

Interview with William William W. Sherrill, January 11th, 2019

Transcribed by John Brundrett

- John Brundrett: 00:00 This is an oral history interview with William William W. Sherrill. It is being conducted on Friday, January 11th, 2019, at Mr. Sherrill's home in Houston, Texas, and concerns his life growing up in depression era Houston, his time in the Marine Corps and the federal government, and his experiences as an entrepreneur and educator. The interviewer is John Brundrett, and Emily Vinson is operating the audio visual equipment. All right, so let's start off. Can you describe what it was like growing up in Houston during the depression?
- William W. Sherrill: 00:34 You know when you're a kid . . . when I remember that only as a kid . . . I thought that's the way things were. We spent a lot of time barefoot, swam in Buffalo Bayou, did all the freedom things that didn't have any responsibility. Did not understand the word "responsibility." And so, it was a natural time for me, not a hard time. But for everybody else, I could see it was really hard.
- John Brundrett: 01:06 Was there anything that went on in your childhood because of the depression that maybe influenced how you reacted to things later in your life?
- William W. Sherrill: 01:18 Yeah, I think the freedom really grew on me. Because I enjoyed being able to spend my time doing things I enjoyed. Maybe valueless, but I enjoyed them. And so, I think that's probably it.
- John Brundrett: 01:33 In your book, you mention you worked for a few small businesses. I was wondering if you could maybe talk about those a little bit.
- William W. Sherrill: 01:41 I actually . . . since I had no money, I was always looking for a chance to trade my labor for some benefit to me. When the various business men would, during the depression, would come around and try to make 10 cents off the corner lot, they'd set up things like the bicycle shops. They set up an Ingo Bike thing, which I don't think lasted very long. What happened, it was like a big scooter where a grown up person could stand on the platform of the scooter. The front wheel was small and the back wheel was large with the axle off center, so that as you went around, it bobbed up and down as it moved forward. There was a

spring in the whole thing. That is, the whole thing was springy itself. As you would bob up and down, you would propel it, and once you got in the swing of that thing bobbing, you really got some considerable speed.

William W. Sherrill: 02:43

Of course . . . I naturally . . . when he set that up, I went to him and offered to do whatever he needed done for a few free rides. He found that easy. That's the deal we made. It was things like that. That Ingo Bike I think was the most outstanding, but I did everything from the toy locomotives all the way up. It was a fun time.

John Brundrett: 03:13

Could you tell us a little bit about your experience in World War II?

William W. Sherrill: 03:17

In World War II, I got lots of experience. I joined the Marine Corp as a result of World War II. It was a grand alternative to having to continue in school. I had gotten through some way for seventh grade, but I was in the eighth grade when the war came along. I had finished the first semester of the eighth grade, was on the Christmas break when Pearl Harbor was bombed. I failed the first semester, but I saw the chance to join the Marine Corp, which I did. That got me a look at the real world.

William W. Sherrill: 04:04

Of course, you start off with boot camp. Boot camp in the Marine Corp was the same for everybody. They didn't care if you were 15 like I was, or 50. It's the same thing. What it is, it puts you under some real stress, both physically and mentally, then takes you out of it the way they want you to be. They spend the first half beating you down from something into nothing, and then, they bring you back the way they want you to be. Well, the first half of it was easy for me. I was already nothing . . . so I thought this was natural in the first half. Then, the second half, when they brought me back and turned me into a Marine, the pride I felt for the first time in my life, in myself, was remarkable. I just was a changed person.

John Brundrett: 04:59

I read this in your book, could you talk a little bit about Palmyra Island? Because as I understand it you were there for some time.

William W. Sherrill: 05:06

I was lucky there. Our whole group went over to Pearl Harbor as soon as we graduated from boot camp. Again, they were looking for reinforcements overseas as quick as

they could come. The whole boat load went over. Out of that boatload there were eight of us [who] were selected in some fashion to reinforce Palmyra. Palmyra Island is about 900 miles south of Hawaii. It's a beautiful tropical atoll. It's a rim of [indecipherable] volcano. It had palm trees and coral, and it has the wonderful tropical fish. You think you've seen a tropical fish in the museum, you should see them in the wild. It was just absolutely great. The air was wonderful. The food, of course had to be basic. We didn't get any sweet. We got one pint of ice cream every two weeks. It was very much rationed.

