

William Heisler

JSF: This is a Perkins Oral History Project interview with Mr. William Heisler. The date is June 28, 2005, and the interviewer is Jan Seymour-Ford. So, just for the record, Mr. Heisler, could we ask you to give us your full name, your place of birth, and if you'd like to tell us your date of birth?

WH: My name is William T. Heisler. I was born in Philadelphia Pennsylvania and that was a very famous day, July 14, which is the French Bastille (sp?), their Fourth of July. And so, it's interesting that it's coming up in a week or so, well, next week.

JSF: You're 88 so we can do the math.

WH: I don't mind telling my age, I'm proud of my age, and I lived this long.

JSF: That's quite an accomplishment. So, first of all, could you tell me us how long you were at Perkins?

WH: Twenty-eight years.

JSF: So, you came in 1942...

WH: To that department. From there, I went to a high school in Virginia (inaudible) department, so I've been to three schools for the visually handicapped.

JSF: So, do you remember what year you came to Perkins?

WH: In 1953. I came to Perkins in 1953. My original job was described as director of the New England Plan for the Education of Blind Children. It was described as including all the New England states, mainly to determine which children would be suitable for special school for the blind or special setting and which children could be sent to public schools. At that time, and probably today, maybe not as much, at the time I mention this, there was a big furor about children should go to public schools or they need special schools. Well, the truth of the matter is they need special attention and special education, the same manner -- that was an argument that went on for some years, and I was right in the middle of it. So, when I finally got to Perkins, they said, now, do you think this job would be for you? I said, I hope so. Well, as it turned out, the New England Plan, as it used to be called, by my first boss, Dr. Edward Waterhouse, he was my first boss at Perkins, and he described what we were going to do. He said, in the meantime, before we get started in this job, he said, Dr. Hayes, who's a famous worker for the blind as a psychologist, (inaudible) Hayes Research Library, so Dr. Hayes is in charge of the teacher training program at Perkins and I would think you might benefit by attending his lectures and gradually doing it with him to program for the teaching of teachers of the blind, preparing them. As it turned out, if you can get six New England states together to agree on something like an educational program that would be under the guidance of say, Massachusetts, was just difficult.

And the hurdle was overcome -- well it wasn't overcome completely, but it wound up to be the Education of the Blind in Massachusetts. Now, the question was, which children, blind children, should be sent to public school and special school. Therefore, we got a committee together known as the Massachusetts Committee on Selection of the Education (inaudible). The committee was called the Committee for the Educational Placement of the Blind Children in Massachusetts, meaning educational placement in a special setting such as Perkins or maybe the Boston Nursery for the Blind babies that existed at that time, it's called something else now, for another program. That all was very interesting. Of course, I became secretary. It was a good experience. The people on the committee consisted of Perkins, represented by myself; a psychologist from Perkins; the head of the Boston Nursery for Blind Babies, which today is called Center for Blind Children. We met once a month and the people represented on this committee from Perkins, myself, our psychologist, and other people selected from the (inaudible) school, including the head of the program for blind children at the Fernald State School in Waltham. That was quite a meeting. Oh, there was one other. Very importantly, the social worker from the Commission -- Massachusetts Division of the Blind, which later became the Commission for the Blind, she represented it. She was the social worker from that organization. We felt that this committee's discussions were most were most helpful to determine most importantly which children should go where. There were many things to consider in this deliberation, among them the background of the particular blind child, blind baby, (inaudible). We discovered that generally speaking, those children from fairly large families were more easily adapted to a special setting. They had to do their own part; they had to pull their own weight. And, there's a lot to that. I could go into the causes of parental reaction to blindness in children. There was complete acceptance, there was denial, there was (inaudible) denial, those three. In other words, the parents' reaction to the child's handicap had an awful lot to do with the educability, the child's finding a place in society. There were parents who wanted them [out?] of the home, put them away somewhere else, these two gradations between the types of acceptance or denial of blind children. This committee went on for some time, until it dissolved at the end of a year or two. These things are very interesting in the field of education because the government people, I don't know whether they did not like the idea of this special committee being put together to determine -- to suggest proper educational placement for young blind children. It finally dissolved when the head of special education in Massachusetts as much as said, "We can't recognize these recommendations," and it sort of dissolved. But, let me go on. My background was not completely in this type of setting. I was hired to be a science teacher at the Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia, and I also was asked to teach mathematics, horticulture in the form of gardening, and one or two -- household management, physics, how to make repairs and so on. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). And so, I was able to become -- I was automatically directed, I'd guess you would say, to be the scout master for the first blind boy scout troop in the United States at Overbrook. I had experience in scouting and so on, and it worked out pretty well. We went on hikes, I took them on hikes to Old Fairmont Park and different places. I was teaching but at the same time, I was I was learning just as much, maybe more, from the pupils themselves. For example, we were walking on the top story of the public library -- Philadelphia Public Library. It was like a roof garden and as we walked along on that, mostly we had blind children, we [link?] their arms together. This one girl, who was totally

