

Interview with
RALSTON VIRDEN REBER

March 29, 1969

**VOICES OF REMEMBRANCE FOUNDATION
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RALSTON VIRDEN REBER

Ralston Virden Reber was interviewed on March 29, 1969 in Mesquite, Nevada by Fielding H. Harris, a representative of the Voices of Remembrance Foundation. He related his personal history of living in various parts of Utah. His wife, [Myrtle (Jensen) Reber] also participated.

FH: Would you [please] give your full name?

RR: Ralston Virden Reber.

FH: Would you spell your [middle] name?

RR: V-I-R-D-E-N.

FH: What is your birth date?

RR: [I was born] April 22, 1903.

FH: Where were you born?

RR: [I was born] in Bunkerville, Nevada.

FH: What was your father's name?

RR: [His name was] Samuel Reber, Jr.

FH: What was your mother's [full] name?

RR: [Her name was] Mary Jane Johanna (Ence) [Reber].

FH: What can you remember about your early life when you were a little boy?

RR: I can remember leaving Bunkerville when I was [between] three and five years old when [we] moved to Beaver Dam [Arizona]. My father drove four horses [and] two wagons, and my uncle drove one wagon and two horses. It had a bosun cover over it for shade. My oldest brother drove the cows on a saddle pony.

FH: Were they moving up there to live?

RR: Yes. He sold out in Bunkerville and bought [land] in Beaver Dam. I started school when I was seven years old. My first teacher was Fred Reber from Santa Clara [Washington County, Utah], a relative. My material was a ring on the blackboard

with marks out from it. It had words like tree, stove, horse, and those kinds of words. When I saw the word, I had to learn to spell it and pronounce it. When I got [so that] I could spell and pronounce those words as he gave them out, he would write one-line sentences and I had to learn to read those sentences. I spent the winter [learning] that way. The second winter [we had] the *Blue Back Speller*. On each page about a third of the space would be words to spell and [then] sentences to read. [This book] acted as a speller and a reader.

I can't remember too much about arithmetic but I had some and learned to count and divide. I spent about three winters [learning]. Then [we] moved to Mesquite [Nevada]. The home and farm washed away [in Beaver Dam].

FH: Did you have a flood come down?

RR: Yes. I went into the fourth grade in Mesquite.

FH: Were there several grades in the same room together?

RR: All the grades they had [were together]. I sat beside a seventh grader. There were two seats for two persons—a bench for two to sit side by side. The reason I had to sit by one of the older ones was [that] I was the only first grader. [Laughter] There were more students in other grades but one teacher took care of all of us.

FH: Did you get special attention when they were teaching first grade work? [Laughter]

RR: [Laughter] I guess. I [spent] two winters [with] the *Blue Back Speller*. Then I went into fourth grade when we [moved] to Mesquite. That was actually the first time I realized what grades were. [Laughter]

FH: Before that, was it different readers?

RR: Yes. I had Mrs. Emma Abbott [for my] fourth-grade teacher. Then I think they had two grades to a teacher. Leon Bowman was my next teacher. He was a young fellow from Bunkerville [who became] a schoolteacher. He taught me a year. The third teacher [in Mesquite] was George Bowler. I went [through the] sixth and seventh grades under him. I went into [the] eighth grade [in] Bunkerville. The eighth grade and the high school students were together to make enough students to have a high school.

FH: Did you [have] one year of high school?

RR: I [had] one year of high school. I completed eighth grade and went through one year of high school. Then one of my brothers, Clarence, went on a [LDS] mission.

Wages were small in those days and my brother and me, we went off to work as teenagers. [We sent] our money home to the family.

FH: Were you about sixteen [years of age]?

RR: Somewhere in there. We spent four or five years like that, sending money home to the family and kept [our] brother on his mission. Then I came home and started working with my father on the farm. They all worked on the farm until they [were] older and married. They all went on to farm [for themselves].

FH: Did you like farming?

RR: Yes. I always liked farming. I had to learn to work hard as a little fellow and I didn't know anything else to do but common labor. [Laughter] As far as I went in school, I was a good student and I got good grades.

FH: Did you get along well with it? Did you like it?

RR: Yes, I liked it. I kept on working for wages up to age eighteen or nineteen. Our money [was sent] home to the family. We helped one another.

