American Meteorological Society
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TAPE RECORDED INTERVIEW PROJECT

Interview of Harry Volkman
27 August 2004

Interviewer: Robert Henson

HENSON: If you don't mind repeating...

VOLKMAN: Hello. This is Harry Volkman, speaking to you from the offices of WFLDTV, channel 32, the Fox Television station in Downtown Chicago, Illinois, and this is August the 27th, 2004, and that's it.

HENSON: OK, and this is Bob Henson, interviewing Harry Volkman, I'm from UCAR, and this is for the AMS Oral History Project. All right. So we'll get started here. So I'm going to ask quite a few questions, and they'll be in roughly chronological order, Harry, but before we start on the chronology, if you could just give us a very short sense of where you've been in your career, starting with Tulsa.

VOLKMAN: I began my career in broadcasting in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the fall of 1949. I was doing some weekend fill-in disk-jockey news/sports/weather kind of thing on a couple of radio stations in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and while I was there, in November of 1949, and I was a student at the University of Tulsa at that time, and some of my fellow classmates said that, "Have you seen that there's a television station coming to Tulsa, the first one, and they are looking for people to come in and work and do almost any job, before or behind the cameras, on-air, technicians, or whatever." And I had, the previous year, graduated from the Spartan School of Aeronautics, where I majored in weather forecasting. So I went to the station, and I said, "I'd like to be on your new station, which isn't on the air yet," it didn't come on until December 30th, and they said, "Well, we don't even think we're going to do weather, and that's not in our plans, and we'll probably have somebody else do it, anyway." So I kind of pushed that aside about, well, I'm still busy with my studies out at the university, I just, nothing ventured, nothing gained. And then, when the station came on the air, there was a fellow named Dave Ketching (sp?) who had been brought in, a former Air Force meteorologist, I believe, and –

HENSON: Could you spell his name?

VOLKMAN: Dave Ketching (sp?). He was only on the air a very few weeks, though, and no one seems to remember him, because it takes a while to get established when you're on the air. And one of my friends from the University, when I was at the weekends radio station, said, "What happened to Dave Ketching?" I said, "What do you mean, what happened," because I didn't have a TV, and most people didn't then. He said, "Well, he's not on the air anymore," he says, "I just saw him a couple of times." So I -- he said, "If you're still interested in doing that weather down there, why don't you get down to that station?" I went down there, and the program director said, "Well, he never worked out, but we don't know if we want to do weather, but I think it can still be done." And this was on January 13th, it was Friday in 1950. And he said, "You can come in and start Monday," and he had no idea what I could do, what I knew, if I would have any on-the-air presence or anything; it was totally up to me, and no audition or anything. So I had to scramble to go out and buy my own weather map, my own grease pencil, set it up on an easel, or a stand, out there in the studio, which was a big truck warehouse, which is what we were using. It's still used, that same building, in Tulsa, 302 South Frankfurt (sp?). And to get the weather, I had all the information I needed and more through short-wave radio. I picked up government statements broadcasting synoptic weather broadcasts, basically to ships at sea, and this was all in Morse Code, which I had learned in the Army. The Army had me in communications for the Field Artillery, and we were required to learn how to code, encode and decode messages. And so I had a surplus radio, put on the earphones, copied all these messages from two stations -- three. One was in Washington, it was NSS. For example. NSS was DAdit-ditditdit-ditditdit, DAdit-ditditdit-ditditdit, that's NSS in the code, and was WEK in New York, and WSY in New Orleans. And I got, from the government, a hydrographic office bulletin which indicated what stations were on what frequencies, broadcasting what information at what time. And so I put all these things to work, and I then began a regimen of copying [Haoles], I mean, synoptics, which were every six hour reports, both surface and upper air observations, radio sound reports, and put all the stuff down, and then memorized as much of it as I could, and took all this information, mostly in my head, to the station, and, at six o'clock in the evening when the station signed on the air that -- they were only on four hours a day, from six to ten –

HENSON: AM or PM?

VOLKMAN: I'm sorry?

HENSON: Six to ten PM?

VOLKMAN: Yes, that's right. Yes. And -- see, there weren't enough programs, and there weren't enough people, so they just started with very few shows. Old Kinescopes and old movie reels and newsreels and so forth. So I did the weather show that way.

HENSON: And the call letters were, again?

VOLKMAN: That was KOTV, Oklahoma Television, with studios atop the tallest building, I mean the transmitter at the National Bank of Tulsa. That was at 4th and Main (sp?), I believe. And we were the only station in Tulsa, and until the freeze went off in '53, there were many markets where there was only one station in the market. So, anyway, I drew the whole map, I drew the front -- I've got a picture of me in my archives. I drew, in the grease pencil, the fronts, and put in temperatures. And then, that was it. And that was the first day. And the boss said to me, "That was pretty good," he said, "We'll try it again tomorrow." And I asked -- I didn't dare ask for money, because I knew that I had no experience and they didn't know what I could do, and -- but there was obviously no pay for this; this was to get experience, that's what they told all of us. And the next day, I came in, and I thought, you know, I looked at that map that I drew, and it was awfully messy once I got through with it. You know, freehand drawing, I never was very good at art, and this was so long before anything like computer graphics, you know, anything, everything was very crude. And I thought, you know what would be really a better idea, just talking to myself about this, I pre-draw the map, and then when it comes on it looks a lot better. Well, I went on the next day, that was Tuesday, with a pre-drawn map, and the boss came up to me, he said, "Why did you change it? Why did you -- why didn't you do it today like you did yesterday?" He says, "If you don't got back and do it the way you did the first day, I'm going to cancel the show." So after that, the next day was Wednesday, I went on and drew it, and they liked the idea of seeing a map being drawn. And -- so, like they do on the Weather Channel now, you know, they'll draw and use these different things to show, point out where areas of severe weather or something are. And I went on and did it that way then for two and a half years, until 1952, and I used to memorize the temperatures. I've always had a good memory, and I've still got a pretty good memory at my age, and I would -- one night, after people would come up to me on the street and say, "How do you remember all those temperatures?" Say, "It's not hard, you just associate it with it, I mean, if you've say, got a 62 temperature, and you find that it's 62 in New York and Los Angeles and Great Falls and Dallas, and just put that all together in your mind, and I would remember it just for that day, and then it was almost like I could erase it, and so that I wouldn't remember yesterday's data on tomorrow's show. And it was just mental kind of disciple. But one night, because people kept asking me, whenever I ran into them, how I remembered them, I thought, I'd better, I want to count. Because I had fifteen minute shows, later on, in my era there. And I counted 98 temperatures that I put on the map by memory.

HENSON: Wow.

VOLKMAN: And I want to tell you, too, about one of the things that influenced me, was that in Boston, on Channel 4 in Boston, WBZTV, they went on the air in 1948, and their weatherman was a Professor of Meteorology at MIT, named Dr. James Austin (sp?). And he was from New Zealand, and he had a very strong New

Zealand accent. And I went in to visit him, because I thought, you know, this is the thing I want to do, someday. And he was putting up all these temperatures. And I asked him the same question that they were asking me, later years, I said, "How do you memorize those temperatures?" He said, "I don't memorize them." He says, "They're written in in light red, and only I can see them, and when I go up in front of that, I just trace over what I've already put in there." And without saying it to him, I thought, "This is cheating. This is a swindle --"

HENSON: Because they were written in light red, the broadcast signal didn't pick up on them?

VOLKMAN: Yes. And it was a light red, too. And I thought, "You're letting the people think that you're memorizing these, and you aren't." And I don't know why I was trying to be such a moralist or anything about this whole thing, but I thought to myself, and said to myself, "When I go on, which I will eventually, I hope, I will not pretend that I'm -- I'm going to really memorize those and not trace over anything." So that's one of the inner urges that I had was to really memorize as much as I could.

HENSON: One area -- I'd like to ask you, before we go a little further, in these late '40s, early '50s, I'd like to be sure we get a little bit of your very early background?

VOLKMAN: All right.

HENSON: Childhood and early adulthood, and kind of the interested that led to your being interested in meteorology (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

VOLKMAN: Surely, yeah, oh, yes.

HENSON: So if you could just tell us where and when you were born, and your family situation, and...

VOLKMAN: Oh. Well, I was born in Medford, Massachusetts, in 1926, and in my home, a radio was on all the time, and I noticed that one thing that my family would never miss was the weather report, weather forecast. And there was a man -- it's funny; he went on the air in 1926, I found out, the same year I was born. His name was E Burton Writeout (sp?). And he was one of the early days' independent broadcast meteorologists on radio. He was working for the U.S. Weather Bureau, in those days, and there was a severe thunderstorm in the Boston area, and one of the reporters from the newspaper in Boston went to the Weather Bureau, or maybe called him, and got this fellow Writeout on the phone, and said, "Can you tell us, we're doing a story on this storm, tell us about what happened and why, and something like that?" And he gave them such an interesting story that when the radio station, it was WEEI in Boston, 590 on the AM dial, hah. They said, "How would you like to come on the radio and do that, and do the

weather on the radio," and he said, "Well, I'm working for the government." And the Government, for years, never allowed anybody to work in the media that was working for the Government; you couldn't mix those things. And so he quit his job, and they hired him at WEEI, and he stayed on there till the 70s. And he was my idol. I used to listen to him, because the family listened to him. And I would hear them say, about Writeout predicted this storm or he didn't predict it, or he missed it, and I heard all the complaints, and they would always say that he's making excuses. And it seemed like the weatherman was always a subject of ridicule, because any time he missed it. They don't remember when you're right, they remember when you make a mistake. And when Writeout would say, "The storm blew out to sea," or something, because those East Coast storms, those nor'easters and everything, if they turn off East of Cape Hatteras or go off east of Cape Cod, oftentimes they will be directed away from the coast. And even today, the computer sometimes can't tell if it's going to hit the coast or if it's going out to sea. And when he'd say 'The storm blew out to sea,' people would laugh and say, "Oh, yeah, he's making excuse, yeah, that's an alibi, saying the storm went out to see or blew out to sea." And I pledged to myself, that if I was going to be a weatherman someday, I wouldn't make those mistakes that these other weathermen were making. Because I felt like that this was a lousy job, that no one could really [predict] weather, that I wouldn't be able to tell it; if they can't, how could I be any better. But I always felt that I could improve upon what's there now if I learned enough about it.

HENSON: Remember what age it was that you be –

VOLKMAN: Well...

HENSON: -- that you remember listening to Writeout?

VOLKMAN: Well, as a little boy, I remember the heat spells of the '30s. When the Dust Bowl times? And I had thermometers. My uncle, Andrew, was interested in weather, and he had thermometers in almost every window in the house, in every direction. I could look out the east window and the west, and mostly it was on the east and west sides. And he would call out the glass in his Boston accent. In the old days, a lot of the instruments were called 'the glass.' You know, like the barometer was a glass and the thermometer was a glass? And so -- and they used to have names on it, like -- not just freezing, but it would have, like temperate. 68 was temperate. 98 was called "blood heat." And they would have that written on the thermometer scale. And then, he also had a one of these water barometers that would go up and down, and it -- colored water in those things, and I've still got one like that. You put the color in it, and if it boils out over the top it's low pressure. So he taught me about tapping the barometer, and he'd get up the earliest in the morning, because he was a carpenter; you go out on the job. And he'd always tap the barometer, and he'd always tell me, later that day, when he saw me, he says, "That barometer jumped up." I remember him use that expression. But of course it's frequent for a morning pressure rises and the

diurnal changes. And then, I had noticed, if you're watching it regularly, that's very good training, because you learn about the steady and the falls and the rapid falls and rises and how it's so much more active in the cold season than it is in the warm season, things like that. And then he was -- he also taught me about the wind direction. We lived near the ocean, and when there was an east wind, he'd say, "It's going to rain." Or -- it could be just a sea breeze, but it was also the east wind. And then, also, we were so close to the ocean we could smell the salt water, and we also could smell the fish. And my aunt would say, "Smell the rain," she'd say, "Oh, smell the rain." Because we had the windows open. In those old days, before there was air conditioning, you smelled the air -- no foul kitchen odors or something like that. It was the outside air. Pollution and all that kind of stuff. And so he taught me not only about, then, the thermometer, the barometer, the wind direction, but he taught me about the clouds, too. He would refer to the outer cumulous as a "mackerel" sky. And he'd say, "Mackerel sky in the south wind means it's going to rain." And then he would look out the west window. I could still see him standing there, and he would see the clouds developing, like you see cirrus banks building up. And he'd say, "Well, it's going to rain tomorrow." And I'd wonder, how in the world can you tell it's going to rain tomorrow just by seeing some clouds over there? But –

HENSON: What was his occupation, Harry?

VOLKMAN: He was a carpenter.

HENSON: OK, so –

VOLKMAN: But he worked outside. And he'd see a big bank building up in the west, a bank of clouds. And when, the next day, it would rain, I was very impressed about that, but, see, what he, like a lot of carpenters, they both work indoors and outdoors. And he would plan, like, if he saw this bank of clouds, and he'd say, "It was going to rain tomorrow, so I'll do my inside work tomorrow." And then he'd tell me about the red sky in the morning and the sailors take warning and the red sky at night, sailors' delight, it's an old adage. And my mind is flooding with all these memories, because he also listened to the birds. And blue jays, he'd say, "Hear that blue jay squawking." And when it was squawking, it meant it was going to rain. And so he -- and then they, the clouds, the birds, the -- he also built windmills, and he watched that thing spin around. I remember watching that propeller spin, and when there was a good wind blowing.

HENSON: So would you say he was the big influence at that point in your childhood on your interest in weather?

VOLKMAN: Yeah, yeah. It -- I -- it was so pervasive, this kind of talk about the weather, and then the listening to Writeout on the radio. And we listened early in the morning and late at night. The weather was something that was always on, and everyone talked about what it was going to be. And they would compare

storms with past storms. I was fascinated by these stories. Like my uncles were -- there was another uncle, his brother -- talked to me about the big storms of the 19th century. There was the big blizzard of 1888, and 1898, they were big storms, and they would talk about, like, this is the worst blizzard since the blizzard of '88, or... '98 was the year that the *Portland* ship went down in Havana Harbor, which some people claim that's what led us into the Spanish-American War. And that was a bad storm, then. Weather-related, or whatever.

