

Ned Jarrett Oral History Interview 1

Interview Conducted by
Christina Wright
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Title: Ned Jarrett oral history interview 1, 2007 June 6

Description: In this first of two interviews, Ned Jarrett recalls his driving career in stock car racing during the 1940s through 1960s. He talks about his experiences growing up on a farm in Catawba County in North Carolina. Mr. Jarrett explains that he learned the strategies of the business world by overseeing the the bookkeeping at his father's sawmill. He describes his introduction to racing, including competing under his partner's name, John Lentz, so that his father would not know that he was racing. As Mr. Jarrett rose through the ranks of NASCAR, he worked to improve his public image and sought to strengthen the business operations of his race team. Other topics discussed include memories of Mr. Jarrett's competitors, which tracks he enjoyed racing at the most, and safety developments in NASCAR in the wake of major accidents.

Biography: Ned Jarrett was a 74-year-old man at the time of interview, which took place at his home in Newton, North Carolina. He was born in Newton, North Carolina in 1932. He was educated at Blackburn School and was employed as a race car driver and broadcaster.

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Transcript Notes: CW : Christina Wright
NJ : Ned Jarrett

Ned Jarrett Oral History Interview 1 Transcript

CW: Today is June 6, 2007 this is Christina Wright interviewing Ned Jarrett for the UNC Charlotte Oral History Archive we are at 3182 Ninth Tee Drive Newton, NC 28658. Mr. Jarrett is a two time Grand National now Nextel Cup Champion having earned the title in 1961 and 1965 prior to this he already proved his racing prowess as NASCAR National Sportsman driving champion now the Busch Series from 1957 and 1958 championship. In his thirteen year career as a racecar driver Mr. Jarrett won a total of fifty Grand National races he retired from racing at the top of his career in 1966 but his association with the industry continued as he took up the microphone and became a well-respected broadcaster for MRN radio, CBS and ESPN to date, Mr. Jarrett has honor of being inducted into twelve halls of fame in association with racing and broadcasting careers he continues to broadcast daily racing commentary for MRN called "Ned Jarrett's World of Racing." He is also in the patriarch of one of NASCAR's driving dynasties as both his sons have followed in his footsteps, but I want to start way back at the beginning and I wonder if you could talk about where you were born and your family and what life was like for you growing up.

NJ: I was born in the country in Catawba County, North Carolina. The address was Newton, North Carolina, same town that serves as our address now my dad had a 300-acre farm and had a sawmill and so we worked on the sawmill, a lot and on the farm a lot. I had two brothers older than I and one sister older than I and then one sister younger than I and one brother younger. The youngest brother was killed in a swimming accident at age fifteen back in 1950, my two older brothers passed away within the last ten years, my two sisters are still living. We went to a country church called Sardis Lutheran Church and we remained Lutherans to this day, but not that same church. But I just came from that, making a talk to the people at that church today, and--

CW: Did the Jarretts have a long history in this county, in Catawba County?

NJ: I don't know the exact year that the Jarretts settled here, but yes, it's a long history. Was in the 1800s when they settled here in this county.

CW: But what was the background to the family? It's interesting they were Lutherans, because you're Lutherans, that's more unusual in that area.

NJ: Well, it has become more prominent in this area now because Lenoir-Rhyne College of course is a Lutheran college, and there are a lot Lutheran churches around here. I think the descent was from Germany and don't know how far back that goes. It would be a long ways back. But I just had an opportunity today to talk to a pastor whose name is Yoder and he was telling us about the church that which is in the county here that he serves, and that it was started back in 1778. And there were three names that were written as the people who formulated or

started that church and Jarrett was one of those names and Yoder was one of those names and the other was Wagner. And so I guess the Jarrett name has been here for even longer than I thought about, goes back in the 1700s as opposed to the 1800s.

CW: Had the sawmill been a part of the family for a long time or was that something that your father created for himself?

NJ: My grandfather had a sawmill and, and he had a smaller farm that my dad was able to buy some property adjacent to his father's farm. And so he continued the tradition of sawmilling which was fairly common back in those days. Farmers, it was difficult to make a living at farming and they used the sawmill to supplement income, and of course cutting timber not only off of their own property but buying boundaries of timber from other farmers in the area as well. And these were portable type sawmills that were used back in those days. They were not the big stationary ones today that, that they are able to cut thousands of feet of lumber per day. So they, just my dad buy a boundary of timber and move the sawmill into it and it was easier to get the log. Cut the logs and get them to the mill and not to have to transport them very far.

CW: Was his work predominantly with the saw then rather than the farm, would you say?

NJ: As far as the money producing part of what he was doing, the sawmill did produce more income than the farm but the farm served also to feed the family because we raised most of what we ate. And, and had cows, and so we got milk from our own cows. And of course we had to have mules and horses to, to help on the farm to work on the farm. And so there were times when my dad actually drove a truck for a trucking company to supplement the income because with six children it was difficult to make a living doing just one thing back in those days and he wanted to provide well for his family.

CW: Must have been very busy, did he have a cash crop as well as growing food for the family?

NJ: Probably there were two cash crops. Really cotton was probably the number one cash crop, sweet potatoes was another one, and he also would buy sweet potatoes. He built a sweet potato curing house and he would buy sweet potatoes from other farmers and cure them and then sell them in the winter, and so that was another means of making some extra money.

CW: Was it assumed that your elder brother would probably take over the farm? How did the family see the farm in terms of going forward?

NJ: I'm not sure that there was ever a plan as far as the farm was concerned because as time went by and we were finishing high school, it became more difficult to make money on the farm. And the, when my two older brothers retired, I'm sorry, graduated from school, then they started

working more in the lumber. The sawmill had graduated into a, my dad had bought a planing mill so we were finishing lumber ready to, for houses to be built or for lumber might be used in furniture manufacturing, so they started spending more time in the lumber business than on the farm. And the same thing as far as I was personally concerned, when I was finishing school my, most of my work, I was the bookkeeper for my dad. All of his employees, whether it was on the farm or at the sawmill or wherever, because we didn't have to hire additional help, and so I kept the books and made the payroll did those kinds of things. I started doing that when I was about twelve years old and it, it was a great experience for me. But it also served as a deterrent as far as education is concerned because you put a twelve-year-old to doing things that normally a college graduate would do, that twelve-year-old gets to thinking, "Hey, I don't need school. You know, I'm, I already know these things. I'm learning them away from school." And certainly, I was learning things that were not being taught in school and I was gifted by God with mathematical ability and my dad recognized that pretty early. I tell people that if you grew up and learned to count lumber, count the number of feet in a piece of lumber, then math became much easier for you, because that's not an easy thing to do. And so I grasped that pretty quickly, and so as a result my dad put me to in charge of the bookkeeping and the payroll and those kinds of things. Which was, again, it was a great experience and I'm certainly glad that I was able to do it.

CW: Which school did you attend?

NJ: I attended Blackburn School which at that time was a full school from one through eleven grades. And the year after I would of, if I had graduated from high school, I would of have to go to twelve because that was the year that it was changed from eleven years to twelve years. And, but I didn't quite finish the eleventh grade, and I have regretted that of course that I didn't get a high school diploma, but I tried to make up for it in other ways by learning in the business world and taking a lot of different courses. Business courses, Dale Carnegie courses, and things that could help to further my education and to make me a better person.

CW: As you said before, you've learned a lot more out of school than you probably would have learned in school. So you were not destined to stay on the farm or with the sawmill or the lumber business. When do you think you first thinking that this wasn't going to be your future?

NJ: They started building the Hickory Speedway in the early fifties. I think they started building it in 1950 and it was a big thing in the community. You go down to the country store on a rainy day when you couldn't work at the sawmill or on the farm and those farmers and sawmillers were sitting around saying, "Wait until they get that thing built. I'll go up there and show them how to drive." Because everybody thought that they were really good drivers, and secretly I said I'd like to try that, because my dad had taken me to some dirt tracks races and North Wilkesboro, North Carolina and a dirt track in Charlotte, North Carolina.

CW: Which was it?

NJ: In Charlotte. It was the Charlotte Fairgrounds track which is on North Tryon Street, and so he had made a race fan out of me. And then I got an opportunity. I bought half interest in a car from a friend of mine and I was designated as the driver and I did so I drove that first race that was ever run at the Hickory Motor Speedway not thinking that it might become a career but just something, a challenge that you're looking for or something to have some fun with.

CW: How old are were you?

