

Interview with
SID MERCHANT
Texas Ranger, Retired

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Project: Texas Rangers

Interview Conducted at Sid Merchant's Home
Guthrie, Oklahoma
Friday—October 24, 2008

Interviewed By: Nancy Ray and Eddie Ray
Longview, Texas

Present at Interview: Sid Merchant, Nancy Ray and Eddie Ray



Introduction

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SID MERCHANT

TEXAS RANGER, RETIRED

NANCY RAY: My name is Nancy Ray and I am visiting with Sid Merchant of Guthrie, Oklahoma. The purpose of this interview is to discuss Ranger Merchant's career as a Texas Ranger. Ranger Merchant, do I have your permission to record this interview?

SID MERCHANT: Yes ma'am.

NANCY RAY: Ranger Merchant, do you understand that this video will belong to the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco, Texas?

SID MERCHANT: Yes.

NANCY RAY: Ranger Merchant, do I have your permission to present copies of this video to various historical organizations such as museums, libraries, schools, and once transcribed, to place on the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum's website?

SID MERCHANT: Yes.

NANCY RAY: OK, today is Friday, October 24th. And we are at your home here at Halvorson Ranch in Guthrie, Oklahoma. And Eddie Ray is also present. Let's start talking about... what is your full name?

SID MERCHANT: Do I have to tell you? Sidney Clement Merchant.

NANCY RAY: Say that again.

SID MERCHANT: Sidney Clement Merchant.

NANCY RAY: How do you spell your middle name?

SID MERCHANT: CLEMENT.

NANCY RAY: OK. And where were you born?

SID MERCHANT: Haskell County, Texas.

NANCY RAY: OK, not in a city.

SID MERCHANT: Haskell, seven miles southeast of Weinert.

NANCY RAY: I don't know where that is either.

SID MERCHANT: (laughter) Ain't nothing there no more.

NANCY RAY: How do you spell that?

SID MERCHANT: WEINERT.

NANCY RAY: OK. And what, when were you born?

SID MERCHANT: August 13th, 1933.

NANCY RAY: And what about your parents, what were their names?

SID MERCHANT: Uh, Mary Merchant and Max Merchant.

NANCY RAY: And what about brothers and sisters?

SID MERCHANT: One sister, June.

NANCY RAY: June. And is she still living today?

SID MERCHANT: No.

NANCY RAY: OK. And you married at some point. What was your wife's name?

SID MERCHANT: Sandra.

NANCY RAY: And you married when?

SID MERCHANT: Oh Lord. August (*chuckle*)... I'll get in trouble now. August 8th, 1963.

NANCY RAY: And I know you have at least one daughter.

SID MERCHANT: Two daughters.

NANCY RAY: Two daughters, and their names?

SID MERCHANT: Rebecca. Do you want the last names?

NANCY RAY: Sure.

SID MERCHANT: Rebecca Halvorson and my youngest daughter went back to her maiden name, Renee Merchant.

NANCY RAY: Renee Merchant. OK. Any grandchildren?

SID MERCHANT: *Oh Lord.* Yeah I'm blessed with three of them. A seventeen year old that I just told you about that won the world show up here. Her name is Lauren. And then Austin is twelve and then the tiger, Calyn.

NANCY RAY: How do you spell that name?

SID MERCHANT: CALYN. He just turned eight in August. Matter of fact, he was born on our anniversary.

NANCY RAY: Well how nice.

SID MERCHANT: He is a pistol!

NANCY RAY: Does he get any traits from you?

SID MERCHANT: Lord I hope not. (*laughter*)

NANCY RAY: So you have two grandsons and one granddaughter.

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: All right, that's good. Where did you go to school?

SID MERCHANT: I started school in Mattson, Texas.

NANCY RAY: Mathison?

SID MERCHANT: Mattson.

NANCY RAY: MATTSON?

SID MERCHANT: Yes. In Haskell County. Then we moved to... it was a little old bitty school so I moved to Weinert because it had 11-man football. And then we moved to Haskell, no, yeah we lived in Haskell for a month or two, a few months, and then we moved to Canyon... up south

of Amarillo. Then my mother got a job teaching down at Happy and we... that's where I graduated high school.

NANCY RAY: OK. I've heard you say you played, that you liked football. Is that right?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: So you played?

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah.

NANCY RAY: Were you good?

SID MERCHANT: No. *(laughter)*

NANCY RAY: Did you have a good time?

SID MERCHANT: Yes, I enjoyed it, yeah, sure did.

NANCY RAY: And it was 11-man, not twelve?

SID MERCHANT: ... *he gave me a look...*

NANCY RAY: Is that what you said, 11-man football?

SID MERCHANT: Yep.

NANCY RAY: OK.

SID MERCHANT: Where did you see 12-man?

NANCY RAY: I was checking you. *(laughter)* OK. What about any favorite subjects?

SID MERCHANT: I don't really know.

NANCY RAY: OK.

SID MERCHANT: Uh I used to love hunting. I've got too beat up, crippled up for that. If I want to go deer hunting, I go right here. But I've been up here several years and haven't even fired, haven't tried to hunt. So I'm sort of wore out from West Texas hunting.

NANCY RAY: I bet so. Well, did you, after you graduated from high school, what did you do?

SID MERCHANT: I went in the Navy.

NANCY RAY: OK, tell us about the Navy.

SID MERCHANT: You really want to know? (*laughter*)

NANCY RAY: I really want to know, I really do.

SID MERCHANT: Oh, uh I was stationed at China Lake, California, for a while. I went through basic at San Diego and we moved to China Lake. We was up at (*unknown word*) California, close to Bakersfield. Then I went on the U.S.S. Stickell, STICKELL, uh a destroyer. I was on there two and a half years or whatever it was. And I uh... anyway, I came out as a gunner's mate and I was in charge of three-inch 50-round, automatic-round guns, anti-aircraft guns. Uh I got in about the end of the Korean War so I didn't see any Korean action. We saw action, what action we saw was in Formosa. So that's but... there was no really... first-line action I'd say. Then we went on an around-the-world cruise which was very educational, very enjoyable. We left out from Japan and uh went around... trying to figure out where we went. Went to South Africa and the first town I remember seeing over there was Durban. Then we went down to Cape Town and back up around the Cape of Good Hope and came back up to Rio de Janerio and ended up in Norfolk, Virginia.

NANCY RAY: What year was that?

SID MERCHANT: '51... When we went around the world?

NANCY RAY: Uh huh.

SID MERCHANT: That was '53.

NANCY RAY: And what year did you graduate from high school?

SID MERCHANT: Ooh, I don't know. (*laughter*) Uh, '50... 1950 I guess. Don't quote me on that. Don't hold me to that.

NANCY RAY: OK, that's fine. So on this... around... did you get out of the Navy soon after you got back from that trip?

SID MERCHANT: Well, I got out of the Navy in '55. And uh...

NANCY RAY: Are there any other experiences in the Navy you'd like to tell us about?

SID MERCHANT: I can't remember anything exciting and all that. Let me back up. A very interesting thing... people of South Africa, we pulled into Durban and I had a job of going on shore patrol as soon as we hit port. And my partner and I were doing our thing and patrolling the streets of Durban which we normally did. And there was a carload of young children, kids, teenagers, a little younger, about our age. Pulled up and asked us what time we got off duty and we told them. Would you like to come to our house for a party? Which was all white kids. You know, we were 19, 20, 21 years old and we did go. Didn't bother us a bit so yeah. So we go... where you gonna... where and when are you gonna pick us up and they did. Went to their house, their parents were there, a lot of adults there. We danced and talked and partied, no alcohol involved or nothing. Just danced and ate and stuff and we told them we need to get back to ship. So OK, they took us back to the ship. Very, very... I wouldn't know any of their names if you called them. But I thought it unusual of them to pick up two "white hats" on the side of the road and take them to their house for a party, to talk and visit. And very interesting.

NANCY RAY: I'll bet. Probably wouldn't happen today.

SID MERCHANT: Oh I doubt it.

NANCY RAY: Times would be different.

SID MERCHANT: Oh Lord... and everything else to. That's the most outstanding thing that...

NANCY RAY: Probably not many people have that experience either.

SID MERCHANT: I don't think so. We all thought we were crazy but...

NANCY RAY: OK. Well when you got out of the Navy, what did you do?

SID MERCHANT: I went on Midland PD.

NANCY RAY: Were you married at this time?

SID MERCHANT: No. Uh I went on Midland PD because they were hiring and DPS wasn't, Highway Patrol was not hiring. So as soon... I worked actually ten and a half months. They gave the Patrol test and I went to work for the Highway Patrol. 1955, '56.

NANCY RAY: 1956?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: OK. What do you remember about the test for the Highway Patrol?

SID MERCHANT: Nothing.

NANCY RAY: Nothing at all. (*laughter*)

SID MERCHANT: I can't remember yesterday why do you go back to...

NANCY RAY: Well we might jog your memory, who knows.

SID MERCHANT: You're gonna have to... I guarantee you.

NANCY RAY: Well, do you remember anything about the interview board?

SID MERCHANT: We didn't have an interview board.

NANCY RAY: Oh, OK. Well, what now school did you attend? Was it the Academy or Camp Mabry?

SID MERCHANT: No, after Camp Mabry, where DPS headquarters is now. I guess they are, on Lamar? Pretty neat Academy. I think if I remember correctly it was the 26th Patrol School.

NANCY RAY: OK.

SID MERCHANT: Have you interviewed Leo Hickman?

NANCY RAY: No I have not.

SID MERCHANT: Well, I hate to admit it but I was in patrol school with him. (laughter)

NANCY RAY: And where does Leo live?

SID MERCHANT: Childress.

NANCY RAY: He's on my list for this trip. We'll try...

SID MERCHANT: You're a tough gal if... (laughter)

NANCY RAY: So were there any others that became Rangers that were in the Highway Patrol school with you?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah, several. Jim Singleton, he's dead. Howard Alfred... and a thought crossed my mind at the same time. Howard is a sheriff over in East Texas somewhere, Slick Alfred. Who else? Seems like there were a couple more but I can't remember their names right now, which ones there were. There wasn't but 23 of us graduated.

NANCY RAY: How many started in your school?

SID MERCHANT: Fifty odd... two or three.

NANCY RAY: Seems like they cut them about half.

SID MERCHANT: Yes.

NANCY RAY: So how... what makes the people drop out? Tell us about the school itself.