William W. Sherrill: 06:13

I got a chance to spend 16 months there growing up, getting trained by veteran Marines. Marines that were really Marines taught me the business. And healthy, I didn't get to eat the normal sweets that teenagers eat. I got a limited, that sort of thing. It just was a healthy growing experience, both physically and mentally. And I became a leader of men. I had an assistant. When I was given a 30 caliber gun as a result of the tests, I got assigned an assistant, first leadership I'd ever had in my life. This vast crew of one, but I learned.

John Brundrett: 07:04

Would you be willing to talk about your combat experience on Guam and then Iwo Jima?

William W. Sherrill: 07:08

Yep, my first. Well, I was at the Bougainville operation, but it was over by the time I got there, so I really didn't get any experience. In Guam, I got experience, and it happened really basically in two different situations. One was a situation that the platoon I was assigned to was a Bazooka man. As a Bazooka man, in those days, you were assigned to a platoon and a lieutenant. The lieutenant picked your targets. He told you what to shoot at, and that's all you shot at. Landed at Guam with the lieutenant in charge, and I was following him around. We go all over the place for six days, and no action or limited action. Then, finally we get into it, and he gets hit and he gets taken out. I'm now on my own for the first time. I joined three guys that are the three left from the platoon.

William W. Sherrill: 08:04

We started with 49 men, and they started into this valley to flush a couple of snipers. Well, they weren't a couple of snipers. When they started in that valley a withering fire, say about small arms, withering small arms. I mean if you can think of a sustained vast valley full of fire, that's what it

was. As a result of that the platoon, which the lieutenant had stupidly not held a reserve, he had the whole thing up. Must have lost most of his men in the first blast. They were down all over the place. We could see them. Again I fell into position, and I got to thinking how can I use this bazooka? All I could see was brush. We were up in the clear part, but there was a big tree coming out of it. The guys at Bougainville had taught me that the Japanese are inclined to set up their headquarters or their weapons near a big tree. I figured that that's a good target, and now left or right of it? I figured opposite the . . . Look at the thing they were shooting at, the platoon headquarters, so probably the left side.

William W. Sherrill: 09:19

I lined up and I fired that first bazooka round. When it exploded . . . It makes a hell of an explosion . . . When it exploded the withering fire stopped . . . I mean like a switch . . . and it never started again. I fired two more rounds, and I was out of ammunition at that stage of the game. We were then replaced when we were pulled out of the line. The outfit that replaced us put in an artillery barrage on the valley the next day. They went in, and these two snipers turned out to be 243 Japanese. We were attacking up a force that could sustain a withering fire, but they cleared that out. We then, the 14 of us, we were assigned a new lieutenant the next day. The next day, we started attacking up the mountain towards Mount Licho, which was the Japanese main headquarters it turned out.

William W. Sherrill: 10:19

It was a twin peak. Our two platoons, that were affective, were moving in front, and we, the 14 of us, we're trailing on behind. The two platoons take one of the twin peaks, and leave the other one for us to clean up. We were assigned to go, the 14 of us, and take that other peak. We round this tank that's in the road and got its muzzle up. It's been firing on the peak. As we round it and get in front of, it fires that 90 millimeter cannon. It knocked us down. The muzzle blast knocked us goofy. That muzzle blast was really something. We get through that and got ourselves back together again, and we attack. It's typical of an attack up a hill. They're rolling grenades and that sort of thing. We were firing back at them and what have you.

