BB: Ok, so I just pressed record. So we’re officially recording. So the other thing I have to do is make this statement to you. So, the key objective of this interview is to serve as a research tool to document memories of the American chestnut in the southern Appalachian region. Information attained in these interviews will be retained and made available for future use in efforts to promote a better understanding of the role of American chestnut in Appalachian culture. Have you signed the participant identification and release agreements?

JR: yeah.

BB: Ok great. Now we can start. And the way I like to start usually is can I have you state your name, where you were grew up, and when you were born, some background information like that.

JR: ok, right now?

BB: yeah, go ahead.

BR: I’m JJ Range, physician. I was born in 1917 in Johnson City Tennessee and have lived or been connected with this area all my life.

BB: so I guess one of the first things I wanted to ask is do you have any first hand memories yourself of seeing the American chestnut growing around Johnson City?

JR: I’ve seen chestnuts all over east Tennessee. My family liked to go out and camp, have picnics and bonfires and got out, stayed overnight. Oh, we were always happy, particularly since we were kids, that we could find some chestnuts, because they had something we liked to eat. And that was why, of any recollection of importance of the chestnut tree. For one thing, chestnut was the prime wood to build anything with because it was so sturdy and resists wear readily. And people would always want to get a house built with chestnut trees, chestnut wood.

BB: was your house made out of chestnut? Was your house in town made out of chestnut?

JR: oh, this is really before that. This goes back to when people were not living in the types of houses they are now. Of course they’re not using any chestnut wood now because they can’t find it. Anybody that finds a house that was made of chestnut, there’s no way of saying how much they could make from selling it for whatever anybody would pay for it. Its now quite expensive when the old chestnut wood can be found, but there’s no essential American chestnut wood that is taken now. The American chestnut and some of the other chestnut all got affected, but the American chestnut, which was the best one, got whacked a lot worse than the others. Some of the other chestnuts are around, but people don’t cut them like they used to, and that’s helping all of the chestnuts come back a little bit at a time. It will take a century if they have good weather and people handle it right.
BB: so when you were young and you would be out in the woods with your family, would you know how to identify a tree, or did you picnic in the same spot over and over and you knew where the trees would be?

JR: well, the adults – of course, one thing was, we were just kids, we were out running around while the grownups were setting up camp. If we found a chestnut tree we sat there and ate them, and they were always very good, much better than the other chestnuts as far as taste went.

BB: how did you eat them? How did you get them out of the hulls and everything, the burrs?

JR: we stomped on the burrs until they came out.

BB: did you have shoes on, or-?

JR: oh yeah. If not we'd take a hammer and chisel of some sort and take the burr off from the outside, and then always have a knife that we could take the shell of the chestnut off, eat all the meat inside.

BB: so that would have been in the fall of the year.

JR: mostly, yeah. If we got into a place where the chestnuts had not been picked over, that was always a big boon because then we could have chestnuts for a much longer period of time. Wouldn't tell anybody where it was.

BB: so, did you ever eat them any other way than just raw? How else did you eat them?

JR: oh yeah. Women were always adding them to various things that they cooked. For one thing, because they had a good taste and they put a good taste in the vegetable and fruits that they would fix. And, always gave them something to chew on.

BB: do you remember anything specifically that they would add it to? Do you remember any specific dishes or vegetables that they would add the nuts to?

JR: oh, they would put it in with turnips and that sort of thing that they cooked, and enhanced the taste of turnips and other vegetables.

BB: so when they would put those chestnuts in with their cooking, was that chestnut that someone in their family went out to gather, or were they chestnut that they bought at the store? Where did they come from?

JR: most of the time if was we would go out and pick them up. They didn’t last long in a store because they would be bought up quickly after anybody put them in a store to sell. At the end of popularity of American chestnut because the blight got them the Chinese chestnuts were not as hard hit by the blight, and there were a lot more Chinese chestnuts but they didn’t have any taste compared to the American chestnuts. And as a result, Chinese chestnuts were not eaten nearly as readily as the American chestnuts.
BB: how were they different?

JR: in taste.

BB: they just didn’t taste like anything?

JR: they had a lot less taste of chestnut than the American chestnut, and they did not add to any of the cooking as far as taste went.