HENSON: Had they experienced those storms, 1888?

VOLKMAN: Well, yeah, they shoveled snow, in these big storms, and they remembered shoveling the snow. And so they would relate all these things. But in those days in the '30s, I remember both the extreme cold of the winters and the extreme heat of the summer. We had a lot of extremes then. And my older brothers were delivering newspapers, selling magazines, they even had a doughnut route; they sold doughnuts and had a doughnut cart. And I remember seeing them come in with their ears frozen in this extremely cold weather, January of '36, extreme cold, that's when there was a huge flu epidemic, so forth. And then the summers, those terrifically hot summers, I remember how stifling it was. And I watched that thermometer regularly. One day I was down at the South Shore of Massachusetts, so halfway down to Cape Cod; my mother used to take us down there. My mother was a widow; my dad had died when I was a baby. But one day, the temperature had been hitting the nineties every day, and then one day I had this little thermometer, and I saw it hit 99°. And it never did quite make 100, but then, the skies start darkening, and this heck of a big thunderstorm broke out. And I associated that, in my mind, with the fact that it keeps getting hotter just before a cold front comes in. And that's frequently the case. And then terrific thunderstorms can break the heat, and that certainly happened.

HENSON: Now, were you aware of a cold front and warm front, the frontal theory even at that point (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) on the radio?

VOLKMAN: Well, no, I don' t think I was aware of cold fronts and warm fronts, because the daily newspaper, I don't know when I started looking at the daily weather map in the newspaper, but I don't think they had fronts on there then. Of course, the frontal theory, you know, dates back to World War I times, and the Norwegians, but I don't recall if they had the fronts on there. They had the pressure systems. And they had the H and the L, and they would just circle, because it was very simple pattern maps. But another thing I remember about 1936, and I was ten years old, I saw ball lightening. And I've been reading about, in this occasionally, and in the literature, it's been in the *Bulletin*, there was a recent article there. And a severe thunderstorm, and I was looking out the window -- we were all inside because it was a bad storm outside, and lightening and thunder. And I saw, it looked like a giant Halloween pumpkin with sparks flying out of it, rolling across the yard like a pumpkin on fire, and it just was rolling right towards our window, and then poof! It just disappeared. And that

was ball lightning, but I didn't realize it then, but the image of it was so riveted in my mind that I'll never forget that. And I was reading, recently, about that seen around airplanes in Mexico; there's an article about that recently. And so I'm relating a lot of things, I have to tell you one more thing about my early childhood interest in storms. And this is before kindergarten. So I may have been only about three or four years old. My mother, as I mentioned, she was a widow, and we were jammed into a house with twelve people, and I slept in one part of the same room that she was in. And I do recall that she was deathly afraid of thunderstorms, and she would always say, "It's thundering," to describe a thunderstorm. "It's thundering," and didn't say the lightning so much the thundering. But she would always describe the lightning as very sharp, and she was fearful of the house being struck. And we didn't -- weren't noted for really this kind of severe weather in Massachusetts as the Great Plains and stuff like that, but one night she was getting up, long before dawn, and she dressed and undressed in the dark, and I could just barely make out that she was getting dressed, early in the morning, and I said, "Where are you going?" She says, "Well, I hope I'm not going anywhere, but," she said, "I'm afraid the house is going to be struck. And the -- if it catches on fire, I'm going to have to call the firemen, and then I want to look nice when the firemen come here." She was such a proper Bostonian. She would in no way want to be in her pajamas or bathrobe, she wanted to be all dressed up, and like, "Come right in, firemen." It's so funny. And I always remember that, and I -- this is another -- and I've talked about this business of telling myself, or pledging myself, and stuff like this -- that I would have to learn about what caused lightning and thunder so that I could explain it to her, and then she might not be afraid of it anymore, because the old adage about education dispels ignorance and fear, and so I could not wait until I could read books in the library, and I was still too young to do that, and no one could explain to me what lightning and thunder was, because nobody was trained in weather in my family, or any of the neighbors, I didn't know who to ask. All they could tell you was silly answers, like, what is lightning, they'd say, "It's angels playing with flashlights." Or what is thunder, they'd say, "It's giants bowling in Heaven." I mean, they give you this kind of stupid -- and, you know, you know that's not right.

HENSON: There were no scientists in your family, right?

VOLKMAN: There were no scientists. Well -- there were several engineers; uncles that were civil engineers like that, as I recall, but they had no training in weather, and really there weren't that many colleges or anything. I remember, when I was first looking into colleges in around 1940, there were only about four colleges in the country -- like, NYU, MIT, Chicago, and Caltech, it seemed there was only about four across the country in those days.

HENSON: That had meteorology?

VOLKMAN: Yeah. So I early set my -- I said, if I ever get into this, I would like to go to MIT. But anyway, that's a little ahead of the storm -- story. But now I think I've told you about so many of these things; the lightning and my mother and uncle and all those weather signs, and the barometer, and I kept records of weather, I think that's another -- on my own -- whatever you do to inspire yourself, without being told to do it, I kept records in a diary. In the old days, kids got diaries for Christmas and stuff like that, and I always included the weather. And I find it so interesting to look -- I saved some of these diaries, and, like, I'd talk about a 'swell snowstorm,' something like that. I know the adults were hating it, but I loved the storms. And we had our share. And in response to your question about making a decision, in 1938, the New England hurricane, I'll never forget that, because it was that storm that, apparently, made me decide definitely to go into meteorology, because I wrote it in my diary. I said, "Today, I decided that I'm going to be a weatherman." And that storm came totally unheralded, because it hadn't hit the coast before it hit Long Island. And when it hit Long Island, then it was a little late to be putting out warnings for New England, because the wind was already picking up, but I'll never forget that September 21, 1938. Then I was twelve years old, I guess in 7th grade. But the vivid memory of that is that in the fall, my buddies and I, we did a lot of touch football, playing in the streets. We didn't have many parks around, it was too far to walk, I don't know if we were too lazy or whatever, but we played in the streets, so this tree will be our goal, this tree... and we were out there, this day, and the wind was starting to pick up, and leaves were starting to really come down, and I thought, you know, this is a little early for the leaves to be falling, and –

HENSON: There was no sense, even then, that there might be a hurricane, right?

VOLKMAN: No, no, there wasn't. And most of us kids, we didn't sit around listening to the news broadcasts in the middle of the day, then, it was the after school, I guess. And then the twigs were dropping and the small branches in the trees were swaying, and then the trees began to come down! And every tree on my street blew down. I'll never forget that. And some of them fell on wires, and there were a lot of above-ground utilities, and this broke the electric lines, telephone lines. And we were without electricity and phones for a whole week. And this storm changed the whole coastline of Rhode Island, eight feet of water came into downtown Providence. And I remember it was a Southeast wind, because we were east of the eye, and it came right up the Connecticut River Valley, and it was moving pretty fast, so the translational speed added on to the rotational. I was nearly blown out in front of traffic, and could have been run over. My mother was calling me, you know, like all the mothers. "Come in the house, quick," you know, like the sky is falling. All this stuff. And I thought to myself, I want to go around one more time around the block and just sense this wind. And one gust picked me up and just picked me up, put me right out in the street, in front of a car, which jammed on his brakes, and it was like, wow, I should have obeyed my mother, I almost... and that experience was really frightening. We had one

window broken in our house from stones; a big building next to us had stones on the roof, and the stones were blown off and came through our window. But these giant poplars, a lot of big poplar trees, they're kind of... they easily break, and the maples and poplars and elms, every tree was down. And it just like was a whole different scene. Like you see in plenty of disaster scenes, but not as bad as a tornado, obviously. And I don't know, at that time they weren't rating them as categories, hurricanes in those days. It was just the New England hurricane. But I guess I saw how low my barometer went, but I have no recollection of actually how low it was.

HENSON: It's not in your weather records?

VOLKMAN: No, I hadn't quite, at that time I wasn't putting down too much, and then '39 is when I really start keeping regular records. Another experience about the weather; I was on a ship in '45, going to Europe, and I was out on deck in a big storm at sea with giant waves, and this shows my foolish love of weather in desiring to be out in the maelstrom. The crew knew, from, I guess, the radio reports, that there was a big storm heading for our ship and we were going to go through it, and they ordered us all below deck, and it was nighttime, and the ship was really, you know, pitching like this. And I, like a fool, I climbed up the gangplank, and I thought, this is my only chance to see a big storm at sea like this; I've got to be out there in that. And it was, I guess -- it wasn't really a rule I could have been court-martialed, it was just for our own safety. Because they knew that we would probably be washed overboard. But I went out there on deck, and these waves... I went right up to the bow of the ship, and the waves coming over that bow. One giant one came right over and just really, you know, I was thoroughly doused, and I thought, "Oh, boy, that could have washed me overboard." 'Cause they told us, "If you wash overboard, or jump, we're not going to stop and save you, because we're dodging submarines." Because there were German U-boats out there somewhere. And they say, "We can't stop to pick you up and endanger the lives of everybody else on the ship, so you're gone." One guy did jump over, but we think he just didn't want to go into combat, but anyway, I heard this laughter. I thought, "Who's out here seeing me do this?" And it was up at the top of the ship were all these fellows manning the guns; they were the Marine gun crews. And they were yelling at me, "Hey, (inaudible), what are you doing out there?" (laughter) I'll never forget how embarrassed I was, and I went down below deck, and I just dried off. But another indication, I've got a picture of myself -- I was going through a bunch of old photos the other day. In New England, we used to go to the seashore a lot, and I noticed that people wanted to be nice and warm and sunny, a great day for the beach and all this kind of stuff. Well, there were a lot of days that weren't great days at the beach. When you get a good nor'easter and you've got the gray skies and the chilly air and the northeast winds, it can be downright chilly and nasty in July. And I would go out to the beach on days like that just to see the waves. And watch them, and I loved the smell of the salt water and the east winds and everything. And some days I'd look out, and there would be absolutely nobody on the beach except me. And so, I

realize now, that from my earliest times, I just love weather and wanted to be in it, and so it was -- it just come to me extremely naturally.

HENSON: Now, tell us about 1940. You were graduating from high school, and by this time you knew you wanted to do meteorology.

VOLKMAN: '44.

HENSON: Oh, '44, OK.

VOLKMAN: Yeah, '40 is, well, that was an important year; that was the Blizzard of Valen-- St. Valentine's Day Blizzard in 1940.

HENSON: February.

VOLKMAN: (laughter) I was still 13, then, just 13. And we used to love to have cap pistols, kids used to... we could buy toy guns a lot. Nowadays it's sort of frowned at, if you come out with a toy gun they think it's a real one and you [can't] get through airport security or anything. But we played cowboys and Indians and cops and robbers and all that kind of stuff, and I guess I heard there was forecast for snow. And I waited outside for the snow to start, the lowering skies getting grayer, Northeast wind picking up. And the first snowflakes started to come down, really fine, the first flakes of a storm. So I took my cap pistol out there, and I was shooting at the snowflakes, pretending to be shooting the snowflakes. (laughter) I don't know if any neighbors saw me, whatever, this kind of stuff, but that storm just built up. It was a classic nor'easter. The next morning, to see how everything was buried, nothing was moving. It was 14 inches, I believe 14.6 or something like that, I almost remembered it, it was nothing moved. But around that time, too, I was aware of the rotary motions of storms, and my mother would give me spools, when she'd finished sewing she'd have the empty spool. And I would tie a string on that and go out and whirl it, and pretend that I was.... low pressure, or something, whatever,

HENSON: (laughter)

VOLKMAN: And one day it slipped out of my hand, sailed across the street, went right through the neighbor's window. (laughter) I'll never forget that. And so all this experiencing. In 193-, my mother, for her Christmas gift, gave me a one-tube transmitter, which was just coming out. It was like a toy thing that RCA had built for people to be able to talk, through your own radio, by a radio signal. It could just be used in your own house. And it was a little microphone there, and I pretended that I was on the air, and would talk, and I developed call letters for the station, and my brother, two of my brothers were sort of like knew that I was interested in that, and they would do things, sing and play instruments on the microphone, we had a lot of fun with that. And I was -- the FCC rules were that this was only to be used within the confines of one home, because you're not a

licensed commercial broadcaster, and it's not supposed to go beyond your confines. Well, my brother was interested in radio, and he had, a lot of people in those days had big antennae on the roof, the old time radio, it's long before the television time. So I connected it up, my station, to this antenna on the roof, which I wasn't really supposed to do. And I went next door, the old lady that I knew there, and asked if I could tune on her radio to see if I could hear it, and sure enough, I was playing a record, because I had a record player connected up to it, and I heard my station next door, and I thought, well, maybe I'm not supposed to be doing this, but it's so much fun. So I got a portable radio, and I put a long-playing record -- well, it was like -- we didn't have the LPs then, but -- and I walked all around the neighborhood, a couple of blocks away, and I could hear it, because it was connected to that roof antenna. And that was strictly against the FCC -- if they wanted to, they could've come by and shut that thing down and seize it, and say, you know, you're in trouble about this. And what stopped me completely, and this is an interesting story, and I told this one time when I was on a German-American station that someone asked me, because their name was Volkman, they said, "Tell us about your heritage." Anyway, when Japan attacked in Pearl Harbor, and then we were at war with Japan and Germany and Italy, they were looking, then, all around, for spies, and people that were doing clandestine operations. And I was still running my little station there. And my oldest brother, who worked in defense industries, or GE or somewhere, he said, "You know, they've been coming around to the neighbors and asking questions, if they've seen anything suspicious in our household," because we have the name of Volkman, and they were suspicious at that time. They didn't intern the Germans as much as they did the Japanese, but if you were -- they thought you were a German alien you might be pro-Hitler, or something like that. So my brother scared the daylights out of me. He said, "I saw an unmarked car parked out in front of the house with an antenna on the roof, pointed up to the attic where your station is, and you'd better that thing off." It scared the daylights out -- I don't know, he probably made that up, but I shut that thing off, and I thought, "My gosh," you know, as a kid, I thought, "This is so stupid." That they would suspect me and my family. I mean, my ancestors all came over here on the last century, and we're loyal Americans. In fact, my mother was teaching people how to become citizens and all that kind of stuff. But, nevertheless, the government couldn't be -- they couldn't assume that anyone was innocent. You sort of had to be proven innocent, that you were guilty if you -- so I would practice doing broadcasting of the weather, and make up a forecast sometimes. I didn't have any maps except what I'd get out of the newspaper, and that was -- when high school ended in '44, then I was drafted almost immediately, as we all were, because almost everyone was subject to immediate induction, if you were mentally and physically fit.

