

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **John Abram Huffman (CN 389, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words that were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

() Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was made by Wayne D. Weber and was completed in February 2010.

Please note: This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.



Collection 389, Tape 1. Oral history interview with John Abram Huffman Sr. by Robert Shuster on April 14, 1988

SHUSTER: If you could say a few words we'll see how this picks up. [Recording is stopped and restarted] This is an interview with Rev. John A. Huffman by Robert Shuster for the Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College. This interview took place at 2:00PM at the offices of the Archives at the Billy Graham Center on April 14, 1988. Rev. Huffman why don't we...let me ask first what does the "A" stand for?

HUFFMAN: Abram.

SHUSTER: Abram.

HUFFMAN: Right.

SHUSTER: Why don't we start off with you're birth and childhood. Where were born?

HUFFMAN: I was born in Dayton, Ohio, one year before the great Dayton flood, 1912.

SHUSTER: And tell me a little bit about your parents.

HUFFMAN: My father was a minister

SHUSTER: And his name was?

HUFFMAN: He was Dr. J.A. Huffman. He...his first name was not John, however. I'm John Sr., there is a John Jr., and John Jr. is J.A. Huffman, III. The three of us have the same initials but Dad's name was Jasper Abraham Huffman. And he started preaching, he was a farm boy, he started preaching at eighteen years of age and was one of the early ministers in what was then known as the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. He always maintained his identity with that group. It changed its name later to the United Missionary Church and then after that it united with the Missionary Church Association of Fort Wayne, Indiana. And the two combined churches are know now as the Missionary Church.

SHUSTER: And your mother's name?

HUFFMAN: My mother's name was Elizabeth Lambert Huffman. Her father was a minister in the same denomination and they were from Pennsylvania, Dutch extraction. She was born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Dad was born up near Goshen, Elkhart, Indiana.

SHUSTER: So your father was a pastor and your mother came from a pastor's family.

HUFFMAN: He was in his very early years a pastor. He spent most of his life in Christian education. He was underprivileged when it came to his early years of training. Was very...very gifted in particularly in languages and...but he started preaching before he'd even gone to college.

And he did go through college and seminary. He went to Bluffton College [Bluffton, Ohio] and...and then on to McCormick Seminary [Chicago, Illinois]. Graduated from McCormick and much of his life was engaged in Christian education. He was with Marston Seminary at Bluffton College. Bluffton was a Mennonite school but a different branch of Mennonite. He also has a history of the Mennonite Church movement some eighteen branches of the Mennonite Churches he has in his history. He went from Bluffton College to Marion College, Marion, Indiana, which was a Wesleyan Methodist school although he did not change his denomination affiliation. He became dean of the Marion Divinity School at Marion College and brought the Mennonite boys of his own denomination headed for higher education into Marion, many of them went to Marion. He was at Marion about fourteen years and then went to Taylor University. Became dean of Taylor University School of Religion and was there for about nine years. In 1928 he became president of Winona Lake School of Theology. And that story will unfold a bit in our...in our interview because I followed him as president.

SHUSTER: And how did he become involved with Winona and how did make contact with them?

HUFFMAN: Well, the first contact he had with that group of people, of course, the...the Mennonite people are Anabaptist and first real contact he had with the...the Covenant group...the Presbyterian group came in his ministry in Bible conference work across the country. He ran across the path of Dr. William Edward Biederwolf who was a great Presbyterian author and pastor and...and Dr. Biederwolf at that time was director of the Winona Lake Bible Conference. And spotted dad and asked him if he would like to come and help bring some academic respectability to the work that was going on rather haphazardly educating ministers in the summer time which was started in 1920 by Dr. G. Campbell Morgan. And so in 1928 dad did go there [train passing by] Winona Lake School of Theology was then and always remained a summer program. It was probably one of the first [pauses] continuing education courses in the country for ministers. But it became recognized and continued until 1970 as a...it was dubbed "America's unique summer seminary" but it was recognized by schools that were in the American Association of Evan...American Association of Theological Schools. And the Association had no accrediting department for distinctly summer schools but they did watch the work that was done there and authorize there member schools to option to give credit for work done at Winona and later it became a member of the Association through it's contact with...with Fuller Seminary.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that [Huffman clears throat] before your father came the education was haphazard. What did you mean by that?

HUFFMAN: Well, he, he really never went to high school.

SHUSTER: No, I don't mean his education, I meant the education at Winona.

HUFFMAN: Oh. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan came occasionally to Winona Lake as a Bible conference speaker and always was very popular with ministers. And so in the year 1920 when Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was there, the great British preacher and scholar, the facilities of Bethany Girls Camp was open to Dr. G. Campbell Morgan in a special program where they announced that ministers that were really interested in Bible study could come and take a serious Bible training course over a period of two and a half weeks down on the campus of...of the girl's camp. And they



had an auditorium that would seat about three thousand...three hundred people. And it was so popular, Dr. Morgan's course, that they had two sessions a day and that auditorium was filled with ministers some six hundred meeting daily with Dr. Morgan. And in his inimitable way he put a big blackboard up and charted the outline of his lecture of the day and they were just eager for it. And then Dr. Taft [clears throat] Taft who was at Northern Baptist Seminary at the time came and sort of gave some leadership to the formation of a school there [clears throat]. And then Dr. Taft didn't have the time or the disposition to concentrate on that enough to give it proper leadership. So father was brought there as the director of the summer school in 1928 and spent all of his summers from then on until many years later developing that and putting it on a real curriculum basis.

SHUSTER: What was Dr. Biederwolf's connection?

HUFFMAN: Dr. Biederwolf at the time was the head of the Bible conference and he, he sort of was known as the director of the Winona Lake School of Theology. Biederwolf was a brilliant man, he was...he was a...a Princeton man and yet he...he was an evangelist primarily. And he realized he didn't have the qualifications to really set up a curriculum for a theological seminary but he was the sort of behind the scenes power getting money and...and support for the institution all through his remaining years.

