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MS. DEINES: Today is May 11th, right?

MR. WRIGHT: Yes, Thursday, May 11th.

MS. DEINES: Okay, and I am Ann Deines, and Mr. Wilkinson Wright is with me, who is the grandnephew of Wilbur and Orville Wright, and we are in Miamisburg, Ohio. As I mentioned in the letter I sent you, I wanted to mainly focus on your memories of Orville first. I'm working on his later years in Dayton.

MR. WRIGHT: All right. All right.

MS. DEINES: Let's start with the years that . . . to put a time frame on it, the years that you would remember?

MR. WRIGHT: Oh, well, I was born in 1922, and Orville died January 30, 1948, so I was almost twenty-six years old when he died. Some of my earliest memories, of course, are of Hawthorn Hill. The family always had Thanksgiving dinner at Hawthorn Hill. We always had Christmas Eve dinner at Hawthorn Hill. And I can remember just very faintly Katharine Wright, just as sort of a presence and that's about all. She moved away when I was . . . in 1926, when I was only four years old, she married and moved to Kansas City and I never saw her after that, so she's just a very faint memory. I can

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remember well, of course, my Grandfather Lorin who lived until 1939, so I was, what, sixteen? seventeen when he died.

Orville was always a very busy man. He had this ingrained work ethic, I guess you'd call it. He went six days a week to his laboratory at 15 North Broadway, and he carried on an extensive correspondence. People often wrote to him with questions about his experiences, aviation and so on, and he knew many people all over the United States, people all over the world really. Then also he was like his father. He was deeply into family genealogy and he would work on that, and correspond. When he was traveling around the country often my brother and I and my cousin Jack Miller would be with him when we were kids...he'd stop at a churchyard or he'd stop somewhere to check some records for his genealogy, particularly over in the eastern part of Indiana where many of the family came from.

MS. DEINES: Did you travel with him a lot when he did?

MR. WRIGHT: Oh, no, usually it would be on a Sunday afternoon or something like that and the three of us would go out to Hawthorn Hill. Oh, and also when I was . . . I don't remember whether it was high school or maybe junior high, I worked in my grandfather's toy factory. He had a toy factory over on the east side of Dayton

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off of East Third Street, the Miami Wood Specialty Company, where he made various toys. But the thing that they made the most of were little balsa wood airplanes that you shoot with a rubber band.

And during the '30s they sold millions and millions of those, many of them to Kellogg, you know, for premiums: Send in a box top or three box tops and you got an airplane. And he made many of them.

And I worked there a couple of summers. And Orville often would stop in there. I think he and Lorin saw each other almost every day. I don't know whether they communicated or how they communicated, and it didn't seem to be in any regular pattern, but Lorin would stop by at South Broadway on his way back . . . They both went home for lunch. Lorin would stop by at South Broadway on his way back to work after lunch, or . . .

MS. DEINES: Where did Lorin live?

MR. WRIGHT: Lorin lived at that time on Grand Avenue, 1224 Grand Avenue, and so he was right off . . . a couple blocks off of Broadway, and he'd just drive down Broadway and visit there. Or Orville quite often, maybe before he went home for lunch, would stop by and visit Lorin. Or sometimes, as I say, there didn't seem to be any set pattern, but he'd stop out at the toy factory. And he was not a part-owner of that, but he was deeply interested and did a lot of work. He designed a printing press for them to print

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the designs on the balsa wood, the wings and the bodies of the airplanes. He designed some jigs. This involved sort of clamping and gluing little parts together, and he designed some jigs that did that sort of thing for them. He was always fascinated by anything mechanical. You've seen the modern computers, you know, where you can throw an image on the screen and then it'll revolve around and you get a three-dimensional view?

MS. DEINES: _____.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, Orville when he was working on anything mechanical, he would pick it up and he would turn it over and over and over in his hands. And he seemed almost to communicate through his hands. But he would look at it and look at it and analyze it.

He was just fascinated by anything mechanical. And, of course, that was something else that he did. A lot of his time he would work in his shop there, or laboratory they call it. It was actually a sort of a combination of a machine shop and woodworking shop. He had lathes and saws and what have you back of the office there on North Broadway.

MS. DEINES: Did he have any employees there or was it just himself?