William W. Sherrill: 11:13

When we get to the top, the lieutenant made it, and then, I made it and my assistant made it. We're the only three that made it to the top. We were clearing out the positions and that sort of thing, and all of the sudden, about 40 Japanese helmets pop up in a ditch across the way. Now, here is an experience. I had never had an officer speak to me, much less ask me advice. The lieutenant, remember, he's new, first time in combat. He turns to me, and he says, "Should we pull back?" Now, I'm flabbergasted, but I automatically reacted and said, "Lieutenant, if we pull back, Crawford will send us back again, and we were lucky to get here alive the first time." So we didn't pull back. In a little bit, it turns out the 40 helmets weren't attacking us. They were trying to get out of there. It was another one of our outfits coming up the far side, and they were trying to retreat. It turned out they were successful, and they got out of the way. It ended the day with us filling in the line. The line's consolidated at the top of the hill. The end of the fight. The fight of course went on for weeks afterwards, but it was nothing. Never another hot shoot like the two we had.

John Brundrett: 12:44

That's when that photo was taken that we have, correct?

William W. Sherrill: 12:46

Exactly.

John Brundrett: 12:48

How about your experience at Iwo Jima?

William W. Sherrill: 12:50

Iwo Jima was a one alone. As in all small islands it's time is kept in days. It was a 36-day campaign. Example, the flag raising, which everybody thinks of as an ultimate victory was on the fourth day. It was the very beginning rather than the end, and I was aboard ship still. The fourth and fifth division made the main attack, and the third division, mine, was held in floating reserve. So I landed on the seventh day. I got to see the flag raising from being aboard ship. It was like a movie when you were aboard ship. You watch over the rail, and this just outlines that sort of thing. You got to see the action and what was happening in it, and I saw the flag raising.

William W. Sherrill: 13:49

Then, when I landed, we were of course unopposed at that stage because we landed behind the line. As I moved up in the next few days about the middle of the second airfield . . . it was on the third day as we were moving into position. We were crossing this airfield, so we were strung out. Then it was sort of a rise up to the natural land because the

airfield had been dug in. The company was setting up on the flat land to make an attack on a ridge that was about 200 yards away. Just as they all got lined up, the damnedest mortar barrage I've ever seen came. It hit. You could look up, and you could see mortars in the air. They're very slow. They must have had a ton of mortars. Of course, a good mortar man can put two in the air at once, but that's about it. Boy, this was like a shower.

William W. Sherrill: 14:53

Lucky me, I'm still on the airfield. I'm the only man left out of our outfit down on the airfield, and the previous outfit had dug a foxhole in. It was below level. I was that deep in the thing, but I was afraid one of those mortars was going to come in that hole. We had three machine guns set up on the ridge looking over the ridge to fire, and we had three mortars set up on the airfield itself. Those guys all got wiped out. As I watched, they all got blown up, and so I thought we were going to lose everything. It just really, really looked bad. After a while back, over the ridge, comes the platoon sergeant. He's saying, "Pull back." We do. We pull back across.

William W. Sherrill: 15:46

There's not a whole lot of us. We get back across the airfield, and we set up on the far side of the airstrip for retaining defense. Then, we watch the mortar barrage go on for another hour, and finally, it lets up. As soon as it lets up, platoon sergeant says back we go. So we went back across the airfield and set up in that space we should have been in the first spot. But we were just a few of us. I don't know how many because never got to count that. We knew we were just in a hold position, but if they had attacked us, we were red meat because we were really not opened up to defend. At night, the next couple of nights, we could hear their tanks squeaking and the treads squeaking. Boy, if they had come, we'd really be dead. Lucky us, they didn't attack. Then, on the third day, the relief outfit came through us. They moved on across, and they took that ridge that we were supposed to take. That night, the ridge blew up. I mean, the ridge blew up. Wasn't an explosion. Turns out there was a bomb dump for the airfield under the ridge.

William W. Sherrill: 17:07

Come morning, we could see the guys digging each other out from the landslides and things that occurred, but they had secured the thing. The next day we moved in front of the ridge to be part of it, but there were only 14 of us, so there wasn't a big reinforcement. We were casual troops.

But we were assigned an area that was not too hot. There were three of us that night. I had the three of us and I had two others, an automatic rifleman and his assistant that I put out on flank to cover the open flank. The three of us in this big . . . wasn't a fox hole . . . a shell hole. We decided that we'd take turns standing watch. I took the first watch, and at 10 O'clock, I turned to wake up my replacement. There up on this bluff behind us is a silhouette of a Japanese helmet, and just as I looked, an arm came up with a grenade. I've got two guys asleep in the hole. I've got no choice but to look for it. I go in the hole to look for it, and happily, it didn't come in with us.

