



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Transcript of interview with Dilmus Hall

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# Transcript

## Preface

### Tape-Recorded Interview with Dilmus Hall

at the Artist's Home in Athens, Georgia

June 3, 1984

Willem Volkersz, Interviewer

#### Editor's Note:

This transcript is from a series of recordings made by Willem Volkersz over a number of years. They are not formal interviews, but rather records of conversations, often taped during photo-taking tours of the artist's studios or home collections.

The naive/visionary artists in these interviews have unique verbal mannerisms, many of which are difficult or impossible to transcribe accurately into written form. Thus, for grasping certain nuances of speech, researchers will find it advantageous to listen to the original tapes.

Our intent in transcribing these interviews was nonetheless to translate as accurately as possible the spoken word into a comprehensible written form, making changes to clarify but not to interpret. Thus the speaker's grammar is unedited. For example, "them" for "those," "themselves," and "gotta" were all transcribed as heard. On the other hand, certain changes were made for clarity: "'cause," was transcribed as "because," "'fore" as "before," "'yo" as "your," etc.

Other editorial notations are as follows: Bracketed words are of two types. Those with "[—Ed.]" or "[—WV]" are inserted by the transcriber, editor, or Volkersz. Other bracketed words indicate uncertainty: Two or more words or phrases indicate possible alternatives; "[unintelligible]" and "\_\_\_\_" indicate words that are garbled or incomprehensible on the tape, the former being a much longer phrase than the latter; "[noise]" is self-explanatory.

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 365 version 1908. Some formatting has been lost in web presentation.

## Interview

**DH: Dilmus Hall**

**WV: Willem Volkersz**

### [Tape 1, side A; Volkersz' No. H1-A]

[Dilmus Hall's speech is quite slurred, probably partially from age, making this interview less clear than usual. Andy Nasisse (AN), who accompanied WV, introduced Volkersz to Hall at the beginning of this interview. Throughout much of the discussion, Volkersz looked through stacks of drawings; Hall occasionally interrupted his train of thought to identify its subject or title—Ed.]

AN: I've got to go have lunch with my friend, and I'll be back in a little bit. Willem just wanted to talk with you if you're not doing anything, and maybe you two can go get something to eat or something like that.

DH: Um hmm, um hmm.

AN: I'll be back in a little bit. But he wanted to see some of your drawings and stuff like that.

DH: Oh yeah.

WV: That be all right?

DH: Oh, yeah. I read a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ here, I'm waiting for a lady in North Carolina \_\_\_\_\_ come and get it, take it home. . . \_\_\_\_\_ .

AN: Willem's also interested in your philosophy of life.

DH: Eh?

AN: He's interested in your philosophy of life.

DH: Oh, yeah, yeah. I understand, I understand.

WV: [everyone talks at once—Ed.] Sit down and talk for a while. Okay. Terrific.

DH: Yeah, I got a boat load of it in here.

WV: [To AN:] Okay. See you later, thanks.

AN: I'll see you.

WV: See you later, thanks.

DH: I got a boat load of it. There's a lot of it.

WV: Hey, it's dark in here.

DH: Yeah, I \_\_\_\_\_ [naked] light.

WV: Yeah.

DH: I did a little drawing last May, not much, if you're interested a little bit. And but I haven't much, much it here.

WV: Well, Andy showed me some of your drawings and I really like them a lot. They're very beautiful, I think. How long have you been making drawings?

DH: Well, I been following this practically all of my life. In recent years, it's just like anything you follow for so long, it becomes deep-rooted to you. But when I was a kid, I used to go to school. I told myself, sitting around here yesterday, I used to get the action going before us and blaze a sweet gum tree, get that juice, the sap, and chew it.

WV: Chew it?

DH: Yep.

WV: What was that for? What did you chew it for?

DH: Well, as a gum.

WV: Oh, I see.

DH: And I was stealing my mother's sugar, make it sweet, you know, and get a little of the [lard] and keep it from sticking to your teeth, you know, and I'd chew it until it get white. See, it's kind of brown, and I chew it till it gets white. And then I'd mold it into various things, you know. Here's what I do. \_\_\_\_\_ these little fellows \_\_\_\_\_. Here, I mold it into various things, you know. [searching for something while continuing to talk—Ed.] See. My talent come from way back.

WV: You've had it all your life?

DH: All my life.

WV: These are beautiful.

DH: All of my life, I've had it. And the older I get, the more perfect I get to be. And I going out of America 1918. . .

WV: Were you in the [First World—Ed.] war?

DH: Yeah. I'm getting to that now. And I was in Europe, you know. \_\_\_\_\_ Florence bombed \_\_\_\_\_. And I

seen in Europe, you know, that \_\_\_\_\_ing my \_\_\_\_\_, well, \_\_\_\_\_ a friend lady of mine, and she was in Israel.

WV: In Israel?

DH: Yeah. And her and her husband did some book writing.

WV: Right.

DH: In Israel. And she is back in North Carolina now. But she's been going over in Israel, stayed over there six months. And being naturalized of America, you know, you cain't go in these different places and come out, unless you get sick. And so that's the way she was. Yes, and I am. . . Yes, see, I [did] those things.

WV: Oh, they're beautiful.

DH: David slaying the lion.

WV: Do most of your ideas come from the Bible?