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MR. WRIGHT: Oh, Mabel Beck, of course, was there all that time, and she was a very unpleasant lady. She wasn't nice to anyone, even to Orville. I never understood that, but she was . . . She seemed to be a very bitter and unpleasant lady, and she was always there. You had to go up a couple of steps to the front door, and you'd knock on the door and she would open the door about six inches and stand squarely in front of it to see who was there. She was guarding Orville I think more than he even wanted to be guarded.

MS. DEINES: Did she do that to family members, the same that she did to other visitors, or . . . ?

MR. WRIGHT: Early on I got a clue about her because my Grandfather Lorin was one of the gentlest, kindest, most courtly gentlemen in the world—lovely, lovely manners. And he was always, with ladies particularly, he was just very gracious. But when Mabel would open the door, he would speak . . . He would say, "Good morning, Mabel," or " Good afternoon, Mabel," but he would step forward immediately, and she either had to get out of the way or get walked on. (chuckling) Because he had learned over the years that she would keep him waiting there outside and go ask Orville if it was all right for his brother to come in. When Mabel wasn't there, and of course she wasn't there on Saturday, and when I went to the shop

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there I was usually with my grandfather. There was a double door that opened onto the alley and the shop in back, and if Mabel wasn't there, Lorin would go around to that side door on the alley and take out his pocketknife and hammer on the door. And Orville would come and let him in and we would visit there.

He worked on anything that suited his fancy. I remember he was working on an automatic transmission for an automobile. During the war he was working on a code typewriter that was supposed to have a million different combinations in it, something like that. Earlier on, this was long before there was anything on the market, he had made his own record changer. He had this big, big cabinet thing at home that had a radio and record player in it, and then he had made his own record changer, and it had this mechanical arm that would go in. He had a series of slots or shelves that the records went in, and the arm would reach in, pick a record out and put it on the turntable. And of course one time, you've probably read this somewhere, but one time he went by my aunt's house and he came by our house wanting to know if we had any old records, because at the time it was throwing them out on the floor. (laughter)

MS. DEINES: And breaking them?

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MR. WRIGHT: Yeah. And he worked on things like that. But he would also work on a potato peeler, a mechanical potato peeler. He was probably trying to find a labor-saving device for when he went to Georgian Bay. He went to Georgian Bay for the first time in 1916.

MS. DEINES: And that was up in Canada, right?

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, it was the lowermost arm of Georgian Bay. It's about a hundred miles straight north of Toronto. And he went there on a vacation with Katharine and his father and my Uncle Horace and a cousin, "Pecky" (?) Andrews, or Alfred Andrews. He went on the recommendation of Professor Werthner who was a professor at Steele High School, a very distinguished gentleman who went up there. And he fell in love with the place, and before he left he had bought Lambert Island, well, it was actually two islands. There was just a little tiny crack at one place where a little bit of water went through, but you could walk over it and not even know it. But it was about twenty-some acres. Have you ever been in that part of Canada?

MS. DEINES: No, I'm from the West, so I haven't gotten to that part of the country.

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MR. WRIGHT: Well, it's absolutely gorgeous. Everything there in this particular part of Georgian Bay is solid rock. I guess some sort of subterranean disturbance of some kind had injected a lot of molten rock into the earth. And then many, many years later the glaciers sort of swept the dirt off the top, and so everything is solid rock, and all the trees and everything grow out of little cracks. The water is crystal-clear. At noontime you can look down in forty feet of water and see the bottom. Just gorgeous. Just gorgeous. And he would go up there every summer as soon as the ice went out, which was usually, oh, middle to the late part of June, and he would stay often till after Labor Day. And four different summers we visited there with him.

MS. DEINES: How many years did he go up there?

MR. WRIGHT: Oh, he went up there from 1916 until . . . I forget whether it was '40 or '41. When Canada was in the war, of course, before the United States was, he could no longer get gasoline. Oh, here, look over here in the corner.

MS. DEINES: The bottom one?

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, the boat.

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MS. DEINES: The boat?

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, a gorgeous boat. And he was about, I guess, twelve or fifteen miles out from the town he went into. He went in and out of Penetanguishene, Ontario, or Penetang. His accommodations were not luxurious at all. He had eight or ten buildings on the island, and most of them had simply studs with siding on the outside, not finished on the inside at all. He had cold running water, but that was it. No electricity. He could have had electricity but he didn't want it.

MS. DEINES: Now, when he went up for those months, did he have people visit, or did other people go with him for the whole time, or . . . ?