SHUSTER: Now did your family move to Winona Lake or did you live there?

HUFFMAN: We had a summer place at Winona Lake from 1928 on and I was born in 1912 so I grew up right at Winona Lake. Always in the summers there were many, many summers I never missed Winona Lake. And it was a long season Winona Lake in those days. Had closed gates, it was known as Chautauqua center it has a ten day Chautauqua course, I mean, program bringing some of the greatest talent of the country there, Madame Shuman-Heined there, Gala [Alberto] Kircher [?], Susie, [John Philip] Sousa...a Sousa Band you name them [clears throat] pardon me, they came, Salvi the world's greatest harpist, they had magicians there, and then the Bible conference as such was a trendy affair too, and it was big. The Billy Sunday Tabernacle, which conservatively seated seven thousand five hundred people, was filled...filled in those days and they ran a very intensive programs about ten services a day, Bible conference services, during the Bible conference. And it was really America's playground and America's greatest Bible conference center.

SHUSTER: What was the attraction about Winona Lake, why was that spot....

HUFFMAN: Well, it was it was in pretty good proximity to Midwestern populace, it was on the Pennsylvania Railroad, fast trains from New York to Chicago went right through Winona Lake, has a station there. [Clears throat] And it was very beautiful lake and had facilities for taking care of thousands of people in the summertime. Most everyone that lived on Winona Lake in those days had property that was income property in the summer months. Many of them lived on the income of the summer. They owned their own interurban system in the early days going down to Peru, Indiana up to Goshen and Logansport and all that rich farming area.

SHUSTER: Like a trolley car?

HUFFMAN: Trolley cars, yes and they...it was owned by the Winona Corporation. You couldn't get into Winona without a pass, you couldn't own property at Winona Lake in those days unless you signed the covenant: you'd have no Sunday boating, no Sunday swimming, no card playing, no smoking, no drinking on the premises, and the property owners were responsible to see that their guests behaved accordingly or they were ousted.

SHUSTER: You mentioned that Winona had closed gates...

HUFFMAN: Yes.

SHUSTER: ...what did you mean by that?

HUFFMAN: Literally. There was a...there was a fence around the entire compound and there were only one or two entrances. One main entrance and always a gate teller there and gates went up and down like on the freeway and you had to show your pass or you didn't get in.

SHUSTER: And the purpose of that was?

HUFFMAN: It was to keep the Hittites out [laughs].

SHUSTER: Meaning?

HUFFMAN: Maintain...maintain a standard. That was...it was never officially Presbyterian but it was denominated by Presbyterians and in those day Presbyterianism was quite puritan and these standards that I mentioned were the standards of the church at that time. A very interesting that many people do not know that William Jennings Bryan was at one time president of the Winona Lake Corporation. Later, of course, many, many years later, R.G. LeTourneau was the big man at Winona because he saved it from bankruptcy. But the gates were open by that time. When Prohibition went out, the municipality of Winona Lake had to decide whether it was going to continue with closed gates and had no post office, no government recognition, or whether they would let down the bars on these restriction which were becoming pretty much Blue Laws [laws against activities on Sunday] by that time anyway. And that was one of the hardest decision that the fathers had to make when my dad was on the board as secretary at that time. Whether...of the Winona Lake Christian Assembly. And [John] Palmer Muntz succeeded Biederwolf as the director of the Winona Lake Bible Conference. And whole thing was pretty much controlled by the Winona Lake Christian Assembly board until...until the gates certainly went out. But it was to maintain a...a very well controlled Christian environment for families. Now in those days many of us would never go to the theater but we got the best pictures at Winona Lake, *Ben Hur*, *King of Kings*, pictures like that when they had made the run in theaters. Winona Lake had regular pictures through the summer months so we got to see all the good pictures anyway [laughs].

SHUSTER: What...what are your own earliest memories at least childhood memories?

HUFFMAN: Well, my very earliest child...childhood memories were in Bluffton, Ohio, when dad was both a teacher and a student. He was prepared being prepared to head up the, a department in the college so he spent time in Chicago at McCormick Seminary and also taught in the



undergraduate level when he finished McCormick he taught in, with Marsten Seminary which is a regular seminary, a Mennonite seminary. My very first memory was running away from home one day. We lived about a mile from the college, and there was a little hill near our house in the, Bluffton was a very pretty town (still is) and I had a wagon, I was three and a half possibly three, three and a half, and I use to see father disappear down the block and then go down that hill and I knew by going to chapel services and the like and occasionally vespers services that beyond the creek down at the bottom of the hill there was another hill went up to the college administration building. And I knew where Dad was going so I decided to go down and explore for myself. And I started out in the wagon got down, coasted down the hill I didn't have to use any foot power to get down there. Got down to the bottom of the hill and then didn't quite know how to get across the bridge and up the other hill. And a person by the name of Dad Lehman, who was the dean of men at Bluffton College at the time later became assistant director of the Westminster Choir famous choir, spotted me and he was one of 's students and he asked me where I was going and I said, "I wanted to see preach." So he said he was going to 's class, so he took me to class and he sat me beside him. Father was very surprised when he found he had an extra member of that class and after the class was over they duly escorted me home, Dad Lehman did took me in charge. That's my very earliest memory. [Shuster laughs] And I remember very happily the old May Day festivals and going to vesper services at the college and at that time the...that branch of the Mennonite Church which was the general conference was rather divided between the conservative group and the very strongly evangelical group. Bluffton was on the liberal fringe. The great Berne Church, Mennonite Church of Berne, Indiana probably the third largest Mennonite church in the world even today was on the conservative side of that. And the church was pretty well split between liberals and the conservatives. Father was on the conservative group coming from a minority group even to them. So his time at Bluffton was a [train passing by] period of about nine years in which Bluffton made some strides academically became recognized and...and became accredited. It also introduced right from Germany one or two real German rationalists in the theological department. Father had quite a, quite a time debating and trying to...to hold forth there for the conservatives and finally decided that for the sake of his family and for the sake of his own conscience he had to move on out to other fields of educational service. He went from there to Marion.