NJ: I was nineteen at the time and my dad sat me down after that first race and we talked, he talked to me for quite a while about that he didn't think that was a good idea for me to drive race cars. He needed me in the business, and because the lumber business was growing at that time and I really was happy in the lumber business. But still, I was looking for a challenge and (pause) thought I had some athletic ability. Played some baseball and basketball in high school but was not good enough at either of those to excel to any degree, but the racing presented the kind of challenge that I was looking for. But anyway, after my dad talked to me I understood where I was coming from. Most of the drivers back then were either considered to be bootleggers or just a bunch of fools who didn't have any better sense than to get out there and risk their necks. And I certainly wasn't a bootlegger. I am happy to say I grew up in a Christian family, not that bootleggers could have been bootleggers too but that was a way of life for many people back then. But my family was never involved in that. And so I understood where he was coming from after we talked for a while. I said, "Okay I won't drive the race car anymore." My partner had been a former motorcycle racer and so he drove the car and did okay for a few weeks, and after six or eight weeks he got sick. The races had transferred from Sunday afternoon races to Saturday night races. And so he got sick one night and didn't feel like driving and we didn't look too hard for another driver. We had one already in our partnership. I thought we could go out in the infield which was pretty dark back then, those tracks were not very well lit, and we could change shirts. Both of us had big noses, so we put the helmet on, we figured nobody would know the difference and they didn't. And so I drove the car while he was sick and I finished second that night. He had not done quite that well, so we thought I must be the best driver. His name was John Lentz, L-E-N-T-Z, and so he encouraged me to keep driving and I wanted to anyway and I continued to race under his name. We just changed right in the dark infield and changed shirts and put on the helmet and got away with it for a good while until we won a race and then in a relatively small community that I grew up in, secrets are hard to keep. And the word got out, got back to my dad and he came to me then and said, "Okay, if you're so determined to drive one of those things, you might as well use your own name and get credit for any accomplishments you may have along the way." Something that I always appreciated and, but he presented to me a really big challenge when he set me down and had that talk that has meant so much to me over the years. He said that it's hard to build respect with those people that you will have to be racing

against. And that was one thing that my dad always instilled into each of us children was try to build respect among your fellow man, and he just couldn't see that happening with me racing against those people that we had to race against, but that's the challenge that he presented me. I don't know if it was intentional or, or if just happen to come out that way, and I never asked him. And I always been sorry I that I didn't ask him, did he mean it a challenge, because it was a huge challenge. He made me work harder that I would of ever dreamed to try to prove to him that it doesn't matter who you associate with, that you can still build respect. And I have really appreciated that of the goal he made me set for myself to prove that you can, you can associate with anyone and still build respect.

CW: Are there particular times that you can think of when it steered you a wrong way rather than another, in terms of how you led your career? Where there particular times when you reflected on what your father had said or was it a constant reflection for you?

NJ: It was a constant reflection as far as trying to build respect that stuck with me still, is in the back of my mind. And I tried to instill it in to my children to that one thing you need to do in life is just to try and build respect with your fellow man. And so that, yeah, that was huge. I didn't know it at the time, but it was very large.

CW: What do you think was the pull for you of this new, interesting and I assume you couldn't making a living to begin with, or it was more of a hobby to begin with? What was it that wouldn't let you go that you had to go and race?

NJ: It was the challenge. Having grown up on a farm and working around a sawmill you had equipment that you, not all of it was motorized equipment. Not much of it was motorized equipment. But still had a love for mechanical things and, and what made them tick and what you could do with them. And my dad allowed to me drive to Sunday school when I was nine years old. And so I obviously learned to drive at a very young age and than to be able to get in a vehicle that I had a love for and that challenge of driving that vehicle against other people and working on that vehicle and trying to make it faster than others that you were racing against. It was just a tremendous challenge and something that I always appreciated.

CW: And you and your friend, did you have a, your own mechanic? Or did you have a mechanic somewhere that you relied upon in that early period?

NJ: Well, my partner was a mechanic and so and I helped to work on the car. I could in those days take an engine apart and put it back together and whatever there was to do on the car, I could do it. I made myself learn to do it. I felt that it was necessary and would be helpful regardless of how far I went in the sport and so, and that was part of the challenge of it.

CW: Can you describe that first car of yours what kind, had to be a Ford, didn't it?

NJ: The first race car that I bought half interest in was a 1939 Ford Coupe and that was sort of the choice of racers back then in the Sportsman division of NASCAR either in 1937, 1938, or 1939. Thirty-nine it needed to be, they had two different models or versions. One was what they called the standard model and the other one was a deluxe model. The deluxe was a little too heavy, you didn't want to use it. And now the 1940 coupes were probably the choice of the bootleggers. It was a prettier car, but also it was very well balanced, but it was too heavy, we learned. Too heavy for racing and also it became too valuable because it became more of a collector's item as time went by, more so than the '37, '38, '39. They were, they were ugly really and so you couldn't afford to build a race car out of one of those 1940 models. And you see, they stop making cars in 1942 for World War II, and so it wasn't long after these models we were using, they were still the cars off the highway. And then they didn't, didn't build cars again till 1946 and, or at least Ford didn't, and so those, those were the model cars that seemed to worked better. The engines were basically the same in all of them, although we were allowed certain modifications.

CW: Do you remember what you modified on your Ford?

NJ: Well, they would restrict you as they still do today as far the cubic inches were concerned. We didn't look at in terms of cubic inches. The standard crankshaft on a flathead engine in those days in the late thirties and early forties was a three and three-quarter inch stroke. That meant that the crankshaft would push the piston up three and three quarters of an inch before it came back down. We could modify it a little bit to a four-inch stroke if we chose to do so. You were taking a risk of, of the engine not living or blowing it up because it was putting more strain on it than it was built to stand. And you could also bore it out a little bit. The standard size of the pistons back then was three and a half inches in diameter, and we could bore it out to three, three quarters, something like that, which would give you more cubic inches. But there again, we were thinking the more, yeah, the more space that you have to, in the combustion area of the engine, the more horsepower that it will produce and that is true. Now the problem with when you started lengthening the stroke from three and three quarters to four inches was the amount of RPMs that you could turn it, the longer the stroke, the less RPMs you could turn it. So you're getting up little bit on the lower end particular of your horsepower range, and so were very careful to not go too far on that. And then another thing we could do, probably the thing that would help more in developing more horsepower was a changing in the camshaft which affected valve train of the engine. That there was a lot of things you could do there. As long as you didn't use roller tactics, you still had to use conventional tactics that were not roller bearing type of deal, you couldn't use roller bearings in the crank shaft or the camshaft.

CW: Who do you think had the best cars out there on the local racetracks in the early fifties?

NJ: Junior Johnson always had one of the best cars. He was a well-known bootlegger. He knew how to build good engines and make them durable and powerful. He always was one to beat. And Ralph Earnhardt, Dale Earnhardt's dad, Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s granddad, he always had a very good car. I would say those two were consistently the better ones that I raced against in my early days at Hickory and North Wilkesboro and tracks like that.

CW: Which courses did you race in that first year?

NJ: The first year we didn't race anywhere but Hickory, and then the second year we would run a couple of special events at Charlotte on the fairgrounds track at Charlotte and also North Wilkesboro, and then the third year there might be a special event. There was a track in Salisbury, North Carolina and there were other tracks that were built. Some of them, they only ran a race or two. There was a track between Newton where I grew up, the town I grew up near, and Charlotte on Highway 16. It was a one-mile dirt track and they only held couple races on it. It was not a very good track and it was very dusty and they only had one way in on a dirt road to get to it. The only, there was only maybe a quarter of a mile or less than that off of Highway 16, but it's still, traffic was a nightmare for them. And, and also maintaining or preparing a mile racetrack, dirt racetrack, was very difficult. It was hard enough to prepare a half a mile track, or even like the Hickory track was a third of a mile track, that was quite a challenge in itself that went, that when you went to a mile track, that was very difficult.

CW: Was the only the practice you could get in the races themselves? Did you have a place that you could practice?

NJ: No, we did not have a place that we could practice. Would take it out on the dirt road that my partner lived on. He had a little one stall garage that he took his family car out of, made a car shop out of it. And, and he lived on a dirt road, country road, and it was a curvy road. And so we would take it out on that to, to tune it up and to practice, but it did give you maybe fifteen minutes practice or something before the event and then you go racing. Yeah, most of your experience really came in the race itself.

CW: So you must have been anxious to pick up on the number of races that you could join in?

NJ: It was good to get additional experience in different, types of racetracks even though they were dirt. The soil was different at almost every one of them. Much of them, it was red soil, which is a characteristic of North Carolina then eventually we'd go to Columbia, South Carolina which was a sand-based track and the soil was totally different from the red dirt. And it was, it was good to get different, get experience on different types of dirt.

CW: Did you have a preference?

NJ: I like the sand-based tracks. Of course Hickory Speedway was my favorite of all because of the design. I've said many times that if I was going to start driving a race car all over again, I'd want to start on Hickory Speedway because if you can learn to drive and win on that racetrack, you can go just about anywhere else and win.

CW: Why is that?

NJ: Well, it's just I think they lucked up on the design. I don't think they did it within any technology involved. They had a certain amount of land to build it on and they had an idea, wanted it to be shorter than half a mile. Most of tracks than were half a mile or longer and they were absolutely right in that respect for weekly events. The, and that's why it survived that long because the danger factor on longer tracks came into play and also the competition. There is more competition on a local track. You can see it all on a shorter track, not on a local, but you can see all of the competition. Where the bigger tracks sometimes it gets harder to see the cars and so they promoters who built that track, they figured that part out fast and lucked up on the design of the track. That, that it just made a very competitive racetrack.

CW: Doesn't have very long, doesn't have any straight away because it's an oval, does it?

NJ: Yeah it's, there is just a little bit of straightaway, not very much. Maybe 100 feet of the front and a 100 feet on the back or something.

CW: So I guess it's good for learning how to take turns?

NJ: Oh, it's great for learning how to set the car up and than learn how to drive around the track.

CW: Did you enjoy the dirt racing? Is that something you really enjoyed?

