

MUSC's First Organ Transplant
Oral History Project

Interview with the Family of William R. Ashley:

Charles Ashley
Robin Jones
Velma McAlister
Joyce Townes

November 24, 2008

Interviewers: Brooke Fox, MUSC University Archives
&
Susan Hoffius, Waring Historical Library

Location: Clemson University

Brooke Fox: The following is an oral history interview concerning the first organ transplant at MUSC. We'll be talking with the family of William Ashley, the first kidney recipient. The date is November 24th, 2008; interviewers are Susan Hoffius and Brooke Fox. I will now ask the family to introduce themselves and tell us his or her relationship to Billy Ashley.

Charles Ashley: I'm Charles Ashley, and I'm his son.

Velma McAlister: I'm Velma McAlister; I'm the sister that donated the kidney.

Joyce Townes: I'm Joyce Townes; I'm his widow.

Robin Jones: I'm Robin Jones. I was his daughter.

Fox: We'd like to start with general questions about Billy; what was he like growing up, when and where he was born, his education, his job, what was he like before he started having problems with his kidneys?

McAlister: He was born in Antreville, Abbeville County [South Carolina]. Growing up, he grew up on the farm. He went to school at Dixie High, and then he went to -- what was the name of the school that --

Townes: Trade school in Columbia.

McAlister: Yeah, he went to the trade school in Columbia and that's where they met, but growing up he was -- he had a dog that he liked.

Townes: Devilish.

McAlister: He was devilish, very devilish. He would -- in fact, he would have his dog lay down on the doorstep if I'd have a boyfriend come in, wouldn't let that boyfriend in, things like that.

Ashley: One time he locked the housekeeper up out in one of the houses outside or something; didn't he?

McAlister: Yeah.

Ashley: Until his daddy got home, left her out there the whole time.

McAlister: Then begged daddy not to whip him, spank him.

Fox: What was his health like before he had kidney problems?

McAlister: The first few years of his life he had problems from about age six to age ten.

Susan Hoffius: What kind of problems?

McAlister: With his kidneys, he and my sister both would be in and out of the hospital a lot, and then they both seemed to do fine until Billy started having trouble and that was after two of his children were born.

Hoffius: So he went through a period where he felt okay, but --

McAlister: Yeah.

Townes: He had sore throat, I think's what started it, a strep throat.

Fox: Okay.

Townes: From what I understand, from Dr. Clarke, you know, and it went to Bright's Disease, and he and his sister both had it, and they were in the hospital at the same time, and they come home, and they were in hospital beds at the same time, and they call them Billy and Polly.

Hoffius: And about how old was he when he had this strep throat that led to --

Townes: They were real small --

McAlister: They were real small, I would say five and three; he was five and she was three when all of this started.

Hoffius: Do you remember how you met Dr. [Arthur] Williams? Obviously he [Bill Ashley] had been receiving medical care locally near Iva; can you talk about the care he received at home before he went to MUSC?

Townes: He was seeing Dr. [Robert] Clarke in Due West. And that was his family physician. And Dr. Clarke was also a heart specialist, and when his kidney failed Dr. Clarke told us that he didn't think he'd live to Christmas. So he had him set up to go let Dr. Williams in Charleston see him, and we went to Dr. Williams, and Dr. Williams told about the same story. And he said that a man had donated money for a kidney transplant in Charleston, but he wanted the man -- the person that had the transplant to be from the area. So we went back home, and I had an uncle in Augusta, and I called him, and he got a hold of some doctors in Augusta, Georgia and had him set up to go to the university there. That same day Dr. Williams called us back on the phone and said, "Come on; he's going to let me do it." And so we went to Charleston.

Hoffius: The first time that you had met Dr. Williams was at that consultation?

Townes: Yeah, the first time he saw him. And he was very friendly, and he kept up with us on the phone, and he'd call Dr. Clarke; he and Dr. Clarke talked a lot on the phone.

Hoffius: When Dr. Williams said, "We can do the surgery," then what happened; did you leave immediately for Charleston -- do you remember what happened?

McAlister: They did. I didn't; I waited until July 26th [1968]. They hadn't told me, or I guess I refused to believe that his kidneys were gone. And that's when they went down and come back, and on July the 27th they told me that I was going to -- he told me that I was to go down to give him a kidney. We had dinner at their house; I had a cookout.

Townes: Dr. Williams wanted the family to go down, and he checked all the family to see who would better be able to give him the kidney, and Velma matched him.

Hoffius: Who else did he test other than Velma?

Townes: Polly, and Viola, and Hollis I believe. His momma, Bill's mom [Viola Ashley] and daddy [Hollis Ashley] too, and out of all of them Velma -- well, I don't think -- they were older or something and between Polly and Velma, Velma was the one more --

McAlister: But Polly's kidneys were going down anyway.

Townes: So they took the kidney from her.

Hoffius: And Velma, do you remember what kind of tests they did on you?

McAlister: Yeah. They run a tube through my artery in my right leg, they took an enormous amount of blood test, they cut our hair for some reason to test my hair and his. And then every so many weeks, I would have to go back, you know, for more blood test and urine test.

Fox: Did you continue having tests until the operation itself? You had to continue having these tests?

McAlister: Yes, uh-huh.

Fox: You said it was in July that you found out that Billy would have to have a transplant. And then he went down to Charleston, and he stayed there the entire time until the operation?

Townes: No. We went back and forth for awhile, and then it seemed like he stayed for -- well, he'd stay at times, you know, for a little while, and then we'd come back. Then we'd have to go back for a week -- a few days or something.

Fox: Because they ended up removing both of his kidneys.

Townes: Yeah. Now he was staying all the time, then.

McAlister: He came from about October --

Townes: Well, they put him on dialysis. They hooked him up to dialysis and --

McAlister: September?

Townes: Probably towards about then.