SID MERCHANT: I don't know, ain't got their mind made up to start with. And they don't have the uh... I guess the best way to put it, the intestinal fortitude. And uh they can't stay hitched with that much pressure, that much hard work.

NANCY RAY: And that's probably the intention to find out who can...

SID MERCHANT: Absolutely. I wouldn't want a man sitting beside or behind me that I couldn't trust that wasn't gonna stay hitched.

NANCY RAY: What did you learn the most? What stands out in your mind from that school that helped you with your career?

SID MERCHANT: Again that's a long time ago.

NANCY RAY: I understand that the physical training was pretty tough.

SID MERCHANT: Yes.

NANCY RAY: How?

SID MERCHANT: Well, a lot of grueling training. Uh I was in pretty good shape. I'd just got out of the service so I was still in pretty good shape. And we had quite a bit of it when you went in the military so it wasn't too unusual to be uh... to have physical training. But uh oh there's... we had one old boy, a big old fat boy. I never will forget, Dutch Myers, later on the sheriff of Victoria, Texas. Now that old boy was tough. He'd get in there, we'd be exercising... of course it was in summer time when we was in school. And he, whatever he was doing, physically, he'd get sick and he'd go outside and he'd throw his toenails up and come right back in and fall in and do the same thing we was doing. And this went on quite... for a big part of the academy, he was sick. He lost a lot of weight and he got to be in good shape. *(laughter)*

NANCY RAY: I'll bet he did. Well did you do, did you ride motorcycles?

SID MERCHANT: We had to qualify on motors. Uh... Harley Davidson's, '35 or '37 models. And uh that's one time I did get a break because I'd rode motors and I wasn't... so but... Sergeant asked us if any of us had rode motors and I said yeah, I rode them. I was the only one in class that had. So the day we started out on motors, the sergeant said go find you a motor and get out of here. So I did and... well they had a mound of dirt out behind the shops, auto shops. Before you could qualify, you had to ride over that mound. So I rode around, got bored. I looked back out there and it was the biggest wreck you ever saw in your life... running over each other

and falling over and everything else. So I tried, I got bored enough and I rode up on top of that mound and was just sitting there watching them. Sergeant saw me and had a heart attack. He came riding up there and said get off this mound, you're gonna come up here and kill yourself. How do you think I got up here? *(laughter)* He let me alone.

NANCY RAY: So you qualified?

SID MERCHANT: I qualified, I did.

NANCY RAY: Well I hear that sometimes they would get you up in the middle of the night and you'd have to go for a ride.

SID MERCHANT: Not us. Maybe that was later on. No, I don't remember ever doing that.

NANCY RAY: What about uh shooting, was that another thing you had to do?

SID MERCHANT: Well, I was used to that, I was a gunner's mate so I didn't have a problem with that.

NANCY RAY: So you're already qualified on that too.

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah, a whole lot heavier than what they'd shot at.

NANCY RAY: Yeah, I would think. So what about classwork, do you remember anything about that? What did you learn?

SID MERCHANT: Everything I guess.

NANCY RAY: Laws?

SID MERCHANT: Traffic laws especially.

NANCY RAY: What about approaching a car. I mean if you stopped someone, they didn't teach you how to do that?

SID MERCHANT: No. I want to back up. I got my nose broke... in boxing.

NANCY RAY: In boxing? Tell us about that.

SID MERCHANT: Well, my nose was messed up from when I was a kid riding those crazy horses. But boxing you know... he hit me on the side of the nose and blocked my whole right nostril. So they took me to the hospital, fixed that nose, next day I was back in class on an ambulance cot. That lasted a few days and I got tired of that. I slept on that darn ambulance cot in the infirmary and uh... I guess I've had allergy problems. I don't know if that caused it or not but I had a piece of lead right across my nose. And both nostrils were stopped up with Vaseline gauze. When I sneezed, it sounded like the world came to an end, and felt like it too.

NANCY RAY: Wished it had?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah, sometimes.

NANCY RAY: Well, when you graduated from the DPS School, what was your first duty station?

SID MERCHANT: Pecos, Texas.

NANCY RAY: OK, tell us about Pecos.

(short pause)

NANCY RAY: OK, so you went to Pecos, Texas. And is there anything that stands out... what did you do in Pecos?

SID MERCHANT: Well, the interesting part about it is back when they irrigated cotton so big out there in Pecos. Before fuel went up so high and before automatic combines, I mean cotton pickers. So they had what they call brasero program. I don't know but they said they had 27,000 braseros in the region then.

NANCY RAY: Now what word are you saying?

SID MERCHANT: Braseros.

NANCY RAY: How do you spell that, do you know?

SID MERCHANT: Don't know... I have no idea.

NANCY RAY: OK.

SID MERCHANT: BRA... I don't know, braseros. And they had camps for them and everything else and they were down there pulling cotton, picked it. And there was... they'd all get drunk on Saturday night and Sunday night either in Balmorreak or in Pecos and we'd have lots of fun with them getting back home. And what I really recall about them is uh they'd get right into town and they'd be in an old pickup and pull a cotton trailer behind with, one of those four-bale cotton trailers. And they'd... didn't never put reflectors or tail lights on them. And they'd run down that highway... you'd just nearly get killed running up behind one of them trailers and they're running 10 or 15 miles an hour. And ooh... we had lots of fun with that.

NANCY RAY: Did you have lots of wrecks that you had to work?

SID MERCHANT: Yes. And uh the main problem we had was some of those guys, braseros, would miss their ride back to their farm. So they'd get in the pickup of another guy and they'd start home. Like I said, they wasn't running 5, 10, 15 miles an hour... at most 15, probably about 5 or 10. And directly this guy would see where he was suppose to turn off to his place and instead of waiting for him to stop, he'd jump out. Holler and jump out and heard... *slap*. We had I don't know how many wrecks of that going on. And but uh that was very interesting experience. They moved me and my partner to Monahans, we was both single so they moved us to Monahans.

NANCY RAY: Well, tell me about your partner. Do you remember his name?

SID MERCHANT: R. V. Martin.

NANCY RAY: Harvey Martin. Tell us about... what did you learn from Harvey?

SID MERCHANT: R. V., just... I don't know, not much. He was from East Texas and of course he had a few little deals out there but nothing really sticks out except we worked a lot and had lots of wrecks.

NANCY RAY: Well was he your lead when you first went to Pecos?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: OK and so he was the one in charge? How long until you got to be in lead?

SID MERCHANT: A week. Like I said, I'd just come off Midland PD so I had a lot of experience that I knew about and the other guys just coming out of school didn't have.

NANCY RAY: So you and R. V. went to Midland?

SID MERCHANT: Monahans.

NANCY RAY: Monahans, tell us about Monahans.

SID MERCHANT: It was a little wild. Sheriff's office closed at 5 o'clock and didn't open until 8 o'clock the next morning. And we got all the calls at night. They didn't have anyone on at night. We had one old deputy in the little town of Pyote that did work and he was the only deputy working that county. And he was a good old guy. And uh he was a good peace officer. We had, I think we had four people killed in Ward County the year before we went over there. And the year we moved over there we had ten.

NANCY RAY: How were they killed?

SID MERCHANT: Car wrecks. Six of them in one wreck of course so that really...

NANCY RAY: What happened in that wreck?

SID MERCHANT: There was a bunch of drunks, run off the road and hit a pole, a telephone pole. I don't remember if it was a high line post or what but it killed them all right there. I beg

your pardon, it was a head-on wreck. They crossed the line and hit a pickup head on. Killed all them and then killed the guy in the pickup.

NANCY RAY: Was alcohol mainly the cause of these accidents?

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah. A lot of them was caused by alcohol. A lot of it was out of stupidity, not paying attention to what they were doing.

NANCY RAY: Not much different from what it is today except now you add cell phones.

SID MERCHANT: Yes, and a lot of other things. A lot more traffic too.

NANCY RAY: Well, you're still in Monahans. How long did you stay there?

SID MERCHANT: Two years.

NANCY RAY: OK, anything else stand out in your mind about Monahans? Did you have a good time as a Highway Patrolman?

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah.

NANCY RAY: What made it fun?

SID MERCHANT: You made your own fun. Back to Monahans... the old gal who was dispatcher of PD called me one night. Asked me, said will you go out and see about that buffalo that run into that truck? What? She repeated it and I said who's working this? It was like two miles out of Monahans. She told me what city police was working and I said send him out there to see if there is a buffalo out there. And if there's a buffalo out there, I'll get up and go out there. Five minutes she called me back, there's a buffalo out there. I said I'm gonna tell you something. I'm gonna get up. I'm gonna put my uniform on. I'm gonna go out there. And if there's not a buffalo out there, before I go back to bed somebody's going to jail. I went out there and sure enough, they had about a two-year old buffalo strung up on the cable of a wrecker. All he did was break his durn neck but he charged a Mac truck head on out there. And I never will

forget because an old boy from Alabama, produce hauler from the West Coast was driving that truck. He'd thought he'd lost his ever loving mind (*laughter*) when he saw the buffalo coming down the road to meet him.

NANCY RAY: He had quite a shock!

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah. But uh he wanted a picture of that buffalo so he could show his boss. Didn't hurt the truck bad but it messed up that buffalo. I didn't know you could break a buffalo's neck but apparently you can.

NANCY RAY: Well, did buffalo roam out there?

SID MERCHANT: Well I found out later that some of them old sand hills up there north of Monahans... a few of the wild buffalo up there. And uh we ended up butchering him and eating him so it was pretty good eating.

NANCY RAY: How did he taste?

SID MERCHANT: Good. I like buffalo meat. If you never tried it, you ought to try buffalo though.

NANCY RAY: I've never tried it.

SID MERCHANT: Try it, you'll like it. You got to realize what you're eating, got to realize it's wild game but it's good eating.

NANCY RAY: OK. Did you ever have any wrecks when you were...

SID MERCHANT: Oh Lord yeah.

NANCY RAY: Did you... pick one out and tell us about it.

SID MERCHANT: Which one?

NANCY RAY: I don't know. Which one do you remember the most?

SID MERCHANT: The one I remember the most is Al Mitchell and I coming back from down around Huntsville, out there close to DeLeon which is in Comanche County. A drunk water-well hauler, water-well driller, made a wide... looked like he was gonna turn left. I was ready to go to his right hand side. About that time he turned right and I had to swerve to avoid him, hit a corner post. Of course we had to call my wife in Abilene to come pick us up, take us back to Abilene. Al Mitchell said I was gonna shoot him. I don't think I was but... (laughter)

NANCY RAY: We interviewed Al.

