

Dana Van Burgh, Jr.  
Oral History conducted  
on April 5, 2010  
Interviewed by Whitney Hill  
at Casper College Western History Center

Dana Van Burgh, Jr. was interviewed by communication student, Whitney Hill. Topics include his life history, working for his father and uncle growing up, school experiences, teaching experience in Natrona County School District and Casper College, influential people in his life, military service, his wife and children.

**Whitney Hill:** My name is Whitney Hill and this is Dana Van Burgh, and we are in the Western History Center in Casper College, and it is April 4th, no, April 5th, 2011. Um today I am going to do an interview with Dana just kinda talking about his background growing up from family memories, school education memories, and then some career, or professional work and also to, different life changing events that he has gone through throughout his life. This information will be transcribed, and both the recording and the transcription will be housed in the Western History Center at Casper College. So, I guess let's start this off.

So Dana what is your family name? As to your first name, like did it have any certain meaning or like a special meaning that?

**Dana Van Burgh:** Well I am a Jr., so it was my Dad's name also.

**Hill:** O.K., and what about any last name at all, just

**Van Burgh:** Well, It's a good Dutch Name.

**Hill:** Dutch name? OK, So I guess...

**Van Burgh:** It's a name that nobody can pronounce; it's amazing how they can mess that up.

**Hill and Van Burgh.** [Laugh]

**Van Burgh:** I am always holding out my check book so they can read it, from the checks

[Laughs] they come close to getting that right.

**Hill:** Oh Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** It is amazing how many people will call me Vandenberg, or Van Buren,

**Hill:** Van Buren?

**Van Burgh:** There is no "e" "n" on it. No.

**Hill:** No. Hmmm

**Van Burgh:** It's a fun name to deal with, and Dana, we fight with, is it going to be "Dayna" or "Danna".

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** The spelling has two different pronunciations.

**Hill:** Oh sure.

**Van Burgh:** I followed a guy through high school that pronounced it "Danna." I finally got the teachers converted to "Dayna" and there was a girl that followed me,

**Hill:** Oh no.

**Van Burgh :** and she was pronouncing it "Danna".

**Hill:** Oh no, "Danna" so now they are all messed up. Well, "Danna," "Dayna", definitely "Dayna".

**Van Burgh:** Definitely "Dayna".

**Hill:** All right so, I am going to ask you to name just like the members of your family. Your parents, siblings, and then if you could spell them for me. I guess that will be good.

**Van Burgh:** That's the challenge.

**Hill:** [Laughs].

**Van Burgh:** Well, my father's name was Dana as is mine. [Dana's Grand dad read a book called, *Two Years Before the Mast*, and it was written by Richard Henry Dana. This was how they came to choose his name as Dana].

**Hill:** OK

**Van Burgh:** And my Mother's baptized, Christian name, christening name is Mary Lucile Geary Van Burgh. Lucille is L-u-c-i-l-e, most of them are double ells.

**Hill:** Yes, yes.

**Van Burgh:** The Geary is G-e-a-r-y, "Geary" pronounced "Geery"

**Hill:** Pronounced "Gary?"

**Van Burgh:** The rest of the family can pronounce it "Geery", but, I have never been able to get that "E" sound in there. "Geery."

**Hill:** [Laughs], there you go. Siblings at all?

**Van Burgh:** No siblings.

**Hill:** No siblings? "Only child;" that's great. Cool. All right, so when did your family first come to, like, the Casper area or...?

**Van Burgh:** They came up in 1917 from Denver. Dad was sent up by Continental Oil Co. He'd be here probably 3 years to run the bulk plant. Then at the end of 3 years, they said well, come on back to Denver, and he said, I don't think so. He said he liked it up here.

**Hill:** Hmm, Was he a rancher kind of guy?

**Van Burgh:** No, well he was sort of; they [the family] ran kind of a farm-ranch in Western Nebraska. He was born in Eastern Nebraska and grew up in Western Nebraska.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** They had a rural operation in a little bitty town.

**Hill:** um huh.

**Van Burgh:** Lived outside of town [Holbrook, NE], so yeah. My Mom was born in Aspen, Colorado and then grew up in Victor, Colorado and then in Denver, so I've got ranching, farming - mining background.

**Hill:** Okay. Did you grow up - Where did you grow up then?

**Van Burgh:** Right here in Casper.

**Hill:** Okay, I guess that makes sense, since you moved here. All right; well I guess we got... so if you can think back to your early memories of growing up, uh, going to like elementary school, can you describe like a typical day you might have had with I don't know, different people, or games that you used to play or any chores that you did or ...?

**Van Burgh:** A typical day?

**Hill:** A typical day.

**Van Burgh:** Most of my typical days were spent gazing out the window, wanting to be outside instead of in a classroom.

**Hill:** [laughs].

**Van Burgh:** I started school at Jefferson we lived over on Oakcrest and Devine [original spelling of street name was D-e-v-i-n-e]. And, my major memory of that is that there was a very steep hill walking up to Jefferson. And, on windy days, it was a very difficult hill to come back down. It was south facing and that southwest wind would get us, and as little kids, it was really hard to get over the edge of that hill.

**Hill:** [Laughs].

**Van Burgh:** Once you got started down the slope it was all right, but coming over the edge, it was hard to do.

**Hill:** [Laugh], Yeah I would imagine.

**Van Burgh:** Blowing around up there. I went to Jefferson to. . . I guess through the middle of second grade.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** Then the folks built a house, or had a house built, it was 2 blocks straight west of this building, Spruce.

**Hill:** How far, I mean how far was it from your elementary school, would you say?

**Van Burgh:** Well, then I went to McKinley, and it was thirteen blocks.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** So, it took awhile.

**Hill:** Did you walk to and from the school?

**Van Burgh:** Oh yeah, oh yea, no busses.

**Hill:** Okay

**Van Burgh:** Not only did we walk over in the morning, but we also walked back and forth at noon, for lunch. We'd go to school, then they would turn us loose at noon and we would walk home, and have lunch and walk back, and if Miss McLaughlin, the Principal, thought we were restless that week. When she would see us coming onto campus back from lunch, she started us around the block. Run a block, walk a block, jog a block, walk a block, jog a block, walk a block.

**Hill:** Yeah, right.

**Van Burgh:** And, she stood there with her meter stick in her hand.

**Hill:** Did you enjoy running at all?

**Van Burgh:** No, heck no, [laughing], it wasn't my sorta thing, but she kept us in shape.

**Hill:** I would imagine that, yeah I don't doubt that one bit.

**Van Burgh:** It was important to her that her teams do well. And, we better do well at the track meets, so, that was part of the whole deal, she kept us running all the time; to be in good shape.

**Hill:** [Laughs]. Did you do, I mean or did you do any chores at all, whenever you were at home? Or ...?

**Van Burgh:** Oh yeah. Being an only child I got the whole thing.

**Hill:** Got grounded for work?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, but being an only child, there wasn't much of a mess, so there wasn't a lot of cleaning to do.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** But I . . . Saturday morning was cleaning the chicken house. 'Cause in WWII we had a Victory Garden and chickens in the back yard, right here in town. Now I've gotta clean the chicken house on Saturday and didn't look forward to Saturdays.