McAlister: Yeah, it was about September because I had one to start to school at that time and Billy was --

Townes: I don't remember, but I remember we went back, and they kept him, and they hooked him up to dialysis, and they taught me a little bit about the dialysis machine, and when they did that we didn't have anybody in the upstate that could run a machine, and so we had to stay there. And we would go leave during the day sometime and then go back, you know, because he had a room there, and I had a cot; Dr. Williams put me a cot in the room with him where I could sleep. And they would take him to dialysis every -- I can't think of how often; maybe two or three days a week back then.

McAlister: Three days a week if I remember correctly.

Townes: And then they took his kidney out. When they took his kidney out, they cut him from here all the way around to the back. I almost just -- I guess they an inch or two in the front and back left, and he couldn't sit up in the bed, and they had to come in and sit him up so he could gain his strength back, and they got him a cane, and I still got it. They -- where he could get up and walk, they, you know, got him walking, and I would build him up for the surgery.

McAlister: He was a fighter, he was a fighter.

Townes: But he lost down to I think it was 78 pounds after he had his kidney took out. But after his transplant, he gained weight back and it was more of a swelling, a puffy-type weight.

McAlister: Bloated.

Townes: Uh-huh, bloated.

Fox: What were your thoughts, Velma, during this whole time when you found out that you were the best candidate to donate a kidney; how did you feel?

McAlister: I don't think that bothered me, but I think I was more or less in denial. The whole time I kept thinking, you know, Billy's kidneys are going to come back; this is not going to have to happen to him, until it actually happened. You know, even going through getting the children somewhere to stay, getting everything ready, getting prepared, even when I got down there I thought -- I was thinking, something will happen; Billy will get okay and this is not going to happen. This is not real. So I think I was more or less in denial.

Hoffius: What did the doctors say to you in preparation for the surgery that you were going to -- I mean, you were about to have major surgery to remove your kidney; what did the doctors tell you that you could expect, or how did they prepare you for your surgery? Did they tell you any warnings, or --

McAlister: No, they didn't give me any warnings. They told me to drink plenty of fluid, and my blood was a little bit low; they gave me a diet to try to build it up a little bit, but other than that my health was good. I think the low blood pressure, or low blood, whichever it was was just a family trait sort of thing and had nothing to do, but they gave me a diet, and I kind of stayed on it, and I was fine when I got down there. It wasn't what I expected.

Hoffius: How do you mean?

- McAlister: I had -- I guess I had never been sick or gone through much pain or suffering of any type; this was a first, and I thought I'd just be able to get up and walk the next day, but I didn't. I didn't; it took me two days before I could get up, or before I'd let them get me up.
- Hoffius: Uh-huh. And how long did you stay in the hospital after your surgery; did you leave within a few days?
- McAlister: A week and two days. They would've kept me longer, but I was so homesick.
- Fox: How did you feel physically after the operation, you know, a month or two; did you notice any difference?
- McAlister: Nope. It's been 40 years; there's never been a difference. I've never had trouble. I've had another child, I've never had trouble; kidney's always been good.
- Hoffius: Joyce, before Billy's surgery he went through a process of lymph depletion; can you tell us what you remember about that, the process or how he felt doing that? I mean, it was about 30 days that he was on this machine.
- Townes: He was really depressed when they did that to tell you the truth. I stayed in the room day and night with a mask, and we would play cards, or I'd try to get him to help me paint by number or something, but he was really very depressed then, and they would come in and they were, you know, drawing it out of him and all, and I think one of the doctors had done, one of the little learning doctors had done something he wasn't supposed to, and Dr. Williams, he checked on him all the time. And he came in there

and bled that little doctor, and I felt sorry for him. Dr. Williams was -- he was good as gold.

McAlister: Yes, he was.

Townes: But he'd get you if you didn't do what he told you to.

McAlister: He would get us too if we didn't, you know -- if we didn't mind him. Billy was his first priority.

Townes: He came in there two or three times a day because I stayed in there. A lot of times he'd get me and take me with him and those doctors to the canteen, and I'd sit up there and he'd give me some -- a doughnut or something and coffee. But Bill was really depressed, I thought, during that time.

McAlister: I think that was the worst he went through, don't you, is when they were taking that stuff out and putting it in.

Townes: I think that's the most depressed time of any of it.

McAlister: That was his worst time.

Townes: Uh-huh.

Hoffius: Physically, was he strong during that period, or did it also physically weaken him?

McAlister: Physically weakened him.

Townes: Yeah, I think so too. I can't even remember him getting out of bed much then except to sit in a chair, and they would help him, or I would help him.

Hoffius: And this was after the surgery where he had been sort of --

McAlister: Cut into.

Townes: I'm wondering, was it after, Velma?

McAlister: Uh-huh.

Townes: Yeah? I couldn't remember if it was after.

McAlister: Uh-huh, yeah, it was after.

Hoffius: So in the day or two leading up to the surgery, what kinds of conversations did you have with the doctors; did you meet the other surgical team members; did they come in and introduce themselves and do you remember anything about them?

Townes: Yes. I met them, and they were real nice, but all of them weren't from Charleston; they brought the best doctors in from different places; did they not?

McAlister: Yeah, they did. They brought other doctors in to --

Townes: I can't -- they had a scan specialist in from somewhere-or-another, but different ones, you know, but I can't remember just who they were, but I remember they talked, but Dr. Williams was the main one. I mean, I met him and that was it, and I just put my faith in him because he was just that

good of a doctor, and he was more like a father to me because I wasn't but 23.

Hoffius: Do you feel like he prepared you well for what was coming?

Townes: He told us everything, every little thing. When he'd come in there to do something, he would tell me what he was doing, why he was doing it. He would, he would explain everything. He would talk to Bill and tell him about it.

McAlister: He did the same with me, he did everything that they were going to -- even if he wasn't going to do it himself, he would tell me why, or we're taking this blood for this reason. We're going in this artery for that reason, whatever the reason was for each test, he would come to me even though someone else was doing it.

Townes: Just like when he needed the blood, he came in there and sat down and talked to me and told me that it was going to take a lot of blood for him and that -- to tell anybody at Iva that want to donate blood to him to donate it. And I was telling my brother about it, and he lived in Lake City, and he got [unintelligible] national director and had a prison, you know, the prisoners in Columbia, and there was twenty-something of them giving blood from the prison. But there were a bunch; I believe he got more blood, they were talking about it, a bunch of people in Iva give blood to him.

