway, that's my little preface onto who I am and how I got here and so forth.

LB: Well, I'm gonna back you up already because you're saying all kinds of interesting things. Tell me more about growing up in Richmond. What neighborhood did you grow up in, what school did you go to?

BK: I grew up in Highland Park. Went to Highland Park Elementary School. Went to Chandler Junior High School -- not middle. Junior high school. I'm still very twentieth century. And I graduated from John Marshall High School in 1966.

LB: And right after that, you came to the GRTC--

BK: No, they wouldn't hire me till I was twenty-one. So I worked at, uh--I worked at social security for two years and I worked at Metropolitan Bank for a year. And then when I turned twenty-one, I applied at the bus company and I was accepted, thank goodness, and, uh... you know, that was a big increase in pay for me, as well as I was doing what I liked to do. You know. Uh...

LB: What was the GRTC like then, when you first joined.

BK: Well, it was Virginia Transit Company. Uh, it was a very male-dominated place. Uh, when I was released from class, I was number three-thirty-three on the seniority list. That means I was

the three-hundred-and-thirty-third bus operator. And, uh... out of those three-hundred-and-thirty-three people, there might have been eight women. Maybe less than eight. But it was very male-dominated place. And of course the--the buses--none of them had power steering. Uh, there was no such thing as a lift or a, uh... a radio or telephone. And about two-thirds of them were not air conditioned. So it was--it was just very different. Now, I said I was three-thirty-three on the list. Right now I think we have maybe two-hundred-and-twenty operators or something. You know. But of course we also have the so-called men-bus (?) operation -- you aware of that? Ok. And then the specialized, the handicapped transportation--

LB: Yes. The C-vans.

BK: Right, yeah.

LB: What's the men-bus?

BK: [Pauses] They're these, uh, so-called buses that are built on a truck chassis. And they service routes that are liably (?) patronized. And the operators of these so-called men-buses -- they make less money than a regular bus operator. And, um... I'm just very old-school. I think if you're gonna provide transportation to the public in a bus system, you need to do it in buses. Not converted trucks. You know, the customers don't like them and they ride rough, and, uh, it's just very awkward machines, uh--and I know they're cheap but you get what you pay for. And if you want to--if you want a small bus, buy a small bus. Don't buy truck conversion. But that's my opinion. And I'd probably be slapped around for saying that. But I mean, I'm just being quite

candid and honest with you. Uh--

LB: And they're operated by the GRTC as well--?

BK: Mm hmm. Yeah.

LB: How long has that been going on?

BK: Mm, two or three years.

LB: I've never even heard of them.

BK: Uh, well, you probably think it's a brinks (?) truck [laughing] when you see one on the street. It looks like a truck in the front.

LB: Huh.

Benjamin: I've seen those, I think.

LB: Yeah.

Benjamin: Yeah, they look like airport shuttle kind of...

BK: Yeah...

LB: Yeah.

BK: Yeah, and that's where they belong.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: Uh, I mean they're very awkward (?) [to operate?] because, ok, here's the steering wheel. You know. The fare box is way over there, back by the door. And, uh, and to see the people get on... you have to do like that, just... hate 'em.

LB: It does sound a little awkward.

BK: Hate 'em. But anyway. I--I'll go off, so don't--

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: You know how I feel about that.

LB: So when you first came to the GRTC, what kind of training did you get and--

BK: It was a three-weeks training period, I came on Monday the twenty-ninth of June, 1970...

Was in class for probably two days.... Then went out on a bus in the park, Byrd Park. You know. I guess... you know, so, if you crash, you know, you'll probably run into the field or something. And, uh, then you would send out with different bus operators to learn the different routes, and also, uh, display your skills or lack of in operating the bus and collecting the fare and interacting with the passengers. Uh, driving a bus actually handling the vehicle, particularly in these times with the power-assist and the cool air conditioning and all that -- that's very simple but to get along with people.... You know. And also people--lotta people don't like buses anyway so they cut in front of them and it's just, uh--it can be, uh... challenging. But you know, you have to-- more than just a--a person who can drive a vehicle.

LB: That's what I keep hearing.

BK: Oh yeah! And--and you--you learn a lot about humans. Humanity. People. And, uh, it's like... why would me, you know, just-passed segregated society, why am I in Creighton Court? I would have no reason to go there. You know. Except on the bus. I never been there, I knew it existed. But, uh, I never been there, and Whitcomb Court and all of that. And the stereotypes of people--the majority of those people are fine. No problem at all. You know (?), but--you take people that have a chip on their shoulder who have something against the bus company, something against people of another race or [ethnicity], uh... people who are intoxicated, and back then I don't think there was that much actual drug use involved, but, uh, those people can be challenging. And you have to learn how to deal with them and how to get what you want done. It's like smoking on the bus. This one operating was ha--harassed all the time... because... ok, the bus pulls up to 1st and Broad. We're gonna stop as soon as we cross 1st Street. Person steps

down on the back step well. They light a cigarette. Well he would yell, "Put that out, I'm gonna call the police." You know. It's... that's... confrontational, you know, is that the way to handle that? I would ask people to please wait until you leave the bus to smoke. And, like, in the case of this guy?

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: I mean with this close to the stop? I'm not gonna say anything to him. You know. You have to--learn how to... talk to people. And you are the one in charge, but you don't need to throw it in people's faces. You know, uh... So I'm sorry, I'm just rambling.

LB: No, you're good, you're great.... It must've been a huge change for you growing up in a, as you say, just-passed segregated society, which by 1970, I mean, there was in flux, still. What was it like for you to suddenly be going into these neighborhoods--

BK: Well, I thought nothing of it because I grew up in a home where... there was not racial prejudice. Um... I'll ask my grandmother when I was a child, I said--like, I wanted to ride in the back of the bus. Most children do. 'Well we can't go back there, that's where the colored people sit.' 'Well, I wanna ride back there!' 'Well, you know, you can't go back there.' So, um, I was used to the race thing as far as--and I wondered why. Why are things like that. Like, the company-- they didn't hire a black bus operator until 1962. And there was a lot of commotion then, about, you know... bringing in these, you know, black men to drive buses. And I remember my mother came home one day and, uh, she said she'd ridden with--and you have to excuse terms of the



time. She said, uh, she rode with a colored man on the bus. And my grandmother said, 'well, how'd he do?' and she said he did as well as anybody else, you know, and, um... that was brought about by pressure from the NAACP and other groups because the company admitted in '62 that their ridership was approximately 50% white, 50% black. And you have to realize in the time I came up in Richmond, it was black or white. I mean... you might see an Asian once every six months. And as far as other foreigners, you just didn't see them, I mean, it was a completely black and white society. And, um.... It's just... it was interesting growing up in that time, and it made me wonder *why* things are like that. Uh, like, my grandmother--I mean, she was in 1895. She thought it was wrong that black people had to pay the same fare but they couldn't sit where they wanted. And they had to get up if a white person wanted the seat. She thought that that was not fair. And, I mean, in reality, it wasn't, but, you know, that was, uh, uh... a bad time in, uh, America's history. And, uh, I remember the bus being stopped and the operator telling somebody to get up and move. And, uh, it was never pleasant. But I never saw any real conflict. As far as a person, you know, wouldn't and the police would have to come and all that, but it did happen. Because in the newspaper, they would have little bits, so-and-so, age twenty, you know, refused to move and the police came and arrested him and, you know, ok... It's just like, you know... in the newspaper of the day--I'm talking 'bout 1950s--let's say that there was an automobile accident. You know, they would identify the person if they were black. It's like, you know, so-and-so comma negro comma, you know, killed, car hit a tree, so-and-so, so forth. And, while that seems very bizarre now, at the time, that was just the way it was done, so.... At least I didn't think too much about it. You know, seeing--I don't know--why do we have to identify people like that, but, uh... that's the way it was. So--again, excuse me if I go rambling...

LB: No! You--you're great.

BK: Just... lotta thoughts.

Benjamin: That's the best [form?].

LB: So keep on rambling. Think--think about those--

BK: Ok, uh--do you have questions for me.

LB: I do, I do.

BK: Well, go with the questions, um...

LB: Well my question--

BK: ... that would stir something up in my head.

LB: Tell me about... your first days.

BK: Alright, my first days. First day, Friday, July the seventeenth. Uh... had an extra on Highland Park Hull Street, bus 89 was parked on track 5. And I went out there and I did the run, and you know, there was no problem. Went from downtown to 41st Forest Hill to Highland Park,

back to 41st and Forest Hill to the garage. Um.... I never felt uncomfortable in the sense of I couldn't handle the bus... I was never frightened on the bus. Uh... some people I think, particularly women, not to be sexist... they sometimes feel like the bus might be overwhelming to them, and I know one girl, she would get real nervous when she'd get downtown in all that heavy traffic. Never phased me. Um, I don't know. Maybe cuz I was young and dumb. But, uh, I've never had a ticket in my life. And I been driving since 1966. So--and I been driving buses since 1970 so I feel like I am a good driver. And I realize, you know, what risk you can take and what you can't take. And, uh... on the street, I was involved in... I don't know, a number of accidents on the bus, but... they were other peoples' fault and... no one was really injured. Um... it's just, you know, a--a bump on the street, you know, uh... and... they come and investigate it and that's it.

