

**HARRY L. GILHAM**  
**March 13, 2010**

CW: Chad Wright

MC: Mera Cardenas

HG: Harry Gilham

MC: Am I pronouncing your last name correctly?

HG: Yes. The “H” is silent. Gilham.

MC: Gilham.

HG: But when I’m trying to get people to spell it, I say Gil-ham because otherwise they don’t spell it correctly.

MC: All right. I’m just going to go through the little intro and then we’ll get started.

HG: Okay.

MC: This is an interview with Harry Gilham of Atlanta, Georgia founder of Georgia Lighting and a Buckhead native. This interview is being conducted on March 13, 2010 at Mr. Gilham’s home at 106 Camden. The interviewer is myself, Mera Cardenas, and Chad Wright representing Buckhead Heritage Society of Atlanta, Georgia. So, now you said the first home you lived in is in Ansley? You were born in 1930?

HG: I was born in 1930, but the first two homes that I can remember living in were both in Ansley Park. And my grandfather Gilham built one of the first homes in Ansley Park at 40 Maddox Drive and my father and mother bought a house on Avery Drive and that must have been in the 1930s and I had very unusual next door neighbors, Alexis Davidson, who we called the “Alusha,” whose father was a prominent physician and he had fallen in love and married a Russian lady. And, all the young children were terrified of her. Not that there was anything to be terrified but she was just different enough, and I played with Alusha and he went on to become a doctor and was quite prominent and I think he may have gone to Russia for a while and may have married a Russian. And then the other neighbors was the Lecraw family<sup>1</sup>. Julian Lecraw, who is a prominent developer and has been very successful, lived next door and he was my age, but I think at that time Mr. Roy Lecraw was Mayor of Atlanta. So anyway, it was an interesting neighborhood.

CW: Was that when the Governor’s mansion was in Ansley also?

---

<sup>1</sup> In reviewing the transcript, Harry Gilham noted that he believed the Lecraws lived next door to the Davidsons rather than his family.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

HG: Yes. And at Christmastime all the kids would be invited up to the Governor's mansion to sing Christmas carols and it was kind of a nice treat.

CW: Growing up in Ansley Park, what was the perception of Buckhead at the time?

HG: Well, Buckhead has grown in size because when I grew up Buckhead really meant the intersection of Roswell Road and Peachtree Road and where there were probably two hardware stores, two drug stores and a variety of small shops and it was not considered residential. It was the commercial part of Buckhead. The Old Buckhead movie theater, of course, was popular and that was where you went on Saturdays.

CW: So you would go up from Ansley to the movie theater?

HG: No, at that particular point kids that grew up in Ansley Park had the Tenth Street neighborhood where it was similar to Buckhead. We had several drug stores, we had Woolworth's and Kress; that is when you could buy things for a dime or fifty cents or whatever and the Tenth Street Theater ran westerns, double-feature westerns, so that's where you would be taken [if] I guess your family wanted some peace and quiet around the house. So, they would get six or eight kids in the car and you would be dropped off at the Tenth Street Theater and it was very entertaining.

CW: Got you out of the house for three hours, right?

HG: That's right. And I remember when I first enrolled in Spring Street School and my father had attended Spring Street School, so I think I was one of the first students who returned there the offspring of a former Spring Street student. But I do remember that it was very safe to cross Peachtree-West Peachtree and go over from my house on Maddox Drive or later – yeah on Maddox Drive after my family bought my grandfather's house when they wanted to downsize and I picked up two native Atlantans, Townsend Budd who I believe is deceased and Bill Fulwiler and the three of us would walk together. It was considered very safe for kids—gosh, I was only six or seven years old—to cut across all those streets. It was an incredible time in Atlanta to grow up and there were a lot of woods and all of Beverly Road had not been developed and it was solid woods. Of course we were told not to go back there. What do you think we did? We went back to the woods.

MC: Now at what point did your family move?

HG: When I was in the fourth grade we moved and I think we moved because I think E. Rivers School was considered a much superior grade school than old Spring

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

Street, although I don't think there is anything wrong with Spring Street, but the neighborhood we lived in now was outside the city limits, believe it or not.

CW: What home did you move into?

HG: We bought a house on Woodward Way.

CW: Do you remember the number?

HG: 2426. I'm good if my memory is so good. 2426 Woodward Way and the nice thing about that house, well first of all it had a Civil War trench in the backyard. It was a very deep backyard and during. . I guess I was an entrepreneur or slated toward business although I didn't know it, I raised chickens and sold eggs to the neighbors.

CW: Interesting. In the backyard?

HG: In the backyard.

CW: How many chickens did you have?

HG: Oh, I must have had thirty or forty chickens.

MC: Wow.

CW: How much would you sell the eggs for?

HG: Whatever the going price was. Of course, they were fresh eggs, you know.

CW: Sure.

HG: And I would bring them to the person's door and it was a lot of fun raising the chickens.

MC: Did you negotiate?

HG: No, I wasn't that old enough to know about that, but the nice thing about . . . what I wanted to say about Atlanta then, there was a sense of community and that was called Haynes Manor and we really did not think of ourselves as Buckhead. We thought we lived in Haynes Manor and it was sort of the E. Rivers School District. And what I remember in the summertime was we would all play games like capture the flag or kick the can and we could play up until about dark and then I remember Ralph Williams, who is an Atlanta native had a big flat backyard and I remember his mother would say, "It's time to leave kids. Go home." Or, "You're making too much noise; it's time for you to go home."

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

CW: How was it growing up on Woodward Way? I know there are some creeks and things that run through there. Did you play in the creeks at all?

HG: Yes, we did and that was . . . Peachtree Creek was a pretty big creek and one side of Woodward Way was all woods and it was like a jungle with these big vines. Of course we were told not to go down there because it – eight and nine years old—I guess they were afraid, you know, someone would fall in that creek and after a rain that creek could really be flowing. But of course, that’s what we did and I would come home muddy because I would have fallen in the creek and so they would say, “Where have you been?” and so I’d have to confess I’d been at Peachtree Creek.

CW: Would you find any Civil War artifacts from time-to-time?