NJ: Yeah, I did enjoy dirt racing. It was my favorite and I still enjoy it. See, I don't go to any, any more, but I watch some on TV every once in a while. Different style cars of course than what we raced back then, but I always felt that it took a particular skill to drive on dirt and of course that was my introduction into the sport was on dirt track racing. Having grown up on the farm running the country road, so with the family car when I get a chance to take it out. Or even after I got into racing using the country road as a practice ground it, I just developed a love for it because you know, you slide the car around. Where asphalt, you don't do that, and it was a bigger challenge to me than racing on asphalt.

CW: Where there quite a lot of accidents because you're sliding a lot? Maybe not such major ones, but were there a lot of accidents?

NJ: There were a lot of spin outs, but not many what you would say major accidents. Certainly, you might bump into someone and many times that would cause a spin out. But those cars were very sturdy and they could take, you could spin it out. In fact, I have rolled cars over in a race, turn over and stay over and still go back and race that car that day. And so the, the number of caution flags compared to today, I don't know. I don't think there was a lot of difference. You didn't wear the tires out and you just might bump right into someone and spin out or spinned them out or just lose it yourself and get when you're sliding in through the turns and get a little over aggressive and spin out, but usually there is not a lot of harm done by that.

CW: And what kind of safety persuasions were you wearing? In that time?

NJ: The only thing that was required was that you wear a seat belt, of course, and most passenger cars did not have a seat belt in it at that time. So we go down to an Army-Navy store and buy old aircraft seat belts and install them, that was okay. Now NASCAR, now of course you had to wear a helmet of some sort. And in the early days the helmet was, it could even be a football helmet and they were not high tech by any means. But if you got bumped on the head it would help, but nothing compared to the helmets that are used and required today. And we also had to have the doors, the doors had operable so you can open them, particularly on the driver's side. And so we go down to the hardware store and get a hang string which is a, the, it's a belt basically, that when you put a collar on a mule or horse to hook it up so that they could work for you whatever you're might be plowing, or whatever it might be and that, that strap would hold that collar together. So we would just use that to tie around the door to hold it shut and we also had to have one roll bar that went over the driver's head. That was only roll cage that was involved, just a bar that was welded to the frame just right over the driver's head and then to the frame on the other side. They didn't have much support. If that thing turns over, it would break the weld off very easy or bend.

CW: Did you think about the safety much when you were driving at this time?

NJ: Not a lot. Safety, we were concerned about our lives of course, but we didn't look at it to being that dangerous. I said many times that I felt safer after I got to racetrack, ready to the race than driving to the racetrack. Because the cars that we would drive on the street don't, many of them have safety features now that they didn't have back then. And many of those features came from motorsports. But you were not subject to run into a drunk or a dope addict or a, whatever kids do today. Or not only kids, but people do, that get on the highway when they should not be driving and you're all going in the same direction or at least it's planned that way. Every once in

a while someone would spin out and go the other way, but we thought that it was pretty safe. That thank God it is not nearly as safe as it is today.

CW: What were the speeds that you were going in these Ford Coupes?

NJ: Well the, the fastest track that we raced on with those two type cars was on the beach course at Daytona Beach, Florida for the Daytona International Speedway was built. And the way you qualified was NASCAR would set up a timing light. They give you one mile to get your speed up and then they would clock you for one mile and that's what determine your, that was qualifying, determined your starting position. Now the Sportsman cars that I raced which had one carburetor would run about a hundred miles per hour. And so that's probably the fastest I ever ran in a '37, '38, '39 Ford Coupe that was qualifying at Daytona.

CW: When did you start moving further and getting down to Daytona? How many years did it take you to take that step?

NJ: I think the first time I raced at Daytona was in 1954 on the beach. And I had a pretty good accident there, pretty serious accident where I was very fortunate to live through it. As a matter of fact, they would on Friday, would race. NASCAR had three divisions: Grand National, Modified, and Sportsman cars. On Friday, they would race the Modified and Sportsman cars together in a race and on Saturday they would race the Modified alone and on Sunday they would race the Grand Nationals, so that made up the full weekend of racing. And on this Friday, it was misting rain when we got up that morning and I had qualified at 100 miles per hour. I was fourth fastest in my class. It went way down the list, as far as, probably would have had eighty or ninety cars. As far as I know, they ran all that came. So, but you got two miles coming up the beach and coming back down the blacktop, two miles, so you had lots of space to get swung out. Especially on the beach side. I will inject this also, they timed the races, the start of the races, back in those days according to the tide. When the tide would be out for long enough they could get the race in, and, and the beach was very hard. It was almost like asphalt it's so hard. But anyways, this Friday my first year down there. We got up and it was misting rain. It was not a rain, it was a really heavy fog, light mist, but anyway. There was not enough that they would postpone that race or call it off, so they ran the Modified and Sportsman together. I was way back in the pack and the sand was wet and the cars would go up the beach and pick up sand and throw it up. In the rooster tails would be, it's harder to get traction on that wet sand. And so it made it difficult to see along with the fog that was already there, the mist that was there. And so I was cruising up the beach we are about half way through the race and running my 100 miles per hour. All the sudden a car hit me in the back and spun me out and I am sure it was one of those Modified cars that year. A, the top qualifier ran 149 miles per hour, that was a Modified car, and so there were cars out there that was running all different kinds of speeds. And so one of those cars that was running thirty or forty miles per hour faster than I was came up behind me and

didn't even see me until he hit me. And it spun the car out and it started digging into the sand and started rolling and finally it wound up in the ocean on its wheels, and I was knocked out, I guess. And when I woke up someone, a track attendant had gotten to me. They had not slowed the race down or stopped it because there was no need to. I was totally out of the racing. I was three hundred feet from the racing area because I was in the ocean and maybe a couple feet deep or something like that. But anyway, he got to me and I woke up and thought I needed to back across that racetrack. Now they allowed spectators between there is, I don't know what the distance was maybe between asphalt Highway A1A and the beach that we ran north on. I would say two hundred feet between the middle. I suspect there were sand dunes and palmetto bushes there, and those people would go in there and watch the race from inside there. And the only thing that separated them from the race cars was a twine string on just a little slat post. It was strong enough to hold the twine string up and they say, "Hey, you don't go beyond this." That was it; there was no protection at all. It was just a borderline that's as far out as the spectators could go. But anyway, I broke loose from that guy and ran across that racetrack. There were cars coming up the track and they couldn't see me or anything but only because of the grace of God did I get across there and I got to that twine string, I was told, and I passed out. And so the next thing I remembered, I was laying in some fat lady's arms sitting there on the sand, and she had about a third of a pint of Early Times whiskey. I can still see it today, trying to get me to drink, that she thought, and blood was running down my face. I thought I was going to die, and I said, "Lord, I don't want any whiskey. I'm fixing to leave here and I don't want to kill my chances of going to heaven." And so anyway, that worker caught up to me and he had a two-way radio to Bill France Sr. And France said, "How bad is he hurt?" "He is bleeding pretty bad but he did run across the track on his own." And France said, "Well see if you can get one of the highway patrolmen to take him to the hospital in case we need the ambulance. Case somebody really gets hurt, we really need the ambulance," so that told me they only had one ambulance at the track. And I guess you had to really get hurt badly to get to ride to the hospital in the ambulance. So highway patrolmen took me to the hospital and he had seen the accident and he said, "Man, that thing went fifty feet in the air." And it did go so high in the air one time and it came back down on its wheel while it still out on the beach. And it knocked the air out of all four tires and bent the rims up on those tires. And my face hit the ground on the left side, hit the sand and just peeled the whole left side of my face and broke my nose. Of course, that was a good thing because I had broken my nose in high school basketball and it was very crooked. And as big as it is, it was bent over this way very bad and, and I did twice within one week in high school basketball got elbowed and knocked my nose off. And the second time it hurt so bad when they set it back, the second time it got knocked off my face, I will never have it set again. And one week that day I got hit again playing basketball and it knocked it crooked and it stayed that way until that race at Daytona. And when it hit the sand it straightened it up, and I still haven't had it reset. It's amazing, you know it. But that was a great experience. I am glad that I, thankful that I lived through it. I certainly wouldn't want to back through it again.

CW: You kept going, so obviously--

NJ: Yeah, and it didn't scare me away from driving race cars.

CW: Where were you coming at this point in time in 1954? What was your typical record, how many races did you race?

NJ: At that time I was running probably eight or ten different tracks. And on occasions, not on a regular basis Hickory was still the number one track and Charlotte Fairgrounds they would race Friday nights. So I would race there on Friday night, Columbia, South Carolina on Thursday night, that was a regular night to race, and then Sundays, we'd run maybe at Asheville, North Carolina or Savannah, Georgia or somewhere like. So I had spread out with running other tracks and begin to notice that there was a national championship involved. If you run enough races and so I was already in the beginning of that stage in '54 and continued in '55 as I mentioned earlier '56 I ran enough races to finish second in the standings.

CW: How many races did you run that year?

NJ: We would run eighty-five to ninety races a year, but many times we would run four or five times a week. So it was not that hard to, it was a lot of work and a lot of traveling, but I was doing this. There was not, there was enough money involved that you could have sponsors back then, but you could buy the few tires that you used and the expenses, the other expenses you had. The gas going to and from the track and used off the track and whatever expenses you had, if you did well enough, you could win enough to do that. You couldn't make a living at it, but you could keep the car going and that's basically what we did in those days.

CW: Where you still working for your father?

NJ: Oh yeah, still working.

CW: So you worked day and night, really?

NJ: Oh yeah.

CW: Did you have, did you branch out in terms of who was backing you at all? Was there anybody else putting any money in, or did you have another mechanic, or was it just the two of you, you and your mechanic taking the car around?