**Hill:** [Laughs] sounds like you really...

**Van Burgh:** Everybody was excited because it was Saturday, and I'm thinking yeah, Saturday, Chicken house blah!

**Hill:** [Laughs].

**Van Burgh:** I liked the chickens, but I didn't like that job.

**Hill:** Yeah. Not so much.

**Van Burgh:** Well, the chicken house was built out of salvage lumber from down at the warehouse. Materials would come in, in box cars and they used lousy lumber to build – they called it dunnage - to hold barrels and boxes in place. So we salvaged all that and it was all bent, twisty and stringy and uneven. So then the chicken house when we tried to clean the floor, the boards that were all warped.

**Hill:** [Laughs], kinda of a challenge.

**Van Burgh:** Yeah it was a challenge.

**Hill:** How long did it usually take you to do it?

**Van Burgh:** It depended on how grumpy I was about it. I could do it in a half an hour without too much problem; but it usually took me a lot longer than that because I was grumpy.

**Hill:** Didn't want to?

**Van Burgh:** Didn't want to, yeah.

**Hill:** All right.

**Van Burgh:** I wanted to go play, go do something else.

**Hill:** Can you remember any of, like your friends back in elementary school that you used to play with all time? Or, what you did for fun?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, it was very open area around here, then. From our south fence there was nothing between it and the mountain, except one little white house and what was then Harding school, more recently it's been Garfield School. It was just open; I could just roll over the fence and I was in the prairie. There was nothing between our back fence and "C" Hill where the college is now. It was just all open, so we could play in this area, I have said, I've probably been on this campus farther back than anybody else on campus because I played on this same ground as a kid.

**Hill:** Wow, cool!

**Van Burgh:** Some friends in the neighborhood in those days, under the lonely street lights, you played "Kick the Can," or something like that at night. All those kid games that I don't think any of them play any more.

**Hill:** Did you have any pets at all whenever you were younger?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah. I had a Toy English sheepdog, and a six-toed cat.

**Hill:** Six toes?

**Van Burgh:** On each front paw, yeah.

**Hill:** Just on one paw?

**Van Burgh:** Both front; and then of course, a yard full of chickens, and I had rabbits for awhile too, so . . .

**Hill:** Hmm, all right. Did you have a favorite?

**Van Burgh:** Oh yeah, I kinda liked my dog. He was a really independent little dog.

**Hill:** Do you remember his name?

**Van Burgh:** Yes, "Skidmore."

**Hill:** [Laughs], "Skidmore?"

**Van Burgh:** Mom found that in some book that she was reading. I thought it was a fun name.

**Hill:** Yeah. Hey! Skidmore. Cool!

How about in High School, was there any ...how did that change? I guess.

**Van Burgh:** Well, we moved when I was in Junior High. Down to Fifteenth and Walnut, so I was a little closer to the school, then. Yeah. And that changed too. It didn't have much space. Of course, it had built up around here, even before that move. Right after the war all of these small houses across from the College Library were built here, so things have changed. We moved down there, and the high school was reasonably tolerable, that's about the best I could say for it.

**Hill:** Do you still walk to and from school? Or did you ...?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, well, most of the time. I, somewhere along the line I got a motorbike.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** Which I loved. There was great freedom with that.

**Hill:** Why yeah.

**Van Burgh:** Well, it was real freedom when you get your first bicycle. But then, if you got one with a motor on it, that expands your horizons.

**Hill:** Yeah, right, you're in trouble.

**Van Burgh:** A whole bunch, oh boy, we could go every where on this. Get out of here.

**Hill:** Cool. Then that was pretty much your first vehicle, then?

**Van Burgh.** Yup.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh.** In high school I sometimes conned Dad into a ride because he was going his direction so I would get to ride with him.

**Hill:** Cool.

**Van Burgh:** In grade school , I would never have accepted a ride, we were proud of the fact that we always walked no matter what the weather was and what was going on, we walked to school.

**Hill:** Oh Really?

**Van Burgh:** You bet; we walked home, wading the snowdrifts.

**Hill:** Ok, dedication right there I think. Hmmm.

**Van Burgh:** Or stupidity, one or the other.

**Hill:** Well, either way.

**Van Burgh:** Yeah.

**Hill:** All right, did you, I mean; did your chores as far as around the house, or anything like that did that changed throughout high school as well?

**Van Burgh:** Well, yes [unclear] up a level in the type of things that I could do -- more strength to do things and figure out. I remember we had moved to a smaller lot so it kind of increased

and decreased all in one shot. But I started working at the warehouse, when I was, well, I actually started down there when I was in grade school. And, my *unfavorite* chore at the warehouse was pulling weeds. Lots of weeds, around that place and since it was oil, we wanted to keep the weeds down as it was a fire danger.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** So, I spent a lot of time out between the siding track, behind the warehouse and the warehouse; pulling weeds out around the fence and by the backside of the warehouse and out by the garage. And, “Wouldn't you like to go pull some weeds today?” No! I had hay fever something awful. My dad didn't believe in hay fever. It's all in your head. I said, no, it's running out of my head. It didn't impress on him at all.

**Hill:** What ...

**Van Burgh:** Still get to go pull weeds.

**Hill:** What was like, I mean, what was the symptoms of hay fever like?

**Van Burgh:** Runny nose, runny eyes, sneeze ... great fun.

**Hill:** Pretty much like now, fever.

**Van Burgh:** The typical allergies kind of things.

**Hill:** Was it easy to catch, or not really?

**Van Burgh:** It just depends on what was in bloom or what was I playing with.

**Hill:** Okay, makes sense.

**Van Burgh:** I liked working at the warehouse. I liked what we were doing down there; it was a fun place. It was a whole lot better job than working in a filling station, or a little grocery store or something; I had done some of that. And, I liked the warehouse, 'cause you are dealing with

bigger pieces and – we had two wheel and four wheel carts to carry stuff around on. And 55 gallon drums are fun to work with when they are full of oil.

**Hill:** I can imagine

**Van Burgh:** Well, they weigh over 300 pounds.

**Hill:** So, how did you move those, then?

**Van Burgh:** We used Chimed. The rim of the barrel is called a Chime or Chine, either an "m" or an "n" is correct. And you learned how; 'cause you just couldn't grab one of those and pull it, around, so you'd push it away from you up on to the rim and then spin it around to keep it on the rim and then you would use one hand to keep it at the proper angle and the other hand to turn it so it rolled beside you. And you've got 350 pounds rolling along beside you that you are keeping track of; and if you lose it, it sits up if it wants to, or it falls down if it wants to ...

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** ... And you really have to be good at keeping it balanced. You'd get where you could move them pretty easily that way. They actually roll easy up on the chime.

**Hill:** I mean, did you work with just your dad, then, or was it someother ...?

**Van Burgh:** My Dad and my Uncle, they worked the place for years. And there was occasionally somebody else that was there, but he was out driving the tank truck. In those days, lubricating oil, and gasoline all were shipped in to that warehouse, and then they went out to the service stations and other smaller warehouses from there.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** Gasoline came in by semi-truck.

**Hill:** Did you guys have to unload it all then?

**Van Burgh:** Yes. Unload it into tanks there at the warehouse, and then load it back on a smaller tank truck to go out to the servicestations. Nowadays they just let them take the semis right to the service stations.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** But you couldn't do that then.