MR. WRIGHT: When he could, he usually had a younger man go with him to do the heavy work. There was a very fine young black man that went with him for a number of years, but then he got married and didn't want to go any longer. And then for, I think, four or five years, Bob Hadelers went with him. Bob Hadelers was a neighbor boy who lived across the street from him in Oakwood. Now he's still living, incidentally, if you want to talk to him. It's H-A-D-E-L-E-R, Hadelers, and he lives on Schantz Avenue. And then later two of my cousins, they would be Reuchlin's grandchildren,

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grandsons, went up there with him. That would be George Russel and Wilbur Wright. George, I think, went up there at least six summers. He was in engineering school and didn't have any money, so he went up in the summer and was glad to have someplace to live for the summer. (chuckling) And he tells some interesting stories about what they did up there. Orville was constantly challenging them, thinking up problems for them to do. They had to design their own traps and trap animals without hurting the animals, and then they'd turn them loose. But the island had a lot of, oh, porcupines and skunks and groundhogs. There are beaver up in there, too. But Orville was always thinking up things like that. And there was a lot of work to keep that place up. He had his own water tower, and so he had a gasoline donkey engine down on the shore. The water up there was so pure that you just pumped the water out of there and pumped it into the tower, and so we had running water. But that engine was always troublesome. Orville loved gasoline engines, and he seemed to be particularly attracted to ones that didn't work very well. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: So he could fix them? (chuckling)

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, when we first went up there, probably the first two times we went in there, he had an old speedboat. It was only, I guess, maybe eighteen, twenty, twenty-two feet, I don't

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know, but he had an old six-cylinder Wright aircraft engine in it.

And then he had messed around with the wiring. He was supposed to be able to run it on one, two, three, or all six cylinders, if he'd tinker with it. No one else knew what they were doing, but if he'd tinker with it . . .

MS. DEINES: But he did.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, and so that if he wanted to go trolling, for instance, he could just go down to one cylinder and go very slowly and so on. But, you know, it was always very temperamental, it wouldn't start, and Orville was perfectly happy with that. He would just lift up the cowling and dive in and experiment with it till he got it going. (chuckling) And Bob Hadelor, for instance, when we were up there in those days, had to go somewhere every day to get milk. One time we used to go across to a hotel that was up there. Whoever was there would take the outboard, or if the weather was rough, they'd take the larger boat and go over to get milk.

But my mother never wanted to go there, because as soon as a lady came to the island Orville would quit cooking. (chuckling) And so the lady was there with a coal-oil stove, cold running water, no refrigeration, and with more people to cook for than if she'd stayed at home. Orville continued to get breakfast. He'd get

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breakfast every morning. The lady then was half a day's round trip from the nearest grocery store.

MS. DEINES: And they'd have to go to the grocery then every day?

MR. WRIGHT: No. His island was sort of a U-shape and had a bay in the middle, and they had an icehouse, and they would come every winter, you know, and they'd fill the icehouse, pack it in sawdust.

But you didn't use that ice to put in drinks or anything because you were getting just the surface ice. You weren't real sure of that. And his only luxury, I guess you would call it, in a sort of a pantry he had there, he had run a little copper coil through a tin box, and it had a little spigot on the outside, and he'd keep that box full of ice. He'd keep chipped ice in there so they always had cold water on tap, but that was about it. Then, as I say, a coal-oil stove. And if you wanted to bake anything, he had a sort of a tin box that you sat on top of the coal-oil stove, and that was your oven. But you're not . . .

MS. DEINES: I couldn't do it.

MR. WRIGHT: You don't remember those things, but that was not that unusual in those days. If you'd go to a vacation place, you often found a coal-oil stove. So that was the way he operated. He would

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work around that place. The fishing there was excellent but he was not a great fisherman. He would take people fishing or he'd show them where to go fishing. It's an area where you have to be very careful because it's easy to get lost. There are, I don't know, something like 30,000 islands in there, and there are a lot of places where there will be rocks, solid rock only six inches under the surface. If they stick above the water, at least you can see them, but there are others that you've got to watch out for. And if you're going a certain direction and you turn around and look behind you, you haven't the least idea where you came from. It's very easy to get lost because the islands will all sort of blend in and you don't know where the passage was you came through, and so . . . But he had learned his way around there very well. He had gotten lost up there many times, I guess, when he first went up there.

MS. DEINES: He learned from experience.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Now, did he have as many little gadgets that he had invented like at Lambert Island out at Hawthorn Hill?