DH: Well, I read the Bible a lot and I get some of my answers from reading, yes. That's a good leaf piece there [blank paper—WV]. I'm getting short on paper. I'm going to. . .

WV: Well, Andy will get you some more, probably. Oh, there's one, yeah.

DH: Yes. Yeah, as I say, I. . .

WV: Put this aside, so you remember.

DH: Yeah. Yeah, because I can make use of that. Yeah, I put something on it. I'll have something on it before dark.

WV: Yeah.

DH: I just, oh, I walk around and things come to me. Now that is, well, another man, he is the artist, Art Rosenbaum [faculty, University of Georgia, Athens].

WV: Art Rosenbaum, yeah.

DH: Yeah.

WV: Andy's told me about him.

DH: Yeah. Yeah, he and I, we had dinner up at the \_\_\_\_\_. And I was sitting, and he said, "Hall, I can make your picture." I said, "All right, Art." So, he laughed and he had his pencil and. . . I have so much stuff here, I just. . .

WV: Yeah, you have a lot of stuff.

DH: I be glad when Mrs. Warner comes. He come in the last of the week. He hasn't come in a week, you know.

WV: Um hmm.

DH: And her and her daughter is coming from North Carolina, and so her daughter comes out, and I'm going to fill that car full of materials and get rid of some of this [stuff]. Are other plus there [drawings—WV] that I will let her have.

WV: Could I buy a few drawings from you?

DH: Oh, yes, I make them for the people, I do.

WV: That's great.

DH: I don't make them for myself. I make them for the people. (chuckles)

WV: I just wanted to look at this one here.

DH: Yeah, I make them for the people.

WV: That's great.

DH: I'm carrying out my will.

WV: What's that?

DH: I say I'm carrying out my will, you might say.

WV: Oh, that's nice. Jesus. . .

DH: That's Christ, He falls to his knees. Oh, it's pitiful how they're treating Him, but what was to be had to be, you know.

WV: Yeah, well, maybe if that hadn't happened, we wouldn't have had Christianity.

DH: Oh, brother, I mean.

WV: Right?

DH: Yay.

WV: That's beautiful. Are there more drawings in that pile over there?

DH: No, nothing in particular. I make them out of anything.

WV: Oh, there's some more.

DH: Yeah, I make them out of anything. I make them on wood, make them. . . I make them on—anything I get my hands. . . Well, it's my talent, you know.

WV: Uh huh. It doesn't really matter what it's on, does it? As long as you get. . .

DH: Yeah. It's so. . . Yeah, I make it on anything. Anything I get my hands on. And so they accumulate. Andy, they bring me the paper and. . .

WV: Yes, they told me, uh huh.

DH: And they don't let me get out. So I just stay put with a lot of work. And I believe this is about the ending of it.

WV: There's another newspaper. There you go.

DH: Is that. . . Paying people who are good, good for you.

WV: Yeah, I'm full of them. So, you build sculpture too, right? You make things too?

DH: Oh, yes. I make it out of anything I get my hands on. Oh, yes. Yeah, I molded a pig out there, and you name it.

WV: That's a good one.

DH: Yes, I read the Bible, and I get a idea, you know.

WV: I'm going to put some of these aside so I can make a choice later on.

DH: Yeah. (chuckles)

WV: [Reads:] "Bark, bark," huh?

DH: Uh huh.

WV: Oh, that's nice.

DH: Well, that's your Bible.

WV: Who barked? Who is that?

DH: Oh, that's Christ. That's a symbol of Christ, you know. And that's a baby lamb and his mother, \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. I name them.

WV: That's a good idea.

DH: I name them. Now, you know about that one right there.

WV: David and Goliath, yeah.

DH: Well, yeah.

WV: David cutting Goliath's head off.

DH: Um hmm!

WV: Oh, boy. He's big; David's pretty small. [looking at another drawing] Who's that?

DH: Oh, that's the \_\_\_\_\_, that's just a picture for. . . I believe it was taken a [sketch] from a magazine in a sickroom.

WV: Oh, I see. A sinner.

DH: Um hmm. She had in a. . .

WV: Who slayed the bear? Who is that slaying a bear?

DH: Oh, let's see. . .

WV: Is that something from the Bible, or not?

DH: Oh yes.

WV: Oh, it is.

DH: And that's Cain killed Abel. And that \_\_\_\_\_ a picture, that's from the Bible. I have never been able to get an answer to one part of it. Cain killed his brother Abel. All right. And he fled from that site, and went over to the Land of Nod. Yep. Well, and the Bible says that he knew his wife.

WV: That's right.

DH: That's what they say. Well, I say, he knew his wife. . . [looking at another picture] Sampson slaying the lion. I say if he knew his wife, well then, what was over in the Land of Nod? Give me an answer. What was over in the land of knowledge? He fled from the Garden of Eden, and he went over in the Land of Nod, which was some distance from his birthplace, you see. Now, it skips from there and don't tell you no more about it.

WV: That's strange, isn't it?

DH: Yeah. It don't tell you no more about it. It just say he went over in the Land of Nod and there he knew his wife. So I wonder. I think that's Jesus receiving the thirty pieces of silver, which was the price of blood, \_\_\_\_\_ blood. Christ wound up in Jerusalem and had to pay taxes. And Jesus. . .

WV: Jackie Gleason?

DH: Huh?

WV: Jackie Gleason, huh?

DH: Yeah, yeah. No, he used to be a awful dancer.