HG: No, at the time I really didn’t look for Civil War artifacts. The nice thing about that neighborhood was the friendships you made. In the summertime at night, of course there was no air conditioning then, we had a badminton court as many people in Atlanta did and it was lighted and adults and kids of all ages would play badminton and about maybe 8:00 or 9:00 we would be told to leave that the grownups wanted to have their game of badminton. And it was also a time where many of those houses had a domestic housekeeper who was really almost like one of the family. Now this sounds very paternalistic but you were very close to the African American help and I know we kept in touch with the housekeeper that we had because her husband went in the Army in World War II and you know we sort of worried about that, whether he would be all right, and then later on she didn’t need to work and I know we would visit her at Christmastime and take all these packages for her children and keep up with her. So it was a – it was paternal but I don’t remember anybody being mistreated in any way because any kind of health issues we took care of. And, it was a happy situation.

MC: So you had – did your housekeeper live with you? Did you just have the one housekeeper?

HG: Just had one housekeeper. Yes there was a nice guest quarters. We had a - - it was a three story house on Woodward Way because the lot fell off and this was in the ground level but it was a full daylight level and I guess you’d call it the maid’s room and even in the Brookwood Hills area there were garage maid’s rooms but ours was downstairs. It was a nice size room with a private bath and that was something that everyone took for granted and that provided a private area and I think it made the family happy because there was someone there and they had their free time and their time off. It was just a different era. Now, what Preston Stevens my friend from many, many years back; we were in the Boy Scouts together and probably the E. River’s band in the fourth grade because Preston is a lot more musical.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

CW: What did you play?

HG: I played the Mandolin.

CW: Did you really?

HG: Yeah.

MC: Wow.

CW: They don't offer that anymore. I wish they did.

HG: I know it's been more – my children play the guitar. But anyway they needed a Mandolin player and I don't know how I got talked into that, but it was a – it was fun. So I peaked early in music but what Preston wants to hear, it was a very innocent time. There was one afternoon before the Boy Scout meeting and the Boy Scout hut was down on Peachtree Battle Circle and nobody wanted to build homes down there because that was a flood plain, but I'm sorry I can't remember the name, but one of the Atlanta city councilmen that was very interested in scouting got the city to donate a piece of land down there and so we raised money and we built a nice Boy Scout hut and it was Troop 212. So we would, Jim Manry whose family lived on Habersham Road was my age and we went to North Fulton and Jim came over one afternoon on his bicycle and we were both going to the scout meeting together and we had our scout uniforms on and we were doing something in my backyard and I guess we didn't know what – we were not trying to get into trouble, we really were not, but there was a bit of mystery. My house on Woodward Way's backyard faced the house on Peachtree Battle where the grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan lived and that house is still there today. It's an Art Deco house.

MC: Is it on Dellwood?

HG: It's on Peachtree Battle.

MC: Oh.

HG: Almost to Dellwood. It's sort of in the middle between Dellwood and Woodward Way.

CW: If you're going to Peachtree from Woodward Way it's on the right-hand side.

HG: Exactly.

CW: Right, okay.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

HG: And it's distinctive because it's unlike any other house.

CW: Oh yeah, yeah.

HG: Well, they had an old cinderblock warehouse and it was right up against the fence of our backyard and the back large window was open. I don't know if it had blown open, it was open and the house, the garage or the storage room set way back from the house and so I don't know whether it was me or Jim Manry, Jim Manry was definitely more mischievous than I was and a lot of fun to be with, so he said, "What do you think is in there Harry?" and I said, "I don't have any idea. You want to get in there and see?" So we climbed through that window and saw these tons of Ku Klux Klan outfits, medals and swords and belt buckles and all kinds of crazy stuff. So we didn't want any of the stuff but Jim said, "What do you think if we put this on and borrowed it and rode it to the scout meeting?" I said, "That really sounds like a good idea."

CW: Oh my gosh.

HG: So we dressed up in these Ku Klux Klan robes and this great big belt with all this metal showing and rode our bicycles and we got down the scout master, he turned white as a piece of paper and he said, "Take those uniforms off. Do you know what you're doing?" We had no clue.

CW: So you had no idea.

HG: I had no idea what we were getting involved in. He says after the meeting, "You go back and tell your parents what you've done." So I did and I thought boy, I'm going – when I did something really bad I got beat with my father's belt and I didn't get into too much trouble because I didn't want to get beat by the belt. Anyway, my father said, "You go up to the front door of that house, you ring the bell, you fold everything up that you've taken and you apologize and tell them you're very, very sorry that you took this." So I remember going up there all by myself. I said, "Oh, won't you go with me dad?" "No you're going to do this on your own. You were the one that got into trouble." So, I still didn't realize the significance. No one in my family had ever talked about the Ku Klux Klan. Sure I had read about it, but it was something that was sort of dwindling in my opinion. I think you have lived in the Buckhead area; there may have been people whose grandfathers or uncles were in the Ku Klux Klan, but I never heard anybody talk about it. So I thought it was almost like a club or something. I had no idea at 12 years old. So I went up to the door and I think my knees were shaking. Anyway, the wife came to the door.

CW: Lucky for you.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

HG: Yes, lucky for me because I thought maybe I'd be snatched into that house and I'd never get out. Anyway it was an age of innocence. Now, I understood that Jim Manry was afraid to tell his parents. I learned that many, many years later.

CW: What did the wife say to you when you gave back the robes?

HG: She said very little. It has been a long time ago. I mean I was 12 years old.

CW: Did you notice if that window got fixed after that?

HG: I would never go back in that back part of the yard. But that was a prank. We looked at it as a joke and I guess it could have caused serious problems if somebody had . . .

CW: Sure. Seen you, who recognized that might have been the robe. We had heard some stories too that that house had tunnels in it. Was there ever any mystique about [unintelligible]?

HG: I don't think the neighbors actually had any parties or had any social contacts with the other neighbors. They were very private. I think the name was Evans but I have forgotten but, I think at one time the house directly across Peachtree Battle was occupied by a high official.

CW: Yes, I've heard that too.

HG: And that house I understand does have a secret passage.

CW: Okay, so it's the one across the street.