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MR. WRIGHT: Probably not, because if Carrie didn't think they were worthwhile, she wouldn't use them. (chuckling) She'd reject them.

This Carrie Grumbaugh was a marvelous lady and she went to work for my grandmother, I think, in 1898 or 1899 when my Aunt Leontine was born. She was twelve years old at the time she went to work.

MS. DEINES: So she worked for your grandmother before she went over to the Wrights' house?

MR. WRIGHT: She worked, I think, two years for my grandmother. When my Aunt Leontine was born, and then she went over to work for the bishop. And she married in 1908, I think it was. At Hawthorn Hill there's a servants' section of the house there, yeah, and she and her husband, Charlie, lived there for all—

MS. DEINES: I didn't realize they had lived there.

MR. WRIGHT: Oh yeah. Yeah, that's one of the things that makes this business that Roz Young has done about Mabel Beck so utterly . . .

MS. DEINES: The marriage?

MR. WRIGHT: Utterly ridiculous, you know.

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MS. DEINES: _____.

MR. WRIGHT: Orville lived . . . most of the later years of his life in a goldfish bowl. I mean he went home for lunch every day at the same time, he went back to work every day at the same time, he returned in the evening at the same time. And if there were meetings, he told Carrie about it. And my grandfather would stop in and see him often. You know, he didn't have a chance in the world of having a secret life. (chuckling) So the whole thing is kind of ridiculous, plus the fact she was a very unpleasant lady.

MS. DEINES: Orville liked her, though, didn't he? Or she was helpful. (chuckling)

MR. WRIGHT: Well, I'm not sure, but she knew where everything was. One of the characteristics of the Wright family, they never threw anything away. Well, you've seen the . . .

MS. DEINES: The papers and . . .

MR. WRIGHT: The stuff that's out at Wright State, you know, their report cards and . . .

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MS. DEINES: Everything.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah. Yeah, Orville's high school botany workbook and all that kind of stuff. They never threw anything away. And all that stuff was filed there, and Mabel could find it. Mabel knew where it was and knew all this stuff. She had gone to work originally for Wilbur in the Wright Company as a secretary, and then had stayed on. Orville kept her and she knew where everything was. And so his life was sort of dominated, really, by two very strong women. Carrie Grumbaugh was a marvelous person, a lovely personality.

MS. DEINES: And how long did they live at Hawthorn Hill? Because I remember seeing an interview with Ivonette that said Orville bought her a car so she could commute from where their house was?

MR. WRIGHT: Carrie?

MS. DEINES: Yeah.

MR. WRIGHT: I don't remember that. But they had bought a house out off of . . . Shoot, I can't think of the name of the street, but off on the east side of where the state asylum used to be out on Wayne Avenue, and then it splits off at . . . Well, she had

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bought a house on one of those streets out there. They had bought a little house. But all the years that I remember, they lived at Hawthorn Hill. And she nursed Orville when he was sick, and of course he had some very bad times. Not in my memory, but in the very early '20s. All of his life he suffered from the effects of the crash at Fort Myer, because he had terrible bouts of sciatica, sciatic pain so bad that one time they had to build a frame to put over his leg because he couldn't even stand the weight of a sheet on that, it was too painful. And he was bedridden with that sometimes for several weeks at a time. He finally, in the early '20s, he went up to Mayo Clinic and a young doctor up there prescribed a brace, or sort of a truss, a belt which gave him a lot of relief. Typically, Orville came home, looked at the brace or the truss and decided that he could . . .

MS. DEINES: Make it better?

MR. WRIGHT: He could make it better. (chuckling) And so he bought a riveting machine and some leather and canvas and he made his own trusses thereafter. But he had to wear it all the time. He had one shoe that was slightly built up, as the result of the accident at Fort Myer.

MS. DEINES: That leg was shorter?

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MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, one leg was. And Roz Young keeps saying three inches, and I finally found out where they got that. They've got Orville's dress suit down there at the Kettering Moraine Museum, and for some reason one—

MS. DEINES: _____ measure the different?

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, one leg is three inches, but it wasn't anything like, oh, you know . . .

MS. DEINES: But if you were wearing shoes higher shoes, your pant legs would be the same.