NJ: Really after, after the first couple of years and I started going to other places, Lance didn't want to do that and so we, I bought him out and we sort of went our separate ways on a friendly

basis. And so I owned the cars then and I in '50, I know in '57 and '58, when I won one of the championships I had a full-time mechanic that worked on the cars. That's all he did, I was winning enough money to pay him to do that. There was a lot of volunteer help. Friends would come in and help work on it at night just to get to go to the race. Not all of races we went to, because they had jobs and they couldn't go to all of these races. Bud Almond was a, everybody knew him as Bud Almond, and Bud went on with me into the Grand National division too and was my chief mechanic or crew chief for the first few years. In fact, when I won the first championship in 1961.

CW: In the early period, did you have anyone helping you in the pits than besides your mechanic or was it just the two of you?

NJ: Basically the two of us, yeah. I remember one year in 1958, a business friend of mine who had never been to a race in his life--his dad was one of the richest people in North Carolina, J. W. Abernathy. And this was the J. W. Abernathy Jr., and his wife and my wife and I hooked the race car behind a Cadillac that I had at that time and we went to, we were going to the Orange Bowl. He had tickets to the Orange Bowl and I said, "Well, there is a race at West Palm Beach, Florida," which is just north of Miami. I said, "We could go take that race car along and we can win the race and have a little extra spending money," and we did. And he served as my crew chief and had never been to a race, and so I basically, I was on my own and in that type of a situation. And there were a few other races that I would go to with nobody but me, and dragging the race car.

CW: On the shorter races you wouldn't have to stop so many times?

NJ: Oh, no. No, you didn't have pit stops then. The main thing was preparing the car, to get it set up where we basically had it set up before we ever left the shop. As far as what we knew, took for that particular racetrack, and there was not a lot of different set ups that you use for one race track to the other. The main thing was getting the right gear in it, and so we had that all figured out before we left home. So when you towed, didn't haul them on a trailer, you had to take one of the axles out so that it would not be turning all the transmissions and gearing in the car. So then all we had to do was bolt the axle back in and put the right kind of tires. Back then, we would run much smaller tires on the left front than on the right front, but to tow it you had to have the basically the same size tires on the front. So you have to put the right size tires on and put the axle in and you're ready to go racing.

CW: How many different cars did you have up until about '58?

NJ: Two. Well starting in '57, I had two because NASCAR had grown to the point that they had an overhead valve division. And I say they had grown to the point also, Chevrolet started

manufacturing V8 engines and overhead valve engines. I should say, well it was also the first V8 for a Chevrolet in 1955 because it's the first year they built those, and so NASCAR created a division. The points would be the same as long as you ran one carburetor on the car and they had a specific type of carburetor that you could run and they still had the Modified division which was unlimited carburetion. You could basically do what you wanted to, to that car, that engine to make it fast. And so I had, had one car starting in '57 with an overhead valve engine and another car with an original flathead type engine, and sometimes we would race both of those on the same racetrack on the same night. I remember one time specifically, and it was one of my great accomplishments that still sticks in the back of my mind. We raced at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. It was a half-a-mile dirt track and I took both cars down there and, they had twin features for each division there was like a thirty-five lap races, twin thirty-five lap races for the flathead cars and the same for the overhead valve engines and we won all four and so that was a great time for us it was rare that you would be able to run both of them at the same night, same track that was a special event.

CW: That was quite an accomplishment, who in that early period who were the names that you remember who were the people who stood out?

NJ: Ralph Earnhardt, Junior Johnson, Gwyn Staley, Dink Widenhouse, was a great driver, Bill Widenhouse was a great driver. Joe Weatherly ran in a lot of those type races, Curtis Turner would run some of those races the Myers brothers, Billy and Bobby Myers where big names in that type of racing back then.

CW: They would all be opponents to you.

NJ: Yeah we were opponents; they were all tough to beat.

CW: Help to teach you some things.

NJ: Oh yes, I learned a lot from all of those guys the Flock brothers would run in some of those races back then as well they basically had moved out of that division when I started, they moved on to the Grand National Series but they would still run some of those races.

CW: Some people run both?

NJ: They did yeah, as today some run Busch Series and Nextel Cup same time.

CW: It makes a hard schedule. But you could do it.

NJ: Yeah it does make for a very hard schedule, they would do it.

CW: Now there are a lot of personalities at the tracks obviously, and people got nicknames and your nickname was Gentleman Jed is that right? When did you first start being called Gentleman Jarrett and what was the reason.

NJ: Gentlemen Ned, I don't know when that started and there were drivers back then that would say that they were not sure the name fit, you get him on the back stretch of a dark track at night sometimes might not be such a gentlemen but I always appreciated it I tried to treat people like my dad taught me to. I traded them with respect and, and tried to be nice to people and I guess that's why, I was I don't say this boasting by any means because I never considered myself to be better than respect than anybody else, but I, I was probably a little bit more friendly and outgoing than most of the drivers back in those days. Especially after I tried, started trying to improve myself after I got involved enough in the sport that I started winning some championships and getting my name out there a little bit. I wanted to represent my family and my sport in the best way possible and I took steps to try to put myself in position to do that and that was unheard of in the sport back in those days. But I tried to run my racing operation like a business and thank goodness I had the experience that my dad allowed me to gain back at the sawmill and on the farm from a business standpoint. And I think that's where the Gentlemen Ned got started and it just stuck and continued on and I am thankful.

CW: It seems very appropriate, what were the steps you took to try and create respect, as you say respect in the profession?

NJ: Well, the biggest thing that I did was take the Dale Carnegie course but that was after I had won the championship and Grand National in 1961. I had gone to some business seminars or business training sessions and self-improvement type things that some company might have that I'd learn about and just sit in on try to learn. I would go to speaking engagements where, and they still do it today people like Zig Ziglar and Paul Harvey and there were lots of big names that would, would have a speaking seminar at a convention center or something like that I would go to those and try to learn as much as I could and then the Dale Carnegie courses the thing that really help me more than any other individual thing to improve myself.

CW: Why did you feel a need to do that?

NJ: Because I wanted to have strong desire to represent my family and my sport in a meaningful manner and not, well in fact I started to say not many, no other race drivers were doing that at that time and I felt that it could help the sport, to have someone represent it who could talk and would be willing to. And that was the motivation especially as far as the Dale Carnegie courses are concerned.

CW: Was there an increasing amount of media exposure you think at that point, or has there always been a certain amount.

NJ: There was very little in the early years very little media support you might have in some of those early days of dirt track racing if it was a special event, bigger race than the normal thirty-five, or forty lap race that they would run. You might get the local newspaper guy to come out and cover it and he might ask you a question or two but they did very seldom ever did features on you, but there were a couple of national trade papers, *National Speed Sport News* and *Speedway Illustrated* were a couple of national papers that covered racing all over the country really I don't think they had representatives at every race but they would run stories that the speedway would send them a story about the race, and they would print it. And so it, it gradually grew it was a very slow process as part as the media coverage is concerned of course when I got to Grand National that increased from what it had been when we just running the Sportsman races and then after I won the championship in '61 they, NASCAR took me to New York for a press conference there. Boy was that big, that was big to me having grown up on the farm in North Carolina and get to go to New York and they had their National Modified Champion and they had the Grand National Champion and myself I guess, and I was the only one that showed up with a suit on, a coat and tie and the others were dressed nicely but not with a coat and tie and that might have been where the Gentleman Ned started out loud here, and that impressed some people the people who were there covering that press conference there was a big crowd, nothing compared to what they have today and I think it also impressed NASCAR that I showed up dressed and so that.

CW: Do you think you can see leaning towards you know some of the media for yourself, obviously in the end what you want to do you think that seeds of that had been sown quite early on that you were interested in representing and making information available to the world about your sport.

NJ: Yeah definitely when I took the Dale Carnegie course that was an it served to be a more meaningful education than I had planned for it to be. I did it than to prepare myself to better represent my sport I was not prepared well enough in '61 when I won the championship and I vowed that I would win it again and I would be better prepared next time to capitalize on the championship. And so the Dale Carnegie course, that's why I took the Dale Carnegie course was to be able to do that but what it did was the words spread quickly through the sport and the small numbers of media of people who were covering it back than that here is a guy that had gone and taken a Dale Carnegie course. And so they would seek me out for interviews after that because they had found someone who could talk a little bit and once you have gone through that Dale Carnegie course you want to tell the world what you know I mean that's part of the deal. And so I was sought after because I had some credentials to go along with it that justified their stories and so that's when I started getting some publicity. And then that too led to the broadcasting

career I don't think if I had gone and taken that Dale Carnegie course I don't think there would be any chance that I would of ever gone into broadcasting.

CW: What point did you realize that you were going to go for the Grand National races when was your first Grand National race.