HG: Has a secret passage; now I'm not sure what's in the Art Deco house because it was probably built after the one across Peachtree Battle at the corner of Dellwood and so a lot of people think that that house was the Ku Klux Klan house, but actually both houses apparently were.

CW: Right. Yes, that's what we have heard.

HG: But anyway it was a real peaceful time and North Fulton was a wonderful place to go to high school in. I could ride my bicycle from Woodward Way across Peachtree. There was very little traffic and then when you got a little bit older it wasn't very cool to ride your bicycle so then I worked out a deal where I would pay Jim Manry the gas money if he would pick me up and take me because it was cooler if you wanted to impress the girls to come in a car and his car was always wild; it was one that he had bought used and repaired and it was fun to do that.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

MC: Do you recall any – did you all ever race? I hear there was some racing on Northside.

HG: Well where you raced was on – we called it the Bell Bomber Plant and where they manufactured the aircraft during World War II—and at night we would go out there and I remember Franklin Wright's family, he was a leader, he was the one that helped form the Boy Scout 212 and he was always organizing things. So I remember one night, I don't know whether it was all boys or we had dates, but I remember going out there and trying to go 100 mph. There was virtually no traffic. It was about midnight.

CW: Where was . . .

HG: That was a double-lane highway that led from Atlanta out to the Marietta area.

CW: Okay.

HG: I don't know how far it stretched then, because there were no interstates.

MC: So would that be like what's called Parkway now?

HG: No, I think that would be Old Highway 41.

CW: Right, okay.

HG: Shot just like an arrow once you cross the Chattahoochee River. And it was a brand new highway and very little traffic at night. And it was a real distance between Marietta and Atlanta at that time. There were woods and it wasn't just completely built up.

CW: Tell us a little bit about North Fulton. Did ya'll have a fraternity?

HG: Fraternities. I was in KDK Fraternity and the North Fulton did not recognize fraternities and sororities, but if you wanted to join a fraternity there were about four fraternities and they served a really good purpose because we had hayrides.

[. . .]

CW: [. . .] If you could hold that up to the camera, that would be great. [Holds up a photograph of the fraternity members.]

HG: All right. John Chapman was the president of KDK and he was also, I think he was our lead quarterback on the football team, great guy and Jim Hickey was the vice president or secretary and we had a great group of people.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

CW: This points you out. He's right there, I believe.

HG: Yeah, there I am.

CW: Hold that up to the camera and show. There he is right there.

HG: Anyway it as fun because . . .

CW: I know this is a girl in the fraternity.

HG: Well she was . . . every. . .

CW: Is that the sweetheart?

HG: That was the sponsor or sweetheart and her name was Joan Court. She was one of the most beautiful and one of the most popular girls and she lived on Shadowlawn Avenue and that was Buckhead. Anyway, she was a wonderful all-around person. Everybody liked her and she was dating John Chapman, the president so that – they did not get married though. And then Jim Hickey who had a Buckhead newspaper for a while was one of my friends. My closest two friends were probably Franklin Wright and Bob Holder.

CW: Okay, got you.

HG: Also Phil.

CW: Holder being in the same construction.

HG: Yes, Bob Holder, even then people knew that Bob Holder was going places. He was smart and well organized and he was just an outstanding person and it's fortunate for me that I have become good friends with one of his sons, Tommy Holder, who is active at Cathedral of St. Phillip and I've played a couple of rounds of golf with Tommy so it's really fun to after all these years to also get to know the son of somebody that I was friends with in high school.

CW: What all did they make you do to join the fraternity or was there any rituals or hazing or anything like that?

HG: I don't know about the hazing at the high school level but I became a Chi Phi at Georgia Tech and that was about a whole weekend of hazing. But I don't remember hazing in KDK, I think it was more social. You had hayrides, you had social events and there were sororities at North Fulton, Washington Seminary,

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

Napsonian<sup>2</sup> and you would be invited to things like that. So it provided a social nucleus where a group of young people had very innocent good times. Now this is hard to believe with today's different world: I knew very few people at North Fulton High School, even the senior year, that had anything to do with alcohol. I never had a drink of beer or alcohol in North Fulton. There were a few people that did but very few. That was just not part of the happenings and I don't remember a single discussion of drugs.

MC: How many fraternities were there at North Fulton?

HG: Well that was on the quiet. I remember there was a fraternity called TKO, KDK, they were the two biggest and there were probably two more. Oh, and we had some inter-fraternity softball games and touch football games. Now I don't know, the purposes of it was social though.

CW: How would they recruit? How did you decide? Was there a period as a freshman where there was kind of an open period or did they invite you?

HG: I think you were recruited when you first entered North Fulton because you could see from this picture that some of these guys, oh George Poole who became a good friend of mine, he was a year younger. Nesbitt Poole, who became a doctor and was a Chi Phi fraternity brother, he's in here. It would be fun to know what's happened to all these people. Well, Phil Osborne, of course, had a very successful travel business.

CW: Uh-huh, Osborne Travel.

HG: That's right. I think he only died one or two years ago. So it was – I think you were just invited but there was probably a vote as to who they took in and who they didn't and I guess some people that wanted to be members, but I don't remember; there were plenty of people that weren't in the fraternities, so I don't know that people looked at it as anything that special. Oh, and then the other ritual: if you had your best girlfriend you would try to pin her and that meant you were going steady and she would wear your fraternity pin on her cashmere sweater.

CW: Okay. Did you ever pin anybody?

HG: I dated a lot of different girls. I think I played the field.

CW: You had a lot of pins, huh?

---

<sup>2</sup> North Avenue Presbyterian School (NAPS) later merged with Washington Seminary to become The Westminster Schools.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

HG: I was a sailor so a sailor has a girl in every port.

CW: Right, right.

HG: The other mystique about high school days was the Pink Castle which is the old, I think it's the old Calhoun home that sits if you are going west on West Paces Ferry, it's the house that sits way back and it's an Italianate house. During World War II it was vacant because I think the owner was either in the military or had an important job in Washington, so this big house was empty. It had a long driveway and after you had gone to a movie with your date and gone to the Varsity and had hot dogs or hamburgers and you still had some time on your hands, people, especially from North Fulton High School would go out there, turn on their car radios and park in the driveway on the lawn and dance or talk or mingle. Again it started out all innocent fun. Of course we were intruding on private property and we were probably breaking some law, but only later did a very few people actually break in the house. Fortunately I was not one of them.