MR. WRIGHT: But if you were wearing a shoe that was three inches higher, you'd notice. Unless you were aware of it, you could watch him walk and so on and you wouldn't notice any disability. Unless he was having one of his bad spells when it was painful, you couldn't tell there was anything wrong. And you had to look very closely at his shoes because it was . . .

MS. DEINES: I remember reading doctor reports or something in the papers at Wright State that initially they said there wasn't a difference, and then they found one later, so it couldn't have been that much.

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MR. WRIGHT: I was just remembering, if you look very closely, it may be a half-inch or three-quarters of an inch at most, but not a whole lot. But he was very sensitive to vibration and he never wanted to ride in anybody else's automobile because it would bother him, and he had his own car specially rigged up to take care of that.

MS. DEINES: What did he do to rig it up?

MR. WRIGHT: Well, I don't know. I can just faintly remember when he had an air-cooled Franklin. I don't know whether you remember those. They were strange cars, the front sort of swooped down and then there was a big, big air intake, and it was an air-cooled engine, and he had that. I can just faintly remember that, but then about 19 . . . oh, I think about 1929, he bought a Pierce-Arrow, which was a *huge, huge* automobile. And the characteristic of the Pierce-Arrow was that the headlights swooped right up out of the front fenders. They were, you know . . .

MS. DEINES: Okay, I have a vague image of one.

MR. WRIGHT: Well, anyhow, the reason he bought that, when he went to Canada in the summer he wanted to take his wardrobe trunk with

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him. And early on he'd take a train. There used to be a train station right on the dock at Penetang. It was an overnight journey, but he could take a train and end up right on the dock at Penetang. But then I think the train service stopped and he would start driving, and he wanted a car that was big enough to carry his wardrobe trunk. Well, that Pierce-Arrow was big enough that you could put a wardrobe trunk on the floor between the front seat and the back seat. I mean, you know, there was a big, big space in there.

And it had, front and back, it had . . . between the bumper and the body of the car there were a couple of big things, big round cylinders, they looked sort of like Thermos bottles and they were some sort of a special shock absorber of some kind. And one of my favorite memories, we were going somewhere one day, my brother and I and my cousin Jack. We were on a country road, we were probably over in Indiana. One of us asked him what were those things in the front and the back of the car. Orville loved a question like that, you know. He started in this long, technical explanation of what those were and how they worked, and at the same time he was doing it he was driving along this country road. And he always drove too fast, he was a terrible driver.

MS. DEINES: I've heard stories. (chuckling)

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MR. WRIGHT: Yes, and he drove right over in the ditch and went *roaring* down through the ditch, maybe a quarter of a mile on this country road, showing us the superior quality of these shock absorbers. (chuckling)

MS. DEINES: Did they work? (chuckling)

MR. WRIGHT: Well, yeah, very well. Of course, that was a big, heavy car. Then I think he had . . . I think very briefly, about 1937 maybe it was, somebody gave him a new Buick. Whenever it was, I think it was one of the first Buicks to have an automatic transmission. But he didn't keep that very long. And then a friend of his who was president or chairman of Hudson Motorcar Company gave him a Hudson Terraplane, and they had done something special to it so that it had a very good ride. And from thereafter, I don't know whether he had more than one of those. It was just a little two-door coupe, and his license plate was W-20-W, or W-2-0-W, however you want to look at it, and he drove that from that time on until he died. I don't know what became of that Pierce-Arrow. It would be great for somebody to find that today. But any car that he had, of course, anything that he got that was mechanical anyway, the first thing he would do would be take it

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apart, see, you know. You've heard the story about the IBM typewriter?

MS. DEINES: I haven't heard that one.

MR. WRIGHT: Well, he bought an IBM typewriter, one of the very first electric typewriters that they put out. He bought one for Mabel to use, and he immediately took it apart and had all this electronic stuff and couldn't get it back together so he called an IBM repairman. And this guy must have been a real diplomat because he came and looked at the thing, you know, and he put it all in a box, all the parts in a box, and carried it away, and IBM sent him a new typewriter. (laughter)

MS. DEINES: Did he take that one apart?

MR. WRIGHT: (chuckling) I guess he left that one alone. But I remember my uncle, Harold Miller, who was executor of his estate, they found in his correspondence there . . . they found his correspondence with the Franklin Motorcar Company or whatever it was, and Orville would write them a letter and say, "Hey, if you do so and so . . ." or "I've done this to my Franklin and it works better." And then in a couple of cases Franklin wrote back to him and said, "Well, would you mind if we adopted this?" and he said

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sure. (chuckling) I remember at one time when he thought the Pierce-Arrow didn't have enough pep, which meant, in Orville's terminology, it didn't go fast enough.