NJ: Well I really had entered a race at Darlington in South Carolina, was there in 1952 as a spectator and I said well I can do that I thought I could I had been running at Hickory and some of these other tracks so I had gotten myself into a position in North Carolina at that time I don't know if this is still or not but if you traded cars five times in a year you had to buy a dealer's license and I traded cars a lot back in those days and part of it was make money I just get a car and my buddies like it and sell them that car and get another one and so the state of North Carolina sent me a letter you have, had too many cars in your name so they figured I was a dealer already and basically I was and that you need to buy a dealer's license so I checked into it and it only cost twenty-five dollars so I bought a dealer's license and a. So I had cars out in the backyard that I said earlier I was keeping books making the payroll for the employees by that time we had got it up to forty employees on the farm and at the sawmill, primarily at the sawmill or the lumber mill, the lumber business and so I would sell the employees cars and deduct the payments from their paycheck so I was getting paid and making a little money on the side as well and the reason I bring up that story is that I went to Charlotte to a car sale and specifically to buy a car to run in the Southern 500 at Darlington and so I bought a Oldsmobile that seemed to be the car of choice in those days, the Rocket 88 Oldsmobile, in fact I believe Buck Baker had won the race at Darlington the year before the year I went down there, him or Fonty Flock, someone won in a Oldsmobile. So I bought that car and ran at Darlington and the engine gave way pretty early in the race and that's a whole different story in itself than I, I drove that car in a couple of other races and then converted it back into a streetcar and, and drove it for a couple of years in the street and then I was after I won the track championship in Hickory in '54, '55 and I won North Carolina State Championship, NASCAR had it set up back then where track championships and you could win the state championship and the national championship and all those points counted towards the same thing. And so I was winning races and track and state championships and so then a guy, dealer, Pontiac dealer asked me in 1955 to race a Pontiac at Darlington so he drove the car down there, brand new Pontiac and I drove it and we ran good, got up to eighth place with it but then the engine started getting trouble the valve train did so we eventually fell out of the race, but I ran off and on for two or three years, just sporadically. And then, after I won the championship for the second time in the Sportsman division in 1958 well I had won everything that that sport had to offer. I don't say that boastfully, but I had I had won the track championships, the state championships, and I won the national championship twice and the reason I went for it again in 1958 was because there was one race that I had not won at that point. It was originally held in Langhorne, Pennsylvania and they closed that track down and the race was moved to Syracuse, New York and so I borrowed a car from a friend of mine, Dink

Widenhouse or his owner and took it up there and I won that race and that was one of the goals that I had set for myself. And so, I managed to do that in '58 and won the championship again and so I said I am either going to move on or quit and so than that's when I started looking at Grand National title racing in the late part of '59.

CW: It must have been quite different running that Darlington race since it's such a long race how did you adapt to that, was that straightforward for you?

NJ: I had learned, I learned in the very first race that I ever I drove at the Hickory Speedway that the, the physical part of it was not the main part of driving a race car I having worked at the sawmill and on the farm I thought I would have a big advantage over those other race drivers that physically I was in as good a condition that you could possibly be in, for a nineteen year old. And I thought that's got to be a big advantage when that fifty lap race was over I was wiped out they had to help me out of the car, this is not possible these guys cannot be in better shape than I am, and I learned from that it didn't take me many races to learn that I was not wiped out because of the physical strain I was wiped out because of the mental strain. And so, once I learned to deal with the mental part of it, I had no problem in running any amount of races or any amount of laps or whatever. So when I got to Darlington and running five hundred miles on the toughest track in my opinion still today I was prepared for it and so it was, it was somewhat second nature than.

CW: What was the longest race that you had run prior to that?

NJ: Probably, (pause) two hundred laps at North Wilkesboro maybe, it was a five eight mile track I would say, which would have been 120.

CW: Quite a lot less. What about the paved tracks, how did you adapt to being on the paved tracks?

NJ: Well the first paved track that I ever raced on other than the half-paved track at Daytona where you went up the asphalt for two miles, come back up the beach for two miles. That was more like a dirt track because both turns were sand really so it was not really racing on asphalt. They some promoters leased McCormick Field, which was a baseball field in downtown Asheville, North Carolina and they paved around the outfield, of the ballpark down to home plate and back out to first base around and made a race track out of it and so I thought it would be neat to try that so I had become friend with Billy and Bobby Myers and some of those guys that had been running Bowman Gray Stadium which was paved for year and they knew what kind of tires, see that was the big secret is getting the right kind of tires. So I went down and they sold me some tires like I needed and I went up there and I blew the competition away in the first asphalt race I ever drove in. Because I had the right tires that was the main thing and so I just

seemed to adapt to it pretty well. And especially if I had the right equipment then began to like it, dirt was still my first love, even until I quit racing but, and I won more races on dirt than I did on asphalt.

CW: You adjusted to the asphalt.

NJ: Yeah, yeah. That was a new challenge and it was something else as life goes on you look for new challenges and asphalt brought it.

CW: Starting the Grand National circuits did you come across some other drivers from Further Field or, a lot of the same names obviously, not all of them though some of them, Dink Widenhouse didn't do very much in the Grand Nationals.

NJ: No, no. Yeah, came across some new drivers than the Flock brothers were kind of winding down their career Grand National when I got involved in it but I had raced against them a little bit on the sportsman circuit but not very much. And you had guys like a Curtis Turner and Joe Weatherly who were regulars in that. Richard Petty of course started back in 1958 about six months before I started fulltime in Grand National and his father Lee Petty and Bob Wellbore was a great driver back then racing against such guys as Jim Reed from New York from Peekskill, New York. And there were even some drivers from the west coast that would come here and run not maybe, well Marvin Panch came along in the early sixties and he was from California and he raced, he never did really race the full circuit and try to win the championship but he ran all the major events back then.

CW: What did, it seems to me that on the track people's personalities come out. So what was your personality on the track how did people see you? And what did you like to run? What did you like to do?

NJ: Well I was more of a methodical driver than most of them the cars back then were not nearly as durable in fact it was almost impossible to run those cars as hard as they would go from start to finish and expect them to be there in the end. Because the technology was not there to do that I learned from the Pettys, in that respect Lee in particular, that was his style he won a lot of races and won championships and I saw the way he was doing it was by taking care of his equipment. He knew, he first had to finish before he could finish first. And so he ran at a quarter, so I tried to do the same thing and as time went by the technology improved it never really got to the point run them during my career, where you could the cars as hard as they would go from start to finish. Some people might of called that stroking I didn't think they were stroking I thought it was taking advantage of the circumstances that were there I loved to race against Curtis Turner and Junior Johnson because they were so good I was nowhere in their class as far as handling their car is concerned they could do things, they were so much fun to watch on dirt but I loved to

get there knowing I was going to beat them a good percentage of the time they might outrun me in the first half of the race, a good percentage of the race they would be sitting on the sidelines while I am out they're going around the race track they broke their cars, the cars simply wouldn't stand the punishment that they gave them. It was fun to watch. Very dramatic no question about it, particularly on dirt but I knew they wouldn't be around long now Richard Petty you knew he was going to be there because he drove like his dad, it was a business for them they made a living from it and so that's the way they raced and that's the way I tried to race too.

CW: Do you think there was a new sort of outlook maybe that this was your generation maybe so the second generation coming through was the beginning of NASCAR in the late forties those guys some of them could have been probably as old as your father. Do you think they had a different attitude, was it more of hell for leather, or a just get out there if the cars busts so what, was that business model coming to play more for other people to?

NJ: When I got involved the business model was changing and as a result the driving styles were beginning to change to some degree. Yeah it was, the very beginning was hell bent for leather type atmosphere that the way they drove and that was just their style the way that the sport was the way people expected them to be. But even in some of those early days, especially in the Sportsman, I still had a smoother driving style than many of those guys I was not, I don't think I was fun to watch, if you were looking for dramatics there just throwing the car sideways and throwing up those rooster tales. I figured out pretty early that a car would run faster straight than it would sideways, and so I always tried to keep my car straight as I possibly could. That didn't excite many people but it won me a lot of races and so I had to drive hard, there was no doubt about that but still it was not as dramatic looking as some of the others that I was racing against. And that's, Richard Petty drove that way, David Pearson drove like I did and they saved their equipment they knew they had to be there to win at the end to have a chance to win so they drove accordingly.

CW: Do you think there have always been the showman in NASCAR some the dramatic some the course?

NJ: I think that's been good for the sport that you had these personalities and show man all along and I hope we never lose it because it's definitely good for the sport. To have those personalities the early ones were Junior Johnson, and Curtis Turner, and Joe Weatherly they were all characters and then you see others like Joe Thomas is a name that don't come to mind when you look at winning races but he was a prankster and he just loved to have fun and he would driving really when I was, and he was just fun to be around. And was a bright spot for the sport of auto racing in my opinion when you a guy like me out there you needed somebody else to spark it up a little bit. They continued all through the years Darrell Waltrip played his part in there and Cale

Yarborough and the Allison's and then today you have the Busch's there has always been a certain number of those people there and that's good.

CW: From the driver's perspective what is it like out there on the course in terms of the other drivers of what is happening, and people who might be more dramatic, like keeping an eye for them?

NJ: Well the first thing to become a good race driver, the first thing you need to be able to do is to size up your competition, and know what you can expect from them in particular situations there are still drivers today that don't do that and they get themselves in trouble and they get involved in more wrecks than other people do, I think that is one of the reasons that they do. I always tried to size 'em up if Junior Johnson came up on me I knew what his capabilities were as far as handling that race car was concerned. And I knew that he was going to the front one way of the other and I didn't race that much with him I let him go it's fine, if my car was capable I would get him later, he beat me that day but most many times he would be sitting on the sidelines when it was all over because that was the punishment that he gave to the car and I just use him as an example he is a really good friend of mine now. We were bitter enemies back in those days but he is a good friend of mine now and you certainly need to size them up and drive accordingly.

