

An Interview with
H. Dwight Weaver

at the Osage Beach Library in
Osage Beach, Missouri

12 April 2012

interviewed by Jeff D. Corrigan



Oral History Program
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PREFACE

H. Dwight Weaver was born May 29, 1938 in Centralia, Illinois. In his early childhood years, he moved around south central Illinois several times. In 1945, his family landed in Hannibal, Missouri, where he was first encountered with caves. His family stayed for a short time before moving to Jefferson City, Missouri where he would graduate from Jefferson City High School in 1956. Weaver attended college at University of Missouri Columbia as a music major and then transferred to Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design. Before completing his studies he returned home to work as an occupational therapy assistant at the Fulton State Hospital where he created a unique caving program for patients. Weaver would continue to work his passion for caves into his professional life after leaving the hospital, and ended up working for the Department of Natural Resources until his retirement in 2000.

With the help of his father, Weaver was able to explore and captivate his interest in the caves of Central Missouri from a very young age. In his adult life, he would help run several popular show caves in Missouri, including Ozark Caverns that he leased in 1964. Weaver critiqued many of the myths that are associated with caves through his personal interactions with residents of Missouri as well as publishing several articles and books on the subject. He and other cavers of the state are responsible for the extensive amount of documentation regarding the history and topography of over 7000 caves throughout the Missouri landscape. He has been associated with the National Speleological Society, American Spelean History Association, National Cave Association, and Missouri Speleological Survey. Beyond his work with caves, Weaver has also published several books about the history of Lake of the Ozarks area, where he now resides.

The interview was taped on a CompactFlash card, using a Marantz PMD-660 digital recorder and an audio-technica AT825 microphone placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets [/]. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [“”] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Sean Rost.

Narrator: H. Dwight Weaver
Interviewer: Jeff Corrigan
Date: April 12, 2012
Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

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[Begin Interview. Begin Track 1.]

10 Corrigan: This is Jeff Corrigan, oral historian for the State Historical Society of Missouri. I'm in Osage Beach, Missouri today at the public library on Thursday, April 12, 2012. Mr. Weaver is being interviewed today for the first time for our Missouri Environmental Oral History Project. Let's begin. Dwight, could you tell me first off when and where you were born?

15

Weaver: I was born May the 29th, 1938, at Centralia, Illinois. And we—my parents moved several times before I started to school. So by the time I started to school in the first grade, we were living in Jacksonville, Illinois. I went to the first grade there. And we moved, let's see, this would have been about 1944, 1945. I guess it was '45 that we moved to Hannibal, Missouri. The World War Two had just ended the first phase of that war. And I remember that, because we had, people were dancing in the streets because the war was over with. But they still had the Japanese were still fighting. And we moved to Hannibal in that period. We lived just out in the suburban area of Hannibal. We were there for probably two and a half years or so. And it was during that time that I had my first exposure to caves.

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25

Corrigan: Okay. Before we get to that, could you tell me, did you have any siblings?

Weaver: I have no siblings.

30 Corrigan: And could you tell me your parents' names?

Weaver: Estle Paul Weaver, E-s-t-l-e and Paul Weaver. And my mother's name was Marelle, M-a-r-e-l-l-e. Her maiden name was Smith. She was from Kentucky and he was from Colorado. He was an ordained Southern Baptist minister. But he found out that that kind of work paid poverty wages. And so during the week he worked either at a printing place or a grocery store. And throughout a good portion of those early years, that was what he was doing during the week. Because he pastored small rural churches. When we moved from Hannibal, we spent just about a year in Browning, Missouri.¹ And then we moved into Ashland, Missouri, near Columbia. And that had to be, I was in the, see, I guess I was in the sixth grade. And he was pastoring a church just outside of town there, but he was working in Jefferson City as a printer. And he took a position at the Missouri State Penitentiary as the Protestant chaplain. So in 1952, we moved into Jefferson City. He stayed with that position, he was actually with them for some twenty-five years. He retired in the middle '70s and he was the Protestant chaplain of Missouri State Penitentiary for about fifteen of those years,

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¹ Browning is located on the border between Linn and Sullivan counties.

and then at Algoa for about ten of those years. So actually we moved into Jefferson City in 1952. And that's where I graduated from high school in 1956.

5 Corrigan: So Jefferson City High School in 1956?

 Weaver: Yes.

 Corrigan: And then where did you finish like the eighth grade? Were you still in Hannibal?

10 Weaver: I was at Ashland.

 Corrigan: Oh, Ashland.

15 Weaver: Southern Boone County. That's where my wife is from, too.

 Corrigan: Your wife is from Ashland?

20 Weaver: We've known each other since we were eleven years old. We were not together at that point. We didn't get together until I was home from my second year of college.

 Corrigan: And your wife's name is Rosie?

 Weaver: Well, her name is Rosetta. But she goes by Rosie. R-o-s-i-e.

25 Corrigan: And Rosetta is R-o-s-e-t-t-

 Weaver: A.

30 Corrigan: A.

 Weaver: Mm hmm. And she's a native of Boone County. She was born and raised near Ashland.

35 Corrigan: Okay. What year did you two get married?

 Weaver: 1959. Got married on my twenty-first birthday.

[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]

40 Weaver: On May the 29th, 1959.

 Corrigan: And then you guys have one daughter named Karen?

45 Weaver: That's correct.

 Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: She lives in Columbia.

Corrigan: Okay.

5

Weaver: She's not married.

Corrigan: So she currently lives in Columbia.

10

Weaver: Yes. She's been there for quite some time. She works for MFA, Incorporated.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay. So now going back to when you were a kid, now you were an only child. Did your parents, did you have a lot of, did you do a lot of chores? Did they give you chores when you were a kid?

15

Weaver: No. My mother was rather protective. She was overprotective, really. I had a kind of a difficult struggle breaking, (laughs) you might call cutting the apron strings when I was growing up, because she did not like caves. And she was determined I would not go in caves. But my dad grew up in Colorado. And he was big in the Boy Scout movement. Became an Eagle Scout. And this was in the '20s. And he hiked and climbed in the Rocky Mountains, foothills. He was kind of an outdoorsy type person. But by the time I came along in his life, we were living in Missouri and there were no mountains in Missouri. And his employment, his lifestyle, didn't allow him to do the kind of things, he didn't seem to have the time, he was always working. So he said, "Well, we'll just go visit some caves." And that was how I got my introduction to caves. We were living in Hannibal, Missouri. And you can't live in Hannibal, Missouri and not know about Mark Twain. You get indoctrinated very quickly. And I think the first thing you do when you move to Hannibal, Missouri, is you visit everything that's associated with Mark Twain. And so we went out to the cave. And I had to be, let's see, this was, oh, '38, about 1947, I believe it was. I would have been about nine years old. And we took a tour. It was a pretty primitive operation at that time. They had a little building sitting out by the cave entrance. And it was one of these things with the open sides, in the morning when they would open up, they would open up the sides. And inside this little building, which was about oh, maybe twelve by fifteen or so, they had a central section where they had ice cream and some souvenirs and stuff like that. And you buy your ticket and get your guide. And what else was interesting they had these rails out by the entrance that were kind of like a hitching rail for a horse. But they were just covered with shirts and sweaters and jackets. Because the cave is one of the colder caves in Missouri. It's fifty-two degrees. And a lot of people, when they would arrive at the cave, they didn't realize how cold it was in that cave. And they came in their shorts and their shirt sleeves. And so they could borrow a jacket or a sweater and put it on while they were taking a tour. So it kind of made the entrance look like a garage sale going on. (laughter) But I was, they have a huge picnic grounds at that place. And it was just used like a city park. So on weekends, you know, the park would just fill up with locals. And if you had company, that's where you took them for a picnic. And so when my folks would have guests or my relatives would come, we'd go out to Mark Twain Caves' picnic grounds. That's a tradition that goes clear back to the 1800s at that particular site. And the cave has several openings at the side of the hill.

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They blocked all those off with the structures. But there's an opening between the boards. And us kids would just scramble up the hillside, you know, and we'd hang on those boards and look at that dark interior, hoping we could hear the tours going by. We never could. But that cold air would be pouring out on a hot summer day. And the cave has an earthy smell.

5 And just, I don't know, it had a pull to it. It was beguiling. And of course if you had company, and we were always having some relatives from my dad's side of the family, because they grew up in Colorado. I had twenty-two cousins in Colorado Springs alone. So they would come and visit us and we'd go out to Mark Twain Cave and it was always an
10 excuse to take a tour. Well if you've been in Mark Twain Cave, it's like a labyrinth. If you go down the passage thirty feet and there's a passage going off to the right and there's one going off to the left, and they're just like that all over. And the tourism is sort of a—

[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]

15 Weaver: —tourist is a larger section. And it kind of makes a circuit around the whole cave system. But you see all these dark passageways. And I was just so overwhelmed. I've got to see what's out there in those passageways. Well my dad got acquainted with Archie Cameron, which was the manager of the operation and a caller(?).

20 Corrigan: You said Archie Cameron?

Weaver: Archie Cameron. A-r-c-h-i-e. Cameron. C-a-m-e-r-o-n. And they visited back and forth. Finally one day Dad said, "Would you mind if I took my son and some other kids in the cave to go exploring off the side passages?" Archie said, "Well, sure." So we picked a
25 day in the summertime when it was in the evening and the last tour, usually the last tour would go in the cave about six or seven o'clock. Because the tour was an hour long. And he said, "I'll give you," us kids, there were about four of us. And he gave us flashlights, gave my dad a Coleman lantern. And Archie said, "You just go on in there. Have some fun. Be gone a couple hours." He said, "If you get lost, don't worry about it. Because," he said, "I
30 know the cave like the back of my hand." Well, there's several miles of passageways in this labyrinth of passageways. And there's no big, deep pits. There's no streams or anything, so you really can't get hurt in that sense. Well, we were reading about Mark Twain in school at that point in time. It was kind of a reading lesson. And I was learning about Mark Twain and the adventures of Tom Sawyer. And I was really excited about all this. So my dad thought
35 oh, I'm going to have some fun with these kids. He went in, he said, "Well, we'll take all the passageways that go off to the right and we'll see if we can get lost." Well unfortunately, all those passages that go off to the right go off to the side of the hill and dead end. So that wasn't getting us anywhere. So Dad said, "Well, we'll go off in the center. We'll take all the left-hand passageways. That will take us into the center." Well, the tour route is a circle, kind
40 of a rectangle, around. And we kept coming back out on the show cave trail. And you could always tell because there was beaten down path and there was electric lights. So then he said, "Well, we'll take off in this other direction." Actually, we were back there for more than two hours. And we were just having a ball, exploring all these dark passageways. And we, Dad said, "We won't crawl. We'll just walk." But in order to find our way back to the show cave
45 trail, we had to get down and crawl. And we were on the way on the commercial trail, headed toward the entrance, when Archie was coming in with a lantern. He said, "You're overdue.

And,” he said, “I was getting worried.” It was years before my dad admitted that we were so lost and he was really getting scared. (laughs) He was so confused with the passageways. And that kind of really, it didn’t scare me. It just enthused me. Well there’s a cave on the other side of the hill that’s even more extensive than the one Mark Twain is about. So, and they only take special tours over there. They don’t take it on a regular basis. It’s called the Cameron Cave. It was named after Archie Cameron, who discovered it. Well, Dad said, “Could we go over there, then?” And so on that trip, it was just me and my father. And we spent several hours in that cave, just the two of us. It was after that that I just could not resist caves.

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Corrigan: Now how many were with you the first time? It was several kids?

Weaver: Yeah, there was me and four other kids.

15

Corrigan: Four other kids. Okay.

Weaver: I think there was a girl and three boys and myself. They were neighbors.

Corrigan: Okay. Well what kind of equipment did you guys have?

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Weaver: All we had at that point was Archie gave each of us kids a flashlight, and my dad had the Coleman lantern.

Corrigan: And you said part of the show trail part was lighted at that time.

25

Weaver: Yes. [It was lit when a tour was in progress]

Corrigan: So it was lit.

30

Weaver: Yes. It was lit. Well, you could see the wires. You could see the light fixtures and that sort of thing. And the floor is hard packed. You can really tell the difference. If you get off into the side passages where there’s not much traffic, there’s a big difference than there is where the traffic—because that cave sees thousands of people a year going through there.

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Corrigan: So it was packed down.

Weaver: Yeah, it was packed down. And it’s the largest, that’s the largest passageways in the cave that they use for the tour.

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Corrigan: Okay. Okay. And do you remember at all how much it would have cost to go to the cave back then?

Weaver: The tour that I remember was twenty-five cents for a kid under the age of twelve.

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Corrigan: For an hour-long tour.

Weaver: For an hour—

[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]

5 Weaver: —long tour, twenty-five cents. And I think it was fifty or seventy-five cents for an
adult. They had a lady at that point in time who was taking clay out of the cave. And she
would, she was a potter. And she was making these little busts of Mark Twain that you could
hang on the wall. And I bought one of those. And I still have that. To me, it's a treasured
possession, because it was only done for a few years. It was made from the clay in the cave.
10 And it's an embossed, Mark Twain's bust. Also, in 19, it must have been 1948, I signed the
guest book. They had a guest book at the cave. I never thought any more about that. Until
many, many years later, when I was actually associated with the cave operation for a short
time. And I asked them, I said, "Do you still have the old guest books?" "Oh, we have them
all. They're down there in the storage building." I went down and found my signature from
15 when I was just a child. (laughs)

Corrigan: Now this was always your father. Your mother did not like this?

20 Weaver: My mother did not like caves. No. She claimed to like nature. But she liked it at a
distance. (laughs) She'd go to parks. She would actually walk in a show cave. But she just
had a little bit of claustrophobia, I think, is what it amounted to. And she was the type of
woman that didn't like to get dirty. I can tell you something more about that later on, because
that had an impact on my caving later. She was, as the church women used to say, "You
could eat off Marelle's floors." That's how clean the house was. Everything had a place, and
25 everything was supposed to be in its place. And she didn't like to clean my dirty clothes
when I would go caving. (laughs)

30 Corrigan: So then, going forward a little bit, you're in Jeff City. You're graduating high
school, okay? Can you talk about, were you caving at all during high school?

Weaver: Let's back up a little bit to middle school. Because we were living, we had moved
to Ashland, Missouri in, I believe it was 1949. And, let's see, how would that be, '49, '47,
'49, I guess I was in the sixth grade. And my dad was pastoring the New Salem Baptist
Church, which is this white church you see between Ashland and Columbia along the side
35 there. And there was one of the members of the church, we were living in the parsonage,
which was in town. And there was a gentleman name of Ross Christian who lived across the
street, and he was one of the deacons of the church. And Ross was retired at that time. He
was a retired farmer. And of course us kids would play out there. And he would talk to us.
And he learned that I liked caves. He said, "Oh, we've got caves out here, just outside of
40 town." And so he got my parents' permission to take me out to them. At that time, this is
what today is the Three Creeks Conservation Area. It was just a grown up abandoned
farmland on the uplands, and down in the valleys, too. But that's where he grew up. His
relatives were out that way. He had a sister living out there. He had other relatives. And I
would sometimes go out and stay at his sister's. I don't remember now why. I guess they
45 were babysitting me or looking after me. But anyway, he took me down to Hunter's Cave.
And we had to fight our way through the weeds. And I recall that Ross had a big stick with

him. And I asked him why he was carrying the big stick. He said, “Well, there’s rattlesnakes down here.” Well I thought he was just pulling my leg. But I found out later that there really were some pretty good-sized rattlesnakes out there. But we had to fight our way through the weeds to get down to this cave that he called Hunter’s Cave. And we went in. We just had
5 flashlights. And we didn’t go in very far. We went back to where you first had to kind of get down low to get under a place. And he said that was far enough. But then he started telling me about his brother, Speed, who was deceased. And he said, “When we were kids, we explored all these caves out here.” And he said, he started telling me the tales of their explorations of these caves. So that really inspired me, too. Well, after that, I would get on
10 my bicycle with two or three of my buddies—

[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]

Weaver: —and we would bicycle. It was only a mile and a half or so from where we lived there out, out of Ashland to that area. We would bicycle out there and spend the day. And we
15 would go in the cave with our flashlights. We went back quite a ways in Hunter’s. We went to Tumblers. We went to a number of the caves out there. So that’s where I really started getting interested in exploring caves. Now at this point in time, we’re talking ’49, ’50, ’51, there was nothing in Missouri as a ways of organized caving. There was some show caves.
20 But there was nothing that had to do with caves as a subject, scientific or otherwise. And I was curious about them. And I was always asking questions and not getting much in the way of answers. So when we moved into Jefferson City, one of the first things I did was to go down to the public library to see if they had any books on caves. There weren’t any. And what they had in encyclopedias was something about Mammoth Cave or Carlsbad. That was
25 about all you knew about. So I was just desperate for information about caves. In 1952, the Missouri Geological Survey produced a partial catalog of the caves of Missouri. There was a geologist by the name of Farrar who was interested in, I suppose, the geologic and environmental aspects of caves in Missouri. And he started putting together a list of caves that he knew about and their locations. And then he went to World War Two and he got
30 killed. And that list was laying around. Well along about that time, Dr. J Harlen Bretz, who was a geomorphologist at the University of Chicago had gotten interested in Missouri caves. And Bretz was up in years. He started doing research to prove his theory on the origin of Missouri caves. And this was in around 1950, ’51. He’d come onto Farrar’s list. So he started adding to that list until he got up a couple hundred caves on the list. And the geological
35 survey put that into a little, they just copied the sheets off. And you could get it for a quarter or fifty cents, I don’t remember the exact price. That’s what I got a hold of.