McAlister: He got more blood than what's actually needed.

Townes: Needed, yeah.

McAlister: And he took a lot of blood, he sure did.

Fox: How were your parents during this time; were they in the hospital with you most of the time kind of seeing what was going on?

Townes: They were in there during surgery.

McAlister: Yes, they were --

Townes: And just maybe a few days off back and forth because Hollis run a grocers -- had a grocery store, and he had to work. Velma, I think your momma was working too; wasn't she?

McAlister: Yeah. Mother worked and daddy worked, but they were back and forth constantly, and he would leave the store with my brother-in-law, and, you know -- and then, of course, during the transplant --

Townes: They were there.

McAlister: I have no idea how many family members we had, but they were -- we had a lot there.

Hoffius: And this was -- so on the day of the surgery, Joyce, you were in the waiting room?

Townes: They told us that -- Dr. Williams told me that I could go in and watch the surgery, and I went in but I left. And they had a little waiting room up there, and we sit in the waiting room right beside the door I think, right close to the door where they -- you go in and watch the surgery.

Hoffius: How long did you wait?

Townes: It seemed like all day. It was a long time, it was a long drawn out affair. It really was. I can't -- eight hours; was it eight hours, I believe?

McAlister: Eight hours I think is in the book we were reading yesterday and it said the eight-hour operation.

Townes: Uh-huh. I was thinking, but the thing about it now, Dr. Williams would either come or call me and tell me every little bit what was going on.

Hoffius: At regular intervals he'd say we're -- what the progress was?

Townes: Uh-huh, yeah. He was real good about that.

McAlister: They asked Billy if he had anything to say before they took my kidney out or before the surgery, and he said, "Just don't drop that kidney on the way over." So those were his words before he was put to sleep; that's the type of attitude he had. He was always cutting up or --

Jones: Now we know where you get it from.

Hoffius: So what Dr. Williams came in after the surgery was over, can you tell us a little bit about what that was like to hear the final report on how the surgery went?

Townes: It was relief; it was a big relief, it really was.

Hoffius: Was Dr. Williams pleased with the results?

Townes: Oh, yeah. You know, he was -- he couldn't have been any closer if he'd have been my brother or daddy or something. You know, he was really into it. He really cared about people, he did. And he would take care of

you; if you needed anything all you had to do -- even after I came back home after Bill died, if I needed to ask him a question I got on the phone and, you know, I was put straight through to him, and he would talk to me. And you don't find doctors like that, but he was very good person.

Fox: When did you start -- when did the local newspapers and the media start -
- when did they catch wind of this operation and start contacting you?

McAlister: September.

Townes: I don't know, but Dr. Williams got mad about that.

McAlister: Yeah, he -- oh.

Townes: But I was -- he said something to me, and I said, "Well, I wasn't even in Iva; I don't know." I didn't even know about it till he told me. He was wanting to keep it hid for awhile [unintelligible].

Hoffius: Did he say why?

Townes: No. He just didn't want to make it public. I guess, in the paper when it did come out he didn't like that. I remember that much; he didn't like that.

McAlister: I remember that he didn't like it. They called me trying to get in touch with Billy, but Billy was at the hospital so they came to the house. I thought this [scrapbook of news clippings] would have a date.

Jones: I think this one does, the blue one [scrapbook].

Townes: I think after they found out, they probably worried him, you know, kept coming to the hospital and stuff, and you know how it is. And I imagine

that's what he was trying to hold off till he had to tell them, maybe till the transplant itself or something.

McAlister: It was early September.

Fox: Okay. Describe the community support you received from Iva.

McAlister: Oh, goodness. The entire town of Iva helped us in so many ways. They had benefits, they had cake and bake sales, they --

You [Joyce Townes] even drove Mr. and Mrs. Ebstein's car, so [unintelligible] didn't --

Townes: Yeah. Bill Ebstein on the [blouse] house, well two or three, and -- three I think, and his wife bought groceries up there from Bill's daddy, and she offered her car, so she had a new station wagon, so I used it going and coming when I'd bring him back and forth. She let me use it, she was real nice. And after Bill died, the Rocky River Baptist Church in Lake City [South Carolina] took up \$300 and gave it to me to help me out with things after he died. So --

Hoffius: And you had mentioned that clergy had gone down to MUSC to be supportive of you all; is that -- do you remember that?

McAlister: Who preaches at Gethsemane?

Townes: Oh, Preacher [Anders] used to go down there a lot, and Preacher [Cantonfor], Preacher [Cantonfor] at the Baptist church at Asaville Baptist; he's not there now. He would go down and check because we -- Bill and I went Asaville then, and he would go down and check all the time, and he had a plane and he'd drive it, fly down. And one time Charles

and Robin was in a beauty contest, and I wasn't going to get to see them; they were real little, you know? And Preacher [Cantonfor] was down there, and he flew me back with him and his son so I could see them. And his wife took me to Iva so I could be there to see them.

McAlister: We have the ministers from both Wesleyan churches in Iva that went down; Reverend [Fortner] from the Pentecostal.

Townes: Preacher [Anders], wasn't it, at the Fellowship?

McAlister: I know he was there when he died, I think so. A number of pastors, and the ones that couldn't get there were in the Iva parking lot praying. So they met for prayer, the Star Iva Ministerial Association met for prayer.

Hoffius: On the day of the surgery how did people in Iva know about what was going on; how did they hear what was --

Townes: I don't know [laughs].

McAlister: Oh, my son was in the first grade, and his teacher knew someone down at the hospital, and she called the school, she brought a little radio in so that they could listen to the news. And she had two calls; one, I think, at lunch time and one when it was over so that she could tell her class that Jimmy's mother was okay.

Townes: And then our pharmacist at [Domley] Drug Store in Iva, his daughter [Elaine] was up there; she was studying to be a pharmacist at the university, and I imagine they heard through her to because we talked to her a lot at length.