SID MERCHANT: Did you?

NANCY RAY: Yes, we did.

SID MERCHANT: He'll lie to you.

NANCY RAY: He said that about others too. (laughter) Were you speeding?

SID MERCHANT: *(he gave me a look)*

NANCY RAY: OK.

SID MERCHANT: No.

NANCY RAY: No? I guess you wouldn't like to me though, would you?

SID MERCHANT: Not much. *(laughter)* Pocita.

NANCY RAY: Pocita. All right, is there anything else about Monahans that stands out in your mind?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah. Again they called me out, Sunday night. And they used to lease those beer joints out and this was just about 100 yards out of the city limits of Monahans. They'd lease them to these Mexicans to have their dances in. So this Sunday night, I'd already worked my shift and came in. They called me out because they had a pedestrian run over out there. I have to laugh every time I think about it because I went out there and this Greyhound bus... a

Mexican decided to go across the road, across the four-lane highway to use the bathroom I guess.

Smack!

NANCY RAY: Into the bus?

SID MERCHANT: Into... the bus smacked him. The driver had realized that something was going on so he wasn't driving very fast. But... that Mexican was so drunk it didn't kill him or hurt him very bad. (*laughter*) He went to the hospital but I don't think he even had any broken bones if I remember right. Too long ago to remember. But anyway, by the time I got through with that it was after midnight. So I walked in there and set two tear gas grenades there on the bar and told them they had five minutes to clear that thing out or I'd do it for them. And they gave me back about two minutes. (*chuckle*).

NANCY RAY: They believed you!

SID MERCHANT: They dang sure well better because I was the only one out there and had to get called out and work a wreck and all that good stuff. And then put up with that... it was after midnight and them still drinking and having a big party. It was time to do something else.

NANCY RAY: Sounds to me like drinking became a big problem for you out there.

SID MERCHANT: Oh, it was. It always was. No, that wasn't the worse of it.

NANCY RAY: It wasn't?

SID MERCHANT: I went to Odessa and that's a little western over there. I spent seven years in Odessa. All during... I know I went through one oil boom out there and they just like... well up to a short while ago, they had all kinds of good folks come from everywhere to work in the oil patch. And uh they had a bunch out of Alabama and Mississippi up there, out in the hills out there, never had been house broke. So we had to housebreak a few of them.

NANCY RAY: How did you do that?

SID MERCHANT: *(hand in fist)* The hard way.

NANCY RAY: The hard way... *(laughter)*

SID MERCHANT: But they didn't think the laws applied to them. They thought... I finally convinced them they were. But we have, north of Odessa... there's a bunch of beer joints. And I wouldn't even hazard to guess how many, there was eight or ten of them at least, and all them roughnecks and people had more money than they could spend and they spent it all at them beer joints. And they got a little western out there every night. Saturday night was real bad.... good. If you could wear the uniform you had on on Friday night, I mean on Saturday night, you dang sure didn't change uniforms because you was gonna be dirty and bloody by the time come Monday morning, or Sunday morning.

NANCY RAY: So it became physical?

SID MERCHANT: Yes ma'am. Wrecks, wrecks, wrecks.

NANCY RAY: The wrecks, OK.

SID MERCHANT: Some four-lane divided highway and them people couldn't remember which way, which side to drive on. I don't know what year it was, don't remember, but it sticks out in my mind a little bit because it was so bad... had an old boy driving up the road, going north on Andrews highway. He must have been running eighty or ninety miles an hour. He hit a kid, an eighteen year old kid, cut him half in two. Literally, cut him half in two.

NANCY RAY: Was the kid in a car?

SID MERCHANT: No, he was walking in the parking lane there. In that parking lane... of course he shouldn't have been there but that's beside the point you know. It was a parking lane so... and it was so bad, the poor little old kid's entrails were hanging on that old boy's antenna. People told me, said sounded like he had paper on the car as he went by. We caught him...

NANCY RAY: So it was a hit and run?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah, another Highway Patrolman caught him up north of Odessa, turned back towards Midland. The Highway Patrolman figured that would be a good way to ... when we put all the information off the radio, he figured it would be a good way for him to go. So sure enough, he intercepted him up there. Brought him back.

NANCY RAY: What happened to the driver?

SID MERCHANT: He went to the penitentiary.

NANCY RAY: Good.

SID MERCHANT: I don't remember the... I know he went to the penitentiary.

NANCY RAY: OK. So how long were you in Odessa, seven years?

SID MERCHANT: Seven years.

NANCY RAY: Was that your last duty station before you went to Rangers?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: Is there anything else you can tell...

SID MERCHANT: I can tell you another wreck.

NANCY RAY: Tell me.

SID MERCHANT: There was... had an old gal west of Odessa on a Farm-to-Market road. She had two women in the car. Either seven or nine children, I'll stop and think about it. I guess eight children. Ten fatal. She run... no, there were nine children in there because one lived. She run a stop sign in front of a cement truck, oilfield cement truck. There wasn't no way he could stop. He broadsided her...you couldn't hardly of measured it and got it any more square in the middle. And then the truck pushed over ... and turned the car over, turned the truck over. We had to turn the truck over to get the car out. And there was two of those children died in my arms. And later

on the truck driver... had to send him to a psycho ward because he lost his mind over it. But a real tragic deal...

NANCY RAY: Well that makes me wonder, how do you deal with something like that? How do... I mean you had to go home to your... I don't know if you were married then or not.

SID MERCHANT: No, unmarried.

NANCY RAY: But you still had to live... how did you handle things like that?

SID MERCHANT: Well, you reminded me of something I couldn't... A girl I was going with at that time, this was late... this was two or three o'clock in the afternoon when that happened. Uh also that woman already had two more wrecks and she'd been fortunate had not killed any of those kids before. But I think, I don't remember the number, but several of them were her kids and others the other ladies' kids. But anyway, I went home, cleaned up and everything, got... I couldn't go to sleep. I couldn't do anything so I called the girl I was going with and I said come on, we gotta go. Where're we going? I said I don't know, we're going somewhere. So I went out by myself until three o'clock in the morning riding around with her and talking to her. It was pretty tough.

NANCY RAY: It would have to be. It is not something that would be easy to leave at the office you know. You can't walk out and just leave it. Uh, the driver of the truck, he couldn't handle it.

SID MERCHANT: No. Another interesting deal... Of course you know every time you have a wreck, I don't care if it's a fender bender you have fifty people show up and want to talk to you or look at you... or a hundred people so you couldn't stir them with a stick. But couldn't do anything because people were in your way. This one old boy kept sticking his nose in my business and I told him two or three times to get out of there. He said I don't have to. I said you damn sure don't. I went up and I put his arm behind his back, I led him over to my patrol car, I

handcuffed his hand and then I put the other one across the bumper guard of my car. I said now you can leave when I do. When I left, he went to jail.

NANCY RAY: What did you charge him with?

SID MERCHANT: Interfering with an officer, a peace officer... and for failing to obey a direct order.

NANCY RAY: Yeah. Is that one of the hardest parts of being in law enforcement is dealing with people like that?

SID MERCHANT: Dealing with people, period. (*laughter*)

NANCY RAY: People period. All kinds. OK.

SID MERCHANT: On both sides.

NANCY RAY: Right. Well, did you become a Ranger after you were a Highway Patrolman?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: Well, how did you... did you always want to be a Ranger?

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah. I... back then... I don't know what it is now, I have no idea. But then you had to have eight years in the Highway Patrol or in DPS before you could apply for Rangers... which I had nine years when I went Rangers. And uh John Wood was the sergeant out there and he had the job of selecting one and he selected me. Have you interviewed John Wood?

NANCY RAY: I have not.

SID MERCHANT: You want to interview John Wood.

NANCY RAY: OK.

SID MERCHANT: He is one of the best Rangers he ever had in Texas.

NANCY RAY: Is he the one who influenced you into...

SID MERCHANT: Yeah, really.

NANCY RAY: What did he do?

SID MERCHANT: Oh, we visited and stuff. And he had something going on in the oil patch he'd tell us what was going on and want us to help him and stuff. Watching him mainly, just watching him going up and down the roads. So... and we was always having coffee with him and eating lunch with him some. John was about 6'6" and stuff, he was a typical looking Ranger and he was one of the smartest guys in the Rangers I ever was with. Plus he's the best oilfield investigator in the state of Texas. And so he really knows his... anything, especially the oilfield. But he hired me in the Ranger service and sent me to Abilene. So...

NANCY RAY: OK. So would he be what you would call a sponsor? Did you have sponsors?

SID MERCHANT: No. You made it on your merits.

NANCY RAY: OK, all right. Well what year did you apply to become a Ranger, do you remember that?

SID MERCHANT: As soon as I had my time, the eight years in. So...

NANCY RAY: Did you pass the test the first time?

SID MERCHANT: Wasn't no test.

NANCY RAY: No test? OK, did you have an interview board or did they...

SID MERCHANT: I told you, John Wood hired me. (laughter)

NANCY RAY: That's it. Well times...

SID MERCHANT: My understanding is the captain gave him the paperwork on two or three men and he told John to pick one and John picked me.

NANCY RAY: OK, so you had made an impression on him already.

SID MERCHANT: Apparently so.

NANCY RAY: Well, now you're a Ranger and you're in Midland.

SID MERCHANT: No, Abilene.

NANCY RAY: Abilene, that's right.

SID MERCHANT: The company headquarters is in Midland.

NANCY RAY: Tell me about your first case, do you remember that?

SID MERCHANT: No, I went around... because I had eight counties at that time. So I went around and got acquainted with all of them and stuff... all the sheriffs and chiefs of police, and whatever. I know one at Breckenridge. Chase Booth was the sheriff up there, been sheriff up there for a hundred years. So I went and visited with him for a while. He said son, do you like to work? I said yeah, that's the reason I hired out. That's good because I don't like to work, you do all my work. And dang near did. (*laughter*) But uh some good guys, some great sheriffs up there.

NANCY RAY: Well how did you get the sheriffs to work with you? What did you do?

SID MERCHANT: Just went up there and told him I was there to help him, whatever he needed done. And that is pretty well the way it was. Get calls out... called out all hours of day and night, murders and robberies... whatever. Uh I'm trying to think here.

NANCY RAY: Let me ask you this. John Wood was your first captain right?

SID MERCHANT: Sergeant.

NANCY RAY: Who was your captain?

SID MERCHANT: Frank Probst.

NANCY RAY: OK, and who were the other Rangers that worked with you?