Corrigan: Okay.

40 Weaver: Because a little piece appeared in the paper about this list of Missouri caves. So I got a copy of that. And then I tried to get my dad, but by that time he was not really, he really wasn’t a caver, so to speak. I couldn’t drive yet. But he would take us out to Ashland, to the Three Creeks Conservation Area, and drop us off on a Friday. And we would camp out there, me and some of my buddies, just like Scouts. We would camp there and we would hike
45 around and we would cave and do that sort of thing. So he would take us places like that. He brought us down here to Miller County, to a property there where there was a cave. So that’s

how we kind of got, and that picture that occurs in the book, of me and my buddies standing near the cave, that was taken before, that was taken when I didn't yet have a driver's license.

5 Corrigan: In that picture you're about—

Weaver: I was about fourteen or fifteen, sixteen in that, maybe.

Corrigan: Right around there, okay, yeah.

10 Weaver: But just as soon as I got my driver's license, I was gone every time I could borrow Dad's car to go caving.

Corrigan: Now you said your father was an Eagle Scout. Were you in those things, too?

15 Weaver: No. We lived in Ashland at that time. And they didn't have a Scout troop at that point. By the time I got into high school, I was a little too old for that. So I missed that aspect of it. But because my dad was into scouting when he was young—

Corrigan: In Colorado.

20

Weaver: In Colorado.

Corrigan: Yeah. Okay.

25 Weaver: He taught me a lot about scouting and that sort of thing. Because he would take, we would go out camping and that sort of thing.

Corrigan: Your family did that a lot, camping?

30 Weaver: We didn't do a lot. But my dad and I would go out.

Corrigan: Okay.

35 Weaver: Because he liked to fish. So that was where that connection was. We'd go fishing and maybe camp out. We'd take a vacation to Colorado, we would camp out. Because we'd go out west to see his—

[End Track 5. Begin Track 6.]

40 Weaver: —brothers and sisters. And they all had big families. So that was where I learned a little bit about the outdoors.

Corrigan: Now you said your mom was from Kentucky.

45 Weaver: Yes.

Corrigan: Did you ever go to any caves or anything there? Did you go back to that side of the family?

Weaver: Well, when I was growing up, my maternal grandmother lived with us for many years. That was my mother's mother. And relatives in the Kentucky field, she would go down there and we had several, we had one branch of the family that lived near Mammoth Cave. And they started talking about the caves. And we would be around, I was probably nine, ten years old. And we would be eating or something. They'd get a conversation going. They'd be talking about Mammoth Cave. And then they got to talking about Floyd Collins Crystal Cave, and the death of Floyd Collins. And that excited me, because that's where I really began to pick up on this sort of thing. That happened in 1925, by the way.² And it was really a sensational worldwide thing. That was awesome. But anyway, they would talk about that. And I learned about that. Then in 1954—let me back up. There was an organization that got started in the '40s, out east. People that were interested in caves got together and formed the National Speleological Society. This was 1943 they organized the group. But it was just a small group in the Virginia, in that area there. One of the members of that group was a man by the name of Clay Perry. And in about 1947, '48, '49, he wrote a little book called *New England's Buried Treasure*, one of the first books ever written about caves out east. A copy of that book landed in the Jefferson City Public Library. And I read that and got really excited about caves. And then the organization grew, mainly east of the Mississippi River. But they would have, they did have various members scattered around throughout the United States. I would say probably half of those people were people involved in the show cave business, because there was a relationship there with caves. And one of the persons that joined was Lester B. Dill, who in 1933 developed Meramec Caverns. And Archie Cameron, who was involved with Mark Twain Cave. And they didn't form any organization in Missouri. But there was another called Alfred Burrill, and he was the curator of the Missouri State Capitol Museum. And Burrill was interested in caves. I tried some years ago to do some research on him and just ran into a stone wall. Because apparently there's no records left of what he did. But he did put out a couple of lists of caves. And he was more interested in the cultural and the archeological aspects of caves in Missouri. And I do quote him in my book in 2008 there on the history of and legend of Missouri caves. But all these pieces began to fit together. But in '54, by 1954, there were enough members of that national organization that they put together one of the biggest expeditions that had ever been held in the United States on the exploration of Floyd Collins Crystal Cave in Kentucky, which is part of the Mammoth Cave system. But at that time, they hadn't made a physical connection. They were still trying to. And that cave was named after Floyd Collins, who died in another cave nearby in 1925. But there was a book written about that, the exploration of Floyd Collins Crystal Cave. It came out in 1954, about that expedition. And when I read that, because there was a little blurb about it in the Jefferson City paper. And I was able to get a hold of a copy, my dad bought a copy of it for me. And I realized there was an organization of cavers. I was too young to belong. You had to be seventeen. You had to be recommended by a member of the organization. And so at the age of sixteen, not knowing anybody else in Missouri, let's see, how old would I have been in 19—

² Floyd Collins died in 1925.

[End Track 6. Begin Track 7.]

Weaver: —54, I guess I was sixteen. Seventeen, eighteen. Yeah. I sit down one Christmas vacation. Decided since there wasn't any information available other than one little partial
5 list of caves that I'd gotten from geological survey, I wrote a letter to every geological survey in the United States that I had their address, and I'd put these addresses by going to the public library and getting these addresses. And I think there was maybe twenty or twenty-five different states that had a geological survey or some kind of survey like that. And I wrote them this very ambitious letter. I was going to write a book on caves and I needed
10 information. And would they, if they, did they have any information on the caves in their state. Well, I stated getting, I didn't tell my dad I did this. I didn't tell my mother I did this. And I didn't have any money. And suddenly things start arriving in the mail. And several of them came along with an invoice. (laughs) And, "What's this?!" Well, I told them what I had done. And they went ahead and, it wasn't all that much money. But they went ahead and
15 paid for them, the little publications that I got. But in doing that, I made contact with two of the officers of the National Speleological Society. And these were very prominent individuals. They had no idea how old I was, because I didn't say so in the letter. It was all typed on my dad's little portable typewriter. And so they recommended that I join their organization. And they sent me along a membership thing with a, signed. So as soon as I
20 turned seventeen, I joined.

Corrigan: So this was 1956, then?

Weaver: '55.
25

Corrigan: '55.

Weaver: '55, yeah, I was seventeen in '55. And I guess it was just before, just before I
30 turned eighteen. I was probably a senior, going in my senior year in high school. They sent me a list of all their members in Missouri. There weren't very many. But there were a couple of people on that list that were very prominent. One was Dr. Oscar Hawksley of Warrensburg State Teachers College which was, he was a bird biologist. And then there was a Jerry Vineyard, who was a graduate geology student. So I immediately sit down and wrote them a letter. And they were just in the process of forming the Missouri Speleological Survey. And I
35 had just graduated from high school. I was going to start the University of Missouri. And Jerry was a senior, graduating, but he was still at the college. So as soon as the school started, I got in contact, we got in contact with each other. And so I got in on the ground floor. I don't think the MSS had, we called it the MSS, Missouri Speleological Survey. And a lot of people can't pronounce the word "speleological." But it had only been organized about six or eight
40 weeks. And I was in. And I don't think we have more than a dozen members at that point in time.

Corrigan: And this was the same time as the National Speleological Survey, that you had
45 just joined, about the same time you had joined there, the Missouri one was forming?

Weaver: Yes. Yes.³

Corrigan: Okay. So we're still in 1955.

5 Weaver: The reason that happened was Dr. Hawksley and Jerry Vineyard had gone to the
national convention. And they got so inspired they came back and said, "We're going to
organize our own survey here in Missouri." So they did. Three of them got together. Frank
Dahlgren in Saint Louis. He was a machinist. Doc Hawksley, biology. Jerry, geology. They
10 formed the Missouri, so three directors of Missouri Speleological Survey. It stayed that way
until '62 when it was reorganized with a representative type board of all the organized caving
groups in the state.

Corrigan: What was the very first name you just said there? You had mentioned before, one
of the directors—

15 Weaver: Frank Dahlgren?

Corrigan: Dahlgren. Okay.

20 Weaver: Frank Dahlgren. He was a, they called him a machinist. He ran machinery in Saint
Louis. And he had joined the NSS, that's how Hawksley and Vineyard knew him.

Corrigan: Okay.

25 Weaver: And they were the three, only three prominent people in the state at that time who
were interested in caves.

Corrigan: Okay.

30 Weaver: There were a lot of people out there, you know, young people that wanted to
explore caves. But exploring a cave is one thing, but doing it through an organization where
you have some rules, where you have some standards, that's a whole different ballgame.

35 Corrigan: So we're right at the time you were graduating high school in '56, you were
members, now, of this already.

Weaver: Yes.

[End Track 7. Begin Track 8.]

40 Corrigan: They didn't know your age up until this point. But you did hook up with [Jerry
Vineyard] when you attended the University of Missouri.

Weaver: Yes.

³ Weaver joined the NSS in December 1955, and the MSS in the spring of 1956.

Corrigan: Correct? Okay. So during high school, though, let's go back a little bit. So during high school when your father, when you did get a driver's license and your father would lend you the car, you and your buddies would go out caving.

5

Weaver: Or if one of them would get a car and we'd go out. It wasn't always just my father's car. But they had fathers, too, you know. And back in those days, kids didn't have cars. Most of us didn't.

10 Corrigan: And so how, were you generally staying in a certain area?

Weaver: Yes.

Corrigan: Were you in Boone County?

15

Weaver: Uh, well, we were in a, I would say, Central Missouri.

Corrigan: Okay.

20 Weaver: Because we would cave in the Boone County area. We would go to Miller County, Camden County, Callaway County, Cole, Pulaski and Phelps. Those were the areas that we did our caving in.

Corrigan: So pretty much central Missouri.

25

Weaver: Yes.

30 Corrigan: Could you tell me a little bit about early caving, then? This is just you and your friends. These are not guided tours. These are not show caves. These are not—I'm curious where you got the information of where, I know a cave is there. Were you looking at these lists? Or were you just listening to people and saying oh, that area over there has caves. I'm just curious about this early caving because unlike what you were talking about at Mark Twain Cave, these were not show caves. These were not caves that define trails and lighting, like Mark Twain. Could you just describe this?

35

Weaver: Okay. There was a number of ways that we found out about the caves. First of all, we talked to a lot of people. A lot of land owners. But to our way of thinking, if we got into the hills, the creeks, we could find caves. They weren't out in the flatlands, they were in the hills. And first we had the list. But the list was very vague. But the list would have
40 coordinates on there. The cave is in township, range, section, quarter section. So when I got that list, I realized that there was a way there that I could locate caves maybe with these maps. So you got these maps from the geological survey, or the USGS. So I taught myself to read a topographic quadrangle. You can flip those over. The old 15-minute quadrangles had directions on the back of how you read a topographic map. So I got some topographic maps
45 for the area in central Missouri. But a lot, not a lot, but there were a fair number of caves that were already listed on those old maps. They were the prominent caves. The ones beside the

road that almost everybody knew about. Or they were, today they're a show cave, or something like that. So that helped us find caves. Talking to land owners was one of the better ways to do it.

5 Corrigan: So you did get permission from land owners—

Weaver: You bet. We got permission. Otherwise, you might get shot. (laughs)

Corrigan: Okay. So you would go talk to them, tell them—

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Weaver: Yes.

Corrigan: —you know, what you wanted to do, when you wanted to do it, if it was okay.

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Weaver: We got a lot of no's. Because they worried that we would get in trouble in the cave. We found – I found – that not only did these property owners own a lot of land that often had two or three caves on them, but they had no interest in the caves. To them, the caves were largely a nuisance. Because they attracted attention. They were a nuisance because they had bats in them. And more than once I heard, "Well, bats are better off dead than alive." And we

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heard all the old things. "Well, there's probably snakes back in there. You'll get snake bit." Or, "It will fall in on you," you know. Or, "You'll get back there, you won't have enough air and you can't breathe." There were all these reasons why we shouldn't go in caves. And I

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particularly from what little information I had learned about in that Clay Perry book. And I read articles, too. There would be magazine articles and things like that. And every time I could find something like that, I would read it. So I was beginning to get the idea that there was just a lot of myth associated with the caves. And it was based on fear. These caves are wet, they're dark. No light. And who knows where they go? And we had all these, well, every cave was connected to a cave five or ten miles away. If it was a cave where you had to go down vertically, it had no bottom. All these things that we heard—

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[End Track 8. Begin Track 9.]

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Weaver: —and we would go in a cave and discover none of that was true. At first, I didn't understand why there weren't any snakes back there. You might find one near the entrance.

40

But you never found them back in the back part, where we went. And it became apparent after a while, when I learned a little bit about snakes, they're cold. Their body regulation, their temperature is regulated by the atmosphere, the temperature around them. Caves are a constant temperature. And here in Missouri, the caves are all between fifty-two and sixty degrees, which was below the temperature that snakes are active. And so if they crawl back into a cave very far, if they didn't get back out, they weren't going to live very long. There wasn't anything back for them to eat in most of those caves. So they weren't back there. And you look at these caves and you see a stalagmite growing up on the floor or a stalactite hanging down and gosh, that thing must be old. If this thing is so unstable, why are these things so big? Because they're just drip by drip, you know, they're forming. So I began to get this sense that most of what I had heard growing up was wrong about the caves. But I

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5 couldn't prove any of that. I had no credibility. Who was I? I was just a kid. And so basically, you know, we had to do a lot of promising to the land owner. We're not going to get in trouble, and we're not going to sue you, and that sort of thing. But by making contacts and getting one or two friendly people in an area, then you can use those names. And you go, "Well, so and so over there, he's let us go in his cave." So that's how we built up a relationship in the areas where we went. And I learned who the land owners were. That was another way to do it.

10 Corrigan: Now were you typically going out with the same people?

Weaver: Yes. Yes. Because I learned that a very small percentage of my buddies or people, kids that I grew up with, were really interested in that sort of thing. They might like to go hiking or camping or swimming or boating or things like that. But to go in those dark caves, they had to first contend with their parents. And then they had to contend with their own fears of all this nonsense they heard about the caves. So it really, it really was a problem. I never had any fear of the bats. To me, they were just interesting animals. But I kept hearing that over. But I'll say one thing. Ross Christian, the old farmer that was retired and took me back to Hunter's Cave told me, he said, "The bats won't hurt you." Now I don't know what he knew about bats. But he said, "They won't hurt you. Just leave them alone." And I never had any fear of them after that. So once we, well, we didn't have any standards. There wasn't what we call caving ethics. You began to see that, well, this cave has been visited by a lot of people. There's names all over the wall here. There's dates and all this stuff. Who were these people?

25 Corrigan: Just painted on there? Or scratched in?

Weaver: Scratched in. Written on there in charcoal. Written on in pencil. Some were actually carved in, you know? Mostly it was names and dates. That's what we found at that point in time. Of course today, in the '60s and 70s and '80s, we begin to get what I call graffiti. All kinds of obscenity and other things like that that would appear on the walls of a cave. There was a caver, I won't name him, he was a wild character up at Columbia that would go caving with his buddies. They were motorcycle guys. Not against motorcycles. But they would run out in the hills of Boone County. And if he, they were always putting their initials and sayings in the cave. And we had one place in Hunter's Cave where it got very difficult a mile back in the cave system. The passage was about twelve inches high and twenty feet wide. And it was a 300-foot crawl where you did it on your side. Slushy sand and water. Very dangerous water crawl. And he [would write a swear word]—so on caves with an arrow pointing down at that point. That's usually where he would stop. And our point at that time was let's go further than he's gone. So we knew there were people going in these caves. But I began to get interested in these signatures. Who were these people? And here's a date. It's eighteen hundred and ninety.

[End Track 9. Begin Track 10.]

45 Corrigan: So prior to '60s, '70s, '80s, you're seeing names and dates.

Weaver: I'm seeing names and dates in caves that are really old.

Corrigan: Okay. And then after that, more vandalism graffiti.

5 Weaver: In more recent years, yes.

Corrigan: Okay. So going back, you're seeing 1880s, 18-?

Weaver: '90s.⁴

10

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: And that began to intrigue me. Who were these people and why were they in the caves and how far did they go? But I have no answers. One of the things that just as soon as I, and I found this the other day, when I joined this Missouri Speleological Survey group, they had a form you filled out. And what were your interests in caves. And I said history. That was one of the first things I put down there. And one of the first things I wanted to do was write a book on the history of Missouri caves. That was back in 1956. And I finally accomplished that goal.

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Corrigan: How long did it take you to do that? When was that first book published?

Weaver: 1971.