**Hill:** Hmm.

**Van Burgh:** It was trans-loaded, so we, un loaded and loaded. And the oil also came in in cases and cans.

**Hill:** Yep.

**Van Burgh:** And we'd have to put that on a truck and take it up town.

**Hill:** How big were the cases? Were they all the big ...

**Van Burgh:** 24 - 1 quart, which is common. They switched, till they went to plastic bottles, it was common. We had 24 quart cans. And it wasn't too bad to lift; to pick those up. We'd always used a cart if we had to get more than one of them around and stack five of them on a cart and roll it around.

**Hill:** That's smart.

**Van Burgh:** And, delivering the pails; some of stuff came in pails. Never did carry just one if you could avoid it. Because, if you carry one pail, it's banging against your shins, weighed 25 or 35 pounds. So you've got that thing dangling out there and you are all lopsided ...

**Hill:** Gotta take two cans.

**Van Burgh:** ... take two. So you'd have one in each hand. Yeah, had people tell me let me carry one of those, No, don't!

**Hill:** [Laughs], "Don't take my balance."

**Van Burgh:** Take a bucket or something, I don't want them get it out of balance. Well, I'm sorry, it works better this way.

**Hill:** Was there any significant people in your life during high school that you can think of that had a big influence on your life?

**Van Burgh:** Oh yeah, must have been. Must have been. I had one really good friend in grade school that I still correspond with. A fella' named Neal Griffith, lived two blocks over on Cedar Street. We did a lot of things together, he was a real athlete and I wasn't, but we had other things in common and we just got along with each other.

In High School, I guess my best friend in High School was the Scout Executive's son. The Scout Executive was "Red" Reynolds, so of course, his son had to be "Pinky."

**Hill:** Oh, [laughs], that's just mean.

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, mean, and he was this tall, slender, dashing, absolutely charming red head; just charmed the girls. Boy, and I just sorta stand around the edge and watch. But, it got to be a joke, because I would come up with some good line, then feed it to him, and he would use the line, and charm the girl. [Hill laughs]. Something is wrong with the system. These are all my lines and you're using them to your great advantage. And I couldn't get a date on a bet. He was probably my best friend in High School.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** My longest term friend was born a few months after I, and a half a block up the street from where we lived at that time, and, we are still good friends. She lives in California, but we still correspond.

**Hill:** Okay, what's her name?

**Van Burgh:** Mary Michie. Her dad was a sheep rancher and County Commissioner here. She became an elementary teacher in Hawaii.

**Hill:** Wow.

**Van Burgh:** Then moved back to California after she retired.

**Hill:** Did you guys hang out a bunch in grade school then, or probably just grew up together pretty much?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, well, she was over at Jefferson and I was at McKinley, so it became kind of a distant relationship till we got to junior high and high school, and then we spent some time together. We spent a lot of time together, but we were just friends.

**Hill:** Cool, Alright, now...

**Van Burgh:** In the adult world; in grade school, I think the most important adult person was the principal. She was something else, she was a gravelly-voiced principal. There was no doubt she was principal of the place. She would come up to you and say something to you, in that gravelly voice and you would say, "Yes ma'am, yes ma'am."

**Hill:** No questions here.

**Van Burgh:** The greatest event - two great things - in Grade School; one was when I got one hundred on a spelling test. Only once in seven grades did I get one hundred on a spelling test, so that was a great occasion. Miss McLaughlin thought St. Patrick's Day was really high up there, just maybe slightly below Christmas in rank of holidays; maybe not even below, and one time my mother made a green satin shirt for me to wear to school on Saint Patrick's Day, and I got to go down to Miss McLaughlin's office and show her my green shirt, that was real status I tell ya, I was living high on the hog that day.

In high school, a Latin teacher named Margaret Shidler became my good friend. I liked R.O.T.C. that was one place I was getting decent grades and we had to wear uniforms three days a week.

**Hill:** What is R.O.T.C.?

**Van Burgh:** Reserve Officer's Training Corps, military, and, she got to calling me General.

Well, I was shy, nobody knew me, hiding in the corner, or sit in the back row, and to have somebody like Miss Shidler, who was a really popular teacher, calling general, just gave a little status there that was pretty darn nice. I only barely passed her course, but I sure liked her.

**Hill:** That was in High School you say?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** The other person of note in the high school faculty, was an R.O.T.C Instructor, named Sergeant [Lawrence]

Adams, I don't even remember his first name, but he was a "cracker jack" instructor, really good at it. He was just one of those natural teachers, really good at it, and a really sharp person.

**Hill:** Did you, I mean you enjoyed his classes, then?

**Van Burgh:** Oh absolutely, enjoyed being around him, just because he was so good at what he was doing.

**Hill:** Hmm, is that kinda... I mean, have you based any of your teaching like, I guess...

**Van Burgh:** Probably, yeah on both of them.

**Hill:** Well, I mean anything specific as far as the qualities that you took out of what you learned from them?

**Van Burgh:** I couldn't pick out anything to make a list but the atmosphere and the feeling that you'd project I think is important. There was no doubt about who was running the class with either one of those people and I think that's important. There was an English teacher that everybody was afraid of named Frances Ferris, and she was famous, renowned, for her speech and debate teams and the nature of her class, and she could "gum gig" you till your toes would braid, boy, I tell you what. When she lowered the boom on you, you knew you'd been in trouble. But, she was an excellent teacher. And, kinda paid attention to some of what she did.

**Hill:** Can you think of anything...?

**Van Burgh:** Keep the kids with you instead of "agin" you if you can.

**Hill:** Okay, keep them focused then?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, always have something to do, but, always have no doubt in your mind that it is your class. Not theirs.'

**Hill:** Right.

**Van Burgh:** Sometimes, you can't hold that, but always try to keep it. Interestingly, after she retired [Feris], I would see her occasionally at a wedding reception or something like that; and she would come and sit with me. Scared me to death! Good grief! What is this? A lousy student and she comes in and sits with me.

Growing up here, and going to school here -- when I went off to college and became a geology major because that was a really acceptable career field here and I liked to be outdoors. Well, people declare majors, but I never thought about what I was going to major in till all of a sudden I get this form that said "major," and I looked at it and thought, "Major? Major, well, I am getting my best grade in geology, so I guess I am a geology major."

**Hill:** [Laughs] Hey, there you go.

**Van Burgh:** That was a great amount of thought that I put in.

**Hill:** Perfect

**Van Burgh:** Then, after I got out of the Air Force, and came back, there were no jobs in geology, so I had to make a career field change. That's when I went into education. I was a graduate student at Casper College, just taking all education for a year. It was a great year, a fun year – a whole bunch of Korean Vets up here. It was a pretty serious; pretty fun place.

**Hill:** Cool, cool.

**Van Burgh:** I stopped at the junior high, I was student teaching at N.C.H.S. [Natrona County High School] and I stopped at junior high one day on my way back up here, just to say hello to the principal because he was my grade school P.E. [physical education] teacher and junior high P.E. teacher. I just stopped to say hello. And he said, say, the Superintendent was up here the other day and he wondered if you would mind teaching here, instead of at N.C.H.S. when you graduate, when you finish at Casper College. Then I assumed I had a job. I didn't apply till after I was already accepted and said yeah, I'll take it.