SID MERCHANT: Well the best one I had was Gene Graves who was stationed at Sweetwater. He was my mentor and whatever you want to call him. Uh so I got acquainted around there. Every Saturday I used to go over there and aggravate Gene. We'd go around, we'd talk, we'd visit.

NANCY RAY: And his last name was Graves?

SID MERCHANT: Um hmm.

NANCY RAY: How did he mentor you, what did he teach you?

SID MERCHANT: Well, anytime I had a problem I went to Gene. Anytime I just needed to talk, to figure out what was going on, Gene would help me. Also I had an old FBI agent in Abilene who had been one time a Texas peace officer. I didn't know it was possible but during World War II they, he'd been in the (*unknown word*) academy so they drafted him in the FBI from assistant police chief in Lubbock into the FBI and stationed him in Abilene. And Bill helped me a whole lot, Bill Mabry. And Warren Dotson and Gene Graves were real close. Warren Dotson was chief of police in Abilene. And he was very helpful in getting me lined out and straightened out. So I'd call Gene in the wee hours of the night or morning or whatever. And tell him my problem, what was going on. He'd say I don't know but two heads are better than one. I'll be there in 30 minutes. I guarantee you... you could set your clock. Of course we were in Abilene. Forty something miles and in 30 minutes he'd drive up. And how he got his clothes on so dang quick and got out of Sweetwater and over to Abilene is beyond me. But he durn sure did. And we had some crazy cases.

NANCY RAY: Well tell us about some of them.

SID MERCHANT: Well, the weirdest one I ever had was in Breckenridge. The old, they called me over there. I don't remember now who called me. But anyway they had this nurse out of California brought this elderly couple, and elderly couple I think was in their nineties, or he was at least. And uh to Abilene, no to Breckenridge. What it boiled down to she was getting them out of California where they had a bunch of kids... to keep them from trying to steal all their money and everything else. The nurse got them out of there just to get away from them because the old

man wanted her to. And he was pretty well crippled up and if I remember, the woman had Alzheimer or dementia or something. Anyway, she couldn't respond to anything you asked her intelligently. So they called me out on this thing and they had them for kidnapping. They had the nurse arrested for kidnapping. Then she told me about the story on this one and I called Gene. I said Gene, I run it down to him. He said son, I don't know but two heads are better than one. So we spent the rest of the night in Breckenridge and I don't have any idea... seems like it was ten o'clock at night when we got over there, somewhere in that vicinity... spent the rest of the night over there. Of course there was a big rigmarole and had a bunch of lawyers and everybody else fussing and fighting over it. So we went back about nine o'clock in the morning, we went back. Got another guy to go over there and relieve us so we could go home and get a few hours sleep and come back. I don't remember if Gene went back with me or not but I went back over there. I spent several days over the. Ended up in court, had a big civil hearing on it. You know how a bunch of lawyers are... always yow-yowing and they all want money. So they're doing their best to get all the money they could out of these people. Heirs were trying were trying to get the old woman, the nurse arrested and everything else. Said you know it was kidnapping... Well the California authorities wouldn't take the case of kidnapping so we didn't have the right to do it if they would. The judge and I were good friends. And they kept arguing and fussing about it. I said judge, why don't we get the old man up there and ask him what was going on. Let him tell us his side of the story. She said she had his permission to take them out of California. Why don't we ask him? Good idea. Nobody in the court, of course the lawyers didn't want to hear his story. Anyway, the judge made them get him up there. If I remember correctly, well I know the old man was pretty blind. He could make out shadows and stuff but he had his wits about him. They put him on the stand and about fifteen minutes later we was through. He was pretty durn

plain. He had not been kidnapped and his wife hadn't either. They were there and she brought them there because she had some relatives there. And so they... he knew exactly where he was at and what he was doing there. And it was with his permission. So that was the end of the court case.

NANCY RAY: That took up your time for how many days?

SID MERCHANT: Oh Lord I think it would be better part of a week. And all it was, the lawyers trying to get the money out of them, and the heirs. *(laughter)* I don't know whatever happened to that couple and could care less. *(laughter)* They got them out of my jurisdiction, my area.

NANCY RAY: Well you talked about working with... two heads are better than one. How did you... if another Ranger needed help, say from another part of the state... Were you allowed to help them or what did ya'll do?

SID MERCHANT: Oh absolutely. Absolutely. If uh... we would always call a Ranger to help him or do something for you in his jurisdiction. If you needed some people interviewed or whatever it might be, or arrested or whatever... you go down there and get him to go help you arrest them wherever they're at. Something like that.

NANCY RAY: There's pretty much a bond between Rangers.

SID MERCHANT: Yes, absolutely.

NANCY RAY: Does that happen automatically or how does that happen?

SID MERCHANT: I don't really know. It's sort of a brotherhood. You put on that badge you... you just become another one.

NANCY RAY: Well when you put on that badge, can you tell me how you felt?

SID MERCHANT: Oh, wonderful. (*chuckle*) Putting that patrol badge on wasn't nothing when I put that Ranger badge on.

NANCY RAY: There's some pride.

SID MERCHANT: Of course when I went to work there were only 62 Rangers in the state. So it was a pretty close-knit brotherhood. A bunch of the old hands, I'm talking about old Rangers, they were older than me. And they were. They were up in their 60s and 70s when I went to work. And I guarantee you there was a wealth of information in that bunch. You could just sit around and listen to them and you learned a lot.

NANCY RAY: Well, we're learning a lot listening to the current batch or Rangers.

SID MERCHANT: (laughter) I bet you are.

NANCY RAY: We are! Well, did people look at you differently when you put on that Ranger badge?

SID MERCHANT: Yes ma'am.

NANCY RAY: How was that?

SID MERCHANT: I don't know. I can't really describe it but it was different. Of course another thing you know, Rangers as you well know work criminal and stuff so uh... Highway Patrol works traffic. So nobody likes to be caught for speeding or whatever so it's a whole lot different. And I can't really describe it but...

NANCY RAY: Well now somewhere along the way you married.

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: Now where were you when you married?

SID MERCHANT: I was still on patrol in Odessa.

NANCY RAY: OK. Did your wife worry about you?

SID MERCHANT: Yes ma'am. (*laughter*)

NANCY RAY: And how did you handle that?

SID MERCHANT: How did I what?

NANCY RAY: How did you handle that, how did you calm her?

SID MERCHANT: (*laughter*) Didn't bother me.

NANCY RAY: Didn't bother you?

SID MERCHANT: (*laughter*) I was used to it.

NANCY RAY: When you walked the door, to go to work...

SID MERCHANT: Scared her to death. Of course we was in Odessa so it was wild... I told you I it was wild out there. Of course she'd never been away from her mama and daddy. She was 24 when we got married so she... moved out there Odessa by... and I was working nights and everything else. I don't believe she slept many nights for a long time. I know one night I came in. The motors in them old cars, the Plymouths we had, had a sound all their own. I mean you could really hear one for a mile away, you knew it was one of those Plymouth patrol cars. She heard me drive up and heard me leave. She couldn't figure out what it was, what was going on. And she was highly upset because I left but it was two o'clock in the morning. What happened, I came in. Went out to the end of the block where I lived there an old an old boy hanging onto a telephone pole, light post or whatever. Drunk, my God, he was so drunk, he couldn't stand up. So I took him and put him in jail. The girl... he got drunk and the girlfriend kicked him out, or wife or whatever. And he was trying to find his way around and we were sitting there in the sheriff's office and I was booking him in. He said can I have a cigarette? If you got one, you can smoke it. I can't find them. I looked at him and his shirt was on wrong side out. (*laughter*) I got

back to the house and Sandy said what did you do? I heard you come in. I said there was a dang drunk up there at the end of the block. *(laughter)* So I put him in jail.

NANCY RAY: Well you were telling me you had a good time being a patrolman. What else made it fun?

SID MERCHANT: We made our own fun.

NANCY RAY: How?

SID MERCHANT: I don't know just... You had to be there to see it go on. But in Odessa our youngest trooper had only five years on. So we had a bunch of seasoned old troops and so... you just, you made your own fun.

NANCY RAY: Did ya'll play pranks?

SID MERCHANT: *(he gave me a look)* No...

NANCY RAY: You did too, I can tell by looking at you.

SID MERCHANT: Yeah, yeah.

NANCY RAY: So humor. You used humor a lot.

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah. You was always doing something to somebody.

NANCY RAY: Can you think of a prank that stands out in your mind that either you played or someone played on you?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah... wasn't me. We got one old trooper, a patrolman, that came up from uh, came off of a mountain up there at Guadalupe Peak. He was an old hand. He moved in to Abilene and retired up there. It was lonesome station up there. He came to Abilene, I mean Odessa, and he was real goosey. And we had one old boy there, Melton Raspberry. He was always having some kind of nonsense going on. Cutting up and pulling pranks or whatever. He was our clown. And he was always goosing old Bob *unknown name*. And uh they was out there

gassing up one day behind the office and had the back door open. Bob was cleaning his gun, pistol... whatever, he was gassing up. Ras came playing with him and goosing him. Directly, he put that cylinder back in that gun and Ras goosed him again and that gun went off... went through the gas pump.

NANCY RAY: Blew the gas pump?

SID MERCHANT: No, it went through it. It didn't... thank the Lord it didn't hit nothing! It went through that frame on it. The secretary was sitting there and said he finally shot the SOB. *(laughter)* Everybody was... and Bob kept telling him, I'm gonna shoot you if you don't quit messing with me. So then the secretary thought that he'd done it. Didn't goose him no more. *(laughter)*

NANCY RAY: That ended that. Oh goodness.