25 Corrigan: '71. Okay.

Weaver: That was about Mark Twain Cave. And I can explain the history behind that a little bit in a minute. But going back to those early days, we had flashlights but having been influenced by men that did hunting and fishing and things like that, I knew a little bit about the outdoors and carbide lights. So we learned that we needed carbide lights in the cave. You get a better light. Flashlights burn out. You can replace the carbide in the lamp in the cave and you can go right on. So I started using carbide lamps. You could buy them in any hardware store. You could buy carbide at any hardware store. Today it's a hazardous substance. But at that time, it wasn't. So we did have flashlights. And I learned fairly early on, from Clay Perry's book and some others, that you really need several sources of light in a cave. Or if you lose one, you're going to be in trouble. So we began to develop a little bit of what I call safety in the caves. Don't run in the cave. Don't climb if you're unsure of yourself, you know. And all these sort of things. But that came very slowly. The idea that you don't bury carbide in the cave stream, which is dangerous to cave life, that didn't come along until the '60s. You don't put your name in a cave and a date today. But we didn't develop that ethic until the late '50s, early '60s. So at that point—

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Corrigan: You're seeing, so in the 1890s, 1880s, it was a whole different world. Different type of history, different type of unorganized caving, just—

⁴ 1870s, 1880s, 1890s, 1900s.

Weaver: They went in largely as thrill seekers. Or just curiosity. I thought that was the only reason they had for going in the caves. But then when I began to talk to land owners about their caves, I would occasionally run into one that said, “Well, you know, my granddad
5 dammed that stream up and used it to run water for his cattle,” or run a grist mill. I began to see that there were other uses for the cave system. I ran into a cave where it was partially walled up. Well, what was it? Well, it was a cool house. It was a place where they kept their, before they had refrigeration, it’s where they kept milk and butter. So I began to see that the caves had other uses than just that. And that was another reason why they went into these
10 caves. But then, in later years, when I did a lot more research, I discovered well, gee, way back at the turn of the century, they were mining guano out of these caves. They were cutting onyx out of these caves. So there was a lot of underground activity that really hadn’t appeared in any history books.

15 Corrigan: Well I think I read somewhere where there was, in Saint Louis, during Prohibition, a lot of caves were used to hide liquor or store liquor or make liquor. Is that—

Weaver: That’s correct. In fact when they, well (laughs) when I wrote the book *Missouri Caves in History and Legend*, we kind of soft pedaled, you know, this was Becky
20 Schroeder’s approach to this, some of this aspect of the caves and the breweries in Saint Louis. Because the German immigrants came in and they brought brewing to Saint Louis. The lager beer industry and that sort of thing. And they began to use the caves because of their constant temperature. It’s a good place—

25 **[End Track 10. Begin Track 11.]**

Weaver: —to process their product. And to store and cool it. And they would go in these caves and build chambers and store ice in the wintertime. And they could keep those caves to a temperature of about thirty-five degrees all year round. So they used the caves in that sense.
30 And there were lots of caves in the Saint Louis area at that time. But as the city grew and expanded, they covered these things up. They filled them up. Today there’s fewer than twenty known caves in the city. But back then, there were a lot of sinkholes. Those got filled up and all that. But there were a lot of uses for the brewing industry. Anheuser Busch started out Lemp Brewery in a cave. They later used them in the 1880s, 1890s, for theaters,
35 underground theaters. Dance halls. During Prohibition, they were using the caves. So Saint Louis had lots of uses for the caves. And that influence spread outward. Because in Westphalia and other parts of central Missouri, there were caves. These Germans moved out into these other areas and they used caves for the same purposes.

40 Corrigan: So you were learning early on that there was a lot of reasons at different time periods why people would be using caves. Different reasons why you may have seen these names, dates, different, more than you had originally thought. One thing I’m curious to know is were you noting, were you ever keeping notes? Or, like if you went into a cave and you observed that, you know, there’s no snakes back here. Or you went into a cave and you said,
45 “You know what, I can breathe just fine back here.” Were you ever keeping journals or notes? Writing notes about caves?

Weaver: I was not keeping notes about those caves. However I do remember in 1954 we went to a cave down here in Miller County with me and my buddies. And I was so intrigued by the structure of the cave that I began to write what I called a geologic story of the cave. It was just, I was just my own wild ideas. And I wrote those down. And I never did anything with those. But when I was thirteen, we were living in Ashland, Missouri, and I had been getting up the hills, Three Creeks area, with my buddies. We'd bicycle out there and go cave exploring. Hunter's was the one that we went to mostly. And it's a pretty good cave system. Today it's habitat for endangered species of bats and its controlled entry and all that. But I knew, I had my dad's background and me with scouting, I had learned how to use a compass. And I had learned a little bit like that. So I decided to map the cave. Now here I was, thirteen years old. Never seen a cave map. Didn't know. But I figured well I can draw the walls in, sketch some of the stuff out. And I mapped about 600 feet of cave. To me, it was just something to do. It was fascinating, because I was seeing this cave in a different way. I was seeing it as a two-dimensional thing. I didn't have any symbols or anything. I would just write in well this is a rock or this is a hole or something like that. But I had a general configuration for the first 600 feet of the cave. I didn't map that cave, after I learned to map, in a more technical way, with the Missouri Speleological Survey, I mapped that cave some years later. And somewhere between the time I did that when I was thirteen and when I actually mapped the cave, about 1959 or 1960, I remembered [my first attempt to map the cave]. And I couldn't find it. But I remembered the layout of it. And the map I made later, it was pretty doggone accurate. I wished I had kept that. But I didn't. But yeah, I had a sense that this kind of information needed to be recorded. But it was just gradually growing on me. Now if you look at that picture in *Missouri Caves in History and Legend* that's taken of me and my buddy—

Corrigan: Say his name for the—

Weaver: Bob Rothwell was his name. And Bob and I were really two boys of a kind. That's us right there. [points to picture] You'll notice that he has a helmet on. But that was his football helmet. He played, he liked to play football. I didn't have any helmet on. We didn't realize at that—

[End Track 11. Begin Track 12.]

Weaver: —point in time the significance of a hard hat in the cave. But the hunters, now that cap I had on, had a bracket on it up here that you could hook a carbide light on. It was used by hunters or miners.

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: So that was what I was using. That was a homemade light. Flashlights and all, and Bob had one, too. We would just take a six-volt battery and a can that we would seal and put a seal beam thing on the head. We made our own equipment. So we really, I'm proud of this picture for a reason. Because that's the only thing I've got that shows me caving, pre-

organized caving in Missouri. I was exploring this cave. My dad had taken me and Bob down to the Miller cave, in Miller County here to a cave.

5 Corrigan: And that's this picture is Miller County.

Weaver: Yes. In Miller County. And dropped us off. Mr. Vernon said we could camp on his property. We'd gotten acquainted with him at a cave. Now there's a bigger picture, just on the inside. Anyway, my dad's youngest brother was visiting us. And my dad said, well, he'd come in, I didn't know that Hal would come in that weekend. And he said, "I'm supposed to go down and pick up Dwight and Bob." And Hal said, "Well, tell me where it is and I'll go." Well, Hal showed up. And we had been out, we'd come out of the cave, we'd been there for two days. We'd gone in a second day. Came out looking like that. And Harold said, "Let me take your picture." So he took a picture of us. And I've treasured that ever since.

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15 Corrigan: And now, that picture you're quite dirty. Now you want to talk about how, you said you'd talk about it later, about your mother, not very clean and not liking—

Weaver: She did not like all the mud. And you've got to realize that Missouri caves have got something called red clay in them. It is just like glue. I mean, it gets on your clothes and it's hard to get off. When you come out of a cave with a lot of that stuff on you, you have to put those clothes in a tub and soak them for a while to start getting that red clay out. After a while, it just dyes your clothes with that color, because it's got a lot of iron oxides in it. But she didn't particularly appreciate that. So I was having to do my own cleaning at home. And I would have to come into the basement somewhere to do this, because she wouldn't let me in the house otherwise. But one day I was cleaning my clothes. And she was coming down the basement steps. And she stopped three-quarters of the way down. And she looked over at me. And she kind of had her hands on her hips. She says, "Where in the world do you think this going caving is ever going to get you in life?" Well, I had no explanation for it. But then in 1985, I was president of the Missouri Speleological Survey. And—

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30 Corrigan: In 1985?

Weaver: Yes.

35 Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: And that's a whole story by itself. But the [MSS] didn't even know that it had been nominated for President Ronald Reagan's Volunteer Action Award. I was at home one day. I'd gotten home early that day from work. I don't remember the reason why. And I got this phone call. And this lady say, "I'm so and so. I'm calling on behalf of President Ronald Reagan." And I thought yeah, which one of the guys is pulling this one? This is a good one. Because cavers are sometimes practical jokers and I knew my buddy Jerry was always making practical jokes. He was good at it.

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45 Corrigan: What was his last name?

Weaver: Jerry Vineyard

Corrigan: Vineyard, okay.

5 Weaver: Anyway, she said, she proceeded to tell us how our organization had been
nominated and had been chosen as one of the recipients of this award. This award was a new
program that Ronald Reagan had established to recognize volunteer action around the United
States. And it was awarded in seventeen different categories. And the one in environment
was caves. And we had won. And this woman had to talk for twenty minutes, at least, to
10 convince me she was legitimate. Because I couldn't believe this. This was just unbelievable.
And she said, "Well, you are the president?" And I said "Yes." She said, "Well, we're going
to fly you to Washington, DC for three days. You're going to get to see your congressman.
You're going to attend dinners. You're going to receive this award in the White House from
the president himself." You know, for—

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[End Track 12. Begin Track 13.]

Weaver: —an Ozark boy, that just didn't sound real. And so I said, "Well, okay." She said,
"Well, there's one other thing." She said, "You do have a board of directors." I said yes. She
20 said, "Well, you can choose one other member of your board to come along with you."
"But," she said, "We don't have accommodations for wives and family and that sort of
thing." I said "Okay." She said, "I will need your social security number because you'll have
to be cleared with FBI check, background check." And that kind of worried me a little bit,
because cavers are kind of a wild breed. And this organization's not geared for speed. You
25 have a good idea for the board and it may take five or six years to get it all threshed out. And
I said, "When do you have to know this?" She said, "Oh, I have to have the social security
number and information about this other person." I said, "When do you need this
information?" She said, "By noon tomorrow." And this is like four o'clock in the afternoon.
And I thought my God, is this for real? So she proceeded to talk to me some more. And I said
30 "Okay." She gave me her phone number. And I said, "I'll get back to you." So I sat down
and I just had to digest that for a while, because it just didn't seem real. And finally I decided
well I better get busy. So I started calling board members. And half of them were students.
You know, we had fifteen grottoes in Missouri, or chapters. Each one had a representative
that sat on the board. Well, [Gregory] "Tex" Yokum was one of the old ones that went along,
35 come from the early days, like me. He'd been on the board and he was well recognized and
well respected. Tex was a good buddy of mine, too. But he lived in Saint Louis. So I started
calling around some of the older members and told them what was going on. And I had to
convince them this was legitimate. I said, "I've kind of come to the conclusion that the other
person who needs to go with me is Tex Yokum." "Oh, yeah, yeah. Tex is the person you
40 need to take with you. He's the one that deserves to go on this trip." So it came down finally
about ten o'clock at night I had enough, a quorum, that I could say "Well it's going to be Tex
Yoakum." So I called Tex. And I had a hard time convincing him this was legitimate. But
finally he came around. Gave me his social security number. Gave me the information I have.
And I met that lady's deadline by noon the next day. And then in late April of 1985, we met
45 in Saint Louis, got on the plane and flew to Washington, D.C. (laughs) For three days of
unbelievable activity. And I don't, I think I've got my picture in here, the president. Tex, of

course, because I was president, I'm the one that actually went up and shook the president's hand. What's interesting was – and this is just personal – I was not a Reagan fan (laughs) by that time in my life. But there's an interesting story. Notice I don't have a beard.

5 Corrigan: Mm hmm.

Weaver: Well I grew a beard and mustache way back years ago, clear back in the '70s. There are a lot of cavers who wouldn't recognize me if I cut this off. But I just had a haircut here a few days ago, so it's really thin right now. But it was pretty bushy. This Jerry
10 Vineyard, who likes to pull practical jokes, I was talking to him about a week before I was to go to Washington, D.C. "Oh," he said, "you'll never be able to get in the White House with a beard." He was real serious. He said, "Those people out there don't wear beards and mustaches." Well I thought, I'm going to represent the cavers of Missouri. So I had better get rid of this. So I cut off my mustache and my beard. First time my face had been naked for
15 years. Went out there and the cavers didn't even recognize me when I got back, the picture of me with the president. And even Tex couldn't hardly believe when I showed up without a beard and mustache. I didn't know that he had just done that, when I got back, [Vineyard] said, "I was just joking!" But there's so much more to that story. I don't know if you really want to hear that story. But we got to Washington and that's a whole different environment
20 than it is for the Ozarks. And they put us up in the Mayflower Hotel, which is a very historic hotel there not too far from the White House. And we got in the room and Tex went crazy, because I mean, they—

[End Track 13. Begin Track 14.]

25 Weaver: —had a [small refrigerator] in there with all kinds of liquor in it and everything. I mean, it was lavish. Very ornate old hotel. They said, "Be on the street out in back the next morning at nine o'clock. We're going to take you on a tour of Washington, historic tour of Washington, D.C. We're going to go to the Library of Congress and we're going to go to the
30 Washington Monument and all these different places." Which Tex and I had never been in the city before.

Corrigan: And this is you and all the seventeen other categories, all these other people?

35 Weaver: Yes.

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: So I almost have to back up and tell you how we got to that point. But Tex and I
40 went out, they didn't tell us there was more than one door. And this hotel was a big hotel. So we go out the door that we thought we were supposed to go out, and we're standing on the street. And right across is a big studio. That was NBC or CBS. But they had big, big windows in there. You know, people are always going along the street and looking in. There's always some kind of a show going on in the inside. So we were standing over there
45 just ogling this whole event going on across the street. Down about 150 feet, there was a group of people gathered underneath a kind of an awning. And pretty soon this lady come

walking up to us. And she said, and we had suits on, we looked like businessmen. She said, “Are you part of the volunteer group?” We said “Yes.” She said, “Well we’re meeting down here.” She said, “The bus is almost here. We better hurry.” So we went rushing down there. And we got some really strange looks from these people. And of course the guys all had suits on and everything. And we didn’t know what was going on. So we went on our tour. And as we were coming back, we had been, there was this one guy in particular who we were kind of buddy buddy with, because he didn’t have anybody with him. And I asked him, I said, “You know, when we got on the bus, we got some strange looks from people.” I said, “Do you have any idea what that was about?” He said, “Yes.” He said, “They were trying to locate you two. They had checked all over the hotel and couldn’t find you.” And they said, “These are a couple of spelunkers from the Ozarks. Everybody was expecting you to have long hair and to be dirty. Scruffy. And here you walk up looking like a couple of middle-aged businessmen.” That was an interesting experience, really. There’s so much more to that story. All the things that happened while we were out there. People just didn’t know how to take us.

15 Corrigan: Now was your mother still around at this point?

Weaver: Yes. All right. I got home and I reminded her of that day when I was about sixteen or seventeen and she came down and said, “Where’s it going to get you?” I said, “Mom, you remember that?” “Yeah, I remember that.” And I said, “Well, it got me all the way to the White House.” (laughs)

25 Corrigan: Okay. Hold on one second here. [pause] All right. We took a brief little break there. So we just finished talking about your story. At least going back to your mother and she realizing it got you to the White House. Going back to college, so you did attend the University of Missouri.

Weaver: I attended one year at the university. And trying to work and go to school, I wasn’t doing, I wasn’t having much success at that. My mother—in high school, I excelled in music.

30 Corrigan: Music, okay. I was going to ask you that—

Weaver: Yeah. I excelled in music. And in writing in my journalism in school. In high school I was on the school newspaper and that sort of thing. But music, especially. I was in the chorale. I was first chair trombone. I played in the Jeff City Symphony Orchestra, third chair trombone. I sang. I was in the chorale at First Baptist Church. And then was in, I had a music teacher, I played piano. I went to state. I didn’t win, but I went to state. I had lots of things. But nobody ever told me that I could have gone on a scholarship. But my mother was convinced that I ought to go—

40 **[End Track 14. Begin Track 15.]**

Weaver: —into music. My dad’s youngest brother was a professional [music teacher]. A wonderful musician. Pianist. But anyway, he’s retired now. But she always envied him and she wanted me to go into music. Even though I excelled, it was largely because I was pushed

into it. I wasn't really interested in music. But I had that sort of a natural talent. So I was involved in all that stuff in high school.

5 Corrigan: Were those your favorite activities? I mean, did you have an interest at all at that point in history?

Weaver: I did not have—believe it or not, I hate to say this, I don't even remember the man's name—my American history teacher in high school was a flop. I mean, he didn't know how to teach history. At that time, I wasn't really yet tuned on to cave history as such. I was just turned on to caves.

Corrigan: Okay. So did you like science classes at that point? Or was it just—

Weaver: I did not have science classes. For some reason I didn't have chemistry or biology in high school. But I had a teacher who was my counselor. And I think he was pretty lousy, too. He never gave me any advice, hardly ever. But when I was a senior in high school I went to the university up there and took a battery of tests to see what I fit into. I came out as being weak in science and math but way up on the scale in fine arts. And of course there was art and music and writing and that sort of thing. The creative things. Very often they say the person who is a creative writer is also good in math. But I wasn't good in math at all. So I knew that I wasn't going to be going anywhere in the geological sciences because I just couldn't, I mean, I had a difficult time getting through high school in math. I passed, but it was tough. So I didn't know what I wanted to do in college. And my dad wasn't able to help me a lot. But I went to the University of Missouri the first year. And the first semester, I took music courses. I had music theory, I had piano. And then the church up there, since we went to the First Baptist Church in Jefferson City when I was in high school, they had a student group up there on the campus. And they had a chorale. And we toured around Missouri doing singing and so forth. But anyway, I was in that. And I was banging away one day on the piano with my music professor. And I said, I just stopped and I said, "You know, I'm really not enjoying this. What's my future in this?" He said, "Well, you could be a music teacher." I wasn't interested in teaching. He said, "You could go to large metropolitan areas like Saint Louis, Kansas City, or New York and get into music programs. Or you could be a church choir leader," you know, all these things. I wasn't interested in that. So at the end of that semester, I just dropped everything in music, despite what my mother wanted. I took a course in art.