BB: ok. So if you bought chestnuts at the store, where would they have come from?

JR: oh, they all would be local. A lot of kids that didn’t like them would pick them up and take them to the store and sell them, but they didn’t last long in the store at all, people were readily buying them up.

BB: you said earlier that there was a railroad that ran right through Johnson City. Do you remember anybody ever putting chestnuts on those trains to go anywhere, or trading them farther off? Anything like that?

JR: most of the railway trains were freight trains, and they had passenger trains but with the advent of the automobile and improvement of roads that went down and now I’m not sure that there are any regular passenger trains. Maybe in New York and around in places like that where people get on the trains for an hour to go work some place else. But most all of the trains now are great big long freight trains.

BB: so you don’t remember having any memories of chestnuts being used as a freight, to send up north or anywhere.

JR: no, I don’t have any knowledge of that.

BB: ok. Well, some people have talked about chestnuts being used as a livestock feed, and there being hogs let loose in the woods. Do you remember ever seeing that?

JR: yes.

BB: how did that work? How did they set their hogs loose like that? How did they ever get them back?

JR: they’d come back to food. It was only when as area got more heavily populated that they put fences up to keep them. It started out earlier than that with people feeding the cows in a certain place every day and they would come in to get the food. They would graze other areas around that as, when they were not being fed at the time they did not have time at that place which they were given food every day. And they handled that way. Of course, they could, the people, the farmers could feed them in such a way that they could handle them. Maybe it was a strip of barbed wire put around, and that will keep them because they don’t want to get with the barbed wire at all. Only once did they do that [laughs]
BB: you were talking a little bit earlier about how people liked to build things out of chestnut, like houses and fences and stuff like that. Do you remember any specific buildings in Johnson City that was built out of chestnut, or did you ever cut down a chestnut tree. Or do you have any stories about the wood?

JR: well the wood, as I stated, was used by the builder. If they were building any type of the building in colorful wood they would want chestnut because it was so sturdy and so much more practical. Now they’re down to a lot of pinewood which doesn’t last near as long. A house that was built way back, oh, 100 150 years ago, if they could they would build it out of American chestnut. And apparently Chinese chestnuts and other kinds of chestnuts, the woods are not as good for structures as American chestnut was.

BB: so, you were in medicine your life, did you ever hear about any medicinal uses for chestnuts. Any health benefits of it?

JR: no, I don’t remember there was anything in my experience with that.

BB: so it would like in your family- did most families do camping and picnic trips like that, or do you think not as much as your family.

JR: no, I think we were a little before people accepted that. We were just outdoorsy because we, 4 boys in my family, we had enough activity that it was better if it was outside, not inside. [laughs]

BB: so you had 3 brothers?

JR: I had a brother and a sister. And, of course I’m talking about my children. Because we, our camping and outdoors from the time I was little, and we went on the, stayed overnight, had camp fire, got going at one point that we had a trailer that was home made that we could put 4 ¾ beds and 2 single beds on each side of that trailer, propped them up, and you could have about, under circumstances, you could put 5 people on either side, but that was not a very well taken type of activity. They, they got kicking each other and all that stuff.

BB: so what would you do on these camping trips, hike around? Tell stories?

JR: h yeah, we’d camp, if we were going somewhere we’d usually have something there that we wanted to do, usually hiking around, up the mountain. So on. And this area of Tennessee and North Carolina was quite taken with that, and not many places have I found that that activity was as localized as it was.

BB: why do you think that is?

JR: just the people, that’s what they like to do. I can’t get into that, because I don’t have any idea what brain function. I’ve been trying to figure that for too many years.[laughs]

BB: well, maybe its so beautiful here, people are more inspired to get out, walk around.
JR: this is sort of a unique area in that, it’s on the way through to somewhere else in certain aspects, because it’s easy to get along the highways that are here, there’s good traffic through the highway through the area.

BB: Was that true traditionally too, the trains and stuff, travel through Cumberland Gap and stuff, down into North Carolina, people came through here?