MC: You learned your lesson, right?

HG: That one episode. But, I think they did some . . . it was vandalism. Maybe they took a clock or a radio, which they should not have done.

CW: And they got caught?

HG: Oh yeah.

CW: Who caught them?

HG: I think the owners. They probably had a caretaker and once you burst into a house it was going to eventually be reported and I remember the police came out to North Fulton High School and interviewed a bunch of people, but there were so many people that were connected to the Pink Castle that I didn't get interviewed, fortunately. And then, what they were doing is trying to verify who actually broke in that house. There were no charges made about people that just went out there and parked in the car and listened to the radio and mixed and mingled. But that was kind of a scary week at North Fulton High School and I think maybe the people that were guilty of taking things out of that house got on probation and had to do work or they were fined. I don't think anybody went to jail but they probably should have, maybe, to teach them a lesson.

CW: Growing up on Woodward Way where do you remember doing shopping, say groceries or school supplies, clothes, those sort of things?

HG: Where did I do my shopping? Okay. Well I think if you wanted to buy something that you went to church or Sunday School with, the main men's stores

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

were actually in downtown Atlanta and we would catch a bus down at Peachtree and Peachtree Battle and ride, I think it made some stops, but you could ride right into downtown and the shops that guys shopped in were Muse's and John Jarrell's and Parks Chambers and there was Buckhead's Men's Store that you could also buy casual stores, but I think Buckhead Men's Store became more popular later on.

CW: Got you. So they were just starting out.

HG: But there were stores, I think there was a huge Kroger Store or Piggly Wiggly or something right down where there is a bunch of shops where Peachtree Creek-Peachtree Battle comes in, if you are going north on Peachtree on the right.

CW: Okay. Right there is where Office Max and Willie's and Panera.

HG: The other side of the street, yeah. But the interesting thing, I'm sure there was parking on Peachtree Road.

CW: Yes, that drops off the to creek back there.

HG: And then we were in the era, I do remember something that really impressed me. My aunt and uncle lived in Marietta and I know one time we were going out there to spend the day and we had our housekeeper and it was a hot summer day and in Atlanta then you could pull up outside of a drug store and they would put a tray on your window and you could get a Coke or malted milk or cheese and ham sandwich and at that time, of course, there was segregation in Atlanta, but if you had your housekeeper and they were in the backseat looking after a young child they would get served also. But we got to Marietta and everybody was thirsty and tired and we pulled up on the Marietta Square and sure enough a girl came out and put the tray, she looked in the backseat and saw this African American woman and she said, "I'm sorry, we can't serve this car." And I didn't say anything because I was a child, but it struck me how unfair and rude that was.

CW: So Buckhead seemed to have more of a tolerant. . .

HG: I'm not saying it was entirely tolerant but it was a little more tolerant than. . .

CW: Compared to Marietta.

HG: Marietta and Cobb County because that was probably the law but it seemed patently unfair.

MC: Do you remember your housekeeper's name?

HG: Yeah, Bobbie Lee Cook. Isn't that a wonderful name, Bobbie Lee?

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

CW: It is.

MC: And where did she. . .do you remember where she lived?

HG: Oh yeah because I remember taking lots of gifts. She lived in the inexpensive housing down where on Northside Drive, SW. I guess those. . .she referred to it, not me, she referred to it as the Projects but actually they were very reasonably priced and when they were new they were well-maintained and she thought it was a wonderful place to live, because it was inexpensive, it was on public transportation. I don't think I thought of that place as being crime laden at that point in time.

CW: Do you remember Macedonia Park at all where Bagley Park is now?

HG: I don't because I probably didn't use that so much. That became later I think. I mean my children went out there and played soccer games.

CW: Well, before it was Bagley Park, before it was actually a park-park, it was an African American community called Macedonia Park and they say that's where a lot of housekeepers also lived that worked in Buckhead.

HG: Yeah. Well, there was always African American enclaves. There was a church over on Arden Road and a cemetery there.

CW: They are still there.

HG: It was an interesting period. I think race relations were calmer in those days, which frankly, I never thought segregation was a fair situation. I was a reader of Ralph McGill, I guess, but that was discussed around the dinner table sometimes and each generation has a different idea I'm sure.

CW: How about. . .did you go to The Cathedral [of St. Philip] growing up when you went to Woodward?

HG: I went to Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church and that was when Monroe Swilley was there and my mother, my great grandmother, my grandmother and my mother were all staunch Baptists. But when I married Caroline, she had grown up from a very early age in the Episcopal Church and so we talked about it and I thought it was important for us both to go to the same church and I remember, because I remember going to Monroe Swilley because he had been very loving and kind to my mother and father and also to me, although I had no particular developmental problems or friendships, but I know I went there and I said, you know in respect when I move my membership from Second Ponce de Leon Baptist, I better tell the minister. So we went and he said—Monroe was a

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

wonderful man—but he said, “I don’t understand why when Baptists marry Episcopalians they always go to the Episcopal Church.” So I didn’t have much to say, but I remember that.

CW: So when you got married is that when you started going to the Cathedral?

HG: Oh yes.

CW: And tell me a little bit, was the main building built then? Tell me a little bit about The Cathedral of St. Philip because it is one of the more prominent churches.

HG: Well I’ve been blessed to be a member of that church now for forty some-odd years; forty-four years probably. We had not put our wing on but it was at the time I went the old little gray church was torn down. I do remember that church.

CW: And where did it sit? Did it sit on the hill also?

HG: Yes, I think it did. It’s a wonderful site.

CW: You say it is a beautiful site, when you say gray church, was it stone or was it wood?

HG: I think it was gray wood.

CW: Uh-huh. And what year do you think it was torn down? Do you remember?

HG: Well I have a friend that does volunteer archive work, you could probably find that out. That was be interesting to interview someone that . . .