SHUSTER: Do you recall a particular point of doctrine that he was debating or....?

HUFFMAN: All I recall as a child was the fact that one of the doctors, whose name slips my mind now, one of the professors that had come directly from Germany would walk the entire distance for the college campus to our home. By that time we lived in...in our own home we rented there for a year or two when we first went there on Main Street, which was about a mile and a half from the college campus. And many, many times this professor would walk all the way home with my father just to argue theological. And I could see them waving there hands coming in and he would walk back then and this happened many, many times. The major differences were, I think, pretty much [pauses] the question of [unclear] experience of conversion. Basically in the seminary...seminary level it had to do with the authority of the scriptures and so forth. But the same issues that come up again and again now were very...very realistic then.

SHUSTER: Now were you an only child?

HUFFMAN: No, I had two other brothers, older. One four years older than I and one nine years older than I.

SHUSTER: And their names are?

HUFFMAN: My...they're both gone now. My oldest brother's name was D. Paul Huffman he was a...carried on sort of a Mennonite tradition, he was a...a ordained minister in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church but he was also a very successful businessman. Sort of a tent maker type of ministry, but he married the boss's daughter and finally became the treasurer and the president of the Bond Trigger Construction Company of Elkhart, Indiana and the Johnson Machine and Tool Company. And when one business wasn't going well the other was so they had a very fine business going there. And then he served a number of churches in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. One in Elkhart, Bethel Church, and several churches in that general area. My other brother was a Christian businessman. He said that he lived what we boys preached. [Shuster laughs] He wasn't a preacher, didn't feel called to preach. But he was very creative. He lived in Canton, Ohio, most of his adult life, earlier, earlier adult life and he was a man of conviction. He became assistant business manager of [unclear] Roller Bearing Company. Resigned his job during the war because he discovered that they didn't need business, they just wanted to keep name before the public and he felt in very questionable ways with pretty models and so forth and he was asked to do things his conscience wouldn't allow him to do so he resigned.

SHUSTER: That was World War II?

HUFFMAN: This was World War II, yes. And then he...he also purchased the Higley Publishing Company and published the *Higley Commentaries*. He also was one of the founders of Malone College and the Miami Bible College. He was very active, he was a starter he got things started and then he moved on.

SHUSTER: And his name?

HUFFMAN: Lambert Huffman.

SHUSTER: Lambert Huffman.

HUFFMAN: Another one of my earliest memories was the, our permanent home in Bluffton was on the Dixie Highway and that was midway between Lima [Ohio] and Toledo [Ohio] and during the war World War number one and endless procession of Army trucks rolled down the Dixie Highway going south loaded with...with soldiers boys. And it in the days when trucks would get overheated and occasionally a truck would stop and the caravan would go around and they would come ask for water for the engine. We'd get buckets of water and give it to them. And I was very much alive when the Armistice [November 11, 1918] was signed and being of a Mennonite extraction, the president of Bluffton College was a real Menno...was a real German, a pro-Kaiser German. And because of that we had some pretty rough times during World War number one. When the natives of the town, good old Swiss village, felt that the college was pro-German, which it wasn't but there was no question what the president was and several of the professors. And they



had those who were conscientious objectors sign the yellow sheet, the yellow paper, my father...

SHUSTER: The college did?

HUFFMAN: No, the government did. So my father very innocently and naively went to Lehman and signed the yellow sheet. That made him a slacker in the eyes of the people.

SHUSTER: And what was the yellow sheet?

HUFFMAN: The yellow sheet was simply, I don't know it was yellow even, it was, it was a sheet the conscientious objectors were to sign to go on record as being a conscientious objector. That was part of...

SHUSTER: Information or a declaration?

HUFFMAN: ...that was a part of the Mennonite concept, of course, anti-war. And I remember one time a...things got very, very hostile and the college stood out as a non-loyal organization to the war effort because of their attitude on peace. And the citizens were pretty...pretty patriotic. I remember one time when an army of...of citizens came to our front lawn, as they did to others, with guns and shot above the house and my mother went to the door and my father physically picked her up and pulled her away from the door so that some person might just not get the idea to actually shooting. And then when the Armistice was signed my brother, my oldest brother, and I were in the parade, we were happy as anybody. There was a little blowing and horns were tooting it was a real armistice. There was a false Armistice a few days...a few hours before that. So I was marching up and down with the parade as happy as anybody could be that this war was over and a big ruffian, a businessman, the owner of the lumber company in town, spotted my as a son of...of the professor from the college and got me by the back of my neck and spit a nice big wad of tobacco juice down my neck. And I was a son of, you know, a disloyal person. And my brother, oldest brother who way nine years older than I, said, "Pacifism notwithstanding if he'd been just a little bit bigger he'd have flatten that guy" [laughs].

SHUSTER: So it didn't seem to take much courage to spit on a little kid.

HUFFMAN: No, no.

SHUSTER: Did your father ever explain to you why you were a child during World War I about pacifism or why people were acting this way?

HUFFMAN: Oh, oh sure he, he explained it to us and told us to watch our step and realize that passions were rising high and not...not to do anything to...to excite people. But it was a firm conviction that he held as well as many, many people that the war was wrong and this was.... On the other hand he was a member of a commission that went to see President Wilson to plead the case of the...of the conscientious objector. And with...with some success where boys would be assigned non-battle duty and didn't have to really just stay out of everything. But that was the Mennonite tradition.

SHUSTER: Did he describe to you anything about President Wilson or the meeting or...?