FH: Do you think that is a little different attitude than there is now-a-days among the young fellows?

RR: Yes.

FH: When they go away to work now, they figure that is their [money] to make. They don't think about helping at home.

RR: No. I was thinking a while ago [about when] one of my brothers, [Ira], was hurt. He was crippled [from what] they called infantile paralysis. I had been working for wages and had [about] \$500.00 on hand. My mother and I took [my brother] to St. George [Washington County, Utah] and stayed there a couple of months. The money that I had [saved] took care of the expenses. Dr. Harris, a chiropractor, gave him two treatments a day. That is to show you how [far] my money went. The two or two and a half years that my brother was on a mission, a lot of my money went [to him], as well [to] the home.

FH: Did you ever regret that?

RR: No.

FH: Did you feel that was the way life should be?

RR: Yes. We were always taught to love thy neighbor as thyself and do unto others as you would like to be done by. That was one way to help each other. [We had] a big family and we never had much of a farm. In those days, there wasn't much [profit] in farming. It took everything we could make as a group to live.

FH: Did you take any trips in those early years?

RR: Not too [many] other than occasional peddling trips. We would go to Cedar City [Iron County, Utah] in the fall with dried raisins. My father would take a load or two of them there. [He would take] chickens to Las Vegas [Nevada].

FH: Were these raisins that you [grew] and dried?

RR: Yes, [raisins] that were raised right here. That was how we made our money until we went [away] to work for wages.

MR: You took grain to the gristmill.

RR: We raised wheat and [there was] a gristmill in Washington [City, Washington County, Utah]. Several times when I was a boy, I would go with my father to the mill to get our flour.

FH: Would you take the grain over and have it ground and bring the flour —

RR: Yes. [We would bring] the flour, the bran, and the shorts back for feed. That was the way they did [it] in those days. We never did have too much.

We would have parties. The Boy Scouts [of America] would occasionally [cook] up a chicken supper, [have] some kind of an entertainment and invite the girls. We would have to make our own entertainment while we were young and going to school.

FH: How did you learn to play the violin?

RR: I always liked music. One day when I was in eighth grade at Bunkerville, the music teacher, Carl Porter, [and] his wife from Santa Clara, loaded a bunch of us on the school bus and we went from Bunkerville to Snowflake [Arizona]. [We] were a bunch of bashful boys. The girls weren't so bashful. They were [a] little better singers! [Laughter]

We each had to take a turn and sing with [the] music teacher. That was the beginning. He did this to see who could learn to sing and what [part] they could sing. We all took turns. I always liked music. I could see I couldn't sing and he could see that I couldn't carry a tune very [well]. He said, "I would like to have you join something." I said, "I would like to learn to play a violin." There were

about twelve or fifteen boys all in the same shape that I was; they had never played [an] instrument but they were willing to try. The music teacher, through the school, got a bunch of cheap instruments [for us] to start on. That is how I started playing a violin. When I got to where I could play notes a little, one of the girls taking piano lessons was my piano player. We would practice playing the same pieces [on the] violin and piano.

After I quit going to school, I [started] taking violin lessons from him. I would play hymns in our church. I was always practicing whenever I [had] a chance. I had one sister [who] was a good singer.

MR: She played the piano.

RR: She played the piano a little. Our music teacher said to me one day, "I would like to bring you back a piano from Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah]. I talked to your father and he thought between the two of you, you could pay for a cheap piano, not [a very] expensive one. What do you think about [that]?" I said, "Okay, we will try it." There stands the piano right there.

FH: You still have it.

RR: It cost \$425.00 delivered here. I helped pay for that.

FH: Was \$425.00 a lot of money in those days?

RR: Yes. In those days, wages for boys were \$.75 to \$1.00 a day. It wasn't [very] much money but we were always glad to work for what we could get. That is the way we went along. I have always been anxious to give my children all the opportunities and chances we could under our circumstances. That was the way [my] father was. He had a big family and still he wanted to help [each one] and that is what my wife and I have been doing.