blind, very smart girl, however, suddenly went, "What's that?" She pointed in the direction opposite her and I said, "What?" and she said, "That over there. There's something wrong." It was about 15 feet or better away. I said, "Let's go over and look at it." It was an [urn?]. She said, "I (inaudible)." My learning was continuing. I realized of course, that we have more than one sense, a sixth sense, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. Now, hearing came in this instance for the youngster, got an echo with her footsteps and picked it up. Blind children refer to seeing things. They're not trying to bluff, but once in a great while, (inaudible) snow on the ground, and people had to walk back to their living quarters on the camps at Perkins, for example, cottage (inaudible). This one girl was walking back through the snow and she said, "I must have walked past the cottage. I didn't hear it." I would often say I didn't hear it. Another instance was I was standing in the hall besides the typing room teacher, typing -- teacher of typing, and one of the girls went by and said, "Hello, Miss Nelson." The girl was totally blind and also, she had a [troublemaker?]. I was standing against the wall with the teacher. She walked by and said, "You're not speaking to me, are you Miss Nelson." She said, "Mr. Heisler, how did she know who I was?" Well, I said, "Well, you know, we have personal characteristics, in other words, sense of smell is often (inaudible)." Senses like that are utilized all the time.

JSF: Would you like to talk a little bit about how you got into the field of being a teacher of kids who are blind?

WH: Yes. I graduated from Penn State -- after three and a half years, I was able to graduate because I took a lot of courses. But, I came home and there were no teaching jobs at that time of years. In desperation, I joined the teachers agency in Philadelphia, and they contacted me in a day -- "We have an interesting job that's opened, and we thought you might be interested, a unique job." I said, "What is that?" "Teaching blind children." I've been trained as a regular instructor and I hesitated and I said -- I asked if I could come and visit the school and observe the children, which I did at Overbrook. I sat in there at the classes. Some were reading Braille and writing Braille on a slate, Braille Writers, etc. I was quite interested in that. I felt, I didn't train for this, I trained to become a teacher, and so -- my qualifications were quite acceptable and they said, "We'd like to offer you this position." I said, "Could you give me about three days to think about it?" I really wanted to (inaudible) soul-searching and what not, I decided to accept the job. This was my hometown, Philadelphia, suburban Philadelphia, Overbrook. (inaudible) nicknamed the school Overbrook. Originally, it was called the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, Overbrook. So, I went to Overbrook. I was there for six years. So much for the beginning. I learned so much at first. I said, "What does this mean to you?" (inaudible) you have to gain the trust of the kids, anybody who's teaching, really call a spade a spade. Jumping ahead a little bit, after I was in school, I got the confidence, and I'd say, "How do you know that?" Well, I could tell the sound of it or the feeling of it. (inaudible) it's where utilizing your other senses and contrary to belief of the general public, the blind do not have better hearing, in fact, statistically -- be careful on this -- there are a rather large number of the blind population that have accompanying hearing loss, even to the extreme of the deaf-blind. However, a person who has their normal senses does not have superior hearing; but a blind person utilizes their hearing potential to the most, whereas a seeing person -- well, they hear

something, but not as keenly, doesn't -- (inaudible) in their lives. And so, I (inaudible) and wrote about it in the Outlook for the Blind, which was our field publication in the United States; you may have seen it. I was interested and I wrote some articles for it -- teaching blind children how to tell trees, trees on the Perkins campus.