**Hill:** And where was that at?

**Van Burgh:** That was at Dean Morgan Jr. High, down the street here. So then I was teaching with teachers that had taught me, and you could just see that look of, there goes the neighborhood, when they saw me. What are you doing here? They would have expected me to show up there as a custodian, but, as a teacher, holy cow! What is this? It made it sort of fun, but certainly intimidating and there were some of those people that, nowadays, students tend to call their instructors by their first name. Well, there was none of that and the principal and one of the other teachers I could never call by their first name, even though I taught with them for several

years. No way, would I call Mr. Tartar by anything but Mr. Tarter, because it just wasn't acceptable.

**Hill:** Respect?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, seven years or something like that of calling him Mr. Tarter, and I never... that just didn't go away. But he was the kind of guy that earned that kind of respect, just didn't even give a thought to call him anything else, I would hear other people call him by his first name and I would cringe I thought the world was falling down, they're ...

**Hill:** [Laughs], they are in trouble?

**Van Burgh:** Yep, probably.

**Hill:** Well, now, I am going to ask you to kinda think back to still, just growing up and if there was a building or space that was really important to you. And then just kind of what it was like appearance, maybe, if you can think of what it smells like, or sounds like, or the people there.

**Van Burgh:** Well, I suppose the one that would fit that the best would be the warehouse where I worked with my Dad and my Uncle. It was a big brick warehouse -- low and long. Brick warehouse and rather large grounds. It had seven big metal storage tanks, raised storage tanks, set up on concrete walls. They were filled with oil or gasoline, diesel fuel, [Tape stopped unclear] and galvanized metal roof. It used to be red brick, but now it has been painted some kind of other color, doesn't look right somehow. The old warehouse was built in the days of horses. They used horses to pull the wagons of oil around town or wagons of gasoline. So, some of that is still there, the barns were gone, but the feel of it was still there. And the warehouse always had, a particular smell, I suppose from the oil. It smelled because we would fill barrels and cans from those big tanks, so, it would all run out of the spout. And, also, depending upon the directions, wind, we used to get the refinery smell. It would blow in under the roof over the

dock and into the warehouse and it was *rank*. Oh boy, it was rank. You can always smell a refinery town a long ways out, and you kind of get used to it. So, those kind of smells, I, in fact when they were tearing up the area down here, that they named Casper Commons, the old refinery site, and they would dig into the dirt, that smell would come out of that dirt. I'd go by and I would just have a flash back of my youth. I grew up with that smell. And, N.C.H.S. that building, has a certain amount of appeal and memory to it.

**Hill:** Because that is where you kinda taught and ...?

**Van Burgh:** No, that is where I went to school as a high school student and then did my student teaching there. But Dean Morgan also has that certain smell and character to it; I guess that's mostly the wax on the floor, the kinds of sealer they used and that sort of thing that still hangs around there as a smell.

**Hill:** Cool. When you think about your family, what person or place do you think of first?

**Van Burgh:** Well, I guess one always thinks about Mom and Dad first, but ... Mom was quiet and laid back. Well, both of them were actually pretty quiet people. Dad was a pretty natural leader without having much to say. You just didn't mess with him. Little guy, only about 5' 8" I guess, but tougher than a boot. Very interesting, he grew up on a farm, ranch, and worked hard all his life. Tell stories about loading box cars with corn, cracked corn with a shovel, a scoop shovel, a whole box car for a nickel.

**Hill:** For a nickel?

**Van Burgh:** For a nickel a car, he got paid for loading those box cars.

**Hill:** Really? Wow. And how many could they usually do in a day, do you think?

**Van Burgh:** Several.

**Hill:** A nickel.

**Van Burgh:** A nickel a car, he got good at it. One of his favorite stories was when he was working for Continental Oil in Denver, [Colorado] started out in a warehouse in the yard and they had box cars of coal to unload. He and a fella that also grew up down in Nebraska, were there they were to unload this car. And, he said to the boss, when they get this unloaded may we go home? And the boss thinking, yeah but they won't get it done today, said "Sure." About 3 o'clock, he and his friend were heading out the gate. The boss said, "Where you guys going?" You said we could go home when we got it unloaded, and it's unloaded.

**Hill:** Wow, so they got good at it.

**Van Burgh:** Why he was good at it, he knew how to work. He always worked smart. Worked around the warehouse, you always worked smart; you didn't strain to do things and he was smart with how he did it. He thought that was important. So he was important. Mom was the one that always read to me, read story, after story, after story. Since I was an only child and I came along late in their lives, she was also my playmate, for part of the time as a kid.

**Hill:** How old were your parents when they had you?

**Van Burgh:** Well let's see, my Dad was born in 1885, and I was born in 1932, so that makes him 47, doesn't it?

**Hill:** Oh Wow! Okay.

**Van Burgh:** Mom was ... eight years younger than Dad.

**Hill:** Okay so thirty-nine?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, I was a surprise.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** Fouled up their nice peaceful life.

The third person I had to list in rank is my mother-in-law. She was a very interesting person, very determined person, grew up in Western Nebraska, dirt poor. They [she and her husband] came in here, when they were just barely off welfare, trying to find work. And, worked their way up, her husband had this big dream that they wanted to have a home of their own where their friends could come and be comfortable, and have enough food that they could feed whoever came along. While I was courting their daughter, I would be over there on Sunday for dinner and there was a family of five, friends of theirs, who would show up unannounced. Just appear on the doorstep, wanting to eat.

**Hill:** Really?

**Van Burgh:** Mother-in-Law would always run downstairs and get another jar of stewed tomatoes and just dump them in a kettle and expand the meal. Feed that many more people. It was a great place to stop.

**Hill:** Very hospitable.

**Van Burgh:** Very, yeah, that was their dream, that they would have a place like that. Which when you grew up dirt poor, I could see how ...

**Hill:** And, you said that was during the depression?

**Van Burgh:** Well they grew up and came up here during the depression. I didn't know them until the 1950's.

**Hill:** Okay, and how old were you when you started courting their daughter? Do you remember?

**Van Burgh:** Uh, in college. So that makes me somewhere around 20 I suppose.

**Hill:** Yeah, well you know the dating game nowadays, how different was it back then?

**Van Burgh:** I don't know I haven't had any dates recently, so I don't know how it is done nowadays.

**Hill:** As far as like, the courtship process I guess, was it, I mean, were you intentional about marrying her or getting to know her well enough to make that step, or was that...

**Van Burgh:** I don't know, that just sorta slipped in to the picture there. She was a person I worked with in an organization, and just, all of a sudden, somehow, that's the way it was going.

**Hill:** Okay. Where did you work with her at?

**Van Burgh:** I worked with her at the Civil Air Patrol.

**Hill:** Cool. Well, I guess we will be kinda moving on to school and education memories that you had. I know you have kinda touched on some of them already, so we will kinda go through some of these.

**Van Burgh:** I suppose we are going to do school and education, then grade school and high school, I suppose I ought to, say something about college rather than jumping right to Casper College as a graduate student.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** I musta gone some place else to get to be a graduate student.