McAlister: Yeah, because she called back and forth.

Fox: So they actually broadcast or had news on the radio during --

McAlister: Yes.

Townes: I didn't know that.

McAlister: They had that at school. Jimmy was the only one we had in school then, and he was just starting; he was the oldest.

Hoffius: Now, Charlie, you were old enough to visit your father in the hospital; do you have any memories, specific memories of going to see him in the hospital before his surgery?

Ashley: Not really before. I think, you know, later I remember going in there and stuff. I know we got to go in there and we had Chicken Pox, but that was afterwards; wasn't it?

Townes: That was right before you --

Ashley: Before he died.

Townes: That was around the 14th of April, and he died the 21st.

Ashley: Yeah. I know they let us go in there even though we had Chicken Pox and see him, so -- and back then kids weren't allowed in a hospital, you know, like they are now.

Hoffius: So after the surgery, Velma, you were doing well, and Billy had to start a regiment of anti-rejection medicine.

McAlister: Drugs, yes.

Hoffius: Can you talk about what that meant for you in terms of your care-giving, or the care-giving that he needed to get in the hospital and just talk about sort of the post-operative time period with the anti-rejection medicine?

Townes: Me?

Hoffius: Yeah.

Townes: Well, he had to go back, and his kidney started failing, and --

Hoffius: And this was how long after?

Townes: Five years, almost five years.

Hoffius: But in the immediate -- immediately after --

Townes: In the immediate, they gave him Prednisone, or Cortisone; different or high-powered medicine. And when he first came home, it was too strong and it kind of -- he got out one day, he just walked out, just flipped out I think, and they -- somebody saw him over at Antreville and told us, and we went and got him. But they lowered his dosage, and he got all right then, but that medicine bloated him that they give him to fight off the kidney, and he didn't feel good a lot of time, but he went and helped his daddy in that grocery store.

McAlister: Yes, he did.

Townes: A lot of days after that happened he'd go in there, and he'd get his -- that's how we got groceries. He would go work for his daddy and bring home

groceries, but he did, I think, pretty well after he got used to his medicine and all.

Hoffius: And how often did he have to go back to Charleston in those first years, those first few months?

McAlister: That first year it was about once a month, wasn't it?

Townes: Yeah, uh-huh. Then I think once every three months or something?

McAlister: And then once every three months.

Jones: We stayed in Charleston at one point in time; when was that?

Townes: Yeah. At this --

McAlister: That was right after the transplant.

Townes: Right after the transplant we stayed in Charleston because he was real dependant on Dr. Williams, and he didn't want to get far from him; he just had to -- just like a child with their mother that, you know -- he didn't want him to be too far away from him, and we stayed in Charleston. And he started school in Charleston and Mount Pleasant, [Mannipy Whiteside] Elementary. And we stayed there for -- I can't remember how long, maybe one or two years.

Jones: I was thinking a year or two years.

Ashley: We came -- we came back when I was in [unintelligible] doing the first grade --

Townes: Right after the first grade; wasn't it?

Ashley: Right after Christmas.

Townes: Uh-huh.

Ashley: It was -- I was in the first grade.

Townes: Okay, and his teacher would write him letters from there. Yeah, and he started Iva Elementary then, but we stayed up there till -- well, Bill finally got where he wanted to come home.

Hoffius: Uh-huh. And his health had recovered enough that he felt okay leaving Dr. Williams?

Townes: Yeah, he even went -- while we were living there before we ever came back, he went to work for the Pepsi Company. We had a friend that worked with him, and they got him a job, and he worked for a little while, but he couldn't hold out; he just wasn't up -- you know, he just needed something he could go in when he felt like it, and he couldn't hold out so he quit. And it wasn't long after then we went back to Iva.

Jones: Didn't they give him a cat working at that Pepsi-Cola Company? I still got that cat in the closet.

Townes: Yeah. They gave him a big old tall cat, black cat [unintelligible] display for something.

Jones: Green diamond eyes.

Townes: And they gave it to him; he brought it home to the kids.

Jones: I still got it in the closet.

Townes: But we lived at Mount Pleasant then, a Hickory [Shadow] sub-division and -- when he was doing that. And I went to work down there.

Hoffius: You worked in Charleston?

Townes: Yeah. I worked at [Wemetco-Vandon] in the money room.

Hoffius: Okay. And then you came home to Iva, and in the years between when you came home to Iva and before he got sick again, how was that; how did he do during that time?

Townes: He did fine. I worked second shift for a long time, and he babysitted. And if he had any trouble he called his momma or daddy or Velma over, but he -- and he helped his daddy out at the store when I was at home.

McAlister: He did.

Townes: Yeah. He would bag groceries and all kind of thing.

Ashley: Yeah. He took me in every morning before school.

Townes: Yeah.

Ashley: Because we'd go in early and cut up chickens and get the hamburger meat ready because he supplied a couple of restaurants in Iva with hamburger meat. And we'd go real early, and we'd do all that before I went to school, you know, because school didn't start till 8:30 then, and so he'd just get me over there.

Townes: Yeah. He always took you out and took you to school; didn't he?

Ashley: Yeah.

Townes: And he always cooked breakfast. I've been very lucky; I think all my husbands cooked breakfast. But he always cooked -- didn't he cook breakfast; do you remember that?

Ashley: Yeah, I remember he cooked breakfast all the time.

McAlister: Well, that started --

Townes: I got pictures of it.

McAlister: That started when we were little --

Townes: Your daddy cooked breakfast.

McAlister: Yeah. After mother had some surgery, me and daddy would get up one morning and cook breakfast, and Billy and mother would get up the next morning. So, you know, and then Polly would get up with him, so we all learned to cook breakfast. We had breakfast if we didn't have anything else. That was and still is the favorite meal.

Townes: But he was more normal, you know, after the surgery for a long time until it started failing on him. And then he -- one day he hadn't been feeling good, and we went back to Charleston, you know, and they started him on Heparin shots, and he wouldn't give them to himself so I had to learn how to give them to him. And I'd give them to him in his stomach, but up until then -- and then he started failing then, and he got Charles one day in

there and taught him how to clean his rod and reel and all this. I believe he knew then he was dying.