HENSON: So there was no deferment if you were planning to go to college?

VOLKMAN: Yeah, well, I, when I was a senior, I went over to MIT and talked to the admissions people, and I said, "I'd like to enroll here when I get through high school. But I know there's a war on now, and no one knows what's going to

happen." And they said, "Well, let's see your grades." And I was all As and Bs and everything, and I was acing out the physics and the math and all that stuff. And they said, "Well, you can just come right over, you wouldn't even have to take an entrance exam, you can just -- " Somerville High had such a great reputation that if you get grades like that you could enroll at MIT without -- (laughter) And I had talked to some of the ones over there, in those days, were Austin, and... well, there were a lot of big names in early-day meteorology that were famous at MIT. But when I went in for my service exam, they'd ask you what your interests are, so they want to find out as much about you so they know kind of where to put you. And I said, "I'd really like to get into weather." But the only way to get into weather, then, was you had to have two years of college before they put you into this air force training, to train Air Force meteorologists, and you had to have two years of college behind you. Well, I was just finishing high school, so there's no way I could get into that. So I didn't know where they were going to put me, but I wound up on a train going to North Carolina to Fort Bragg. And that's the artillery. But we were in communications. And our platoon was the radio operator's platoon that was going to be studying codes that were based on the winds. Wind speed and wind direction, and so this was my first training in getting weather codes. And we learned how to copy the Morse Code. Like, for example, the north wind is 360°, that's 36, so you have ditditdidDADA, Daditditditditdit, that's three six, and you learned that, as you heard that, you then could plot north, and then, I think they were using miles per hour then, they hadn't gotten into the kilometers. But at first, I didn't know what we were copying, but all the instructor would say, "These are wind codes," he said, "you don't need to really understand it, you've just got to learn how to send it and receive it, because then you'll hand it to the officers, who will then use it to adjust the artillery, because the winds --" And I had a letter, not too long ago, from a man who was, he heard that I was in that, he was in the Philippines in early days of World War II, and he said that if they didn't adjust the guns for the winds, their shots would be way off. I mean, you might be shooting at something over here, and you fire, and if you aim at that, it's not going to get there. It's going to go way over here. So you got to aim it over here, so that the wind. And I used to think that these shells were so heavy; how could the wind possibly blow them? But then, when you think, you see a giant jet up in the air, when it's coming in cross-wind, if it wants to land on that runway, it's got to come in like that, otherwise it's not going to -- so I was -- that's the kind of exposure I had, really, only, to weather in the Service. And when I got out of the Service, I went over to MIT after I'd been discharged --

HENSON: And when was this?

VOLKMAN: This was '46, at two years. And they said, "Well, now you've been away from school so long, you know, and you've been overseas, and you've not been around academics." And I -- there was a three hour comprehensive math exam. I could not get but a tiny fraction of it. I forgot all my algebra, my geometry, my trigonometry... I was so shocked. And my heart sunk, because I couldn't go to MIT. Unless I -- you know, I didn't know. I would have had to go through all kinds of refresher, and stuff like that, and it didn't help that the counselor talked to me, he said, "Well, you're maladjusted." I said, "I'm not maladjusted." He said, "Well, most of you fellas are." Like, you know, you come out of -- especially what guys had been in bad combat; I never actually had to fire a gun, because the German surrender was just before I got over to Germany. But there -- you have to be rehabilitated, I guess, a lot of cases. So I thought, "This is not going to work." So I thought, "Well, I'll just go back and start with the basic physics." So I enrolled at Tufts University, which was in my town. And then I was able to get in there all right. But even then, they said that my, seemingly my ability along the science line had been greatly diminished for some reason. And that I was more into the English and other stuff, and communications, rather than the science end of it, so I had to kind of change my direction a little bit, and concentrate. I knew, though, that I was going to have to get the weather somewhere, so after --

END OF SIDE 1

Interview of Harry Volkman

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

HENSON: On August 27, 2004, and, Harry, you were just telling us about finishing your two years at Tufts.

VOLKMAN: Yeah. I just stopped my classes there and went to the library. I tend to be impetuous, and just do things like on the spur of the moment. And I've got myself into trouble, a lot of times, because of that, but then also I've made great sea changes in my career and things like that because of that. Anyway, so, I went to the library, and I asked to see all the literature they had on colleges, and schools across the country. And I said, "I want to get into the weather." So I was very anxious.

HENSON: How did you picture being in the weather, though, did you picture --

VOLKMAN: Well, I, because of my interest in broadcast, in that 1929 little station, I knew I wanted to be on the air, and I could -- but I knew I had to have some professional training in meteorology. Even though I'd read books... You know, I'd read every book in my library, as soon as I could read, about the weather. As long as it stayed below the level of the math, because I didn't have the math, yet. But the descriptive kind of stuff, and synoptic, I could ace all that stuff that didn't require a knowledge, say, of calculus or something like that.

HENSON: Do any particular books stand out in your mind?

VOLKMAN: Oh, well, the very first one, my brother got me. I didn't dare -- I was so bashful, like a lot of kids are. But my older brother, Donald, knew that I was interested in weather, so he got me a book called *Fair and Warmer*, which had cumulous clouds on the cover. And I remember the author was a man named Gaer; G-A-E-R, and I mentioned this book one time at a school, and I've done a lot of school visits. And this teacher said, "Let me have that name again." And she went out -- I guess you can go onto a computer to locate books, and she found this book in a North Carolina library somewhere.

HENSON: Wow.

VOLKMAN: But I remember that it taught me all about the cumulous and all the cloud classification, and that was my first weather book, and I always so much appreciated my brother getting me that, and that was the very first one. But I just -- I've got some old books, like, Humphreys wrote a book; W.J. Humphreys, he was a weather writer a lot back in the '20s and '30s. And there were books about storms and everything else in the nonfiction part of the public library, and I read quite a few of them, and some of them I read several times, until I almost memorized them. Because I knew that I wanted to know this stuff. And it's

funny, when you're the only one around, in your family, that's interested in that stuff, and you -- they sometimes think you're kind of nuts to be so interested in weather. (laughter) "Why do you care?" they would say, "why do you care about those things?"

HENSON: They were supportive in general, though, it sounds like.

VOLKMAN: Well, yeah, they didn't -- sometimes, you know, I felt a little bit of ridicule, of course, I was probably too sensitive about it, like who'd ever want to be a weatherman, 'cause they're always wrong all the time, you know? (laughter) And I knew that people laughed at weather people and made fun of them, but I've told other kids, "If you want to be something, don't let people laugh you out of it or intimidate you. You just stay your course." And I quoted the late Senator Hubert Humphrey, in Minnesota. They asked him, one time, during his final days, what was something that he'd noticed about life. He said, "Well," he said, "You'll find out that nobody else is as interested in what you're interested in as much as you are." And that's true. So even if you're all alone, if that's what you want to do, that's what you want to be, that's what you do. And I don't know why nobody else in my family could have an interest in weather. I know they -- my oldest son has a lot of interest in weather; sort of something that he can talk to me about it, and he's done it all his life. But...

HENSON: So now, getting back to yours _____, you think of yourself doing broadcasting; radio, radio at that time.

VOLKMAN: Oh, yeah, I went to this library, and I found this book that explained about the curricula in colleges, and then I ran across this school in Tulsa called the Spartan School of Aeronautics, and it had been developed, I think, probably, in the 30s, in aviation. They taught mechanics, A&E, aircraft and engines. They had an excellent course in aeronautical engineering, where they threw calculus at these guys and they learned it all in about six months. It was eight hours a day, five days a week kind of school. It was a trade school, in a sense, you know. But they had a school of meteorology, which was weather forecasting. And I looked over the curricula, and thought, "My gosh, these are all the things I want to learn without all the other stuff like psychology and English and sociology..." I'd had some of that at -- already, in Tufts, but I wanted to get away from all the liberal arts requirements and stuff like that, and just get into the meteorology. And there was enough math for us to understand basic things like Petterssen's Formula, and things like that. But it was heavy on synoptic, because it was training people to work for the airlines a lot, you know, map plotting analysis, and we spent long times on plotting and analysis. I remember we'd cut the maps in half, and your buddy here would take the Western United States, and you'd take the Eastern United States, and then when you get through you'd put the maps together, and then analyze it, and we'd have races, like, to see who could get the map drawn first, analyzed first. And there was a guy who used to sit in front of me who -- he was a really whiz at analyzing. And he set the tone for the rest of the class, and

everyone tried to catch up with him. And so it's good, sometimes, to have a leader that will set an example. It's like, if he can do it that fast, then maybe I can do it that fast. He later become an analyst on one of the North Atlantic stations that have -- I don't know if they still have ships at sea. They maybe don't have that anymore. But the paucity of reports from the ocean are still a problem, but he went on one of those ships often; Newfoundland or some way out there. Anyhow, then we had good instructors. They had been Air Force meteorologists, most of them. One, the head of the school, had been the chief meteorologist for TWA back in the '30s, way back then, and he knew weather inside and out. But we learned about all the charts, you know, we did all -- I can remember learning how to do all these cross-sections, and things that people really don't do too much of anymore, but... And we didn't have any of the models, then, we didn't have any computer models. We had to hand-draw, and there was, I forget some of the terms we used, but we just had to learn how to project the weather. And the professor would say, "You need to learn how to move the weather. That's how you learn to become a forecaster." And he'd say -- I remember I used to hang over the teletype. The other guy'll be out on a break, you know, out smoking or just playing around, eating, and I would stay in there, and I'd hover over this (inaudible). And one day, he said, "The person who watches the teletype, who doesn't let the weather get away from him, that's the one that's going to do the best job." And he wasn't specifically maybe talking about me, but I remember he'd sit over there, he was sitting in his chair, he was too lazy to get up out of the chair a lot of the time.

HENSON: What was (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

VOLKMAN: -- Watch me, just looking at the teletype, but there's something that he said about never letting the weather get away from you. Because you just -- you work five days a week, you take off for the weekend, sometimes, well, you come back in on Monday, you may have lost track of the regime of things that have happened. And one of the fellows I work with here, he doesn't work weekends, but I do. And he'll call me on the weekend, and I'll tell him sometimes, "Can't you get away from the weather?" he says? "No, I can't." And you know that, yourself, when you're in the weather, you just want to be with it all the time, and be -- get up, look out the window in the middle of the night, you will, if there's something. Tune on the radio, or get onto the computer nowadays. So when I finished at Spartan, I thought, "Well, you know, I really feel like I know how to forecast pretty well," and I had a good record there, I could --

HENSON: How long were you there?

VOLKMAN: It was -- actually, that was just a twelve-month course, but it was five days a week, eight hours a day. It was nothing but just that from seven AM in the morning to four in the afternoon. And we were from every state in the union. It was, like, we're all ex-G.I.s from World War II, most of us, and some of the guys went on, and thought, well, we want to get a degree, and they'd go on to like,

Oklahoma State, because Oklahoma University didn't even have weather in those days, or they'd go up to wherever, Wisconsin or MIT, or something like. But I got to know a bunch of young people around Tulsa, and they said to me, "Don't you--" I mean, I knew I wanted to go back to college, because I hadn't finished Tufts. And they said, "Why don't you -- you're in Tulsa, and we've got a great school here, and they have a radio station. It's FM, it's the only FM station in town. It's the University FM station; it's not commercial." In those days they weren't sure FM was ever going to make it.

HENSON: So this is the University of Tulsa.

VOLKMAN: Yeah. And some rich old man, Skelly, Skelly had donated the money to build a station. KWGS, that's WGS, stands for William G. Skelly.

HENSON: Oh.

VOLKMAN: And... 98 or something.... way down the dial. And so I enroll there, and the radio speech, there was no television yet, although they were trying to teach some television fundamentals, but we didn't have any cameras. We pretended we had a camera. Looked through a glass door and pretend that was a camera lens, stuff like that. It was make-believe, like you do when you're a kid, you know, show and tell or something. But the radio station, I got a job doing some station breaks, and I said, "You know, I'd really like to work up a weather show on this station." They said, "Well, we don't know how that would work in with a college station." And I said, "Well, I'll write a nightly five-minute weather show." And so they had -- one of my friends talked the program director into allowing me to do that. And so I got a show at 9:45 at night. It was, "It's time to talk about the weather, time to turn our eyes skyward and see what's going on. And here, now, is the KWGS staff meteorologist Harry Volkman."

HENSON: So that -- was that your intro every night?

VOLKMAN: Yeah. (laughter) I remember he couldn't say meteorologist, he called "meaty-e-rologist." (laughter) He had a hard time saying the word. And I'd get on there and talk about everything happened around the Plains States there. And I had a radio that I could pull in the aviation broadcast, the voice broadcast in the low-frequency band, around 350 kilohertz you can get like -- and I got Oklahoma City, [Bunk] City, [Hardmore], [Gage], [Hobart], Tulsa, [McAllister], all those, the standard ones. And they have you the temperature; wind, humidity, and, I guess -- well, it was the standard hourly kind of report.