We got along fairly [well with our music] and [the music teacher] decided he wanted to show off his orchestra and chorus. It took a good half a day to drive from Bunkerville to Santa Clara. He had quite a number of [students in] the orchestra and the chorus. It brought memories back when this [group] from Provo played here the other day, but [we] weren't as good as [they were]. Thinking back, [we] sounded good to me! Then, it really sounded good to me! After the program was over, four men stood up — our music teacher and Aaron Reber, the choir leader for years in Santa Clara, and two Tobler brothers. They were all good singers and sang two numbers. The four men sang four parts. They did that to make our program longer and strengthen our program. [It] made a real evening out of it. We stayed in town overnight. The people took us in [their homes] and we spent about —

FH: Was that a real excursion for music?

RR: That was our first trip. I remember [when we] left Bunkerville. Now-a-days the [students] do a lot of [traveling], which I am glad they do.

FH: It gives the [students] a chance to learn and advance. Did you have [any] accidents when you were a young fellow?

RR: I was unloading a load of hay with an old-time derrick. I pulled it off the horse and the fork tripped with the rope. The rope broke loose and I was standing on one of the front corners, went over backwards and lit on the ground on one hand and on my head. It knocked some of the vertebra out in my neck. I was pretty knocked out for a year over that. I made a number of trips to the chiropractor in St. George. I think I was really blessed then [because] I could have been killed.

FH: You were blessed not to [have] a worse injury and you were blessed to have a chiropractor that you could go to.

RR: Yes, that's right. He was a wonderful chiropractor.

FH: Did your training for [your] life's occupation come largely from working with your father?

RR: Yes, on the farm here.

FH: [Has] farming [been] mostly your life?

RR: Yes. I used to work on a binder. We used to cut grain and bind it with the horses and [I would] work on the thrasher when they would thrash [the grain]. I [have] worked on everything that pertains to farming.

FH: During the years you were growing-up, were you active in The Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints]?

RR: Yes, I was in the Deacon's Quorum gathering fast offerings. In those days, we chopped a lot of wood. We don't do that much anymore.

MR: Tell about when you would chop [wood] for the widows.

RR: [We would chop] for the widows and older people. There would be a day or a half a day set aside for the deacons to do that. That way we were active.

FH: Did the people have to have wood to keep warm?

RR: Yes. There wasn't [any] other kind of heat other than wood stoves.

FH: Did you come right up through the ranks of the priesthood?

RR: Yes. I moved right along as a deacon, a teacher and then a priest. I was ordained at the time that seemed [best] for the bishopric to do it.

FH: Did you attend the different organizations —the Primary and the M[utual] I[mprovement] A[ssociation] and Sunday school?

RR: Yes.

FH: Did you have a job in one of the organizations as a counselor before you were married?

RR: That was in Sunday school in the Littlefield [Arizona] Ward. I lived in Beaver Dam for four or five years and during this time [while] I was growing up. After I [was] out of school, I was a counselor to two superintendents of the Sunday school there.

FH: What can you remember about your father?

RR: He was always a good provider and a good father. He tried to teach us like we should be taught; encouraging us to go to everything we could like school and church. He was always interested in us. He went a lot, too. He took us along by example. The way he taught us was more by example. When our [children] were small, we would take them to get them started and go with them.

FH: Isn't this much more effective than to stay home and tell them to go?

RR: Yes.

FH: Was your father's personality kind, gruff or strict?

RR: He was quite strict. We knew when he meant [some]thing we had to mind, but he wasn't mean with us. He never whipped us much. We did know that when he spoke to us, he meant it. We would have to do [whatever he said]. We could just tell from the way he talked to us. He wasn't a man that would swear either, [or be] rough like that. You could tell he meant [for us] to go do it. If we didn't get it done he would say, "What did I tell you to do," or something like that. He would remind us and then we knew we [had] better be getting it done.

MR: He was a jolly, good-natured man.

RR: He was a good-natured fellow and lots of fun. He was [the head of] the old folks' committee for years. He did a lot of work one way or another in the ward.

FH: Was he interested in the community and people?

RR: Yes, he was interested in the people and was a good neighbor. He was sociable and he [would] loan. If you needed anything and he had it, you were welcome to it. In those days, people would donate food. They would give bottled [canned] fruit, chickens, beans and rice or anything they had.

MR: Tell about the time the mules and chickens [inaudible].