Corrigan: Was your, were you actually a declared major at that time in music? Or was it just a—

40 Weaver: It was elective.

Corrigan: Oh, okay. Okay.

Weaver: It was an elective.

45

Corrigan: So you were general studies.

Weaver: Just general studies. Elective. Because I didn't know what I wanted to be.

Corrigan: Okay. So music—

5

Weaver: My mother was pushing me towards music. But I didn't like music. And—

Corrigan: So the second semester, you said you took an art class.

10 Weaver: I took art class. I loved it! But my buddy, Jerry Vineyard, knew that I had some talent in drawing. He said, "Why don't you take a major in art and a minor in geology?" And he said, "The reason for that is when the geologists go out in the field, they have to do a lot of sketching. Stratigraphic profiles and all this stuff." And he said, "Having the ability to translate that into a graph or a chart or something is very valuable." And so I thought about it
15 and I knew at that point in time that my father wouldn't stand for it. Because this is an aspect of my childhood and my growing up that I don't usually talk about.

[End Track 15. Begin Track 16.]

20 Weaver: But my father came from the old fundamentalist religious school. He was really adamant against evolution, geology, and [related sciences]. He would not tolerate it. In my home, you didn't read fiction [and couldn't bring science fiction books home]. He thought it was the work of the devil. And so I couldn't bring any books home from the library. I got quite a reputation for living at the library in Jeff City because I liked science fiction. But I
25 could not have one of those books in my home. My father wouldn't tolerate it. So I knew that he would never support me or even help me if I wanted to go into geology as a minor.

Corrigan: What about the art part of it?

30 Weaver: The art part of it. That's something else.

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: So after that first year I got home, I got a job locally working for electrical outlet
35 doing data work for electrical firm. And I said, "I want to go to an art school and try that out." So I went to the library and I began researching the subject. Because I couldn't find anybody who'd give me advice. We're talking back in the '50s. At least in my environment, I couldn't seem to get people who were knowledgeable in those subjects. Didn't get any push from my parents in that. So I discovered the Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design.
40 Same school Walt Disney graduated from. Tuition was high. But I managed to save enough money and get a little help from Dad that I could enroll. And I got a job in Kansas City to work part time in the evenings to help me out. But when I got to the university, I was asked there why I didn't get a music scholarship. Of course I said, "Well nobody at school even
45 told me it was possible."

Corrigan: This is at the University of Missouri?

Weaver: Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay. Okay.

5

Weaver: Nobody at my school ever told me. Not even my counselor ever told me that I was eligible for a scholarship. So anyway, I went on to Kansas City and started there. Well, basically I was taking freshman courses because I had just transferred to a different school. That was a totally different kind of environment from what I grew up in. A very conservative religious environment that I grew up in. And I had a course, three hours, every day I spent in life drawing. Because as they said, if you learn to draw the human form, you can draw anything. And I had also learned that in my art course at the University of Missouri. Well, they draw nudes. I had like a half a dozen different models we had in this big studio. And I didn't think anything about it. In fact, that was one of the first schools I went to where there wasn't any graffiti in the restrooms. It was a very clean, wholesome environment.

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Corrigan: This is at the Kansas City Art School.

Weaver: Yes. Yes.

20

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: Very, to me, a conservative environment. But I had a portfolio with a lot of these [nude sketches done in life drawing class]. And a lot of the courses I was having at the time did not have something that I could show. They were things you were doing in class, like three-dimensional design, spatial relationships, all that kind of stuff I was taking in art. And so along about Christmas, my parents came up to see me. And they had my dad's younger brother, his youngest brother, with him. Well, Hal's a very liberal individual. And, "Oh, we've got to see your work! We've got to see your work! Where's your portfolio?" I said, "Hal, you don't want to see it." Because we had my dad and mother and my grandmother with them. And, "Oh, you've got to get it out. I've got to see it." So I finally said, "Okay." Well, it was a great big thing. I open it up. My grandmother gasped and walked out of the room. My mother gasped. And my dad said, "I'm not helping you up here to draw naked people. I'm not helping you anymore." So I left school at that year. And then got a job over at the state hospital⁵, working for the division of mental health.

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35

Corrigan: In Fulton.

Weaver: In Fulton.

40

Corrigan: Oh, okay. So Kansas City to Fulton.

⁵ Fulton State Hospital.

Weaver: I came back home. What it amounted to was I knew I was coming home and I was going to have to get a job. So I had come home at one time and taken tests to get on the merit scale.

5 **[End Track 16. Begin Track 17.]**

Weaver: Most of them were clerical positions that I tested for. Just as school was getting out, I got this letter that said you know, I have an interview over at the state hospital with this Mr. McCarty who was the occupational therapy department head. So I trotted over there. And he had an opening in his office for clerical help. And I was a pretty good typist. So he said, "But I want to find out about you first." So we sat there, I guess, about an hour and talked. And he found out about my background. He said, "I don't want you in clerical. I want you over in my OT department. Occupational therapy department." He said, "We need guys over there." He said, "We've got a surplus of women in that program, and we need fellows." And he said, "I've got an opening in my bibliotherapy section." He said, "We need somebody to manage our library." Because they had a hospital library. And he said, "You'll also be putting out the hospital newspaper. For the patients and all that. And running the bookmobile to all the wards." I said "Okay." Well, it was an unclassified position. So I wound up over there. And I had like three or four patients every day that came in that were assigned. Every Monday I went on ward rounds and the doctor, we would be talking about a patient, and this patient's background. And we'd actually talk to the patient. Especially if I was going to have that patient under me. And then I had to read that patient's history before they came in. And the doctor would give me instructions on what I was to do with this particular patient. And so there were some that were in reading programs and working on the newspaper and that sort of thing. And I worked there about a year. And Philip McCarty said, "You need to go and take a test." He said, "And really get on this." And the lady who was under him, I guess she really liked me, Eunice Soper, and she was a registered therapist. Anyway, I took the test and passed with flying colors and got an OTA1. They call them occupational therapy assistant 1. Couple years later I took the next test and got a two. And then I got a three. And so I'd been there now about four years at that time. And I was at, I wasn't making a lot of money, but I was looking down the road. And to go any higher, I would have had to have a degree in the field. And I could see that I was going to be frozen at a certain level. So that's when I began to think about is there anything else I could do? Because they had so few men in the program. I had been working with the juveniles. The court system in Missouri at that time passed a law where if a juvenile got into trouble, he was to be sent to the hospital for evaluation for about a six-month period. And then they would place him or whatever. So these were troubled kids. And I was working with those kids. I actually developed a caving program. We couldn't take them off, you couldn't normally take patients off the grounds. But we had a recreational therapist there who thought this was kind of interesting. And I had written a paper that I gave at the national convention on recreational therapy using caving. And so we took some of these kids out on several field trips to caves. As a consequence, some of these kids were totally reevaluated with their skills. So it worked real well. We didn't have any problems with it.

45 Corrigan: And this was caves in, would you be coming over to Boone County?

Weaver: We would come over to Boone County. Boone County. Yeah. In my area where I knew all the land owners and stuff like that. We didn't really do the difficult stuff.

5 Corrigan: And you would take a couple kids at a time?

Weaver: No. We took six kids at a time.

Corrigan: Six. Okay.

10 Weaver: And we had three adults. And we basically had flashlights, you know. And we tried to teach them a little bit about caves. That was the basic thing. Took them in as far as we could without any really difficult stuff. We didn't do any climbing or swimming or any of that sort of stuff that you do in caves. But anyway, it was rather successful. But then my wife kept saying, "Well, you're coming home with these kids' problems." I found it difficult to
15 work with the kids. It was an emotional thing. And then the last, I guess it was the seventeen months—

[End Track 17. Begin Track 18.]

20 Weaver: —we had problems at the Biggs unit, you know, which was the criminally insane division over there. And they transferred me up there to the art department. And so I was supervising the patients there. I was behind seven locked doors every day. We were in a huge room with no walls and you could see everything that was going on. In my section, we had scissors and things like that. And we had some pretty dangerous customers in that program. I
25 felt really trapped. It just wasn't my kind of environment. But they didn't have enough men in the program to do that sort of thing. And we just had men up there. In fact, that's where I was working when President Kennedy was killed. I remember that because of where I was at when it happened. So, seventeen months of that and I said, I have got to get out of this. It's killing me. My wife said I was a nervous wreck. And I was fairly young. So at that time I, we
30 jumped off the bandwagon and came to the Lake.

Corrigan: Okay.

35 Weaver: She got a job at the, she was in banking, she was working at Boone County National Bank. And so she went to work at Bank of Lake of the Ozarks. And I leased a show cave here in Lake area. And we run a show cave.

40 Corrigan: Okay. So before we get to that, so going back a little bit, you were able to weave in not only art in your positions, and it seems like you've had a connection to a library your entire life—

Weaver: Yes.

45 Corrigan: —whether it be Jefferson City library, the public, or the Jefferson City Public Library, the library at the Fulton Hospital, so it seems like—and we're in a library right now, too. So it seems like there's been a connection to that. But it seems like you were able to

weave in—so during this time, were you still spending, you pulled in the caves with the kids. But were you still going out at these times, caving in Boone County?

5 Weaver: Oh, yes. I was caving.

Corrigan: That hasn't stopped.

Weaver: Oh, no, no. No, no.

10 Corrigan: Did you do any—are there caves in the Kansas City area?

Weaver: There are no caves right in Kansas City. There is in Jackson County, but they don't amount to anything. When I was in school up there, when I would go caving there, I would come down to southern Missouri. There were cavers up there.

15 Corrigan: You'd go south.

Weaver: And I would get with them and they would drive. And they had a car. I didn't have a car at that time. And we would come down to the lake area or some other part of Missouri and do our caving. So it was usually a weekend activity.

20 Corrigan: So there was no caves in Kansas City.

Weaver: There weren't any that we were working in. No, there wasn't anything of significance. And you can read that on the book on Jackson County or the Kansas City area.

25 Corrigan: But you're still doing that on the weekends. And then you were folded into your job at Fulton and then art and that. So you're still doing all these activities.

30 Weaver: I'm doing all these activities and I'm weaving them all together.

Corrigan: But then you move down to the Lake. And that's where you've been ever since, then.

35 Weaver: That's where I've been ever since. However, the show cave industry, as I got into it, it's a difficult industry to make a living in. Especially if you don't own the resource or the show cave and you're just working for somebody else. You don't have any benefits most of the time. They tend to hire students for guides during the summertime. They hire retirees for guides in the wintertime.

40 Corrigan: Had you worked in a cave before this point or no?

Weaver: No.

45 Corrigan: Not worked in one.

Weaver: But, here's what I think is the interesting connection. Archie Cameron at Mark Twain Cave, where I had my first experience with caves, I had wanted to write a book on caves. And I would go back to Hannibal because I had a buddy, Paul Johnson, and we were mapping Mark Twain Cave. And I knew Archie. He'd kind of become a family friend. So one weekend when we were up there, Paul and I came out after long hours of being in the cave mapping⁶, and this was, I mean, we were running our lines and doing our sketch work. And MFA's got like three miles of passageway and twenty acres. Archie said, "You know," he said, "I have so many people that come out to this cave. And they don't believe that Mark Twain ever was actually here. They think that we just use that as a gimmick." "Because," he said, "I don't have any written history of this cave. And," he said, "You like cave history," he said. "You're in caves. Would you write me a little book on this?" I said "Okay, I'll do that." I said, "You know, in the wintertime I have more time to do that sort of thing and I'll start doing the research." That—

15 **[End Track 18. Begin Track 19.]**

Weaver: —was my first time to go up to Columbia to the historical society. My problem back in those early days was you didn't used to be open on Saturday. And I had a difficult, I couldn't get to that library because it wasn't available on Saturday. So during the wintertime in the cave business, I was sometimes laid off. So it gave me an opportunity to go up there and do research. In 1960, late '63, a man by the name of Pete Christus from Booneville, Missouri, had acquired Rocheport Cave out near the river, where you cross to go to Booneville. Today it's the conservation owns it, it's a bat sanctuary. But that was one of the caves we caved in earlier than that. But he was developing that cave for a show cave. But just before that, Archie had told me that this cave, down here, Lake of the Ozarks, Ozark Caverns, which was then privately owned, was up for lease. And my wife and I were making our transition to come down to the Lake. So I went and acquired a lease on the cave. I hadn't, it hadn't been three or four days and I got a call from Pete Christus. And he said, "I'm developing this cave and I sure need somebody to take over this operation and kind of run this thing. Would you be interested?" And I said, "I'm sorry, but I've already made a commitment down here." I said, "How did you find out?" He said, "Archie Cameron told me." He said, "Archie knows you're really interested in caves and he really thinks a lot of you. He said he really wanted you to be up here in this operation." And I said, "Well, I'm sorry I can't do that." Later Pete came down and I got acquainted with him and he talked to me. But, so I never got involved with that operation. But here was a connection. Archie Cameron. And that was the first man I had connection with in caving when I was a kid.

Corrigan: So then you leased, what was the name of the cavern?

40 Weaver: Ozark Caverns.⁷

Corrigan: Ozark Caverns.

⁶ Weaver and Johnson were mapping in the cave at night to avoid conflict with daytime tours.

⁷ Ozark Caverns was privately owned until the Missouri Department of Natural Resources purchased it in 1978.

Weaver: I had a partner in it. He was not really involved in the cave business. He was in the printing business. He dropped out. I finally gave up the lease because I was having difficulties financially. It was a small operation and I was kind of off the beaten track.

5 Corrigan: What time period was this? The 1970s?

Weaver: 1964, 1965. I had it for two seasons, two years. And then, my wife was working at the Bank of Lake of the Ozarks. So then I went to work for Osage Outdoor Advertising as a painter. And I did not only paintings, signs, billboards at that time, but I did pictorial work on
10 the signs. You know, they always have pictures and things.

Corrigan: Yeah.

Weaver: And my background, a little bit, in the art, helped me there. So I was working at
15 that. And the cave owner of Ozark Caverns is, the fellow that owned the cave, wanted me to come back and manage the cave. And this was in '68. Because I was having difficulty making any money because the way the contract was written. And I didn't know enough about it at that time, making those kinds of contracts, to really do a good job of it. I don't think I was that great of a manager at that point in time. So I liked Mr. Olson and I said,
20 "Well, yeah, I might come back." We made a deal on it. And I went back and I was working there, and I'd worked there in '68 season and '69. And Bob Hudson from Meramec Caverns showed up on my doorstep. And I'd gotten acquainted with Bob Hudson and the other show cave operators because they had just organized, in the '60s, they had just organized the Missouri Cave Association. This was all the show caves in Missouri.

25 Corrigan: 1960s?

Weaver: Yes. They organized the show caves of Missouri in 1962. And so anyway—

30 Corrigan: So Bob Hudson had showed up there.

Weaver: He showed up. And he said, "We've got a position over at Meramec Caverns." And he said, "We sure would like to have you over there." And I said, "What will I be doing?" He said, "You'll be writing our press releases. You'll be training our guides. You'll be in a
35 supervisory role." And he offered me a salary about twice—

[End Track 19. Begin Track 20.]

Weaver: —what I was trying to make at the cave. So I went home, talked to the wife. And I
40 said, "Well, let me go over there for a while and see." I'd be coming home two days a week and they would probably not be a weekend," because those were our busiest times. So I was over there for basically a year and a half or so. Well, there for about a year. And I thought it was going to be pretty good. My wife decided she would just leave the job and come over there and get a job at the Bourbon Bank. Well she just barely got over there and [Bank of
45 Lake of the Ozarks built a new bank]. And her boss called her up. He said, "I've got to have you back over here." Because she was in bookkeeping, she was head of bookkeeping. He

said, "I've got to have you back over here." So I came back to work at Ozark Caverns. Left Meramec Caverns operation. But while I was there, I had made a lot of contacts. And I had gotten Lester B. Dill. And they knew, I'd written enough for them, press releases, things like that, I guess did a pretty good job. Right about that time, a big issue exploded in Missouri called the Meramec Dam. When they wanted to dam the Meramec River. And Dill called me over. He said, "I have got a problem." He said, "I'm trying to lay low, but," he said, "this association is supporting this dam thing." He said, "That's going to flood a lot of caves. And they've got bats in them and all kinds of problems." And he said, "I want to save the caves." And he owned one at that time. He owned Onondaga.⁸ And he said, "I'd like to make that, I'd like to make that kind of a project," he said. "I need enough information to get that cave on the National Register of Historic Sites." "But," he said, "I don't have a history of it." So he asked me to do the research and write a book. So at the time I thought, hmm. I said, "Les, I'll make a deal with you." I said, "We'll write that one." And I said, "Then we'll do one on you, because you're a unique individual." "Oh, yeah, great! That sounds like a great idea." So I did the research. Wrote the little Onondaga book. It got on the National Register. In the process, as time went on, the dam got defunded and all that came to an end and we did the Meramec book. But by that time I was back over, we were back at the Lake. And she was never gone from the bank more than a year. But then I was back here and I'd been asked, local guys, they had acquired Stark Caverns.