HUFFMAN: Well, that fact of the matter is he never saw Wilson. He got there and the president was busy and then they...they gave them good treatment and hear them out and they never saw Wilson. William Jennings Bryan was, of course, was a person that we learned to know later. He was secretary of state who resigned during the war because he could not go along with the war policies. But Bryan...if you're interested to know anything about Bryan...my first contact with Bryan [train passing by] was as a boy about eight years old my grandfather came to visit us as William Jennings Bryan was out campaigning for his son-in-law Owens who was running for Congress. And grandfather was great admirer of Bryan and he couldn't get anybody that wanted to go with him to hear Bryan speak. This was in Marion, Indiana. Bryan was scheduled to speak in the coliseum, which seated, an indoor auditorium, which seated several thousand people. It was a hot day and my grandfather [unclear] me. I was the youngest one around to go with him. He didn't want to alone he couldn't go alone. But he said he promised me if I'd go, I'd never forget it and I would appreciate it all my life.

SHUSTER: Why couldn't he go alone?

HUFFMAN: He just wasn't able, he was elderly.

SHUSTER: [Unclear]

HUFFMAN: Well, he just didn't know the area and he just felt more comfortable with someone as his side. So I, you know, I went. I loved my grandfather and it was the first time he ever visited us and the last time, he was from a distance. So we went to...to hear Bryan and the place was packed hot, hot day, afternoon. And we got on the top bleachers and there were windows out, looking out over the street. So Bryan was at least forty-five minutes late or perhaps longer. And there was such a crowd outside that couldn't get in that when he pulled up we could see him out the window in an open limousine he had to orate to the crowd out there hundreds of people and then he came in. And I remember several thing that happened. First he...he was a giant man he was physically a giant.

SHUSTER: About how tall would you say?

HUFFMAN: Oh I'm guessing but I would imagine he was six feet tall and probably weighed about two hundred fifty pounds, two hundred eighty pounds maybe. And I remember his saying in his speech he said, "I have received more voted for the presidency of the United States than any man that ever lived." He said, "The only prob...problem is it was over three different elections." And then he said that he would shake hands with everybody that was there if they'd formed two lines. So grandfather had come down from the bleachers and got into one of those lines and I got in line next to him. And father or grandfather and grandson we made our way slowly, slowly down there and I shook hands with William Jennings Bryan's left hand. Father shook, [laughs] grandfather shook hands with his right hand. He was a great orator and became a hero of mine. He and Billy Sunday were my boyhood heroes

SHUSTER: What, how would you describe him as an orator, what was his style?

HUFFMAN: He was a silver-tongued orator. He was the old "Father Caldwell" [?] type. He was...was really an orator, he orated and he could just play an audience in his hand. He was a Democrat not a Republican. We were all Republicans. And my father incidentally...Bryan was never at Winona at the times that we were there he was there before our time as president of Winona. But father was on the train going across country and he hear that William Jennings Bryan was in the car ahead of his. He called the conductor and asked him if he could go up to the next train he had a person he wanted to talk to and he gave him permission. And he went up and had a several hours talk with William Jennings Bryan. And Bryan...father asked Bryan said, "Mr. Bryan, I've admired all through my...my lifetime but I...I, I'd like for you to explain to me how a man can be a Democrat and a Christian at the same time." Bryan said, "Well, I've had some problems with that myself but," he said, "I just feel called to reform the Democrat Party" [laughs].

SHUSTER: You mentioned that he was a silver-tongue orator and could really play an audience...

HUFFMAN: Yes.

SHUSTER: ...how do you mean that, I mean, could you give me some more concrete...

HUFFMAN: I mean he went into flights of oratory and he had catch phrases that were...were used, I can't [pauses] he was, I can't quite catch any of them at the moment. But he just lifted you to a...a height of...of another dimension and he could play an audience in a marvelous way. He was a man of God there's no question about that and yet he was a real politician and a man of great conscience.

SHUSTER: Are you familiar with Vachel Lindsay's poem *Bryan*?

HUFFMAN: No, I am not.

SHUSTER: Lindsay heard Bryan during the 1896 campaign as a boy and he always remember it and wrote a poem about it later. You mention that when you were about sixteen your family had a summer home at Winona.

HUFFMAN: We had a summer home from...we...we lived in the summertime always at Winona from 1920 on. I was a eight years old at that time. And we maintained, that is, the president of our school at that time, [tape distortion] not the president but the main financial backer was a man by the name of Saul Taw [?] a multimillionaire from Cincinnati. He had a beautiful home in Winona called Aloha Cottage which he turned over to our family for its use in the summertime. That was our home we didn't own that home. But with the exception of a couple of years when father put me on the farm where he thought...thought every boy ought to be for a couple of years to become a man, in the summertime. From the time I was eight years old until 1970 I was at Winona every summer in one capacity or another.

SHUSTER: Now, were you acquainted with the Billy Sunday family?

HUFFMAN: Yes. From the time we got to Winona Lake Billy Sunday's family had all left Winona Lake except the youngest son, Paul. And he was sort of a rare bird. We...we got a glimpse now and then. He had a canoe down at Rodeheaver's Rainbow Point and we knew when the canoe was out and Paul was in it and when it was in. And....

SHUSTER: Was he about your age?

HUFFMAN: No, no, no he was much older than I. I was at that time probably [pauses] well ten and he would have been at lease eighteen or nineteen, I would think. But if you want me to talk about Billy Sunday a little bit...

SHUSTER: Sure.

HUFFMAN: ...I could go on and on.

SHUSTER: How did you first meet the family?