**Hill:** That is true. Did you ever go to like other colleges? What other colleges did you attend?

**Van Burgh:** Well, I started my college career at Wentworth Military Academy. I liked R.O.T.C., liked things military and I thought that would be really fun. Most of these guys get sent there, but I went because I wanted to. It was great experience. I was only there for a year because of my high school R.O.T.C. I was a year ahead in that program and that meant the end of the first year I spent down there I was supposed to sign a contract with the Army that I would go ahead and get my Army commission. And I had crawled around in the brushes and brambles down in Missouri where the school was located enough to know that I didn't want anything to do with the Army that was not my idea of fun. So I wanted the Air Force. And, I had to find a

college that just had Air Force, there would be no argument about going into the Air Force R.O.T.C., so I transferred after my freshman year to a little college in Iowa. It was Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; about a thousand students. Wonderful place. Iowa is nice in the fall and for a brief period in the spring but the rest of the year I don't know why people live there. But Coe was a good school I liked it because, with that small of a student body, I knew most of the faculty and even the administration.

**Hill:** Right, yeah. Was it pretty small class sizes too, there?

**Van Burgh:** Class sizes were small, there were three of us that were Geology majors.

**Hill:** Three?

**Van Burgh:** Of course, we had everything from one professor, which is not always the best and he would only offered a limited amount of courses, but we sure had all of his attention.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** He was great about field trips, we learned all kinds of things. His wife was just finishing a Ph.D. in botany. So when we went on field trips, we got geology from him and botany from her. And it was just back and forth, back and forth. They just poured it to you. And, I didn't do very well in college but, I did a lot better than I did in high school. Began to catch on to how this whole thing worked.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** I enjoyed the place, and enjoyed the idea of it. He and she both just assumed that we were going to do graduate work. So when I graduated from college, then, it was time to go on active duty. In fact. I didn't even get home from college graduation. I called home and my Uncle said, Oh, you've got your "Greetings." You got orders to report." So, I left my friends in Iowa and came home to Casper, saying, I'll probably never see you again, too far away, and all

that. Came home and picked up my orders and I was supposed to process into the Air Force at Samson Air Force Base in Geneva, New York. So I went driving back through Iowa. I figured okay if they processed me in Geneva they were going to do what they were doing with a lot of people and send me directly over seas. So I would be going to Europe from that end of the country. No, I got assigned to Lowery Air Force Base in Denver. So, here I came back through Iowa again. For crying out loud can't we get rid of you? You keep turning up here. Went from College then into the Air Force on active duty for two years, which was with R.O.T.C. requirement at that time.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** They, I told them I wanted North Central U.S., Toole, Greenland, or I forget what the third place was; but they sent me to Kansas. I suppose they figured anybody that asked to go to Greenland can't be bright, so we'll send him to Kansas as punishment. But then, they sorta thought better of it and I was sent temporary duty to Alaska for the four months of the summer, which was kinda nice.

**Hill:** Yeah, how was that?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, it was nice. I liked that.

**Hill:** Why'd you like it?

**Van Burgh:** Why did I like it? Oh it was big, empty and open. It was kind of an exciting place.

**Hill:** So were you there in the summer?

**Van Burgh:** Yes, summer,

**Hill:** It's still summer, not fall?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, sun was up all the time.

**Hill:** Did it bother your schedule?

**Van Burgh:** Nope didn't bother me a bit. That's why we have eyelids.

**Hill:** [laughs loudly], there you go.

**Van Burgh:** When you have your eyes open you stay awake all night. Then, I got out of the Air Force, we got out of active duty, actually. Came back here and looked for a job in geology, they said well, there just wasn't anything; it was one of those low points in it, and decided to go back to school. Came up here, had a fun year at Casper College, got the teaching job; went to work the teaching job; and, a friend, pretty near forever, and I start in adjoining rooms, a fella named Ed Strube – a jock from down at Lusk. We got to talking one day, saying well okay, if we are going to make a living at this, we are going to have to go get a Master's Degree, that's where the money is. In the long run, it's there. So we went right after it to get a Master's. So I went to, I looked at the University of Wyoming and talked to them and they didn't talk worth a hoot. They didn't seem to care one way or another. So I went to what is now the University of Northern Colorado at the time it was Colorado State College. And, I had a good time down there. Three summers worth. So there was more time to get the thesis written, got my Master's, and then, after that I went to summer school somewhere, several years running. National Science Foundation had what they called summer institute. You applied for it, you get paid enough to make it worthwhile to go.

**Hill:** Really?

**Van Burgh:** So I went the first summer to Ripon College in Ripon, Wisconsin.

**Hill:** You but said you actually got like paid to go to school there?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah we got a stipend.

**Hill:** Hmm that's cool.

**Van Burgh:** So we found it didn't quite pay the expenses of the family going and making a trip out of it, but it was too much to pass up. So we'd do Wisconsin one summer and I was at the Northwestern University with the Adler Planetarium in Chicago, a summer; a West Virginia University, a summer. That's a neat place, you wouldn't think of, but boy, it is a neat place. Pretty town. And then, the University of California, at Berkley for eight weeks one summer.

**Hill:** You went all over the globe.

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, I just jumped around a little bit.

**Hill:** Was your family always really supportive with you going to school a lot?

**Van Burgh:** Oh, It was never even a matter of discussion, it just seemed like well this is the thing to do next and went ahead and did it. And in the process of this thing, while I was going to school, my wife was also going to school. She just had, I guess she had one semester at Casper College, when we got married. She picked up a quarter at Denver University when I was stationed down there, and three more semesters when we were in Kansas, that was the only worthwhile part of being in Kansas.

**Hill:** Was she, I mean she kinda went to the same schools you did then?

**Van Burgh:** Well, well, no, only Casper College. She came back here and wanted to finish her degree and again, U.W. just wouldn't even talk to her about it, so she went up to Billings and went to Eastern Montana and got her Bachelor's there. And then again, it behooves you to get a Master's to make any money in education, so she went down to Arizona and got her Master's in Library Science. And she was a Librarian here in Casper College for twenty-five years.

**Hill:** And you, how old were you when you got married?

**Van Burgh:** Eighteen and twenty-two.

**Hill:** And were you both out of school, then, or no?

**Van Burgh:** She just had one semester, I had a Bachelors Degree. I was on active duty when we got married. We got married a little earlier than we figured on. Because I thought I might get sent to Germany. If we were married before I was ordered over there, she could go along at Government expense. If we waited till after I got my orders then it was on our dime. So we pushed to get married a little earlier.

**Hill:** Okay.

**Van Burgh:** Had no regrets of doing that, but ... **Hill:** Yeah, I was going to say, was that more difficult, or ...?

**Van Burgh:** No, uh uh. She was an easy person to live with. Very determined, cross her but don't buck her, but she was easy to live with.

**Hill:** That's great. What were some of your favorite subjects in school? And why?

**Van Burgh:** [Laughs] I always said I majored in "Window." Spent most of my time looking out the window, wishing I was outside doing something else. In high school, R.O.T.C. was far and away my most interesting subject. In grade school I kinda liked geography, and what little science we got then, I liked.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** College? Well, geology major, of course I liked that, I went to a Liberal Arts College where you got a broad span of history, English and literature and all those things and I kinda enjoyed that, a variety of subjects. Based on whether the instructor was any good, and most of them were at that college. I even tolerated a year's worth of Religion Class.

**Hill:** [Laughs].

**Van Burgh:** I tolerated is the best you can say.

**Hill:** [Laughs], Yeah sounds like you weren't a big fan of it?

**Van Burgh:** No. Well, the subject could have been interesting, but the instructors were poor.

**Van Burgh:** Nice old guy but they wrote the course notes for the first year they taught it, and they were going through the same notebook, same stuff.