MS. DEINES: Fast enough. That's right. (chuckling)

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, he wanted to go fast. And so he decided the carburetor wasn't getting enough air into it and he started boring holes in the shaft of the carburetor. Then after a while he decided it wasn't that, it was something else, and he started whittling little pegs and filling in these holes with these little wooden pegs. (laughter) So, you know, you never knew what you were going to find there.

When NCR took over Hawthorn Hill, he had done all this stuff with the plumbing, the heating and the water system, and some of the things they never did figure out what they were intended to do. In his living room right by his fireplace there was a rod that came up through the floor and it had a little knob on the end of it. And he'd be sitting in there in the evening and he'd go over and he'd push that down or he'd go over and he'd pull it up. It was something he had going through to the basement connected to his furnace and he would work it out. Of course, the day he had his last heart attack, he had been running up and down the stairs when

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he went home at noon, trying to fix the doorbell. Something was wrong with the doorbell. And it was just not in his nature to call somebody and say, "Hey, come and fix the doorbell." He would rather work on it himself.

MS. DEINES: How would you describe Orville's personality, if you were describing him as a person?

MR. WRIGHT: Well, he was a very warm, friendly man when he was with people he knew. He liked people and liked to talk to people. He did not like pomp and circumstance. And when there would be an occasion, you know, and speeches and so on, he would just . . . He would just clam up and his mouth would sort of take a different look, a very firm line, and he would just say the absolute minimum that courtesy required. But when he was with people that he knew he liked to talk. Well, you know, Nancy Porter was asking me about that the other day, how often did I see Orville. Well, I don't know, but the family was always very close. So, when somebody had a birthday, you'd have a birthday party, whether it was at my grandmother's house or my aunt's or our house, whatever, and he was always there and always very friendly. Of course, always a practical joker. An inveterate practical joker. Always liked to do that sort of thing. And with people that he knew well and was at ease with, he was very talkative and enjoyed talking with

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people. One of the few occasions I can remember, a formal occasion, when he was not frozen up sort of, if you will, was when they dedicated the house and the bicycle shop at Dearborn in . . .

MS. DEINES: In '38?

MR. WRIGHT: Thirty-eight, yes, thirty-eight. Well, first of all, he liked Henry Ford because Henry Ford had taken the trouble to come and look for the house and the bicycle shop and to consult with Orville and take it up there, and Henry Ford hired Charlie Taylor, you know, to build an engine and so on. And when they had that dedication, he invited a lot of old flyers who had learned to fly here at Huffman Prairie. There was a whole group of Canadians that came down, and people like Foulois and Lahm and Humphrey and all of those people.

MS. DEINES: So he was surrounded by people he knew.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, and he loved that. Walter Brookings was there, and Griffith Brewer came over from England and so on. It was a great occasion and he enjoyed that. On the other hand, I've got one picture of him when they dedicated the monument at Kitty Hawk in 1932, and he was just . . . Of course, it was a miserable day . . . but he was looking really grim.

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MS. DEINES: Like he didn't want to be there? (chuckling)

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, really.

MS. DEINES: So did he do a lot of these official things because he more or less felt he had to, or should or . . . ?

MR. WRIGHT: By and large, no. He avoided them if he possibly could. But if it was a scientific group, he was . . . Of course, he was a member of the Engineers' Club, and he was active on their program committee and so on. And he was a member of the NACA all of his life until he died, and that was a forerunner of NASA and they ran the big laboratory at Langley, Virginia, and I think they ran Lewis . . . I don't remember when Lewis Laboratory was started. But he was always very interested in that work, attended the meetings as regularly as he could. He'd take a train to . . . an overnight sleeper we had in those days either to Washington or to New York. That was another thing, he always . . . I can't remember what, but he always specified a certain kind of accommodation because of his back problem. I forget whether he rode longways in the car or crossways in the car. But one way he could ride comfortably, the other way he couldn't, and so he always had to specify what it was that he had to have.

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MS. DEINES: I had a question and I just forgot it that you made me think of.

MR. WRIGHT: Will your letter help you any?

MS. DEINES: No, it was something you were just talking about, sort of a question, and I didn't write it down. Oh, let's go back to what were the family gatherings like at Hawthorn Hill, the Thanksgivings and the Christmases?