RR: My father had a young team of mules and had them on a two-wheeled rig. He had two or three chickens and tied the legs to a button on the outside that held the top to the seat. They had catsup bottles and different kinds of fruit bottles [and] tomatoes. They drove the mules up to the fence. There were two of them in the buggy. They [were] going in to ask for stuff or tell them what they were there for. The mules got scared and the chickens started flopping around and [the mules] got scared and they ran! They [almost] skinned the chickens. When they caught the team, everything was jammed up together in the [wagon] box.

They [started] kidding them about drinking. They called it partying. They didn't have that kind of [liquor] in those days; like they have it now. What I mean is, now you can go buy beer [and] liquor. My father was not like that because he didn't drink. They would joke and he was a good joker. He would joke back with them. He wouldn't get mad. He would take it. He was on that committee for a number of years.

FH: Do you remember anything about his parents?

RR: I remember his father. His mother died when my father was seven years old and his [father] remarried.

FH: [What can you] tell about your mother?

RR: My mother was a hard worker. She was a good house woman and good cook. She kept us all in good, clean clothes. She was good to the neighbors and to the sick. She was a good attendee to [the] Relief Society.

FH: Was she active in her church work?

RR: Yes. My grandfathers on both sides emigrated from Switzerland. They were asked to go back [east] from Dixie to bring other groups out [when] they landed in New York [City, New York]. I don't have that history.

Both my Grandfather Ence and my Grandfather Reber took about six months, each way, to make the trip. My grandfather's first wife was a [young] girl. They had [a team of] oxen. Wherever these people could ride they would let them ride,

and where they couldn't ride they would have to walk. I imagine many times [they would have to] carry [items] up hills. There were no roads. When they began to get near Salt Lake [City], he started courting this girl. Whenever they could ask the children to ride, he would ask her to ride. Like a young couple would, they would get together alone visiting. When they got to Salt Lake [City], some of [the group] was going to go to California.

I heard him tell this story when I was a small boy. One evening he said to the girl, "This is as far as part of them is going. Part of them [will be] coming down to Southern Utah, Dixie, and part of them are going to go to California." He told her she could decide what she wanted to do. In the night, she decided that she would come to Dixie. They immigrated on and [arrived in] Cedar [City]. It [became] night and they [had] the bishop marry them in Cedar [City].

FH: By the time they [were that far], had they made up their minds what they wanted to do?

RR: Yes, they made up their minds to get married. I heard my father say how they would run to this next little town this side of Cedar [City], Kanarraville [Iron County, Utah] because they were [afraid] of the Indians. This was at night and they would run to catch up. They would run a-ways and then walk a-ways to catch up with the crowd. They brought [the group] right to St. George and Santa Clara. That is [why] so many of them, the Ences and Rebers, are related in Santa Clara and St. George. They are his relatives.

FH: Does Santa Clara have a lot of people that belong to your family?

RR: Yes. That is the story. I never saw her because she died when my father was seven years old. They had seven children, five girls and two boys.

FH: How many children were there in your parents' family?

RR: [They had] thirteen [children].

FH: Could you name those children?

RR: Arthur was the oldest and Julia was the second child. Clarence was the third child. Clyde was a fourth child. Then I had a sister named Lottie and she died at two years of age. They were on their way then to Santa Clara from Bunkerville and camped at Beaver Dam. The baby, Lottie, died lying on her mother's arm during the night. When my mother woke up, she was dead but they don't know what happened. The next two were Ralston and Ralph. [We] were twins, [my] brother and me. Our names were Ralph Virl and Ralston Virden.

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

The next child was Lyda. The next two [twins] were Leonard and Leah. The third pair of twins was Ira and Iva. He was the one I was telling you about who was sick with infantile paralysis and [we] had him in St. George. The last one was Caroline. That is thirteen.

FH: What can you tell about your family? Are they scattered all over?

RR: They aren't scattered too much. My oldest brother [Arthur and] my two older brothers [Clarence and Clyde] lived here. One of them died but the other ones live here. I have a sister in Idaho. [She] married a man from there named [inaudible] and moved there. Then my oldest sister [Julia] had mental troubles that [started] in her [later years]. She is in Reno [Nevada]. She had a nice family. She is in her seventies.

MR: One of them lives up in Pioche [Nevada].

RR: One of the girls and her husband live in Pioche.

FH: They really haven't spread out too far.

RR: No. Then I have a sister in Las Vegas [Nevada]. I have three brothers here besides myself. We have kept close together all through the years.