SID MERCHANT: We had an old boy who came out of the Panhandle in Texas. Reinstated him and sent him to Odessa, Bob Maxwell. Odessa was a different world. I mean you had to live it to appreciate it. Those roughnecks and those oilfield hands out there, they were wild. I mean they were crazy wild. Like I told you, we didn't change uniforms on a Saturday night because you might... I mean between the wrecks and the blood and the fighting and everything else, you nearly had to fight everybody you put in jail out there. And uh so it was little western. They sent Maxwell out there and he could not believe himself. He just, he used to sit on the side of the road and watch them go by as crazy as they were. I never will forget, Johnny *unknown name*... my old partner, we switched different cars. We were out there on the Andrews highway, a four-lane divided highway. We had all three cars out there working. I called him and I said uh I'm bringing one towards you on the wrong side. OK, be careful, I got two coming on the road fighting... side by side. I said what? They were leaning out of the cars fighting. And they, when they got to the

car coming toward on the wrong side, they was flipping around and went back to fighting. Johnny got them and I got the one going on the wrong side. All of them went to jail. *(laughter)*

And that's just a sample. You set your clock, I mean you could set your clock by them, but you'd have to look at your clock... ten, ten thirty or whatever, I don't remember what it was now. Seems like it was 10 o'clock. Them beer joints... you'd have the biggest influx of traffic going into town you ever saw. In about 30 minutes, here'd come another bunch out. The wives and girlfriends of them old boys having a shift change on them towers, oilfield towers or rigs. Guys getting off the tower... and they'd run home before their old man got there and here'd come... a new crew would come out. Every night, seven nights a week... so that's just a sample of Odessa. And Bob said he never had learned to be a Highway Patrolman until he came to Odessa. *(laughter)*

NANCY RAY: Well, did you ever get in a fight with someone yourself?

SID MERCHANT: *(he gave me a look)* Yes! How many do you want me to tell you about?

NANCY RAY: Well, I don't know. Tell me about one that...

SID MERCHANT: Oh Lord, I don't know. It was so dang regular that we didn't even pay attention to it.

NANCY RAY: It was that often? Well, let's go back to your Ranger career. You're in Abilene and you don't remember your first case but...

SID MERCHANT: I remember the first case I made on myself. I mean by myself.

NANCY RAY: OK, let's hear about that one.

SID MERCHANT: I was standing in a boot shop, James Day's Boot Shop. This old boy come in there and you could tell by his, the way he looked, the way he acted, and the BS he was putting down that he was a con man or whatever. And he bought two or three, I don't remember

now but several pair of boots off of James. And that was the time we didn't have checks like we have today called counter checks. There wasn't no numbers on them, just a piece of paper. And he wrote James a check. After he got through I said James, let me see that check. I said that thing is phony as Dallas, Texas. I said that's a hot check. He said you sure? I said no, but I bet money that it is. He said OK. So he took it to the bank right then and sure enough, it was a forgery. And I don't know why but I knew which way the old boy went. He went to Albany and I trailed him down. I got back several pair of boots, five or six pair of boots. I got him in jail for forgery. I think if memory serves me correct, I got them all back except one pair, maybe two. They hadn't even been worn so James was very proud of that of course. Needless to say, he and I were good friends after that. That was the first one I made. I guess the first bad one.

NANCY RAY: *pause to change discs*

NANCY RAY: OK, we're back.

SID MERCHANT: I worked a lot of bad old cases. One that really, was really bad is a Highway Patrolman murdered his wife there in Abilene. Beat her to death with a piece of lead pipe, or piece of pipe. And he tried to blame it on some Blacks. Needless to say that caused a lot of dissention between the Rangers and the Highway Patrol. Nobody wanted to believe it, including us, but it was obvious that something was wrong because it just, things didn't fit. We called Austin and asked them to send a lab crew up there. And they went over the crime scene and they said it didn't fit. And so everybody suspected him from the word go. Turned out that sure enough he admitted to killing his wife. They'd had trouble, he had a girlfriend out there that worked as a waitress and her husband was in Air Force. And the two Blacks that he described that was supposed to have done it were two guys that worked at that motel and bar or café. And when I realized that, the woman said yeah, said didn't you know who they were? Because I

drank coffee there too and so I said no, I didn't realize it. They were awful scarce around there for a few days after that happened. Because the composites came out so they knew who he described and uh took... there was a bit of animosity over that deal for a long time. Most of the Highway Patrolman knew it as much as I did from the onset but again they didn't want to admit it and nobody else did. But it caused a lot of friction.

NANCY RAY: Now you investigated this case as a Ranger, correct?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: And so you arrived at the scene and what did you do?

SID MERCHANT: Well, time I got there the Odessa PD, I mean Abilene PD was already there. They made all the preliminaries and we photographed the scene, the body and stuff.

NANCY RAY: OK, and you asked for help from the lab, right?

SID MERCHANT: Well, I called John Wood in Midland. Of all times, Gene Graves was on vacation and he was out of town. And I couldn't find him. (*chuckle*)

NANCY RAY: You needed two heads, right?

SID MERCHANT: Oh absolutely, or three or four. So I called John and he said call Gene. I said Gene is on vacation, get yourself over here I gotta have you. So him and Bud Newberry, a Ranger from Midland, came over there and then called the captain and everybody else over there. So pretty hectic around there for a few days.

NANCY RAY: Well you didn't have DNA at that time, right?

SID MERCHANT: No.

NANCY RAY: So what were your... what did you use to prove things?

SID MERCHANT: Same thing we use every case, every case. (*points to head*)

NANCY RAY: Your head. You pointed to your head.

SID MERCHANT: Of course Abilene PD had a bunch of good detectives, I mean great detectives. And I worked with them all the time so they... from the word go it was obvious what was going on. A couple of them kept telling me, trying to tell me what was going on and again, I didn't want to believe it either. It didn't take very long to figure out what... matter of fact, when I called John, John Wood, I knew in my own mind what had happened. So we just went from there. But back up on my story, we had an old crazy guy down at Santa Ana which is between Coleman and Brownwood. Crazy and I don't know if he was crazy or what he was but anyway the Railroad Commissioner called me that morning... had to deal with them because he was flaring a well, a gas well down there. Do you know what I'm talking about?

NANCY RAY: Uh huh.

SID MERCHANT: He'd open a valve and they'd flare. So they had to go down there and shut it in and seal it. They wanted me to go with them to protect them so I did. And this old boy acted an idiot out there in town... giving everybody a hard time. He told me said... of course I had my .45 on and he started telling me all about that stuff. He knew everything about everything so you didn't have to worry about him... L. Gene Shields. Good Lord. So anyway he had his house drawn out on the ground. Had a bedroom here, even had a bed there sitting on top of the ground out there. Had him a refrigerator over here of course there wasn't no electricity or nothing to plug it into.

NANCY RAY: This is just wide open?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah!

NANCY RAY: Just drawn out on the ground, no real walls?

SID MERCHANT: No nothing. *(laughter)* Except a bed sitting there. He said this is my house and you can't come in here. I can't? I stepped across it and I said I want to tell you something,

Hoss. You've got to have a roof and walls to have a house and this ain't got none. And he started telling me about shooting somebody. I said you don't ever pull that pistol unless you intend to shoot somebody. I said if I pull it I intend to shoot you. That stopped that nonsense. It took them nigh on forever to get that durn well shut in. I know he was really upset and he broke the seals right after we left but we did what we were supposed to do. But you could hear them old wells hissing for a half mile away. Anyway, finally got through with that and Sweetwater PD, I already said Gene was on vacation. Sweetwater PD had an armed robbery and they wanted me over there to help them with that. I went to Sweetwater and got through, worked that. At 10 o'clock that night I got home. Of course I hadn't ate anything or nothing else. Sandy and the baby were already in bed. And uh I just... she said and I guess it's right. All I pulled off is one boot and my gun belt. And told her something that didn't make sense because I was so durn tired I was left handed. Meantime I had cut my foot from mowing the lawn and couldn't hardly walk so that made it worse. *(laughter)* Then they called me out on that murder. Three days later I got back to bed. It was a little wild. You know back then you didn't worry about it, there wasn't no such things as hours, you worked from can to can't.

NANCY RAY: I was gonna say, really it was 24x7 and you might leave home and when would you come back?

SID MERCHANT: *(chuckle)* When I got there. Well, somebody kept calling the house one time wanting to... Sandy would say he's not here. Well when do you expect him? When he walks in. And he, whoever that was, I don't remember the deal but he called several times. I don't think I ever talked to him. After Sandy got through with him he didn't want to call no more. One of the last calls I guess... when do you expect him? When I see the whites of his eyes. *(laughter)* And so, but I didn't tell you. We got married in '63. And uh in '65, Rebecca was born

and I went into the Rangers in September of '65. So we moved to Abilene and didn't know a soul down there. And then again I was out gone night and day. She raised them two girls by herself really. So I, that was before the days of all these hourly stuff. You just went as long as you could. She raised them girls by herself because I was gone. But she was big pregnant when we moved to Abilene of course. (*chuckle*)

NANCY RAY: Well, you talked about not doing, not keeping track of your hours, just working from can to can't. Can you tell us about some of the differences that you see in the Rangers today versus when you became a Ranger? There must have been some.

SID MERCHANT: I don't even want to talk about them.

NANCY RAY: None of them?

SID MERCHANT: Well, we... a bunch of us old ones got kidding here a while back... they're not even carrying pistols anymore. They're carrying computers on their hip.

NANCY RAY: They really don't carry pistols?

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah. Well, the main thing I see, it's not just the Rangers, it's everybody in law enforcement. Number one the federal government is sticking their nose in state business is the worst thing that ever happened to them. Telling them what they can and can't do because they control the purse strings. So they you know, if they got the money they can control it. But just like everything else the federal government does, they mess it up. But uh that's the main thing. We didn't have to call Midland every time we went to do something. If we'd go out of state or going way out of our district, we'd call Midland and tell them where we were going. Didn't ask for permission, you just went. So you had some reason to go or you wouldn't have called in to start with. And I was blessed with two great captains, that was Frank Probst and then Jim Riddles. Jim Riddles came up there and he said you boys "do the needful." Don't bother me,

you do what you need to do and send me the paper. And that's basically what we did. We didn't call. If I needed to go to Dallas, I didn't call him and tell him why I was going to Dallas or whatever you know. You had enough... they hired you to do your job. You were supposed to have enough commonsense to handle it and do it right. But nowadays, you can't even go to the bathroom without calling and getting permission.

NANCY RAY: So there's, you had more freedom?

SID MERCHANT: Oh, I guess that's putting it mildly. You did what... you played hard and you worked hard or you worked hard and then you played hard. Then you took off. You took that old car and you went where you needed to go. We didn't have any problem. We didn't abuse it but they wanted you where they could get hold of you and at that time the only communication we had was that radio... before cell phones and pagers and all that junk. But you just needed to "do the needful."

NANCY RAY: Did you feel that you didn't have as many uh, as many restrictions from being politically correct? I'm not sure how to word that.

SID MERCHANT: That's a pretty good way to do it. But there wasn't near as much politics involved. You... they hired you to work, you worked. There wasn't... I'm sure there's more of it than I realize but those guys were a bunch of good old hardworking Rangers. I mean they knew their business. They did their business and then went on their merry way.