HENSON: In spoken word, or in more --

VOLKMAN: …yeah, it was a spoken word on that. And then I had the -- but when I got into the TV, then I had to get the full synoptic stuff, so that I could draw a map. It's interesting to note, you know, you could not use official Weather Bureau

information and make your own forecasts before 1952. This was a hard rule that was enforced strongly by Reichelderfer--he was the chief of the Weather Service. He was a hard nut to crack; I met him one time, in '76, I met him. But you -- so I thought, there's more than one way to skin a cat. I got to get these weather reports. And when I went out to the airport, and Tulsa Municipal Airport, which was near the Spartan campus, I would go out there and look at their teletypes. And we got a new meteorologist; MIC came in town, Bill Chapel. And he didn't like the fact that I was copying that stuff, and then going on the air and making my own forecast. And he'd call me the "thorn in the flesh," because I was disagreeing, and when I'd be right and they'd be wrong, he didn't like that. And so, like, for example, if they were predicting 48, I might say it's going to be 49, and then if it hit 49, heh. There's a lot of envy and jealousy like that; it's inevitable when you get competing.

HENSON: Were you the only live weathercaster on (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

VOLKMAN: Yeah, because there was only one station.

HENSON: That was it.

VOLKMAN: And I was --

HENSON: But on the AM dial there weren't any live weather...?

VOLKMAN: Not any independent. There was Tulsa Municipal Airport did a broadcast from the Weather Bureau office, and I can remember them doing that. But in those days a lot of the radio stations went to government. Like W-- In Boston, as a kid, I listened to the Yankee Network News Service, and that was forecasts sent out to the radio station from the airport, or from the weather bureau, or they did a live remote from the Weather Bureau. And they would allow that, but they didn't allow those guys to go on TV. They allowed them to do it on radio. But anyway, that's why I was forced to get the weather from the short-wave radio, because they locked the door of the Weather Bureau office at night, to keep me out. I was told -- the guy that was there first, was a guy of the name of Garrison (sp?), he was a nice guy, he didn't care, if I wanted to take the weather reports, he felt like, you know, let him have 'em. But the next guy was totally different. But Garrison was called back into the Korean War and he went to Alaska somewhere. But he taught me about using the 850 millibar chart for forecasting snows. "That's my snow chart, right there, that 850." I never will forget that. And so this was a necessity for me, and so it -- I had to drop out of Tulsa, because I was spending so much time -- because I didn't have any money. And --

HENSON: And you were actually -- you (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

VOLKMAN: I went through four semesters at Tulsa, so I was getting close to getting enough points for my degree, but the pressure of getting a weather show together

every night and spending hours copying data, I just let my studies slip slip slip to where I was getting all these incompletes, you know, because I wasn't completing the courses. Finally, they said, "You're going to have to leave," you know, because... and I thought I eventually would get back, but the thing was, I didn't have any money, and they were paying me so little, once they started paying me, $25 a week, they thought that was a big salary and I could barely eat on that, you know, and I had a room that was $15 a month, that's all the rent was, so that wasn't too bad, but it was in the attic, I had to share the bathroom with everybody else in the place. But it was pretty crude living. So I found myself, once again, dropping out, but hoping to get back someday, but it was not to be, because the career was gradually coming along, and they were gradually -- when I got up to $35 a week, I thought I was wealthy.

HENSON: And this was still on radio?

VOLKMAN: No, this was on television, in 1950.

HENSON: OK.

VOLKMAN: Yeah, in 1950. 'Cause I was doing the radio show at the University in '49 and '50, and I started the TV in the January of '50, but then I -- when I dropped out of the University I had to drop the radio show, because I wasn't there anymore, so I don't know what, actually, some time in '50. I -- third -- summer semester or something like that.

HENSON: Ah. So in the first half of 1950 you were doing TV and radio in school.

VOLKMAN: Yes, that's right. And not making any money doing either of them. (laughter) But there were no unions, of course, or anything like that, and no lawyers, and contracts, and all the stuff that we have today. And if you were nutty enough to want to do it for free, you know, they'd be more than willing to let you do it. So people -- I'd be willing to pay them to let me do it. But I wasn't -- I felt I was just qualified as an expert. Because I used to regularly beat the Weather Bureau at my forecasts. I had this confidence, because I watched I all my life, and there's no substitute for experience. If you've been watching the weather -- it's like old farmers, who look at the sky and can tell, they tell you this -- I never forget -- I've never told this theory, maybe this could be investigated someday, but when I was in Oklahoma City, in '52, I was lured over there by the Oklahoma City station from Tulsa, they said, "We have just one weatherman," there's only one channel in Oklahoma City, and that was WKYTV Channel 4, and this guy had been in the Air Force in World War II, and they called him up again, to go back in, and they went into the weather service and then went over to Korea, and the sponsor of his show in Oklahoma City said, "The only way I'll keep sponsoring this show, is if you get that guy Volkman from Tulsa to come over and take his job. Otherwise I won't pay any more." So they came over and said, "Well pay you $80 a week if you'll come to Oklahoma City." And I thought,

well, they're getting ready to increase my pay here, maybe I'll turn it down. So three months later, they came back at me again, they raised it up to $100 a week. I thought, "I just can't turn this down, this is way too much money," you know.

HENSON: That was pretty good for --

VOLKMAN: Yeah, I mean, I'd be making almost $400 a month, and that was considered -- if you could make about $400 a month, you had really made it. This was in the early '50s. And so I took the job in Oklahoma City. But anyway --

HENSON: When did you start, in 19-- early 1952?

VOLKMAN: Yeah, it was March of '52, and that was a very important week. You talk about, you know the earthquakes, it talks about them in the Bible, even, and the lightning, with Paul and all this stuff? But anyway, the first day I was to go to work, it was Monday, it was the last Monday, I think, or the 2nd to last Monday in March. It was there in the village, which is the northwest suburb of Oklahoma City. And I heard the screen door rattling. And it was open, I thought, what is that? I later found, in the newspaper, there had been an earthquake. It was a small earthquake in Oklahoma City, and they didn't really have too many earthquakes down there. I don't know where the fault line is, but so this was earth-shaking.

HENSON: (laughter)

VOLKMAN: And the next day --

HENSON: Tuesday.

VOLKMAN: Yeah. My boss was Buddy Sugg. And there'd been some bad tornados down in Carswell Field, at Fort Worth, at Barksdale and Shreveport, and the Air Force, Fallbush (sp?) and Miller (sp?), were alerting these bases. They call them tornado alerts, in the early days, they didn't use the word 'watch,' then, they called them 'alerts.' Because they'd lost a lot of planes in '48 to the tornadoes, B-36s or whatever they had, then. And, well, my boss, who had been a Navy man, in World War II, he said, "Volkman," he says, "We've got to get those tornado alerts and put them out on the air." I said, "We can't do that, it's -- not really law, but the government doesn't authorize civilian broadcasting, or the media, from putting out, they say we don't know enough how to do it, and it's a method that the Air Force has and we don't know that method." And so, up in Kansas City, Don House (sp?) was sent down to Norman (sp?) to copy the message of Fallbush (sp?) and Miller (sp?). And they didn't like House hanging over their shoulder, then -- it was this kind of competition between the government and the Air Force.

HENSON: So House was sent down there to learn about the methods of the Weather Bureau so (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) begin applying --

VOLKMAN: Yeah. That's right. And he knew that he wasn't sort of welcome there. And they sort of felt like, "Don't come down here and start stealing our method." (laughter) Anyway, they were quite a pair, that Fallbush and Miller. Col Fallbush and Major Miller and Wally Conan, whose place I had taken, had worked with them, also. Wally was a good friend of Miller, especially. And he used to say, "Miller has a sixth sense about these tornadoes." Like, there were five rules, but there's like the sixth, and that's a sixth sense, like he almost has an ESP, like, "That situation looks right, but I don't think it's going to happen," or he might say, "It doesn't look right, but I think it is going to happen."

HENSON: And that was Miller.

VOLKMAN: That was Miller, yeah, he was Major Miller. And then the guy that did a lot of the statistical work, was a Captain Starett (sp?). And Starett did a lot of the legwork. He went to the Oklahoma City office down there on [Clarison Boulevard], and W.E. Maughn (sp?) was the chief of the Weather Bureau in Oklahoma City, an old-time guy --

HENSON: How do you spell his name?

VOLKMAN: M-A-U-G-H-A-M, it was sort of like Somerset Maugham but this was W.E. Maugham. And he had a climatologist there named Oliver something. And they were so -- such old-fashioned kind of guys, the big old public building there and (inaudible) side of Oklahoma City. But anyway, Starett went in there, was sent up by Tinker (sp?), and he wanted to go through all these maps, because they want to do all these analogues, you know, find out what conditions prevailed in the past when we had tornados, so that, you know, you can say, "Well, if they happened in the past and you had a tornado, then if they happen again there could be a tornado," I guess that was the big -- kind of the basic theory of developing the scheme. And then the Fallbush and Miller saw about the all those -- the dry lines, the convergence, divergence, the fronts, and all that kind of stuff that they put together. Instability and all that stuff. Whatever. So anyway, this week, this week in March, getting back to that, Sugg and I, he talked to me about it, and he said, "Well, we're going to get those alerts and put them out on the air." And I said, "Well, it's against the rules," and I said, you know, "Maybe we could get arrested for doing that." I never will forget asking that. And he said, "Look," he says, "I'm giving you the order to do this. If they want to arrest anybody, let them arrest me, because I'm giving you the order; you're just obeying my order." It was sort of like command; he was the captain and I was his underling. And so what we did is, our newsman, Frank McGee (sp?), his real name -- we called him Mac Rogers. Everybody had a fake name at Oklahoma City. They didn't want you to use your own name, because if you go to another station, you can' t take that name with you; you've got to start all over again. So they wanted to change my name to McCan (sp?), Harry McCann the weatherman, but that was one of the reasons I turned them down the first time, I thought, "I'm Harry Volkman, I'm not Harry McCann." They said, "Yeah, but over here we don't let you use your own name

on the air." And so every newsman was somebody else. Like -- well, I go through all that, that would take too long to talk about. But anyway, we sent this Frank McGee, Mac Rogers –

HENSON: So Mac Rogers was his real name?

VOLKMAN: His name was really Frank McGee, but we use Mac Rogers on the air. He was from [Shawnee], and he was a very good newsman.

HENSON: He was on the Today Show, later.

VOLKMAN: Yeah, that's right. He smoked himself to death, he died of lung cancer. But he was very intense person, was always there, smoking away. And we sent him out with, like a hidden microphone, out to Tinker (sp?). He was going to bootleg this information and call into the station and say, "They've just issued a watchbox," I don't know if they'd call it a watchbox then or not, they may have -- "alert for the central part of Oklahoma," including what counties were, and then the boss said, "All right, Harry, you go on the air, and you put that out on the air." And we didn't know what was going to happen.

HENSON: And was this on that Tuesday?

VOLKMAN: Yeah, that was that week. I think it was that -- either it was Tuesday or the next day, but it was right in there. And so I put it out, and we had -- you mentioned it in the book, because I talked to you about this before. There was a tremendous outpouring, approval from the public, and I got cards to myself saying, "Thank God you've come here," because they thought that I brought these alerts from Tulsa or something, because they'd never had them before, and I was the new weather guy, so that really helped my fame. Because all of a sudden, here was this angel come to town, I don't know (laughter) that's going to save their life. So we had an overwhelming response, I can still see the cards and the letters that came in saying, "Keep them up," you know, "Don't stop, keep doing that, putting out these alerts on the air whenever you get them?"

HENSON: Do you know why Wally Conan did not do that, say, the year before?

VOLKMAN: Well, because he knew that they weren't supposed to. And the boss didn't tell him to do it. See, Wally knew the protocol. He was in the Service, and he had them out of Tinker, obviously. He had to go on the air in the uniform in those days. If you were in the Service, you still had to wear the uniform on the air, I remember. Wally and I became very good friends, you know, he just passed away, here, a couple of years ago, down in Houston. He was a great guy; he had a great sense of humor.

HENSON: So you were the new person, so maybe you --

VOLKMAN: Yeah, that's right, so some of that. I've never been asked that question; that's very interesting that you ask me that, Bob, because he could have put it out, but it would have been -- it certainly would have been frowned upon. The upstart of this whole thing was that Reichelderfer himself came down to Oklahoma City from Washington. And met -- and the reporters, and I don't know why I wasn't allowed in on the meeting, but I remember seeing them all in there in this glass, closed room off the lobby of the station. And the reporters from the *Daily Oklahoman* and other papers there, radio statements. And they hammered out an agreement saying that, "If you guys--" in other words, "We can't stop you from putting these out, but you're going to have to take liability, responsibility, for anything that happens, because we're not going to be responsible that panics or stampedes or crashes because they're trying to get away from a funnel cloud or something like that," and so they said that, "If you're willing to take this responsibility on, then we can't really stop you from doing that, so you can do it." And Reichelderfer actually told me, he said, "You'll be the first one to put this out on the air." And a lot of people have asked me, "Where is this documented? That you first did this?" Well, all I know is, that I was there that week when they said we could do it and Reichelderfer said, "You'll be the first one." I only had his word on that.

HENSON: And when was that meeting; was that the same --

VOLKMAN: Well, that was that same week; I think it was -- it could have been the following week, but it was during that same last part of March. Sometime between the 21st and the 28th. And I went to the Oklahoma City Library and tried to do some research to find out about it, and I know that they had the head of the Flight Wing at Tinker there... Fallbush and Miller went there, but they're -- the bosses of that Air Wing, of the Air and Weather Wing down there at Tinker, were involved in that meeting, too. And so, from there on, it just proliferated, and we have been doing it ever since, from that particular time. That's, when you think about it, that's a long, long time ago, 1952. We were still in the Korean War in those days.

HENSON: And before that, radio and TV just did not mention tornados at all.