WV: Right, uh huh.

DH: And his headquarters was at Miami. He come on the screen, you know, he says he's from the capital city of the world. And Jackie Gleason is there over in the corner, though.

WV: How old are you, sir?

DH: Me? I'm eighty.

WV: You're eighty?

DH: Yeah.

WV: Oh, boy.

DH: Yeah, I'm eighty.

WV: You live here a long time?

DH: Well, no, I live a lot of places. I've only been here over 50- something years, I've been right here.

WV: (laughs) In this house?

DH: Yeah.

WV: What kind of work did you do?

DH: Well, I worked in a hotel downtown, \_\_\_\_\_.

WV: I see.

DH: \_\_\_\_\_ . I worked there 25 years. I got tired of that and I went to Public Works. Is that another clean leaf [of paper—WV]? [WV is apparently sorting out clean paper from a stack of drawings—Ed.]

WV: Yeah, two of them.

DH: Oh, good for you.

WV: What did you do in Public Works?

DH: I worked as a day worker, following the cement mixer, concreting the [cracks] in the highway. And I left that and went to stitching mattresses, mattress work. I did the work of a lot of things since I've been in Athens. But labor was cheap and I just made enough to get to eat, you know.

WV: Did you retire at 65?

DH: Yeah. Yeah, I retired. Then my wife, she [died]. . . Is that a good one?

WV: Yep.

DH: Oh, that's wonderful.

WV: We're finding them.

DH: And my wife, she, since her, I never did make that commitment no more. \_\_\_\_\_ . . . Yeah, I never did make that commitment no more.

WV: Commitment to what, sir?

DH: Hmm?

WV: Commitment to what?

DH: Yeah. Ah, she died here. Had a heart attack.

WV: Ohh. Oh, no. How long ago did that happen?

DH: Oh, it's been fifteen years.

WV: Oh, boy. I'm sorry to hear that.

DH: Yeah.

WV: Don't you want to sit down?

DH: Oh, you know what it should be will surely come, and each and every individual comes in the world on borrowed time. You don't own nothing here throughout eternity. Because the good book says it's written that a person come, they come going—returning back to the Creator—and thus you come and thus you go back. See.

WV: That's right.

DH: Yeah. I don't care how old you get, why you just only returning. Here, that's a good paper. I can use the. . . [pauses] Oh, my co- worker, who is a woman, name is Ramona. Oh, she will just be thrilled to know, and I wish [it was you], that you yourself could meet her and her daughter, out from North Carolina.

WV: Are they pretty wonderful people?

DH: Oh, boy, they are. And so she oft times tell me says, "Hall," says, "Don't give up." She says, "You've got too much in front of you to give up."

WV: Well, you do, and you do wonderful work. And this way, a lot of people can see your work and they will very much appreciate that.

DH: Yeah. Carol, she said to me, "Regardless of how the life situation is, then just don't give up." Said, "There will be a way for you." And so I. . .

WV: That's good. She's keeping you going.

DH: Oh yeah, um hmm.

WV: Good for her.

DH: Some paper I guess is no good. It doesn't take ink, you know.

WV: Yeah, right.

DH: Like I want.

WV: That's not meant for that.

DH: No, uh uh uh. I test it out and it's no good. Andy, he brings it. Andy don't know. Andy, he's a pretty good. . .

WV: He's a good man, isn't he?

DH: Yeah, but there's a lot of things Andy don't know. He tell me, he says, "Hall," he says, "I wished I could be like yourself!"

WV: (chuckles)

DH: I said, "Well, Andy, don't sin." I said, "If the Lord intended for your talent to be any greater than it are," I said, "Well, he would have, he would'a gave it to you." I said, "Use what you got." Yeah. That's [in view] Jerusalem.

WV: Yeah.

DH: I copied that from a card that she sent me when she was yet in Jerusalem.

WV: That's great. Big Albert.

DH: Yeah, old Big Albert. Yeah. And that is Sampson.

WV: Sampson, at the columns.

DH: Yeah. He killed more in that building than he killed in his life. Yeah, I copied that one from the Bible.

WV: "Meow," huh? That is the family scene?

DH: Yeah.

WV: Oh, that's real good. What kind of materials do you use? Do you use just color pencil?

DH: Yeah.

WV: And what, ballpoint, sometimes?

DH: Hmm?

WV: Ballpoint?

DH: Yeah.

WV: Ballpoint pen?



DH: Um hmm, yeah.

WV: Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy.

DH: Um hmm.

WV: Wonderful. Jezebel?

DH: Yeah.

WV: What's this over here?

DH: Well, I think that it's curious, ah, well, she was great in her way, and quite natural, it don't represent too much of nothing, other than that bracelet that she got on her hand, that's the serpent.

WV: Right.

DH: And the Bible says that she wore a serpent bracelet.

WV: I see.

DH: See. Well, I just made that extra attachment to. . .

WV: Okay. Is this the door or a window, or what?

DH: No, that is, this here, you might say, or something like that.

WV: That's all right.

DH: Yeah, I had to give it a [prop], you know.

WV: Right, I understand. Is that about the man who broke into your house?

DH: Yeah.

WV: That's good.

DH: Uh huh.

WV: You didn't kill him, did you?

DH: No. I shot him twice. But he didn't die. He's down in the low part of Georgia and Florida line [border—WV] now, doing lifetime.