NANCY RAY: Now was Abilene your only duty station?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: OK, so you were there until how long? When did you retire?

SID MERCHANT: '88.

NANCY RAY: '88. And what type... you had a variety of cases. What kind of cases did you have?

SID MERCHANT: I can't think of one that I didn't have. I did what came along you know.

NANCY RAY: Like murders?

SID MERCHANT: Lots of murders.

NANCY RAY: Oilfield...

SID MERCHANT: Oh, a lot of oilfield. (*chuckle*) I'm gonna tell you a while ago. Back in uh the late '60s I guess it was, maybe the early '70s, I don't remember now. Do you know what mercury is?

NANCY RAY: Um hmm.

SID MERCHANT: In the oil patch they had what they call bellows meters.

NANCY RAY: Say that again.

SID MERCHANT: Bellows. Those bellows worked on mercury even before the gas wells. And we had got to where it was scarce, there was a shortage of it and they were stealing that dang stuff out of those meters faster than they could put it in there. And we had a bunch of thieves out of Hobbs, New Mexico. They swooped through Abilene oil field, they'd go one way and come back another direction and hit them mercury meters. We had I don't know how many but numerous, this would be putting it mildly, thefts of mercury. And finally traced it to Houston to Chicago where they were remanufacturing it and selling it back to them. All they were doing was cleaning it up a little bit. Up in Jones County, just north of Abilene, there was one little old field up there they hit it every time they come through there which was about once a month. So it was getting about time for them to come through and hit it. So I had to find me a spot so I could sit up there on a little old *unknown word*... it wasn't a hill or anything it was just where the land was

raised and I could sit there and watch that whole oil patch, field out there where they hit. If anything moved out there, I could pretty well tell it you know. So I sitting up there on my little hill, I was sitting there watching. And I'd laid back in the seat, had my radio real low. It was the fall of the year. I had my, seemed like about half of my elbow sticking out of the window and a damn German Shepherd dog licked me on the elbow.

NANCY RAY: You were staked out? *(laughter)*

SID MERCHANT: I don't know what you call it. I like to have tore the headliner out of that car. I couldn't get to my pistol, couldn't do nothing... scared that dog as bad as it did me. There were a bunch of farms around there so I knew where it come from. Couldn't hear it for the radio and the grass out there so I couldn't hear him. Oh Lord, needless to say I didn't go sleep the rest of the night. *(laughter)* Of course they didn't either. The durn thieves didn't either because it was a wasted night. Ooh. If I tore that car up I'd been in trouble.

NANCY RAY: Well, did you ever catch the mercury thieves?

SID MERCHANT: Not by surveillance, no. We caught them. Later on we caught them with a load of it and got them. So... went on to something else.

NANCY RAY: What about any kidnappings?

SID MERCHANT: No.

NANCY RAY: You didn't have any kidnappings?

SID MERCHANT: Of course we had extortions but never seemed, they weren't legit extortions. They came up but turned out they were hoaxes mostly. Never... of course in Abilene it wasn't that kind of a deal.

NANCY RAY: Well, did you have bank robberies?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: Anything in particular stand out in your mind?

SID MERCHANT: Oh, not really. We had a lot of armed robberies. Two little old Mexican boys robbed a service station out there on Interstate 20 in Abilene... killed a kid who was the operator. We traced them down and finally got them caught. And of course it was another of them nights we didn't get any sleep. Caught them in the little town of Munday and they'd... we finally ... to them on polygraph. Got up there and of course then they admitted it and then we had to drive back to Abilene. Finally got their car... what they'd done, they'd stole a cash register and put in the back of their old car. In the trunk of it there was the imprints of that old cash register ... (*laughter*) so I shut the lid on it. I just had to see it and that made it right. So, we had lots of armed robberies, especially on interstate out there you know.

NANCY RAY: Were these oilfield workers or people passing through or...

SID MERCHANT: These were just a couple of locals. They were from Munday, the little town of Munday up there. They just come to Abilene to make some money.

NANCY RAY: Well, when you became a Ranger, were you issued any equipment? A car, a pistol...

SID MERCHANT: A car. They issued weapons and stuff but most the Rangers carried 1911 Colts, .45s, because number one you could carry more bullets. And number two, you didn't... it's awful hard to get them little old bullets in them holes when you're getting shot at. So we all, most of us carried automatics because all we had to do was put another magazine in. But uh, they issued us camera equipment and first one thing and another. Fingerprint kits, I don't know what all.

NANCY RAY: What was in a fingerprint kit?

SID MERCHANT: Well, it was basically where you could dust for latent prints and little feather dusters and stuff. Also you had fingerprint cards where you could fingerprint somebody. Ink pads and stuff, a deal you could hold the card on, to hold the fingerprint card. And...

NANCY RAY: Well, what else did you need to do your job? Any other equipment or tools or... did you have a horse? Did you...

SID MERCHANT: We didn't have to have a horse... didn't have to own a horse but we had to have a horse available. We had to have saddles available and stuff so yeah... We had... In my area, we didn't really.... Oh we'd go out and ride a horse a little while to look at for cattle, look at cattle or something.

NANCY RAY: Not... not stolen, just to look?

SID MERCHANT: No, check the brands on cattle that suspected to be stolen. Or to just check brands to settle disputes between neighbors and stuff.

NANCY RAY: Did you have something about cattle that...

SID MERCHANT: Oh we worked a lot of cattle thefts. Uh I say a lot... we had a lot of cattle thefts, a lot of tack thefts, trailer thefts. You name it we had it. But uh off the top of my head I can't remember a good cattle theft case. Well I do too. One old kid was... on *unknown word* Prairie... an old kid was... his mother was head of the Probation Department. Him and his girlfriend who was a waitress who worked for my wife who managed a restaurant, they went out and stole some cattle. (*laughter*) Caught them. That kid didn't think the law applied to him either. Got them convicted.

NANCY RAY: Well, what characteristics or traits do you think make a good Ranger?

SID MERCHANT: A good level head to start with. Uh... I guess self motivation is... becomes the same thing as level headed but self motivated. In today's world, I wouldn't... I don't have any idea because it's a whole a lot different than when we were.

NANCY RAY: What did you enjoy the most about being a Ranger?

SID MERCHANT: Being a Ranger. (*chuckle*)

NANCY RAY: What did that...

SID MERCHANT: I don't know. Just...

NANCY RAY: Can't put it into words?

SID MERCHANT: No ma'am. Has anybody ever told you about Charlie Miller?

NANCY RAY: No. Would you?

SID MERCHANT: I'll tell you what I know about him. Toughest old bird in the road. Have you ever heard about the old river Rangers?

NANCY RAY: You know what, I believe Bob Favor... is he the one who pulled his tooth?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah.

NANCY RAY: What do you remember about him?

SID MERCHANT: Well, I never worked with Charlie a whole lot. But he, Charlie, was a different breed of cat. Uh you went in the Ranger service out in his proximity... he would wait a long... until you got your feel around, then he'd call you and want to go visiting with you somewhere, visit with somebody. My instance was he wanted to go see, visit Homer T. Melton who was Ranger out at Benjamin. And so he called me one day and said what are you doing tomorrow? I said nothing important. Let's go visit Homer T., I haven't seen Homer T. in a long time. OK, I'll be up there in the morning at eight o'clock or whatever. So he did and here he come waltzing in there and here we went. Well in the meantime they called me on a burglary up

at Anson so we stopped and he helped me work that burglary. So went on... we got through with all that nonsense we went on and had lunch with Homer T. This was the part I wanted to tell you. On the way back that afternoon, he said son, I want to tell you something. Said you may have to kill somebody one of these days, and it might bother you. But if you have to kill somebody, call old Charlie. It might bother you but it don't bother old Charlie. And he was serious as lye soap. He meant exactly what he said. There's lots of stories about Charlie... how many people he killed and stuff. But I can't prove any of them but I bet they're all true. (*laughter*)

NANCY RAY: Well, did you ever have to kill anyone?

SID MERCHANT: I had to shoot a couple, yeah.

NANCY RAY: Had to shoot a couple?

SID MERCHANT: I don't know what year it was. Oh Lord, it was late '60s or early '70s. Al Mitchell was a New Mexico State Policeman at that time over at Hobbs. He had a suspect in the penitentiary in Texas so he called Captain Riddles. Captain said well Sid's been working with that old boy a long time, he probably knows more about him than anybody else. Call Sid and ya'll go down, or "do the needful." So he and I went to Huntsville to question this old boy, Cecil Ray Rhinehart. And uh we kept on talking to him until directly he dropped his head and started crying. So we knew where we was at... we was on the right track. So finally, yeah, he confessed to it. And told us who else was involved. So Al went back to New Mexico and got a warrant and arrested this old boy. A long way around the bush but I'll tell you the end of it after while.

NANCY RAY: That's OK.

SID MERCHANT: Uh, so we were gonna try this old boy, moved the trial from Hobbs to Carlsbad. So I was going up to court. I left out on a Sunday because I knew I had to be up there on Monday morning. And as usual I was low on reports, way behind. And uh so I was gonna

stop by the Midland office to finish my reports and then I was gonna go on up there. Well I get nearly to Midland and I hear this radio talking about this patrolman in a chase over there. Well I spurred up a little bit and got over there. And about the time I was between Stanton and Midland they get in a... he chases the old boy in an old Chrysler 300. Ya'll probably don't remember back then. An old Chrysler 300, late '60s model, would run a hole in the wind. Didn't know how fast it would go but anyway this patrolman had one of those old 440 magnum engines in a Plymouth and they were in a pretty good race. This old boy started shooting at him, the patrolman. Well I don't know how far he chased him or where he chased him to but out of Midland, this old boy run a roadblock and was shooting at officers there. Long story short... he went down south of Midland and started circling back and I got involved in it about that time. And uh Captain said I passed him and he was running 140 when I passed him. *(laughter)* Those cars we had would run back then. But anyway, I stopped to get a rifle out of the back of my car and the chase went down south of me. So I pulled up and directly here come that car right in front of me. Umph! He saw me and he took off through a little old field out there full of deep sand. He got stuck. I was trying to tell them on the radio what was going on but everybody was trying to talk at one time. I tried to tell them where I was at and what was going on. Anyway, that old boy got out there in the sandy field and he was stuck. He jumped out and he started shooting at me. Well, I got a little upset about that and I started shooting back at him. *(laughter)* I shot him right through the rear, hip to hip. Needless to say, he went down. Of course it was on Sunday, right after church on Sunday, and there were people everywhere out there. So I... they saw what was going on and it was a miracle that we didn't kill somebody out there, or that he didn't... because he was shooting with a .22 rifle just *pop, pop, pop, pop, pop*. But anyway after I shot him, I had my suit coat on, didn't have time to put my hat on. Walked over to him and he

was trying to get that rifle and I pulled a .45 out and said son, that'll be the last mistake you ever make. So he realized who I was and so that was the end of it. About that time, about 40 officers showed up out there... (*chuckle*) grabbed him up. Of course he lived, didn't do a good enough job on him.