JR: well, the southern railway came from, started in New York and through Washington, and through, Roanoke Virginia, Bristol, Johnson City, Knoxville, and on into Nashville. From Knoxville some of them split and went down to Chattanooga on down towards Atlanta. The other railroad was from Elkhorn, Kentucky down to Spartanburg, South Carolina, and it was mainly freight. Still is. And it is, that has been going on, that railroad has, lets see, it’s over 100 years old. That was the straight shoot from the Midwest to the southeastern coast. And it was and still is, they had a number trains through both ways.

BB: so was there a lot of logging through here, or what was the main economy here when you were growing up.

JR: logging? There was some of that. Generally, flooring, this is took a bunch of oak, which is a little bit short in volume now, but before oak it was you could get chestnut flooring. And that was the first thing that they stocked because of shortage of chestnuts. That was probably as much as anything else. And of course, swapping box cars and freight here between the two railroads, because they crossed pretty much at regular angles and they wanted, in other words.

BB: there was a round house here or whatever?

JR: the Southern came down, as I said before, from Washington down through Roanoke, Bristol, Johnson City, Knoxville and it split up down there, Nashville and on to Chattanooga. And the Clinchfield was the shorter, shorter length, and it went from Elkhorn, Kentucky where it was a hub for freight being sent to the coast.

BB: freight, what would the freight have been?

JR: any kind of thing that’s used down along the shore that they would get there at, a lot of lumber they’d pick up, and they – one essential that I haven’t mentioned that’s really most important is coal, because they would get the coal in Kentucky and the coal trains would be twice as long as the others, and they’d take it down to South Carolina and on down, because they didn’t have any coal down there. That was the closest.

BB: were there any tanneries around here? Some people have said that the chestnut trees were used, they used to grind it up and use it for the tannin in the bark. Have you heard anything about tanneries or remember anything about that?

JR: using bark for the tannery, yes. They had one here but, and it wasn’t a great big one, but they did use bark for their tanning. The last of the tannery was knocked down about a year ago.
BB: I'll pause it. --- One other thing I've been asking people is were there any traditions or sayings, songs, festivals or gatherings that concentrated on the chestnut that you can remember. Like I guess in your family it was a tradition to go camping, and part of that was gathering chestnuts, but was there any other traditions that you can think of that were city wide, or community wide, neighborhood wide, that involved chestnut?

JR: I can't recall anything like that.

BB: was chestnut more of a snack that you would eat here and there, or was it a part –

JR: every chance you got.

BB: was it kind of a snack you'd have here or there or was it actually a part of-- would you eat chestnuts everyday, or once a week, or once a month.

JR: well, it was according to when you got filled up. You ate them until you got filled up and then it'd vary with various people. Some people would eat them every day that they could get them. And it worked on down to someone might eat them every 3 or 4 weeks, something like that. About like most anything, personal desires hold sway.

BB: what did the chestnuts look like when they were growing in the mountains here? How were they different from other trees?

JR: the older ones were great big. I don't know any specific amount, but it seems to me that they had trunks 4 or 5 feet in diameter, and those of course, people would get to first, and if they weren't protected by somebody that owned the land that they were on, why they'd go for building. But that was, this is gone on, the oak trees, that's, the oaks are a little behind chestnuts, the chestnuts went first and then the oaks. There's some along with the, now the hemlocks are going, but the local people who used American chestnut first, and then the others secondary in their building. That was one of the main things that they used them for. Of course, the chestnut fruit, that's just a real add on.

BB: did your grandparents, did you grow up around your grandparents?

JR: yeah, they lived next door.

BB: oh perfect. Did they depend on chestnuts more in their lifetime than you did in your lifetime, or growing up anyway?

JR: I think they probably used more chestnut lumber. I don't remember that I have ever used any.

BB: their houses were made of chestnut?
JR: they would use it for the main rafters where they needed strength. Chestnut is heavier than most of the other woods, and for that it is stronger. Wouldn't bend as easily, and was used by whoever could get a hold of it.

BB: do you remember when you first heard about the blight?