CW: Most certainly.

HG: But I’ve worked on stewardship at St. Philip’s and have been on . . . really enjoy the community and the spirit at St. Philip’s. I’m on an ushering team, which allows you to meet people of different ages, and we have a lot of camaraderie. I’m on a finance committee, I was on an outreach committee for a while; I’ve been on numerous stewardship committees and it’s a place that I feel that I belong.

CW: Have you noticed any changes in the church from when you joined with Caroline until today?

HG: I think the changes are all good. I think we have a tremendous amount of younger people with children there. I think possibly there is 600-700 children under 10 years old now that are attending.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

CW: That's amazing.

HG: So that's really a blessing. We are very blessed. Sam Candler and his wife Boog Candler now have completed ten years at the Cathedral and it seems like just yesterday that they first came there, but they've really energized everyone there.

CW: When they added on, I mean it is such a beautiful sanctuary, do you know anything about the construction of the main church or how the funds were raised?<sup>3</sup>

HG: Oh yes.

CW: Tell us a little bit about that.

HG: Well, I was on the lead committee with, let's see, Sonny Schoen<sup>4</sup> who's an old-time Atlantan; in fact Sonny's grandfather and my grandfather were in business together in the 1918-20s. It was called the Gilham Schoen Company and he doesn't remember anything about his grandfather and I barely remember about my grandfather.

CW: What did they do, Gilham Schoen?

HG: Well, Gilham Shoen were in the electrical business and they also started one of the first radio stations in Atlanta. I've done a little research because I'm writing a memoir. It's virtually done and I was putting a little sense . . . I was in the electrical business. I was putting my father and my grandfather but they were in different parts of the electrical business. But my grandfather was a licensed electrician. That's how he started out and he decided that Atlanta in 1920 needed an electrical wholesaler because, if you were a working electrician, you had to buy your supplies in Cincinnati. That was the closest electrical supply and then they came by train and it would take probably one day or two days to get here and get to you, so he persuaded Westinghouse which was a very big and prominent manufacturer of electrical devices, to allow him to be a franchise distributor. And he did that for about 20 years and then sold it.

CW: Smart man.

HG: I guess. Anyway, he was the one that built the house on 40 Maddox Drive.

MC: And you mentioned a radio station. Do you remember what it was called?

---

<sup>3</sup> The interviewer is referring to the Cathedral proper, completed in the early 1960s. However, Mr. Gilham subsequently discusses his involvement with raising funds for the construction of the new Atrium and Education wing in the early 2000s.

<sup>4</sup> Sonny's first name was Charles.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

HG: WBDE and that station was given to Tech High School, which of course doesn't exist anymore. And it took me a lot of stuff on Google in getting the obituaries to uncover that. The Gilham part of my family was not particularly interested in genealogy and I really can't go back very far.

CW: Well you mentioned you and Sonny on the lead committee to design the church. Did you choose the architect? Who did you choose? How did you raise the funds?

HG: Well there was a big planning committee. We were just one . . . there were about 20 people on the lead committee including Dean Candler and what our job, the lead committee was a quiet campaign. We were trying to get donors who were very loyal supporters of the Cathedral in the past and we were trying to get gifts of somewhere between \$25,000.00 and \$200,000.00 that would commit in advance and I think they were given three to five years payout. And so it was an early campaign so that we could – when we started the full campaign of all members — we would say we have already raised so much and we need so much more and it would give everybody more of a good feeling.

CW: Who did you target? Do you remember?

HG: Well, I with help and you know you have to wipe it out of your mind because I wasn't interested in what people were giving, but we had to find out who in the past had been the largest 125 givers and then we had to contact them in a respectful way and I think it was a very successful campaign. The total goal was \$15 million and we had an incredible two men that were the top leaders. Jimmy Fluker was the overall leader and had more energy than anyone I have ever seen and he just did an incredible job. And then Tommy Holder was the pro bono leader who worked with the construction, so the amazing thing is we came in on budget and on schedule and a lot of people thought, well gosh, why does that church they're always raising money. What do they need? But actually it had been forty years since that church had had any major renovation and the hallways were way too narrow. There were not enough Sunday School classes, there were not enough. . .the clergy was scattered all over the building and it was difficult to work.

CW: So what all was added in that campaign?

HG: Well, first we added a big atrium, which is a wonderful reception meeting, ground.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

CW: The Hall of Bishops?<sup>5</sup>

HG: And we redid the Hall of Bishops, which looks wonderful. And then there was an open atrium just beyond the – I'm not getting my terms right, I need my wife. But there was an open atrium with an ornamental fount and we enclosed that with glass and it's a beautiful area where people waiting to be baptized are gathering.

CW: That's [. . .] kind of between Mikell Chapel and the main ..

HG: Yes, uh-huh.. But we really didn't do too much to the main Cathedral. Right now we need money to do some work on the organ which needs some. There is always something going on which is useful and necessary.

CW: So the main Cathedral was alone so to speak; that was the church for a long time?

HG: Yeah. You know I have forgotten who the architect was and I really shouldn't but I think they did a marvelous job because when you ride along Peachtree Road you are really not aware that there are two different buildings.

CW: No, not at all.

HG: The stonework and everything was done. Of course, we got . . . over the years I helped raise money to allow us to have more parking and more physical space.

CW: Bought the Children's Museum next door.

HG: Yes.

CW: Tell me what year was that when the expansion occurred, do you remember?

HG: Oh you mean the biggest expansion? Yeah. Let's see, gosh now you will have to get my memoirs.

CW: Well roughly, you can say early 60s.<sup>6</sup>

HG: I believe now it was 2003 maybe.

CW: Well how about when the atrium was filled in and the Sunday School classrooms?

---

<sup>5</sup> The Hall of Bishops, now Child Hall, was completed in 1955, prior to the campaign Mr. Gilham is discussing.

<sup>6</sup> The interviewer is referring to the construction of the Cathedral proper, which was dedicated in 1962. However, Mr. Gilham has described in the interview his involvement with the construction of the new Atrium and Education wing in the early 2000s.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

HG: That's what I'm talking about, 2003-2004-2005 maybe and then we had a grand event when we opened it. Now if I knew you were going to ask me those questions I would have . .