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Corrigan: Stark or Start?

Weaver: Stark. S-t-a-r-k.

25

Corrigan: Stark.

Weaver: Stark Caverns. They'd acquired Stark Caverns and they were going to redevelop it.

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Corrigan: And that's at Eldon, Missouri, right?

Weaver: Yeah. Just outside of Eldon. This way on the highway there. And said would I come on the project and manage the operation once they got it open. I said, well. So I went and helped them redevelop this. Well, I did not like the way it was done. To me, it was a rape of the cave system. But these guys had the money. And I didn't have any influence on them. I stayed with them until they got it done. And believe it or not, I was taking pictures all this time. I have those pictures to this day, showing you all the things they did in there.

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Corrigan: So before and after photos and—

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Weaver: Yeah.

Corrigan: Okay.

⁸ Lester Dill owned Meramec Caverns and Onondaga Cave.

Weaver: I mean, we had a, they had a, there was a building in front of the cave. Was used for a gift shop. And there was old brochures in there, there were old pictures. And they just bulldozed it down and put it on fire. I salvaged as much as I could before it got burned up. So I knew that it was historic information. And I just took it home with me. But there was
5 burials discovered in that cave many years before. And Kit Beeler(??), who had made the discovery, I knew him. He came up from Oklahoma. And he showed me these artifacts. And he gave me a little tube with all the little bird points. And then when I discovered that they were going to, that they were bringing in artifacts from other places, it was one of those, one of the operations that was not, I consider kosher. They were adulterating the display. I said,
10 “No, I’m not going to fool with this. I don’t want to ruin my reputation.” So then I took a position at Mark Twain Cave—

[End Track 20. Begin Track 21.]

15 Weaver: —at Hannibal.

Corrigan: Okay. And this was in the late ‘60s or ‘70s?

Weaver: Oh, this was, let me say ’75. And during that period, I was putting out the trade
20 newsletter for the National Cave Association. And I was attending meetings. And they were held different places in the States. For instance, I’d gone twice to California. We had the convention at Redding, California.

Corrigan: Now is this the *Cave State Courier* you were publishing?
25

Weaver: No. *Cave State Courier* was the Missouri group.

Corrigan: Oh, the Missouri group. Okay.

30 Weaver: Yeah.

Corrigan: So this is the national level.

Weaver: Yes. It was a little quarterly publication called *Down Under*.
35

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: And so I went to Mark Twain Cave. And I was there until ’78. And that’s when I was offered the position at Bridal Cave as general manager.
40

Corrigan: Down here in Camdenton.

Weaver: Yeah. And it was a way to get back to the Lake. I was just getting home two days a week. And the wife was wanting me back. You know, family. It was really hard on my
45 daughter, I think, in those years, because I was gone a lot. But I came back. And I was with

Bridal Cave basically, well, I left there in, it was at the end of '83, '84, somewhere in that period. And I went to work for the Department of Natural Resources.

Corrigan: So late '70s to early '80s.

5

Weaver: Yeah. Early '80s, I was at Bridal Cave. And then, I had made, you know, a lot of the fellows that I knew in the caving, DNR had been organized in '74 when they reconsolidated state government. And I had Jerry Vineyard and [other individuals] I'd known for years in the caving activities had positions with the Department of Natural Resources.

10

And Jerry Vineyard was the assistant state geologist at that time. And they said, "Why don't you come to work for the DNR?" So I was really at a point in my life when I said, you know, I've worked all these years in the show cave industry. I have no benefits. And I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. And I said I've got to get a position or a job somewhere where I've got some benefits. I've got to build up an IRA and that sort of thing. So I discovered that

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I could pick up, I had been with the state over at Fulton for maybe six years. At that point in time, I was able, I discovered I could go back and pick up those years and add them to my overall retirement. And I said "Hey, this is something I can do." So I took my test and I got on in the, as a public information specialist 1 at the Department of Natural Resources. And I worked for the first few years there working, I was a writer. I was on the editorial board for their magazine. I did all kinds of news releases and PSAs and that sort of thing. And we had

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a program going for hazardous waste. And I worked on that and we gave presentations to groups all around Missouri on that. There was a big project down in Branson area on Lake Taneycomo where we had a lot of siltation and so on. I got involved in that. And then in '95, I was able to, I had taken a test again and became a Public Information Specialist. I was always climbing the ladder. And I had a chance to take over a position down at Rolla and become the public information officer for their division. And that was just right down my alley, because that's where the caves, that was where everything was. So I said, "Okay, I can do that for five years." Because I could see retirement coming up. So for five years, I was there doing that. I retired in the year 2000.⁹

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Corrigan: Now, go back a little bit. Was there much interaction between DNR and the cave people of the state?

Weaver: Yes.

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Corrigan: Was there much interaction, both—

[End Track 21. Begin Track 22.]

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Corrigan: —show cave and otherwise. Was there, you said you ran into a lot of these same people, you knew these same people. But I'm just curious the relationship. Was DNR working with all these different show cave operators? On some level, were they—

⁹ Upon retiring in 2000, Weaver was the Public Information Officer for the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geology and Land Survey.

Weaver: Okay, let me explain that relationship. Back in the late '50s, Lester B. Dill and some of the other show cave operators realized that we needed some kind of a safety program, because they were beginning to have insurance problems. Caves were classified with the same thing as theme parks in the insurance industry. And theme parks have a lot of accidents. Missouri show caves didn't. Clean record. Nobody had ever been killed, or even seriously injured in a show cave on a tour. And so Les Dill teamed up with Missouri Division of Labor Standards and all, and they developed a program to inspect show caves on an annual basis. If you have a show cave, or if you have a cave and you're going to commercialize it, under Missouri law, you have to have a map that shows it's on your property. Or, if it goes beyond your property, that you have a lease and a legal right to be in that portion. You have to meet these regulations and they come out and inspect it because they want to make sure the air is safe, the rocks aren't going to come down on people's head. All manmade structures like bridges and steps have to meet certain standards. The electrical system has to meet certain standards. So that became the cave inspection law. And so that built a bridge between the show cave industry and the Department of Labor Standards. The Missouri Geological Survey has a history going back to the 1850s. And it has been under several different state agencies over the years. These days, it's under Department of Natural Resources. They've always had an interest in caves. From the geological standpoint. And I've kind of explained earlier about Farrar and Bretz and wrote *Caves of Missouri*. They published his book in 1956. I didn't really explain something else. Another, there's been all these strange coincidences in my life. When I was living in Hannibal and eight or nine years old and going out to Mark Twain Cave, it was 1947, 1948, right after World War Two. And when we would go out there for a big picnic, us kids would like to hang around up where they sold the tickets. It was kind of fun to watch the people come in. And of course we had nickels and dimes to buy candy and stuff like that. And I don't know that the ones up there appreciated it all so much. But the guides were older gentlemen, usually, and they kind of humored us. And so you could hear all the things that were going on. And one day I was up there and everybody was down in the park having a picnic. And it was a weekend. And here these cars drove up and parked and disgorged all these college students. And this older gentleman came up and he talked to Archie Cameron for a while. And I didn't know what was going on. But after he talked to Archie Cameron he went out and these students started putting on all this regalia, they got on these clothes. Well at that point in time, World War Two was over with and everybody had war surplus. Dr. Bretz was the older gentleman. He was doing his research for the *Caves of Missouri* book. And he was using college students to do the mapping in the caves. To help him. Because by this time he was emeritus. He was up there in years. And they put on this army surplus stuff, because that was basically what they had to wear. And they had their boots and they had their helmets and all that. Their carbide lights. And they took off up the road to go to that Cameron Cave on the other side of the hill. And I remember watching all that. And I was just, you know, in awe. Who were these people? Because he must have had ten or twelve students with him. Never thought too much more about it. But there was another occasion when I was out there and he showed up again with these students. Well, that's a pretty good slice of cave system.

[End Track 22. Begin Track 23.]

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Weaver: Then the rumor began to go around Hannibal, these students are actually working for the government. It's a secret project. Because everybody then was beginning to worry about fallout shelters. So they're mapping the cave for the government, and this is just a cover-up. This professor who's supposed to be doing this geological research. I never
5 thought anymore about that. Until in 1956, *Caves of Missouri* showed up from Dr. Bretz. And then in '62, our group had a meeting up there and we honored Dr. Bretz. And I got to go to the cave with him and talk to him. And here it is, I'm meeting this famous gentleman who's known all over the world for his research in geomorphology and talking with him and I'm just a kid, you know, still just a kid. But then I knew him, or I saw him, when I was nine
10 years old. I think there may be a picture in here. Anyway, that's another one of those strange coincidences in my life.

Corrigan: Well it sounds like all of those interested parties in Missouri regarding caves had to be pretty intertwined.

15 Weaver: Yes. Yes. Okay.

Corrigan: It couldn't have been that large of a, I mean, we're not talking about thousands of people. We're talking about a hundred people, maybe, that are closely tied to caves in
20 Missouri at this time. Or are we talking a couple hundred?

Weaver: Okay, in the show cave industry there was, at that point in time in Missouri, let's say, in the '50s and '60s, there were more than twenty show caves. So if a person went out and wanted to go to a show cave, they had a lot of choices. When the Missouri Speleological
25 Survey was organized, we started with about a dozen cavers. By the late '60s and early '70s, on any given weekend, there were probably 100 cavers out there doing research in the caves. And we had multiplied from one grotto to fifteen. And every one of those groups, except those in large, like, for instance, in the Saint Louis area, Meramec Valley Grotto has around 150 members. And of those, there may be 60 that are active all the time. But in the outer
30 areas, like say here at the Lake of the Ozarks in 1967, another fellow and I organized a local Lake of the Ozarks Grotto. And ours had a stable membership of around thirty-five or forty members, of which there's about twelve to fifteen that are active all the time. So that's kind of what the thing was like.

35 Corrigan: A lot of these people crossed over in many different avenues, whether it was for research, for show caves, for mapping, like you say. So that was a serious consideration that they were doing, that those were going to be fallout shelters, then?

Weaver: At that point in time, they wanted to, I forget what branch, civil defense was the
40 one that started that. They wanted locations of caves from us for that. There had been some studies done out east on use of caves for fallout shelters. And they just simply weren't good for it. The environment was damp. It was dark. Some caves, if there's a lot of bats in them, there's a possibility of coming down with histoplasmosis, which is a lung, fungus disease of the lungs. And people just freak out in cave environments. I remember I was working at
45 Meramec Caverns and the civil defense guys over in that county decided they were going to put these supplies back in Meramec Caverns.

Corrigan: These are government supplies.

5 Weaver: Government supplies. Basically crackers and lemon drops and all kinds of stuff. The Geiger counter's going to be left up in the front. So they arrive one day with all this, a big truck pulled up. So they had decided where this stuff was going to go. Way back in the cave on the first level in what they called the bomb shelter. That's what they had decided to call it. And they stacked these boxes up. It was a fairly dry area. But dry in a cave is really not a good term. There is no such thing as a dry cave— (laughter)

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[End Track 23. Begin Track 24.]

Weaver: —in Missouri. But it was reasonably safe, because these were hermetically sealed containers.

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Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: And we stacked these things up. And a tour would go by. And off in the distance you'd see those and explain what it was for. But I asked one of the fellows, the civil defense guys, I said, "What's in those boxes?" And that's how I found out what was in them. The crackers, the lemon drops and things like that. I said, "Are there any candles? Matches? Batteries and flashlights?" "No." I said, "What's going to happen when the lights go out?" I said, "You're going to have people way back in this cave." And this cave was rated for, I think, up to a thousand people they were going to house. I said, "These people are going to freak out. Have you ever been in a cave without lights?" "No." This was the kind of mentality that went with these guys. So it became just something that the show caves suddenly latched onto. It's like hey, this is something we can promote. And they did. Mark Twain Cave got its supplies. Meramec Caverns got its supplies.

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30 Corrigan: So they were asking to be a government surplus housing. Is that what you're saying to—

Weaver: Not, well, yeah, for potential fallout shelter, in the event.

35 Corrigan: But it would bring more awareness of the caves.

Weaver: Yes. Yes. The show cave industry saw it as a way for getting publicity. And bringing more people. And some of them actually made fallout shelter passes and gave them to people as kind of a little plus to come. You go through the cave and you get one of these little things. And if there happens to be a problem, you can come here and you can get in. That was the kind of mentality.

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45 Corrigan: Were they passing out far more passes than they probably could hold?

Weaver: Of course. Of course they were.

Corrigan: So now how long did this go on that there was just government storage of these crackers and things?

5 Weaver: Well, I think that some of those supplies stayed in those caves for up to ten, twelve years.

Corrigan: And this is through the, what decade are we talking about? The '50s, '60s?

10 Weaver: We're talking, no, believe it or not, '70.

Corrigan: '70s. Okay. So during part of the Cold War.

Weaver: Yes.

15 Corrigan: Okay. Are you aware of other people in, so during this time period, so that was what the government was doing, but there are a lot of caves in Missouri that are privately owned. Were private citizens storing, were they considering them that if something happens, I would use my cave on my property as a fallout shelter?

20 Weaver: Some of them were. Some of the individuals were. In fact, some of them actually built chambers back in there and housed them in. There were, they had a sign, they had a sign. Fallout shelter. And it had a number which was what the cave was rated as. How many people it would hold. And whenever they would list a cave, that would be placed on the, near the entrance, so you could see it. So these signs showed up on private property on many
25 caves out there on their list. They wound up, and I talk about that in one of my books. I've forgotten how many caves there were, but they marked quite a few caves.

Corrigan: So the government was even marking private caves.

30 Weaver: Yes.

Corrigan: Did they have agreements with these people? Or they just decided these were going to be fallout shelters.

35 Weaver: Well, they were going to. This was just a long-range program. They were going to develop these agreements with the land owners. It never got that far.

Corrigan: Okay.

40 Weaver: At least to my knowledge, it didn't.

Corrigan: Because you're saying these are not good places.

45 Weaver: No.

Corrigan: So the food was hermetically sealed. But these are damp areas. These are wet. You have no light or electricity. You have no bathroom facilities.

Weaver: Right.

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Corrigan: You have no, a lot of them would have had water in them, right? Fresh water going through?

Weaver: Yes. Most of the caves had streams. And a show cave like Meramec Caverns, it's a little bit different. They've got large areas that are reasonably dry. And they said, at least when I asked him about all that, he said, "Well we're hoping and banking on the fact that there will be at least electricity in this, in the cave, for a long enough period." Because these were only to be fallout shelters for a short period of time. You know, three or four days or a week. And Meramec Caverns had an electrical system that pulled from two different sources. And if the power went down, it automatically switched to the other source. But these were still outside sources from different electrical suppliers.

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[End Track 24. Begin Track 25.]

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Weaver: Not all caves had that. But Meramec did, because of size of its operation.

Corrigan: Did the, to your knowledge, did the show cave operators, did they, I guess what I'm asking is, did they have a sense that you know, okay, we'll go along with this, but this is never going to work, or this is not going to—

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Weaver: I think down underneath it all, they did have that sense. But Eddie Miller, who was the manager of Bridal Cave at that time, really jumped on the bandwagon and started promoting this. And then so did Lester B. Dill at Meramec Caverns. And several of the caves jumped on it. Because we were having the association meetings. And they all just kind of said, "Hey, this is the way to go." I don't think any one of them wanted people to be there. But I think they, in the back of their minds, I think they were skeptical of the whole thing. Caves are very dynamic. There's a very close association between what's going on underground and what's going on on the surface. And there's a lot of water that moves through those caves. And any fallout that's going to be on the surface is going to be brought right into the cave by the water system, the drainage system. So it was not a practical kind of thing.

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Corrigan: Okay. You mentioned *Down Under*. You mentioned—

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Weaver: Well, there's some other aspects of this.

Corrigan: Well I was going to, you mentioned, we've gone through NSS, MSS, Missouri Caves Association, the National Caves Association. I have down that you were a charter member of the American Spelean History Association?

45

Weaver: Okay.

Corrigan: Is that pronounced correctly?

5 Weaver: Yes. American Spelean History Association. I don't know exactly when, I think it was 1967 or '68 when it was organized. And one of the leading persons there was Dr. William Halliday, who was then from the state of Washington. He was an MD. He now lives in Hawaii in retirement. But there are a number of individuals that have become prominent in the field of cave history. A lot of that came about because of caves like Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, which has a rich history going back to the Civil War and before. So these guys got together at the national organization and said let's form a section. Because the NSS is broken up into sections. There's the cave divers, the cave climbers, the biologists and so on.

Corrigan: Okay. This is all under NCA?

15 Weaver: NSS.

Corrigan: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay. Okay. NSS.