**Hill:** Yeah, lot of tone and drone.

**Van Burgh:** Yeah same old, and on and on. You expect preachers to be pretty dynamic and they sure weren't – which may be why they were teaching college instead of preaching in a church some place.

**Hill:** So yes, we have already kind of touched on this, but what did you like least about school?

**Van Burgh:** Being there.

**Hill:** [laughs] Not a big fan of school?

**Van Burgh:** Not a big fan of school, no which seems ridiculous, because I was a school teacher.

**Hill:** Yeah, I was just gonna say that.

**Van Burgh:** I think maybe that is one of the reasons I became a school teacher. Thinking, there ought to be a better way to do this.

**Hill:** Um huh; there you are.

**Van Burgh:** "Here I are;" I am still at it.

**Hill:** Well, now that we have kinda explained a little bit more about your school and education. I am going to try and move on to your profession and work and career stories that you might have. So, what was your very first job? And, if you can describe what was a typical day of working that job?

**Van Burgh:** I have already said something about that, working at the warehouse and enjoyed all of it but pulling weeds.

**Hill:** All right, cool. So can you think of any like, memorable moments or stories while you were working with your uncle and your dad that kinda stick out in your mind or...?

**Van Burgh:** The people that came into the warehouse work, were what made it more fun. With just three of us around there, or four with the tank wagon driver, it wasn't much variety there as far as conversation was concerned. I already knew their stories I had grown up with. But, for example, the Ellis' - ranchers, sheep ranchers out Northwest of town, would come in and they were Irish, and they were really Irish. And, I would see their big old Power Wagon pick up coming and I would run and hide in the warehouse, because I couldn't understand a word they said. Their Irish was so thick. My Dad could pretty well understand it, what was going on. But, I couldn't. They were neat folks. Occasionally, they would come in and they'd say something and point to the tarp in the back of the truck, and you'd go there and there would be a leg of lamb or something they had brought in to us, just for fun. Nice folks, Great folks!

**Hill:** How many?

**Van Burgh:** I know some of their family members now, and they are just really wonderful people.

**Hill:** Can you understand them any better now?

**Van Burgh:** Their kids I can understand, but the adults I just didn't do that well. Those kind of people were fun to talk with.

**Hill:** Do you want to expand anymore on how you got into teaching, or geology?

**Van Burgh:** Sure. Teaching was because there were no jobs. We were staying in my folks basement, I was back out of the Service. My wife was not liking that at all. We had a little one [Christine Lucile Van Burgh].

**Hill:** How old?

**Van Burgh:** Well, she was born in April, and we were released from active duty in June, and so she was a little one. She was a couple months premature, so she was a little thing.

**Hill:** OK.

**Van Burgh:** And I just was trying to decide what I wanted to do. I visited some oil company offices and talked to Geologists and went to the Geological Association meeting, and the more I listened to what they were saying about their business, the less excited I was about being an Oil Company geologist. I asked one Geologist how often he got to the field. He said, well, I was out once last year.

But wait, wait, wait, I was going into Geology cause you were in the outdoors and kicked rocks and this is not sounding good. So, I need to do something different here, this is not right. I spent a lot of time pondering that and I didn't have to hurry anything. I thought, I worked on a Boy Scout camp staff when I was in high school and I really enjoyed that. It was fun. Maybe I ought to become a school teacher. Maybe that would be all right. So, I checked into it, to see what I would have to do to get my teaching certificate. I could do it in a year and do it all right here at Casper College, because at that time you didn't have to have a Bachelor's Degree to be a teacher. I had one, but you could get all your teaching stuff at a junior college. So, I came to Casper College as a graduate student and had a world of fun. Great place; and I told you how I got hired at Dean Morgan.

**Hill:** Right.

**Van Burgh:** By then, Mr. Tarter took me up to my room. The building was only about three or four years old, so it was really in nice shape. And, I had this great big room, wow! This is pretty darn neat. A new building, and a nice room. My wife and I had thought, OK, we will stay here

three years, get some experience and then we are going to Alaska. Well, I retired from that same classroom where I started 38 years later.

**Hill:** Wow.

**Van Burgh:** Yeah. So, either I get in a rut very easily or something.

**Hill:** [Laughs loud].

**Van Burgh:** I guess serendipity ruled my life, I just sort of fall into things. But, all of this is neat; I had a wonderful time there, and enjoyed junior high kids. Particularly the 9th graders, that is what I taught most of the time.

**Hill:** Why is that you think?

**Van Burgh:** Why? Why did I like then? Well, 9th graders are just tipping over into that got a little better clue about how things work and able to deal with that abstractions and kinda figure out, particularly by the end of the year, about those tremendous big forces, and distances and times of Geology. And they were just growing up a bit. I dumb lucked; again serendip. When I first started in there, I was fresh out of the military, so I called my students by their last names. They were “Mr.” and “Miss.” It sorta set them back, they were not used to that. They were used to this Johnny and Betty type of thing. Oh, this was a whole different ball game. It was one of the most marvelous classroom management tools I could come up with at that time.

**Hill:** Really.

**Van Burgh:** Now they'd probably just ignore me. But, at that time it made a big difference, it made them feel a little more grown up.

**Hill:** Yeah, yeah, they saw the teachers being called that so that ...

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, so, I expected ... you could have it too. So, it just sort of fell into that kind of a classroom management and I had a good time.

And the last year I taught, I just had that sudden feeling it's time to go. In fact, I said, I was standing by the overhead projector in my classroom and a little voice from right in my middle said, "It's time to go." I've heard about things like that and I always thought that was a bunch of poppycock. But it happened. I thought well, that's interesting. And, a couple days later, the same thing, right there. Now, if it had been from my head, I wouldn't have paid any attention to it at all -- nothing good ever come from there, or this heart business. Agh. But when my stomach talks to me, I listen, it was coming from there. I thought, "Well, it's getting hard to do six [classes] a day and do them well. Maybe this is a message that it is time." So I went out to check on retirement. The fellow who had been our principal [Jim Clark] was out there in Personnel. I said, I am not sure whether it is time to be doing this or not. He said, if it wasn't time, you wouldn't be here. I said, Oh OK. So I retired.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** And before I got my stuff cleared out of the building, I got a call from Casper College asking me if I would come up and teach a class up here. Which was perfect, I didn't want to quit teaching; I just wanted, needed, to cut down the number of classes per day, so I came up here. So, I think this is year number 53 in teaching.

**Hill:** Wow, and you love it just the same as you did when you first started?

**Van Burgh:** Different. Yeah, because it is different. I (tape unclear) ... even got involved in teaching online. I thought that was the most crazy thing in the world, teach Geology on line?

**Hill:** Yeah [laughs].

**Van Burgh:** Teaching Geology is a hands on subject. What is this? And I am supposed to be teaching them to do *hands on* activities, in their grade school classroom ... on line. Good God,

let's promote on line teaching, or I mean, hands on teaching, online. That makes a lot of sense.

Turns out it's kinda fun.

**Hill:** You prefer like, in classroom teaching still, or do you like the online?

**Van Burgh:** In fact, I like them both. They seem to work out all right.

**Hill:** Ok

**Van Burgh:** One of the things that I liked about the online is often you get these single parents with two jobs and three kids desperate to get out of that two job routine and get into a real job.