William W. Sherrill: 18:22

Of course, they're awake. About that time I look up and another silhouette come up there. At this stage of the game, he ducked back down when I fired. I fired, but no idea I hit him. Then the arm came but no look. We all got ready for that grenade but don't know where it went. The next morning, the two guys in the other hole were dead. Either the first or the second grenade got in the hole with them. They got wiped out.

William W. Sherrill: 18:57

We were assigned to attack in a non-combat situation. Again, the brand new lieutenant and the 13 of us go with him and we get to the third airfield. There's still no resistance. I'm excited. It's the first time we're making any ground. So I'm worked up. I asked the lieutenant if he'd like me to scout across the open airfield. Of course, naturally, he took me up on it. I'm sure he looked at that as very brave on my part. The other thing they taught me was that the Japanese tend to let the scout through and attack the main force. I was going to get through and look see where the attack was coming from and warn them. But got through and got across that third airfield there wasn't any. They all came across. We then set up at the anti-aircraft up on the hill.

William W. Sherrill: 19:53

The Japanese had lowered their aircraft to fire at us, but anti-aircraft shells have a fuse that has a timer. It won't go off until a certain altitude to keep from blowing up the crews. These guys would fire at us, and they'd go whistling by us, and then, explode behind us somewhere. We got a little bit, scaring us. We got wiping them out, and they took off. Now we're all set to attack. We start up that ridge all together, and I'm behind my section of the line. Also, they were in a hole. I go to shame them out if it, and I got

Basnick, the automatic rifleman, that's following me. I said come on, "Basnick, let's go." As I turned around, there's this Japanese rifleman got me leveled off. He fires about the same time I see him. Boom, like that, my arm dropped. I go to one side. Basnick wipes him out, and whole line picks up. That's the last I saw of them. I became a non-combatant from that point forward.

John Brundrett: 21:01

Moving away from the war . . . Oh, sorry, moving away from the war, I'd like to hear a little bit about your various experiences of entrepreneurship. I was wondering if you could talk to us a little bit about your time with the Jamaica Corporation and its development of the . . .

William W. Sherrill: 21:19

The Jamaica Corporation was really, at the time . . . the way we formed it . . . was five of us, but two of us were active, Welcome Wilson and myself. He headed it. It was his idea to begin with, and he was the head of it and I was number two. He came up with the Jamaica Beach property as our first one. It went very slowly, and we worked really hard to get it going. I was looking elsewhere for opportunities and saw the Tiki Island property. I kept driving past it every time I'd drive down to old West Galveston. I'd look off to the right and the reeds. There weren't any land. There was nothing but reeds. I'd see these reeds and "boy, if we were there, I wouldn't have to drive another 30 minutes to get to Jamaica Beach." And I kept driving by. Finally, I decided, "I wonder if that's privately owned?" So I checked on it, and sure enough it was. Had four ownerships. The biggest being University of Texas.

William W. Sherrill: 22:21

I called this guy at the University of Texas and told him what we were looking for and [asked], "Do you sell it?" He says, "Yeah, we'll sell you it, but we won't sell you mineral rights. We'll sell you surface only." I said, "That's all we need. We don't have any diggers on our list." I bought that property, purchased it. Then the next piece to it was the second largest. I bought that for a little bit more than I paid Texas, but still very reasonable. Then they found out we were block land buying. Land goes straight up. The third piece I really paid for, and the fourth piece this guy won't sell. I've got everything but this one smallest piece, and I told him, "Here's my plan. I'm going to name a price for you that you won't get this price for another twenty years. If ours doesn't go through, you're going to be waiting forever. This is a good price I'm going to give you, and

then, I will not raise it. No matter what I will not, but if you and your wife want to go on a first class trip around the world, I'll throw that in to boot. Whatever you want, to boot, I'll do, but I won't raise the price."