WV: Oh, really! He \_\_\_\_?

DH: Because they had five different counts agin him already.

WV: Oh. You didn't want him to die, did you?

DH: Huh?

WV: You didn't want him to die, did you?

DH: Well, I didn't really care at the time. You know, I shot at him. I didn't shoot at him to kill him. But he was on the inside, you know, and he had to receive what come. See? Because he come inside, you see? He broke in. And he was just lucky that I didn't kill him.

WV: Yeah, sure.

DH: Yeah. [pause] [giggles about the next drawing—WV]

WV: Hmm? Comes back home, huh?

DH: Um hmm.

WV: Hmm, Charlie Brown, Snuffy—Snoopy. How long does it take you to do a drawing?

DH: Ahh, it don't take me long. Yeah, I just knows how it ought to go and, well, after I map it out in mind, you

know, well, I put my pencil to the work.

WV: Um hmm.

DH: And, you know, I'd be, it's my talent and, you know, and I. . . There's one unfinished.

WV: Yeah, right, you've got to color it in.

DH: It's my talent and so it don't take me long when I get my eye to frame it out.

WV: Um hmm.

DH: Well, then I go to work. And before I get a picture complete, something else—that's the way a artist is—there's something else comes to my mind and, you know, and it keep my mind occupied and, so. . . But you first have to be endowed, let's say.

WV: Um hmm.

DH: That's Snyder.

WV: Who is that?

DH: That comes in on the TV here, [Tom—Ed.] Snyder.

WV: Do you have a TV? Oh, right there, yeah. I didn't see it.

DH: And there's Snyder.

WV: And there's John F. Kennedy. Do you have a picture of him that you drew that from?

DH: No, I just draw him from memory.

WV: Ah, good for you.

DH: Yeah, there's his picture. There's, behind you.

WV: Oh, yeah, you do have one. Here's some empty pages in here, too.

DH: Hmm.

WV: There's some empty pages in here, too, you can still use.

DH: I'm glad to know it, because I. . .

WV: You're running out of paper, huh?

DH: Yeah, running out of paper. Yep. I ain't going to do no drawing today, though. That's Christ on the floor [a drawing—Ed.].

WV: You don't draw on Sundays?

DH: No. I have. You see Crucifixions in a lot of books, \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. If you sit down and think about it, you know.

WV: Yeah. Now, I think Andy has a little sculpture of the Crucifixion too.

DH: Yeah, I just made that.

WV: Do you have any more like that?

DH: No.

WV: It's like the whole Bible has been illustrated by you.

DH: Oh, yeah.

WV: Oooh.

DH: Well, when I make my figures, when you come down to these pictures, I make them where you can understand what they mean. I make them talking, you might say.

WV: That's one of the Romans there?

DH: Yeah. Well, you see I had to reverse the position of that picture to show you that he wasn't \_\_\_\_, this Roman wasn't \_\_\_\_ back here; he's watching Christ, see?

WV: Yeah, that's interesting.

DH: Yeah, that's where I was right lucky, you know. I changed the position of my picture.

WV: Um hmm. You're very inventive with these pictures, you know.

DH: Oh yeah.

WV: You're very creative.

DH: Well, that's my talent, and I've been like that all my life.

WV: How long have you been selling pictures and sculptures?

DH: Oh, well, ever since I've been a master in it, over 50-something years.

WV: Oh, boy.

DH: And that \_\_\_\_, when he was [haunting, hurting] me.

WV: Have your drawings changed much over the years?

DH: No, uh uh. Um hmm. That's Archie Bunker.

WV: Yeah, right, I recognize him. That's great.

DH: Yeah, Archie Bunker.

WV: [reading:] "President Davis leaves Richmond, Virginia, was captured but never tried, the War Between the States."

DH: They overtaken him.

WV: Right.

DH: Um hmm. He had the government of the cabinet, you know.

WV: \_\_\_\_ right there.

DH: At that time, you know, when they, they used those carts, two-wheeled carts.

WV: Yeah, that's right. Where were you born?

DH: I was borned out down near in Watkinsville.

WV: Watkinsville, that's not too far from here, is it?

DH: Um hmm, yep. \_\_\_\_ home.

WV: How long were you in Europe?

DH: Oh, I stayed over there two years.

WV: You know, I was born over there.

DH: Were you?

WV: In Holland.

DH: No.

WV: I was born over there.

DH: Were you?

WV: I came here when I was fourteen.

DH: Oh, boy.

WV: We really appreciated what you people did, you know, back then. World War I and World War II.

DH: No.

WV: Made us free again. You were there in World War I, right?

DH: Yeah. Yeah, I left New York and landed over in Liverpool, England. And then we went across Dover Strait. I don't know if you know where that is or not.

WV: Right, I know it.

DH: Dover Strait and went to the low country. As they doing it from that, Cher and Sonny Bono.

WV: Right. (chuckles)

DH: And the little girl. And we go across—that's a little bunny [referring to a drawing—WV]. We go across Dover Strait to the French country, and then, you know. . .

WV: Right. Were you in the infantry?

DH: Hmm.

WV: Infantry?

DH: No, medical.

WV: Medical, good for you.

DH: [referring to a drawing—WV:] Red Skelton. You know him?

WV: Sure. "Good morning to you all."

DH: Him right there. He come on the screen and said, "Good morning to you all."