HUFFMAN: Well, we knew where they lived and it was sort of a sacred shrine. If you'd been to Winona there's a main Administration Boulevard it was called from the entrance went right through toward the Chicago Boys' Camp. To the one side was, as you went right through the entrance was the lake to the other side to the left was the Winona Hotel and then you went down past the...the beach swimming area and...and then to the left you had the Billy Sunday Tabernacle to the right the business section and on through. And you get down to the other end of town, two three block through, there's a hill and a...a crossroad going up called Evangel Hill. The top of Evangel Hill was the Billy Sunday cottage. And it was on the...a very modest cottage by present measurements, but then very, considered a very fine cottage. It overlooked the lake over the house tops. And by special permission Billy had a...a irrigation system that piped in from the lake, pumped in from the lake so when water couldn't be used from the city system to sprinkle lawns, his lawns were sprinkled. There was a cascading little creek coming through his lawn on down toward the lake and a beautiful garden. So...there was shrubbery around the place so that you couldn't actually get on the Billy Sunday lawn but you could pass by the...the walk that, to the edge of it. My first actual glimpse of Billy Sunday was peeking through the shrubs when he was out working in his lawn. He was a very retiring person and home to him was home. He wanted nothing of phone calls or reporters. And we had a way of knowing when he was home because they didn't have air conditioning in those days and it was a cottage type house, one room house. Well, there were several upstairs rooms but a cottage type and the main part on the one floor. And there was a gable end at the front looking down toward the Administration Boulevard and the hill was quite a little hill up there, it seemed like it in those days at least. When Billy Sunday was home in the summer time always that...that window up in the gable end was open. By having that open they got some ventilation fans through the cottage. And one of my first glimpses of Billy Sunday was when he umpired a baseball game, he did that regularly. He was a famous baseball player he had a reputation as great as any baseball in this day. And baseball was...was a strong sport in those days. And I remember he would once a year umpire a baseball game at Winona Lake played between the Winona Lake...the Warsaw team, Warsaw really the main town of Winona, Winona is sort of a little village, suburban village of Warsaw, which was the county seat. And the Warsaw team would play the Fort Wayne baseball team once a year and Billy would umpire. My father has just been



made the...the president...the dean of Winona Lake School of Theology and then [pauses] well, I guess Dr. Biederwolf himself decided to introduce my dad to Billy Sunday during innings which was a bad time to do it. [Clears throat] So he took my father out on the playing field when Billy was out at the pitchers spot and Biederwolf tried to get Billy's attention to introduce him to my dad and he said, "Billy, I want you to meet the new dean of our school of theology." Billy stuck his hand out, shook hands with dad's one hand, looked exactly the opposite direction and said, "I'm glad to meet you." And on he...he wanted the game to go on [Shuster and Huffman laugh] he didn't want to be stopped. But he was a rare character and he, his...his life was a very...very interesting life. Ma Sunday was the power behind the throne.

SHUSTER: How do you mean that?

HUFFMAN: I mean just that. She made the decisions in his life and she sat on the platform to see that thing went right. She maneuvered...she could control Homer Rodeheaver who was something to control but she could control Homer. And Billy depended very much upon Ma Sunday for decisions. To illustrate he was being booked for the great I think it was 1918 meeting in Boston. It was during the war, during the close of the war period.

SHUSTER: It was 1916 was when he went to Boston but anyway.

HUFFMAN: I think, I'm not sure of the dates, I...I thought that the, that the end of the war came in 1917, maybe I'm wrong, but anyway.

SHUSTER: Anyway.

HUFFMAN: When war hysteria still was...was alive. Billy was booked for a big campaign and in Boston. And he always retreated to Winona between campaigns. That's where he rested, that's where he felt comfortable. And he got a telegram from the Unitarians in Boston inviting him to speak at a Unitarian meeting to take place, I think, the night before the big campaign started in...in Boston. And Ma Sunday used to tell this story got a great delight in telling it that, that Billy came in and he was just trembling and he had this...he said, "Ma, look at this, look at this." She said, "What?," said, "This is a telegram from the Unitarians Association in Boston wants me to preach to them." Said, "There's only one thing I can preach to that bunch of hell-bound sinners, it's, it's... 'For there is no other name under heaven whereby a man must be saved.'" [Acts 4:12] Why she said, "Good." Said, "You mean it? She said, "Good." So he wired back that he...he...he would appear there. Well, it was a frame-up on him. The Unitarians were going to put campaign down and lick it before it started by making a fool out of Billy. And there are legendary stories as to what really happened but the best story I've ever heard as I was given this legendary story was the facts are there but the details, two things may be combined here, but anyway the story is he got there. And they had a...a imitation hall which was to be a imitation of the Billy...Billy Sunday campaign tabernacle inside. Sawdust sprinkled up and down the center aisle an altar at the, at the head and everything just like Billy would have it. And he got up and simply preached the gospel and it was so effective, this I know to be true, it was so effective that it completely undid what they attempted to do. So many of the Unitarian ministers were there, some of them were converted, all of them were interested and instead of, it backfired on them, instead of people staying away from this



phoney operation was going to take place. It became one of the biggest campaigns of Billy Sunday's whole career.

SHUSTER: How were they trying to make a fool of him?

HUFFMAN: Well, they...they were making fun of the sawdust up and down the sawdust trail, they were making fun of the altar. It was all just a...a farce of...of what he really had in his campaigns. It was just like...talking a person who is not a Mason into speak and setting up in a Mason hall an evangelistic setting and said "To go to work boy." But Billy just forgot the whole business and preached the gospel with such earnestness that he was effective. And the papers just played it up. There are papers to show this...this thing backfired on the Unitarians.

SHUSTER: You mention that he was rather a retiring man and also a great athlete....

HUFFMAN: Ma Sunday stated that there's only one constructive thing he ever did in the home there that she could remember and that was she, he hung a little, maybe it was a clock that he put up on the wall or something like that...that she said, "I'll never let anyone touch that because that's the only constructive thing he's ever done in this home." But yes, he had, he had a track record...a running record, baseball running record that was not exceeded for many...many years. He was fast on his feet and he was a fielder but he also had conviction. He refused to sign a contract with a team that wanted him and he would have had to play on Sunday if he played on that team and he wouldn't do it. But he was a popular player. And he...he preached liked he played. He would wind up just as though he was throwing from outfield into the base and he would...he would go through all the motions of...of running the bases. I mean he...he was athletic in the pulpit.