William W. Sherrill: 23:43

This negotiation when on for six months. Finally, he says, "You really mean anything I want, you'll do?" "Anything I can get done, you go it." He says, "My daughter is going to the University of Texas, and she wants to be in this sorority and she can't get in." I said, "Are you telling me if you get your daughter in that sorority, you'll sell the land at the price?" "Right." I called a friend of mine at the governor's office and I told him what my problem is. He starts to laugh. I said, "Don't laugh, this is serious."

William W. Sherrill: 24:18

We worked it out, and sure enough, we got her in. I called him and I said, "Have you heard from your daughter?" He said, "She is happy as a clam." I said, "You're willing to sign at the price?" "Absolutely." That was the final buy, and I got Tiki Island under way, which turned out to be a really profitable deal. In the meantime, we'd started to buy a bank here in Houston. All kinds of businesses we got into.

John Brundrett: 24:50

Mr. Sherrill, you were telling us about some of your work as an entrepreneur, and we were talking about Tiki Island. Was there anything else you'd like to tell us about that?

William W. Sherrill: 25:01

Well, at that stage of the game, as Tiki began to develop, I had to come up to Houston to find other things, and at that stage, bought a bank and a savings and loan. We did the Fox Hall apartments. That was an interesting case by the way. The guys brought me in this situation roughly at the corner of Wirt [Road] and Interstate 10. It was 26 acres priced way below the market. Owned by a wealthy young man that had inherited the wealth. I looked it over, and it was really a bargain at the price, so I checked to see if it was usable because they had two bayous on the borders of it. Checked for pipelines. I checked for reasons that it would be on the market like that. Couldn't find them. I told the guy, "Go ahead and make him the offer." They make him the offer, and he changes the price. Just not significantly, but just changes it. I say, "Okay, give it to him." He changes it again.

William W. Sherrill: 26:20

I said, "Look, see if he'll come in and meet with us here in the office. I just want to sit in on it. I won't say anything. You guys handle the interview but keep him talking as long as you can. I just want to hear him." They brought him in, and they interviewed him, interviewed him. When they finished and left, they came back and I said, "Offer him cash." They said, "He won't take cash, he's rich. He doesn't need cash. In this market, it's not a good idea." I said, "Offer him cash." They did, and he took it. They asked me, "How did you know?" I said, "Well, I didn't know, but what he sounded like to me was that he was new in business. He really wasn't sure what he was doing, and cash everybody understands. He wouldn't be cheated by us in a cash deal." I figured just to make it simple was what he was after, not the value of it. I still think that's why. We got that, and as you know, that's turned out to be a bonanza.

William W. Sherrill: 27:33

That sort of thing. Got into this and that. Whatever offered the opportunity. See, land buying is wonderful because it's one decision. It's not like business. You don't make decisions, decisions, decisions. You make one decision to buy, and if you make it right, if the price is right, if you get that right and a thing goes, you sit there and wait for your decision to pay off more and more and more. Business doesn't work that way. You have to keep making decision after decision after decision. So land, I found very simple and very profitable in an area like Houston that's growing. Growth, land value, tied together.

John Brundrett: 28:15

This is a question still about entrepreneurship, but for a little bit later in your life. What were your most memorable projects during the time that you were at the head of Sherrill Financial Consultants?

William W. Sherrill: 28:31

Really, I didn't have any that stand out to me, didn't do any real coups. They were all relatively good deals. We didn't have bumlbers either, which I would remember. I think it was a pretty profitable, growth-rising time.

John Brundrett: 28:54

Okay. Just before you started that, because that's when you came back to Houston, I believe you worked in what you call the "big corporate world" for a couple years. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

William W. Sherrill: 29:05

Yeah. I worked with what was called a conglomerate at that stage. I was head of The Associates Corporation which was

a two million dollar . . . which at that time was a . . . That's a big corporation in those days. Then I sat on the board of Gulf and Western which was a big corporate conglomerate. The practices they had I discovered, I didn't like. One in particular sort of sums it up. It's called pump and dump. The conglomerate had 54 corporations. What we would do is use that corporate buying power. We would buy a company that was down, and we'd feed it business. It'd rise in value. When it got up high, we'd sell it and pull the business. Called pump and dump. They thought that was funny.