LB: How long did you stay an operator before you switched over to being--

BK: Twelve--twelve years.

LB: Ok. So during that time, what would say were the best and worst parts of your job, just routinely?

BK: Ok. Best part of the job, it was something I liked doing. I think it's very important to like your job. If you don't like your job, you're gonna hate it and not... be happy at all. The pay was good. Now, during the '70s, you know, the cost of living went up... drastically. Well, we had a cost of living clause in the contract. Union contract. So we'd get raises all the time. You know.

Um... I don't know, by '75, I guess we were making seven dollars an hour. As opposed to 2.89, and you know, it just kept going up. Um... the bad thing... hours that you work. You know, the new people work the, un...desirable hours. You know, most people don't wanna get up at three-thirty in the morning to get up and go drive a bus--or go do anything else. Uh, most people, young people, they wanna be off on the weekend at night. Well, no, you're gonna be out here working late on Ginter Park. You know. That. The--the hours, but, um.... I was lucky in the sense of when I came here, there was a lot of turnover. Because the economy was good. So people came and people went all the time so I rose in seniority fairly quickly. And I was able within a year to pull a run -- if I didn't wanna work weekends, I could pull a run that didn't work weekends. Um... bad--some people are--can be very unpleasant, but they were in such s--I minority, that, uh... you know, I just dealt with them and... went on.

LB: How did you--what did you do when you had a really difficult or challenging rider? Or situation?

BK: Well, I remember one time this, uh, man got on the bus at Meadow and Broad. Was working the Northside bus that we over down Brookland Park, Boulevard, Highland Park--

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: ...and he sat right behind me and... the smell of the liquor was so awful. I pull that window wide open and I drove as fast as I could to get him off of there. Um... one thing--I guess... I had an incident on Grace Street--this would've been in the late '70s. Uh... 5:30 in the afternoon. This

man on the Westhampton bus, he was smoking a cigarette in the back. So... said, you know, should wait till you... leave to smoke, please, and you know... went on a few blocks, kept smoking. Said, you know, uh, you're gonna have to put that out. Which he would not do, so... Then we had no radio on the bus or anything, so I went to, uh... phone booth on the corner. Called, told 'em what the problem was. So I got back to the bus and I got in the bus... and he walked up to the front of the bus, and I had the front door open. He stopped down on the step well and pointed a gun at me. And, uh... he said, "This is gonna make a difference in your rules, isn't it?" I said, "Well, no. You know, rules are the same for everybody." Now I'm not some bold Batman-and-Robin character, don't get me wrong. But I felt in my mind that at 5:30 on a weekday afternoon and [that?] thirty people on the bus, this man would not dare shoot. Now, they couldn't see the gun because there's a panel--like, person sits sideways and the door's here and there's a panel. And he was down on like the bottom step so they couldn't see the--the gun. So, um... he just stood there. So I said, "Well I have to go, uh... you know, you need to get off." So I started moving the bus. And he jumped off and I went on. So when I came back down from Westhampton from the University of Richmond, there he was on the street, waiting to be picked up. Just drove by. And after that, I would see him--I think he was mentally challenged, black man, forty-something named Joseph. I said, well, you know, I can't keep passing this cat up all the time. So I stopped and opened the door and he got on and paid his fare and there was no issue.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: So I didn't have any problem with him after that. Now I had another incident where--once

again, working Westhampton at seven o'clock at night. Must been winter time because it's dark. Ok, we have about ten people on the bus going up Grace Street. Alright, this... young black woman gets on. Young, twenty-ish. Um... and she takes a seat in the bus. And the guy across from her is this old white man who is drunk. And he said something about damn niggers get up in here and blah, blah, blah, blah. And, you know, I--I just... I was totally pissed. So I pulled the bus to a stop and, uh... I went back and said, "The only nigger on here is you and you've gotta go." So picked him up and dragged him up to the front of the bus and pushed him out the front door. And I shut the door and drove on. So when I got near the end of the line, this woman came up to me and said, "You know, you shouldn't have done that. He might've had a knife." I said, "Well that's true, but, uh... I just can't tolerate that type of behavior." And, uh, never saw him... before or since. But, uh... you know, I never had any actual physical confrontation with anybody. There were no blows exchanged. Uh... ninety-five percent of the time I got the passenger to accommodate with my request. And the other five percent I just have to call for assistance. You know, come and remove him.

LB: Which must've been so difficult in the days before you had radios on the bus.

BK: Oh yeah, you had to look for a phone, [better?] have a dime [laughs].

LB: I mean that's so crazy [laughs]!

BK: It's just the way--the way that it was--

LB: Yeah.

BK: ...and, you know, um...

LB: But you know, what--what if you're in the middle of... the route, you know... I mean, I know there were more pay phones then, but...

BK: Oh yeah, many. They were... fairly common.

LB: But--but what if you were not... happening to be right next to a pay phone and something nutty started happening on the bus?

BK: Ok, would depend on the nature of the, uh... situation. Um... if it was something that I felt would endanger myself or the customers at that location, I would continue to drive, looking for a police car or a telephone. Uh, now, there've been a couple of cases where people were really acting up and the bus driver just drove the bus down to the police station. You know, and they drive down in there and [laughing ]they can't get out because it's like... not enough room to turn the bus around. But they'll drive right to the police station. But, uh, I never, uh... never had that, uh, situation. And, um... you know, some things are like dumb, like, um... when the back door is unlocked?

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: Most of 'em--or all of 'em I guess now are push-doors. You know, a person pushes it out, ok. Well, somebody on the outside can pull that door open. So people wanna sneak in the bus. Well, [now?] I ain't havin' that. So I would flip the handle to unlock it. And then as soon as someone'd open it, I'd flip the handle back so when it closed it would lock. Some people would sit there and leave the back door unlocked, you know, anybody can come in there. And there was a bus over at Fairfield (?), uh, now why would--Whitcomb and Redwood... in Whitcomb Court. Well the driver was sitting there with the [end lock?] on, which acts as a brake also, the... so... should pull the brake. Anyway, somebody pulled open the back door and started shooting. Well... the driver couldn't leave because the back door was, you know... y--unlocked. So he couldn't just pull away. So anyway, I guess I was the one that had to go to the scene. Somehow--this is when I was supervisor--[?? after?] said, you know, never use the end-lock (?) at the end of the line. Use the parking brake. That way, nobody can pull open the back door. And you know, you're not gonna have that problem because you wanna be--particularly in a area like that--you know, if the guns start shooting, you wanna be able to pull away right away. Not, you know, be trapped there until somebody lets that door close. So... but again I had no physical confrontations in my years, um...

LB: But you're reminding me of a story that someone told me -- I was interviewing people about growing up in Civil Rights Richmond--

BK: Mm hmm.

LB: ... and they include a lot of people who were bused to school. And...



BK: Mm hmm.

LB: ...a couple of them told me this story about how before they got the school buses to do the busing in the, you know, like, around 1970 through the early 70s, they were taking...

BK: Right.

LB: ... just regular buses.

BK: Right.

LB: And they talked about--they're going to George Wythe High School and they talked about going down Hull Street and having members of the Pagan's motorcycle gang shooting at the windows of the buses--have you heard that?

BK: No, that I haven't heard. I have heard--now, I rode Hull from John Marshall on the special 53. What that was... it was a special bus, it went from John Marshall through Highland Park, to Fulton Hill. Ok, uh... the bus driver apparently--I would get off in Highland Park. But he would stop at 4th and Broad, which is at the bottom of Highland Park. And [?] to get drinks. Anyway, so when they went through Fulton... they would throw the bottles out at, you know, black people in Fulton and the black teenagers in Fulton would be throwing stuff at them. But I never rode all the way to Fulton Hill so I never witnessed it. But I heard about it. And, uh... they had... lotta

special school runs. In other words, like this one, they would run from Fulton Hill through Highland Park to John Marshall. Then it would go on and do a regular route. You know, so it was, uh, tied into that run. And, uh... the Chamberlayne bus got a lotta school children, and, uh... some of the girls were very rough. I know one pulled down a pole, you know, the stanchion that people'd hold on to--

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: She pulled that pole down somehow and she stuck it out the window of the bus going down Broad Street and she was hitting people with the metal pole. So I think Carolyn got arrested, but, uh... your stereotypical sixties poof-hair bad girls? There were probably a few of those in every school.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: But, you know... I re--I remember them. But, um... I didn't experience in my travels on the bus any type of... racial incident for lack of a better word.

LB: Yeah.

BK: Um... I just didn't witness that. Things happened. But I just didn't happen to be there at the time.