JR: well, we used to go up abouts in North Carolina, and camped at the foot of Grandfather Mountain, and there were, when we started we were kids, 85, 90 years ago. Not 90, but 75 or 80 years, because I’m just 90. We got to one place, set up a tent, set of a trailer, that was a good camping spot. One I particularly remember, it was at thanksgiving one year we went up there and it snowed, and our parents gathered up some rocks, you know, 6, 8, inches in diameter, put them in the fire, got them hot, put towels around them and put them in our beds. We of course slept good. Everybody had their rocks in the bed and they’d sleep around them, but that was the coldest, or course that was below freezing. Nobody could think of it now, having to do that, I’m sure there are some people somewhere that that would be apropos.

BB: so you remember the blight when you were on those camping trips?

JR: I wasn’t aware of anything like that when I was that age. It worked slowly, and spread slowly, but it was deadly to the tree. Then, as I got older, that is up junior high and high school, I remember something was said but I didn’t pay much attention to it. Didn’t know what it was, didn’t make much difference. As it went on I became knowledgeable of what it was doing.

BB: what did it look like?

JR: when I say you could see it, I mean you could see its effect on the wood itself. It looked like a little flake powder type of stuff as far as I remember, and it was under, as I remember, it was sort of under the bark, got in and worked there. But it was slow. And it was well along before there was any bog to do about it. That's when people realized they weren’t growing, the small trees were not growing. They were not growing up to even where they would be good lumber. And this is the way that most of these blights work on trees. I think there’s probably maybe some Chinese chestnuts, they’re about the only ones that have any big trees left as far as I know.

BB: that’s right, they’re pretty resistant.

JR: yeah, of course their nuts are not a thing that compares with the American chestnut as far as taste and eat-ability.

BB: do you remember what the sentiment was? How old would you say you were when the blight came through here? Do you have any sense of what age you would have been?

JR: lets see. I guess I was maybe 15 years old, probably when I first turned 15, 20. Somewhere in that stage, in other words I was still in school, as far as local schools.
BB: was it something that the younger people cared about, or was it just the older people that cared about it, or did anybody really care about it at all?

JR: well, they didn't know what, it took a while to really get on to what was going on. And then they got seriously concerned about it. Of course as it went along, trees stopped growing, small trees, the ones that were not building any resistance in time I think that time has worn on now, they're probably building a resistance. That will probably take a long time.

BB: did anyone do anything around here to try to stop the blight? Was there any action taken around here that you remember?

JR: no. A lot of talk about it but I don't remember anybody being able to do much about it.

BB: so do you remember when you were no longer able to find chestnuts on those camping trips? Did a time come?

JR: yeah, that was later on. I have camped variously over a period of time. When I was, after I went to college and through medical school why, I had no contact with it at all, because my mind was on something else, I wasn't thinking about it. Actually, I guess it was 25 or 30 years ago that I saw what it was and I didn't know what to do with it. I found out after time that nobody else did. And, since then they've been working on trying to build immunity and I don't know exactly how far they have some on that, but apparently if it comes back, say in our generation, or your generation, it will be in protected areas that the trees will be allowed to grow and become great big again. This has happened to others. Oak has gone through one of these, and I think there was some concern about the walnuts being affected at some point.

BB: so, do you think that the loss of the chestnut had any direct economic impact on your family?

JR: I think it happened so slowly it didn't have much effect.

BB: so what replaced chestnut? If people didn't build their houses out of chestnut, what did they build it out of, if they didn't eat chestnut as part of their diet, what replaced chestnut?

JR: I'm not acquainted with how much people ate nuts as a definite part of their diet, other than something that was pleasant to eat. In other words, they didn't eat it much for, you wouldn't eat say, a while bowl of chestnuts and nothing else. If you did that, why that would last you for a while. But everybody liked them and they were missed a great deal by the populous that knew about them.

BB: did some people not really know about them?

JR: some people it didn't make any difference.

BB: who were they?
JR: various people. That concerned more of their type of thinking that, you know, that maybe they could care about it, it didn’t make any difference to them, but a lot of us that miss them. Be happy to get them again. And they’re trying to, after that sort of they tried to make that Chinese chestnuts, they got affected less than the American chestnuts.