William W. Sherrill: 30:06

The other board members would laugh about that sort of thing, and it sort of got to me. I didn't feel right. I decided I couldn't stay. But before I made any great moves to move, I had a private jet. I had an apartment at the Waldorf Astoria and a \$500,000 [salary], which was a great salary at that stage of the game. I had a little problem, but I did finally pull out and just went back to doing entrepreneurship. My feeling about the big corporate world was not a good one.

John Brundrett: 30:52

Maybe something that was a little bit more cooperative. What could you tell us about your time working for the City of Houston?

William W. Sherrill: 31:00

The City of Houston was an interesting time because I was very young. I was just barely getting started. The reason I was working for the city of Houston was principally the great philanthropist that was backing the reform mayors of Houston. We had a very corrupt government, and he kept making it reform. The first one was Roy Hofheinz. That was the first time I went to that. Mr. Smith, R.E. Bob Smith was the philanthropist. He was civil defense head of Houston, but he didn't want to run the department of course. So he hired me to run the civil defense department, which was just a standard sort of thing but made up a great deal of volunteers. Boy, you learn something when you work with volunteers. They can be tremendously helpful, and they can really drive you crazy.

William W. Sherrill: 32:03

For example, we decided to do evacuation. We put up these signs along evacuation routes identifying the route. This guy, I had him supervise the putting of the signs, this volunteer. He puts them all facing out instead of in. We have to go and redo the whole damn thing. That was a lesson. At any rate, I served in that position until we had

the city treasurer [who] was caught stealing houses. Now how do you steal a house? That's not easy. When the city would buy right of way, there'd be houses on it. A brother in law of his was a house mover. He'd come in and jack the house up and haul it off. He was caught at that. He was fired, and that was a top position, so they sort of moved everybody around. I wound up with the city courts department, first time I carried a badge.

William W. Sherrill: 33:08

That was an interesting assignment in that both of them were administrative but not critical administrative things. I got some good initial experience. Then, Roy Hofheinz had eight councilmen. All of them were on the take. Hofheinz decides that he's going to get rid of them. He calls a special election to get rid of these eight guys. They have a slogan I'll never forget, "How can eight men be wrong and one man right." The net of it was Hofheinz got put out, not the eight councilmen. I left with him and went back to selling real estate.

John Brundrett: 33:58

In your book, and this is something I'm really curious about, you mention that you worked with Hofheinz, after he was mayor, on the Astrodome project. I was wondering if you could talk about your involvement in that?

William W. Sherrill: 34:09

On a national project?

John Brundrett: 34:11

On the Astrodome project.

William W. Sherrill: 34:12

Astro, yeah, sure. I was doing financial analysis for him. I ran the numbers on it, and it didn't work. I'd take them and I'd show him all the reasons why. He said, "Well, let me have it." He takes them, and that night he goes and develops a plan to go to the county. He goes to the county and tells them, "Okay, I'll do one of two ways. Either you build this dome and I will lease it from you full time at a price that will pay it off, or I'll just lease my share of it at a good price for you." They elected to do it. Of course, that meant they have a county interest rate, was better than private, and borrowing the county could do a lot cheaper than we could do. He always held that over my head. He loved to beat on me. He would beat on me the fact that I didn't think of that. Anyway, I learned a lot while working for him. He was really a shrewd, shrewd businessman.

John Brundrett: 35:33 Let's move on to your time in the federal government. Could you describe what it was like to work for the Johnson administration?

William W. Sherrill: 35:40 Well, the federal government, it's different. My first appointment was director of FDIC. Well, it's a presidential appointment, so there's nobody around that can push you around on where to get your job appointment. Again, the FDIC has a board of three, the chairman of the board who is appointed by the president, the directorship which I had, and then, the controller of the currency. They're all appointed by the President. Turns out that when I went on the board, the chairman of all banks was a Republican, but he was appointed by Johnson, [a] Democratic president. We were somewhat allied to everybody. I went along and I had the swing vote. I could just cast my vote and that was that for them. But I didn't want to do that. I went in and got to looking at the problem, and, "Well, what is the problem?" I worked on it, and I worked on it, worked on it 90 days.