VOLKMAN: No. There was a fear that it would cause panic. Like they said, "You don't cry fire in a crowded theatre, or in a circus, you know, where people stampede, and all that kind of stuff, and kill each other trying to get away." And also, they'd say, "You don't know enough about how to forecast them anyways, so it'd be like crying wolf, and so until you come up with something that would indicate that there is really a likelihood, strong likelihood, that severe weather, tornado weather can occur, just leave it alone. I mean, you can mention --" You know, they had to always write out the word 'tornado,' you could never abbreviate it? On the teletypes, 'tornado' always had to be typed out, the whole word. Like, everything else has an abbreviation. And so, that's how all that developed. And I was in on that, so to speak. And '52 was -- that was quite a banner year. In '54, I

went on the first color camera. And I did a weather show, in color. Now, this same boss, his name was Buddy Sugg. P.A. Buddy Sugg. S-U-G-G. There was a Sugg in the Hurricane Bureau, I remember, in Miami, years ago, but I don't think he was any relation. But Sugg was one of these 'damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead' kind of guys, you know, 'let's do it if we can,' you know, 'go after 'em.' And so he was always -- he was a great guy. He liked me and I liked him, until '55, one day, when I flew the coop, but that's another story. Anyway, in '54, he heard that, you know, color was being (inaudible), and RCA was finally going to get into making a color camera, the RCA Compatible Color. And he knew a lot of the people that worked for -- in fact, RCA owned NBC. And he said, "When that first camera comes off the line," I think they'd build them down in Bloomington, Indiana, I think there was a TV tube factory. He said, "I want that first camera for my station."

HENSON: Oh, you mean the very first one?

VOLKMAN: "The very first camera that comes off that assembly line, I want that for WKY in Oklahoma City." And so we promoted that, that we were going to get the first camera. And this, I think, was the spring of '54, I'm pretty sure of it. This year I was trying to find out the time of it, because this would have been the 50th anniversary. And what we did, is we put out like a program, we -- publicity that we were going to give away a color television set to the winner of a contest. It was a 'Who do you want to see on TV first -- first in color?" Well, I won the contest. And I've got some of those letters, still. So I won, they said, "We want to see," they called me "Harr' Vo'kman, we wanna see Harr' Vo'kman on the TV." That first -- and so they said, "Why don't you do just kind of a special weather thing. Not -- we don't want it to be part of the newscast." So I had always been relatively serious, except for some of my corny humor and stuff like that, and so, I don't know who I got together with, and I -- we thought, let's do all different kinds of weather. And they knew I liked to sing; I sang in the church choir and all that stuff. Sing... Ain't No Sky as -- "Don't know why there's no sun up in the sky, Stormy Weather," and you come out with an umbrella, something like that. And then, "Let it snow, let it snow," and we'll have you out there with an overcoat and a snow shovel, and "April showers come your way," we'll have you with a raincoat, and so I did a fast change kind of thing, and a bunch of skits about the weather on that colored camera, and I wished -- we didn't have videotape then, and it would have been great to have a kinescope of it or something. Too bad that wasn't done.

HENSON: This was the first color broadcast.

VOLKMAN: That's right. Well, as far as we know, at least on the RCA camera. I don't know if somebody else had a camera from some other company, but I think that may have been the first one.

HENSON: Do you remember the exact day?

VOLKMAN: No, I don't, but I've been trying to find it. I went on the online to try to get the Oklahoma City -- *Daily Oklahoman* to give me some archives to get in there, and I checked -- because I thought it was July, and I went through the July _____, and I had a guy down there even look for me, and he says, "I couldn't find anything about it in July," so it may have been back in the spring. But, anyway, the upstart of that was, public response is always interesting. You never know how the people are going to respond. Like they did with that tornado thing in '52. But -- you remember the story about Orson Welles and the "War of the Worlds?" And how people thought we were really being invaded by men from Mars? (laughter) Well, people thought -- because I'd always done the weather straight, that all this stuff I was singing about was going to happen. On a warm day in spring, that it was going to snow. (laughter) And they'd say, "Harry Volkman wouldn't joke around about things like that, you know," so they -- some people, you know, they just don't know how to take it, so even though I could put out disclaimers and say, "This is not," you know, "what we really expect." And so that was the upstart of that kind of thing.

HENSON: Was it the same time of day as the regular newscast would have been, or was it --

VOLKMAN: No, I think it was... for some reason, it seems to me like it was early afternoon. But, gee, I wish I could find out about that. So sometimes the paper, though, won't even cover stuff like that. They did, a lot of times, have columnists that would talk about some of these things. So that was like a first, as far as I know. And then, two years later. Well, in '55, the -- '53, let me say, '53 the freeze went off.

HENSON: The FCC freeze.

VOLKMAN: Yeah. And many cities only had one station. Denver had -- had not applied -- so Denver was the only major city in the country that had no TV station. So they were, you know, so anxious for that freeze to go off, because they had to re-allocate a lot of the frequencies. At first, we only had Channel 2-6, that's all it was. That was called low-band. Then, finally, they got high-band, which was 7-13. Ah, excuse me. But anyway, so that's how Channel 9 could get on the air. Well, immediately, Channel 9, they tried to get people -- steal people from the other channels, 'cause -- they tried -- they came after me several times, and said, "Harry Volkman, we want you over here on Channel 9," I said, "Well, I'm working for Channel 4, now."

HENSON: And they were KWTV.

VOLKMAN: Yeah. The "World's Tallest Video;" that's what WTV stands for.

HENSON: The world's tallest --

VOLKMAN: Yeah, that was that spike that's down there. Johnny Carson went up in an elevator in that -- all the way to the top the day they dedicated that tower.

HENSON: And that was the world's tallest structure at the time?

VOLKMAN: Yes, that's right. But the insurance companies wouldn't let anybody go up after that, they wouldn't even let maintenance go up there to do light changes. But that tower was so great for having the low-level jet, at night, I could hear that. When I come off for the night I could hear the top of that tower, roaring. And we didn't know much about the low-level jet, in those days, but in that plain state. I'd hear that when I'd come out of the station. And then, the next morning, I'd hear about all these storms that develop up in Nebraska and places like that, where, you know, fed that whole thing. It was fascinating. Anyway -- it might be nearly calm on the ground, but up above you'd hear that. Anyway, in '55, I finally decided, since they offered me more money at Channel 9, that I would go over there. Well, you know, Mr. Sugg, you know, he didn't like that, naturally. He says, "The only thing that I can say is that you must be immoral." The reason he said that is because I was denying that I was going. And I learned a lesson, it's a tough lesson. When you make an agreement -- if someone comes after you, to give you an offer, "Why don't you come to work for us," if you tell someone, "I won't say anything about this," that means you're going to have to lie. And as my old boss used to say, "I never lie because then I don't have to remember what I said." I can recall, that's what my boss at Channel 9 said. Anyway, so the cat got out of the bag. Channel 9, when they heard that I had accepted the offer, that I would come over there, and they said, "Well, don't say anything about it, now, that you're coming over here, wait proper time." Well, they hired a carpenter to build a weather map. And so he's building this new weather map over at Channel 9, and someone says, "What are you building this weather map for?" He says, "Harry Volkman's coming over here." So he let the cat out of the bag. And that word got around; you know how rumors go. So the boss's assistant came down and said, "We've got a rumor that you're going over to Channel 9," I said, "Oh, no, that's not true." So I had to start lying about it. And I hate to do that. Sometimes, though, you get into things -- lawyers will tell you to lie, you know, when you're making an agreement. Don't, you know, "You deny this." Because there's always denying, when you get in courts, and all that kind of stuff, to make cases. It's such a complicated, messy thing to get involved with. And so, when they finally found out for sure I was going, they said, "That's it, you've done your last show." That's the way they do it. And that's happened to me several times. You walk in, you're ready to go on the air. They won't even let you in to clean out your desk. That could still happen, you know, very easily.

HENSON: So that has happened to you before.

VOLKMAN: Oh, yeah. It's happened here in Chicago. And, you know, not just me, a lot of people. And they'll just cut you off like that. Because the way management looks at a lot of these things, is that every day that you're still there, before you go to another place, we're promoting you for your next employer, so we're not going to do that. Well, so in '55 I went over there and started working for Edgar Bell (sp?). And --

HENSON: Now, were you the weathercaster at KWTV when you started?

VOLKMAN: Yeah, oh, yeah, I went over to be their first weathercaster. And the next year, a very significant thing happened. Mr. Bell -- and he had worked for the company that owned Channel 4, the *Daily Oklahoman*, Gaylord (sp?) and that big company, Gaylord, you know, is big in Nashville, hotels... But he said, "I want to get radar," he's from Alabama, not Enterprise, I don't think. I said, "Well, I don't know where to get it." He said, "Well," he said, "We're going to get a surplus radar from a World War II airplane, a CPS-9 or something like that," the old radar with the PPI scope on it, the black and white thing that, you know, has a light sort of thing that goes around?

HENSON: Sure, yeah.

VOLKMAN: And so we put that on the air, and we put in the paper right away, the first station to have radar, weather by radar --

HENSON: And you -- first in Oklahoma?

VOLKMAN: Yeah. I don't know if other cities had it, in other parts of the country. This was in 1956, and I don't remember the month. It might have been late summer, early fall, but it infuriated Channel 4, because they always thought of themselves as the leader, the first. And they -- Sugg, the same guy that ordered me to put the tornado up, he immediately ordered his technicians to set up a microwave relay from Will Rogers' Field to the station to microwave the radar station. So they had up, the next day, the day after we got it, they had it. And so they could advertise right away that we've got weather radar, so they didn't want to let us get ahead of them by one day, even. But that's how competitive the business is.

HENSON: Were they comparable quality, as far as how they looked on the screen?

VOLKMAN: Well, you know, compared to today's wonderful color Doppler stuff, it was so crude. Everything in those days, you know, the old weather maps, the first satellite pictures, everything was --

HENSON: But the two stations, in other words, microwave relay, did that provide them with pictures that were comparable to --

VOLKMAN: Yeah. Four and Nine, then, we both had it, and I don't know, Five came along later down there, is another station that got good stuff later, but that was -- and then 1956 or 7, we heard about the [Spyrix] program up in -- the Air Force had been doing it for a while, this triangulation to get static from the other storms, and I think the three points that they used were Kansas City, Amarillo, and Shreveport or something like that. There were three points like that where you'd zero in on the thunderstorm. And the Air Force supported this research for a while. And then they withdrew the funds, they said, I think they were getting too many false reports. But up at Oklahoma Norman, Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, was Dr. Herbert Jones (sp?), electrical engineering professor, still strongly believed in this method. And so I went up into the special with him one day, and he had his little shack way out off-campus, he said there are too many high-tension wires out here, we've got to get way out away from the spurious electricity here. And he taught me stuff there that I've never forgotten, and stuff that you don't hear about anymore. But -- and we did a special on Channel 9 about that, and it's listed in their historical archives about my special on [Spyrix] with Dr. Jones. He later went to New Mexico University, I believe, and since passed on, but I never will forget. He had (inaudible) tornado meter that he had there, and he had directional antenna pointed to the thunderstorm, and he would talk about the -- I think the mesocyclone or the tornado cyclone, he called it, was up about 16,000 feet.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Interview of Harry Volkman

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

HENSON: -- Side One of the Harry Volkman interview on August 27th, 2004, and we were just discussing the [Spyrix] interview that you did.

VOLKMAN: Oh, yes. I guess [Spyrix] went out of favor and everything, because of -- I think Dr. Fujita may, himself, may have told me this, that it was because of too many false indications. And I guess that's worse than no indications. But I guess, the professor, he said that the -- Jones -- that the static that would be picked up on his tornado meter, which is like an [acyloscope], he said, if it gets 17 pips a second, he counted it, he said, that meant that that cloud, within 45 minutes would produce a tornado funnel. Now, that's pretty specific. But I've never heard or read anything else about that. I had some old data I was looking through a paper one time that was in a bulletin about [Styrex], but anyway, he followed that along; he felt that that was a reliable kind of indicator, and the -- I remember, the tornado cyclone, is what he referred to, that is up in that level. And that'd be a little below the 500 millibar level. And so there may be -- there's probably something to it, because it's like legends and sayings. There's always some truth in it, but maybe not enough to really hang your hat on, or something like that. And so if that had worked, that'd be a helpful thing to even use today, I would think.

HENSON: But you did have things like hook echoes to watch for even on the early radars, right, you could still look for the hook echoes?

VOLKMAN: Yes.

HENSON: Would you like some water?

VOLKMAN: I've been fighting a cold, but I've had to cough more that that today.

HENSON: Oh, OK.

VOLKMAN: Anyway, yeah, this was -- a lot of things have come along since then, but the hook echo was something that we, I think we were thinking about in those days.

HENSON: Now, let me ask you something else here, since we're kind of in the late '50s, now. Were you involved, at all, in the beginnings of the AMS Seal Program that kind of the getting together in the late '50s?

VOLKMAN: Ah, well, I have probably the longest-lasting -- well, one that's still active, Seals. I think I'm number 23. And it was in the last few years, I talked to almost every member of the committee, either by phone or by letter, with the group that started it.

HENSON: Were you involved, in the late '50s, in the Seal, in the (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

VOLKMAN: No, the Seal criteria and everything were devised by those original founders. Like Jimmy -- fella from San Antonio --

HENSON: Jim Fiddler?

VOLKMAN: Jim Fiddler. And -- not Roscoe Braham, not Horace Byers, no, they were in the Thunderstorm Project in the '40s. The fella from -- I just saw a letter from him the other day, from Philadelphia. He worked with Wally Conan. Wally was one of the honorary first Seal members that helped work on the Seal -- yes, I --

HENSON: Oh, Francis Davis? Was it him? Francis Davis?

VOLKMAN: Francis Davis, that's right. I have a letter from him at home that he wrote me just a few days ago, tell me about how he was involved in that.

HENSON: How did you first hear about that?