FH: That is good for a large family like that. Do you believe in prayer?

RR: Yes.

FH: Have you had any faith-promoting experiences in life that you would like to mention?

RR: There have been two or three that I have felt through prayer [that] their life was spared. If it hadn't been for that, I have my doubts that they would live as long.

FH: Can you tell about any one of those three experiences?

MR: [Inaudible]

RR: One of them was a child that we thought was drowned in the ditch. After he was administered to, they drove him about forty miles before they could tell he had any spark of life in him. I am sure it was through prayer that [the] boy was spared. [It was] the same way with my brother [who] had infantile paralysis. I don't believe he would have made it if it hadn't been for prayers.

FH: Was this something that was as common as breathing in your life?

RR: Yes.

FH: This is something that a lot of people wouldn't understand because they don't realize how strong this is in the life of some of these Latter-day Saint people.

MR: They lived by faith. They depended almost entirely on faith, on the Lord.

RR: This one boy I was telling [you about] had infantile paralysis. To start with, I think he was hurt. It could have turned into something like that. He was having a devil of a time trying to pull out of it. The bishop said to me, "President Heber J. Grant is going to be at Boulder City [Nevada] to dedicate that chapel. Let's take that boy down and see if we can't have President Grant give him a blessing." So we did that. When we came back, he started to look to me like [he was] mending [and] feeling different. I could see a little difference.

Somebody said to us, "There is a chiropractor in St. George that can help that boy." My mother and I took him there. We stayed there about eight weeks. Dr. Harris was the chiropractor. The first few days we couldn't see too much difference. Sometimes I would turn that boy from one side to the other, two or three times, within fifteen minutes. He lay so long he got bedsores. I felt it so strong that through the prayer he was going to come out of it. He is here today. I don't see how people can go along without faith and prayer.

FH: This is such a wonderful thing in life. Let's reminisce for a few minutes about your early life. What did you do to have fun?

RR: We would get out, ride horses, and play marbles when we were [youngsters]. [We] would get together and have parties for fun and recreation. [We] would go to dances. When the older people had dances, they danced these old-time dances. The children had to go and had the music on. That was the kind of recreation we had.

I can remember seeing boys go to those dances that didn't have shoes at that time so they went barefooted. I never happened to be one of them. Those were the conditions of the time. That man that played one of those accordions would sit there all evening and play for \$1.00. That was about the wage.

MR: It was good music, too.

RR: I didn't learn to dance until I was past twenty [years of age]. My father used to go to these dances and he would call [the dances], that is what they did for those kinds of dances. He would do a lot of that. The older children learned to dance. I would go there and sit on the seat. I would leave that dance thinking next time I am going to learn those dances. The longer I [waited], the worse it was for me to

get started. One evening her grandmother pulled me up off the seat and I was dancing a quadrille with her.

FH: This was your wife's grandmother?

RR: Yes. I can see her laughing. I was always in the wrong place! [Laughter] But you have to have a beginning!

FH: That broke the ice.

RR: From then on they started dancing more waltzes, two-steps and fox trots. I started learning and my wife did too. She is younger [than me] and that is when I started dancing.

FH: That got you going?

RR: Yes. But I was going to tell you one little instance. They called it the one-step. I remember one Sunday morning all the fellows in priesthood hadn't separated into classes. They [were] talking about the way the young folks were dancing. This old man said, "Wasn't that a fright the way they [inaudible] on the corner?" They whirled around several times. He didn't like that. [Laughter] I don't know whether it made him too dizzy or what. I don't think he danced. He was an older man. He said, "I don't know what is going to become of things." Well, if he could see what happens today!

MR: He would turn over in his grave. [Laughter]

FH: How long [has it been] since you went to a dance?

RR: Not too long.

MR: Not very long, [it would have been] before he broke his leg.

RR: We have been dancing those older dances with the young folks. That was how I got my children started. We would take them [to] dances. We would go to dances [and] entertainments.

FH: I am glad you said that.

RR: That was the way we brought them up.

FH: What can you tell me about your courtship and your marriage? How did you happen to start [dating]?

RR: As I can remember, I was coming from church and had gone a block or two. I happened to look back and saw her kind of hurrying. [Laughter]

FH: I see there is a difference in the way this is told!