JSF: We still have that.

WH: I would go through it. Suggestions for Tree Study. The teacher takes her children out on the campus, you've seen it there, the tree signs and all. It includes brief descriptions of the leaf, bark, and tree characteristics of the campus trees and facilitating identification of all seasons of the year, winter, spring, summer, etc. I came out and stated that children that had the least difficulty in identifying twigs and leaves because of the three-dimensional character of twigs versus a flat leaf, things like this, that's when you're learning all the time -- put two and two together. I became a member of the committee, it wasn't the board, a committee of the Outlook for the Blind. It's a national organization for teachers of the blind. It changed later to the Teachers of the Visually Handicapped, and today, Teachers of the Visually Impaired, which is a broader term. So, I was interested in that and became, for a space of time, I was a member of the National Committee I'd guess you'd call it, and made decisions about publication and so on. That led into another avocation that came along, the education of the international -- the International Journal for Education of the blind. It might be in the Research library.

JSF: Was education of the visually handicapped, is that different?

WH: The international (inaudible). The American group -- we met once a year at a conference, whereas the international group met once every five years in a different country. I happened to go to the first country, which was held in Oslo, Norway. These were workshops. Teachers -- administrators trade experiences and as in any workshop, it came out with suggestions at the end, education of (inaudible) group recognized that as well. But the education of the blind in all the different countries -- for all the countries involved, it went from Norway to Germany, and different countries. Excuse me for a moment. Other countries that I visited to interview students or coming to teacher education (inaudible). I interviewed prospective teachers of the blind or teachers of the blind in their countries who wanted to come to the United States and (inaudible) some of the techniques. The countries involved were India, East Africa, Kenya. In the foreign countries, there was a higher incidence of total blindness than we experienced here. In the case of India at that time, causes of blindness were smallpox, which was one of the leading causes, (inaudible) this country. Many of the children came to Perkins on scholarships to learn some of the techniques, educational ways of teaching the blind and visually handicapped, visually impaired. Smallpox left pock marks and the association between smallpox is blindness, is the fact that the pox went into the eye. This is my wife, Ruth, (inaudible) my former wife, I've been talking about the past, she keeps me on an even keel. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

JSF Thank you for letting us come into your home and interview...

RH: Fine. How's he doing?

JSF: He's doing good.

RH: You'll have to excuse me.

JSF: Oh certainly.

WH: Thanks. Sorry about that mistake. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Well, OK. A friend of mine remarried and would call his new wife his former's wife's and my name. She would get back and she'd say, "OK," and she'd use his name, her husband's name. So, from Overbrook, I went to the Virginia State School for the Blind. In between, I did a little bit of teaching in biology at a college and one year at Pennsylvania Military College and then (inaudible) become principal in the state school for the blind in Stanton, Virginia. I just spent my first and only year at Pennsylvania Military College, and I told them I wanted to accept another job as head of the School for the Blind, Department for the Blind in Virginia. One year of teaching, it's not good to jump somewhere else. They came to me and the dean said, "You know, are you telling me something? Are you leaving a job or going to a job? Things were going well here?" I said, "Fine."

JSF: So, had you left Overbrook and were full time at the Pennsylvania...

WH: After Overbrook, I went to the Pennsylvania Military College in Chester and was there for one year, and back into working for the blind at the Virginia State School for the Blind, where I was principal. Then from there, I was interviewed by Dr. Waterhouse to take over this job that I described earlier, The New England -- the education of blind children. Just one more reference back to that. The Massachusetts Plan, that was killed. It was (inaudible) really was. The director of special education at that time didn't want to recognize this, even though a member of his staff was on the committee, so she was on the spot.

JSF: So, why do you think he didn't want to consider your suggestions?