CW: Were there people who you really didn't like to drive with, or can you not say? (laughs)

NJ: Well I wouldn't want to name names there were some that, that you preferred not to race, I will name one name and he was a very good friend, but it has been documented. Tiny Lund, he was a hard, he was one of those characters and he was a hard charger man he punished that equipment but he was good. He could handle a car very well, monumental sized guy probably 6'8", I don't know how tall he was and probably 300 pounds nicknamed, Tiny, and as far as racing with him for position he was not too difficult I enjoyed racing with him.

CW: I am sorry I don't want the tape to run out but it's not quite run out so finish this story.

NJ: I enjoyed racing with him as far as he and I racing for position is concerned if you would get a lap on him he would race you the hardest he has ever driven to when you got a lap on him he just enjoyed doing that but it was frustrating if you were racing with somebody else--

Pause in Recording

CW: Today is June 6, 2007 this is Christina Wright interviewing Ned Jarrett for the UNCC Oral History Archive. We're at 3182 Ninth Tee Drive, Newton North Carolina 28658. This is our second disc. We were just talking about the different personalities and how that showed on the

course of the different drivers on the race course. Were there people who you felt were really dangerous I suppose those people were dangerous you were just describing really weren't they. Out there on the race course what about when people were rookies did that present a certain kind of danger

NJ: You were considered about rookies when you would go to the big tracks like Daytona and Atlanta and what is now the Lowe's Motor Speedway. And most of the time they would talk to you or they you would just talk to them and try to give them any kind of advice that you could I did that you go to other drivers and talk to the you still would keep an eye out for them on the racetrack I did that you go talk to them and try to give them any advice you could. I did that before I went to drive on those big tracks, I went to talk to them. You still would keep an eye on them, that's something NASCAR has always had a special identity of those drivers. They had to run a yellow stripe on the bumper, something to identify that they were a rookie so when you were around them, you know that you were racing against a rookie. Yeah there was some that along the way, that I'd be more dangerous, or subject to get you into trouble than others, but you watch out for them. So it was just part of the sport.

CW: With the Grand National series that you started racing, how many races a year would you tend to do? Were you building up to doing more than you had been during the Sportsman series?

NJ: Well not as far as numbers are considered the first year that I ran fulltime in the Grand National Series was 1960. And I think we ran about forty-six or seven races, something like that, which was not as many as I had been running in the Sportsman division. But they were bigger events and all of them were at least one hundred miles, so well there might have been a few that was run on a quarter of a mile track that were 200-mile races, but they were still longer than the Sportsman racing that we run. Once I commented to run the races in 1960, to run all the races I did that through 1965. Those were the only six years I had run the full circuit. And--

CW: How exhausting is that, how exhausting is that?

NJ: It was pretty exhausting when we got, I think in 1964 we ran fifty-eight races. Of course I believe it was. It was tiring. Of course I didn't have to work on any race cars so then that helped but I still was either the owner or the manager of the team I didn't race at any time during my career that I was not either the owner or the manager of the team. And so that out extra strain and stress on me but you know it was a part of having to do what we do.

CW: Why did you choose that was there just ever anybody who would have been a perfect match for you or was that just more normal for the time to be--

NJ: Well it was more normal for the time certainly yes. My first preference would have been to drive for someone whom I didn't have to have anything to do with could just drive the race car. But that were not many of those opportunities around. And so I had to create my own involvement in the Grand National I knocked on doors six or seven months. I just didn't have any with somebody but there were just not many rides around do I gave a bad check for a car and bought it. And a that launched me into the Grand National series.

CW: So is that where you bought the car (laughs), raced it, won it and then put the money in the bank is that the story?

NJ: Yeah, I there was a car, 1957 Ford, this was in 1959 that was for sale that Junior Johnson had been driving and it was a winning race car because Junior was winning races in it. And I was cocky enough to believe I could win races in it also I had never even been in a real competitive car in Grand National but (pause) I had been running driving for a guy in a whole wasn't even secondary equipment it was worse than that, but I was out there getting some experience the old saying is Out of sight out of mind. And so if you are not about there if somebody or a ride does come open you aren't likely to get it. So I told a friend of mine and my brother that I knew I was going to change my style I was going to buy that car they wanted \$2,000 for it. And they say, What are you going to buy it with? I said, "Well I'll wait until the bank opens." This was on a Friday night and the bank stayed open back then Saturday until noon and said, "I will wait until the bank closes and I will write a check for it." And there was a race at Myrtle Beach in South Carolina that paid \$950 to win and there was a race at the old Charlotte fairgrounds track on Sunday afternoon that also paid \$950 to win. And I said, "I will go win these two races and that's \$1,900 of the \$2,000 and I scrape that other \$100 up before the bank open on Saturday morning. And I always had money flowing in one way or the other with all the things that I did here or there so I would have found it one way the other to cover that check. But my plan was to win those two races and fortunately I was able to do that and so I was in business then. And so then the next year I was going in it fulltime and had a guy that promised me, at a Ford dealership, that promised me help. The Ford Motor Company was going to do through him. And I fell for it, ordered a car, we took the cars off the showroom floor back then and built them, and ordered the car and he said, "I need for you to give me a check for it." And he said, "I'll give you my check but neither one of us will put them in the bank." And if we do, said, "I will call you the day I put mine in and you put yours in the bank the same day." So that sounded reasonable to me and I believe the guy so we came home and tore the car apart and started making a race car out of it, in about three days, three or four days the bank called me and said, You are overdrawn. I paid him \$2,500 for the car that's was a new car back in 1960. And I called him and I said, "What is going on you are not supposed to deposit that check." He said, "We are having a mix-up with Ford" and said "You can't deposit that check that I gave you yet, said I will tell you when you can." So I had to go borrow money to cover that check and I had employees, I had to two fulltime guys working for me then, so I starting having to pay them so I borrowed money to get through all of

that. And basically financed myself that first year in 1960 and we did pretty well we were third in the points going into the last year the last race of the year and we blew an engine and we wound up fifth in the points but we won five races during the year so that was pretty good in our first full year. And he was good enough that Chevrolet was doing somethings under the table with Rex White, and he won the Championship in 1960 in Chevrolet and they wanted a young driver another driver they wanted more than one running out there on a regular driver and so Rex recommended me of I was running Fords of course to that point and so I had to have help or I could not continue. So, they gave me enough help so I was able to run the next year we lucked up and beat Rex White for the fourth championship and then Chevrolet still helped us in '62 then Ford knew what was going on as far as Chevrolet was considered so they came to Darlington in September of 1962 and announced to the world that they were going to have four teams in NASCAR and they would sponsor them to a pretty good degree and fortunately I was one of the four that they choose to do that so, each year got a little bit better as far as getting some help was consider.

CW: What kind of help did Ford give you?

NJ: Well Ford's deal was that they would--see they had Holman and Moody in Charlotte, was a performance arm for them, they made a lot of racing parts for Ford. And all of the parts, Ford would give you their cars that were, Holman and Moody would build them up to a certain point with the chassis and the roll bar cage and the body, well the body was wrong to begin because they didn't do them back then, they still did them were taken new cars you would get the car then you would tailor it, take it to your shop and tailor it to your own specifications and so they that during the year so they would continue to give you the parts and they also gave \$2,000 per race for every race that was 250 miles or longer. There was seventeen of those events back then so that was \$34,000 in cash that we would get and Chevrolet I was only getting \$15,000 cash after I won the championship, the first year in '61 they didn't get I forget I am not sure there is any cash involved that first year. But they give us cars and parts and things like that so that still was not enough money, the sport had got to the point where you couldn't win enough money and make it, but it was very difficult, put it that way. But in that year of '63 I brought a partner in and he put up the money to--during the winter--to pay the mechanics and get the cars built and get us to Daytona and that was the deal that he would put up the money and I would take a salary of \$200 a week, and I was having to help work on the car some at that point, not a lot, because I was running the organization. At the end of the year then if there was any money left over he would get his money back, my partner, and then we would split what was left. And at the end of the year we won eight or nine races that year and at the end of the year we had enough money to get his money back and we had \$10,000 to split. And so, when I said you couldn't, I had to work all kind of tire deals, this that and the other to make that happen it, certainly wasn't, it wasn't due to prize money that we won but we made it work by watching things very closely. And I think my business experience that I had learned early-on in life helped me to do that.

CW: Who was your partner?