NANCY RAY: Well, you went to write reports and you ended up shooting somebody in a field. Quite a difference.

SID MERCHANT: My wife had become friends with the Highway Patrolman there in Abilene at that time. So they came out... the message came out that I had shot somebody in a shoot-out. So I get to the office and the Captain said, first thing is, call your wife and tell her what happened. I did. Here come Helen and Bill Davis, all down in the dumps you know, didn't know how to tell her. ... Come up visiting... well, did you know that Sid's been a shoot-out? Yep, he already called me. (*laughter*)

NANCY RAY: It's a good thing! Goodness

SID MERCHANT: Yeah. A young (*unknown word*), an old boy out there in Abilene called, he'd just got out of the penitentiary, put him on fifty armed robberies. And he got involved with some local thugs there in Abilene and they pulled two or three armed robberies there in Abilene. Had a bank robbery lined up and the local boy got drunk and they'd messed up. So we was gonna arrest them on those warrants and we got a little light-running shoot-out with that. I had to kill him. And I got back to the house... I finally got back to the house... another night I didn't get no sleep. Finally got to the house, drank some coffee and shaved and cleaned up and go back to Grand Jury. Looked up there when I was shaving, there was a bullet in my hair. (*chuckle*) That's when I had some hair, a little hair. Needless to say, I woke up after that again.

NANCY RAY: I guess so. Well, what is the most scared, can you think of the time when you were the most scared during the career? Something happened?

SID MERCHANT: No.

NANCY RAY: You were never scared?

SID MERCHANT: Probably mad but I wasn't scared. (*laughter*)

NANCY RAY: Well I guess that's good because you could deal with it that way.

SID MERCHANT: To really say I was ever scared, probably after the fact I was probably scared.

NANCY RAY: Yeah, that's what I would think.

SID MERCHANT: But when they were going down, I don't remember being that scared. I hadn't thought about it that way.

NANCY RAY: Yeah. Well did you ever have a close brush with your own death in the line of service?

SID MERCHANT: Well, that one about that first one. Them bullets coming around me but... worried me a whole lot.

NANCY RAY: Ya'll didn't wear vests or anything.

SID MERCHANT: No, didn't have them. I ended up with one years and years later. It's a GI vest, military, flak vest.

NANCY RAY: Well think about something that happened during your career that you're very proud of. What is the thing that you are the most proud of?

SID MERCHANT: My girls, I guess. (*chuckle*)

NANCY RAY: Yeah, well I know you're proud of your girls and your grandkids. But as far as being a Ranger, or a Highway Patrolman, something that happened related to your career?

SID MERCHANT: We're talking too many years ago now.

NANCY RAY: Maybe it was a case that you had to work really hard to solve.

SID MERCHANT: Well, one that really stands out in my mind... we had back in the '70s boom. We had some old boys stealing crude oil. This is gonna be a long story too but. They were stealing crude oil, three or four counties around Abilene there. Uh some in Jones County, one in Taylor County, some down south in Runnels County, Callahan County and that's all I remember now. They was pulling up to a tank there and stealing a whole load of crude oil. Well we knew something was wrong with the whole deal but we couldn't figure it out. The tracks weren't right. The reason the tracks weren't right is they filled up from the right-hand side. Crude oil trucks fill up from the left-hand side. So the driver sat in that cab, looked out the window in the mirrors and watched that pump. Uh another one of those nights I got called out. Worked all day and late that evening, or that night, the sheriff over in Jones County called and had an armed robbery in Stamford and they were shooting at the officers. We caught them out in the field shooting at the officers holed up there. Anyway, we got them caught, two kids, probably 18 or 20 years old. Well, Stamford's on the county line. Jones County is dry, Haskell County is wet. So the robbery occurred in Haskell County. Homer T., Melton, Ranger that worked that territory, Haskell County, was gone on vacation. So the DA over there in Stamford wanted me to work that case. And I did. I worked all day, got home, ate a little supper and went to bed. The following morning I got up and Sandy said, you going to Ballenger or Winters? Why? Well you told Johnny today, you'd come down there today. Johnny who? You know Johnny, the chief deputy down there, Johnny Wilson. Why? He called you last night and you told him you'd be down there this morning. I didn't talk to him last night. You durn sure did. (*laughter*) What about? He said he caught them crude oil thieves. So that got my attention and I said what's going on? I don't know

but you told him exactly what you wanted him to do. *(laughter)* And he'd done got them in jail down there in Winters. Well I started and I think for three months I was back and forth to Houston. This all centered out of Houston. And back then they'd cry for crude oil. I mean everybody was begging to buy crude oil. Everything they could find, they were buying. And uh two, I don't remember now how it all went down. Two old boys up there were pumpers, oilfield pumpers, contract pumpers. They got involved with a bunch of people around Houston. They'd spot these loads or wells. And they would call them and they'd send a truck up to get a load of crude oil. Take it back to Houston and try to sell it. Well, they had, I think it was probably about four trucks. Turned out these old trucks were old gasoline transports and the hookup on them is on the right hand side because they can probably go to a curb in town and unload their gas on the right-hand side. That's the way those curbs are all lined up. That's the reason they was using them old trucks. That's the reason the tracks didn't look right. I'd be lying if I told you how many but... I'd go to Houston and turned out the Ranger from Brownwood was going with me from time to time. We'd go to Houston and work all week. Talk and interview them people and come back. Follow up on that and turn around and go back to Houston the next week. And I think three months I did this, if I remember right, somewhere around three months.

NANCY RAY: Were you having to testify in court?

SID MERCHANT: No, we was going down to interview these people trying to get more suspects. Then come back up there and talk to suspects up here and go back down and talk to suspects down there. And anyway, it looked like I was talking to the mafia. Them old boys come out there with their shyster lawyers, wearing them black suits and white ties. And all they was, was a bunch of dang crooks you know. They weren't thieves per se but they was buying this dang crude oil. And I don't know how many but the long and short of it is, I called Austin. Had

two old boys out of Railroad Commission come down there and help me. They had more access to records from the oil patch than I did, or easier access I should say. So they was helping me down there. Well we... Sun Oil was buying it all. And so I knew who was doing it. We called them and set up a meeting with them, a crude oil purchaser and a regional manager and two shyster lawyers showed up. One of them was a big old, old-time lawyer out of Philadelphia. And he thought he was the cock of the walk. So he just sort of stuck his nose in the air and wouldn't hardly talk to us. And so we got mad and I called the attorney general's office and talked to them. I said I want a lawyer down here with us now, one of our lawyers. But anyway they didn't... brushed us off like we weren't nothing, you know. Didn't want to talk to us. Ooh, I got madder than a Jap. You will talk to me or you will be subpoenaed by the Grand Jury in Runnels County, Texas. In the meantime, I told this old head of Sun Oil Company, where is your corporate security office? Philadelphia. Who's in charge up there? Why? And I said because I want to have somebody from there come in down here Monday morning to meet me, one of the security men down there. And you will talk to me. So I, anyway, I got the name of the head of the security up there. I got his phone number and I called him. I said I want somebody here, from the Security Department, down here Monday morning in Houston, Texas, to meet with me. Why? I said because your people are stealing crude oil, or buying stolen crude oil, and I want... and the smart aleck lawyer don't think he has to talk to me but he's gonna find out he does. Sure enough, that old boy met me down there Monday morning and he was green as a gourd. He knew nothing about the oil patch. He couldn't even spell oil patch. And he told me right quick. Said I'm not a policeman, I just do corporate security work and I don't know what you're talking about. Well you take that SOB over there and tell him to talk to me. Those people are gonna talk to me or they're gonna wish they had. So he told them you better talk to the man or... he's not

gonna mess with you. Well the long and short of it, he was, this kid was a crude oil purchaser and they were after him so hard that he was buying anything he could get to look like crude oil, even buying barge bottoms. Buying BS&W out of them tanks, anything he could get to fill his quota of oil. And turned out they had a tank up there at the... a 100,000-barrel tank, up there north of Houston. I don't remember where now. But it had 78,000 barrels of crude oil in it and we confiscated it... lock, stock and barrel, all 78,000 barrels. And we stoled it, sold it I should say, and it went in the coffers of the state of Texas because it had stolen crude oil in it. *(laughter)*
Well...

NANCY RAY: That would be worth about how much money?

SID MERCHANT: Oh Lord, I don't know what oil back then... it would be a bunch, well it wouldn't be a bunch today. A month ago it was a whole lot more. But uh I think something like \$30 a barrel back then. I don't remember. That's too long ago. I didn't know there... a shortage of crude oil and here we go. That was in the '70s when all that stuff was going on. Anyway, bottom line is of the story, that young crude oil purchaser got fired. The young lawyer got fired. The old lawyer got transferred back to Philadelphia. And guess where the district manager went... Abilene, Texas. *(laughter)*

NANCY RAY: You had a relationship!

SID MERCHANT: Yeah, we did. *(laughter)* Sort of an irony... I had oh me and some commissioners there in Abilene... they wanted me to make a little talk on theft to them. And so I went up there to make a little talk. And after they introduced me and after this meeting was over with, this manager, the regional manager, the district manager whatever he was, came up to me and said do you remember me? I said yeah, I know your face. He said you like to got me fired one time. I said where? He told me Houston. I said I intended to get you fired. That was my

whole... my motive behind that whole deal. He said why? I said because ya'll lied to me. Ya'll were gonna... ya'll better than I am, I'll come down and show you who holds the big stick you know. But he and I got to be fairly good friends. He got a problem he'd call me. But oilfield things, anything in the oil patch, they... they stole it. I don't care what it was whether it was worth a darn or not. And there was a market for it. We had what they call "order" thieves. And this... and still today there's the same thing. In certain places, or a place... café, beer joint, or wherever you want or all of the above, you could go to and put the word out that you need such and such. I don't care if, what it is... I want a drilling rig on down. In just a few days you'll have it. That's what an old boy in Graham told me back on that '70s deal. He owned the same set of power tongs three times. *(laughter)* They'd steal them and he'd buy them back from somewhere.