WH: Because we were not employees of the state. It was political. I hesitate on that, and she was on the spot. She was a contact between the Commission of the Blind of Massachusetts and this committee (inaudible). But, she stood her ground and finally had to tell us that she could no longer serve and we were (inaudible) somewhere they got the director of the school, but they didn't recognize this committee, although that committee had functioned very helpfully for the better part of a year. But, it was treading on toes. The state head of education didn't want this committee recommending, even though it made some good recommendations. (inaudible). So much for that belonging to a nowhere organization. I can hardly read my writing (inaudible). Part of my job at Perkins again, I visited many -- a goodly number of colleges and universities in the New England area, generally, to interview seniors. I interviewed them through the Department of -- I don't know what you call it, through their placement office, that's it, and I sat

down and described as best as I could, and they listened. They were just out of college, and it sounded pretty good. I brought a long a few items to show them. What's Braille, things like this.

JSF: What items did you show them?

WH: (inaudible) children would handle utilizing their remaining senses and here I mentioned again, use of their other senses, touch, taste, smell, hearing. (inaudible). We were able to sign up -- offer scholarships to quite a few college seniors who had just graduated and didn't know what to do. They were interested in education, and of course, I came along, through their education placement office, and I'd sit down here and I think (inaudible) communicate my general good feelings in this field of work. (inaudible) few Braille cards and I would wind up and say, probably you won't make as much money teaching blind children or other children. If you like it, it's a very self-satisfying thing. Part of the -- not hire --- interviews with the director of the school, at least 50 or 100 (inaudible). That's just a ballpark figure. I was doing that since 1953 until the late -- mid to late 70s. I retired in 1981. During that time, I visited schools that ranged from Holyoke, Smith, University of Massachusetts, and other colleges in the general area, right up into New Hampshire. I met people who were interested, and they were offered scholarships by Perkins Now, these scholarships granted to these people their room, board, and laundry. They lived in a cottage and were eating with the children. They have a wonderful cottage system of education, independent -- kids (inaudible) waiting on the tables, bringing in the food, (inaudible). Staff members, there was always one staff member at each table in the cottage and there, again, self-improve. The staff, we learned a lot from these kids just at the table. (inaudible) other people who were training, interested.

JSF: So, the teachers that you recruited were they mostly young women, or was it a mix of young women and young men?

WH: They were men and women. Now, I recruited not only in Massachusetts; I went as far as the state of Washington, California, and hither and yon. There were men, mostly women, (inaudible) Spokane, Washington. I'd fly out there, I'd meet them someplace, and I had the interview. So, I was sent around the United States to interview these people for scholarships, and it went very well, I must say. I cannot decide, but over the period of 1953 through the late 70s, a lot of recruiting went on ad nauseum. It was wonderful to talk to these people who were emerging from college and weren't sure of what existed. (long inaudible) over the years. The point I am making is -- well two things. One is to describe experiences in the profession of education (inaudible) and bringing some of the healing touches to it also, some of the real stories, you know. They came down and visited, some of them, and signed up. It was a good feeling. Now, getting to the collegiate level, we were sponsored, I believe, by Boston University, the graduate program at Boston University in special education. Students took certain courses at BU, and the main training was done on developing (inaudible). They were given responsibilities living with these children, and they had to -- I was going to say keep the kids straight. They also met with myself, weekly meetings, maybe two or three a week, we had sessions to discuss the teaching experiences as well as other parts in general education, but how it all related together. As I look back now, I can remember there were men and women and a number of them were

from other countries, so we had an interesting (inaudible) American teacher trainees and trainees from Europe, Asia, Africa coming over on scholarships. Several were blind, too. I had a totally blind girl from [Isvahan?] -- I remember her name, her name was (inaudible) Karan Bahashe (sp?). I had to correspond with all these. I carried on a correspondence with (inaudible). I would make mistakes in addressing some of the foreign names. Kopad was her first name, Kopad Kahanan (sp?). I remember when she came back here. She said, (inaudible) is Miss. I was addressing her as Miss. But, she had very good mobility. We gave her mobility training later to Boston College. After a number of years, we changed affiliation from Boston University to Boston College. Well, that program started on travel training. They called it parapatology at the time (inaudible).

JSF: I have seen those articles.