SHUSTER: What was he like just to talk, to just on a man-to-man?

HUFFMAN: Hard to talk to, to carry on a conversation. I...I never...I never tried, I tried once but I didn't get to him. Ma interfered, she always played interference for him. I decided that I was going to see him up close not just from a distance.

SHUSTER: When you were still a boy?

HUFFMAN: I was still a boy. I was twelve years old maybe when this happened. So, I had, I would, use to sell Christmas cards. Go around selling printed Christmas cards with your name on it. So I took my card book. I told the kids down at the hotel where I was staying washing dishes in the summer time for the [taps on table] cafeteria. I said, "I'm going to see Billy Sunday or know the reason why." So I got my...brought my samples. I walked up that long flight of steps up the hill to his house and I stood there I pounded on the front door and a maid came to the door and wanted to know what I wanted. "I wanted to see Mr. Sunday." So, she said, "Just a moment." Then Ma Sunday showed up. Big, pleasant face, jolly person. She said, "What do you want, sonny?" I said, "Well, I want to see Mr. Sunday." She said, "Well, he's very busy, you can't see him. But what can I do for you?" So I told what I was, what my purpose was [rubs against the microphone] suppose to be, (it really wasn't) but anyway. She said, "Well, lets...lets see your samples." So she sat on the swing with me went through the whole book and looked at ever card and she said, "Well, Sonny," she said, "I'm sorry but I can't buy any card from you for two reasons. We don't have any money to

pay for cards and we have so many friends we wouldn't know where to start sending or to stop." That's as close as I got to him in that attempt. When my girlfriend (who's my wife been my wife now for fifty-three years) was a freshman at Marion College and I was a junior, she came to visit and I took her to Winona Lake. And I wanted her to see the great Billy Sunday and I knew how...how to let her see him. The window was open and I saw some strange movements behind the shrubbery there where he worked on the lawn when he was there. No newspaper men allowed nobody. And I knew where there was a gap in the, in the shrubs and so I took her to walk, the main walk went along there and I saw him there and she peeked in there. And there he was no shirt, no undershirt, [Shuster laughs] no socks, no shoes just a pair of slacks or shorts. And they were blue with a great big green patch in the seat or them or some odd color and he was just...he was...he was not a...a big person, he a wiry person but he had a big broad chest, hairy broad chest. And she got the real view of the great [laughs] Billy Sunday. At one time I was walking by there and he was working in there and sprinkling and some kids came by. And he just waited 'til they got right in that gap in that fence and he...he turned the hose on them just gave them a soaking [Shuster laughs] and off they went. But he was very non...he was very nonsocial off the platform, he really was.

SHUSTER: Very retiring?

HUFFMAN: Very retiring.

SHUSTER: Have you had, did you have an opportunity to see him preach?

HUFFMAN: I heard him preach twice. Once at the Billy Sunday Tabernacle and once in Fort Wayne, Indiana at the Fort Wayne Gospel Temple. He was...

SHUSTER: Towards the end...

HUFFMAN: That was the echo of the old Billy. Billy's prime was less than twelve years. And I mean he grew up in Iowa and for years he never left the state. He never did leave the country he never preached outside the United States, not even in Canada to my knowledge and never abroad. But he was sort, it was sort of...he...he lost his fortune toward the end of his life through a business deal with one of his sons. And he really had to get out and work to...to...he had good insurance for Ma when he left but...but he had to get out to work. So he'd go out to on one-night stands and it was on...he always preached at Winona once a year a least in the Billy Sunday Tabernacle and it was usually a fund raising thing for Winona Lake. He gave all the money to Winona. And in his one-night stands he gave the money to Winona Lake. For years he was the financial backer of Winona Lake. Yes, I heard him at...at the Billy Sunday Tabernacle at Winona and I heard him at the Billy...at the Fort Wayne Gospel Temple.

SHUSTER: What stands out in you mind about his preaching?

HUFFMAN: The thing that stands out in my mind was how...how athletic he was, how fast he was, there's a record available that you know about I'm sure of his preaching, he was high pitched, and whirlwind of...of a preacher. I mean he...he had heavy notes on every sermon he preached but they were in big type and drawing things that would bring to his mind the illustrations and the like. And he was glued to that podium but you wouldn't thing of it because he was all over the place. He

was on the chair, he was smashing a chair, he was taking off his coat throwing it to Ma and she'd catch it, Ma Sunday catch...catch it and was always behind him. And at the Fort Wayne Gospel Temple I was impressed with two things that I shouldn't been impressed with. He was raring to go he was always...they would say, "Now we'll turn Billy loose." That's the way they introduced him usually. And this particular time they had a high falutin church soloist come in there to sing a number that he was absolutely mortified with. He couldn't wait for her to get through. And she had a great big mouth, and a great big voice and he got up from where he was sitting walked around and looked down right down her throat when she was singing as though...one...one hand on his hip and said, "Where does that terrible sound come from" [Shuster laughs] well, she ended pretty quick and so he started to preach and this I heard. The place was packed and normally in his own campaigns it was a controlled situation. Rodeheaver was not only...he...he was the Cliff Barrows.

SHUSTER: Rodeheaver was?

HUFFMAN: Yes, he was the Cliff Barrows. He was the platform manager...