MR. WRIGHT: Oh, they were always fun. The table at Hawthorn Hill, of course, was always set with white damask tablecloth and napkins. There are pocket doors there that close off the dining room, but he never used them. He had curtains, and when you went in, the curtain would be drawn over the dining room. And in those days, the front hall was an open space. He had a big couch over where they have that sort of a secretary now, and a table over on the other side, but there was very little furniture in it and so it was a big, open area. The kids usually gathered there, you know. It was a place where you could play, sort of, and do what you wanted to do.

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Over in the little breakfast room he had a drawer which is at the end of the dining room. You remember there are pillars there. Well, that was supposed to be a breakfast room. He never used it for that, but there was a drawer there and he had toys in it. And they were usually always mechanical toys of some kind that he liked and enjoyed, often German-made. I can remember a little man who stood at a pool table, and the man would stand there and a ball would pop up and the man would stroke the cue and the ball would roll across the table. There was a clown that rode a bicycle and balanced something on his nose, and things like that he had. So there were toys there, and then, of course, as we got older there were always things there in his study that would be of interest because he'd have aviation magazines and so on. And I was always fascinated by the cartoons. That's one of the originals there, and that was my favorite, and we always used to look at that and laugh about it. And Orville was very fond of that, too. When he'd see us looking at that, he'd always chuckle and was very entertained by that. You've seen that one, have you?

MS. DEINES: I don't think I've seen that one.

MR. WRIGHT: Careful, the wire. But the one in the middle there.

MS. DEINES: (chuckling) That's a good one. _____ that one.

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MR. WRIGHT: Yeah. Well, you've seen that. The woodcut up at the top, you've seen that?

MS. DEINES: Yeah.

MR. WRIGHT: And then the thing below it is a piece of the fabric and a piece of a spar from the first plane that Neil Armstrong had sewed in his suit when he stepped on the moon.

MS. DEINES: Oh, that's neat!

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah.

MS. DEINES: _____. I did remember. The other question I was going to ask was about taking the bicycle shop and the house up to Greenfield Village, to branch off a little.

MR. WRIGHT: Well, that's a sore subject with a lot of Daytonians. Actually, of course, Orville didn't have any control over that because he didn't own either one. They never owned the bicycle shop, it belonged to their friend Charlie Webbert. And nobody in Dayton at the time was interested. You might look through the newspapers. I think probably in '35 or '36 was when . . . I think

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it was '36 was when they took it down, but I think the negotiations were before that.

MS. DEINES: There's a few articles saying Dayton is losing something, but most of them are just factual, it's leaving and . .

MR. WRIGHT: Nobody really . . . yeah. Well, the bishop had left the house to Katharine, and then she had sold it to Charlotte Jones who was a black lady who was their laundress for years and years and years, and she was living there. And they never owned the bicycle shop, so the Webbert family still had that. And I think Orville was pleased that anyone was interested enough to care, because that's when the Smithsonian thing was still at loggerheads and nothing was happening, and he was very disturbed about it.

I can remember just very faintly . . . this probably was in 1927, but one evening after supper the whole family went out to the laboratory on Broadway and he had the plane, the first plane set up there in the shop. He had had it recovered, the wing fabric recovered, and he was getting ready to have it disassembled and sent to England, and he asked the family if they wanted to come over and see it before it went out. I can just faintly picture in my mind seeing that thing. That shop was always sort of black and

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dark, and I can remember seeing patches of light material . . . the wings, these big . . . sitting there in those dark surroundings.

MS. DEINES: And do you remember any of his involvement with Colonel Deeds and the Wright Flyer III?

MR. WRIGHT: No, I was gone pretty much. Well, I heard about it when I came home, but I was gone pretty much during that time, because that was in '46-47, I guess. After I got out of the service in '46, I went back to Miami for a year and then I went to graduate school at the University of Chicago for a couple years, so I was out of town much of the time when that was going on.

MS. DEINES: Okay. Let's see what else I had on the list. When did your grandfather's toy factory . . . when did he own it, from like beginning to the end, do you remember?

MR. WRIGHT: Oh, I think from the very early . . . early in the '20s sometime. Lorin had worked for many people in his life. He was never particularly successful at any one thing. Those were tough times economically and he was a bookkeeper.

MS. DEINES: Because he worked with Wilbur and Orville in their bicycle shop then later also, right?