RR: I turned around and I said, "If you want to walk with good company, hurry up." I slowed up for her. As she said, we walked down about a mile to my mother's place. I wanted to be polite to her, so I said, "Let's go in and see if we can't find something to eat." We went in and had a piece of pie. After we sat there and talked a while, I thought we had better walk on down to [her] place to get better acquainted. I knew their family well. We went down there and visited. I don't know how soon it was but it went [on] a little while. Finally, I said something to her about going to the dance. They had those old-time shows and occasionally we would [go to] one of them. We would go to the dances. [Because she] was going to school, she kept up on the entertainments and socials. She would let me know about them and we would go. It went along like that for about a year.

FH: Was she still in school when you first met?

RR: Yes, she was still going to school. [It] was her last year of high school. I was [at] her mother's place one day and she said to me, "I have always felt like you were going to be my son-in-law." I knew the family well and I thought the world of her parents. I thought I had better pay a little more attention. [Laughter] Money was scarce but we decided to get married. We put it off and I kept saying, "As soon as I can get a hold of a few dollars we will get married."

The pile bridge across the river went out below Bunkerville and I got a job with my father's team towing cars there. I was doing well, [making] \$8.00 a day, for man and team. Half of that went to my father because he was taking care of feeding the horses and my grub. [That] was an expense, so we split. A fellow from St. George, McMullen was his name, came down here with a one-seated car, a Chevrolet, I guess it was. My father and I had an old four-shift truck which was small. They came down to see me. My father said, "We ought to get this car. It would do the family good. It is a better car." There was \$190.00 difference in the price of the two cars. [I] had enough to get this car so I took the money that I [had] made [and] that left me broke again. I had to come back with another story! [Laughter]

We went together a while longer. Finally, we [started] talking about it strongly. One night she said, "It doesn't look like we ever will get married." [Laughter] She was getting discouraged with me. I thought there is something else. So I borrowed \$20.00 [in] greenbacks. In those days, \$20.00 would be worth \$50.00 now.

FH: A lot more than that, I bet.

RR: She told you what we did with that \$20.00.

FH: Did you have a real excursion for your wedding?

RR: We did everything up that day. She got a dress. It was a nice dress but it wasn't an expensive one. [Myrtle (Jensen) Reber]

MR: It cost \$5.00 for my dress.

RR: [It] cost \$2.50 or \$2.00 for our license. My father said, "You better donate a little here," which I did. When we got through, there was her mother and father and my father, and we decided we had better get something to eat. We went to get something to eat, sat on somebody's lawn and ate lunch.

This car only had one seat in the back. We raised the [back up. It was like] the hood up front. [There was] a hook there. Her parents [and] my father had to sit back there to come home that afternoon. We came home about the middle of the afternoon, sat around and visited with her folks. Finally, we picked up what she had in her trunk. My brother was building a home near my father's place. We got a room from him and lived there a year or maybe a couple of years.

MR: [Inaudible]

RR: I worked with my father on the farm wherever I could and partnered with him. We got along. Then we got a hold of this piece of ground. I drove a school bus [for] four winters. The wage was \$47.00 a month. [In] the summer months I farmed. We put the money into the home here. That was the way we went along. We raised seven children and tried, as much as we could, to give them an education. I am proud of my family. Five of [our children] are married and [they were] married in the temple, the same as we were. [There are] two more to go and I hope we will be lucky. The girl is writing to a boy that is going on a [LDS] mission. Neither one of them have bad habits of any kind.

FH: Are you proud of your family?

RR: We are rich. I feel we are rich with that kind of a family.

FH: You wouldn't sell any one of them for a couple of million [dollars]?

RR: No, that is right. You said to say something about each one of them. That is why I said that I am proud of the way they have come up, are as well thought of as they are and the habits they have.

FH: You have had a wonderful lifetime of experience. Have you been a pioneer in this area?

RR: Yes, you might say.

FH: With that background, what counsel would you like to give your descendants?

RR: I would like to have them go on and live the gospel as we [have been] taught. That is the main thing.

FH: Do you have a testimony of the gospel yourself?

RR: Yes. I have always believed in whatever the authorities have told us and [in] what I have read. All those things in the scriptures are true. I don't know what more I could give them than something like that.

[END OF RECORDING TWO. END OF INTERVIEW.]