Hoffius: In terms of how it progressed, did it seem pretty sudden that it came on, I mean, his final illness where --

McAlister: The rejection. I would think so. I mean, it was pretty quick after it happened.

Townes: Evidently, he didn't show a lot of how he was feeling, I think. I think he hid a lot.

Hoffius: Okay. So then you went to Charleston, and was he put back on dialysis; was his --

Townes: Yes.

Hoffius: Was the kidney that Velma had given him --

Townes: After the Heparin didn't work, they put him back on dialysis. They couldn't put it in his arm; Dr. Williams said his veins were like an eggshell and every time they put a needle in them, they cracked. And he said it was because they had give him so much high-powered medicine, and he thought maybe it kind of killed him inside, you know? And so they'd put it in his leg, and they put it near his ankle, and it cut the flow of his blood off to his leg and Gang Green set in, and they had to go and cut his leg off. And they put it up higher, and then they had to go and cut the - - up by the knee, and Dr. Williams told me that if he would've lived he would've had to have every -- eventually had every one of his limbs cut off because of that.

Hoffius: And then after the second partial amputation, that's when he developed a blood clot?

McAlister: Yes.

Townes: Yeah. And I asked Dr. Williams, I said, "Did he have a heart attack?" And Dr. Williams said, "No. We don't call it a heart attack as young as he is; we call it heart failure." So, you know, but I think what it was, was a blood clot went to him. But he --

McAlister: He said his organs were like that of a 90-year-old.

Townes: Yeah, yeah.

McAlister: Because of the medicines.

Hoffius: Uh-huh. And it's during this illness that Robin and Charlie got to go in and see him?

McAlister: Yes.

Ashley: Yeah. I had Chicken Pox.

Hoffius: Do you remember that?

Jones: Well, daddy died, what; was it April 21st?

Townes: Twenty-first, and you're birthday's the 14th.

Jones: My birthday is April the 14th, and I had just turned six years old, and I remember we were in one of those boarding houses or something that had

the great big high ceilings, and daddy was sitting in the middle of the -- kind of laying on the bed, and --

Townes: He was at the hospital.

Jones: No. I seen him laying on the bed, and he had a present --

Townes: Well, you were a child.

Jones: And told me to get up there -- I remember the big ceilings, though, momma; how did I --

Townes: You were in the hospital sitting on his hospital bed.

Jones: I don't remember no hospital stuff in the room, and I remember him sitting on the bed and he had a present.

McAlister: It was the hospital.

Townes: It was at the hospital; he couldn't get up.

Jones: And he told me to come sit up on the bed and gave me a present, and I did. And it was a little sun dress with spaghetti straps, it was gathered at the front, and it had little bitty, pink, pastel blue, and green, and white checks in it, and I still have that dress to this day.

Townes: Yeah. I asked Dr. Williams could they see him, and he said, "Yes." And when they come down, they had Chicken Pox and his [Charles Ashley] were in a lot, but hers [Robin Jones] were showing real bad. He said, "Well, I don't care; I'm going to get them in anyway." And he took them in to see him with me.

Jones: Preacher [Anders] brought us that time too.

McAlister: Yeah.

Townes: Uh-huh.

Jones: Because I remember how he pulled up on the side of the road and somebody had to throw up or something. Preacher brought us that time.

Hoffius: What do you remember, Charlie, about that last visit?

Ashley: I just know they took us in there, but, you know, I don't really remember a whole lot of what took place when we was in there because we really didn't think, you know -- think he was dying or nothing, I mean not us anyway, you know?

Hoffius: Uh-huh. And how old were you, then?

Ashley: Probably eight or nine.

Jones: Nine.

McAlister: Nine.

Ashley: Nine. I remember when he left the house to go back to the hospital.

Townes: Well, you were nine in July, I believe. You were eight probably; you were nine that July.

Ashley: Yeah. I remember when he was leaving that night. They left at night for some reason. I don't know why it was night time, but -- to drive to Charleston when he left that last time because I remember I wouldn't want to come out of the room because I was mad because he was leaving. So -- but I don't know why -- do you remember --

Jones: I remember --

Townes: We used to go at night some because it was less traffic.

Ashley: Well, I believe that was the last time he ever left, so --

McAlister: It's easier to drive here.

Ashley: -- to go, you know --

Jones: The last time we seen him, though, he asked for Charles to come in, they had the wards, like, four people, you know, to --

Townes: That's on your birthday.

Jones: Well, I can remember him asking for Charles to come in there, and he went behind the curtain and he -- Charles stayed in there awhile to talk with him, and then all of us went back or something, and I remember him giving us a half-a-dollar. I remember that. Still got it too.

Hoffius: During his final stay in the hospital, was it mostly with Dr. Williams that you were in contact, or --

- Townes: Yes. I never was too much contact with Dr. Fitts and those because, I mean, they were just there for it; Dr. Williams was his main doctor, the one that looked after him.
- McAlister: Dr. Fitts talked with me a lot, and he would keep me abreast of what was going on during those final days, and we just -- I think we just kind of clung to each other.
- Fox: When did he enter the hospital on his last illness before he died; was he there a couple of weeks before he passed?
- Townes: It was probably the first of March or the last of February, and they had a freak snowstorm in Charleston. And what happened, we went for a check-up and they kept him. And he didn't have any clothes but what he had on, and I had to come back and get his clothes, and when I came back to get his clothes, they had a freak snow storm. It might've been the end of March, and I couldn't get back to him. So I had to call a friend of mine that I knew in James Island, and she went and got him pajamas and took them to him. And then we had to wait till they cleared the roads, which was a few days before we could go see him, but -- the only snow storm I ever heard of in Charleston.
- McAlister: I came home the night before he died, I came home in the middle of the night with an uncle that had been there a long time and my pastor.
- Townes: And I begged you to stay.
- McAlister: Yeah, Joyce begged me to stay, and I was sick for some reason, I was exhausted and for some reason I felt like I just needed to go home. And she begged me to stay, she said, "I need you, I need you." And I thought, well, she'll be okay; I'm coming back tomorrow. You know, I'm coming

back in the morning, but in the morning was too late. So I wasn't there for her when she needed me the most [unintelligible].