LB: But I imagine during the '70s and early '80s, Richmond was going through so... much. I mean, in every respect, right? I--I wonder how you saw all of that reflected.

BK: Well... I enjoyed Richmond in the early '70s because... there was all that activity downtown. And you think of all the people that went to Miller and Rhoads, Thalhimers, Woolworth's and Murphy's, not just to shop, but all those people that worked in those stores, most of them rode the bus. So when all that dried up, we lost a lot of riders. Same thing with Azalea Mall. Lotta people ride a Chamberlayne bus to Brookland Azalea to Cha--to--Azalea Mall. Uh... I remember at Christmastime in the early '70s, I would be working Chamberlayne. Now, that would leave 1st and Broad, go to City Hall, come back to 2nd and Broad. It could take forty-five minutes sometimes just to get from 1st and Broad to City Hall back to 2nd and Broad because of all of that traffic. All of those people. And... I don't know whether I was not paying attention... but slowly downtown began to die. And then of course it was like almost 1990 before Thalhimers and Miller and Rhoads did leave. But, uh... like, that 6th Street Marketplace--

LB: Mm.

BK: ...that waste of money. You know, buses detouring for months, all that money spent on that and it didn't do anything. Um... it's just, uh... things change but it was so gradual. I guess like if you see a person--like, look at me now. If you saw me forty years ago, I wasn't as big as he is. Um... but you wouldn't notice that unless you didn't see the person for a while, you know, they slowly get bigger and bigger and bigger, you know. Downtown, one store closes, then another and... you know, the movie theaters closed and, uh... it's all sort of depressing to think about

because it was such a... a vibrant place. And where people of all... types... uh, came. And, uh, they shopped. And there weren't, uh... to my knowledge, there weren't... many issues at all, I mean, like, people weren't shot in the street coming out of Thalheimer's, you know, uh... um... There weren't race riots at 6th and Broad. You know, that type of stuff didn't happen. We were blessed here that, you know, we never had riots like some other cities did. But, uh... it was sad to see things go down. And, uh... they just did. Um....

LB: Can you tell me more about some of your more memorable experiences -- good, bad... or anything in between? When you were operating the bus?

BK: Well, I don't know why this one comes to mind. It's pretty distasteful, but, uh... one cold morning--it's probably February. I was working Ginter Park, going downtown. Got to Brookland Park and North... and this old woman dragged herself up on the bus.... She paid the fare and she sat down right beside--behind me. And, uh... there's this terrible odor suddenly appeared. Just--*what is that?* You know and--everybody was detecting--you could tell by looking at--the way they were. So anyway, um, she only rode down to, uh, Overbrook Road, so we gonna talk but maybe eight or nine blocks. And when she got off the bus, each time she took a step, turd fell out her pant leg.

LB: Ugh.

BK: You know, *plop... plop*. So I got up and kicked them out the door. But anyway--here's a thirty-degree morning and everybody on the bus, the window's are open. You know. I'm sure

people on the street were--'what is wrong with those people, the windows are all open.' Had another experience, uh... if that was too graphic, I apologize. The, um--

LB: No, you're fine.

BK: ...coming down from Westhampton, I pick up those bratty St. Christopher's and St. Catherine's children. And they could be a headache. Um... but anyway. Half of the bus was those children, elementary school children. And half of the bus were domestics, you know, day workers, black women who went out there and cleaned the houses. And, uh... we were coming along down pass Woodlawn and Grove and there was a tremendous *BANG!* And I looked in the mirror, and I could see smoke. And I see the children running and screaming to the back door. I'll never forget that image, it's like I wish I had a video of that. So anyway, I pull to the curb and opened the doors and everybody rushed off. Found out that the air conditioning compressor had exploded.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: And I guess it sounded like either gunfire or an explosion or both. But it was really wild to, you know, see that happen. Um... I guess I never really had any dramatic things happen to me on the street or things that I remember seeing. You know, um... I don't know I guess it was, uh... it's pretty calm time. You remember certain things like, um... westbound on Grove at the Boulevard, working Westhampton this one afternoon, this woman comes up, "Did you hear that Elvis died?" I said, "Really?!" You know. And that was just a big shock, but that stayed in my

mind. I remember where I heard it, you know. Not that I was such a big Elvis fan, but just, you know... And things like you know, President Reagan was shot, you know, all these little bratty children got on and they said, 'the president's been shot, the president's been shot!' So, really, is that true? I asked somebody else because, you know... you know how--what with children. And don't get me wrong, I don't hate children.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: But... I come up in a time when children were seen and not heard. And there's a way that children need to behave. So, uh... bunch of screaming kids get on my nerves, you know. Where are their mothers, you know. Where's the nanny? Somebody needs to take charge of these children. So... anyway, I just didn't have any... fantastic events, um... just can't think of anything.

LB: Well, tell me about... some examples of good leadership you encountered along the way. Or other kinds of leadership.

BK: Well, the... the supervisors when I came here, street supervisors, they were interested in helping you. And, uh... they gave you good instruction. If you're not on the street and you had a problem, they came to assist. And they weren't bullying or degrading, they were just helpful people. Um... [Then? Now?] we had some classes one time on human relations maybe... you know, helping you to learn how to get along with, uh, different types of people. Um... as I said, the company... under the private company, Virginia Transit company was run like a business, it

was very professional, there were standardized procedures in place. They worked and they were followed. There was no questioning, you know, we shouldn't--we should do it this way, not that way, you know. Uh, to my knowledge, politics wasn't involved in things. It was just very... very business-like. And, um... like, the buses they had, some of them were older than I was. But, uh, they were well-kept.

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: You know. Uh, they weren't banged up. They weren't dirty. Um, they were mechanically sound. And Richmond was known for having one of the best transit systems in the country for a city its size. And it did! All without any tax dollar. And, uh, I thought that was very impressive. Now things changed as the downtown died, ridership went away, the school buses came... Um... suburbia boomed. Uh, the cost of fuel skyrocketed. They couldn't have continued that. But, uh, in all the privately owned bus companies in the state, the transit companies, they all went out the seventies. I think Danville (?) was the last one in '77. And, um, it's a shame, it's just like the school buses. Ok. Why do we have a school bus fleet? Why doesn't the transit company provide school service? Why do you having two school--two systems, I mean... until 1969 or '70, the schoolchildren rode city buses. Now some of them ran special runs, you know, like would... not be on a particular bus route. 'Scuse me, I've had a cold. Uh, to pick up children going, you know, straight to school... but to me that makes more sense than you have a fleet of school buses. That's money. You have all the fuel they use, that's money. You have the housing and maintenance of things. All that money. You have that employees. All of that money. It could be better done by the transit company. But the school bus lobby I'm sure is very strong. They wanna

Commented [1]: Stopped here.

keep their jobs. And they would raise Cain about, 'oh, city bus is dangerous and the children will all be sexually abused and the--there're no blinking red lights.' Well maybe that's--good thing, you know, they need to learn to look before crossing the street! You know, um... that will never happen but in a few cities, the transit system does provide the school service and I think that's the way it should be here. It'd save a lot of money. You know, um... also, I guess parents would expect the children to ride free, since they been getting a free ride all these years. Forty-plus years. Whereas when we rode the school bus, you had to pay, but the tickets--they were half-price. You know, so, you used a half-price ticket. But that's sorta off the subject, but that's just, you know, the way I feel about that. There're so many things that could be done better. But, um... you know, someone [gonna?] always object. Just like, 'oh, the school bus is safer,' well... it doesn't have those metal rails in it, but the structural integrity of a transit bus is better than a school bus because it's a heavy-duty vehicle. You know, it's made for a long life and the school buses... legally classified as a medium-duty vehicle. But, uh, oh they don't wanna hear that. They don't wanna hear that.

LB: Can I take you back to the seventies for--

BK: Sure. Mm hmm.

LB: ...another couple of questions?

BK: Yeah.



LB: You must've been here during the '75 strike.

BK: '76.

LB: '76.

BK: Yes, I was in Toronto and came back, the next--the next day we were on strike.... I remember that.

LB: Tell me about it.