BB: well actually there’s an organization called the American Chestnut Foundation, they’ve been working for 20 years now, maybe 25, and what they did is, you’re right, the Chinese is more blight resistant than the American, so what they’ve been doing is breeding the Chinese and the American, and what they’ve got now is a tree that’s 15/16th American, and 1/16th Chinese. And they think they’ve got a tree that will grow back in the wild here, in Johnson City and all through the Appalachian range. And they’re getting close to the point where they’re going to try to release it back in the wild and develop a plan so they can just turn them loose and they’ll start regenerating in the woods.

JR: what do the chestnuts taste like?

BB: I don’t know. I’ve heard. Oh, the ones in the American? Supposedly it looks like an American, tastes like an American, walks and talks like an American, but it’s got this blight resistance of the Chinese.

JR: well, did getting the blight resistance take away the taste of it?

BB: not that I know. I know what they’re trying to do is breed in only those genes that have the blight resistance, and keep all the others American. What I’ve heard is that it walks and talks like an American but has the blight resistance of the Chinese. Have you been involved in those efforts at all?

JR: no. I just learned, along the way, that they were trying to do this. I knew that that would take a good while to do it. Couldn’t do it in 4 or 5 years, your talking 20, 30, 40 years.

BB: do you think its important to restore the tree to this area, or why or why not?

JR: I think that ultimately they will do that with the chestnut and they will do that with the oak trees, because the oaks are taking a big hit. They’re little trees are coming along but they don’t have the big oak trees that they need to use particularly in the building trades.

BB: say they release these trees and they populate back in the wild, and you can go walking in the woods and see big old chestnut trees with lots of chestnut burrs all over them. How will people use the tree today, will they use them the same way they did back when you were young, or differently, or how would that be different or the same?

JR: I think the most people would eat every chestnut they could find, and because they’re not really many people who look too far forward, when you’re talking about a big bunch of people. They’ve got to use a little bit of trickery to get their point across somewhere or other to the one that don’t have the desire to be part of it the regrowth of the American chestnut.
BB: how do you think we could get people more involved or interested?

JR: I think that's probably a part of their bringing up. They do that like they do most other things. If they got interested in it, why they would go hog wild, but if they just average I don't think they would get too excited about it. It took a long time to get where it is, it will take a long time to get back. I don't think they ought to take the chestnuts they're working with and throw them out on the grocery counter. I think they ought to use them, and I think that the scientists that are working with it will do just that. That's part of their living, getting some enjoyment out of what they're doing. The old people are the ones that are going to try to build it back, do things to do it, like keep it away and keep growing more and more and not destroying their base of operation, base product. I don't think you'll see it, I know I won't see it. But, somehow in 25 years you'll be able to see a difference. I think it will take that long. A 25-year-old chestnut tree should be pretty good sized, a foot in diameter or more.

BB: do you think people will use the wood and eat the nuts in the same way you did when you were young.

JR: when they get enough reproduction and growth, then I think you can go ahead and start eating more of the chestnuts, but they'll need a little telling them what to do.

BB: some people have talked about when they were young, boys would stomp chestnut burrs with their bare feet to prove they were tough. Did you ever see any of that, or hear of that around here?

JR: not that way. I have seen and experienced walking barefooted in the woods and stepped on one and I did not like it.

BB: how old were you.

JR: I sat down, not on a burr, and started picking those things out of my foot. Yeah, I guess there would be some people somewhere whose feet were tough enough to do that, but not in anyplace where people wore shoes.

BB: yeah, I think it was more people in rural areas, who'd walk to school barefoot and they'd build up calluses throughout the year.

BB: so would people bring chestnuts to school in their school lunch boxes and stuff? Just raw ones?

JR: yeah. Go and use a stick or a piece or rock and get the burr off of it, and break the chestnuts out, put them between your two back teeth and crack them. And they'll crack this was and that way, if you do it right, and you pull it out, pull both sides off, eat it. That's what you always tried to do is get the point in your bottom teeth and squeeze with the upper teeth and it cracks the chestnut this way and this way, and you can get it out, eat it. [laughs]
BB: were there any games you’d play with chestnuts at all. I’m just thinking that they’re these little hand held, marble sized things. Were there any little games you could play with a chestnut? Throw it at a target, I don’t know.

JR: there was more thought about eating them.

BB: you didn’t want to play with they, just eat them.

JR: you could play with other things.