WV: Um hmm.

DH: Yeah, Red Skelton.

WV: "I will not run for President again of the United States." Yeah, I remember when he said that. Did you see that on TV when he said that?

DH: Yeah, that is Richard Nixon.

WV: Oh, and Louis Armstrong?

DH: No, I mean that "I will not run for President," that's Richard Nixon.

WV: Yeah, I know.

DH: Yeah. I didn't vote for him, no how.

WV: Hmm, good.

DH: I didn't like him.

WV: I didn't either. (chuckles)

DH: I didn't like him. Of course somebody has to be president, but. . .

WV: Yes.

DH: I can read some parts of a person about his past life, and you have to go the majority, and the majority didn't think so well of Richard Nixon, and so I didn't vote for him. [The material from here to the end of this tape side was added by Volkersz. Apparently, the Archives copy of the tape is not complete—Ed.] And the majority don't speak well for Ronald Reagan. Because, see, he came in on the rich man foundation. He had \_\_\_\_\_ plenty

when he came, so I don't take too much side with him. 'Course, there's somebody gotta. . .

**[Tape 1, side B; Volkercz' No. H1-B]**

DH: \_\_\_\_\_. So that's what you need. You need somebody to reach down and get your people—you know that—and have a \_\_\_\_\_. We made a picture of Lazarus and Abraham in the land of promises.

WV: Yeah.

DH: And \_\_\_\_\_ was in Hell. I don't know whether it was here; I've never known where Hell was.

WV: (chuckles)

DH: But I had to give it a picture, you know.

WV: Right, I understand.

DH: You know, give it an idee [idea—WV].

WV: I understand.

DH: That's Mr. Lincoln.

WV: That's great. That's a nice picture.

DH: Yeah, that makes a nice one.

WV: And there's Christ on the Cross again.

DH: Um hmm.

WV: Oh, what's going on here? [unintelligible] [Reads:] "Sinful woman." Oooh, there's Satan.

DH: That's him. They say that I make my pictures where you can understand. If anything, you can understand enough to get by.

WV: Right.

DH: I make them talking, see.

WV: Right, I really like that. You really explain what they're saying and what they're doing.

DH: Yeah, uh huh.

WV: [leafs through drawings for some time]

DH: That is [Diara]. That's in Cincinnati.

WV: Oh, right.

DH: In Cincinnati.

WV: Right.

DH: And he is going in Texas. You know, his father had much land in Texas and he's going out there to close a trade with the buyer. And he's telling the mamma to take the baby until he comes back, see.

WV: Right. That explains it very well.

DH: Diara.

WV: Um hmm. Here's an empty page too.

DH: Yep.

WV: This is "Anne Curtis, stage actor, after 60 years, with her cat." That's great. "Queen of Sheba and King Solomon."

DH: Um hmm. I read a lot and then I do the work, and then I, that's why I read.

WV: I understand.

DH: To get an idee.

WV: You read the Bible pretty regularly?

DH: Oh yeah. Have two Bibles.

WV: Yeah, it's right there.

DH: There's one right there, and. . . I don't complete them; I just read certain pieces of \_\_\_\_\_, and then I get an idea from there.

WV: So then you draw.

DH: Yeah. No man read the Bible complete, I don't believe.

WV: No, I doubt it.

DH: Do, he'd lose his mind. Wonder where'd Andy go.

WV: He had to go see somebody.

DH: I thought he was going to bring some food back.

WV: You want me to go get some?

DH: Now, I. . .

WV: Because I just want to sit here and look at the drawings.

DH: Well, that's. . . I thought he went out \_\_\_\_\_ getting out. He said something about going and getting some food.

WV: Well, shall I go get you some?

DH: Well, you don't know where to go.

WV: Well, maybe you can tell me.

DH: Well, now, out here; it's not very far.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: Oh, sure.

DH: Yeah. I'll put that to use. I may do it today. It don't take me long to accomplish something.

WV: Once you get an idea, you just sit down and draw it, huh?

DH: Yeah. Well, that's all I have to do. Eat and be merry! (laughs) Tomorrow you may die.

WV: Does drawing make you happy?

DH: Oh yes. That's [like, life] entertainment. Yeah. It's kind of like food, but a nourishment for the body. You see?

WV: That's right.

DH: When you have food, \_\_\_\_\_ food, you be like myself now; you feel better. Because that was made for you. And it's the same way through this, you know. Yeah. Here, I'll put this away.

WV: How much are the drawings?

DH: Ahh, (clears his throat) I'm afraid that you bite off more than you can. . . [evidently Volkersz has a piled up a fairly large stack—Ed.].

WV: Oh, no, I just want to choose a few. I just want to know. . .

DH: Those. . . Let me show you.

WV: Okay.

DH: These, this size, is \$20, and that size there, that's a bigger. . .

WV: Yeah.

DH: See, I've got to go according to. . .

WV: Size?

DH: . . .my size of the book, see.

WV: So how much are the bigger ones?

DH: Ahh, those little ones is \$20.

WV: Yeah.

DH: And the big ones is I think \$40.

WV: Oh, I thought Andy said they were \$25.

DH: Huh?

WV: I thought Andy said they were \$25.

DH: Well. . . No, Andy. . . Maybe Andy got some for \$25 \_\_\_\_\_. Not mine. I tell you what I can do. Now, it's just between you, me, and the gatepost. You see, I do them by sizes.