Townes: I drove from Charleston to Iva by myself.

McAlister: And daddy and mother was in the car in front of her.

Townes: They did an autopsy, and Dr. Williams come and talk to me after he died. He took me in a little room and asked me, could he do the autopsy, and I told him, "Yeah." He said, "It might help somebody else," so I told him, "Okay." And I never did learn what happened about it. So I don't know to this day if they found out anything to help him because I really never asked Dr. Williams; I have talked to him since, but I never thought about it at the time, you know, when -- so I really don't know. But I did know they did it because I signed papers for him to do it.

Hoffius: Just to change gears a little bit, now you said that Polly, your sister Polly also had a kidney transplant, which was probably a very different experience.

McAlister: Very different. That was on October 13th, 1982. They had called us about four o'clock in the morning, or call mother and daddy. And they called me, and we left at 7:30 that morning, went to Charleston, they prepped her, took her on to surgery.

Hoffius: And how long was her recovery?

McAlister: She was out of the hospital within a week. She came home, she did exceptionally well, and she lived for 30 years.

Hoffius: With her new kidney?

McAlister: Yes.

Townes: She had an adopted son, and I kept him when she had her transplant; he stayed with me.

McAlister: These transplants and sicknesses and everything, we --

Townes: Now, Bill --

McAlister: We had to just kind of wrap around each other.

Townes: Bill had an aunt died from kidneys failure, but when they took Bill's kidney out they said that -- Dr. Williams told me that your kidney was the size of a large grapefruit, and Bill's was the size of a small boiled egg and not but a part of it working, a third of it, I thought he said, working.

McAlister: That's what I understood.

Hoffius: Do you have any -- having had experience with Bill and with Polly, you've had more experience than most families with transplants.

McAlister: Yes.

Hoffius: You know, do you have any thoughts that you would want to, you know - - anything that you would do over again, or that you wouldn't do over again, or anything that you would want to know? I mean, what could be different that wasn't different?

McAlister: I think with Billy's, between Billy's and Polly's, the fact that we both had to go through so much, and they had everything they needed on computer.

By the time, in '82 -- by the time Polly had hers, she lived for 20 years. I said 30; didn't I? She lived for 21 years. It was just everything was so different; they didn't have to test the --

Townes: She wasn't even in Charleston long, was she?

McAlister: Uh-uh, about a week.

Hoffius: But she had -- her transplant was in Charleston?

McAlister: Yes, it was.

Townes: Yeah, and they put her kidney in the front right up under your skin. They -- that's how they put Bill's, right -- they took his other ones out and put that one right where they could get to it, Dr. Williams said, but hers, they didn't take out.

McAlister: No, they did not remove her kidneys, nor did they have to do the lymph fluids. She was just on a list. They had everything that they needed so that when they found the person that matched they could just take her right on in.

Hoffius: Uh-huh. And she was on dialysis at that point?

McAlister: She was on dialysis for about ten years.

Hoffius: And did she have the dialysis done --

McAlister: In Anderson.

Hoffius: Okay.

- McAlister: In Anderson; she went back and forth to Anderson three times a week.
- Jones: I remember she had a little green station wagon, it was a straight drive, and her arms had gotten so weak from having to be put on the machine so much. She asked me to drive her one day, and I'll never forget, I'd just gotten my license, and we were coming back from dialysis clinic, and right behind Anderson Hospital, it's, like, a roller coaster road and it's got maybe four red lights back to back. And I'll never forget it, it was a hill, and it was a red light, and I went through three of the red lights before I finally ever got that straight drive to take off because I was scared to death I was going to roll back and hit somebody. I said, "Now we're stuck." She laughed at me.
- McAlister: She was a fighter too.
- Jones: She had spirit like daddy too, kidder, yeah.
- Ashley: She'd say anything and do anything, and she didn't care.
- McAlister: That's [unintelligible].
- Jones: And never complained about hurting whatsoever. You ask her, "How are you doing, Polly?" Shoot, always fine.
- Townes: When they gave Bill the heparin shots, seem like they had a shunt in him then; didn't it? They put another shunt in him? It was different from the first one they put in, and it failed and they took it out and then went to the leg; it seemed like that's what happened.
- McAlister: It was -- I think so, yeah.

Townes: And --

McAlister: Because the arm had started turning black.

Townes: But when they -- they were teaching me -- they were going to teach me how to run the kidney machine because there weren't any in Anderson then, and they were going to send one back with us. But then they had to put it in his leg and all that happened, so --

Fox: I'd like to go back to Billy's operation, the period before because I read in some of the news -- or what I've read to kind of get myself ready for this interview, is that your mother had a skin graft?

McAlister: Yes, from Polly.

Fox: That was to determine who was the best match for --

McAlister: No. This was to determine -- they said, determine how long Billy would keep my kidney because the make-up of her, something.

Townes: I don't know.

McAlister: Her make-up and Polly's were similar to mine and Billy's.

Fox: So she just had a skin graft of the --

McAlister: Yes, on the arm.

Townes: Well, what did they do to her when they checked all of you all for? They just took blood test on all you all then.

McAlister: Yeah, they just took blood tests, but they had about decided, you know, if I matched that would be that because Polly did have bad kidneys, and mother and daddy were older. And --

Hoffius: Did they give you any idea of how long the kidney might last in Bill? I mean, you said that they were trying to determine --

McAlister: How long it would last?

Hoffius: -- how long it would last; did they ever tell you what they thought in terms of number of years or --

McAlister: Well, not really, they didn't. They were satisfied with what results they got from it, but I'm not sure if they gave us a date; I'm almost positive they didn't.

Hoffius: So they -- if they knew, they didn't tell you about how long it would last?

McAlister: Last -- no.