BB: yeah, I just thought about that, I never thought about playing with them. Were there any other things you would eat out of the woods like that, or was chestnut the main one? Were there any other things you would eat?

JR: oh there are a number of things. Berries and, you could find a berry bush full of berries you could pull them off and eat them. I’ve done that many many times. And there are other things that you, apples, pick them off the ground, wipe them on your britches, go ahead and eat it.

BB: would people ever bake chestnuts in bread? Was there any special holiday dish that you would have chestnuts in?

JR: that doesn’t strike a bell. I’m sure various people would have various things to do with cooking, but I don’t know specifically about what they would do.

BB: were there any places around here named after chestnut? Chestnut street, chestnut hollow?

JR: yeah Chestnut Ridge, there’s one down somewhere. Where is it, Chestnut Ridge? I think its up in the North Carolina Mountains. You look on a map along this Appalachian range and you can find things named after chestnuts, or had chestnut in their name.

BB: why would a place be named after chestnut?

JR: I guess the commonest thing would be that there were chestnuts there and they referred to that area, whether is it was chestnut trees that they were talking about or something else, they would say, well down by the chestnut trees there, down in chestnut hollow. It was commonly used, I sure did hate to see them go.

BB: do you remember how you felt when you heard about the chestnut blight, or when you realized you would never eat a chestnut again?

JR: it really happened and came full force when I was away at school. And that was from 1936 to 1950. Yeah, I came back here and started a practice in 1950. When I was in college, in medical school, internship and so on, I didn’t think about any specific stuff. I ate what they served me and that was it, just filled up my stomach because I had my mind on medical stuff. I would go to miss so and so to do what, something she needed to so to get her heart working.
BB: well before I called you up today, when was the last time you thought about chestnuts, is it something you think about often or just here and there?

JR: There’s several places that, where there were chestnut trees all along that every time I go by I think oh, I’d love to have those chestnuts there. One of them is at the foot of Grandfather Mountain; turn off the highway between Blowing Rock and Linville. Those were the biggest chestnut trees that I’ve seen. There was one up there I think was fully 3 feet in diameter.

BB: you remember the exact spot?

JR: yeah. Well the last time I was up there was a year or so ago, and they were encroaching on that with buildings and various sorts. That’s the area that the Scottish Games are played up there every year in the summer time.

BBL I’ve heard of those I think.

JR: and I found out that there are some Irish men and that have Irish games, but I haven’t heard about it in so long. They’re trying to build up the same kind of deal as the Scottish games, but I think its somewhere down in the Carolinas

BB: that would have been a long trip to get down to Linville from here, right? I guess, well I guess I’ve been to Boone from here?

JR: it’s about, let’s see, oh easily, taking an easy ride is maybe an hour to Linville is 45 minutes.

BB: are there any other things from your childhood that you lament similarly to the chestnut. Or is the chestnut a symbol or the good old days, or a time that’s passed?

JR: well the time has passed because the chestnuts are gone. I think very good of those every now and then, like you’re describing. And I wish I could have chestnuts again, sure. But, reality is reality. I’ve got to where if reality is that, I’ve got to go with reality.

BB: I know you said you’re not involved in the restoration, but what do you think motivated people to try to restore the chestnut tree, why do you think people want to restore it.

JR: I think people in the business of making things grow take it as a challenge. I think a lot of those people, they do things to make it work for them, and they get a big bang out of that. Scientists of all sorts, I think exactly, well now if I can make this work Ms. So and so can get so and so better. Most of the time I want to get this thing done so I can help most of the people, not just one person. I think that’s trouble. And I think that’s what motivates a lot of scientists.

BB: that’s interesting. So, you’re saying that scientists are motivated as a challenge to see if they can do it?

JR: yes.
BB: so why do you think they would have decided to take on the challenge of the chestnut tree as opposed to some other species?

JR: because its been hit the hardest.

BB: so it’s the most dramatic...

JR: well its been hit the hardest and is one of the most renowned things in that category and there is, down the line if they can get the growth of these chestnut trees back it will be a personal pleasure for these fellows, scientific fellows that want to do it.