WV: Right.

DH: And the book, now, you take that book there, it costs very small. Well, there not much room on the pages to make the figures, see.

WV: Right. I understand.

DH: See the point?

WV: Right.

DH: And so the material has to come out of the price, plus the experience of the artist. All that price is combined.

WV: I understand.

DH: And so that takes care of the situation of the difference between these prices. And of course, I could make a cut. But I don't like to do that because I have them come here from Chicago and they don't budge on the price. And when you have a talent, your brain, you can't give them away.

WV: Oh, no. I don't ask you to. No, no.

DH: You can't give them away.

WV: Can you take a check?

DH: Oh yes.

WV: Check's okay?

DH: But these people are. . . I'm afraid. . . I would rather have the cash, because I'm afraid that it'd be like I once had to do, here. I had to wait over, because these people didn't [receive] this check, you know, you see. Now this is a National Bank here, of course. Do you do business there?

WV: My bank is in Kansas City, you know. But it's a National Bank, you know.

DH: Um hmm.

WV: So it'd be, the money is good, you know.

DH: Well, okay.

WV: I would help me, you know.

DH: Yeah. Well, I \_\_\_\_\_.

WV: I'll just pick a few and then we'll decide, okay?

DH: Okay, okay. Yeah, I [run the risk]. Well, since it's National Bank, well, of course I know. We have two or three different kind of banks here, but I do business through the National, yeah.

WV: Um hmm. [continues looking; pause in conversation]

*[Interruption in taping]*

DH: All the time. We have wonderful people scattered all over the country.

WV: All over, right, \_\_\_\_\_.

DH: Um hmm. And I and Miss Ramona have been dealing with each other for, oh, Lord, three or four years. And I tell her, I says, "You seem like my sister." And she said, "Well, Mr. Hall," says, "You seem like my brother."

WV: Isn't that wonderful?

DH: And that's the way we go. Yeah, yeah.

WV: That's wonderful. Would you think \$100 for these drawings would be all right?

DH: Yeah, yeah.

WV: That would be great.

DH: Yeah. Now, I go sell off no more until she come, though. (laughs)

WV: Uh huh. Yeah, I don't blame you.

DH: No, I don't sell off no more until she comes.

WV: Oh, that's great. I'm real glad to have them.

DH: Because I want to save some for her.

*[Interruption in taping]*

WV: . . . painter.

DH: Oh yeah. Well, we can agree. I didn't know that.

WV: Yep. So the first name is Dilmus, D-i-l-m-u-s?

DH: M-u-s, that's right, yeah. That's correct. [unintelligible] [pause] How long you been a-working?

WV: Oh, about 20 years.

DH: Oh.

WV: I'm also a teacher. I'm like Andy. I teach at an art school in Kansas City. And I collect folk art.

DH: If I can get a break, I'm going to come up your place of business and. . .

WV: Okay.

DH: . . .and go to northern section. I'm going to take in New York and go around west.

WV: Would you like to see the sights?



DH: Yeah. Yeah, because I don't have no childrens, and so when I lock up, well, everything is safe and secure.

WV: There's \$100, sir.

DH: Yeah, okay, thank you.

WV: Thank you very much.

DH: Yeah.

WV: You don't have any children?

DH: No. Never had none.

WV: You never had any?

DH: My wife, they operated on her, and the doctor, he was a nice \_\_\_\_ doctor and he told me, he said, "Hall," he said, "If you ain't had no children," he said, "you ain't going to have none. It might kill her." So he cut out her ovaries.

WV: I see, that's too bad.

DH: Well, no, it ain't.

WV: It ain't?

DH: No. What is to be, listen, will be.

WV: Yeah, that's true.

DH: Yep. But she didn't die from that. She got well. But she had attack, had a heart attack.

WV: Ohh, how old was she?

DH: Oh, she was. . . She'd a been older than I because she was older than I when I married her.

WV: I see.

DH: But the doctor here couldn't save her. You know, that heart attack business, when it hits you so bad, boom! It's got you like that.

WV: Yeah.

DH: And she died right in this room.

WV: I'll be darned.

DH: And I was through there, in the kitchen, cooking. That morning, at quarter till eight, and I had the door open, where I can see up in here. I'd built up a fire and had her some water on. That's in the wintertime.

WV: Right.

DH: \_\_\_\_ take her \_\_\_\_ and to. . . [My mind] told me, he says, "You go in there and kick her and wake her up," he says, "she's asleep." And she really was sleeping. And I got in here, she was cold as piece of beef. See.

WV: Hmm.

DH: Died just like that. And I said. . . It worried me for a couple of years, because I shouldn't have been thataway. I was just was worried that I missed her so, you see.

WV: Yeah, I understand.

DH: But what nature do, there's nobody can interfere, see.

WV: Right, right.

DH: And I said, if she had of told me. . . I wasn't in no hurry, sitting in there eating. If she had a-told me to come and consult with me, that she was fixing to go, I would have felt better. But the plan is not that way.

WV: Right, you've got to just accept it.

DH: Yeah. So I said, "Well, what was to be, had to be." So. I just said, "Well, I'll never make another commitment."

WV: Right, can't do that.

DH: Yeah. I like women, but. . . You married?

WV: Yep.

DH: Got a family?

WV: Yep. Got a seven-year-old boy.

DH: Oh! (laughs) Are you going to make an other children?