VOLKMAN: In 1960. In fact, Sugg -- oh, wait a minute, Sugg, how could that be? I was in Chicago by that time. No. What -- I don't know, it's obviously him, but he was head of NBC owned and operated stations, and I was with NBC...

HENSON: Maybe you should tell us about, then, about -- because it was 1959 that you came here, right?

VOLKMAN: Yeah. In 1959, OK. I heard, way back in the spring of 1959. See, the '58, Wally Conan went to Philadelphia from Oklahoma City. He came back from the Korean War, and he worked on Channel -- he came back to Channel 4, where I was, and when Channel 9 came after me, I thought, you know, "This is a good chance for Wally to get his old job back, and I've become a good friend of his, and if I leave, then he's the natural one to take it over." No one thought that I would be that magnanimous, you know, to sort of like, here's my job, but I was going into something better. And we were neighbors, actually, in the same community out there in the village. And so I went to Channel 9 and Wally got his job back from Channel 4, and then in 1958, NBC bought Philadelphia Station from Westinghouse. They said they needed a new weatherman, so Mr. Sugg took Wally Conan with him, and I always thought to myself, "Gee, if I'd only stayed at NBC, I might be going to Philadelphia, which is my father's old hometown." And my son lives there now. But anyway, so Wally went to Philadelphia, and then the next year, I got word in the spring that Clint Yule (sp?) was being let go in Chicago. Clint Yule was making a lot of money, but the ratings weren't very good. And he was making like two grand a week, in those days -- which isn't bad now, but I mean, then, it was huge money. Probably nobody else in the country

making that kind of money doing what he was doing. So they said, they're going to conduct a nation-wide search for his replacement. Well, I got word of it from my old boss; I called him in New York even though I'd left him, and I thought, "Well, maybe he'll still talk to me or maybe he won't." I said, "I hear Clint Yule's leaving." He says, "He is." I said, "Well, do you suppose I could apply for that job?" He says, "Well, why don't you call Lloyd Jeuter (sp?)," he's the new boss up there. And so I called him, and he probably wanted to tell me to go you know where, but he was gracious enough to say, just, "Let him know you're interested." So I started sending him letters and testimonials about my success not only as a weatherman but for getting sponsors, 'cause I was very commercially successful in Oklahoma City. And so I finally got a letter back, saying, "We're going to have open auditions in June," I think it was, of 1959, "and you can come up here and go to that." So --

HENSON: You didn't send kinescopes or anything like that?

VOLKMAN: I think I must have; I must have sent a kinescope. I probably did. At maybe their urging, or I don't recall, but I probably should have, if I didn't. Anyway, I got up here, and I walked into this studio, and all this crowd of people, I thought, "What are all these people doing here?"

HENSON: What station was this again?

VOLKMAN: This was Channel 4 -- Channel 5, here in Chicago.

HENSON: Which is W--

VOLKMAN: --NBC. It was WNBQ, were the call letters. All the NBC stations were NB-something. Like NBC, New York, NBK, Cleveland, NBQ, Chicago. There was another one for that Washington and Los Angeles (inaudible). But anyway, I should've known. If this is a job that they're throwing open to everybody in the country, you're not going to be the only one here, don't let (laughter) don't be a misguided fool, you know. So I thought, "Well, you know, I'm going to give it a shot." And we took turns going up, and this was color. NBC is the first all-color station in the country. NBQ, Chicago. And I went out there and did my bit, and they said, "Something happened to the camera, can you do it again?" And I believed them, you know, but they just wanted to see more than one of me. So I didn't realize that that was a good sign, 'cause they could have said, "Next," you know, just have you step off. So I did a second one, and they said, "Now, don't call us, we'll call you if you want you, so just go back to where you came from, and if we're interested, we'll get in touch with you." Well, two months went by, and I never heard, I thought, "Well, you know, it was a good try." And I'd hate myself forever if I didn't do that. Well, sure enough, I got a call in August, first week in August '59, saying, "It looks like you're the one we want." And I make a joke about this, and I say, "How come you chose me," and the guy says, "Well, everybody else turned it down." (laughter) But that's not the truth, but I said,

"How soon do you want me?" They said, "Two weeks." And I told my boss, he says, "Well, I can't replace you in two weeks, you've got to give me at least four weeks." So I told my boss at Channel 9, I said, "I'm -- got this offer in Chicago, and they gave me a good increase in pay." So 25th of August, '59, I did my last show in Oklahoma City. Got in my car the next day and drove up to Chicago and on the following Sunday, the 31st of August, Monday, the 31st, I started doing the news here in Chicago, and that was 1959 and I've been doing it here ever since.

HENSON: The last week of August, of fifty--.

VOLKMAN: Yeah.

HENSON: So exactly --

VOLKMAN: The thirty--

HENSON: 45 years ago, the --

VOLKMAN: That's right. And --

HENSON: But what was the day again? August...?

VOLKMAN: August the 31st. That was a Monday. Actually, they introduced me on a Saturday farm show, just to introduce me to the audience; I just sat there and they said, "This is the new replacement for Clint Yule." Clint Yule had been the weatherman since 1948, and he -- they let him go in the summer of '59, and he had been an Air Force guy.

HENSON: They let him go -- they didn't fire him, though.

VOLKMAN: Well, they did. They just said, "We're not renewing your contract." It's sort of like the way I am now, here, I'm just like, you know, I'm lame duck, so to speak. But anyway, it's been a long run, and it's been great, and we had a long way to go in the ratings, but things, over the year happened that have been great. In 1962, I had joined, pretty much when I came here, the local chapter of the AMS, Chicago Chapter, which met at the campus of the University of Chicago. And in 1962, there was a new guy in town, from Japan, called Ted Fujita. And he was working on taking distortion out of satellite pictures. He wasn't involved with severe weather much at all; he had been urged by Horace Byers, I think, to come to this country. So in that '62 year of the local chapter, he was President and I was Vice President. And so this fall I'll be back in office as the President; the first office I've had there in 42 years. In the local chapter. But I remember Dr. Fujita from way, way back then. He said, "I never see tornado."

HENSON: He finally did get to see one, I believe, later on.

VOLKMAN: Yeah, oh, yeah, oh, sure, he finally did. He was a -- he was studying sort of like damage investigation. And he never talked much about this, but when he was in Japan, when they dropped the A-bomb and the H-bomb, he was out on the team surveying the damage. And he could tell the difference between the bombs. One was uranium and one was plutonium, I think. And he's described one as the fires, and the other one, it was the blast. And he described the damage that he observed from the two different kinds of bombs, and so -- but anyway, so, I got to meet, you know, people like Roscoe Braham, the cloud expert, and Horace Byers, and Dr. Fujita, and so many of those people that were -- that had been related -- some of the pioneers in this business.

HENSON: Did you have a family when you first moved here, or --

VOLKMAN: Yes, I married in Oklahoma, in Tulsa. I married and then had four children in Oklahoma City and moved up here with all of them. Of course, they are all grown now, and I'm a grandfather now. (laughter)

HENSON: Were they supportive of the move up here, your wife and children?

VOLKMAN: Not too much. My wife was not supportive of it because we had so many friends down there, and she felt like, coming to the big city -- she was born and raised in Oklahoma, and it was quite a cultural shock, to come up here from down there. But to me, I looked at it totally different, because I was a Northerner, born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts, and I always knew, from being acquainted with news and the nation, that Chicago was the center of almost everything. Transportation, commerce, industry, railroads, and everything, and a tremendous media center, and I thought, if I really want to be in the big place, I should try to go to Chicago. So I sought it out; it didn't seek me, but as I talk to kids at school I say, "They're not going to come looking for you; you've got to seek it out yourself, you know, make people know that you're available and that you're willing."

HENSON: What were your impressions of how weather was done, here, and how the station operated, as compared to Oklahoma (inaudible)?

VOLKMAN: Well, I was confronted, right away, with a cartoonist, very popular cartoonist, named P.J. Hoff (sp?). And everyone said, "You've got to have a gimmick if you're going to make it here in Chicago." Because he's got a gimmick of cartoons, and "Mr. Achoo" was a little character he drew himself during the hay fever season, and "Mr. In Charge Of Looking Out The Window," and "Mr. Yell-an-Cuss," the guy that didn't like the bad weather, and he was pretty popular. And they were a dynamite team on the CBS station. And we were floundering on NBC; that's one of the reasons that they were looking for new people. And so, I said, "Well, I do some sound effects like 'whoosh' or something like that, or... but I really don't have what you --- what I think you should call a gimmick, I just try to do it professionally, do a good job, be as accurate as possible, be pleasant, and

if that wins audience, fine! Hopefully it will." (laughter) And it took five years for us to gain #1, and we finally did it.

HENSON: Really.

VOLKMAN: They told us, in a big market, it takes -- you've got to be here two years before anybody even knows who the heck you are, and so it was a long time. You know, they'd call me by some name of somebody else, who had been here before; they didn't know Harry Volkman from Adam. Then, after a while, when you get established, then it seems like everybody knows you, and you can't go anywhere without them letting you know. Sometimes bothering you. And you have to learn how to handle all that kind of stuff; if you get popular, suddenly you're signing autographs everywhere you go; you can't go into a restaurant without them doing that. And then you get all this jazz about, "When you gonna warm it up?" Or, "I thought you said the sun was gonna shine today," and all that kind of stuff. (laughter) It just goes on and on. "You gonna give us some rain?" I remember another thing; this is an interesting contrast so far as, like, cultures. People speak differently and use different terms in different parts of the country, and in Oklahoma, they would frequently ask me, "Is it supposed to rain? It supposed to rain this week?" And I'd come up to Chicago, and I'd say, "It's supposed to rain," because I'd picked that up. And they'd say, "What do you mean, it's 'supposed to,' don't you know?" 'Cause they don't use that (laughter) -- they don't use that term here. And then -- I had this Boston accent when I came out of New England, and Tulsa, fortunately, tried to get me to put my Rs in my speech. But in Boston, we say a 'tawnado, a tawnado.' And then -- but you have to learn to say tornado. But in Oklahoma, they would refer to them as cyclones. The old-timers say, "You gonna come up a cyclone tonight?" And I'd say, "What's a cyclone?" Because I think of a cyclone as just a general low-pressure area. And so, sometimes, they'd say, "Well, where are you from?" (laughter) Like, don't you understand this language down here? And they'd have a lot of colorful expressions. I want to tell you about this incident in Oklahoma City; there was this fella, from -- I remember his name, his name was Bert Harbor (sp?). An old-timer from Southwest Oklahoma, it was out near [Hobart] somewhere --

HENSON: Oh, that's -- my mom's family is from around there.

VOLKMAN: Yeah. And he was from the -- it was cattle county. Carnegie, or somewhere like that. I'd say Carnegie and Cattle County, my wife was like, "Cattle county? No, it's not cattle, it's cat...." (laughter) But he, he said, "Now, this is an old-time thing," and he says, "it works like a charm and I want you to watch it." He'd say, "Three months after we have a dense fog, we're going to have a big storm." And he'd want me to watch that. So, like, if December first have heavy fog, around the first of March, he'd say, we were going to get a big snow. And he swore by that thing, and I never did ever think to write down the stuff, because, you know, in three months a lot of things can happen to you; you forget about it. And then there was another fellow, come to think of it. He fed the birds.

And this is a fascinating thing, too. You know what they say, if you feed the birds they'll get used to it, and (inaudible) they tell you, you shouldn't start it and stop it and all that kind of -- but anyway, he said, "The birds will feed on everything you put out there," and that means there's a snowstorm coming that's going to cover up their food supply, so they eat to store it away. And I predict maybe a good-sized snow. And he'd call me up and say, "Harry, these birds are not feeding; it's not going to snow." Sure enough, the snow didn't come. He'd make a fool of me sometimes, because -- and then, on the opposite way, he'd say, he'd call me and say, "They're not eating, so it's not going to snow." He said, "They just have their daily ration and they fly away, and so these birds know." And so that's when I talk about people who are being out in the weather; farmers, ranchers, all that kind of stuff. They get a sense about the weather; they can sense the environment. The Indians used to do that.

HENSON: And how would you handle those interactions, as a --

VOLKMAN: Well, you don't say, "Wow, you're a nut, don't bother to call me anymore," as some of the-- you treat them graciously, and -- 'cause if you don't have a secretary to say I'm in conference or I'm busy. I get a kick out of talking to the people. Once in a while, though, you'll get a person on there that they're alone -- there're a lot of lonely people out there in the world. And once they find out that they got someone that they can talk to, they're going to pester you from then on, because they're just, "Oh," I found – "Harry Volkman will talk to me," you know, and so then they'll start calling all the time. And then they want to come and see you, and then they want to borrow some money from you, something like that. (laughter) So you have to be careful, but -- be approachable, but, you know, don't be gullible, just you have to protect yourself, but then, on the other hand, you don't want to be a snob and not be accessible to people. People stop you in the street. Had a guy ask me the other night, said, "Don't you talk to people on the street?" Well, I knew he wanted money, but I just was, you know, passing by. And then there was a woman used to call me that was afraid to death of thunderstorms, and I cou-- I was sympathetic to that because I know of my mother's old fear. And she lived out the suburban area, where there were a lot of small homes where she lived, and she never felt safe in a small place. She said, "I -- whenever I know there's a thunderstorm and it's coming after midnight--" it has to be after midnight, she said, "--then I want to be downtown in a big, high building, because then I know I'm safe." And she had a husband and kids, and she'd make the husband take the whole family downtown to come in some big bank lobby or somewhere, where she could be safe from the thunderstorms. And now, of course, that was before 1968, when we had all the buildings go to security and locked up. People forget that before 1968, which is when Martin Luther King was assassinated, before that you could walk into an awful lot of these buildings, and there was no security. Buildings didn't used to have all that stuff. But then, after his assassination, there was a lot of riotous things, like, "We're going to blow up your building."

HENSON: And the Democratic Convention here --

VOLKMAN: Yeah, the Democratic Convention. And that's when they decided, "You know, we're going to protect these buildings against possible terrorists." Not they meant Al Quaeda, or anything like that; they were local people that might decide they were going to get revenge for one thing or another.