NJ: A guy by the name of Bob Robinson from Fairfax, Virginia. He had a cement business, a commercial cement business, Burton and Robinson, he had a partner in his business too. But Robinson was the big race fan and the car was listed in his name and he was just a big fan and he wanted to be a part of a team and so we did that. And then at the end of that year Holman and Moody called me--John Holman of Holman and Moody called me and said, "How would you really like to get into a situation where you really didn't have to worry about the money would be there for you. You could manage the team and drive the race car probably the best deal that you have had in your life." I said, "We'll talk more." And he kept telling me about it, was Bondy Long whose mother married a DuPont and he had a race team but he was floundering with it because he had no leadership. And he had been to Ford, Chrysler, and General Motors, or his representatives had, there was a lawyer and a banker from Wilmington, Delaware who were Mr. DuPont's, two of his right arms and then they went and tried to get help and those manufacturers were not going to give help to that team because of its lack of experience and management. So they said well you got anybody in your organization or your drivers that might could fill the role as a manager for us, be a father, so to speak, to Bondy Long. Bondy was twenty-three years old and he was just a kid that that had, didn't really care that much about the business end of things, he liked to tinker on race cars and be around the sport. But money didn't mean anything to him--not that he had that much of it, he just, it had no, all of his life it had been handed to him, not just give him a big bank account and say you go do what you want to do. I mean they kept control of things, but he never really had to work for a living and so he just really, he didn't know what to do. So we flew down, John Holman and I, he chartered a small airplane and we flew to Camden, South Carolina that's where they were located and met with them. And before that day ended, I made a deal with them to come down and be the manager of their race team and would be the driver of the team. And as far as I know, I was the first driver to get a salary, now there was a guy by the name of Kiekhaefer that was in the sport back in the late fifties and he was very dominant. He had Mercury Outboards and he ran Chrysler cars and he was very, very dominant, even more dominant than Hendricks is today and he did pay his drivers a salary but it was based against the money that they would win, it was more of a guarantee. But I was paid a salary, plus my regular driving commission and that was pretty big, so yeah it took the load off of me. That I was able that first year driving for them to pay back the money I had borrowed the first year in 1960 to get into the business. It took me that long to win enough money and to keep my head above water all along, keep doing it, and even after I won the championship there was no money in the championship. I got just a little over \$6,000 for winning the championship in 1961. So that was a Godsend for me to be able to get into that situation, it was basically like running my own team but I was using somebody else's money. So we did that for two and half years.

CW: Do think that there were many people who can do that run a team and also drive?

NJ: Not today the concept of the sport has changed so much you know Robby Gordy does a pretty good job at it today. Although he has a business manager and he has, of course I had a crew chief, but he also has engineers and people who can help do all that kind of stuff. Of course he does not have to worry about that kind of stuff, but it is difficult first of all for a single car team to make it through especially if it's owner, driver type situation.

CW: How have things changed for you then after all that? Do you have a crew chief now you had a whole pit crew and--

NJ: Yeah, we had a full pit crew we had seven people working for us then where I, I had evolved to the point where I had three fulltime employees. When I won the championship in 1961 I had only had two employees that year but then after that year I went for Rob Robinson '63 we were able to hire another mechanic but we had three mechanics fulltime running fifty to sixty races a year.

CW: Did they all come from this area? Where they--

DJ: They did, John Irving was a young guy that just come out of high school he was a real good worker and was good guy and then he learned and wanted to learn and to he did learn he eventually became my crew chief but all I mentioned earlier he was the first crew chief that I had there but when I moved to Camden, SC to do the deal with Bondy Long did not go that is when we separated he didn't want to move his family and go down there so John Irving became the crew chief.

CW: Did your other employees did they fluctuate or were they the same?

NJ: Well when we, when we went to Bondy Long, we inherited some of his buddies that had been working on the car. One was a cousin and couple of others were just buddies so we inherited them. But they were good, they were good workers, they did have before it was a business-like organization they didn't know really what they were supposed to do and so we went in there with John Irving being a good leader and also another guy by the name of Mack Howard which had become our third employer so he did move down there also. So they had two leaders there to train them and they were willing to learn so it made a pretty good team what were the challenges of the time.

CW: What were the challenges for the team at that time what did have to be able to do?

NJ: See the crew chief back then worked on the race cars along with the other mechanics we would try to specialize as much as we could what guy would work on the suspension of the car. Now Bondy was good at the engine that was about all he was good for. But we had another guy by the name of Kenny Miller that came from another team, from Spartanburg, South Carolina that went to work for us over there he was very good at engines. So we tried to put them in positions today they are all specialist but that was somewhat back in those days and--

CW: Was that your idea?

NJ: Well it was beginning to happen and other racing organization I wouldn't say that we copied them in any means we just tried to make the best of what we had to work with.

CW: When you won the first Grand National what was it like how did you feel?

NJ: Well it was a great feeling of accomplishment to a degree we didn't realize the total significant of it as I mentioned earlier I certainly wasn't prepared personally to take advantage capitalize on it, to capitalize on it get the most from it or either to represent my family and my sport the way I wanted to but still you know that was the goal was to go out and win the championship. And it has become more meaningful as time has gone by it was more meaningful today to be listed in the book, the records as being one of the twenty some odd champions all with NASCAR and then to have done it twice there, there are less than twenty people who have done it more than once. So, it has become much more meaningful as time has gone by but again I mean it was a goal but that we set and we try to do it and you know the trophy was nice and the little bit of money that went along with it was nice.

CW: Where was the celebration held at that time?

NJ: The celebration was held in Daytona NASCAR would celebrate all of its champions--the Modified, the Sportsman, and the Grand National--the same night in the same building. As a matter of fact, they didn't have room enough. In the (pause) I guess it was a restaurant or some kind banquet room I guess it was a banquet room. But they didn't have room where you could invite all of your crew up for three different divisions. You could take your crew chief I think and that was about it. That's where I meant Bobby Allison he had won the Modified Championship in '65 when I won the Grand National for the second time we were seated beside each other at the end table.

CW: Now one of your great races was I guess the Darlington race part of that '65 Grand National series I don't know if you see it as being a real highlight but can you describe that race.

NJ: Definitely, it was the highlight of my driving career and it was one of the goals that I set for myself when I got into the sport. I wanted to win the Southern 500. It was the first 500-mile stock car race and a lot of tradition that went with it, on the toughest track there is. And so, it took me awhile but finally accomplished it in 1965 and it was not an easy one to win then even though it is still in the record books as being the greatest margin of victory of any 500 mile of any NASCAR race really. But I feel good about that part of it, I would love to sit here and tell you that I just flat out ran anybody by fourteen laps but I didn't. It was a good race for about 400 miles Fred Lorenzen and Darel Dieringer and myself, and Lorenzen and Dieringer in particular, I mean they were fighting for the lead more times than I was involved with fighting for the lead but I did. There as far as competition was consider if my car would finish I could finish the race. There was question of concern if my car started overheating that the thing that put Lorenzen out and every other Ford manufactured car that was in the race all went out with burned-up engine. Ford had bought a new aluminum radiator there for that race overheating was always problem at Darlington still is today and it is the reason for it the build of rubber on the track the track just grinds rubber off the tires and builds up as you go around the car in front of you throw that rubber back into your grill and that's when the grill stops it up where air can't flow through the engine gets no cooling. And everybody knew that so Ford had these designed to eliminate that problem. Well the problem they made them bigger they hold more water but it still didn't fix the problem because it made the fins too close together. They put more fins in it and put them closer together and that would catch the rubber more it would make them run hotter quicker than they were before and we fortunately realized that before the race started to we put some extra screen off with a rope wire or something that I pulled that screen off and layers of it and that helped but eventually my car started over heat to and the last one hundred miles but there was no way the engine was equipped but it did through prayer and preservation we made it and (pause) that was yeah my biggest win because it was one of the goals I set for myself. Of course I was living in Camden, South Carolina about forty miles away at this time it was our own track and it was a very, very special day.

CW: What were other highlights for you what was the second most wonderful race you ever ran or--

NJ: Are you talking about my driving career?

CW: Yeah, yeah, no in your driving when you were driving yourself.

NJ: I won in at Atlanta in 1964 and that was very that was the first superspeedway race that I ever won. Again, it was the day that all the Ford cars had trouble, and Ford had a new valve system they had engineered or had someone to engineer a very special valves that were supposed to produce more horsepower and live longer. The only problem was that the material, the metal that they put in the valve stems would grow when it got hot and when it did then as the values

got longer the springs would push it more against the camshaft and against the cylinder head and you pop the head off the valve and you were basically done for the day. So then you pinch through the metal down there and you would blow the engine and there again we learned on Saturday before that what was happening that those valves were growing back then we could keep the values adjusted. Back then we adjusted the values right before the race and after each practice and all this kind of thing and you're wondering what in the world is going on those things tightening up so much and you couldn't keep them adjusted so we figured out there growing. So we started the race the car wouldn't run very fast and we taken the horsepower away from what those valves were intended to do. And we just guessed at how much we needed to open them up for them for them to still be there at the end of the race how much ever they to grow and be right at the end of the race and we ran the fastest at the end of the race. Fortunately we guessed right, and every other Ford in field blew up excepting ours and because of the values deals and I think Richard Petty ran second I believe we had a pretty good race with Richard Petty and Paul Goldsmith they were with Chrysler cars and, and that was a great feeling of accomplishment to beat everybody on that track. And it also was a, it was during the time between when Fireball Roberts had been burned in his accident that I was involved in that accident too between the time of that accident and the time of his death. And so that I dedicated the race to him and that was very special to me.

CW: He was a friend of yours?

NJ: Yes.

CW: As well that must have been an excruciating experience a trauma.

NJ: Yes it was. Certainly to lose a friend to see him get burned and suffer for six weeks and eventually die. That was difficult to take but I think race drivers all, there philosophy is, When my time comes to go, I am going to go wherever I am at or whatever I am doing. If you believe that it helps you get through things a lot easier it helps you get through life a lot easier I still believe that I want say it is written down in a page somewhere a book. I just think the good Lord takes you when he sees fit and when that time comes. I don't know that it matters what you're doing or where you are, or things like that but that helps you get through but having that belief, whether it's right or wrong, helps you get through those difficult periods. But you know there were some good things that came out of that accident with Fireball it is too bad someone has to lose their life to awaken the eyes of people. To start making something better. The fuel cell along with that accident and the next day at the Indianapolis Speedway the flameproof uniforms was another item that came as a result of that accident. Thank God for those innovations, how long we would have continued with those safety features, who know if man not died. Too bad it had to happen that way that life, that's the way things are. The great things we have today many of them came from tragedy.