William W. Sherrill: 37:01 Finally, I go in to the chairman, and I said, "Kay [Kenneth A. Randall], are we an insurance company or are we a government agency?" He said, "Well, we're kind of both." I said, "Not kind of both. Which of the two? If you had to pick one, which one would you take?" He said, "Well, I'd say insurance company." I said "Well, in that case, Kay [Kenneth A. Randall], it's been my experience that insurance companies that don't pay their claims on technicalities don't prosper." He said, "I never thought of it that way. You're right. I'll vote with you, but we're going to change it right now. You've got me." We voted, solved the problem, and I got off to a good start. Then, of course, 14 months later, the Federal Reserve came in. It was a fairly short time.

John Brundrett: 37:54 Could you tell us anything else about the time at the Federal Reserve?

William W. Sherrill: 38:02 Oh, with the Federal Reserve. That was really an interesting time because, again, the appointment was interesting. The Federal Reserve Chairman William McChesney Martin had been chairman through five presidents. He was a legend in Washington. I had never met him. I'd been there 14 months and not met him. My phone rings one day, and he says, "Hi, I'm Bill Martin. I'm

chairman of the Federal Reserve Board." I said, "Yes sir, Mr. Chairman, I know who you are." This was on a Tuesday. He said, "I know this is kind of short notice, but could you have dinner at my home on Thursday?" "Yes, sir." "Would you mind, my wife will be in New York. The staff has the night off, except the cook. She'll serve us, and then, she has the night off." Now, in Washington speak, that means "confidential," don't bring a driver. "Yes sir, I understand." I show up there on Thursday night. He meets me at the door. Sure enough, the cook serves us drinks in the library, and then, she serves us our dinner in the little side kitchen sort of thing, and then, she takes off.

William W. Sherrill: 39:20

He watches her go out the door. As she leaves, he turns to me and he says, "Bill, there's an opening coming up on the Federal Reserve Board. Governor Shepardson has to retire 18 months early, so we're replacing him. I have two men that I'm recommending to the President for replacement, and every time I bring their name up, he brings your name up." He says, "Either one of these two is better qualified than you." Right on, throw me right out. I'm so relieved that he just wants me out of his way. He's not going to chew me out. I said, "Well, Mr. Chairman, if they're qualified at all, they're better qualified than I." He laughed, and I laughed. All the pressure's gone. Then we have an interesting evening. I think the key was when later on he says, "What do you think of gold, price of gold?" I said, "I don't think about it, Mr. Chairman. I'm an American businessman. Not allowed to own it." Which we weren't at that time. "I don't think about it." He said, "Well, what do you think about it as a monetary reserve?"

William W. Sherrill: 40:32

I don't know where he is on that major issue, but I think, "Well, what the heck." I said, "Well, candidly, Mr. Chairman, I don't think it's very smart. I don't see any relationship between the amount of currency that's needed to be added each year internationally to the rate of mining gold." He laughed. He said, "Bill, you know more about gold than most people here in Washington." So we were off to a good start. As he takes me out to my car that evening, as he's holding the door for me, he says, "Bill, I like the cut of your jib. I'm going to recommend you to the president." That's how I got on the Federal Reserve board.

John Brundrett: 41:23 Just one more question on the federal government. What lessons did you learn from working in the federal government?

William W. Sherrill: 41:28 Well, the federal government has to have an overview. I learned the difference between big policy decisions and small policy decisions. In these other government positions I'd held, I had a bunch of small decisions to make. At this other level, I had a very few big decisions to make. It's just a matter of being able to concentrate at a higher level. Taking more things into consideration. The higher you go, the more things there are to be considered in making a decision. The lower level, you can make decisions faster because it only has several things that make a difference. You go about this, that, and you're ready. Up here, it takes more than that.

John Brundrett: 42:25 You spent over 20 years working to educate students in entrepreneurship, could you talk to us a little bit about your role as an educator?