CW: Sure. Well I'm intrigued with how the Cathedral, the initial church was built after the gray one you mentioned and how that one was constructed.

HG: There is a lady that is a native of Jackson, Mississippi but she came here as a young woman and she married a very good friend of mine, Oliver Wright, and she's the volunteer worker doing all of these archives. She's a good friend of ours. She introduced, she and her husband introduced me to my wife some 44 years ago.

CW: Is that right? And how did you meet? Go ahead and tell the story.

HG: We met on a blind date.

CW: How old were you?

HG: Well I was in my middle thirties. My Benton side of my family all married late and so I married in my middle thirties. I was a very happy bachelor. I'm even happier married.

CW: That's good. And you went to Georgia Tech for a year.

HG: Yeah. My father was an outstanding basketball player at Tech High School. He was on the All-State high school basketball team and he was a golfer. He was someone—I did not inherit any of that athletic ability. I'm a fair athlete but my father was outstanding. And what is the question now? I'm winding up too quick.

CW: Just talk about how you went to Tech. You went to Tech and then Emory.

HG: Well first of all, I really wanted adventure when I got out of North Fulton and at that particular time we did not have counselors like they do at Westminster and Lovett and Marist that you take a battery of tests. I was a pretty good student. I never had any academic problems at North Fulton. My grades were good when I wasn't busy pursuing other interests but when I went to Georgia Tech I did fine in most of the academic subjects like math and chemistry and that kind of thing but I was a horrible failure at mechanical drawing. And I think I was only 17 and I think I was very immature. So after three quarters at Georgia Tech I wanted to go away from home and experience a different college. I wanted to go to the University of North Carolina but this was the era in college that veterans on the GI Bill were coming in and new, young 17-18 year olds were coming in. So it was a strange mixture of young men that were anywhere from 25 to 30 years old

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

entering college and young kids entering college. So, North Carolina put me on some kind of a waiting list but I was accepted to the University of Florida and probably I would have stayed there. I liked the University of Florida and I liked . . . I got into a lot of sports down there because Chi Phi at the University of Florida was one of the smaller fraternities and my fraternity brothers pulled me into all kinds of sports. They said well we need a body, we don't care how well you play, get out there so I learned that I wasn't that bad an athlete.

CW: Okay.

HG: And then I was in a minor automobile accident which put me on crutches and I missed the beginning of a semester and I wanted to graduate on time so I started – I enrolled at Emory and I liked it so much that I decided to stay.

CW: How many years were you at Emory?

HG: About two years, two and a half. I graduated with a lot more credits than I needed because when I switched from the Arts & Science, I was going to be an economics major, then I had to take all the business courses, accounting and statistics and I really enjoyed it. Emory Business School was small then and I really enjoyed being at Emory.

CW: So you married obviously after school. Had you already started your lighting?

HG: No. I was in the Navy for four years and I had quite an adventure in the Navy but you are going to have to get . . . I'll have to send you my book.

CW: You'll have to. I have to promote it on the Buckhead Heritage.

HG: My memoir starts with the Navy.

CW: Okay, starts in the Navy. Okay.

HG: And I worked in Dalton-Chattanooga for almost four and a half years before starting Georgia Lighting in 1960. And many people think that my father started Georgia Lighting but he was a very successful manufacturer's agent and doing quite well and he encouraged me to do it. He always encouraged me to start something but I started it all on my own very, very small and that was a wonderful adventure.

MC: Where was your first store?

HG: First store was on Spring Street at Biltmore Place just south of Fifth Street so I would tell people when they would call up on the telephone and say well where's your store located Harry; I said I'm just behind the Atlanta Biltmore Hotel and

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

just north of Capitol Cadillac, so it was a great location because people would say oh, I know where that is.

CW: And how big was your first store?

HG: My first store was 7,000 square feet.

CW: Pretty sizable then.

HG: Yeah. And then in 1968 I was able to acquire some land on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and I moved from a 7,000 square foot building into one that was 30,000 to 40,000 square feet.

CW: And that was on 14<sup>th</sup> Street?

HG: 14<sup>th</sup> Street just east of where Northside Drive-Hemphill and that was a wonderful location at that time, because if you were from Macon or Savannah or Buckhead or anywhere you could come on the interstate and get to it.

CW: Did you do mostly contract? Obviously you sold to a lot of individuals but did you do a lot of contracts?

HG: The first customers were building contractors. DeKalb County was absolutely booming and Interstate 85 had just opened and there were wonderful new subdivisions out there so I started with only one employee and then I got two and it was an interesting adventure and luckily, I think I'm a plodder and a striver. The company grew and it grew and it grew and finally after about twelve years we became the largest, single store lighting company in the U.S. There was only one store larger and that was in Los Angeles and they had thirty branches. But the first target were building contractors and the other targets were interior designers, architects, electrical contractors and then of course the general public.

CW: Now did you find them or did they find you?

HG: Oh we had to find them. You had to go out and call on them and it's hard to get a building contractor to change from one company to another which once you get them unless you really perform poorly, you have got them for life. So anyway, most of the building contractors became really good friends.

CW: And that was obviously the key to your success, too, was that you're a very personable guy.

HG: I'm not sure. I think my Emory business background helped me because I had a business background. I was not an outgoing person all of my life. I think I had to learn. I never thought I would make a sales person but I think I'm a pretty good

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

sales person now. But that was not by choice, that was by necessity, but I think I like it. I like people. I enjoy people; finding out who they are, what they're like.

CW: And you sold the company.

HG: I sold the company because I was about 67 and my two daughters had other careers. My younger daughter who you knew, Jean, had worked for Merrill Lynch in London and New York and then she got a degree from the Darden School at the University of Virginia, got hired; she got five job offers right away. She's smarter than I am. Anyway, she had her career and Anna always wanted to be a teacher and got a Master's in Civics and teaching from Emory where she met her husband, by the way. And I discouraged her from . . . she worked for me briefly at Georgia Lighting because the boss's daughter is always going to be treated perfectly sort of, although one time she wanted to go on a beach vacation and we told her that it was weekend to be on duty and she couldn't go. I didn't have to tell her that, her boss did. But I wanted to sell the company because [. . .] at that time my two daughters I thought were doing fine and both wanted to be eventually homemakers and have family. I have five grandchildren now. Isn't that great?