BK: OK! It's a strike that really nobody won. To my memory, it was basically, the city does--did not want to deal with the union. Ok, but because of federal law--now, don't know the number, but... uh, when a--when a public--when a public agency takes over a private transit system, they must honor the working agreement of the union. It's like when we got our paychecks? It did not say GRTC on it. It was Old Dominion Transit Management Company. We worked for Old Dominion Transit Management Company. That way, we didn't work for the city. And that's how we were paid. But, uh, anyway, it was forty-nine days. And, uh, you know, we walked and picketed and, uh, the city wanted to, you know, really get rid of the union. And at that time the union was strong enough, they could prevail. But it was really a no-win situation, I mean nothing really changed other than the union stayed in place. Except! In forty-nine days, a lot of people had never had a car, went a bought a car. Lotta people that had jobs and lost them cuz they couldn't get to work, they were not happy with the bus company. You know. Many of them did

not come back. So we lost riderships. Ridership. And, uh, it was a bad thing. And it went on for forty-nine days. That's a long time. Um... it's just sad, it's just like the bus service now -- there're all these jobs in suburbia for teenagers and others. You know, way out Broad Street. You know, way out Midlothian. Hull Street. Ok, in some cases, we can get you there on the bus to go to work at three o'clock. But there's no bus at night to get you home. You know, so, what good's a job unless you got a ride when you can't get home. And you know, I wish the bus went all the way to Short Pump Town Center, it should. And it should run every ten or fifteen minutes. You know, if you have convenient, reliable, safe service -- if your'e going where the people want to go, they will ride with you. Well, nobody's gonna ride... can't get back, you know, it's two hours before the next bus. You know, but it takes money to provide the service and you have to be there and provide the service for people to become knowledgable about it and use it. It's like I heard downtown San Francisco never suffered because there were streetcar tracks. So you knew the streetcar would come by. I mean, it can't go around the block. Uh, be rude and--we go a different way now. It's gonna come right here where you see the tracks and the wire. And, uh, you know, I wish we could be more.... *less* flexible.

LB: Mm hmm!

BK: You know, another with the bus coming up Broad Street. Ok, the city doesn't like all these buses on Broad Street. You know, well... that's the main drag. So now downtown, when they turn around, they go up the street, down that street, turn around, you really have to know, well, what street does the Ginter Park bus come out of? Used to all come up Seventh and used to all go down Eighth. And the other ones went back and forth on Broad. Now it's been all twisted

around. And--and you know where they have, uh, bus stops. Nobody wants a bus stop in front of their house. You know. They lose their parking. They say people will stand there and throw trash. And in some cases, they probably do. But, you know, uh, nobody wants the bus on their street. I hear now that they don't like it on Robinson Street, there are too many buses and they go *fast*. Well they been going up and down Robinson Street since... 1920s. You know. What's the deal? You know. Just... I don't know. Modern people. Modern times.

LB: [Laughs.] So--

BK: I have a saying, the more I know about people, the better I like dogs.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: That doesn't sound very good for someone who drove a public bus, but... That's another thing, I think of this--this lady got on the bus with, uh... she had a little tiny dog and it was a cage. So I let her bring the dog on the bus, you know, there's no *danger* to anybody. So she sat behind me and the little dog, you know, in the little cage there, so -- pulled up to Seventh and Franklin and opened the door. And this woman started stepping up on the bus when the dog barked. And if you could've seen that woman's face, like... you know. *Is a dog in there?* You know, that was so funny. You know, she came up on in there and, uh--now, of course you have to allow people to ride with a service animal. And it may be no more of a service animal than I am. But you can't ask the person to--well, what does it do for you? Make it do something. They say it's a service animal, you have to accept that. [Well, I mean?] that's fine but I hear there's

some sorta homeless-type people that like to ride the broad street with their large... dirty... unkempt dogs. Which can be, um... frightening to others, you know. So, uh... it's just different world.

LB: And speaking of different worlds, back in the sixties, I understand it was only Mrs. Robinson who is female bus driver, right?

BK: No, that was--go ahead and then I'll give my retort.

LB: Well, no, I mean, I'm just going from what Deborah Hopkins just told me.

BK: Mm hmm.

LB: And... it sounded like in the mid 1970s, there were a lot of women coming in, training as drivers.

BK: Oh, it's good you brought that up cuz I wanted to talk about that.

LB: Good!

BK: Ok. In the--in 1970 when I came here, there was Anne Robinson who had come here in '67. There was Elaine Pleasants, who had come here sixty-five or -six. There were a couple of women that had come... in the very late '60s. Now the women that they would hire at those--that

time, they were thoroughly screened and they had to have some type of heavy-duty driving background. And I think in these cases, the women had all driven school buses. Well those things were awkward to drive then because [?] now power-steering, gear shift, you know, no air conditioning, they--they had to really be able to handle the vehicle. But. There were four or five women leftover from World War II. Now that--have you seen that book in the front of the building with the history and all of that?

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: You know what I'm talking about. [Whispering] Well they make me so mad. They know everything. It says, you know, they started hiring women in the 1960s, late 1960s. They started hiring women in World War II because there was a shortage of men because of the war, so they hired women... to be bus and streetcar operators. Ok, there were some of those women still here. And, uh... they all died or retired out in the early and mid 70s. But they were still here. Um... you say all these women--and they did in the mid 70s, the place became... crowded with women. Ok. I heard the reason that happened was that the psychological tests that they would give to applicants? The female mind was more likely to pass the test than a male. And, uh, so the women scored better and they got in the door. And I give credit to a lot of those women because, uh... they did have to work. In other words, we were talking about still there's no power-steering. There's still some with no air conditioning. You know, um... They worked. Now, it's just like even in today's time, and I'll say things that are probably taboo. But there are a lot of people here--mm, back off from that. There are a *fair number* of people here, particularly female. They have no more interest in driving a bus than I do of going here and jumping off the balcony. But with

their educational and work history, where else they gonna get a job and make twenty dollars an hour. So they're here, doing this. And I can't blame them. But if you really hate what you do, you know... money isn't everything, you know, just. Mm-mm. You know, cuz I've had job opportunities where I would make more money, but... mm-mm, I don't want that pressure and stress and you know.... what type of job security is that? Because people get thrown out of here, you know. Unless you're a union member. You know. I [want the one to say?] on a whim, but you know, you make the wrong mistake to the wrong person and, you know, you're gonna be escorted to the gate. So. I wanna know about all the drama that's going on around here, but I don't wanna be up in it. So, I come to work on Sunday nights, 'what happened this week?' Why's so-and-so on hold, you know. That type of thing.

LB: It's kind of amazing that the union has survived here. Given--

BK: It is--

LB: ...the hostility of the city.

BK: Well, it is too, because the lack of membership. I don't know what percentage actually belong to the union but it's not the percentage that it was forty years ago. Um, a lot of people they [don't want to] pay the union dues. But you have to realize that, um.... I understand the importance of a union, but at the same time, I dislike it when the union defends someone who is obviously wrong and has a history of, uh... poor performance. And, uh, some people are not cut out of the job. You know. You need to go. You know, uh, our job is to pick up people and give

them a safe ride. Not to see if you can pass somebody on the street, you know. And there's some mentality like that, you know. I've always told people, said 'I didn't haul but five people today, blah blah blah-blah.' Well... you know, if that's all you haul, that run's gonna be gone next time there's a run for (?), you know. I tell 'em all the time, we need every fare we can get. Pick up everybody who'll pay the fare. You know, and we do! We need that money.

LB: Yeah. It sounds like absolutely.

BK: Yeah. Very much so.

LB: So how--how do you think bus ridership has changed over the time that you were an operator and since then? ...I mean besides the numbers growing smaller. Different kinds of people or--

BK: Ok, um.... There are probably more... economically disadvantaged. For lack of a better description. People riding. Um.... A lot of people, between things that have happened, such as the strike and after that, uh, the continued production of service... the bus no longer became a viable option for them. So they got cars--I mean now, if you have a family with three grown children, there are probably four or five cars in the driveway. Everybody has a car. And, uh, you know, so we've lost some of the, um... more stable citizens of the community for lack of a better way of putting it. But there are a lot of them still there like that Chesterfield service. You know, they demand that that run and they, you know, they fill up the bus. Uh... they are a minority. They don't have--none of them have to ride the bus. They all live out there in far suburbia,

Amelia, whatever. You know, they have to have cars to get to the bus stop. But they--they realize the convenience. Uh, the economy. Uh, of riding the bus. And, um, you know, we do still have a lot of quote-unquote normal people riding. You know, everybody is not on welfare. You know, everybody's not a thug. Everybody's not either too old or too young to drive. You know. There's still a--a--a great mixture of people. And you have to realize the city is changing, too, like--are you familiar with the Church Hill area?

LB: We both live up there.

BK: Ok, so you know that used to be an all-black community.

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: Ok. Well, there're a lot of white folks living over there now. So we have that change in... uh, demographics--is that the word? And, uh, some of those people, like, cuz they work at MCV or they work downtown in an office building. How convenient is it to get on the bus? Comes right up Marshall Street. You know. Goes right up Broad Street, you know. Seven, eight, ten minute ride. You know. No traffic hassle. You know, uh... they contribute to our ridership. And, um.... It's funny -- I like Church Hill. I like the variety of homes. It's like Highland Park, that was wonderful community. You know, now it's drug-infested and they're trying to bring it back, but I'll never live to see it come back fully. I would love to live in all those classic, you know, two-story homes. You know, but at my age, I don't need to be moving. And, uh, dealing with stairs, you know. I don't know how long I'm pulling myself up and down so I stay where I am,



but [clears throat], I'm grateful I grew up in my time and I grew up in, uh, that kind of community where it was safe and, uh... peaceful. Good bus service. Good schools. Um... the general way people were then, you know. People tended to look after each others' children and... that type of thing. So it was a wonderful time to grow up. I feel sorry that ya'll missed it. But, uh, luckily I was there. I enjoyed it.