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MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, he kept books for them but (chuckling) Orville was a poor guy to work for because he didn't pay very much. Of course, they had a lifelong habit of frugality. Being in a minister's family, you can understand that. And then in the early '20s, I think it was, some guy came to Harold Miller who ran a small loan company, that was the business he was in, and this guy was looking for money for a toy that he wanted to manufacture. He had this idea that he wanted to sell, so Harold Miller took that to Lorin, and Lorin . . . Harold Miller, I guess, took a third interest, my grandfather took a third interest, and there was the guy that had the toy took a third interest. But he and Lorin didn't get along, which is hard to imagine because my grandfather was always a very pleasant and agreeable guy, so Lorin bought him out and the other third of the business was divided between my father and my Uncle Horace. And they owned the business and it, surprisingly, did well during the depression. The first toy that they brought was one they called "Flips and Flops." (chuckling) Have you ever seen . . .

MS. DEINES: I've read about that. I haven't seen one.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, well, it was a board, and at one end there was a couple of posts stuck up, and then there was a wire trapeze there,

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and at the other end you had a little sort of a seat in a little spring steel thing and you had this little clown that you put on there. It had two wire hooks for arms, and you'd release the seat and the clown would flip through the air and he'd catch onto this trapeze and spin around. And that's the first toy that they made.

Then they had one called "Toby Tumbler," which was a ladder, and again you had a little clown that you put at the top and it would come down the ladder.

MS. DEINES: I've seen that one before.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, and so that was about the early '20s, '21, '22, around in there somewhere. And then they kept going. Surprisingly, they were one of the businesses that went well during the Depression. When they got into the balsa wood airplanes, much of their business was with the cereal companies particularly who were promoting their business by giving away premiums. But then the business started to get very bad along toward the end, and finally they sold it to the Riegers. They sold the company, I think, probably within a year or two before my grandfather died. Of course, he was well along in years by then. He died in 1939. Well, '39 and thirty-eight, he was seventy-six or seventy-seven when he died. He was born in '62, I think November of '62, and

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died in December, I think it was, of '39. But that was an interesting business they were in.

MS. DEINES: One last question for you and we'll call it a day.

MR. WRIGHT: Mm-hmm?

MS. DEINES: What did you hear about Wilbur? What did people always tell you, or what was he like?

MR. WRIGHT: I heard about Wilbur. I can't recall any specific instance of Orville talking about him. Oh, he'd say the name Wil now and then. But Wilbur I heard about mostly from my father and my aunts and uncles, who remembered him very vividly and very fondly. He was a lot of fun. I think a somewhat different sense of humor than Orville's, but nevertheless, a very, very wry and very funny guy, and they enjoyed him thoroughly. Well, my aunt tells the story about his reading to them. But then if he got to the point where he'd had enough of it, he would just straighten out his legs and let the kid slide down to the floor. (chuckling) But they were very, very fond of him, liked him, thought he was funny and a lot of fun to be with. Here, look at this. That, up in the corner, the red? That's a postcard.

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MS. DEINES: This one?

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, that's a postcard that Wil sent to my dad when he was flying at Le Mans in 1908. And he's promising him he was going to take an airplane ride when he got back.

MS. DEINES: Yeah, he seemed to have a good sense of humor from what I've read.

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, and somewhere I've got another postcard that he had sent to my dad when he was in Washington, I guess. It's just a picture of the United States Capitol, and this little writing at the bottom: "This is an historic place." (laughter) Stuff like that, you know. When the Wrights became so famous, they were overnight sensations in 1908 and '09, '10, my dad built models of the Wright airplane and he would rent them out or sell them, but mostly he rented them to merchants who wanted to display them in their windows.

MS. DEINES: Little models, or . . . ?

MR. WRIGHT: Oh no, they were sizeable. I've got a picture around here somewhere, and I can't think where it is right now, but of my dad standing there with one of these models on the table, and they were good-sized. And then he even had printed letterhead, which I

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imagine had something to do with his uncles having been in the printing business, but "Milton Wright Jr.," I think it says. He had this business going for a while.

MS. DEINES: That's great. Well, thank you for today. Let's call it a day because we've been talking for an hour.

MR. WRIGHT: Well, okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
FOR THE
HISTORIC RESOURCE STUDY OF
DAYTON AVIATION HERITAGE
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Wilkinson Wright

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