20 Weaver: Let's form a section on cave history. And they called it spelean history, s-p-e-l-e-a-n. And so what they do is individuals who are doing research on cave history, like I did in Missouri, when they have the NSS conventions, they can give papers on their research. I'm the only one that has done it consistently in Missouri. There are a couple of people who've written a paper or two about a specific cave or something like that. But I'm the only one that has a reputation and a title in that field. I mean, I'm recognized as the Missouri cave historian. Just like now I'm recognized as the Lake of the Ozarks historian. But the thing about me, I don't know, it's just, I fell into those cracks. I guess I was just, it was just happenstance, but here I fell into this crack of doing all this research on Missouri caves. And being the only individual, I'm the only individual who writes about these caves for the public. And then I start doing the same thing about Lake of the Ozark, and nobody had ever done that before, either.

35 Corrigan: I'm curious. You said early on, you mentioned when you were a boy and there was no books, there was no nothing. And all the way through, you know, you're sixteen, okay, you're going to write your first book. The '30s, or the, well, you were born later¹⁰, so '40s, '50s, these things are, these organizations are all forming. So I'm curious to know just your general opinion of when you had nothing at all, are you pleased on what is available now? Are you pleased on all these organizations that are available now? Are you pleased about, you know, there's more books, more research?

40 Weaver: Um, yes and no. That's a very loaded question. Because it depends upon what aspect of the caves or cave industry you're talking—

[End Track 25. Begin Track 26.]

¹⁰ H. Dwight Weaver was born May 29, 2938.

Weaver: —about. If we're talking about wild caves and cave research in Missouri, caving, for a lot of individuals, is just a sport. We've had, early on in the organized, we kind of call ourselves the organized caving, as opposed to just anybody who just goes out there and goes to a cave. Organized means that we try to work together to record, we locate, record, explore and study caves. And we build, Missouri now has the largest cave database almost of any state in the union because of what we've done. But it's still kind of a special area. And you have to be on the kind of inside to get access to a lot of that information.

10 Corrigan: Because where, I mean, who's the repository for all this?

Weaver: Okay. Repository. There was a fellow by the name of Koenig who worked at the Geological Survey back in the '50s. And because, as soon as Jerry Vineyard and Dr. Hawksley and them formed the Missouri Speleological Survey, they got in touch with the Geological Survey. And the Geological Survey said, "Hey, you know, these guys out here go in these caves. We need this kind of information for our environmental work. Let's make a contract with these guys." And so they got together, and made an agreement. At that time, Koenig had given way to a fellow by the name of Beveridge, who was the state geologist. And Beveridge was really tuned into this. He's the one who became the author of *Missouri's Geological Curiosities and Oddities*.¹¹ He's got a book about it. But anyway, he's deceased now, long ago. But anyway, he said, "We have got the resources. We have got the place to store it. If you map a cave out here and write a report, and submit it to us, we will reproduce it and give you copies. And we'll keep master files for you. We'll give you a storage place for this." Well, Jerry Vineyard, after he got through college and got through his military service, he got a job there. And he became the point person and the overseer of the files. Well, the push on, early on, was to see how many caves there were in Missouri. We didn't know. We still don't know how many caves there are in Missouri.

Corrigan: But you told me earlier it's estimated around—

30 Weaver: We know how many we've got recorded.

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: That is, we've got coordinates on exactly where that cave is, and it's recorded in the database. But—

Corrigan: And did you say 6300 to me earlier?

Weaver: At this point in time, it's 63. But you've got to remember, that's a fluid figure.¹²

40 Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: Because reports are constantly flowing in and those figures change.

¹¹ *Geological Wonders and Curiosities of Missouri* by Thomas Beveridge.

¹² Estimates now place the number of caves in Missouri at over 7000.

Corrigan: Okay.

5 Weaver: Sometimes they'll find a cave and it's already been recorded by a different name or something, so they'll have to subtract it from the list. Whereas the next day, they might, somebody might report totally two caves that have never been recorded before. So it grows and it changes. So we can only give an approximate figure. But that race, there's other states that have been doing the same thing. Kentucky and Tennessee. They have lots of caves. So it kind of became a macho thing among the cavers in Missouri and the cavers in Tennessee and 10 Kentucky to see who could record the most caves. And so there's this excitement of going out and finding a new cave. And getting it recorded. So that motivated the cavers. And Jerry just, the Geological Survey just milked this situation. And information began to flow into the files. And we were recording—I say “we,” the MSS—was recording anywhere around 100 to 200 caves per year, doing that. And over a period of all these years, we're over 6,000. I can 15 recall when we first started. The most knowledgeable person we had at that time said they thought there might be a thousand caves in Missouri. But we've far exceeded that. For many years, we called it “the cave state.” Because we thought we had more caves than anybody else. We're not anymore. Tennessee's got more. They've recorded around eight or nine thousand. But the show cave people picked up on that cave state business and started using it. 20 So it became, when you use that title and you tell your guides that this is the show cave state, or this is the cave state—

[End Track 26. Begin Track 27.]

25 Weaver: —and you realize that 300,000 people a year are going through Meramec Caverns, that's 300,000 people who've heard this. Multiply that year after year after year. There at one time, we were estimating that there was two million people a year going through show caves in Missouri.

30 Corrigan: Just in Missouri.

Weaver: Just in Missouri. With all the twenty some odd caves that we had. Every one of those were using that. And so it became widespread throughout the continental United States that this was the cave state. The battle really wasn't settled until just a few years ago, when 35 Tennessee surpassed us. As the years have gone by, that race has petered down. And really today, we're still doing that. I say “we.” The organization is still doing that. We started in the 1990s to computerize everything. That has been a very difficult process. But I say that we're very close now to having everything in the files on a searchable database. So, and if somebody wants information now, it's on a, like I said, a proprietary basis. But we used to 40 print, Jerry used to, the Geological Survey used to print a catalog. And for a few years, it was open to anybody. Public. It had cave locations in it. But then in the '60s, they realized that this was creating a problem. It was a problem whenever you're going out to a cave and you find somebody killing bats. Or you go out there and you find guys digging up the floor for artifacts. Or you go in and you find a bunch of guys writing graffiti all over the cave. Or 45 breaking off formations. That's the kind of thing that we were facing. So they said, “That's it. No more cave locations. They're going to become proprietary information.” Well, at that

time, the Missouri Speleological Survey said “The catalog, if you want a catalog, you’ll have to go through our board. There will be a regular process for this, and each catalog will be numbered. It will be registered to you.” So that occurred in the late ‘60s. And right on up until 1995 was the last time that we printed on paper a cave catalog. Since then, everything
5 has been on computer.

Corrigan: Since ‘95?

Weaver: Since ‘95.
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Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: So if you, for instance, let’s say right now they’re in the process of trying to review the stuff in all the counties. This local group here at Lake of the Ozarks is working on
15 Morgan County. They’re going out and GPSing all the caves that are already recorded to make sure that—we’re trying to go now from, well, from the quarter section type of arrangement to a GPS location. So they’re going out and doing that and sometimes they find the location is a quarter of a mile off, you know, or whatever. Because not every caver that went out was that good at reading a topo map or writing a description. So that’s what’s going
20 on now. If when our group here decided they wanted to do Morgan County, then the MSS gave us the database for Morgan County only. And then we worked from that. It’s highly organized from the organized community. And it is, there’s a lot of oversight, you know, when it’s done. But that’s only come about in the last fifteen or twenty years.

25 Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: I think, if I was young today and was starting out to be a caver, I would find it very discouraging. One of the big complaints that has occurred with our organized groups is that every one of our organized groups, whether it’s, they’ve got fifteen members or they’ve got
30 150 members, it kind of is viewed as a factory for cavers. We have these individuals that come in out of the cold blue, they join the organization. They caved for a couple of years. They get lots of information. And then they disappear. They take their buddies, and their buddies and their buddies. And pretty soon, you’ve got all those people are going caving on their own. And they’re not interested in the more serious aspects of it. They just want to do it
35 for the sport. So all that sort of thing leads to tighter and tighter restrictions on information.

Corrigan: Could you tell me, earlier, before we started recording, you were talking about, you really told me there are, I think, four different aspects to caving. Four different kind of distinct groups besides, there was the show caves, the, you talked about them from different
40 standpoints. Could you talk about that a little—

[End Track 27. Begin Track 28.]

Corrigan: —bit on the recording where people are coming from, the different areas people
45 are coming from and the different reasons for, their interest or purpose or use of caves.

Weaver: Okay. Number one, we have show caves, and that's a business. Then we have grottos or chapters that are located in different parts of the state. And usually a chapter gets started because there's three or four guys that all want, but they want help. A lot of times the ones that organize it are really serious. Maybe they're out there leading a survey team. But you've got to have somebody carrying the stuff. So you say, "Hey, you can go caving with us. And you can help us out." So you have these kind of sherpas that develop within the organization. They're out there helping you. They're holding the survey line down there at the end or something. You know, you've taught them just enough. But they're not doing the, they're not doing the sketching, they're not doing the compass readings and all that. So we have, early on in the organization, we had this terrific battle that developed between what they call speleologists and those that are called spelunkers.

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: Now the spelunker, that's a French term. It means one who crawls into holes. Okay? It came out of Europe. And in France and in some of those places, it's a highly evolved organization, or a highly evolved activity that has a history of over 200 years. They're crazy as hell. They're largely sport cavers. But then there are those small number, I guess in any organization, you have two or three that are really serious. They want to map. They want to inventory for data purposes. Maybe they want to study the watershed or the ecology of the cave system. Whatever. But they have to have help. So they utilize the spelunkers part of it to, it kind of satisfies both. But there are downsides, no matter how you go about that. But early on, we had a real battle between the speleologist and the spelunking elements within the organizations. We had professional people, biologists in particular, who wanted to study the blind creatures that live in caves and all. And they were kind of on a pedestal. They didn't like the [spelunkers], but they had to use them. So we had this kind of a bracketing that took place within the organization, larger organization. What it really amounted to for so many years there was we were just basically collecting data. We taught a lot of people how to map. Because that was one of the primary things we, our organization has done. However, mapping only, here again, mapping only appeals to a certain segment. Because it's very slow. It's not exciting. And you spend an awful lot of time standing in water or mud while somebody's sketching something or gathering, making measurements. So we began to develop another kind of caver, cave diving. Because down in the Ozark region, the Current River area, we have these huge springs. And Jerry Vineyard was doing spring studies. And he wanted to know what is going on down there in that underground area where it's full of water. Cave diving is an extremely dangerous [activity]. It's one of the most dangerous sports out there in caving. We've probably lost two dozen people in Missouri to cave diving over the years. But, and there's just certain springs that have been really more tragic than others. But most of those have not been members of our organization. There are diving groups, particularly out of Saint Louis and places like that.

Corrigan: Are these for recreational purposes? Are these for scientific?

Weaver: Most of them for recreational. But we developed within our organization a group of cave divers. For instance, our Lake of the Ozarks grotto at one time had five serious cave divers in it. So Jerry said, "Here's the kind of information I need. Dive these springs." Well,

from that diving, we learned something about the plumbing in the Ozarks. I mean, these things are diving down at acute angles for 300 feet before they level off.

[End Track 28. Begin Track 29.]

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Weaver: These are caves that are now in the forming stages. A million or two years from now, the water table will have lowered and they will be air filled, probably. But these are, this is what the caves, in this situation, used to be like several million years ago here now that we're going through that have got air in them. Because water always seeks a lower level. Your stream's keep eroding down. And so we've developed cave diving. And we've had, some of these things have been mapped for three or four thousand feet underground down in that area. Then we have the vertical cavers. These are the guys that like the pits. They're mountaineering in reverse. And here again, it's specialized. Back when we first started, we didn't have the right equipment. I mentioned earlier that, right after World War Two, we used a lot of army surplus. We had to have schools for our people to learn how to do rappelling. Because some caves are on bluffs. And you can't get to the entrance. You have to rappel down to the entrance. Or even have to use cable ladders to go down a pit. Something like that. So we hold schools within our group, teaching them how to tie the knots and how to rappel and that sort of thing. I mean, I learned how to do it, too. But by the 1970s, late '70s, this is a broader thing. Throughout the United States, cavers who were engineers and working in various fields began to develop their own caving equipment. They developed special ropes. They learned, they developed very special Prusiks, climbing gear, stuff like that, which were useful for mountain climbers but not necessarily. I mean, you don't necessarily use pitons and all that stuff in the cave so much. Because in the cave, you're dealing with water and mud and a whole different kind of geology than you do in the mountainside. And you're doing it in the dark. So it's a whole specialized kind of thing that cavers do. And it is dangerous, but we've got a very good record of that. We've had very few injuries or deaths over the years of people. And generally when we do, it's somebody who's not affiliated with our organizations.

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Corrigan: Is this, throughout the various types of caving, whether it be cave diving, cave rappelling, cave—just all together, you're saying there's a decent record on, there's—

Weaver: Safety.

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Corrigan: Yeah. There's a decent safety record.

Weaver: There's a very decent safety record.

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Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: And we don't have a lot of deep caves in Missouri. But even a, even a drop of twenty or thirty feet can kill you. So you need to know how to do it. And you need the right kind of equipment. But when you get in different parts of Missouri, you have different kinds of caves. You get down to southwest Missouri, into south of Greene County, on down into Webster and on over into McDonald County and those areas, you're getting into some areas

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where they have caves that have a total vertical range of 200 feet. So you might have two or three pitches in the cave, sixty foot and eighty foot and so on. And you really need the right kind of equipment and the right kind of teamwork to plumb those kind of caves and to survey those kinds of caves. You go over around Perryville and we've got, one of our caves over
5 there is a 120 foot vertical drop. That's about the deepest in the state. Wherein Saint Louis, down in Saint Genevieve County, and up through Perry County, there's lots of pit caves. And also, the other thing that you encounter in those caves, is dead air. Pits are especially bad for that. So you have to be real careful. You get down at the bottom of the pit. These pits tend to
10 be animal traps. Animal will fall in and die. Debris gets in there and it generates gases that can create a real high carbon dioxide or whatever kind of environment. And it can kill you. So this was one of the other things. We used to use carbide lamps. Gradually we got into the electric field, because they developed batteries, rechargeable batteries now, that will last for up to eight or ten hours on a good recharge. The problem with battery lights is it doesn't give you a very broad field. It gives you a more narrow field. Now I'm at the age now where I
15 need light around my feet, because I don't have the good stability I used to have as a young person. Carbide lights give you a lot of light like this. When we got away from carbide lamps, it really became more difficult for me to cave. As I got older.

[End Track 29. Begin Track 30.]

20 Weaver: But there's so much you can do with a carbide lamp that you can't do with electric. But there's some things you can do with electric that you can't do with carbide. I mean, I could thaw out my pipes at home with a carbide lamp. But you go in a cave and you're wet and cold. And let's say you've been caving in a passageway. You've been in the cave for
25 eight or ten hours. And you're waiting for a group to come back to point so you can all leave the cave. And you can get awfully cold sitting there. Even though, even if you have a wetsuit on, which some of our cavers do when they do a lot of the wet water stuff. I have, many a time, gathered myself around my carbide lamp like this. And the heat coming out keeps you warm.

30 Corrigan: You can't do that with—

Weaver: I have cooked food in a cave with a carbide lamp.

35 Corrigan: Oh, you have?

Weaver: Yeah. Warmed up beans and things like that. But you can't do that with an electric light. But the electric is more environmentally friendly. Because the carbide is toxic. And it used to be in the early days of caving we didn't understand the ecology of the cave. We
40 would bury spent carbide in the cave. We would dig a hole and bury it. But that stays there for a long time and it becomes toxic. Especially if it gets into the stream and runs downstream. We stopped doing that in about the early '60s.

45 Corrigan: '60s? Okay.

Weaver: Uh huh.

Corrigan: Now if you're spending, you just mentioned, eight to ten hours in a cave, you're eating in that cave.

5 Weaver: That's right.

Corrigan: You're using the restroom in that cave.

Weaver: Yes.

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Corrigan: You really have to be prepared to spend a day in that cave.

Weaver: One of the very first fieldtrips that I took with the Missouri Speleological Survey, it was February of 1957. The MSS had just been organized. We were very young. And they were going to a big cave here in Camden County called Carroll Cave. I was a new caver. But Jerry was kind of my mentor. He'd been caving three or four years. So he knew, and he was older, he knew a little more about it. He said, "We're going to go down, we're going to be in the cave at least sixty hours."

20 Corrigan: Sixty.

Weaver: We're going to camp back in the cave about a mile and a half. This is a big cave system. At that point, a mile and a half back was, at that point in time, that was as far as the cave had been surveyed. Huge trunk line passage. Passage that was sometimes of 100 feet wide and eighty feet high. With passageways going off. In fact, in the first mile and a half of the cave, there's ninety-seven side passages. And some of those will go half a mile or more. So we had, I had over fifty pounds on my back. And he and I arrived early that day. We cut some classes to go on the field trip. And we started in the cave. And I was just amazed. I had never been in a cave that big. And it got to be quite a burden, because we were having to go back and forth across the stream. It was mud, sometimes almost halfway up to your knees. Sucking mud. And sometimes you never knew whether the water was going to be knee-deep or waist-deep. But he had been in that part of the cave before. We got back in the cave and I don't know, it was like about four o'clock in the afternoon. We were roaring out of Columbia to get down there. Said it was going to be a big expedition this weekend. We were going to get cavers from all over the state. Well at that point in time, we didn't have two dozen cavers in all of the state. But the word had been sent out. Jerry and I made our camp in the cave, in what they called the lunch room. And he said, "Well, the cave has not been mapped from this point back to this big canyon." He said, "There's what's called the water barrier between here and there. It's very difficult to get through." But he said, "Let's map it from here back, just do a base map from here back to the canyon. And that will be something we can use later to finish a better map." And he said, "By the time we get back, maybe more of them will be here." It was just me and him. And at that time, we didn't really realize that if you're going to go into a cave like that, we don't go out in teams of less than four. Because if you get in trouble, one person can't rescue you. It was a safety precaution. But that was new, fresh news at the time. So he and I made that trip. We were gone, I don't know, we got back in base camp around nine o'clock that evening. And we'd made it all the way back to this big canyon

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and got through that water barrier where water was up to our neck in places. And camped. I'd been told various things I needed to do. I needed to put my foods in this and that. I needed various kinds of foods because of the environment. And I couldn't imagine being in a cave for a long period of time. But that was like Friday night. We bedded down. And when I woke
5 up the next morning, it was still, of course, dark in the cave. That's kind of an—

[End Track 30. Begin Track 31.]