LB: How do you think that people that don't ride the bus in Richmond see... the GRTC?

BK: Well, some of them thinking that all bus drivers are rude and road hogs. Uh, some of the public thinks that it's nothing but a system of welfare--system of transportation which of course it is not. Um... some people think it's a waste of money. They say, 'I only saw two people on that bus.' Well, if you looked at it two miles up the street, you'd see there are fifty-three people on there and they were standing up. You know. They always wanna report, you know, like near the end of the line, there's nobody left on there, you know. '[...] only two people on that bus, what a waste of money.' You know, well... they--there are a lot of 'em standing up at certain times and places during the day, even on weekends, so... um... I think... there's a negative opinion by a lot of people. For reasons that are, um... not really valid. You know. Just like all these old folks that live in suburbia, as they get older and older--I'm talking about my generation, baby boomers. They can't drive anymore. Well. Ain't no bus out here. You got a friend that can come and get you every time? You know, uh... elderly people... to a great degree depend on the bus. And those that live on a bus line, they are frequent users of the bus. You know, with the low-floor bus and the easy to get in, the lift and, you know, all of that. And the half-price ticket to--you know, it does make sense. Well, what are these old people in suburbia gonna do, you know, when they

can no longer drive. And of course some people will never give up the right to drive until they are forced to, in other words, they can't see but they're still out here driving up and down the street. Um... it's just, uh, bad, but Henrico--I mean, Chesterfield County is so anti-bus. And they're just--I don't understand that. I mean, you know... *bringing the wrong element in the community*. You know, the wrong element rides around in cars. You know. How many people rob a bank and get on a bus. How many people break in your home that arrive by bus. You know, it's just ridiculous. But, uh, you know, mentalities. You know... Just... just bad. I want dedicated funding. You know. I want--I want the system to, you know, increase to, uh, provide better service, to provide more service, to go to more areas. There's so many politics and then this Rich--the Virginia thing of independent cities. And counties, you know. It's just, uh--that makes things more difficult. It's like the thing that befall on the company, the bad things over the years, I don't attribute to the company. It's just things beyond their control. And, um... with the little money they have I think they probably do pretty well with what we do provide.

LB: It's pretty amazing.

BK: It's just, uh... but, you know, constant battling. You know, you think about the cost of fuel. You know, um... buses drink a lot of fuel. And you know, the price goes up, you know, that's... tremendous increase in the budget in--for the amount of fuel they use. When I came here they bought diesel for a dime a gallon. And, uh, so...

LB: So what kinda changes have you seen within the GRTC since you came in 1970?

BK: What kinda changes... Besides reduced service, uh...

LB: Well, just, you know... also as a workplace.

BK: It's always been a good place to work. Now... the benefits for the employee are much better. When I came here there was no sick leave. And you worked six days one week and five the other. Um... it's, uh... vacations, um... you get more vacation now, um.... The benefits are better. Um... [Pauses.] I guess if anything I worry about, uh--not for myself particularly but of the operators in the sense of, well, what if we do have to cut back service? Who's gonna have to be laid off? There was a layoff in '82... And before that, I think, in '47. But to my knowledge they're the only two layoffs they ever had, so it was a very--if you came to work-- [aside] go ahead, go for it. If you came to work, did not have accidents that were your fault--

LB: [Sneezes] Excuse me.

Benjamin: Bless you.

LB: Thank you.

BK: Yes, bless you. If--if you came to work, didn't have accidents... got along with the people, you could work here as long as you want. You know, and good retirement plan. Uh, good benefits. Good pay. Um... I look in the paper at jobs, uh... quote-unquote professional jobs. You know, gotta have a BEA and MA and this all the other, you know, starting salary seventeen-nine

(?). You know, God... make more than that driving a bus! Driving a specialized van. Uh, it's a good place to work, but you have to stay out of the drama. You've gotta come to work. You have to, uh, be drug-free. Um, alcohol free, when you're here. Uh... but it can be a good career for someone who likes being out. [Coughs.] 'Scuse me. [Coughs.] Meeting people. One thing I liked about the job was... you were outside. But if you had an air conditioned bus, you know, it was like climate controlled. And even if you didn't, you know, back in those days, people just-- that's the way it was. How many people had air conditioned cars in 1970. Not many. Anyway. You got to see what was going on, you know. The action on the street. People. Traffic. Um... It was interesting. You know, it was not like being shut up in a room, like, I wouldn't wanna be shut up in here all day. Is it day or night out there? Is it...

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: ...sunny or is it snowing? You know. So that wa--that was interesting if you--[didn't you get?] bored driving around the same places? Well, if you had a really short route, it could get boring. You know. But if you had a long route, no, because every time you pass through here, there's something different to see. So it was interesting. And again for people who... uh... can come to work. You know, can go by the rules, can be on time. Uh... uh... know the proper attitude to have, it's a very good job. And I recommend it to anybody who, uh--male or female, who, uh, could meet that criteria.

LB: So... if you met... a new bus operator, what advice would you give that person at the beginning of their career?

BK: Well, for one thing, I would remind them that the customer is your reason for being here. So we need to, again... pick up everyone that you can that will pay a fare. Collect a fare from everybody. Treat the people with courtesy and respect. Even if you don't get it back. Remember that you're always on camera. Whatever you say or do will be recorded. Uh, and safety is first. So, um... Just remember those things. And then, uh, everything will be fine.

LB: How do you think that... your chosen career has changed your outlook of the city?

BK: It's made me m--more knowledgable about the city in the sense of I went places I normally would never have gone. It's given me more of an insight into the human being. Because I met all types of people. And sometimes they would fool you, the person that looked the most respectable was just this low-down *dog*. And then somebody who you'd... think would be, 'well that--he's gonna give me trouble,' you know. Um... they would come to your aid. Uh... remember this guy... used to have--have zone fares.

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: You went past a certain place, you had to pay an extra nickel. So when you got off, you know, you paid the nickel or gave a zone check to the operator. Going the other way, the bus would stop at a certain place and you'd pick up a zone check. So I had this guy that he looked like this really *thug*. And he never caused me any trouble. But I remember one time there was a disagreement with me and a passenger at the zone point and anyway, this guy came up and got in

the guy's face and said 'you hear what he said? You need to do what he says.' And I never would've thought he would've... you know, gotten involved at all. But, um... uh... and the question was what is--what have I learned about the city?

LB: Well, just how has it changed the way you look at the city?

BK: Well... sad in the sense of what's died downtown. Um... On the good side, all that stuff that VCU has built up... on Broad Street, it certainly looks better than those w--old warehouses that used to be there. Um... I don't know if, uh--it--it's like with society in general, for everything bad that's happened, something good has probably happened, too. But, you know, I'm a creature of habit. And I don't like changes, you know. Thalhimer's needs to always be here.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: Need to be open, you know, till nine o'clock. [Cuz] I'd leave downtown on Chamberlayne, just leave City Hall at 9:05 and you'd get *all* these people, have a standing load by the time you get to Second and Broad. People that were either working in the store or, you know, shopping at the last minute. Uh, I'm glad I was out there seeing all of this activity. That went on at the time. How vibrant and bustling the city was. And, um... You know, it's not so pretty in some places down there anymore, but, uh... shall I say let's hope there's hope for the future? You know. It's like Walmart. Walmart! Why don't ya'll put a store at Seventh and Broad? You know. All these city folks! That wanna go shopping. They gonna come to Walmart. It would help our bus line tremendously. Think of all those people going to Walmart! But, no, you know they're not gonna

build a store there, but you know... something like that would really--that would *bring* people downtown. Because whether they admit it or not. Most everybody likes to go to Walmart. And, uh, you know, in the city the only Walmart that we go to, if I remember correctly, is the one on Forest Hill Avenue and... that's way out there if you're coming from Church Hill or Highland Park or way out there on Forest Hill Avenue, you know, past Chippenham and all of that. But, uh, at least they can get to that one on a bus and we do have customers that go out there to shop at that Walmart. But you know, put one downtown. Um...

LB: So... how do you like to spend your time then when you're not working?

BK: I like to travel. Like I said I just came back from Nassau. I'm going to Harrisburg this weekend. I like to travel. I like to relax. I like to work in my backyard. I like the ability to do what I want to when I want to if I want to. It's a wonderful feeling. I hear people say, 'oh, you're gonna be bored.' Haven't been bored since the seventies. There's always a book to read. There's... always something on TV to watch. There's always housecleaning to be done. You know. There's always something to be done. The people that are bored, well, all you need [to do] is think a little, there's something that you need to do--

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: ...or could be doing. No, uh, I feel blessed that I'm not bored--now, of course some of that may be when you grow up as an only child, you tend to learn to entertain yourself more than if you were one of four, you know, children. So, uh, again, I haven't been bored since the seventies,

and uh... I appreciate every minute that I have being retired, so to speak. Uh, it's wonderful.