CW: And you won an award for bravery was that for helping him to get out of the car?

NJ: Yeah, NASCAR gave me a heroism award for my efforts for, my efforts in helping him to get out of the car and that was a natural instinct thinking that you do. You don't think about the things that you do you go do what you have to do at that moment. When our cars finally quit wrecking, we were only about thirty feet apart. And the advantage that I had was that my car remained upright though the whole deal it was in fire it was the first car to catch on fire and Fireball when it hit me and hit the wall both them bust the gas tanks open when he hit the car backwards. So his car caught fire too and he hit an embankment and the wall caused his car to flip upside down, and caused the firewall to burst open which allowed raw gasoline to run inside the cockpit of the car. And he was not physically injured in that wreck so I had gotten out of my car immediately because I knew it was on fire so I went and sat down on the wall there for just a second or fraction of a second and I looked up and saw that he was trying to get out of his car. So, I went over and took he already had his seat belts loose so I just grabbed him and pulled him out so we stood there on the track and ripped his uniform off. Fireball was a class guy, he was the first one that I remember of using tailored made driving suit and in those days, there were no known fabrics on the market that were flameproof except for asbestos; and asbestos was much too heavy. I had a uniform built of asbestos before that accident happened but I couldn't wear it. I couldn't have made it a hundred miles and so NASCAR would require us to dip whatever clothing we were wearing, didn't have to be a uniform, whatever you wanted to wear they had a mixture of boric acid and other ingredients that flame proofed that cloth and you would hang it on the fence and it let it dry. It looked terrible, looked like you had got drunk and threw up in it and wallowed in it, but it was flameproof. You could take a blow torch to it and it would not burn it. But Fireball was allergic to that solution and he had a letter from his doctors not to that effect so NASCAR allowed him to drive in the uniform without having them flameproof and he had a uniform that had just been made for him for that race. It had zippers on the sleeves and down the sides and on the legs. I mean tight fitting very neat, classy looking uniform hard to get off when you need to get it off in a hurry though. And we just literally ripped it off of him all the places where their zippers where you know they got hot they burned him and where there was an opening you know if you strike a match here it's gonna burn much more quicker than if you put it up here where there is air that can get around it and so that what was happening so at the bottom of his uniform where there opening was and then it was burning there and then it got the zippers hot and the neck and around the sleeves and that's where his major burns were. By the time we got it ripped off of him the damage had already been done and it was only a minute or so before the rescue people got there and I just stepped aside and let them do their job but of course there weren't many of us, so we weren't able to do enough quick enough to save him. Of course it was not the technology and treatments then that there are today if that would have happened in today's world it would not of been a big deal they would have treated him and he would have been fine. But they did the best that they could do and fortunately Firestone went to work

immediately after that and made the fuel cell then DuPont also immediately started making flameproof cloth that you could make a uniform out of--

CW: There are some good things that come from tragedies.

NJ: Yeah, yeah.

CW: Did you, what did you feel about the race course at Charlotte and the 600-mile race? Was that a whole lot more sort of autos' than the other races?

NJ: Well in one sense it was but it was only a 400-lap race and so we were running, we were running 500-lap races at Bristol, Tennessee and I high banked half-a-mile track at Weaverville, North Carolina that were more physically demanding than in Charlotte. You had to prepare yourself more I knew that I would get hungry during that long period of time and I get weak when I get hungry and I didn't have a lot of reserve back then and I am still bought the same way as I was back then then I am today. So I would get what would call that stuff Metrical(??) it was a mixture that had just come on the market back then that many people use now as then had a lot of protein in it other values that I didn't anything about back then I would have then give me a cup of that so I would have me a meal when I would come in the pit stop. And so I stayed hydrated I always carried water that was very important had a water jug in the car.

CW: How much would you drink in one of those?

NJ: Oh maybe a gallon or so yeah, but it got where it wasn't very pleasant halfway through the race ice had melted because the water had gotten hot sitting there on that floorboard but it was still wet, it was better than nothing.

CW: In a race that long is there any point which you are on automation can you never afford to be on automation?

NJ: No you can't afford to be on automation at all you just got to fully concentrate all the time that's why it is so tough mentally because the concentration level you have to maintain.

CW: How did you prepare for something like that?

NJ: I thought about it a lot certainly and tried to tell myself to not get upset and do things that cause additional stress to you so I just tried to remain calm and not get stressed out and I knew if I could do that and stay hydrated that I would be ok.

CW: Did it ever feel tedious or not?

NJ: You mean anxious--

CW: Or well--

NJ: --when the race was starting?

CW: When you're going around and around does it ever feel?

NJ: You didn't get dizzy no. (laughs)

CW: Did it ever feel, oh I wish this part was over?

NJ: Oh there were times you look up to the scoreboard and say man this thing is only half over--

CW: Yeah.

NJ: --can you make it, but you can. Mind over matter in a situation like that just not dwell on it you can't afford to dwell on it.

CW: Where would you start to compete where would start to really try to get into the front well if the car capable to do it comfortably I would do it at any time my style was the last a hundred or a hundred and fifty miles or something like that depending on the circumstances you knew that there was going to be a lot of attrition in those races back then the cars just simply the technology was not there so you sort of watched how that would go on a given day it is a lot easier to race four or five cars at the end of the race than it is to race forty cars at the beginning of the race so we, as time would go by, I was a methodical-type driver calculating and tried to take a lot of things into consideration while I was out there driving. You see we didn't have communication, audio communication between the driver and the pit crew just used signals even though your concentration level still has to be high to think through what was going on and try to blend in accordingly.

CW: And it wouldn't have made a huge difference when they did get communication in terms of impute that the pit crew could give you and also you get them ready for what you needed.

NJ: And we had signals that we could use if the car was tied for example we usually would put my hand out the door on the top of the car and if it would lose I would pat the door down.

CW: So they knew.

NJ: Yeah, so they knew what adjustment they needed.

CW: How many times did you have to change the wheels on that long of a race?

NJ: Well the fuel cells were the same size back then so you still were stopping every hundred miles at that point.

CW: So would you change tires at that point?

NJ: Not every time of course the tires were so hard back then they would run faster and longer. In 1955 Jim Reed won the Southern 500 on the same set of tires no chance of our and that's on a track that really eats tires up and he got faster as the race went on because the rubber was so hard and tread depth was much higher in the tires now you don't have but six or seven thousand of pieces of rubber. But back then I think those tires had close to a half an inch of rubber one man's so the more you have wear down the more rubber you would have on the racetrack the more (pause) pattern, pattern of the tires well basically more rubber on the racetrack that would make you run faster. You know people had somewhat of the misconception, is when the tires run out on the passenger car that they don't have as much grip as they have when a tire has a lot of tread and that is true if the pavement is wet. But on dry pavement you have a lot more traction and capability to sticking to the road when tires are worn down most people don't think about that they don't have reason to because you do to when your tires get worn out you do need to get new tires because primarily because of the wet pavement situation. Slick tires will not appease to wet pavement like the treaded tires will.

CW: I mean I knew about them wet but not with dry that's interesting.

NJ: And so that's the same those hard tires back then the longer you ran then the better they would be because you are running on a dry racetrack the only thing that you risk your chances of picking up something on the track or cutting a tire increase as time goes by; because those were all treaded tires back then. Today of course they are all slick tires to begin with and degrees before that more rubber on the ground.

CW: Shifting back to the drivers in the early sixties when Curtis Turner tried to form a union of drivers where you very involved in that did you feel it was a good idea?

NJ: Well to a degree he convinced me that we really needed that, we needed some representation then we had no representation in the sport at that time. It sounded really good that they could maybe help to increase the purchases to do things that would be more beneficial to the drivers and the car owners and I actually had agreed to join the union until Bill France came to Bowman Gray Stadium and made his speech to us and he convinced the majority of us that not the way to

do it. And I am glad he did because that is not the right thing to do, but from that after that it did serve the purpose of NASCAR. They appointed a committee, I happened to be the one they choose, they was car owner, a driver, and couple of track promoters, I forget how many were on that committee and it served a purpose and we would have periodic meeting, drivers had grievances and they would come to me and pass it on and we go through that committee. And I think that was one of the first steps to NASCAR beginning to open up a little bit to others involved in the sport the drivers other people to listen a little bit more to them I think it was beneficial for NASCAR.

CW: Does that committee still exist?

NJ: No, no but they still consult the people now on a regular basis that the public never knows about. Not as a group, well I take that back, they do it more as a group there bring all the crew chiefs together for example when they decided they were going to bring in the car of tomorrow starting next year full time they did that through talking to a lot of people, drivers, car owners, and crew chiefs, so the final decision was made after meeting with the crew chiefs they said, Yeah let's go ahead and do because we are spending too much money two different types of cars here. And so the concept still exists today, better than it ever did. A lot of times the public never knows about those meetings and what decisions were made and many times a decision might be made from those meeting but NASCAR will take the information from them and then make the decisions that they feel is best for everybody involved. So I think that is good.

CW: And I am aware that you have a doctor's appointment that they were letting you leave so I think we probably will actually, even though we are kind of in the middle of things, will need to finish for today so you can get to that appointment.

NJ: Okay, okay.

CW: Thank you.

End of Interview.