SHUSTER: [Unclear]

HUFFMAN: ...he was also the choir director, he was the MC [masters of ceremony], he had everything in control. And this wasn't a controlled situation and the babies weren't in the audience. They had places to take care of the babies. They weren't supposed to be in the audience but there was a baby in the, in the Fort Wayne Gospel Temple which seated three thousand people. And he just started to preach [and] a baby started yelling back there and he stopped and he stared and he simply stood just piercingly looking in the direction where that noise came from and he spotted the mother and he said, "I'm not going to say one more word until the young heifer walks out...out with that bawling calf." And it was, you know, a deadening thing, and he was crude but people never forgot what he said. I mean he...he said, you know, during the war, he said, "If you tell...find...if you turn hell upside down, you'll find printed on the bottom Made in Germany." He...another quote that he had was, "If Al Smith would run against the Devil for the presidency of the United States, I'd vote for the Devil." You'd never forgot what he said but he was deadly earnest endeavoring to win people to Christ. And his converts, percentage wise, stuck.

SHUSTER: What about Ma Sunday and how would you describe her?

HUFFMAN: Very gracious, very humble, you'd often see her going away from a meal from the hotel with a little bag she'd take food home, she was very, very...

SHUSTER: [Unclear]

HUFFMAN: ...very saving, very generous but very, very thrifty and very self-sacrificing and often you'd see her going about the campus at Winona picking up sticks and she'd take them, she had a whole of...of firewood for the, for the winter stacked up there and most of it she gathered off the...the kindling type thing off the [laughs] but she was a, she was a very gracious person. And she was...she was the power behind the throne.

SHUSTER: Did she have management abilities?

HUFFMAN: Yes, very much so, very much so. Now Billy was a genius, he know how to bring to his team, management team, real professionals and to entrust them with, with various points of leadership. Billy Graham learned much that he knows about mass evangelism from Billy Sunday's operations through Ma Sunday. Billy the young fellow during his early, early years with Youth for Christ would spend hours and hours with Ma Sunday. And a lot of it was like "Mutt and Jeff" [cartoon characters] going out to play golf. And Mutt says, "Come and I'll teach you how to play golf," and he said, "I didn't know you knew how to play golf, Jeff." And he said, "Well, you follow me and do everything I do and nothing...do nothing I do and everything I don't do and you'll be a good golfer." So Ma did instill in...in Billy Graham many, many principles that he uses the main one how to raise a family. And Billy took it very seriously, Billy Graham.

SHUSTER: How...what do you mean how to raise a family?

HUFFMAN: The wife is to raise the children, be at home when the children come home. And Ma Sunday made that very plain to Billy and Ruth has done that. And Billy Sunday's family was fiasco but the kids were raised by a nanny and.... One experience I had with Ma Sunday and I got very close to her through the years. She was on our Winona Lake School of Theology board, she was one of our best givers, she was generous. When he died she was well taken care of she had plenty of money. And she...her main passion was the city rescue missions and she went around speaking to rescue missions, raising for the giving of money but she was also gracious to our school. And when I was in Boston in well shortly before she died I don't know what year this would be exactly but anyway I went to Boston in '36, '37 and this must have been around [pauses] maybe '42. I brought Ma Sunday to Boston to speak at my church in a tent meeting and she was entertained at Wayside Inn. And Wayside Inn at that time (Longfellow's Wayside Inn) is out from Boston some few miles, eleven, twelve miles. And it was owned [train passing by] by Henry Ford at the time and Henry Ford while the inn was owned by him had a...the inn had a policy of allowing ministers to live there free, to eat there free. And some of us Harvard students knew this. And so I use to go there on weekends with my wife hide away and study and vacate free. So I went to the inn manager and told him that we were bringing Ma Sunday out for a weekend and I wondered if they would like to entertain her out there. And he said, "We'd be...be glad to." So she was a guest of the inn and I went out each night, each evening to have dinner with her and visit with her and talk with her. And one evening I went there she was sitting out as I, she knew I was coming to have dinner with her, sitting on a bench in front of the Wayside Inn and as I approached and sat down and talked with her a little bit she said, "You know maybe I was wrong," she was just musing about something, "Maybe I was wrong." I just listened. She said, "Dad said he needed me more that the kids but, maybe I was wrong." But....

SHUSTER: Well, you mentioned that one principle that she taught Billy Graham. Were there others?

HUFFMAN: Well, I'm sure that...Billy Sunday had a very fine way of accounting for his funds, he never got in trouble over funds. They published all receipts, they published the...the...the disbursements and the whole record of the whole campaign always in the papers. And Billy's been very careful. Billy's been free from, from a lot of the problems that evangelists have had and churchmen have had. And I know Billy had said this, I heard Billy Graham say that he...he learned

at the feet of Ma Sunday much that he knew about getting a team together and holding at team. Billy Sunday held his team together. Rodeheaver was with Billy as long as...he took him away from Biederwolf. Rodeheaver with Biederwolf's song evangelist and then Billy got his eye on him and when they went together they were a team just like, just like Cliff and Billy.

SHUSTER: How do you think he held his team together what...how did he do it?

HUFFMAN: By the respect of the man's integrity, by sharing his...his passion for winning souls to Christ, he had it and by careful organization he had a carefully organized team.

SHUSTER: How do you mean careful organization?

HUFFMAN: Choice of leaders for various departments, deputizing authority to those leaders, always knowing that Billy was [taps on table] riding herd on what was going on. He knew what was going on, they reported to him directly.

SHUSTER: Now how did Ma Sunday fit into this?

HUFFMAN: They all knew that Ma Sunday...if Ma Sunday approved something, it went, if she didn't it didn't. She was in on everything she now...I don't think that Ruth is quite that strong with Billy but maybe behind the scenes, more that one would suspect. But Ma Sunday...Billy just depended upon her just like a little child does upon a mother, behind the scenes.

SHUSTER: So she was kind of general manager of...

HUFFMAN: If anybody wanted Rodeheaver handled (and Rodeheaver was a bachelor and a popular bachelor and a wealthy bachelor and...and he was some...something to cope with) Ma Sunday could do it. Billy couldn't. Ma could handle him.