CW: Congratulations, that is. It sure is.

HG: So I wanted to sell the company and Arthur Blank out of the blue called me on the telephone one time and invited me to dinner and we had a long discussion and the wheels began to turn and Arthur Blank is someone that I greatly admire and enjoyed working for Home Depot while he was there.

CW: And what year was that?

HG: I can tell you that exactly now. That was in, let me get it exactly right. I signed the actual sales in June 30, 2001, but we started negotiations probably, it took a long time by the way. Due diligence is a long process. I think the whole thing would have started in 1997, late 1997. It took us almost two and a half years to reach the point where Home Depot decided to buy Georgia Lighting and Georgia Lighting decided to sell it. It wasn't a difficult process, it was just a lengthy process. Georgia Lighting at that time had almost 300 employees and we were doing — it's small by today's standards—but it was large for the specialized industry. We did \$40 million in sales and Home Depot did \$40 billion in sales. I admire Home Depot. It's a wonderful company. I met a lot of good people there.

CW: How long did you spend after you sold it with the company getting transitioned?

HG: Well they wanted me to spend five years but then I was ready to retire and do travel and enjoy my second home in Cashiers so I agreed to work for three years but I worked really, I mean I was busy for those two years. I had reassigned all

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

- of my work and when Arthur Blank resigned and left the company and I thought, you know, I've done everything that I know how to do. The company is in excellent health; it has great management, this is Georgia Lighting now; it has great management; we have rewritten the Lighting-Sales Program; it is used all through Home Depot; we have changed their display; we have changed their purchasing; maybe it's time for me to leave after two full years. I had gone to 30 Expo stores and critiqued their assortment, critiqued their personnel, written reports.
- CW: So it wasn't simply the sale of the store it was also come consult Home Depot how to better present their product.
- HG: They weren't interested; \$40 million in revenue although we were a very profitable company with a larger gross profit than Home Depot because we were specialists but they were interested in increasing the profitability of their lighting departments. They sold a lot of lighting but the lighting department had sort of been neglected and so they were looking for someone that understood lighting. I had a wonderful group of associates at Georgia Lighting.
- MC: Now some of your employees at Georgia Lighting actually started their own company, right?
- HG: You'll have to read my memoir as to why they did that and why the company got closed but the successor to, as everyone knows that reads the Atlanta paper or the Wall Street Journal, the successor to Arthur Blank was Robert Nardelli and he decided that Georgia Lighting was outside of the core business and he closed it and I'm sorry he would not sell it. There were at least three companies and individuals waiting to buy it but I think he misunderstood the type customer that goes into a lighting store that handles thousands of products rather than a big box retail. Nothing wrong with big box retailers. I mean I still own some stock in them, but they are different animals.
- CW: Well there is still that person who wants to walk in and have a sales associate take them through and have an interior design eye to help them.
- HG: Right, right. Are we through with the interview?
- CW: Almost. We've got maybe two more questions. One you mentioned the bug. Let's go back to that one. We'll turn the camera on.
- HG: All right the bug. Everyone knew about the bug. My memories of the bug were when my family lived in Ansley Park. Now it may have traveled to Woodward Way, it probably did, but I just took it for granted that your domestic help, I think it really, I wouldn't say preyed on the African American community; the odds of you picking the right number but I think you [. . .] even could have bet a dime or a

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

quarter or fifty cents. Remember at that era you could buy a Coca-Cola for a nickel and you could go to the movie, a double feature movie was twenty-five cents, so a dime or a nickel or a quarter was a lot of money then comparatively. So you would put your piece of paper, I guess you would have to put your name on it or your telephone number and your two numbers and your money and it used to be under a brick or in a bottle and in Ansley Park there were alleys in back of most of the homes, so I knew not to touch that particular brick. I was either told by our housekeeper or told by my parents now don't you fool around with that, these people know what they're doing.

MC: Do you remember where the brick was or was there a drop point?

HG: I think it was in that alley back there which was a common area where the garbage people would pickup.

CW: Behind Maddox?

HG: Behind Avery Drive.

CW: Avery.

HG: I don't remember there being an alley behind Maddox but I distinctly remember the bug when we lived on Avery Drive right in front of McClatchey Park.

CW: Okay yeah, exactly.

HG: Now I did one thing that was very bad. I had two big white Spitz dogs that I really liked and I would wake up early in the morning before my parents needed to get up so I would take these dogs out for a walk and these dogs liked to jump in the swimming pool at McClatchey. I didn't have any idea about disease and dogs and I would let them jump in there for a minute or two, because they loved it. Wouldn't do things like that today.

CW: No.

HG: All right. What's your next question.

CW: Last couple of questions would be you moved here obviously onto Camden in Brookwood Hills, what year did you guys move here?

HG: I can tell you that. Lots of things happened in 1968. Some very sad things. We lost Martin Luther King; we lost John Kennedy; it was both a sad time; my first daughter, Anna was born; the Georgia Lighting moved from Spring Street to 14<sup>th</sup> Street and we moved in November from Colonial Homes where we had lived for the first two years of our marriage into this house. And I remember the doctor,

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

Caroline was pregnant and the doctor said, "I don't think it's a good idea for you to move," so I put Caroline on a comfortable chair in the little hallway and I said, "You sit here and you point to where each piece of furniture goes and I'll see that it gets there." Anyway, this was a wonderful neighborhood. Our daughters were on the swim team; Jean was a lifeguard; we love our neighbors. I've got friends that we made over here that are still friends.

CW: A good community feel still?

HG: Yeah. I'm in a men's wine tasting, the Brookwood Hills Wine Tasting, although about half of us don't even live in Brookwood Hills anymore. You meet wonderful people here, George and Betty Heery grew up and raised their family here. My next-door neighbor is the head of the Dermatology Department at Emory, Wright Kaufman and his wife, so you can't find better neighbors.