WH: (inaudible). We went from BU to BC and gradually, they earned more credits through BC -- reasons for this, (inaudible) they continued on at BC and got a Master's degree. They have a full master's degree program with our scholarships. Earlier, on their own, out of pocket, (inaudible) they stayed on at BU and got their Master's degrees. Here's an interesting (inaudible) that was her full name, (inaudible). "I've been blind all my life," but she wanted to learn...

End of Tape Side A

WH: ... wound up in Putney, Vermont, (inaudible) teaching college up there, totally had never graduated from school back in [Isvahan?] and (inaudible). She utilized her senses well. (inaudible). This is a thing I stress when I work with teaching prospective teachers of the blind - - we call them the trainees.

JSF: So, when you recruited students from foreign countries, did you travel to those countries to recruit them?

WH: Yes, not all of them, but some of them. I traveled to India, Kenya, Turkey -- it will come to my mind (inaudible). We recruited more foreign students from India than any other country, because the blindness in that country was tremendous. I think we -- I'll have to have you check in the library -- I think that we had 71 recruits from India over the inception of this teacher training program which went back to Dr. Allen. He started it. I was asked by Kevin Lessard (sp?) -- (inaudible). He called up one day; I was living on the Cape, and he said, "Bill, I have to get some information from you, information about the foreign students that you had." I said, "OK." He asked me to write a report on where they were from, why they were there, what they did before they came there, and what happened as a result of their training (inaudible). So, I wrote a fairly decent report, I think, and gave it to him. He (inaudible) the report -- it had come out as a publication but I gave him raw material -- give that man credit. He was able to bring about the union of Perkins and the Hilton Foundation -- you know about that?

JSF: Oh yes.

WH: Kevin Lessard and I felt, no wonder he wanted to learn so much about the foreign students, because up to that point, he had to he had to (inaudible) money. (inaudible) interesting -- everybody, then he came out about this foreign students and something was percolating (inaudible) about the future spread out, of course, now into multiple impairments, well, a different (inaudible), what is it, the infant, toddler, (inaudible) business programs and teach those programs. They're being trained (inaudible) the Hilton Perkins. It was after my time, but I knew the people. Kevin Lessard, he was principal at the time. Now, he is just about to retire. We were good friends. (inaudible).

JSF: Oh, don't, it's all part of the history.

WH: A lot of things happened during that time. Oh yes. Perkins was recognized for their teacher training. They wrote to Perkins and wanted someone to take over teaching -- offer a summer program -- a course for public school teachers (inaudible) going in the public schools (inaudible). I was invited to teach education of the blind, at three levels. We had the partially-sighted, we called them at that time, low vision one summer, totally blind the next summer, and multiple impaired. It was a three-summer cycle. I worked for the University of Wisconsin's Department of Education, Even though I lived (inaudible) that, there again, I was among not the blind children, they were out for the summer, but the teachers of the blind children, at the Wisconsin School for the Visually Handicapped. I had to get certification. They had to get certification. They were teaching the blind, but they weren't certified. So, I was sent there to formalize their training, and they got certification through the Department of Special Education of the state. So, I mingled with (inaudible). This sounds like self -- they came to me one time, the blind teachers out there, their own faculty can't even teach the blind. (inaudible) she said, "You know, Mr. Heisler, we like to receive compliments." She said, "You know, we blind teachers (inaudible) we blind teachers -- we look forward to your coming each summer because you don't talk (inaudible). She said, "It's funny but even teachers in the school, sighted teachers, -- there was clear patronage. Some (inaudible). I felt very good because I felt this way. I have dealt with blind people at all levels, kids, training students. We enjoy talking to you." In other words, (long inaudible). Do you want to bring up any questions you might have?

JSF: Did you also work in the cottages?

WH: No. I didn't live in them. My wife, former wife and I, lived in Virginia. We had two children at the time, and we were given an opportunity to live in Nortonville, a nice house in Newtonville, and our only cost was the \$150 a month, and the school could cover some expenses. Later on, I moved on to the campus because they built some campus buildings, like the director's home, the principal.

JSF: So, which house did you live in?