SHUSTER: How do you mean handle him?

HUFFMAN: Take him aside and give him a lecture and tell him what to do and he'd listen. Biederwolf could do that with...with...with Rodeheaver too but very few could.

SHUSTER: Did you get to know Homer Rodeheaver at all?

HUFFMAN: Yes, we knew Rodeheaver very well.

SHUSTER: How would you describe him?

HUFFMAN: A very, a sort of in quotation marks "sanctified" playboy, with the word sanctified in quotation marks. He was a, [train passing by] a million dollar personality when a million dollars meant something. He could play an audience. He always had his trombone on his arm and that was his inseparable companion and he spared his voice with it, he led singing with it, and he did a fair job of playing. But he had a gift of having appropriate stories at just the moment of crisis that he would use. He didn't hesitate to use it again and again and again. He has a book of anecdotes that

he used that still are good. And when someone went to Rodeheaver one time and said to him, "Why tell the same old stories all the time?" He said, "They work." [Shuster laughs] And he said, "Half of the people that are there have never heard them before and the half that have heard them like them." And he wouldn't...wouldn't discard them [laughs] because they were threadborn [sic]. But...but he was a great personality and a very shrewd personality. To tell you how shrewd he was, I was the founder of Boston Youth for Christ and we about the seventh or eight rally to begin in the country. And we brought the biggest people across the country and we held it in Park Street Church. And if we got down to eight hundred in an auditorium seating twelve hundred we thought we were slipping badly. So we had the thing well filled for the best part of the eight or ten years that I was there the director of it. I had other things but that was one of the things I took care of. So I wanted my friend Rodeheaver to be a headliner for one of the rallies and we got those kind of people. So he came out and he got up and [slams hand on desk] told the crowd how happy he was to have his neighbor John Huffman. He saw me grew up from a little boy, doing a great work for the Lord like this and he was so happy to be there. And I was feeling rather puffed up about this until he sat down and he said, "John, do you have a Youth for Christ hymn book of any kind?" And I said, "Oh, yes we do have." "Why I don't see any around. Do you happen to have one on your person?" I happened to have one I tucked away that wouldn't be seen and I sort of felt that maybe it wouldn't be to proper to have. I didn't know why but I just felt probably we wouldn't use it that night. It had a little looseleaf thing. And he said, "Could I take a look at it." And I gave it to him and he never gave back. He did his thing, and we entertained him and had a great time and about a week and a half later I got a letter from Jim Thomas, his brother-in-law who was the manager of Rodeheaver Hall Mack Company in Winona Lake. "It has come to my attention that you've used the words in your Youth for Christ hymn book, a little pocket size thing, without permission and I want to know how many copies of that Youth for Christ book you had printed, how many copies are still available, what happened to the copies [Shuster laughs] that have disappeared, and I want to put a hold on this thing until we work this out. You know that's the way we earn our living, with copyrights."

SHUSTER: Sure.

HUFFMAN: I called my Dad right up, he was living at Winona Lake at the time [microphone rubs against something] I said, "I...I've got maybe something pretty serious here." I said, "We published this Youth for Christ hymn book and we, in the, it was looseleaf and in the back we put just the words to some of the songs that we didn't have the music for and among them was...was *The Old Rugged Cross*." And I told him what the letter I got from Jim Thomas, whom I knew well. And Dad said, "I think you better get on this pretty fast John, take care of it." I...I went out to Winona went into the company had a...had a conference with Jim and he made me sweat. He said, "John," he said, "Is that book copyrighted?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Who copyrighted it?" I said, "Our, our Youth for Christ musicians." Told him who it was. Chap [?] lives in Wheaton right now, incidently, I don't want to give the name. But he said, "Well, don't you know the value of copyrights?" I said, "Well, yes I do." He said, "Well, you've used *The Old Rugged Cross* without our permission." I said, "Just the words to it." "Oh-oh," he said, "We've got the words copyrighted too." And he made me sweat and if it weren't for Bennett of the Bennett...

SHUSTER: Walter F. Bennett?

HUFFMAN: Walter Bennett, who was then doing my...my broadcasts. I was on net...net...network broadcasting by that time. I never wouldn't have gotten those thing free and probably would have been hit with a good suit. But I told Walter about it and of course Walter was handling Rodeheaver and Walter said, "Well, let me take care of it." So finally I got a letter saying, "Go ahead and use the books." But he became a...a multimillionaire Rodeheaver did.

SHUSTER: Rodeheaver did?

HUFFMAN: Yes, and it was only by...he owned hundreds and hundreds of copyrights and that's where the money came from.

SHUSTER: And did he also write songs?

HUFFMAN: Not much. I only know of one of two songs he ever wrote but he popularized songs [shuffles papers].

SHUSTER: So he bought the copyrights from....

HUFFMAN: Yes, I...I went to the author of [taps his finger on the table] *The Old Rugged Cross* (hat was his name?) Bern...Bernard...Bern...Bennard with my story about this and I thought maybe he'd be a helper to me and he wasn't. He said, "Well, listen." He said, "You know, I know that sounds a little bit tough but," he said, "There's another side to this whole thing." He said, "Rodeheaver is the most gracious man I've ever heard, I've ever known." He said, "I have...." George Bennard! He said, "I was having the hardest sledding and he knew it and came to me one time and he said, 'George,' he said...he said, 'Many people have come to me and said, 'Is it true that...that Rodeheaver bought *The Old Rugged Cross* for fifty dollars or something like that and made thousands on it?'" "George said, "It's nobody's business what he bought it for or what he's made on it. He satisfies me and it ought to satisfy them I have no complaints." Then he told me the story that he was having a hard time savings his home and Rodeheaver found out about it and sent him a check to pay his home off. So there's two sides to that story.

SHUSTER: Oh, we'll switch to the next tape, we're almost out here.

END OF TAPE