William W. Sherrill: 42:35 Yeah. The education it turns out is so vital to our society. That we have enough educated people to carry the more sophisticated side of our economy. At the end of the day, we're really talking about the economy. The people who didn't ever get a college education are an important part of the economy. People who got the education are another. They're the leadership. It's important that we have a good educational system, and therefore, worth spending the time. Secondly, you have to want to be an educator. Because the challenges of educating are very varied. Some of them are just exactly straight in what you'd see. Other things are very indirect, very subtle. You can run into a great mind, when you are teaching, that he's one click off of really hitting it, but you can't tell that.

William W. Sherrill: 44:00 You certainly can't tell what that one click is. You have to be in tune. You have to really feel that person's mind and really be able to understand, really more than they do, what their need is. They have it, and they want to tell you, but they haven't got the words for it. They don't have a way to grab it. That's something that's an important part of education is you have to be understanding enough about that to do it well.

John Brundrett: 44:33 How are we looking on time?

Emily Vinson: 44:37 [Inaudible]

John Brundrett: 44:40 Maybe we have time for maybe one or two more questions.

William W. Sherrill: 44:42 Yep.

John Brundrett: 44:45 I want to ask you about Houston. I know you are quite fond of the city.

William W. Sherrill: 44:50 Yep.

John Brundrett: 44:53 What do you like most about Houston or what do you think sets it apart from other places that you've been?

William W. Sherrill: 45:00 Well, of course, the thing I like most about it is growth. The growth brings about difference which it doesn't get dull. Houston is not dull. It's everything from an okay place to an exciting place, depending on what you're doing. There's that I love about it. Of course, you get to love it for the people you know that are in there forever, for the long term citizens that you get to know and be part of. Those are the two, I think. It's the people that have sort of become Houstonians rather than change the atmosphere. That's what I like. I like, it's different. It keeps growing, adding differences.

John Brundrett: 45:59 I'm trying to be good with our time here. How has Houston changed, from what you can tell, since you were growing up here in the depression?

William W. Sherrill: 46:09 Well, it's more sophisticated. It was a very "Texas" city when I was first growing up. It's now an international city. Our connections with the rest of the world, just amazing. University of Houston has about . . . a third of its students are international students. They are willing to take a job anywhere in the world. We help supply that need, which causes most of the world to focus on Houston. They send us opportunities, and we take advantage of them.

John Brundrett: 46:48 Finally, is there anything that you think maybe I should have asked in this interview that you would have liked to talk about?

William W. Sherrill: 46:57 Like, why am I so intelligent?

Emily Vinson: 47:00 We were thinking, why are you so handsome?

John Brundrett: 47:06 Would you like to answer that question?

William W. Sherrill: 47:07 Let me think. You guys are great.

John Brundrett: 47:19 Well, Mr. Sherrill, we thank you for your time and the stories you've shared with us. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we stop recording?

William W. Sherrill: 47:27 No, you guys are doing a great job. I'd like to say keep it up. We can use all of this we can get.

John Brundrett: 47:37 All right sir, we thank you very much.

William W. Sherrill: 47:39 You bet.

William W. Sherrill: 47:42 Getting Suzanne, my youngest, into Andover. She had applied and she got all the way up to the lip of the cup. She was next up, and they ran out of space. She called me. Of course she's crying. I give him [George H. W. Bush] a call. He was on the board. H.W. was on board of Andover. I get his . . . I tell him, "Suzanne has gotten all the way up. They ran out of space." He said, "But she's the kind of girl we really want." I'm, "My point exactly." He says, "Let me see what I can do. Call me back." This was on a Friday. He was head of the CIA at that time. I called back on Monday, and he's in China. I said, "oh, my god." I told the secretary what my problem was. He said, "Well, we talk every night, and I'll find out." Next day, when I called, he said, "The message is the deed is done." I said, "How CIA-ish can you be?" Anyway, what happened was, they had run out of space, and they had old houses on campus that the faculty lives in. The faculty's downstairs, and upstairs, the attic, they make out for students. But this year, they were retiring one of the ones that was older, and they put it back in service, so six openings came up, and she was one of them. And five other girls got in as well, so it was a good deal.

Emily Vinson: 49:18 Absolutely.

John Brundrett: 49:18 All right.

William W. Sherrill: 49:18 Anyway, H.W. and I were much better friends.