WH: I don't know if it's the director's house still, a great big one.

JSF: The (inaudible) House?

WH: Yeah. There were two other houses adjacent to it, (inaudible) staff residences, one for the principal, (inaudible) and the other for myself. There was no charge there. In fact, we could take a meal at noon, at least I could, with the children. That's part of their education. So, I got a home -- we were on the campus. My wife at that time taught the blind at Overbrook. That's where I met her. So, I married a former teacher of the blind and moved out to Perkins. They needed a teacher to replace somebody, so they asked her, and she said, "Well, OK." It was in the elementary grade, lower school. She was a teacher there (inaudible) a few years and then came back home on the campus. Our children were interested in the program. My boy was allowed to join the short-wave radio club and they put short-wave radios together. That was sponsored by one of the teachers at Perkins, the music teacher. He brought in a (inaudible) engineer. My son soaked it up was invited to (inaudible). Well, that was good because the more he could have an interest in seeing (inaudible), great. So, that worked out. So, to them, this was interesting. He became interested at Perkins with senior [pupils?] at Perkins and their sponsors, in electronics, and he went into electronics here in Cambridge, and then married and moved out to Salt Lake City, and enrolled in the University of Utah, (inaudible). Today, he's head of the electronic division of the Physics Department. He designs computers.

JSF: Great.

WH: It all started with the kids.

JSF: That was wonderful.

WH: Life is interesting. I must be (inaudible).

JSF: We'll pick up just -- so you know, you became the head of the Teacher Training program after Dr. Hays?

WH: Yes. I was co-head. I observed under him and he gradually turned it over. Oh wait a minute. I'm going to bring some lemonade in.

JSF: Do you want me to stop this for a moment?

WH: Yeah, stop it.

JSF: So, are there any staff members, colleagues at Perkins that really stood out in your mind, that were particularly memorable?

WH: Yes. One of them, I think, was Ed Jenkins. He was a music teacher and taught organ. He could play (inaudible). He was a member of the music department. See, I gravitate toward music. (inaudible) Sue Drucker, you remember her. She died but she taught English, second graders, and the kids really listened to her. I made up a handbook of raised diagrams of cells and (inaudible) and all that business and it was printed eventually by American Printing House for the Blind (inaudible). It's called a handbook of biology diagrams, the stages of mitosis. So, the old science came in. I mention Sue Drucker I'd go in for proofreading (inaudible). And she was

(inaudible). You could tell. Two kids told me one time that she was one of their outstanding teachers. One year, I taught biology at Perkins (inaudible). They lost their teacher in the middle of the year and they needed a replacement.

(pause; microphones moving)

JSF: Thank you.

RH: Those are very good, but they break very easily.

(microphones moving)

RH: I think I'm bothering you.

JSF: Oh, not at all.

RH: Have you ever read the *Da Vinci Code*?

JSF: Yes, I have.

RH: Did you read the one before it?

JSF: Yes, I have.

RH: The *Angels and Demons*? Well, I'm almost through it. I got to go back. (background talking off microphone)

JSF: So, you have just the one year in the classroom during your time at Perkins?

WH: (inaudible). I wasn't anxious to take over his biology class. Carl Davis, he was head of the -- you came across his name -- he was head of the Guidance Department, he taught physics and somebody else covered the general science, I don't know. But, that was (inaudible) return to teaching blind children. Oh good. It stimulated me to develop a handbook of diagrams. They use it and say, this is really helpful, I understand it better now. Then, there were some people that -- objects, three-dimensional objects, (inaudible) outlines of (inaudible). They published it and sent it around the United States to other schools for the blind.

JSF: That's great.

WH: I'm taking the money for it. When I was at Overbrook, Mr. (inaudible) he taught piano tuning (inaudible), well, there was a perfect line. One of my blind colleagues, Dr. Currans (sp?), Bill Currans, a totally blind man, he can go anywhere in the city, trolley cars, buses, and (inaudible). His little cane, like almost a toy cane, he tied a balloon off it and called it his antenna. Overbrook has two cloister gardens with walkways. It was modeled after a Spanish castle, but (inaudible). This cloister gardens in the middle of the sidewalks. He could run, so help me God. He could run on that four-sided cloister; at the junction, he'd slow down.