Hoffius: Okay. Did you understand or did you hear from them that it might -- that it would eventually fail? I mean, did you expect his illness, his later illness, or did you think that once he had his kidney that that kidney would last forever?

McAlister: For me, I thought it would last forever, but then I'm one of these people that stay in denial until -- thinking that something good is going to happen, something's going to happen, and -- that's going to last.

Townes: What Dr. Williams told me that anytime you put a foreign object in your body, your body's going to fight it.

McAlister: Oh, yeah; I remember that.

Townes: And he said that they were going to give him medicine to try to keep it from fighting it, and as long as the medicine worked we were going to be all right. And so we just didn't know from one day to the next.

Hoffius: Okay.

Ashley: My granddaddy thought the world of Mr. Williams, though because I remember -- Dr. Williams.

Townes: He stayed with him, so --

McAlister: Yeah.

Ashley: Because I remember he talked about him all the time.

Townes: Dr. Williams asked -- he invited me, but I never -- I always -- well, I had a cousin there, and I stayed with him a lot, but Hollis stayed with Dr. Williams some at his house.

McAlister: Yeah, he did.

Townes: But we all thought the world of that man. But he -- every time he come in there to do something to Bill he would tell me what he was doing; he would just include me, he never left me out. When he took me down with them to have coffee or something he would tell them to talk layman's terms; he would just include me in the conversation.

McAlister: He did my husband, he did Doug that way too. He would talk with him when, you know, something had happened.

Hoffius: About your surgery?

McAlister: Yeah. I remember waking up and he was talking to Joyce and Doug; they were in there. I think mother and daddy were down with Bill. Or you couldn't go in the room with him; you could just look at him through a glass, and I think they had went down to see about him, and Joyce and Doug were still in the room with me, and I remember coming to enough to know that he was talking to them, and it was about me but I was still going in and out, so I didn't remember a whole lot.

Hoffius: You've had a chance -- or in preparation for this interview, I know that you've all gone through the photo albums, the scrapbooks that you've kept during that period; are there any stories that you hadn't had a chance to tell us today that you remember?

Townes: You want to know who's in the bed next to him.

Hoffius: You can tell that story if you'd like.

Townes: I grew up in Lake City right near Prospect. Prospect is the home of the notorious serial killer, Pee-wee Gaskins, which we knew as Junior Parrot, and he had brothers. And he had a brother near my age, and I think his brother went by Gaskins; they might've been half-brothers, but he was in the hospital bed beside Bill when Bill died. I went to the hospital; I was staying up there, and they called my name, and they say he remember me from school. And I talked to him -- his wife some; he was in there with kidney failure, but that was the serial killer's brother in the room with

him, but we didn't know it then. I didn't even -- I'd been around him, but I hadn't never really talked to him.

Hoffius: Uh-huh. Any other stories? You all put a lot of miles on the car.

Townes: Yeah.

McAlister: We put a lot of miles on the car. Joyce and I went down a lot by ourself, and we think back today of some of the things we did; we didn't lock a car door. You know, if we decided to pull over and rest a minute, we just pulled over and [unintelligible].

Townes: A lot of times when I went, I went by Lake City to take my children to my brother's, and we would go to Charleston and it would be late at night. And one time it was over toward morning, I think, when we got there. And the train, there was a train going, and we stopped there, and there was a carload of boys up ahead of us; they were drunk. And one of them got out and started to the car, and I locked the door, and he said, "This ain't going to stop me," but I always took a gun with me, and I held it up and I said, "Well, this is going to stop you." And he went back and got in the car, and they made a u-turn and left. And we got across the -- and the train went by, and after the train went by there was policemen on the other side of the train track. And he was stopped on the side of the road so we stopped and told him; didn't we?

McAlister: Oh, yeah.

Townes: And he turned and he took off after them.

McAlister: That same night, we didn't stay in many motels.

Townes: No.

McAlister: We didn't stay in many motels; we usually had stayed at --

Townes: That's the only room that I can remember.

McAlister: Yeah. We usually stayed at a particular boarding house there, and we went in, and they gave us a room and bugs everywhere. So Joyce called the front desk and said, "Look, we've got to change rooms. We got bugs everywhere."

Townes: Water bugs.

McAlister: Water bugs. And we got in a --

Townes: Another room and it was the same thing. We didn't even sleep that night [unintelligible] --

McAlister: Yeah. We crawled in the same bed, you know? We didn't want to sleep.

Townes: I guess that would protect us.

McAlister: We were going to protect each other.

Townes: But that was awful, I couldn't believe it.

McAlister: It was.

Townes: That's the only time we ever stayed at a motel in Charleston, back then.

McAlister: Yeah.

Townes: I don't know how it is now, [unintelligible] stayed now, but that was an experience everybody needs to have one time.

McAlister: One time, yeah. That was enough; once is enough. But usually momma had some relatives down there, and Joyce had relatives. Then we had the boarding house across the way from the hospital, and everybody was so, so good to us.

Townes: And then the time when Darlene -- I had my last child by Bill in '72 and he died in '73. He -- it surprised me that I was pregnant, and I told Dr. Williams, I said, "I didn't think I could get pregnant." And he said, "Well, honey, I just messed with his kidneys." He said, "I didn't do nothing with that." But it really shocked me, but she was a baby when he died, and right before he went to the hospital I got pictures of her, him holding her outside. I think it snowed that day or something.

Jones: Uh-huh.

Townes: And he was out there with her before he went to the hospital that last time. I reckon that was the last time, she was --

Jones: She was nine months old; wasn't she?

Townes: She was ten when he died.

Jones: Ten months old.

McAlister: Ten months, when he died.

Hoffius: Do you have any other stories you want to share with us, any -- you talk a lot about Dr. Williams, was there anybody else, nurses or anybody you remember specifically?

McAlister: I wish that I could remember the names, but, you know, it's been a lot of years, but the nurses were just --

Townes: They were good.

McAlister: They were so good. When we were -- they were having a strike at one time.

Townes: Oh, yeah.

McAlister: I'm not sure if it was the transplant or --

Townes: Yeah. They were having that strike.