**Hill:** Yeah

**Van Burgh:** They are serious students and they are fun to work with because they are just driven. I like to see, when they sent the lesson to me and it was two o'clock in the morning when they was doing their homework.

**Hill:** Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** You have to be impressed by that, it's pretty neat.

**Hill:** That's great. So, I guess if you knew then, kinda back when you started what you know now is there anything that you'd change about it or, the way you did things or anything like that?

**Van Burgh:** Ha! well, you always get that well, I'd spent more time with my family and I would have studied more diligently and I would have, and I would have... Wasn't it Henry Ford, that somebody asked him was there anything you'd would have done different and he said, "Yes! I would have parted my hair on the other side."

**Hill:** Yeah, Yeah.

**Van Burgh:** I kinda fall in that category. Yeah, it would have been nice if I would have studied more, been a better student, if I knew more; but, I am happy with what I've done.

**Hill:** Cool. I kinda have some stories about your family and your education and your professional work, so I guess some life changing events, maybe. Do you have any like personal achievements, or successes in your life that just kinda give you that sense of “Yeah! I did it!?”

**Van Burgh:** [long pause] Well, I guess 38 years in the junior high and still enjoy it, must be something could be said for that, or maybe that just tells how nutty I am. Somewhere in there - yeah, I was fortunate enough to receive a Presidential award in Science Teaching. That was a big deal. One per state, every other year, so...

**Hill:** Wow, and when was that, that you got that?

**Van Burgh:** Oh gosh, I don't know '82 or something like that.

**Hill:** Were you still at Dean Morgan though?

**Van Burgh:** Oh yes, you had to be an active teacher then. I had to go to Washington, D.C. The big excitement of that was when the envelope came, it was the nice envelope and all it says on it, is “The White House.”

**Hill:** Oooh, that makes you feel good!

**Van Burgh:** Oh, yeah, you know what that is. That was really cool. I think the envelope was more exciting than the matter inside.

**Hill:** I am going to save this envelope right here.

**Van Burgh:** Holy cow, Holy cow. Then go spend a week in Washington.

**Hill:** Then did you get to meet like, anyone at the White House, then ...?

**Van Burgh:** Well, we kinda got aced out. The early ones got to meet the President; but, we didn't get to meet the President. We got our certificates from the Secretary of Education. Big shrug. I can't remember his name now.

**Hill:** Who was the President then, do you remember.

**Van Burgh:** I think the first Bush.

**Hill:** Ok.

**Van Burgh:** Maybe; don't rightfully remember since we didn't get to meet him, it was no big deal. But, that was a fun thing, a few awards along the line. I think one of the neatest awards I ever received was -- Casper College gave me an award for 50 years teaching in Casper. Nice plaque, beautiful fossil on it. That was a nice recognition.

**Hill:** Yeah, congratulations. That is way awesome... Were there any personal relationships that you had, or even just someone that you met, that really had a big influence on you, or that you learned a big life lesson from or anything like that?

**Van Burgh:** Oh gosh, that's kind of a hard question isn't it because lots of people have made a big difference. I'd have to list a few of the selection. I mentioned Ed Strube who started with me in adjoining rooms at Dean Morgan and we are still working together. We developed a summer field program for ninth graders. Take them out in the field and teach them Biology, Geology, and eventually included some History for a week in the summer and that is still an on going program, it isn't for ninth graders any more; it moved to teachers and then to seniors -- we work with the Ollie Program here, and are still doing that and working with the American History Cowboy Coalition School District doing summer field trips with them. But it's still chugging along. That's been kind of a fun experience, always working with this crazy guy. A fellow named Terry Logue came to teach at Dean Morgan and he joined us with the field programs, and he is still working with us. So, at least long term things, where you work with somebody for so long that you have a meeting, and you don't say anything that sounds serious and you get everything accomplished. Already know what they are thinking. Makes it kind of fun. Mr. Tarter that was principal at Dean Morgan was very influential in my life.

**Hill:** How so?

**Van Burgh:** Just because he was such an honorable, honest, straight forward, no-nonsense guy. I admire him, because, when you were one of his teachers, he would support you, and back you up -- no matter what happened. If he thought you were absolutely wrong, he'd back you up, till the parents or the administrator, whoever was after you, got out of sight. Then he would take you apart. If you screwed up, boy, he would take you ..., but never do that in front of anybody else. He did that in private, in his office. I always admired that part of it. You knew he was going to support you, no matter, he would support you. There aren't many of those around anymore.

**Hill:** No, no.

**Van Burgh:** You'd just count on him being there. Coming up here has been a great experience as far as people are concerned. There are a lot of super people here at Casper College. Dr. [Kent] Sundell, who is head of the Geology Department, is an amazing man. He [pause in tape] blows my mind at what that man knows, and he is always willing to share all of it. Whatever you need to know, if he happens to know - he's yours. Very generous fellow. Just amazing as a person and as an intellect.

**Hill:** Well Okay, cool. Do you remember any economic hardship that you went through, or that you have gone through with or maybe your family?

**Van Burgh:** Well, of course, I was born, coming out of the depression, I was born in 1932. Times were pretty tough then. I was probably an unwelcome economic surprise, but, they wanted me and so I grew up with it. Money was slim, just didn't have much and yet we always had plenty to eat, nice place to live. Folks were good money managers. I didn't inherit that trick, unfortunately. But I don't remember anything that I considered a hardship.

During the war there was rationing, but that was no big deal. Just got used to it and, beginning salary for a school teacher wasn't all that great; but we got by on it. I started teaching for \$4,000 a year.

**Hill:** Wow.

**Van Burgh:** Kind of fun to say that. Doesn't sound like much now.

**Hill:** No, it doesn't, but back then I'm sure it was enough to get by.

**Van Burgh:** We bought a three-bedroom house for \$15,900 [In 1958 - 714 East 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, Casper, Wyoming]. So, it's all relative.

**Hill:** Wow that is as much as a car, nowadays.

**Van Burgh:** Things just move up and down together and so ... yeah, it makes a difference. I don't remember any time when I was really suffering from economic loss or gain or anything like that, or didn't have what I needed. I guess, you think about the losses in your life, not economic. When my wife died that was, that was a bummer.

**Hill:** And when was that?

**Van Burgh:** That was almost 20 years ago. She came home one afternoon to tell me she had cancer. Prognosis was 2 years, and it was just right close to 2 years. She was gone.

**Hill:** What kind of cancer was it?

**Van Burgh:** Multiple Melanoma. If you looked at x-rays of her skull or her bones, it looked like Swiss cheese. You couldn't hug her, she'd just break. She would sometimes break a rib just by moving. She was famous with the past president of this college [Dr. Leroy Strausner], he said he saw her on campus one day and said didn't think she looked like she felt so good. She said, "Well, I think I broke another rib last night."

**Hill:** Oh my goodness.

**Van Burgh:** Tough, oh lord, she was a tough lady.

**Hill:** She sounds determined.

**Van Burgh:** Yup, nothing would stand in her way doing what she was supposed to do or what she wanted to do.

**Hill:** Had she always been that way?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah. Yeah. She just (unclear); but her mom was that way. Her mom lived till the age 93 and she worked on 5-year plans. She'd get the next 5-year chunk planned out, what she wanted to do and accomplish in that length of time and she'd do it, and she would set up another 5-year plan. It was just that determination. What she wanted to do, how she wanted to get it done.