(inaudible). I would walk with him. I would take walks with these guys. A blind person, of course, takes your arm. You don't push them -- oh, you know that. We were going to cross a certain street, and he'd say, "Why don't we take just another minute. There's something (inaudible)." So, it was an example of what can be and what kind of happiness (inaudible).

JSF: So, that's what he taught...

WH: (inaudible). He knew a lot about music (inaudible). The blind teachers tended to clump together out there.

JSF: They socialized with one another, not so much with the sighted teachers?

WH: Let's put it this way. Dr. Cummings got his Ph.D. at University of (inaudible) on history of the romance languages. Well, anyway, he taught French at Overbrook. He was totally blind, but (inaudible).

JSF: The teachers socializing?

WH: He wrote two articles for the Outlook for the Blind, back in, I don't know when, the earlier days of public school education for the blind, and he was hired by the State of Delaware as the head of the blind programs. At that time, (inaudible) completely on public school programs. I think, under some duress, he wrote an article on the education of the blind in public schools, and it was written correctly to follow the (inaudible). He came out a year later with my life at a residential school. He said -- he had an example of kids that went to public school where "they can't do gym, they can't do that, they might get hurt." If I went around supervising Boston College teacher training students, I supervise them in the classes at Perkins, but also out in the public schools. I went to one public school, never mind where it was as I can't remember, but the principal (inaudible) school. I said, Physical education." "Oh yes." I found out his physical education was taking care of the uniforms. This was the sort of thing you (inaudible). But, he came out and wrote in his article about -- it sounds good, that was the essence. "We, at the school for the blind, address them, coach them, and on and on. We are expecting (inaudible) much." Whereas the public schools (inaudible). That's changed now, perhaps. But, he wrote this article saying, "More than anything, he treasured -- (inaudible) friendships that were established." Perhaps, we were wrestling with the same problems. There are strong kinships there, and he wrote that. The next year, by God, it was this is what he really thought. (inaudible).

JSF: So, when you say that in the following book, he endorsed public education of kids who are blind in the public schools. One year later, he said based on my personal experience....

WH: (inaudible) (pause) I use the word (inaudible) in the public schools education because I thought public school education for blind kids was very special. But next year, he decided to come back but (inaudible) participate in this, that, and the other thing. We had physical education; wrestling teams would wrestle with sighted schools and he went on and on. The kids

were under his jurisdiction, I guess, and many jurisdictions. The public schools were just a little hesitant to take on responsibility and they might get hurt and what would happen? (inaudible) process they have (inaudible) school, learn how to do wrestle; learn how to do this. So, you look back on it -- I supposed I babbled too much...

JSF: Not at all.

WH: But, it becomes a part of your life.

JSF: Definitely.

WH: The older I am, 88, mind you, you try to understand a particular meanings (inaudible). Electronic devices. I remember the first (inaudible) from MIT, a scanner that would scan print and vocalize. I remember the first one that came out, boy, that was something. They used television screens. (inaudible).

JSF: Plus, the technology these days is more (inaudible).

WH: We didn't have it in the 40s and 50s.

JSF: I don't want to keep you very much longer, Mr. Heisler. Is there one thing about Perkins you'd like the world to know, what would it be?

WH: Perkins provides maximum of understanding of blind children and provides experiences for them; practical, living experiences, like wrestling, (inaudible). I don't know what's going to out on that, but I can only tell you that I feel my ability -- I used to stammer and stutter a little bit awhile ago, so it took me -- I had gone through a period of (inaudible). I don't know, but I got a lot of anxiety and deep depression. (inaudible), rehab and medicine. Brought my kids in from the west coast. They started me on a program of rehabilitation and some medicine, too. I got Wellbutrin, Enduron, and Klonopin. I was (inaudible) deteriorate. Depression, you can't sleep, it's called (inaudible). I have come quite a way, but there are hesitations in my speech.

JSF: But, you speak beautiful, nice and clear.