HENSON: Are there -- was there ever any point, after you came to Chicago and thereafter, where you wondered whether you might want to do something other than TV weather? Like teach at University or something like that, or...?

VOLKMAN: Well I never felt that I could get up to that level, because (inaudible) have to go back to school and get a masters, at least. I taught a lot in schools, and I love kids, and over the years I've done thousands of schools. I've been to almost every community in this area, and, in fact, even across the line in Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana. And I've traveled in almost every community within, say, a 75-mile radius of Downtown Chicago. And I run into people today, "You came to my school," or, "You came to my grandmother's school," people will tell me. (laughter) And, you know, I realize that where I started, because I started doing this in Oklahoma City. In 1952 I went to a school down there, and these kids are in their sixties, now, that they were only twelve years old when I was with them. So I love the live audience, where you can see their faces, you can hear their questions, you can respond to them individually, and that means a lot to them. And it started, a tradition, it started back in Oklahoma, they started giving me flowers. And I used to get a flower for every school I went to, and the people got so used to seeing me with flowers, they stopped me on the street, and say, "Where's your flower?" And sometimes they'd give me a big thing, like a corsage, and they'd -- (laughter) When the guys ask, "Where's your corsage," you feel like he's telling, you know, that maybe you're not totally masculine or something.

HENSON: (laughter)

VOLKMAN: And one time I went to (laughter) Wisconsin, and I spoke to a group of workers from the American Motors Factory in Kenosha. And they wanted people to know, then I went back on TV, that I'd been in the home of American Motors, and also in the Dairy State. So they gave me a model of a car to put on one lapel, and a cow to put on the other, so I went on the air wearing a car and a cow. (laughter) And I spoke to U.S. Steel, over in Gary, a bunch of executives, and they give me a steel flower, and I've still got that; all the petals are bright, shiny steel. And I've gotten some weird things. I've had knitted -- when I was in Oklahoma, I was having babies. In the early days of television, Bob, we were like a member of the family. Television was so different, then, because it was so new. When people saw you come on the screen, they'd say, "Oh, there's old Joe," or old Harry, Mary, whatever. And we talked about our families, and they knew what clubs I belonged to, what church I went to, where I shopped, and then all

that stuff, because of [Payola], and stuff like that, and then the seriousness and competition, and studies, that sort of faded away, and you didn't -- it became corny, or something like that, especially in the big cities. Because you don't have Dan Rather coming on now and say, "I went to my Lutheran Church tonight," or something like that. But in those days it was all very apt, and so people related to you, and so -- this is a funny story I like to tell, about in -- I think it was in Oklahoma City. I had a habit of putting my hand in my pocket, my coat, like Jack Kennedy, when he was President, JFK? He would do that, all the time you'd see him with his hand in his pocket like this, and sometimes a person will pick up on your habit; they'll be watching you on the screen, and they'll note some idiosyncrasy, and a lady wrote me, she said, "Did you know that you put your hand in your pocket forty times last night during the program?" And she said, "Have your wife sew up that pocket." So -- and so I went home and I told my wife about this -- it's a true story -- and she said, "Well, let's do something funny, here," so she took some great big darning thread, and I wore a light-colored coat, and she put these great big stitches in here, so it was very obvious. And so I went out on the set, and I started to do the weather, and I started to put my hand there, I said, "Oh, I can't do that; my wife sewed up the pocket." Well, the mail came in, "You tell your wife to take those stitches out of that pocket, and if you want to put your hand in your pocket, that's you're business, you can do it all you want." (laughter) That's the kind of thing that I -- hardly anybody would get away with stuff like that today. And then, in the early days, we had all kinds of ways. I mentioned grease pencils, we started we were writing with grease pencil, and then we would get Crayola, stuff like that. And then we used chalk, a lot of the time we had chalkboards. Well, I was forever breaking chalk. Well, I had more chalk sent to me, for people say, "Here's some chalk," you know, "you broke your chalk," and it felt like they're going to resupply me.

HENSON: A lot of people in the '50s also used the glass boards, right, where they would write on one side or the other.

VOLKMAN: Yeah. And Lola Hall (sp?), in Oklahoma City, who was Gary England's (sp?) predecessor, used to write on the -- behind a transparent screen, and the camera reversed polarity, so you'd think it would come out backwards, but they reversed polarity in the camera so it came out right, and you'd see her standing behind this glass, the plexi-glass, drawing on it. But I came on there, one night, and my hair wasn't combed right, and a woman sent me a comb, she said, "Here's you a comb." (laughter) And they used to -- when I was having babies, they'd -- the women would knit booties, for the babies. And I got, I don't know how many booties I got for my first son. He couldn't wear them all. You know, they'd taken the time to do this sort of thing. And I got in trouble, over the years, with editorial comments, that's something I haven't done now in a long, long, time, but back in 1952, when we were in the Korean War and I was working in Tulsa, before I went to Oklahoma City, General MacArthur wanted to chase the Chinese out of Korea, back across into China. Well, Truman thought that would get us into a world war; we can't go to war against China, it's bad enough we're fighting

North Koreans. Well, so, MacArthur was going to go ahead and do it anyway. Well, Truman had no other recourse but to fire him, and he was a very popular supreme Allied Commander over there. And the *Tulsa Tribune*, very conservative, reactionary newspaper in Tulsa, still a big paper there, I guess, the editor was Jenkin Lloyd Jones (sp?), and he wrote a front-page editorial condemning Truman for firing MacArthur, and I sort of went along with him, and I went on the air and I said, "Truman should have been fired, not MacArthur," and oh, my gosh, you know, that was way out of line, but anyway, I had one woman write me, I can remember, and she said, "You went out on a limb, and I --"

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Interview of Harry Volkman

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

HENSON: ...August 27th, 2004.

VOLKMAN: The time was during the meetings of the SALT talks, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, I think it was in the -- about 1976, and the White House, then, was occupied by Gerald Ford, taken over after Nixon's resigned. And Gerald Ford had gone to Vladivostok to talk to, I believe, Brezhnev. Or, that might have been the Russian leader at that time. And I was so concerned. We were sending out a newsman at that time to talk to the people; Jack Taylor was, I was on Channel 9, then, in Chicago, and Jack Taylor talks to the people. He would go out on the streets, and say, "What do you think about this, that, and the other thing, or this person." And he asked them what they thought of the SALT talks. Well, the vast majority of the people had no idea what the heck he was talking about. They didn't -- they'd say, "I don't know, I use salt on my food all the time," but SALT meant Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. And -- but I was alarmed of the ignorance of the average person on the street, that this was the very thing that'd affected the destiny of our country. If they don't know what's going on over there, I said, "This is alarming, Jack," because he came to me and instead of the usual talks, like, "Now to find out whether it's going to rain tomorrow, we go to Harry." They would -- stations are different, anchormen are different, or anchorwomen, and he said, "What do you think of the SALT talks, Harry?" So that just opened the gates for me. And if he knew how steamed up I was, you know, I had to let off steam right there, before I got into the weather. I said, "I am appalled at the ignorance that the average person on the street doesn't know that," I said, "By the way," I said, "President Ford's over there, he's about to sell our country down the drain, we ought to be over there bombing the Kremlin." And the avalanche of mail that I got in support of what I had said, even from college presidents, police chiefs, people said I should run for President! They were obviously a lot of right-wingers like I guess I've been described as, although I'm not that extreme. Only one letter, the boss showed me, said that I should have been yanked off the set screaming, and not allowed to ever go back. (laughter) And they showed that, he says, "Now, see, that's what the people think." I said, "But did you hear about all the other comments," but they just wanted to caution me not to do that again. And so I have done it infrequently enough to not lose my job --

HENSON: That's what happened, I suppose, to Tex Zanfon (sp?) in New York...

VOLKMAN: Yeah, well, I've never got obscene, I never got into that kind of thing, because I know that's stupid. I mean, I'm not -- some of these shows where, you know, are like DJs, and some of these people... I don't ever found that necessary. But when it comes to, like I have trouble sometimes staying out of politics from religion, in the settings where I'm not supposed to talk about those things. And,

like, if you're in masonry, you don't -- when you're -- you don't ever talk about those things, because you don't want to get under discussions and arguments. So --

HENSON: Were you ever pressured by a station, to say something you didn't believe in, or to...?

VOLKMAN: I've never been pressured by stations to do anything like that, either -- I mean, they just assume that you will not. I mean, if you're mature, or you're professional, if you've got sense, you should know, you know, you shouldn't get involved in things like that, because that's not why you're there. But if you're a personality, people will accept a lot of things, if a few things slip out every now and then, you can't help -- but people, sometimes, will even try to read your expression, without you saying anything, they'll say, "I can tell by the way you look," like they used to say to one of our anchormen, "that you hate the Mayor, because you have this look on your face when you mentioned his name that shows you really hate him." And I had a woman, one time, saying that, she probably thought I really hate people, because -- but then she saw me at a school, and a photographer went to take a picture of me, smiling at some schoolchildren, she said, "I've got to change my mind, I think you must really like them." And so that can be very insulting, but then, you don't know how they're going to interpret your expressions, face or verbal, whatever.

HENSON: Is that, perhaps, because you kept a fairly serious approach toward the weather?

VOLKMAN: Yeah, but you don't want to be like -- I don't want to mention any names, but we had a fella here in this town, that the adrenaline really ran when he had a big storm to talk about, and he -- people didn't like that, because they think he loved adverse weather, and he admitted to that, he said, "Makes the adrenaline run, you know, when I've got a big storm to talk about," and so they've told me they like the fact that I've never exaggerated and overplayed... See, in our business, and the weather people know this, the producers love to have exciting stories. They don't want every day to be partly cloudy with little change in temperature, they want a storm warning. I've had people call and say, "Why do you play up these storms when all we have is flurries?" I say, "I don't do that," I said, "that's management; that's the producers. They want that."

HENSON: How do they accomplish that, if you're not wanting to hide the -- is it the way they --

VOLKMAN: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) I mean, literally, I was told this one time. They decide the weather. Like, in the morning, they have the news meetings, a lot of stations, you sit down, it's like a conference. "What's the big story today," as far as they know; you never know about stuff, what's going to break out, but, you know, "Looks like there's a major storm heading this way, so

we'll make that the top story tonight." And the anchors will say, "A major storm is approaching the Chicago area, and here to tell us how many inches we're going to have, here's our meteorologist Harry Volkman." And I came on one night, and said, "Well, it's not going to be too bad, maybe we'll get a couple inches." And I was told that the producers are swearing at me in the control room, saying, "Damned Harry Volkman, because he's not going along with what they're saying, and he's sabotaging our efforts to build the ratings," and they -- I told this to a newspaper reporter, and the newspaper then put it in the paper. Management came at me, very angry, saying, "We've paid you big bucks to do this, and you come on and say that. Why do you talk to these newspapers?" I say, "Because they call me." They said, "Well, turn the call over to us." I say, "Well, but they didn't call you."

HENSON: (laughter)

VOLKMAN: (coughs) Sorry about this. But this is what you face with your integrity, as a meteorologist, trying to be a conscientious reporter. You can't let them lure you into making something out of nothing. (inaudible) I kid them; I say, "Well, we've got our first flurry, are you going to have team coverage of this tonight? In other words, are you going to send reporters out all over town, standing on the overpass, and say, "Here are the first flakes! It's starting now already!"" You know, and it's just barely, you can just barely see a few flakes in the lights. And that's no indication that it's going to be a big storm. But they want that. Because they lead with it. And they want weather to be -- and we know how important it is; the station that gives good weather coverage is going to get good ratings.

HENSON: And that's something -- has that changed or evolved since you've been doing TV?

VOLKMAN: I think it may have calmed down; it's not as much as it -- but it still is very important, and they still overplay it, because, I mean, when you get into November, and it's been months and months since we've had a flake of snow, and the winter's coming, here we go again, it's something to make people perk up and take notice, because --

HENSON: And November is Sweeps month, also, right?

VOLKMAN: Yeah, that's right. And it impacts -- a big city like this, all these hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of commuters, industry, you know, the airlines, it -- granted, it's a major story and a major impact, but for that reason, it shouldn't be overplayed, it should be handled as straight as possible. I mean, if -- one fella came on, one time, and this was a big storm coming. He said, "We're going to get at least six inches, or twice that much, or three times that much, or four times that much, or five times that much." I thought, "How can you miss?" Well, we actually did get 20 inches. And then, one of the reporters, one of the columnists, in the papers, said, "He was the only one that got it right." Well, how can you not

get it right if you -- Sverre Petterssen, in one of his books, says, "If you don't know what to say, or what to forecast, just couch the terminology of the forecast in vague generalities." I mean --

HENSON: Petterssen said --?

VOLKMAN: Just save your neck, you know, 'might snow today.' I had a kid write me one time, and I thought this was, he said, "If you don't know, as they say, ask you how much it's going to snow, just come on and say, "We'll see.""

HENSON: (laughter)

VOLKMAN: (laughter) But you can't get out there and say that. And then I had a woman write me, one time, she said, "Why do you bother to even say, an amount, or how much this -- why don't you just do what I do? Just wake up and be surprised?" (laughter)

HENSON: (laughter) Well, let me ask you this, Harry --

VOLKMAN: And another guy said to me, "Why do you bother with a five-day forecast, why don't you just try to get tomorrow right?" So, you see, you can get -- you could let that stuff bother you a lot.

HENSON: Yeah.

VOLKMAN: One time a woman called me, and criticized me strongly for encouraging her daughter to go into meteorology. Because, she said, she went through, she got a degree, and then she said, when she got out, she realized she didn't know how to forecast, she still didn't know how to forecast, and she said, "My daughter is very unhappy, and it's your fault. Because you made it sound interesting, and she went into that," and she said, "Don't encourage women to go into weather." And another time a woman told me this: in the early days, there were very few women in weather. I can remember the first broadcast conference where the first woman was there, it might have been a woman from Louisville, Kentucky, Virginia...