Weaver: —experience to go to bed in the dark, wake up in the dark. But there were
10 seventeen cavers in that group. They were all over that room. And the next day, next morning by about ten o'clock, we had our expedition out. And we headed back to that canyon because just downstream was a big waterfall. A big lake room. We were the first ones to rig the waterfall. And two of the guys went over the waterfall. And we had a rubber inflated raft. They went down in the lake room. But by that time Jerry had been doing exploring along the
15 side. And he'd found a way around the waterfall. The guys that went over the waterfall were so bushed and so drowned that they decided to go back to base camp. But Jerry and myself and one other man were the first humans to ever go down Thunder River, as we call it, for the first mile. All virgin. As far as we know, no human had ever laid eyes on that part of the cave. That's one of the key things that excites cavers. To find virgin cave. And it was easy in
20 the '50s and '60s. It's not so easy today to find, to get in undeveloped, or I mean unexplored, unmapped territory in a cave today may be a ten or fifteen hour trip one way. So it becomes a very difficult supply problem. But we were in that cave, we slept in that cave on Friday night and Saturday night. Didn't come out till Sunday. We had to have all of our gear and everything. I remember one of the interesting little fun things that happened was that caves
25 have packrats in them. And during the night, one guy had a whole loaf of bread stolen. And all he had left the next morning was a little pile of rocks. The little critter took a piece of bread and leave a rock. He didn't, he didn't have it protected.

30 Corrigan: Why would they leave the rock?

Weaver: That's just their nature. They do that. They trade. These little characters do. There are in some of the caves, there were then, I don't know that that's so true today. I have been, I was in a cave in Laclede County one time mapping. It was kind of a narrow passageway, a
35 little ledge. And these little cave rats, they're kind of friendly but they tend to make a little nest on ledges. They're just a rodent. And I was very quiet. I was making sketches. The guy was ahead, you know. And this little guy comes along the ledge, goes over my shoulder and comes down to see what I'm doing. And I just stood there. I couldn't believe it. And finally he looked up at me. His nose twitched. And he went back up and went on.

40 Corrigan: So was that when you were getting to this point where it's, you know, virgin caves, nobody's ever been there, is this exciting? Thrilling? Scary?

Weaver: It's all those things mixed together. Because you don't know what's around the
45 corner. And the other thing that made the particular passage scary was that it was a big passage. We were looking. And you could see where water marks were twenty feet above

your head. You knew that if it was raining and you were having a flood, you could be drowned very quickly. That's the number one hazard in Missouri caves. Drowning.

Corrigan: From like flash flooding?

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Weaver: Flash flooding. So you really need to know something of what the weather's doing, and something about that part of the cave. You need to be real careful. But anyway, the stream, as it meanders down through the cave passage, has these big slopes of mud that fan out from that water line. And they're conical kind of shaped. And they're just like molasses. You can't keep your bearings when you get in one. Your equilibrium. So you had to get around those just to be able to explore on down the canyon. You think of caves as being a place where there's lots of echoes. But there isn't. Because most of these caves have a lot of sediments in them. Clay, gravel, sand. And that acts like a blanket. And it keeps that echoing that you hear in the Hollywood movies, that doesn't occur in most caves. The—you think of caves as being a quiet solitude. And they are, very often. We went almost a mile downstream and we stopped, we were pretty exhausted at that time. We didn't have wetsuits. In those early days, we didn't know what a wetsuit was. In fact, they didn't even have them. And we made a cairn, and it was just a pile of rocks to mark where we were. We didn't mark on the wall; we just made a cairn and recorded its location. And—

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[End Track 31. Begin Track 32.]

Weaver: —we were just sitting there eating before we headed back upstream. And that was the noisiest place you could imagine. We had squeaks and plops and groans and all kinds of sounds. And most of it was caused by water. I've slept many, many nights overnight in a cave. They are not quiet places. Especially if they're a large cave system. And you don't, in most cases, know what's causing all that. But there aren't, in this day and age, there aren't any animals in the cave that are a hazard to you. Nothing poisonous or dangerous. Nothing's going to bite you or get you. That wasn't true 10,000, 15,000 years ago. Because back during the latter parts of the Ice Age, from around 50,000 to about 10,000 years ago, you had the American lion. You had cave bears. And these cave bears were bigger than the Kodiak bear. They were ferocious. I can imagine what the early Americans, how they got along with those things. We find their bones. And that was one of the first things that we began to notice very early on. We would run into these bones in these caves! We didn't know what they were. But we had an old boy up there at Columbia that, Dr. Mehl. And he was a vertebrate paleontologist. And he discovered cavers. And he said, "Hey, you know, I'm doing a book on the Ice Age animals of Missouri. And I'll bet there's lots of bones in those caves." So we began to haul bones out of the caves for Dr. Mel. And he wrote his Ice Age animal book. One of the first things we had in Missouri on the caves. And a lot of that came right from the cavers themselves. He taught them how to do the excavations. How to preserve the bones. Dr. Hawksley at Warrensburg, we're talking way back there at an early point, recognized this was going on. And he said, "We need a repository for these bones. Because we're going to be finding a lot more than Dr. Mehl will need." And so he established a bone repository at Western Missouri Teachers College¹³ up there. And then anytime you found bones, you

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¹³ Central Missouri State University (now University of Central Missouri).

could send them up to him. And he would evaluate them, analyze them. Those are now over in Springfield, Illinois, their big repository over there. In fact, I did an article on that back in the '90s. The very first bones that we ever found in our Missouri caves were over there.

5 Corrigan: So where are they at in Illinois?

Weaver: I'm trying to think. It's their, Illinois State Museum, they've got a repository there for Pleistocene, or not Pleistocene, but paleontological resources and studies. It's one of the few in the central United States. And a number of their fellows worked in Missouri, and did
10 work in Missouri. Dr. Graham, who was over there, Russell Graham, I did some writing about him. He's now on the staff at Denver Museum of Natural History. But he did a lot of studies of that, of those bones. I mean, we've got ground sloth, sabertooth cat, jaguar, all these bones have come out of the caves. That was the other thing, too, that we discovered, too, early on in the Missouri caves. There's a term, I can't remember how to pronounce it,
15 but it applies to footprints. I call them, in Europe they call them bioglyphs. That means it's a print print that's been left by an animal. Because we were finding bear beds in the caves. We were finding their tracks preserved in flowstone. We were finding their teeth and their skeletons and that sort of stuff in the caves. So we also, the other thing is that when you get into a virgin cave, you have to be very, very careful. Because you can destroy something just
20 so quick and easy. Especially something under a footprint. But there were caves in Missouri, and there still is one, where there are prehistoric footprints. I mean, these were of Indians that walked there 1500, 2000 years ago.

Corrigan: Because we're, I mean, all you mentioned were animal bones. But are there
25 human remains?

Weaver: Yes. Well, no, not—

[End Track 32. Begin Track 33.]

30 Weaver: —human remains. Well, yes, we do. We have, the archeologists mainly handle that sort of thing. We used to think that the Indians never went very far in the caves, just into the entrance zones. But we have since learned they went a lot deeper than that. Because there are things in the cave that we found useful. Epsom salts and other kinds of things that had
35 medicinal and ceremonial value. They went looking for that. They used the clay and stuff, the minerals there for pottery. There were all kinds of uses they had for the cave resources. And, yeah. We found bones in these caves that will really puzzle you. Not only human bones, but the animal bones. You're way back in a cave and you find, I told you about camping in the lunch room.

40 Corrigan: Mm hmm.

Weaver: On the very early days, the very first expeditions, the '57 expedition and several of them, some of the cavers complained, there were clay floor there where we were, but they
45 were bumpy. Lumpy, too. And they said, "Boy, we can't lay our bed rolls out here because it's so hard to sleep on it." So one weekend, one of the guys said, "I'm going to dig these

damn rocks up.” It wasn’t rocks. They were clay-covered bones of a dire wolf. The dire wolf was not a prowler of the caves. But these caves have gone through cycles in which there are openings to the cave at different periods of time in geologic history. Five thousand years ago, even the weather was different here. So these animals had access to the cave. Sometimes it wasn’t that they were alive when they did it, they got washed in through a sink hole or something like that. Or carried in by a large predator like the sabertooth or whatever. Now I’m not a biologist, I’m not a scientist, but I’ve acquired this kind of information from simply being with it for so many years and affiliating with so many different individuals. Both in the professional levels and in, because I knew Dr. Mel. And a lot of these people are key to what went on in Missouri.

Corrigan: Well, and you were observing a lot of these things.

Weaver: Yes.

Corrigan: You yourself observed bones. You yourself observed the sounds you mentioned. Encounters with creatures and rodents and bats. That you experienced the insides of these caves in a lot more than the average person ever has.

Weaver: I think so. And I also experienced the smell of a cave. I alluded to that a while ago. But when I was on the, on the staff at Mark Twain Cave, you know, you hire students to take tours in the summertime. You train these students. And they’re supposed to kind of follow a procedure. This cave was laid out in such a way—are we running out of time?

Corrigan: No, I was just checking. We have the room until one, you said.

Weaver: Oh. What time is it?

Corrigan: It’s 1:05.

Weaver: I’m not going to worry about it.

Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: I would sometimes, if I had a guide or two that I was a little suspicious of, because sometimes they get to telling jokes, and that’s all they want to do is just entertain the crowd. As opposed to being serious and telling them about what they’re supposed to be doing on the cave. I would go into the cave and stay off in a side passage and just listen as the tours come by to see what was going on. Mark Twain Cave has an interesting atmospheric or meteorological kind of air fill. Because it’s a labyrinth. It’s a maze-type cave. A tour could go by. And a lot of times, the tours were anywhere from ten people to thirty people. I could walk out of that passage, into that main passage, after the tour was gone and out of sight, and tell you if they were children, if they were senior citizens, if they were largely women or largely men, just because of the smell. That’s how acute it is in a cave. If you’re really observant. You don’t read much about that. But I have written a little bit about it. But it’s there. And some of the caves it’s more prominent than others.

Corrigan: So different caves vary on the different smells—

5 Weaver: Yes. Because of the air flow. Caves tend to breathe according to barometric pressure. And in the summertime, they're breathing out. In the wintertime, they're breathing in. Air flows in along the floor, comes out along the ceiling. Or, no. Hot air goes up. Then it comes down on the floor. That—

[End Track 33. Begin Track 34.]

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Weaver: —creates a problem for cavers in the wintertime. Because a lot of times, you're back in a cave. And you're soaking wet on your way out. Many times, cavers have their clothes totally freeze solid on them before they get to the entrance in the wintertime. So you have to have some dry clothes close to that entrance so that you can get out of them quick.

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Corrigan: Once you get back out to the—

Weaver: Once you get back outside. Or you wind up getting hypothermia.

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Corrigan: Because you're in the fifties back in the cave—

Weaver: And it may be below freezing. I've come out of the cave when it was like three or four degrees above zero, you know. And you can just literally freeze to death in a short period of time. Especially if you've got a lot of equipment to bring out of the cave. If you're in a cave like the Devil's Icebox up by Columbia. I've had my clothes freeze on me there. And I had to break my clothes just to get them off. Our cars would be down where today is a parking lot. And we would have to walk down. But we would leave clothes up here to dress into before we'd start the long walk down to where cars were parked.

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Corrigan: Okay.

Weaver: Yeah, that was, the Devil's Icebox was one of the first big caves I explored. And that was before I knew anything about organized groups. There wasn't anything at that time. I learned when I was, when Ross Christian took me out to Hunter's Cave and took me out to Tumbler's Cave. He said, "There's a big cave I've never gone into," but he said, "I'll take you over to it. It's called the Devil's Icebox." So we drove up there one day and he was showing me this entrance. The Ingrams at that time owned the property and lived there. And he said, "I don't know anything about the cave except," he said, "there was a man and his son that went in this cave back years ago. And they were gone for all day. And they came back out and told this big story about all these wonderful things they saw." And he said, "There was an article in the Columbia paper about it." This was 1925, I believe it was. So that excited me. So I talked my dad into going in that cave in 1950, was it '54. I was sixteen. And it was, that was just about the last cave I talked him into going into. I did get him into the entrance of, first portions of Carroll Cave once. But he said, "How we going to do it?" And I said, well, I told him this story of what I'd learned, you know, about this [man] and his son and they went back there. And I said, "If he can do it, we can do it." I mean, I was full of

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ambition. I was pretty rangy and pretty healthy and all that. And he was in his forties, and he wasn't too bad at that time. I said, "Well, we'll build our own boat." Now there had been a painter in our neighborhood who was painting a bunch of houses. I went to him and I said, "Can I have the cans and the lids?" He said "Sure." So I had quite a huge pile. And I burned
5 those cans out. And then I pounded the lids back on and soldered the lids so they wouldn't come off. And I built a framework with partitions in it and put those cans up under there. I had me a raft made out of cans with a framework. The thing weighed 100 pounds by the time I got through. (Corrigan laughs) I said, "We'll go in the cave with that." He said, "Well, we better test this thing out first." So they had a little recreational lake and swimming area there
10 called Sunset Lake not too far from where we lived in Jeff. So we took that thing over there and threw that thing in the lake. You couldn't sink that thing. I got out on it. We tried everything. And it just balanced beautifully. I had door handles on each end so we could carry it. We took it up there and went in the cave. And my dad and I went about a mile and a half back in the system. Where beyond where you would park the boats. And we walked
15 quite a thing. And we took a few pictures on the trip. And on the way out, you know, there's about a three-quarter mile boat trip that you've got to make on the way out. There's several portages where you have to get out and carry the boat over dry land and get it back in again. Well, we started losing cans. I don't know how many we lost. But we probably lost ten of them by the time we got, because I had taken wire, a little piece of wire, and then wired like
20 this to hold those cans up in there. And I never thought anything about it. But there were some years later, the word got around, people were finding these cans back in the cave. But they were back underneath these ledges along the stream passage. (laughs) Where did these cans come from? Because they were all alike. (laughs) One of my wild ideas.

25 Corrigan: (laughs) But it worked.

Weaver: It worked. We developed a better raft system later. We just took inner tubes, six inner tubes, and put a plywood sheet on top of it and roped them all and away we went.

30 **[End Track 34. Begin Track 35.]**

Corrigan: Probably a lot lighter, too.

35 Weaver: Oh, it was a lot lighter.

Corrigan: Okay. Before, I do want to just mention some other stuff, too, just to get it on here before we move on. But I saw that you were a member of the Camden County Historical Society, the Camden County Museum, is that correct? One of many?

40 Weaver: Uh, well, the Camden County Historical Society was organized in 1962. My wife and I came to the Lake in 1964. And one of the very first things we did was join the Camden County Historical Society. At that time, they were just meeting in the courthouse. It was a small group. As the group grew, we developed, we got the lodge at a facility down in Linn Creek. And the lower floor was available to us for meetings. And we set up a little museum
45 there. And I was president of the group at that time. And then later, they acquired the old schoolhouse in Linn Creek and moved everything over there. So, yeah, I was active in the

society. My wife and I were active with them up until the '70s when my daughter was so busy in school. And we were so busy with not only our other activities and her, we kind of dropped out. But then when we retired we, before we retired, we rejoined the historical society. And since that time, I have built a large display in the museum that shows the tourist section of Camden County. Kind of refocuses on the tourism history. I did the same thing in the Miller County Museum.

10 Corrigan: Because I read somewhere that, you know, when we talked a little bit about it, you have quite a large collection of photographs. But you also collect booklets, maps, brochures, travel literature. You've been doing this a long time. You've been collecting these. And so that's what they were for?