BB: something interesting to me is that it’s such a long shot. That they’re trying to breed this tree that can resist this blight, but not only does it have to be able to resist the blight but get tall enough to get into the canopy, and they have to look in the future and see other diseases or blights that might come and hit it again, who’s to say that there won’t come and wipe out all this work that people have dedicated their lives to. And its interesting to me that its such a long shot but people are so dedicated to it, and care so much about it. It seems to me like a lot of people involved in the chestnut project had a father who told them as a child about the chestnut blight, and how the chestnut is this 'little engine that could' type of tree. Do you have any thoughts on that; do you think that's accurate?

JR: I think there’s a couple of people who’d treat this subject like that, and then there’s other that just say, well, lets kill that blight and get these trees working again. That’d be a different attitude. It comes down to people.

BB: well you've been really great. It’s hard to find people who have memories of the tree, and remember it, really remember it. Is there anything else you can think of, memories of the chestnut, other memories you have?

JR: well I can think of places I’ve seen these large trees. Like the base of Grandfather Mountain. There was a couple in Boone, on a hill back of the hill where that big building is up on top of the- you know about Boone?

BB: I’ve been through there a couple times, the big hotel up there, the Boone Hotel or whatever, the school. Yeah, I think I’ve been up that hill.

JR: its something that they built up there, I think it’s the University. That used to be a teacher’s college like this one was here, and the one in Chattanooga. It was started and run by, lets see, my grandmother’s sister married Dolf Dougherty, and he was president, and Bland Dougherty was vice president, and when Dolf Dougherty died Bland Dougherty was made president of the school. And its still, it’s a great old big place now. I’ve been up there lots of times when I was a kid. My Uncle went up there, spent about 2 or 3 weeks every summer with my Aunts. But, that was a lovely family. They all worked together and got that place. I wanted to go to Duke school, and I thought maybe Uncle Bland could help me out. I went up there and talked to him, told him I wanted to go to Duke to school. And he said, now buddy, I know who you want to talk to over there, I’ll just write him a letter.
When I went over there to apply I said, I'm the fella, and he said, so you're the one who Bland Dougherty was talking about.

BB: so you went to Duke?

JR: yeah.

BB: neat.

JR: when the Duke family was really interested in that school there was a niece of the guy that started that up there, her name was Mary Duke Bill (?) And at that time Dike was really on the high, and of course that was way back there. That was in the mid 30s. And since that time they went through a period, and from where I was looking at it, I saw that it was going down and I think they hit the bottom when the pulled all that stuff on that bunch of boys over there having a party and somebody, the guy, the lawyer for the old girl that spinning her wheels. Why, he lost his job and his ability to practice law over that. And they got through with him, he knew that he had been had. I don't know what he's doing. But he was going to make a big deal about that, but he was going to stick the hot poker in duke. And they guy that was the principle at duke, he wasn't much on the ball, raised a lot of fuss over that, expel them this that and the other, and when it all wrapped up, they boys have taken them apart. I think each of them boys, is to talk it off, he got about a million dollars out of that. I think that was the nastiest thing I ever say....

BB: well, is that going to do it. Chestnut memories, tapped out. Pulled them all out of you?

JR: this end of town is up on a hill, and it's covered with forest. The old boy that lived there, his nephew has it now and he's rented it to a family, they've got a real jungle going on, probably 3,4 hundred yards one way, 200 yards the other way. It's interesting. I'm thinking how am I going to get in there to see if there is a chestnut tree in there. I called the nephew that's had charge of the thing, he rents this stuff out. He said yeah, go ahead, go in there and look. I haven't found one.

BB: why were you hunting them? How long ago was this?

JR: yesterday.

BB: did you remember one being back there or something?

JR: it's been a long time since I've been there, because I've had no call to go there. But the old lawyer that lived there he had it all cleaned up. This is sort of a morass they have over there now, its all grown up. And the other place is right up here across, they've got a big dip and its sort of a pool type thing there. There's no water in it, but there's a lot of undergrowth of trees. I couldn't see any chestnut.

BB: were you looking in those two places because you remember some being there?
JR: No, I was just, it would be the place that could grow one if it just happened. I was just, you know, shooting in the dark.

BB: ok, well I think that was great. Thank you so much, those were some really good memories.