WV: Am I going to what?

DH: You going to make other children?

WV: Not necessarily. I don't think he wants to be an artist, but time will tell. We'll see. Whatever he wants to be he can be.

DH: Yeah. Well, that's his life, you know. You can choose the road you want to go.

WV: Right.

DH: Yeah. And just like me, now. I choose what I wanted to be. And I put my interest in it, see.

WV: That's right.

DH: I make it pay off. And I believe nature is satisfied when you have a talent that He give you—let's go back to Him—and He grants you the opportunity through life. I think you ought to appreciate it. And he will bless you. He was thinking [of] you, on and on, and on and on. He knew me. I trust Him, see. I'm not perfect but I use the talent that He give me.

WV: I understand.

DH: You remember that this book here says when they were given, those fellows, the different talents, and He come back later to see what they were doing. And some of them were working and doubling up with their talent, see.

WV: That's right.

DH: And there was one fellow that had \_\_\_\_\_. [unintelligible] He were busy! I don't know what kind of business he had in view, but this good book here say he didn't have time to fool with God. And God come in asking him about his talent. And he told him, he hid it in a bushel. See? Instead of putting it to an [exchange], which is the point. And He rebuked him and told him, "Here take that which thou hast and give it to one that has." See? So I'm still saying that this book there is too right just to lie.

WV: That's right.

DH: And whatever it says, you can bet on it. That's the reason why I keep them.

WV: And you've lived by that all your life.

DH: Oh yeah. Oh well, I've tried to.

WV: Well, you tried, yeah. That's important.

DH: Yeah, right. And this is the Holy Bible, and this is the New Testament. The life of Christ.

WV: Right.

DH: From the day he come until the day he departed from life. This book here tells the story. (chuckles)

WV: That's right.

DH: Aaah. It's what's known as the "red edition," which is the. . . Speaking of the Messiah.

WV: I see. Oh, it's in red whenever it speaks of the Messiah.

DH: Yeah.

WV: I see.

DH: That was the blood that was shed for us. When they slayed Him in the side, and they said out come blood and water, as a testimony for us. And when He appeared before His disciples, he memorized that to 'em. Told them that as often they done those things that He commanded, it would be a testimony for himself, yeah. Are you sure [unintelligible] that you are falling in line according to my death and my supper? That's what He told they. That's what that book say. And I believe it.

WV: Yeah. I do too.

DH: Yeah. I know it was before my time, but there was a lot things happen before you come in the world.

WV: You bet.

DH: Yeah. And it don't mean that because you didn't see it that it's untrue.

WV: Right.

DH: Because there was Thomas, you remember. And he came to the other disciples before He came to Thomas, and Thomas, he was a unbeliever.

WV: That's right.

DH: So he waited until He got Thomas \_\_\_\_\_ of the others, then He came before him, and told him to Thomas, "Reach forth thy hand." That's what that book says.

WV: That's right.

DH: And Thomas raises his hand. He told him, says, "Feel the nail print in the palm of my hand." And Thomas did that. And He says, "That's where I was tacked to the cross." Of course, He was in a spirit. Yeah. Because Thomas, he doubted it. But he had to do that for conviction. No conviction, there's a \_\_\_\_\_. That's what \_\_\_\_\_ may have \_\_\_\_\_. Convincing. And He told Thomas that now, "Thrust your hand in my side." Thomas did that, and he felt the hole where that old soldier speared him in the side. He said, "This is where they speared me in the side." He said, "Now Thomas, better are those that have seen"—he was talking to him—"and believe." Because Thomas said, he himself said he just wouldn't believe, that why he sold down the \_\_\_\_\_. And He said, "There will be some that haven't seen, but yet they will believe." And then He vanished away from Thomas. But He had to work Thomas over. (laughs)

WV: It took a while.

DH: He worked him over, didn't he. Yeah.

WV: When exactly were you born?

DH: Huh?

WV: What is your birthdate? When were you born?

DH: I was born in 1901.

WV: What day and what month.

DH: Uh, fifteenth of March.

WV: Fifteenth of March.

DH: Uh huh.

WV: So you're 83.

DH: Yeah.

WV: Boy, good for you.

DH: Yeah, I'm in my eighties. Hitting 'em heavy.

WV: (laughs) Good for you. Hitting them heavy.

DH: Hitting them heavy.

WV: Well, you seem to be doing pretty well.

DH: Well, I'm thankful of it.

WV: Are you in pretty good health?

DH: Well, I have arthritis, from the World War I.

WV: Oh, is that when you got it?

DH: And I told them at the time, I says, "Take us as American, we'll have a good warm bed and bring us over here." Of course we had to abide by what our superior said. And that's all. . . In all of combat you have to obey your superior, because you don't go in under the boss of the army. (laughs) No.

WV: I've been in the army, I know.

DH: And now my boss [is] you.

WV: Yeah, it sure does.

DH: They got rules and regulations, I'm saying, that you must abide by. Don't, you don't stay in the army long.

WV: Right.

DH: There are two things they'll do to you: they'll disqualify you, one, and they'll put you over for a firing squad, too, and blow you down. They've got their \_\_\_\_\_, see.

WV: You were in the trenches?

DH: Heh?

WV: You were in the trenches?

DH: No, I was behind the battle line. We was in the medical, in the hospital, you know.

WV: Right.