LB: And you've got that whole book of photos that you brought.

BK: Yeah, just, you know--like I said, I wish I had pictures of people. Um... but different things over the years. Um... [laughs] that's me in '73, that's *awful* picture, but that's me in December of '70.

LB: I don't think that's an awful picture--

BK: ...in the [back/rec?] room of...

LB: ... that's a nice picture.

BK: Look like a freak.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: That's in the recreation room of the old place. That's me in the eighties, supervisor gig.

LB: That's a very different look.

BK: Mm hmm. I've had many looks over the years.



LB: A rare snow storm.

BK: Mm! I love snow. I've always loved snow.

LB: I think it would be very challenging to be driving a bus through the snow when no other driver in Richmond knows how to drive in snow.

BK: It's more challenging because the--too many operators don't know... or don't... operate in the proper manner. You don't jam the accelerator to the floor, you go very gently. You don't slam on the brakes, you'll go into a skid, you apply very gently. But so many new operators--I mean, it doesn't snow like it used to around here, so they rarely... drive in the snow. But I get annoyed, you know they--all these people stuck. *Why??* I mean, you know... Just if you do the proper wh--you know, technique, you know, there's no problem at all. That's a streetcar over in Highland Park. I rode this and--as an infant I was told, but I don't remember.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: The last ones ran on November 25th, 1949.

LB: Yeah, we saw the... video of them being burned. It was tragic.

BK: Mm.

Benjamin: [Undecipherable.]

BK: We used have these little fake trollies.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: They sold those off. It was turned into a mobile information center.

LB: Very different look for the buses.

BK: Yeah. The--the--the--the... look has changed over the years. Somebody said that they know that's an old photo because there's a c--a cigarette commercial on the bus.

LB: Well that's so true.

BK: Mm. That's the first Virginia Transit Company paint schemes. 1945.

LB: Wow.

BK: That's the kinda buses I rode to school for twelve years. That was the most common type that was on the school runs. Beautiful snow.

LB: It is beautiful.

BK: Hated that paint scheme. Bland and dull.

Benjamin: I like the--the red and white buses. Those are...

LB: Yeah, those are snazzy.

BK: That was the first air conditioned bus in Richmond, 1957. I remember riding it that summer. And the air conditioning came from the ceiling and they had these little streamers so you could see the air coming down.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: And when I got here it was still here and I drove that many times. Um... that's the paint scheme they used from '60 to '62 only. I think it's a nice color.

LB: It is!

BK: There's snow (?) and that's driver's room. Which they have a very nice recreation room. They should really appreciate that. After what it was (?)...

LB: Yeah we saw it on our tour here.

BK: Ok, well. Used to be a hole in the back.

LB: It is nice now.... More snow.

BK: UGF was--yeah, they--UGF, they called it that. Now before that it was Community Chest.

LB: Oh sure.

BK: That was my favorite bus. I drove that as often as I could. 1951 GM, oh that was a sweet bus.

LB: What made it sweet?

BK: It drove... easy steering. Had the classic sound of an early 671 Detroit diesel engine. Uh, nice Spanish green seating. Um... just, uh... it was a sweet bus. Just loved that one. Buses used to crawl (?) across the old Ninth Street bridge, it was a wooden bridge?

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: These were the only buses that could run on it cuz they were the lightest in weight. So these 1947 buses ran till '71 till they tore that bridge down.

LB: Didn't they call this, what, the viaduct or something?

BK: No, the viaduct went from downtown over to Church Hill.

LB: Ok.

BK: That was the Ninth Street bridge. Children called it Singing Bridge because when the cars would go on those metal tracks, it'd make a singing noise.

LB: Oh yeah... I think you must have captured every snow storm that Richmond ever had.

BK: No, I--I missed some, but, uh... I was out there a lot. [Pause.] Modern stuff...

LB: Yeah. They do look so different now. But, boy, that's a very classy looking bus.

Benjamin: I know. I really like those...

BK: I was working an early one Saturday morning on the three-line. Think of all the pictures I coulda taken if I'd taken the camera all the time. That's what the driver's area looks like of that type of bus.

LB: Oh...

BK: Used to take buses around, have 'em on display for people to... come and admire.

LB: When did they do that?

BK: They did that up until--that--that was in '74. That may have been one of the last times they did it, um... now they just put 'em out on the street, you know.... That's very old, that's a 1930s bus--

LB: Wow.

BK: ...seen in 1948.

LB: Wow.

BK: [Pauses.] New buses on display at Capitol Square, 1966.

LB: [Laughs.] This is a good looking bus.

BK: That's the driver's area of that type bus, from the eighties. [Pauses.] Used to have coach-type buses to take out-of-town trips in. [Pause.]

LB: This looks like--is this...?

BK: It's in the Fan--

LB: In the Fan?

BK: ...on Grove Avenue. Yes.

LB: Ok. Different looking outfits.

BK: You talking that lime green dress?

LB: Yes. [Laughs.]

BK: [Laughing] Yes, I know, that's comes at you before you even see the bus. But he's waiting for her (?).

Benjamin: Those are cool. I like these lines (?).

BK: Brand new bus in '62.

LB: Yeah.

BK: This is what the schedules used to look like. They were little pocket size. And see they ran all day and then they ran all night.

LB: Oh, they sure did.

Benjamin: It's horrible there's no overnight service...

BK: That's up there on Jefferson Avenue right by the park?

LB: Oh yeah. Wow.

Benjamin: Seems like they would have one--at least one or two runs that ran...

BK: That's the old gas station where they used to fuel buses. These were for gas buses and these were for diesel.

Benjamin: Is this over on Robinson?

BK: Mm hmm.

Benjamin: Ok.

BK: That's torn down now, but that was the fueling station. More streetcars.

LB: They were so pretty. And, boy, does that look--well, I'm looking at the cars, too, so that



[laughs]--

BK: That--that's '59. But the cars, that's a '48 car. That you see there. That's really frumpy looking, a Pontiac.

LB: [Laughs] What's that building?

BK: That was a... that was a little, uh... uh... what do you--convenience store?

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: You know. Drivers would go in there. Get a soda and drinks. There--way back, too, in the thirties.

[Pause.]

LB: The Richmond Rebels.

[Laughter]

BK: That's a long time ago.

LB: I didn't know Richmond had a pro-football team.

BK: We had a Christmas bus in '67.

LB: [Laughs.] There's the Church Hill bus.

BK: Yeah.... \$33,000 investment. 1966.

LB: The bus?

BK: That's what it would've--that what it cost new in '66.

LB: And now it's what, 430,000?

BK: Well 300-some probably. Um... that's in front of Fox School, they were my favorite gas buses, I just like the look of them. Back in the forties.

LB: These are little.

BK: Well, not they're--well, smaller than today's, but--

LB: Yeah.

BK: ...you know, not--not tiny.

LB: Not teeny tiny, but...

BK: Now, I like that picture. Taken on 9/11/31.

LB: Wow.

BK: It's a baby twin down on, uh... Meadow Street. They call them a baby twin... because these little small buses, made my Twin Coach. Well, the company also had larger ones, like forty-seat buses. They had two motors in 'em. They were the regular twins and they called these small ones the baby twins. But look at the--look at the way people dressed.

LB: Ahh...

Benjamin: Great [stuff/style].

LB: Great shoes.

BK: Mm. It's going up Brookland Park Boulevard to Chamberlayne--that's where were (?) the end of Chamberlayne Avenue. That's at Twelfth and Broad. There's the state library. Or where the use--state library used to be.

LB: Looks so different now.

BK: Mm hmm. Yes. That's old city hall on the top.

LB: Wow.

BK: It's a 1912 streetcar. But the picture was taken in '46.

LB: It looks so different. [Pause.] These are some great photos.

BK: So many--and I have so many others but I couldn't find 'em to put 'em in the album. There's one album I mislaid. But, uh--I'm glad I took these pictures and saved them. And you know, some of them, of course, before my time, I was able to come across one way or another. But, um, wish I'd taken more. And like I said, I wish I'd taken pictures of people. Because it's like the buses, you don't think anything of them when you see them every day, year in and year out, and then suddenly they're all gone. There are no more like that left. Same with the people, you see them day in and day out for years. And then they pass away.

LB: Maybe you'll find some more and certainly please bring that albums when you meet, um, Michael Lease our photographer.

BK: Ok, I will.

LB: Because I know--

BK: Maybe I can find some other pictures, too, that, uh...

LB: He would so love to see them.