**Hill:** What was your wife's name?

**Van Burgh:** Nora.

**Hill:** How many children did you guys have?

**Van Burgh:** Three.

**Hill:** Boys or girls?

**Van Burgh:** Some of each. Christine is the oldest, she works for the State Library now. And has for quite a while, and she has lung cancer. Never been a smoker. There's a bummer in my life. The second one is a boy Dana the Third, can't have a name like that without wishing it off on some body else. It's the only way to get even. He works for Alaska Fish and Game in Haines, Alaska. He's a real outdoor type; quite content out in a tent. The youngest is Gabrielle, she's looking for a job right now. She's a historian. Got her first degree in Occupational Therapy and discovered she didn't want to work at that. Went back and got a Master's in History, and now after like so many with Master's Degrees in History, she is looking for a job.

**Hill:** Wow. How long did she go to school for that?

**Van Burgh:** Oh gosh, I don't know. Bachelor's plus probably about three years work on her Master's.

**Hill:** And how old are each of them?

**Van Burgh:** They are all three in their fifties.

**Hill:** Okay. So that hard, I mean, when your wife died, was that really, did it got, grew your family closer or was it something else that kinda separated you, do you think?

**Van Burgh:** I don't think either way. We just stayed pretty much the way we were. We are not one of those sticky glued-together families, but we are not far apart ones either.

**Hill:** Just there for each other?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, yep. Whatever you need.

**Hill:** Well, I do remember you talking about your online class a little bit now, with the technology and what not. Was there any other, like, introductions of new technology that really kind of changed the way you did things or not?

**Van Burgh:** Oh yeah! The most marvelous piece of equipment that was ever put in the class room was the overhead projector. Because, up to that time, six times a day, I wrote the same stuff on the board with chalk, and I didn't like the chalk dust. It made my hands break open and bleed and it was not pleasant. Along came the overhead projector and I could make up the transparency, put it on there first period, second period, third period, it was all there. I could put it back on there next year, if it was a good transparency. If it wasn't I would wipe it off. If it was a good one, save it from year to year – three-hole punch it and put it in a notebook. So, that to me was the most wonderful piece of equipment. I think these page projectors they have now would be really neat to work with the Elmos.

**Hill:** Are those like a whiteboard, smart board thing?

**Van Burgh:** No, these are where you put the picture or whatever you want under a camera and it projects it up on the screen.

**Hill:** Oh yeah.

**Van Burgh:** I haven't tinkered with the whiteboards yet, the first ones I saw I wasn't very impressed. These have got a long ways to go before they are practical. I don't like the whiteboards that you have to write on with one of those solvent smelling pens. Because, always when I get to use one, the only thing that is left is the yellow pen that you can't see it anyway, or the pale green one. And you can never find anything to wipe it off with. I just don't think they are so good. Get a lot more reflection from them. The best, if you have to do upon a board, is the old true slate board. Real slate, because you can wash those off. These green monstrosities you can't clean very well.

**Hill:** Were they like the black ones very well?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah, they were really black and they were actual rock. They were good. But that dates me. I taught only a occasionally in a classroom that had one that of the slate boards, but I didn't actually have slate boards in my room.

**Hill:** What about like, with all the computers and stuff did you always have computers while you were teaching?

**Van Burgh:** No, no. I carried the first computer into Dean Morgan, bought it myself and brought it into the building, set it up, and we had what we thought was really exciting. We had communications between Dean Morgan and Red Creek School out there in the Bates Hole Country – little rural school – comparing weather conditions on one side of the mountain and the other. That was really exciting communication. Dial up Modem. I never got to be a techy type.

I thought it was important to have computers in the room and gee, I was really living, I had a computer in my classroom; because, I bought it and brought it in.

Then we got a school computer in there and that was pretty neat. So, we had one and then we got a computer lab in the building. That was okay, but you had to reserve it down there, and so you went and did something computery in the computer lab instead of the computers assisting what you were doing in the classroom, like they should. Now there are a lot more computers in the classroom so all a kid has to do is turn around and he is at a computer. I like that and I think that is worthwhile. I think computers are, have become a crutch, they are okay, I don't have to learn it because I can just look it up, get out my telephone and punch it into the telephone and there is the answer. I love that in a classroom when I am teaching and I'll see somebody say, "Oh." Okay, just that quickly, there's the information. Wow. We should be moving a lot faster in education when we have that kind of an asset.

**Hill :** That's true. Hmm, yeah, it does make it a lot to kind of, easier to determine...

**Van Burgh:** The downside of that is the phones keep ringing in the classroom. NO, no, no. Vibrate people.

**Van Burgh:** Yep.

**Hill:** So I guess one of the last questions I have for you is, how has retiring from teaching been? Just how like an effect on your life now?

**Van Burgh:** Well, I haven't yet.

**Hill:** Well, retiring from Dean Morgan?

**Van Burgh:** Retiring from Dean Morgan? That was sad thing to do and yet it was a happy thing to do. I missed the heck out of it, and I still miss a classroom full of kids. There was an atmosphere there, that -- the energy level in junior high is incredible. Just, kinda never get over

that I guess. It was fun. Always fun. But being able to come up here has been wonderful, saved my life. Retirement is kinda nice, because you don't have to get up so early in the morning, you don't have to function quite so immediately. Having to come up here some days, that makes it different. My life is more controlled now by CATC [Casper Area Transportation Coalition], than anything else. Because I can't drive so I have to ride the transportation system, and okay, so, it has made me a slob in the morning, 'cause they won't pick me up before 10:00 and I have to be ready twenty minutes before that in case they get there early, so what's to hurry for if you are not gonna start your day till 10:00?

**Hill:** Yeah, makes sense. Gives you some time to sleep in at least. Right?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah.

**Hill:** In that sense you could probably be a college student, and stay up late at night and ...

**Van Burgh:** That's just exactly what I do, 1:30 or 2:00 [am] I'm still up – darn fool, go to bed; but I don't. But, it lets me sit at the computer in the morning and do E-Mail and then, if I don't have anything else to do for the moment, play a little solitaire, till I get my breakfast finished and then go do something else. Don't want to rush madly into these things.

**Hill:** No you don't. Enjoy it day by day huh?

**Van Burgh:** Yeah. A plus of retirement also is, of course being able to teach as an adjunct up here, but also, come here to the Wyoming ... Western History Center; to be a volunteer here, play with history stuff. I enjoy that. Give me an opportunity to do a little research and, occasionally, be of some assistance to the program up here. That's good. There's always something you can do.

**Hill:** Well, it sounds like you keep yourself busy, at least...

**Van Burgh:** I never understood people who were bored because they didn't have anything to do.

**Hill:** Me neither.

**Van Burgh:** I think they must be feeble minded. I just can't comprehend not having anything to do.

**Hill:** Yeah, me neither, that's funny. Well, you know, I think that is all I really have for you, so I guess.

**Van Burgh:** Okay –

**Hill:** Do you have anything else you want to add?

**Van Burgh:** I don't know of anything that would fit in here, so ...

**Hill:** All right well, thank you Dana.

**Van Burgh:** Thank you.

**Hill:** It was actually really fun. I really enjoyed it. But I will be transcribing our recording and both the recording of your Oral History and the transcription will be held in the Western History Center at Casper College.

**Van Burgh:** The preceding is a paid commercial.

**Hill:** And cut.