DH: We cared for the wounded—and them that was blown all to pieces.

WV: Hmm.

DH: Oh, I never realized that. . . Well, I knowed God was merciful enough to carry me through the battle and bring me back to New York, where I departed from. I knew that. But I guess they didn't have that faith. Because there were so many people, like myself, desiring to come back to America. It is not so; they over there now. We have one of the beautifulest cemeteries in Europe.

WV: I've seen it, yeah.

DH: You see it?

WV: Yeah.

DH: Oh, no. Just as far as you could see, those little white. . .

WV: White crosses, exactly.

DH: Yeah. You know what I'm talking about.

WV: Yeah, exactly. But you got arthritis there, you think?

DH: Oh yes, I've got it, and the doctor, they are working. . . I've got some medicine here now, from the doctor.

And it's good, but the doctors, they can't cure it. Arthritis is embedded, exposure in the bone. I used to [cut] it. Now when the cold settles in the, let's say the marrow in your bone, doctor can't go in that bone. They can give you something to feed your circulation.

WV: Or to ease the pain.

DH: Right, now you're getting it. But they can't go in that bone. Lord knows that when he made man.

WV: So you've had arthritis for a long time?

DH: Well, it came on me about two years ago—severe. And I've gone to the hospital, and some of the best old doctors know what to do about arthritis, they practice on me and give me some pills. And they were like [sounds like: mustard irons], I couldn't do nothing but beat them up or crush them. And I taken them for a while, and they's hard as everything for me to swallow. So I go on back there to the hospital and told them that those pills was too great for my [cause]. They said, "Why are you speaking?" I said, "Well," I says, "I have to eat them, because you can't swallow them, I sez you drink too much water." They said, "Well, we'll tell you what we'll do." Said, "We'll give you a stronger pill, very small, and one that will pass you throat and go down," say, "because we want it to go inside of you." I said, "Well, let's do that." And so I had some little ones here.

WV: The same ones here. These here?

DH: Yeah. And so he said, "Now these are double strength material and they're easy to swallow." I said, "Well, let's ride with them." So I got those big ones in there now, but I don't fool with them, unless I eat a piece of bread or something, kind of like a gun were to knock it down. See?

WV: Right. Too big.

DH: So I was taking those and I got along all right, and so, there you are. But I'm not, a, let's say, totally well person, because once that arthritis get in bad in your system, you got it for a long time.

WV: Now does your neighbor cook for you, or who cooks for you?

DH: I cook myself.

WV: Oh, you do! Oh, good for you.

DH: Yeah, I got a electric stove in there.

WV: Oh, I see. Terrific.

DH: Yeah, I go in there and smother up something, burn up something, and. . . (laughter) And then I eat at the \_\_\_\_\_ [name of a restaurant he eats at—WV] place here, and eat at the waffle place, which is up there. According to how you come in, you may have passed that waffle [place] there up there on the right. And I go up there and eat, and my neighbors here, they sell me coffee and anything else I want. I guess I'm all right.

WV: That's good.

DH: I'm just living along, that's it. But if it please God for me to do that, I can't argue.

WV: Right.

DH: Because He got me life in His hands, see. And He's help where the help done fail, that's what he say. It's right there, it's [quoted] right here.

WV: Well, you've got a reason to be living because you're making all those beautiful drawings.

DH: Yeah, um hmm. And the people pay me for them, and I didn't bring this in the world like this. And you know what? The secret part of it is the way I see it and the way I've heard talk of it years ago, you bring nothing in the world, and you go out you don't carry nothing. That's the answer. See? You're naked while you're in life, and you leave it right while you're naked.

WV: I see.

DH: Yeah. You ain't going to carry nothing away.

WV: No, not a thing. That's for sure.

DH: (laughs) Yeah.

WV: Well, that's terrific. Well, I'll leave you to your drawing.

DH: Yeah.

WV: It was sure nice visiting with you.

DH: Well, I'm going to spread the news of you, and as I so said, a little later on when my co-worker, Miss Ramona, get here, well, she always bring me a fistful of money, because me and her have been cooperating for a long time.

WV: That's nice.

DH: And she love me and I love her. She's a white woman, I know it, I'm a black man. But beneath the skin, in the heart.

WV: Everybody's the same.

DH: Underneath.

WV: Right.

DH: You got to answer me. (laughs)

WV: Yeah.

DH: You wasn't born yesterday, was you? (laughs)

WV: Been around a few years. If people in Kansas City really like your drawings, I'll come back and we'll. . .

DH: Yeah.

WV: I'll come and get some more.

DH: Yeah, 'cause now, you give them an answer, because the work of anyone proves a lot of things, their work, see. And I have stuff in California. I have it in Chicago. I had a minister to come from Chicago plus he, the minister was one, and this other guy was, he runned some kind of a beauty shop. But however, they drove through from Chicago and came here and they stopped at the market here. I don't know whether you paid no attention to the market here. But however they requested for Hall and so someone come out and pointed them down the street west on the \_\_\_\_\_. And then when I know they was parked out here, and we introduced ourselves and they made known what their business was. [The material from here to the end of this tape side was added by WV from his original—Ed.] So we just got to talking, and they got to looking, and they bought up I think it was \$140 worth of my material.

WV: Boy.

DH: Carried it back to Chicago.

WV: That's great.

DH: So your wake goes, it goes behind you.

*[End of interview]*