BK: Mm. Yeah. Like I said, I'm glad I have these. And, uh, wish I had more, but--occasionally I'll find a picture on ebay. And I will, uh.... It's funny, I found one picture on ebay, the pic--and I said, I took that picture. That's my picture. So I had to outbid somebody else.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: Had to pay, like, twelve dollars to get the picture, but when I got it... yeah, I took that picture, but somebody had gotten the picture and blown it up into, like, uh... eight-by-ten? And I'd taken it with a little 127 camera. May 30th, 1964. Belmont and Cary. Bus 88. Isn't that terrible that my mind has all this stuff in it? It's dangerous--

LB: It's amazing that you remember all those dates and--

BK: It's dangerous, I know. What is that thing that somebody calls me a, um... what was the person in Rain Main called?

LB: Oh, an--a idiot savant?

Benjamin: Idiot savant.

BK: Savant! Yeah, yeah. She calls me a savant. She says I'm a savant. So... I am what I am.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: And, you know, at my age, I feel like I have a right to be a little bit eccentric.

LB: Absolutely.

BK: I've earned the--earned the dues to do so.

LB: So was there anything I didn't ask you that you would like to talk about?

BK: Nothing comes to mind. You know, I'll--I'll get outta here and think about, but no. I think we've had a very good conversation.

LB: It's been fun for us.

BK: I hope--I hope I haven't been overbearing.

LB: Not at all.

BK: Um... but, um.... you know, I've had a wonderful career. I have many wonderful memories. And, uh... I'd do it all over again, just take more pictures [laughs].

LB: It's so amazing that, you know, everyone we've talked to... they seem to have loved their work--

BK: Mm hmm.

LB: ...all the way through.

BK: Right. The... most of them, if they've been here that long, they like what they do. And, uh, for ever minus there is to the job, there's a plus. And in a lot of cases you make your job--it is what you make of it, you know. Just like if you go out there on the street and you're in a bad mood, you know. Well, you're likely to get in an argument with somebody. But you need to go out there with a clear head and a smile and be pleasant, you know. They pay their fare, thank you. And, uh... you know. Do the job the way it's supposed to be done.

LB: May have been Marshall Avent (?)--it was someone we talked to last week who said, you know, if you're not cut out for the job, you know it three to five years in--

BK: Oh yeah, yeah--

LB: ...and that's when those people wash (?)--

BK: Well, yeah, you would. You know, you should know it in a quicker time than that. Uh, it's interesting that statistically, the first year that a operator drives the bus, he's generally very careful. From years two to five, they get to feeling a little too confident and they sometimes get themselves in trouble. But, um... you know, just--again, the camera's always on you, you need to... you know, watch what you say and do and, uh... you certainly don't want to be involved in accidents because--this would annoy me, go to an accident--went to an accident where a pickup truck hit the back of a bus in from of the twelve-way (?) station, Ninth and Broad. The only damage to the truck was two headlights on the left side were broken. Oh, they're carrying out two young men on boards to put 'em in an ambulance. You know... probably wouldn't have known they'd been in an accident unless driver, you know... stopped and went out and looked. But, uh... people are what they are, and, uh, thank goodness everybody's not a rat. And a cheat and a fraud. So, uh... and on the bus, you get to meet all kinds of people. And there's some very nice people out there. And then of course there always a few, but, um... if you go in the grocery store, you'll have a l--have a run in with somebody, so, you know, it's just, uh... just part of the job. And, uh, I enjoyed it.

LB: Well thank you so much.

BK: Well thank you for inviting me--

LB: It's been fun.



BK: ... uh, I feel... honored to have been selected. To, uh, say what I had to say. And, uh--

LB: Please let me know if there's anyone else that you think... we should be talking to.

BK: I will think about that. I need to pull out a seniority list and see... Have you, uh--Harry West just retired, have you talked to Harry?

LB: Incredible memory. Amazing memory!

BK: Ok, so you did talk to Harry.

LB: Yes!

BK: Ok, he came here right after I did. I came here in '70. He came here probably early '71. And he has maintained so well. I mean, look what happened to me! And then he does--he's got some gray, but--I remember seeing him, he was off-duty at Eighth and Broad standing on the corner, I thought, "That's Harry West, he looks like a kid!" You know. Well, but he hung in there. And he's still here. And, um--

LB: He's like you, he remembers dates.

BK: REally? Ok. That's interesting. Um. I'm glad you got him. Um. I'll have to see if I come up with any other names, but you--you got a good one if you got Harry.

LB: Yeah, we--we got Harry and he was fantastic and--and let's see. Who else did we get. We talked to Julio Bidal (?).

BK: Mm hmm.

LB: Um, Dave Edmonds.

BK: Ok.

LB: George Barrett.

BK: Alright. David Edmonds was here since '63, I think.

LB: Yeah.

BK: Long time.

LB: Yeah, he was great, too. Frank Tunstall--

BK: Ok.

LB: ... we talked to. And of course Deborah, um... and Marshall Avent. And that's been it so far

and then we'll talk to Jenny Bullock, Carl Brown, and Marsha Schmiegele (?) next.

BK: I'm glad you--

Benjamin: Eldridge [?].

LB: Oh and then of course Eldridge.

BK: I'm glad you got, uh, Jenny because I remember Jenny came here in '78. And they'd just gotten these new buses, the 700s which were, uh--they were big buses. Standard forty-foot but they were--no power steering, they were hard to turn, this type of bus.

LB: Yeah.

BK: And that little Jenny--it was like her first week, I think, and she was out there on Ginter Park and she turned off of Laburnum onto Pilot's Lane, which is a bad turn and I think the back wheel went in the ditch there. And [?] she was aggravated and the supervisor, [laughing] she didn't like the way she talked to her. And, uh, anyway. Jenny. Jenny did a good job out there and then, um... she, uh, became a supervisor. But like I said, I talked to Jenny right before I came in here, I was just saying, how've you been, blah blah blah blah. And... ya'll don't remember the Greyhound bus station downtown. Do not--you would not--too--much too young.

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: Anyway, my grandmother and I... we would often have lunch in there before we went somewhere on a bus. And anyway, Jenny said worked there at the time we would've been in there so I bet she waited on us. One time--she had been, like, eighteen or nineteen years old. And, uh, worked as a waitress at the Greyhound... bus station--station restaurant. [Whispering] Lord, that's a long time ago.

LB: She must be retired now.

BK: Oh, she is. She's been retired for some years. [Clears throat.] Yeah, she's, uh... she's been retired at least five years. But, uh... yeah, she's paid her dues around here, too. And, um... in the old days... until the women became so c--many of them, they had sort of a difficult time because of the--they had one little bathroom for the women. You know, and there got to be all these women in this one, you know, bathroom for them. And, um... then on the streets... when he gas rationing and all that was going on, gas stations would close and they had a hard time finding somewhere to use a restroom. But, uh, they all survived, and, uh... anyway. I'm sure she will have some interesting stories for you. Do tell her I was here [laughs].

LB: Oh, I certainly will.

BK: So...

LB: I know Deborah Hopkins was so excited that you were coming in.

BK: Oh, yes, Deborah. Deborah's been here over thirty years now, uh...

LB: Now did you hug all your passengers like she hugs hers?

BK: No.

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: No, I didn't. But, you say that--it's interesting that, uh--I worked this morning run on Ginter Park--this would've been '80, '81. Oh, maybe '79. Anyway... that--I would wait for people if they were coming. I mean, you know, it's just a courtesy. So, uh... that last day before Chrstitmas, I got all these gifts from passengers. So, uh--I went into--after I got off the run, I was carrying my stuff in the... driver's area. Turn in my paperwork. And some of the guys [?], 'Look at him! A white guy over there gettin' all these gifts. I didn't get anything!' Well, you know. I guess I had the right people, but also, I had displayed, you know, I'm--if your'e running, I'll wait for you. Now, I mean, I'll wait for you to have your mother take a bath and come out. But, uh, you know, just treat people like I'd wanna be treated. And you know, it was... they were good times. Good times. But now I'm glad I don't have to get up in the morning, you know. Five o'clock in the morning.

LB: Yeah, I could see that would get a little old.

BK: Particularly in the winter. And then you would go up to the garage and they'd have the buses in that big building up on Davis. The big one? Tall one? They'd have the buses running when it was real cold, and they all--the building was filled with thick black smoke.

LB: Ugh.

BK: You could hardly breath. I'd go in there and set the bus up, like, put the sign up and the transfers on the rack and--you know, get ready to pull out and I'd go out and stand outside. Till it was time to go. Wish I had pictures of stuff like that.

LB: I know!

BK: These people now--they'd all claim they have lung cancer after one day out there. You know. It was just such a different world. You know, the--the people and the--the way things were and the equivalent, uh... And I guess the people before my time, it was the same thing. Like when I came to work here there were people on the seniority list that had come to work in 1922. [Phew!] My God, they didn't even have a bus in '22--

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: ... I mean, it was all streetcar. And you are still here? You know. That sorta freaked me out. You know, a lot of guys that came in the twenties were still on the list.

LB: That's crazy.