NANCY RAY: I wonder how much he paid... total?

SID MERCHANT: Oh, I don't have any idea. *(laughter)* But they were pretty high dollar piece of equipment. That was the most... one of the most drawn out and interesting cases I worked on.

NANCY RAY: So how long from... you said you went back and forth three months. But for them to be, for everything to be over with, I guess you had to go to court some and...

SID MERCHANT: I think about two years

NANCY RAY: Long case.

SID MERCHANT: Yeah. By the time we got... I think we indicted nine people out of the whole deal. Most of them pled out though.

NANCY RAY: Well, do you have any interesting court cases? When you went to court and had to testify or something that happened?

SID MERCHANT: Oh, I can't really... I had a lot of cases...

NANCY RAY: OK. I understand that you also worked with Glenn Elliott on a case. It was a murder case out of Henderson. Do you remember that where a boy killed his grandparents I believe?

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah.

NANCY RAY: Is there anything interesting about that you can tell us?

SID MERCHANT: Not that really sticks out in my mind. I remember the case.

NANCY RAY: What was your role in that?

SID MERCHANT: I don't really remember. I know... if I recall correctly, there was some people out there that he wanted me to interview for him. But I don't really...

NANCY RAY: So that's pretty much standard procedure for a Ranger?

SID MERCHANT: Oh yeah. Which reminds me... I don't know what year it was, stuff runs together. A Highway Patrol up in Anson called me. They'd arrested a bunch of Blacks for a bunch of hot checks. I don't know where the checks... They couldn't get anything out of them so they wanted me to talk to them. They had a bunch of counter checks in their collection so they wanted me to take it over. Another one of them cases where it drags out for two or three weeks. And they had this old Black guy that was probably the kingpin of the bunch. They were out of East Texas, I don't remember exactly where. Anyway, they were going all over the country forging these checks, grabbing these counter checks in places and going around forging them. Said old so and so paid me... worked for old so and so and he paid them. All you did was look in the phone book for the name or whatever and find out who the farmer was or whatever, the rancher, and forged checks on him. I'd be lying if I even hesitated to guess how many checks they passed all over the state of Texas. I mean dang near from east to west. But there was one Black guy, I mean he was black, my TV is as black as he is, or was, or whatever. And he gave

me more names than you can... Every time I'd catch him lying on one name he'd give me another one. I finally drewed all these things to an end. It's what they call the gathering. I said give me a set of his fingerprints. What do you want with his fingerprints? Get me another set. Why? I said I'll tell you why. Just get them. He fingerprinted him again, got a good set for him. What're you gonna do? I said that airplane that come through Midland, the mail plane come through Midland every Wednesday. It stopped at Abilene and picked up the mail going to Austin, packages and mail. I said I'm gonna put them on the plane tomorrow and get that pilot to take them to the fingerprint people in Austin and have them find out who this guy is and let me know. So again... I did this and told the mailman, or the patrolman that carried the mail out to the plane. Give this to the pilot and ask him to take it to the fingerprint section and have them run them. And as soon as they get them, call and tell me who he is. I know he's a convict and whatever. And of course I went back to Jones County, Anson. Same old routine...had him down in the sheriff's office talking to him. That afternoon I got a phone call. The dispatcher told me said it's for you, Austin's on the phone. I grabbed the phone and sure enough, it was one of the fingerprint experts. He started running this record down to me and I mean he had a record as long as a railroad. I said wait a minute, wait a minute, time out. Send me a teletype on it. I can't copy all this junk. He said his nickname is Black Willie, his nickname is Black Willie. OK. I go, hello Black Willie. Hello Mr. Merchant. *(laughter)* That sure did change his... *(laughter)* And again I'd be lying if I told you how many forgeries we cleared up but I know all over East Texas, all over... I don't remember how far. I know they went to Wichita Falls. I don't think they went out to Amarillo... but south of us down Angelo, Brownwood. He had forged checks. I said how do you do this? He said I just talk to them folks and they believes my story. And they did, I could

understand why because he could put a story on you. *(laughter)* If you didn't have one, he'd have another one for you. *(laughter)* Ah, he could lie to you. Best one I ever talked to.

NANCY RAY: Well did you use polygraph very often?

SID MERCHANT: A lot, a lot. I don't know. I just had a thing. I wanted to make dang sure somebody was telling me the truth. I did not want to bum wrap anybody. And so I probably over used it but if I had any doubt in my mind, I used it. That's what they're there for so I used it a whole lot.

NANCY RAY: Well did you ever believe that someone beat the polygraph?

SID MERCHANT: Yeah, yeah. But uh actually to say beat it, I ain't sure they beat the polygraph. They beat the operator.

NANCY RAY: The operator. How did they do that?

SID MERCHANT: I don't know. The operator just don't have confidence enough in his self to call it right. We had some operators wouldn't call them if they was black and white. You know showed up on their foreheads that they were lying. Some polygraph operator wouldn't call it. But uh no I had all the confidence in it.

NANCY RAY: OK. Out of all the things that you encountered in your career, uh I think you've mentioned one person that probably had a lot of influence on you. But the one that had the most influence on you. Is that... is that George? Is that the person that you were telling us about earlier?

SID MERCHANT: Gene. Yeah. Oh I'd say so. Gene had the wisdom of Solomon. Uh I mean you know he thought everything out before he made a rash statement. He didn't make no rash statements. But he didn't know I was going over to East Texas and one of the Rangers came out

there and out of Sweetwater... But he was solid as a rock, I guarantee you. It was I guess he influenced me more than anybody else in the Rangers, him and John Wood.

NANCY RAY: That's a tribute to them. Well if someone is looking at this video, you know the next generation or a hundred years from now or whatever, what would you want those people to know about you, Sid Merchant, the Ranger.

SID MERCHANT: Oh I don't know.

NANCY RAY: What would your legacy be?

SID MERCHANT: I can't really come up with anything off the top of my head. I'm not really... I just... I spent 32 years in DPS and that's... eight or nine in Highway Patrol and 23 in Rangers. I wouldn't relive them but I wouldn't take a million dollars for them. *(laughter)*

NANCY RAY: Well, do you think people would say you were fair?

SID MERCHANT: Good Lord I hope so.

NANCY RAY: That would be one of the things.

SID MERCHANT: Can I tell you about one more murder case?

NANCY RAY: Yes.

SID MERCHANT: The last murder case I worked. An old kid, big old fat *(unknown word)* kid in Albany. Killed his mother, his sister, and niece, six-year old niece. And it was the most stupid murders I ever saw. All of them are stupid but this one was worse. This kid worked for the Highway Department. Lived with his mother, both of his sisters were gone and married. And he uh, this one sister divorced her husband and came home with her six-year old daughter. Well he had his mother, was with his mother all those years you know, she was his one and only... and taking care of him. Well the sister came home and messed up his happy playhouse. Mother would take her side of the arguments they got in and interfered with his whole way of life. So he

uh... they got in a big argument. He uh killed, shot his mother right in the head. Then he shot the niece because she was crying. The sister came home... she'd been working or whatever. He walked up behind her and shot her right behind the ear, killed her. And set the gas stove and stuff, set it on a timer so it would blow the whole house up and destroy everything. Laid the pistol in the house so it'd blow up too, it'd burn up too. When it arrived, by the time when the timer came on, the gas had burned all the oxygen out of the house so it didn't blow the house up. And had it blown it up there was an apartment house catty cornered across and there ain't no telling how many people it would have killed. Thankfully it didn't do it that way. But anyway, we arrested him and it was somewhat disgusting. He finally admitted it and we took him to Dallas and run him on polygraph. On the way back we stopped to eat supper. And I looked at him and told the sheriff I said, let's go, let's go. Why? He's gonna tell us. Sure enough, time we got to Breckenridge, got to Albany, he told us the whole truth. It was the most disgusting thing. Like I say, all of them are but this one really got my goat. Because I had two young daughters I guess is the reason. I said why did you kill that niece? She was crying. She wouldn't shut up. That just got my goat, I couldn't...

NANCY RAY: Did you ever just want to choke someone?

SID MERCHANT: *(laughter)* Yes ma'am! *(laughter)*

NANCY RAY: And can't.

SID MERCHANT: Yes... I worked another murder where an Air Force sergeant kidnapped this little ten-year old girl and raped and murdered her. I wouldn't even go in a talk to him with my pistol on because I knew I'd shoot that so and so. He had four sons and he kidnapped this little ten-year old girl and took her out and murdered her.

NANCY RAY: Well you really... you just dealt with some sorry people.

SID MERCHANT: Yes ma'am.

NANCY RAY: I just don't understand how you can turn it off or you were able to turn it off and go home.

SID MERCHANT: You don't. You don't. Thank goodness I had a good, understanding wife. And so I'm sure she, I know the girls went through a lot of pain and misery but she did too. But they stayed with me.

NANCY RAY: They stayed with you. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your career?

SID MERCHANT: Nothing sticks out. And uh...

NANCY RAY: You retired in 1988 and what do you do now?

SID MERCHANT: Now I do nothing. And I don't start that very early.

NANCY RAY: There's no need to be in a hurry.

SID MERCHANT: I worked for an oil company for... until they sold out after I retired. That was another story too. We had some wild times on that deal working down in the Rio Grande Valley at places down there. I had some interesting cases down there but... it's a different world. A free world.

NANCY RAY: Well, if you were giving advice to a brand new Ranger, what would you say?

SID MERCHANT: Don't. (*chuckle*)

NANCY RAY: Don't? Do you mean that?

SID MERCHANT: Oh not really. We gotta have them. As long as there's Texas, there's gotta be Rangers. Thank God they do a pretty good job of stretching them. Some I wouldn't want to work with but basically they're good guys. And I'll leave it right there.

NANCY RAY: OK. That's good enough. Well, I want to thank you for your time.

SID MERCHANT: Thank you, very much. I enjoyed it.

NANCY RAY: And if there's anything else you'd like to say, this is the time to do it.

SID MERCHANT: Well, I don't remember anything else, or I can't think of anything else. I'll put it that way. I'll probably... as soon as you walk out the door I will.

NANCY RAY: You probably will. Well thank you for your service also, for serving the state.

SID MERCHANT: I appreciate what ya'll are doing too, I really do.

NANCY RAY: Well we're enjoying it... getting to meet some really nice people. *(laughter)*

SID MERCHANT: Meeting some characters?

NANCY RAY: We're meeting characters! Thank you.