HENSON: Marcia Yokey (sp?)?

VOLKMAN: I think she was out of Louisville... Virginia, can you remember that woman.... anyway, she stood up -- and we were talking in this one session. What do we say to the public when we're wrong. Do we apologize? What do we say? And she said, "Well, I," and she was the only woman there, and she volunteered, she said, "I never apologize," she says, "because I never make a bad forecast, it's only that the weather changed." Now, isn't that unusual logic? I don't know if you call it logic or not, but I don't think that would flock too much -- but anyway, another person told me, who was a teacher in a school, and I think she's a woman, and she said, "You know, one of the reasons," -- she might have been joking

about this, but you never know. But she said, "Do you know why women don't go into weather?" And I said, "Give me an answer, because the whole AMS would like to know this." She said, "Because women always want to be right." Now that's something to think about. I'm not sure if that's true, in other words a man doesn't mind being wrong, but -- none of us like to be wrong, but you don't want it pointed out all the time, but it's something you always think about, and you sort of like hope that they won't remember, but the average person really doesn't remember what you said, and also they don't know what channel they were watching. I've had people on the street come up to me, I don't know how many times, and say, "Where's that snow you forecasted last night?" I say, "I never predicted snow." And then they think that we're all saying the same thing. They sometimes think that all the channels get it from one source, and they don't appreciate the fact that NBC, CBS, ABC, and FOX, and the independent -- they may all have different forecasts. And now, frequently, that's the case, because like in this market, you can't hear the official forecast out of most other media. 'Cause you -- they come up with Joe's Five-Day, Mary's Five-Day, Sam's Seven-Day, whatever. And mine is on it as Harry's Seven-Day Outlook. So what's the public to believe? And the complaints are, sometimes, we just don't want to, all those explanations, we just want to know if it's going to rain tomorrow. And I've had every complaint that's possible, like, if I mention too many other places, they say, "We don't live in Pocatello, Idaho; we want to know about Chicago." And then if you concentrate too much on the local area, they'll say, "You know, I can look out the window and see what's going on here, but I've got a sister up in Syracuse, New York, and you never mention Syracuse." And they believe what they want to believe; this is another thing. I had a guy call me, one time, and say, "I'm going hunting over in Michigan, and I hear it's supposed to snow," he says, "It isn't going to snow, is it?" They'll say stuff like that. They will say what they want you to say, and I'll say, I told this one guy, "It's going to snow, it's going to snow quite a lot." He says, "Well, you've been wrong before."

HENSON: (laughter)

VOLKMAN: (laughter) So the guy goes anyway, because if a person is determined they're going to go, they'll just go come hell or high water. And this guy went, and he got stuck in the snow over there, and he comes back and he said, "Why didn't you tell me it was going to be that bad?" I said, "I did, I did tell you, but you didn't want to believe me!" And then, this is still another one. This guy goes up hunting, up in Ontario, and he calls his wife and says, "I can't get back, there's too much snow up here, I'm marooned up here." His wife calls me, and says, "Is it really snowing up there?" Because she doesn't believe that he's really stuck in the snow, she thinks he just wants an excuse to stay away for a while. So she's asking me to verify that it snowed up there, so, you know, I have to take the Fifth or something, because I don't want to get him in trouble, but I try to be as honest as I can, but you're going to get all kinds of calls about weddings and fishing trips and confirmations and all that kind of stuff. Even legal cases, that's why we have forensic meteorology. Like, "Was it really foggy on that day I had an accident?"

And so they'll -- sometimes people want you to go to court and testify that the visibility was restricted and all the streets were wet or icy.

HENSON: But you've never done that, right?

VOLKMAN: No, I've answered some letters by mail, but that's another whole aspect of this business, which I guess some people delve into.

HENSON: Now, have you ever have consultants telling you, specifically, things to change about your weather tests?

VOLKMAN: Consultants in the business to tell me --

HENSON: TV consultants, like people that work with the stations to --

VOLKMAN: Oh yeah. Oh, they're the bane of a lot of us in the business, because they come in and try to completely revise the way you've been doing it, and they want you to -- nobody wants to know this, that, or the other thing. I started giving lake levels back in the sixties, and our ratings weren't too great. Some consultant said, "Nobody's interested in lake levels." Well, sometimes, it may be partially your fault that you're not presenting it the right way, but at the time we were having critically low levels of the Great Lakes, and this is a very important factor, to keep in touch with the precipitation and the likelihood, and are these lake levels going to -- you know, people can't get their boats in the water, because the level is out so far. But if you just blandly come on and say, "The lake level is 579.8 feet today," they're not going to be tuned into that, but if -- so you've got -- sometimes a criticism is good for you, because it means that you need to think about how you're presenting this data. And -- like, one time, I had a lot of aviation people say, "Come on, give us some more aviation weather; we want to know about ceilings and visibilities." And one weather guy, who had the top ratings, he ridiculed that, he says, "Your ratings could go up maybe one point by giving the height of the ceiling," because there aren't that many people interested if it's 400 feet or 3,000 or whatever. So you can work that stuff in slowly and carefully. Now, there was a big push to go to Celsius, a number of years ago, remember when we had that?"

HENSON: Mid-seventies, late seventies?

VOLKMAN: I'm sorry?

HENSON: Around the mid-seventies, or late seventies?

VOLKMAN: Yeah! And we even had the gas stations changing over to liters, Standard Oil or something like that. And one of the stations here started giving the temperature both in Fahrenheit and Celsius. And people say, "Why are we doing that?" I had some angry mail from people, saying, "This is a United Nations ploy

to get us to conform to the rest of the world, and aren't we an independent nation? Why do we have to go to that just because England and everybody else is on it?" And so -- and then science teachers would call and say, "Look, we're trying to educate these children in the metric system, and you could be one of the leaders of this, and you don't do that, so why don't you do that?" But remember that kind of fell flat on its face, and we pulled away from trying to --

HENSON: Did you ever use that yourself, did you ever --

VOLKMAN: I mentioned Celsius a few times, but the station never pushed for it, but one of the other stations, CBS, I think, did here, push for it, and -- you get in trouble so easily. Like when we started, you know, having these campaigns about getting, you know, thinking about the ozone layer thinning, and getting away from the spray-cans and the chloro-whatevers, that big long term, is that we should get away from the sprays? Well, I had the people from the spray industry saying, "What, are you trying to ruin our business? It hasn't been proven that that's hurting -- putting the ozone hole bigger." So it's very -- they felt it was almost un-American of me to come on and use my platform of a TV weatherman to try to damage an industry. I got in trouble in Oklahoma about talking about tornado safety one time; I guess I'd read some rules from those days about how a brick home was safer than a wooden home, and the guy who worked with the wood, he was against that, he said, "You realize you could be just as dead being hit by a brick as you can by a plank," (laughter) you know, and then mobile homes, we know that mobile homes are the most dangerous places to be. Look at all the people that were hurt in Florida, recently, in the hurricane. So I was accused of damaging the mobile home business by telling people how dangerous it is to live in mobile homes.

HENSON: So who had contacted you to express dismay about that, or...?

VOLKMAN: Well, you know, I just emphasize, you know, seek other shelter rather than say, "Don't live in a mobile home." You can create concern with people when you say, "Don't do this, don't do that." Like, around the holiday season, one of the stations I've worked in, it was Channel 9, we'd get a lot of mail from the merchants, "Saying 'don't go out shopping today, we expect a lot of ice, sleet, glaze, stuff like that,' you're ruining business. You know, it's up to the [people to] save themselves, you know, be careful, but don't tell them not to shop." And this makes me think of another, the craziest thing, in Oklahoma. I was down there, you know, twelve years, and in the old days, Saturday night was a big day to go to down and shop. People, the farmers, they say they come into town and shop on Saturday night, and I -- it was a pastor down there, in one of the towns, said that I was hurting the churches, because on Saturday night I get on TV and say there's going to be a tornado, he said the people would decide to stay home from church, because they didn't want to be at church, or they'd -- if I would say it was going to be good weather, they'd all go fishing. So he didn't even want me to be on on Saturday night. (laughter) So that's - what that indicates is the importance of

weather, and weather information, and what you say and show, and all that stuff, does impact a lot of lives, and so, you know, you have a responsibility to be accurate, mislead, and not over-hype stuff, and be friendly, and all those things. And I've thought about that all of my career.

HENSON: Well, gosh, we've covered a lot of ground.

VOLKMAN: Whoa. You've got oodles and oodles of stuff here. Any more questions (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

HENSON: Is there anything, is there anything that I've missed, is there anything you think you would like to add or anything?

VOLKMAN: Well, I -- it's been interesting for me, that I have worked with about 38 anchor people, and I've seen the all different kinds of people, that I've seen how the business has changed, from it being an all white male business, to now, I'm in the minority. I mean, we now try to include everybody. And frequently, I'm on the desk at night as the only white male in the cont-- on the set. And I have -- they're all wonderful people, but it's so different, the change, because for years we've never had any woman on the news, and Lola Hall, because she had to be one of the first women, and... but... and then we try to be fair racially and nationality-wise. I was replaced one time by an Hispanic woman, and I said, "Why is that? She doesn't really know meteorology." They said, "Well, that's not the important thing is that we have half a million Hispanics here and we need to have them represented, and the weather is one of the easiest things for them to do." Now, I sort of resent the fact that they feel like that weather should be the entrance door to a lot of different things. And like, it's the easiest thing to do -- it's not the easiest thing to do, if you do it right! Diane Sawyer started as a weatherwoman in Louisville Kentucky, and that's nothing against her or anything like that, but I don't -- have never felt, like a lot of people, that weather is a stepping stone to something good. I've had people ask me that. "What do you really want to do in this business eventually?" I say, "I want to be the best weatherman that I can be." At one time they had me going into the ministry, because I was active in the church, down in Oklahoma especially, and I said, "Well, that's a fine profession, that's fine, but I intend to continue to be the best weatherman I can be; I'm not trying to be an anchorman or go into management." I've been offered jobs up in program direction in Oklahoma City, they want me to start with Channel 5 there as a program director and do the weather, both, but I didn't want to water down, so that I couldn't spend the time that I need to spend in doing the best job as a weatherman. I can do things on the side, and help people and appreciate the other jobs that other people have, but I haven't wanted to get out of what I've been in.

HENSON: But you have, enjoyed, for example, being active at your church, and, what are other kinds of --

VOLKMAN: Yeah, I'm very active in civic clubs, Masons, and in my community, in my neighborhood. I like people; I associate with people, and I just -- I'm not in some ivory tower, stuck away in front of a computer screen, just looking at radar satellite pictures. I'm not that much into just weather. But I'm in it enough to where I keep up with it. I've learned, as I -- along when the computers came along, people thought it was time for me to go out to pasture, because, you know, can't teach an old dog new tricks? Well, as soon as someone tells me that I'm probably not able to do that, that makes me turn on the determination within me that I will show them that I can do this, and that I'm not too old, and that I'm not too stupid, and I can learn it. And so it takes a while, you know, I'm kind of slow at learning, but once I learn it I never forget it. And so I can sit in front of the computer screen, now, and work with all this stuff, when I admit, when I first looked at it, I was intimidated by the whole thing. How do I even get online, here? And there are still things I don't know, but I've -- as I told one of our Society meetings, I try to make it a point to say to myself, "Learn something new every day; it makes it worthwhile getting up in the morning, and gives you a goal, and you work towards that, and it's such a great feeling of accomplishment, when you feel like you've got a skill today that you didn't have yesterday." So I think that that's important. I've continued to learn until I can't learn more, I guess. (laughter)

HENSON: Well. Anything else?

VOLKMAN: No, I just want to say I've been color-blind all my life. When I went into color TV, I found out that I had to have some help in picking out my clothes, and so my wife has always been very supportive in picking out stuff so I don't clash. I had an anchorman one time, I had been divorced and I was living alone for a while, and one of the anchors turned to me and said, "Harry, do you realize that your tie doesn't match your shirt?" And I said, "But, Jack, I'm color-blind." And he says, "But I'm not."

HENSON: (laughter)

VOLKMAN: And I could tell, sometimes, when people'd look at me, like, "Boy, does he really clash." And so you have to spend time on your appearance, your hair. I started dyeing my hair at one time, because, inevitably you gray as you grow older, and I had a guy tell me, "Why don't you dye your hair, because you still act young, but you're starting not to look young?" So I went out and got some of this Grecian Formula stuff. So -- but I did it in a sudden way and shocked a whole bunch of people, because I suddenly came on from white hair one night (laughter) to brown hair the next. And some people didn't even recognize who I was! (laughter) One lady wrote me and she said, "I screamed when I saw you, and I told my husband, 'Look at Harry, something's happened to him!'" And he says, "Well, there's nothing happened, he just dyed his hair,"" and she said, "But he wouldn't do that, he teaches Sunday School!"

HENSON: (laughter)

VOLKMAN: (laughter) That was really the conversation they had! I remember we started using hairspray. I saw an anchor, a sports anchor, using hairspray, and I thought, "That's only what women use!" But now men use hairspray all the time. We got into the leisure suit era, the wild patterns of the '70s. I look at some pictures at myself with my gaudy plaids, big bulging -- I even had a big white bow tie on one night, and I thought, "Did I wear that on the air? Looks like I'm in a circus!" But it -- we had the big, long sideburns. Now it looks so ridiculous, but then, every era is a changing scene, and you never know what's going to be in next. People used to come to work, no matter what job you had, guys came to work in suits and ties all the time. The cameraman, everything. Nowadays there's no dress code anymore. I mean, the people can't get out of what they're wearing on the air so they can get back and look like a slob all over again (laughter). It's -- so the clothing allowance -- Giddings, Giddings, out in San Francisco, used to say that all the stations should supply the weatherman with a clothing allowance of, like a couple of grand a year, but he was -- his schemes were very grandiose. He wanted us all to go to station, to work, in limousines.

END OF INTERVIEW