15 Weaver: Well when I first came down to the Lake, and there's a connection with the historical society on that. The historical society was organized by the, what you call, what I call the survivors of Old Linn Creek. This was the town that, the county seat that was flooded when they created Lake of the Ozarks. Well, these people were then in their late sixties, seventies, eighties. And they founded the historical society. A lot of them were still bitter about the creation of the lake, destruction of their home areas, you know, and all that. And I would ask, "You know, well, there's resorts over here. Do you know anything about that old resort? What, do you know any history about the lake? What's under the lake? What about the towns that are in the lake?" And my general response was, "We're not interested in the tourist stuff." And most of them would not solicit membership in the society from the tourist industry in this area. So consequently, we had very few people in the society that had any connection with the local tourist industry. I was the exception, because I was involved with it. I thought well, gee, if they're not interested, I am. And my wife and I kind of liked to haunt flea markets and antique stores. So I started collecting postcards. Because about that time, I got involved in writing that history of Mark Twain Cave. And I discovered that on the old postcards, there were a succession of pictures of the entrance of the cave. Through the years, they had different postcards made for the cave. And they showed just the evolution of that entrance area. How it had changed. And how the lighting had changed, and things like that. So I started collecting cave postcards because I was interested in the show caves. And any cave, for that matter. But when we came down here, and I got involved with the society, I said "Well I'm also going to collect Lake of the Ozarks memorabilia." So I collected brochures, pamphlets, Chamber of Commerce publications, maps, anything I could get my hands on. It's been forty years. And I have an enormous collection of that stuff. And today, I never thought I'd ever have any use for it other than a hobby. To me, it was a hobby in those early years. But then, in the mid '90s, I was working over at the DGLS. Ameren UE had reacquired the old lodge.¹⁴ What's his name? It's there where they got the—oh, I'm having a senior moment here. Anyway, they wanted to create a museum in it. And they were going to have it as the office for their—

[End Track 35. Begin Track 36.]

¹⁴ Willmore Lodge.

Weaver: —chamber. So I had to coordinate with Dan Jarvis, who was the principal engineer over at Ameren, over at the dam. He was the head honcho over there. And he and I got acquainted. I started working with him. He learned about my collection. This was '95, '96. And he said, "You know, we don't really have anything on the history of the Lake." And he said, "You know, I've got in here all these pictures that were taken during the construction of the dam." I'm like, "Whoa! I'd like to see those." Well he hauled out of the closet this box that had eight by ten folders. And every one of them had an eight by ten negative. And of course they had printed quite a few of those negatives off. And he pulled those out. They had those in some binders. And they were all these pictures. I said, "How many you got?" He said, "I've got 800 of them." Because during the construction, they had hired an Eldon photographer to document the construction of the dam. And he said, "You could use some of these pictures." I said, "You've got a state treasure here." So I started working with him and I got him together with the Missouri State Archives people. They got with Ameren's legal department and got that whole set donated to the state archives. So there I had that connection in doing that. But I decided then well gee, I can use these pictures that I've collected. And I put together that very first book, *Lake of the Ozarks: The Early Years* that Arcadia published. Arcadia said, "Hey, we would like another one." I said, "Well, I've got oodles of pictures." So we did the next one.

20 Corrigan: Is that the volume two one?

Weaver: No. That's not those.

25 Corrigan: Oh, not those. Okay, okay.

Weaver: No. You know what Arcadia books are like?

Corrigan: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, with the—

30 Weaver: Yeah. Well, there's two of those. *The Early Years* and *Vintage Vacation*. And so, yeah, I did another one. I did *Vintage Vacation*.¹⁵

Corrigan: So you used just a lot of your own materials you had collected.

35 Weaver: Yeah, yeah.

Corrigan: You didn't have to go too far to get—

40 Weaver: I didn't. But there were gaps. Because I said, I laid out, when I decided the format that I was going to use, I was going to do it as a travelogue down to the highway, I had gaps. So that's when I went to the historical societies and the state archives and places, looking for just a few pictures to fill in the gaps. I probably didn't have to have more than fifteen or twenty pictures to do the whole book. Because I had all the others. I just finished one for them on Osage Beach. But Lynn Morrow is a good friend of mine. And he said he believes

¹⁵ After the interview, Weaver published *Osage Beach* in 2012.

I'm one of the persons that probably made more use out of those kinds of pictures than anybody else he's ever seen. That this whole series of books that I do are based on a lot of those. And I find a lot of response from people. When I started to do those, I did the first two with Arcadia, and I thought well, I would like, because, when the first book came out, I started getting emails and phone calls from people saying, "You know, you had a picture in here of such and such a resort. And I'd like more information about that resort." Whoa. I don't have that information. So I started doing the research. I thought, I'm going to put me out a series of books. Then I thought well who's going to publish these things? And at one point, I went ahead and did the first volume, which we don't have here. But a volume of the *History and Geography of the Lake of the Ozarks*. And the reason I said geography was it's the scenic beauty and the geologic features down here that make this so interesting to people, make it a nice destination point for their vacation. I said, that needs to be featured, too. There was so much history. I had to define the area. I decided finally it was an area that stretched from Bagnell Dam to Warsaw and twelve miles out on either side. That was the area I would focus on. I would call that the lake region. Because that was the area that was impacted by the development. And so anything that is in that area is germane for my research. Well, there are so many subjects. People like bridges, they like rock formations, they like towns, they like people. So what am I going to do? So I just sort of made it as an encyclopedia. And I thought well I'll do it A to Z, and I'll just do short narratives. Not real in-depth about any one particular subject. But just kind of an overview. And that way, if somebody in Warsaw picks up the book, or somebody in Sunrise Beach picked up the book, they'll find something of interest to them. So I put out number one. And then I got a feeler from the University of Missouri.

25 **[End Track 36. Begin Track 37.]**

Weaver: They were kind of interested. But I chose not to do it because I had been writing long enough and had enough contact with publishers. I was thinking well, I'm going to do this. And what if they have a change of administration. Arcadia, just during the time I did those two books, changed ownership twice. You never knew if they were going to discontinue a book. And they might tie a manuscript up for four or five years before they release it. So I didn't want that to happen. So I just thought, I'm just going to, this is a local book. I'm just going to do this book, this series, by myself. Because when I was working for DNR, at DGLS, I was also in charge of the graphics department. I had the overall sight of all the publications that we produced. And I had to spec those publications. So I knew something about—

Corrigan: Layout.

40 Weaver: —layout and design and all that. And it just so happened that when I retired, the lady I had supervised who was the top graphics person, retired, too. And I said, "Hey, Susan, would you like to help me with this project?" So she does the layout. I do the writing.

Corrigan: And then you self-published it, right?

45 Weaver: I self-published it. And I've got—

Corrigan: And that's these, *The History and Geography of Lake of the Ozarks, Volume 2*—

5 Weaver: Okay. I've only done two volumes of that. And I'll tell you what happened. I did
volume one and volume two. And then Lake Ozark I got involved unintentionally with the
betterment committee on, the Bagnell Dam down to Lake Ozark. I'm not living in Lake
Ozark, but that's where I worked, and I know a lot of friends and stuff like that. They said,
"We want one of our own. Just Lake Ozark." So I said, "Okay, I'll do it." So I did this one
10 just for them. And I barely got that one done when, and I've got about twenty outlets in the
Lake that sell my books. Several of them said, "You know, one of the things we get the most
requests for is a book on Ha Ha Tonka." There wasn't anything. So I said, "Okay. I'll do one
of those." So that interrupted this series.

Corrigan: Okay.

15 Weaver: The thing I didn't count on was the fact that it's like eating popcorn. You can't
stop. And when you publish one, it creates a demand. Every time you publish one, it creates a
surge of interest in your books and you sell a bunch of them. And it just sort of, if you don't
publish books, it sort of begins to die down. So you have to keep the wheels spinning. And
20 then I began to get phone calls and emails from all over the United States. People who have
lived here, who've had businesses here. They want to know this, they want to know that. I
become almost a central clearinghouse for this kind of information. I had—and I'm not
getting any younger. I do have a voice problem when I speak to large groups. And I'm really
lucky today that my voice is holding up, because I don't usually talk this much. But as soon
25 as that first book came out, I started getting requests for programs. So I began to give
programs all over the Lake area. And it got to the point by, I retired in 2000, by 2005 or '06,
I was giving a program every week somewhere. To church group, a similar kind of fraternal
organization. I was going to the schools. They were asking me to give programs to the kids.
The leadership programs. The counties had me out, you know. It just got to the point
30 where—and then I started getting these requests to go to Fulton and Columbia and all these
other towns around twenty, thirty, forty, fifty miles away. And I'm a diabetic now. I also
have a heart problem. I've had two heart attacks. So I said, "Well, this has got to stop." My
wife said, "You've got to stop, because it's just tearing you up." So about two and a half
years ago, I quit giving programs. But I'm at the point now where I've got these tremendous
35 collections. I've got collections of cave materials. I mean, I've got postcard collections and
photo collections on the caves. Not quite the volume that I have Lake of the Ozarks. I don't
know how many images I have of Lake of the Ozarks. It's probably over 6,000 images.

Corrigan: Mm hmm. Of just the lake.

40 Weaver: Just the lake.

Corrigan: Okay.

45 Weaver: Resorts and things like that. I've probably got six or seven hundred images in the
cave. A lot of those are show caves. And they're good images. I said, "Well, I don't know

how much longer I'm going to live." And my wife said, "You better take time now and stop all that and start getting your stuff together." I've already—

[End Track 37. Begin Track 38.]

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Weaver: —put in my will, the Lake of the Ozarks collection goes to the Missouri State Archives. I've had a lot of friends up there, a lot of contacts. That's one of the reasons why it's going there. That and the other fact that they're rather reasonable. If I went to the, well, I was asked why I didn't let the university publish some, I've forgotten which one it was. I said, "Well, you know, I sat down and figured it out. If I had taken the *Lake of the Ozarks: The Early Years* and got my images from the state historical society, by the time I was done, my user fees and my costs, it would have cost me \$15,000." I said, there's nobody in my age, in my category, and these books don't make me a lot of money, that can afford that. But I can go up and get an image for free if they've got it on the database up there at archives. And they had already expressed an interest. I've had three different groups wanted the collection. I mean, and then my local groups would like it. The Camden County, the Miller County, the Morgan County, they would like this collection. I finally said, I said, "Well, we're just going to give it to the Missouri State Archives." And the collection of cave stuff will go there, too. So I've got to organize. I've got to reorganize. I've got to sit down and figure out all this history that I've done, all this work. So I'm working now to reconstruct my caving and my Lake, all that history, and going to do it as a memoir in a way that I can preserve what I've done. But that's going to take time.

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Corrigan: So that's your current project.

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Weaver: That's my current project. So my publishing of these books has at this point in time stopped. I do have, I can go on to write those indefinitely, because there's so much material. There is another one that I want to put out. And that is, what I call, a working title is *Where's that Old Resort?* People don't realize, there's been over one thousand named resorts at Lake of the Ozarks in the last eighty years. And I get so many calls. "You know, when I was a kid, Mom and Dad used to take us down there and we'd stay at that Red Bird Resort. We can't find it anymore. Where's it at? Where was it?" So I have to go to all my maps and my things. It usually takes me about an hour or two to put all this information together. And I can tell them, a lot of times I can tell them who established the resort, who owned it, when it changed hands, all that sort of thing. So what I want to produce is a directory of all these old resorts. In the past, basically from the beginning of the lake up to 1980. And the reason I stop at 1980 is that's when everything changed down here. We got the new superhighways. We began to get condos. Everything changed. That's when they began losing all the little, small family-owned, family-run resorts. Being replaced by townhouses and villas and condominiums. So that's where I cut it off. So everything prior to that will be in this, it's already in a database that I'm building.

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Corrigan: That's your current project.

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Weaver: That's my current project.

Corrigan: And the other project is to—

Weaver: Put together my memoirs and—

5 Corrigan: Pull this together to make it so that it eventually will be made accessible.

Weaver: Yes. I haven't decided how to make it accessible. Because I worry about what I can and can't say in some of this stuff. I don't want to make show cave people mad at me or resort people mad at me. My experiences have not always been positive. But I had a friend,
10 Roy Davis, who owns Cumberland Caverns or he's involved with it, has been for years. And I was at an event with him, with the National Cave Association here in Arkansas about eight years ago. And Roy was sitting at the table. And Roy is one of these guys, he is very talented at lighting. And he can go into a cave and just build beautiful lighting systems. And he can hide the fixtures so the way you don't even know they're there. No matter which way you
15 come at it, you don't see the lighting fixture. And he puts them in three-way systems, low-voltage systems and everything. Well he did that for years. He lit about forty different caves across the United States. And he was saying, "You know," and he's getting up in years now. He said, "I'd like to write my memoirs." And he looked at me, he said, "You do a lot of writing."

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[End Track 38. Begin Track 39.]

Weaver: He said, "How do I go about it?" I said, "Well, I've never written any memoirs yet." But I said, "Here's kind of what I would do." And he said, "Oh," he said, "you know."
25 He named a cave. He said, "I had such a bitter experience there." He said, "I did all that work and then they wouldn't even pay me." And it was all these kinds of situations he ran into with these cave operators. And he said, "I don't know how to handle that." And I said, "Here's what I would do." I said, "I would sit down and write my memoirs out. All this. And get it all written out, the good and the bad. Set it aside. Leave it there for a while. A year.
30 Two years. Because," I said, "just writing it down will purge your system. It will get that hate, that feeling out of your system. And then you come back to it and you can look at those parts that are so negative. And you can rephrase them and polish them down," I said, "like an apple. You can polish the apple and give it a better light." So that's kind of where I'm going now. I'm looking at doing memoirs in an episodic but yet chronological way. Mentioning a
35 particular thing, what I did, at a particular time or thing I was associated with. Telling about my role in that and its significance. And then go on to another subject. That's kind of the approach I'm taking.

40 Corrigan: Okay. Well that sounds good.

Weaver: And I belong to the Missouri Writers' Guild and the Ozark Writers' League. And Lake of the Ozarks Writers Guild.

45 Corrigan: That's a lot of different writing organizations.

Weaver: Yeah, writing organizations. Uh huh.

Corrigan: Yeah. And I saw you were, yeah. Just involved in a lot of different things. Earlier you mentioned to me that you also help your daughter along with her collecting of Pepsi memorabilia.

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Weaver: Yeah. She doesn't do that so much anymore. But we're still involved in the organization. They have their big blowout in Branson every year in August. And I do their newsletter. And it's a quarterly.¹⁶

10 Corrigan: So still quite busy.

Weaver: I'm still quite busy. Yes. (laughs) My wife says I'm too busy. Much too busy. And she's probably right. She's probably right. I mean, I've had to get up every day this week at six o'clock in order to meet my schedule of things to do.

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Corrigan: Well, I do appreciate you—

Weaver: That's all right.

20 Corrigan: —taking a chunk of time out today for this. Because it took us several weeks to come up with a date that would work. But, well, if you want, I was going to give you, if there's anything we didn't cover you want to. Or just, if you want to say anything final right now and then we can go ahead and end for today. But—

25 Weaver: There's one other thing here that I want to bring out about publications. When we started the organization, the Missouri Speleological Survey, that February, when I got together, or when I got together with Jerry Vineyard up at the University of Missouri, he had just started a little newsletter for the organization, because our members were scattered all over the state, even though there weren't so many of them. And we needed some kind of an organ that would let us coordinate activities. So he said, "I'm putting out this newsletter. I've only done one issue." He said, "I'm working on the next one. Will you help me?" So I helped him on the very second issue of the newsletter. And as time went on, I became the editor of the thing. And then it was basically just a newsletter, like most of them, you know. We didn't publish big articles and all that. It was just what's going on and who's doing what. We sat around one time and we said, at that time we had a couple living in Columbia that he had to come up there for his doctoral work. He was a geologist. Him and his wife. And they were really involved in caves. They said, "You know, you guys need a journal. Something that will focus on the cave, the more serious stuff in the caves." So we talked about it and we decided to put out something called *Missouri Speleology*. It would be a quarterly journal.

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40 And it would publish papers in any of the disciplines that relate to caving. Or caves, rather. Not caving, but caves. We're not going to have field trip reports in it. These are going to be descriptive material on caves. Maps of caves. Photographs of caves. And articles that, research papers. And we're going to call it *Missouri Speleology*. We started that in 1959 and it's still going. In fact, in 1959, it was thirty pages of just some maps and cave data. We said,

¹⁶ Weaver is still in both the Ozark Mountain chapter and the national organization.

we won't publish anything on this particular county unless we have it on file and we know it's factual. And if we run a report, we have to have a map to go with it. It was very restrictive and set a standard. And we're going to start with A and go to Z with the counties. And then we'll start that over again. And that way we keep up with all the stuff that's going on. So that's exactly what we did. And as the years, today, when you pick up *Missouri Speleology*, it may be that thick. It's got color pictures.

[End Track 39. Begin Track 40.]

10 Weaver: It's all, you know, done on desktop. Everything. It's a beautiful publication these days. And some, I mean, we've put out guides to the salamanders. We've put out papers on all kinds of stuff with math that's way beyond me. You know. It's become a wonderful publication.

15 Corrigan: Yeah. It's something to be proud of. Especially with that long running.

Weaver: I was editor of it for a while. But anyway, those are the kind of, we did. And that really has helped Missouri grow its base of information about the caves.

20 Corrigan: No, that's great. No, thank you. I had that written down and then we didn't cover it there. No, thank you, that's great. Well thank you for giving up most of your day today. I appreciate it.

Weaver: Oh, that's okay.

25 Corrigan: And I think we got a lot of great information. I think it will be a great addition to the collection. These books will be a nice addition, the ones we were missing from the collection. I just really appreciate you giving up most of your day.

30 Weaver: That's all right. That's what I do. If you want to talk again anytime, if you have some gaps, just email me a question and I'll fire an email back to you.

Corrigan: Okay. Sounds good. I'm going to go ahead and shut off the recorder here.

35 Weaver: Okay.

Corrigan: But thank you very much.

[End Interview.]

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