BK: Yeah! I mean, you know, 'seniority date 5/10/29.' Mm. My God, I wasn't even born for twenty more years. So, uh... anyway. It's like--one thing and I'll leave ya'll alone. The last two streetcar lines, or last three streetcar lines, Amphil, Ginter Park, Highland Park. They were gonna convert those... streetcar lines to trolley coach lines. Now, trolley coach is a bus that runs off electricity. Has two poles on the top? Have ya'll ever seen that type of--

LB: Yeah, sure, up in Cambridge.

BK: Ok. So they had ordered, uh--yeah, exactly, Boston has it. So the company ordered sixty ACF-Brill (?) electric trolley coaches. And, uh... you know, I read this many years later. You know. Well, it never happened! The buses were... the lines were converted to regular gasoline bus. I'd love to know what happened. Did you decide for some reason you didn't want electric trolley coaches? Did you not have the money to buy them? I'm sure that the company that you ordered them from was highly upset when you cancelled the order. But all of the principles in that time period, here, I'm sure they are long since passed on. But I'd love to know, well, why... why didn't you... uh, buy them? Why didn't you bring them? Now, had they actually come? I know what the outcome would've been. American transportation enterprises took over control of the company in 1962. They're the ones with the silver and green paint.

LB: Yeah.

BK: They use that in all of their properties. Ok. So that's when they changed to that color paint. But whenever ATE took over a property, the first thing they did was get rid of the electric buses. So anyway, in 1963, all the electric buses would've been disposed of and they would've been replaced with GM diesel buses, but, uh, it never happened. Uh, just would like to know, you know, the background of why it didn't happen. But, uh, maybe I'll find out one day. I don't know if--maybe when I get to heaven and talk to some of these people that--

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: ... uh, are now gone. But again, I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you folks, and, um...

Benjamin: It's amazing to me to see... that the trolleys all ran up Broad on rails. And they were replaced with buses that run those same routes.

BK: Oh, yeah, the Highland Park bus! It follows exactly where the car went.

Benjamin: Yeah.

BK: You know...

LB: It's crazy.



BK: It's--you know, it's the same route. It's--exact, I mean, you know. It's just like the car tracks under there unless they pulled them up. And it's a shame that--you know, there was an effort to-- to bring back electric trolleys in the late eighties. *Oh we need the money for schools, we can't have that.* And, uh... that never came to fruition, but considering Richmond was the first place in the world with a successful electric streetcar system, it's a shame we didn't keep a route. You know, just like New Orleans, you know--

LB: Yes.

BK: ... kept the Canal Street streetcar, you know. Why couldn't we have kept the streetcar. Like the Westhampton streetcar, it went different from the Westhampton bus. It went up Broad to Lafayette?

LB: Mm hmm.

BK: Down Lafayette to Grove and out Grove. Like if you're familiar with Lafayette Street, it's really wide. And [all the? other?] streets around there that are like wide like that and that's--the cars went down that street. And, um... you know, it's.. it's all gone now. But, uh... just like an old bus. Why don't we have an old bus? I tried to give them one and they didn't want it. Uh, so it ended up getting scrapped, I didn't have any place to keep it. But this company... their interested in their history when something happens and they get all excited. And then two weeks later, they're not at all interested, you know. It's the way things were, the history and all that. Well, me and my mentality, you know. I'm still a twentieth century. You know, I do have a cell phone but

I--otherwise, stay in the [laughing] twentieth century. Um... you know, a lot of properties have an old bus that they bring out for special events. And it creates a lot of interest from the public, like... you know, the parents will say to their children, 'that's the kind of buses we used to ride.' and the children of course want to get up on it and see it, and then you know... um... it's a great PR tool. But, uh, again, they didn't want it and they've made no effort to save anything, uh... which is a shame. But, uh... they do what they want to do. So... Thank you again.

Benjamin: Thank you.

LB: Thank you.

BK: And, uh, I'll think about people that, uh--

LB: Think about people--

BK: ...might still be around that, uh, you could talk to.

LB: Cuz we've got a couple of interview slots... Thursday in the afternoon and then... I'm gonna be out of town until mid-July and then we're gonna be--

BK: Oh wow. Are you going on holiday?

LB: I'm going to summer school! At UVA.

BK: Ok. Oh, I thought you [might have said]... somewhere in England [laughs].

LB: No, no. Charlottesville, not that glamorous, but...

BK: Ok.... Well--

LB: But I'll--I'll be in school but then we're gonna be back in July--

BK: Now, what is this event in September that's gonna happen?

Benjamin: Oh yeah, you have to tell him.

LB: Oh, it's gonna be so fun.

Benjamin: It's...

LB: It's at the old GRTC building, and its the street art fair. So we're gonna be installing these big portraits? Of GRTC operators. Big color photographic portraits.

BK: [Coughs.] Excuse me.

LB: And then there's gonna be a text panel with your edited interview.

BK: Well do you have someone that can do a makeover?

LB: [Laughing] I don't think you need a makeover.

BK: I don't feel very--

LB: You look great.

BK: ...photo...genic. I told him before you got here, you know, I just... and to hear that squeaky voice [?]

LB: No, no, no, you're great.

BK: But, uh--

LB: And then we're gonna have a sound installation that Benjamin's gonna create so that people can... hear your voice.

BK: Mm. Well, um... what was I gonna say, uh... I guess senility is setting in.

LB: Well while your'e thinking of it, I'll tell you one more dimension to this. We're gonna be having the portraits and the text panels up in the buses, as well.

BK: Mmm.

LB: For the riders to see? To learn more about the operators.

BK: So I finally became the star [laughs].

LB: [Laughs] So that's the part that we're especially excited about, so that, you know, course--not everyone is gonna go see--

BK: [Coughs.]

LB: ...exhibition, but everyone's gonna be on the bus.

BK: Yes! I know what it is, that--what are they gonna do with that property?

LB: What are they doing, just tearing it down?

Benjamin: I read an article that came out, I think in... two-thousand... eight? That said it would take six months to... like, take care of the property, and--and--

BK: Oh--well, ok. Whatever they want to do there, you got to realize there's eighty years of diesel and gas and oil that's dripped on there. There are car tracks that are still under there in

places. Um... you know, it would take a tremendous and expensive cleanup. But I mean the location is, you know, great, great, great.

LB: It's amazing.

BK: But, uh--and then people would move into that neighborhood. Ok, cuz I used to work all-night dispatches sometimes. [Coughs.] And when it was really cold, under twenty-five degrees, they'd turn the buses on in the morning, you know, before the drivers go there. Make sure they'd start and also that some heat start coming in. These people in the neighborhood call over there, 'turn them buses off, what you running buses for?' You know, and I had to... you know, handle it diplomatically, but I felt like saying, 'Why'd ya move next to a bus garage for?' You know. You know, you can see 'em over there. You think they're quiet electric buses?

LB: [Laughs.]

BK: So, um... they were there for a long time, though. That's--that's just... I took my first bus picture when I was five. My mother and I'd been to Byrd Park and we were walking by the bus garage. I said, 'can I take a picture of those buses?' and, you know, she gave me the camera and I took the picture. And, uh, still have the picture. So, course, it's... it's not very good, but for a five years, you know, effort was made and uh... you know... it's just a... you know, good times. Well, I appreciate the time, ya'll.

LB: We appreciate yours.

BK: And if I think of somebody, I will email you.

LB: Please do.

BK: And, uh--

LB: See, you are the most twenty-first century person here because you're the only person who replied to my email.

BK: Oh really? Hmm.

LB: Eventually, eventually Marsha did, but everyone else--had to be a phone call.

BK: Well, I was--

LB: ...which sometimes was returned and sometimes not.

BK: [Coughs.] I was excited because, uh... you can probably tell I love talking about the good old days. So this is an opportunity to talk about the good old days. To somebody who must have some interest... uh, in it. Because, you know, most people, they don't wanna hear about that, you know, uh, it's just... bo-ring!

LB: I think you'd be surprised. I think a lot of people are gonna be very interested in this.

BK: Just wish you could have a vintage bus sitting there.

LB: I know, wouldn't that be the best?

BK: Yeah, that's.... Just the way we were. But, uh... you know, it was a great place to work, again. And, uh, it still is, just you have to stay outta the politics and the drama nowadays. You know, speak no evil, see no evil, hear no evil, just come and do what you're supposed to do. And, uh--that's... not directed to the company so much, it's just... business in general now. You know. It's just, uh, we can't have any scandals. You know, um... and one needs to behave. Just like people that don't wanna--this woman didn't wanna wear her uniform properly. *I don't like this uniform.* I said, 'you should be proud to wear that uniform.' And, you know, you want to look professional, even if you're not professional. You [need to?] look like you are. And, uh, I got her to do it, and then she got fired for running off her mouth at somebody, [laughs] so... anyway. Well, thank you very much.

LB: Thank you.

Benjamin: Yeah, and we'll be in touch with you soon.

BK: Ok, sounds good. If I come up with a name, I'll email you Laura.



LB: Please do. Thank you so much, Bruce. I appreciate it.

BK: Ya'll have a good evening.

LB & Benjamin: You too.