WH: Thank you. My wife, she says, "Bill, I think your medicine has you doped up." I was stammering and I would fall, and my balance, medicine. The wife -- she told -- vital signs, (inaudible). She said, (inaudible) his balance, this and that, are doping me. I had two Wellbutrins, one Klonopin, and two Enduron. Enduron is for tremor. Klonopin is for anxiety and for making you sleep better. Well, he said, "OK, why don't we cut it in half, Wellbutrin only at night." I could swear she said (inaudible) much better. Your stammering is gone. Your balance seems better. I do take a cane. But, it's funny how medicine can work for you and against you.

JSF: Absolutely. It's a real art to get the balance.

WH: My wife says, (inaudible) she told them -- she didn't tell the (inaudible), she told the assistant (inaudible). She is works at Cape Cod Hospital in Records.

JSF: So, she knows the ropes.

WH: It's been an interesting life, I would call, my career, I think, in special education of the visually impaired. You mentioned the deaf-blind. I worked more with the visually impaired. (inaudible). Deaf children and taught them this way, with their finger-spelling. It's quite a sight, and I still think it's remarkable (inaudible) the human organism adapts (inaudible) to varying degrees. I've preached now. I hope something comes out of this.

JSF: Certainly. Thank you so much. The last thing I'd like to say, I believe Ken Stuckey says he asked you to write a history of Perkins; I think it was in the late 70s, early 80s, for the 150th anniversary. It was printed in the Lantern. It's excellent. We still actually use it.

WH: A history of Perkins that I did?

JSF: It's so beautifully written, it's still what we use when people ask for a brief history of Perkins. That's the handout we give them.

WH: The early beginning...

JSF: Absolutely. There are a few paragraphs that update things, but it's what you wrote, so nicely done.

WH: You know, you lose touch after awhile. I'm glad it came out OK.

JSF: Oh, it did, it did.

WH: Well, this has been a great faith experience for me.

JSF: Oh, I'm glad. Thank you so much, Mr. Heisler.

WH: I hope -- it was back there...

JSF: I'm sorry?

WH: I hope my experiences will be (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

JSF: Oh, absolutely, nice and clear, and so rich in detail.

WH: But anyway. I appreciate the opportunity to provide that.

JSF: I appreciate your generosity and your willingness to spend a little time.

WH: I haven't had a chance to up to Perkins much lately because well, we can't drive. I can drive, but...

JSF: It's a long trip.

WH: The old [system?] is getting tired, the eyes are going, and my wife, she has her dialysis and she's developing glaucoma.

JSF: Oh dear.

WH: Some degree of that. She's hard of hearing. But you know, we're (inaudible), and I don't treat that lightly, but we understand each other beautifully, and I guess one hand washes the other. That's an overdone thing.

JSF: No, not at all. So, thank you very much.

WH: If there's anything else, let me know. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Let me know if there's something you want to know. I could have sat down and just written something up.

JSF: Well, because this is an oral history, we want to get the spontaneous...

WH: You get a spontaneous (inaudible). Talking with somebody else, you can bring (inaudible) rather than just sit down. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Can you see my writing now? It's hardly legible because of the tremor. So, you use what you have left and I think I have improved after he cut the medication in half. (inaudible). Makes sense to me (inaudible).

JSF: (inaudible) because my father had a similar experience. They had to adjust some medication that made a dramatic difference.

WH: (inaudible).

JSF: Well actually, no. He died in May.

WH: In May?

JSF: Yes.

WH: Oh, I'm sorry.

JSF: Thank you.

WH: We have one father and one mother; that's a long time ago with me. He died at the age of 63.

JSF: That's -- we consider that pretty young these days.

WH: Cancer, cancer of the -- it was an occupational hazard. He was working with a lot of chemicals.

JSF: It's a sad thing.

WH: But, that was quite awhile ago, 1967. Time goes faster and faster. It's scary. You know -- of course, you're young, compared to myself.

JSF: Well, I'm getting up there.

WH: (inaudible). I've enjoyed this exchange very much.

JSF: So have I. Thank you.

WH: I hope you get something out of it.

JSF: Oh absolutely.

End - William Heisler