MC: Would you have neighborhood events when your girls were growing up; because you have a pool but were there other types of neighborhood events you would do?

HG: Well you would have neighborhoods where Wakefield and Camden come together and they would block off the streets and you would have like hot dogs and sandwiches and beer but the pool is the nucleus of what makes this neighborhood tick; the pool and the athletic field and the tennis courts because in the summertime you would get Kentucky Fried Chicken or you would make sandwiches and you would meet your friends down at the pool. The kids would swim and the adults could have a beer or relax and so it brought people together. I don't think there are many communities left in Atlanta exactly like.

CW: No, no, very few.

HG: But when I lived on Woodward Way it was a similar community. Every neighbor knew each other and the kids played in everybody's backyard until you made too much noise and you were asked to go home.

MC: And got sent home.

CW: Kids knew which yard to stay out of as well. And the last question I have was kind of on the sports line, you mentioned playing badminton, did you ever play badminton at the court at Piedmont and Lindbergh? There is the old wooden building there that was built and was originally badminton.

HG: No but I tell you where I did play. My father was a member of Eastlake Country Club because he was an avid golfer and there was a winner's series of badminton downtown in the old Athletic Club, which was torn down, and it was a parking lot for years. That was a wonderful, sophisticated . . . at summer nights the roof had an orchestra and you got dinner out there and well it wasn't much of a skyline but

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

you could see what skyline Atlanta had and that building was torn down which I think was kind of a tragedy. I have been active in preservation. I have been a past president of the Atlanta Preservation Center so when you're in the business of selling lighting fixtures to new construction and you also believe in protecting historic neighborhoods and historic buildings you are kind of torn between the two.

MC: So are you all<sup>7</sup> thinking of moving from a conservation neighborhood to a historic district here?

HG: Oh it would be wonderful but no, we're thinking of joining the Isaacson's and moving to Peachtree Hills Place.

CW: Okay, yeah.

HG: When it gets built and we have high hopes because it will be a wonderful community.

CW: Yeah, certainly. I think a lot of the folks in this neighborhood have signed up. I know my parents are as well.

HG: They are. Oh your parents too?

CW: They are on a waiting list.

HG: The one thing I wanted to make a postscript was how important to me and most of my friends the Boy Scout Troop 212 was and I loved going to Athens Y Camp, but the camp I really liked was the Old Burt Adams Scout Camp.

CW: Up in Vinings.

HG: Yes. And that was just a wonderful experience.

CW: And would you go up there for . . . Preston mentioned that also. Would you guys go up there for a week in the summertime?

HG: We would go up for as long as they would . . . we went one time for three weeks. I think you were only supposed to . . . allocated two weeks but we had *more fun* at Bert Adams, which was a very affordable camp.

MC: And what did you do at camp?

---

<sup>7</sup> The interviewer is referring to Brookwood Hills, not the Gilhams themselves.

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

HG: Well you did, of course you did hiking, you got merits; if it was Boy Scout Camp you did merit badges, so I remember you would have to learn about the different variety of trees, you would have to build a fire from a stone and a stick, you would take long hikes. Oh, the most exciting hike was to hike down Tallulah Forge Gorge in a storm and lightning. It was a 17 mile hike and it was kind of the – I guess that was the Boy Scouts. It was Athens Y. Whatever it was, it was a wonderful adventure but they kept you busy at Bert Adams and everybody had really a good time, but you were working on your merit badges.

CW: If you had to guess, how many troops were there in Buckhead? You were in 212.

HG: 212 was the newest one. There were some older troops. I would guess 6 or 8. You probably have heard this before but you know there were only three elementary schools; there was R.L. Hope, E. Rivers and Garden Hills and they all fed into North Fulton High School. So North Fulton was it. And people came as far as Sandy Springs to North Fulton.

CW: How about that.

HG: So it was a wonderful community then. You really knew people growing up.

CW: Any last parting nostalgia or stories or anything that we may not have asked that you kind of have in your head?

HG: Well, I am very blessed to be a very healthy, very active 80 year old.

CW: That's remarkable.

HG: And the last statement I would make is I hope my friends and former customers will read my memoir and I have a path to retirement, how to achieve a happy transition into retirement. I have other thoughts but mainly it's about the ups and downs of a business.

CW: Okay. Well if interested we do have two or three; three or four events and lectures every year and perhaps when your book is ready to come out if you would be willing, we would be happy to sponsor a lecture and send out our membership and if you want to. . .

HG: Well only if you will be the what do you call it, the host.

CW: Oh certainly we would be the host. Exactly. Yeah exactly. We would host you to come espouse your book and pass on your. . .

Harry Gilham  
March 13, 2010

HG: Well I've enjoyed growing up in Buckhead and I think I have enjoyed most of my experiences in Atlanta. I think Atlanta is an open city; friendships are easy to make here; I think newcomers are welcome.

MC: I did want to ask because you touched on some of your, you have worked a lot in preservation in Atlanta, what types of projects have you worked on?

HG: Well we worked on raising enough money so we could do our walking trips; walking tours. We actually – The Atlanta Preservation Center was the leader in writing the new ordinance that would allow neighborhoods to become historic and Brookwood Hills oh back about twenty years ago came very close to becoming an historic neighborhood and we had a handful of homeowners who felt like that would restrict what they could do to their homes, although they were not, strangely enough, they were not in the historic district. So we aid people. I think one of the first neighborhoods was – well Inman Park became a historic neighborhood and let me see, I'm trying to think of the name of it; the Edgewood Avenue area became historic. Druid Hills became a historic neighborhood.

MC: So how – when were you with the APC?

HG: It was gosh, I've got that in the book too, I'm still an honorary board member and the exciting thing right now about the APC is we have saved the old Grant mansion in Inman Park.

CW: That's great.

HG: And the nice thing about the APC is to meet different people from different parts of the city.

CW: Well thank you for doing that and being a part of that for all of us to benefit from, so thank you.

HG: Well it has been a struggle.

CW: Well thank you so much for your time this afternoon and your reflections and memories.

HG: Well I hope I've answered some of the questions.

CW: Oh it has been great.

MC: Oh no you provided us with a lot of great information.