McAlister: When we went down for the transplant there was flu; Asian Flu, is that what it was called?

Townes: Oh, I don't know. I don't remember.

McAlister: And they were very particular about who they let in to see us. They did let our family, all these people that came from Iva and around come into the hospital.

Townes: Yeah. I remember one time about him watching you about being sick. He really didn't want you around him.

McAlister: Yeah. I was coughing, and I couldn't even go around Billy; I had to stay away.

Townes: And we were -- and we stayed in Mount Pleasant for awhile, and we were coming over to the hospital one time, and it was during the curfew. Oh, and they -- we got off the ramp, you know, from the bridge and went through the black neighborhood, and there was a man out there in the middle of the road trying to stop up, and Bill had a big old stick, a walking-tall stick -- that was a movie that come out back then, and he had that stick and he pulled that stick out, and he said, "He's not going to stop me." He finally had the man moved, and -- enough for us to get by, but it scared me to death, I'm going to tell you, it really did, but they were having really a bad trouble down there then.

McAlister: I wish I could remember every nurse and every doctor because they were good to us.

Townes: They were good. I stayed in the room in a cot and wore masks to sleep with; I had to have a mask on. They had a bathroom in the room; I took my baths in there. Dr. Williams had my food brought to me in the room; I didn't have to leave for anything. And we just sat in there, and I played cards with him and tried to entertain him when I was down there.

McAlister: Yeah. They had no T.V. in the rooms then.

Townes: We had to buy our own T.V. and put it in the room, really did. I remember that; I forgot about that. We bought a -- in fact, have I not -- no, I haven't still got it. I thought for a minute I --

McAlister: That little one.

Townes: Yeah, but we bought a T.V. and put it in his room.

Jones: What nursery did I stay at while you was working at one point in time, when I fell and --

Townes: You were at River's Avenue Baptist Church, I believe.

Jones: Yeah. I sucked my thumb and had a --

Townes: You fell outside and hit the cement steps.

Jones: I thought I had a -- was carrying my blanket and tripped over it.

Townes: Yeah. Well, you had a blanket and your thumb in your mouth.

Jones: And I thought I was carrying something, and I tripped and fell and knocked my two teeth up in my gum [unintelligible].

Townes: And she was in the hospital for awhile when he was in there too; I believe he was in the hospital at the time too. And I'd go from one floor to the other, and when I went down to [unintelligible] her, she was about a year old, and I'd go down there, and they'd be toting her around. I said, "Why isn't she in the bed?" And they said, "We can't keep her in there; she climbed out." It's a big old crib, and she climbed out to go to the bathroom, and they couldn't believe her, that little was going to having to climb out and go to the bathroom.

Jones: You said I was crying, and they wouldn't even know why I was crying.

Townes: No, you weren't crying.

Jones: You said, "If you'd take that diaper off and she'd be all right."

Townes: Oh, yeah. She didn't wear a diaper when she was a year old, and they had to take her diaper off, and she was all right then. But he was in there too. I had to go -- I remember that; he was up on another floor.

McAlister: Yeah.

Townes: They had them both in there.

Hoffius: Do you have anything else you want to put on record as memories, or stories, or -- and it's okay; you might think about things later, and we can talk about them later too.

Townes: Well, they had -- the man that was over -- I don't -- I thought he might have been over the dialysis, but he just might've worked in dialysis; I don't know. But he got him a walking cane when -- and he used to come down there, and he helped him -- he come into that room all the time, so he might've done something else.

McAlister: I wish I could remember his name.

Townes: I know; he bought him a walking cane.

McAlister: Macintosh, Macin- -- I remember [unintelligible].

Townes: He got him a walking cane and brought it down there to him. He used to walk when he first had his kidneys took out.

McAlister: He was great.

Townes: And when he was on dialysis he came up, and he told me one time he was going to -- they were going to start -- what day they were going to start teaching me dialysis.

Hoffius: That was the second illness; that's when he died?

Townes: Yeah, uh-huh.

Hoffius: Okay. Do you have anything else?

Fox: So at this time we'd like to thank you for meeting with us and telling us your stories.

Hoffius: Absolutely. And we look forward to seeing you in January.

Townes: Okay. Will you be there?

Hoffius: Yeah.

McAlister: We appreciate you doing this.

Townes: Yes, we do.

McAlister: It means a lot.

Hoffius: I know it's a long time ago.

McAlister: It was a long time ago. I looked at the pictures, and I told Joyce I don't believe I was ever that young or I was that small.

Townes: It's 40 years; right?

Hoffius: Yup.

McAlister: Forty years.

Townes: I didn't realize how young I was; I was a year older than my granddaughter, my oldest granddaughter when all that happened.

Hoffius: Put some years on.

Townes: Uh-huh.

Hoffius: Uh-huh.

Townes: A lot of -- oh, and I meant -- I'll tell you about the time we left the hospital for Christmas. They let him out of the hospital for Christmas. I don't -- he stayed a few days, I think. He wanted to come home for Christmas, so we got him out, and we started out of the room, and this lady, the nurse was pushing the buggy and -- with his suitcase and all. And we got to the steps, and she's helping me get him down the steps to the car, and I put him in the car, and we took off. And Bill said, "Joyce, where's my suitcase?" And we had to turn around; we circled the block, went back to the hospital and got his suitcase.

Hoffius: That's because the media was there; they were taking your picture and --

Townes: Yeah, yeah. They took our picture all the way down the hall in that hospital, and it was very irritating, you know, you were nervous and wasn't expecting it, and I don't know how they knew. And they took us walking all the way down the hall, all the way down the steps. It was on the news that night in Charleston. And I thought the nurse had his suitcase

because she had been pushing it, you know, and so we got in the car and left and didn't have his suitcase. We had to go back and get the suitcase. But he was so funny; he's the one that thought about it. It never even crossed my mind; I would've been in Iva and --

Hofix: All right, well thank you all so much.

McAlister: Thank you.

Jones: Thank you.

Fox: Thank you.

End of recording.