

## Questions for AOI Project 160 Self-Interview

### Childhood

- What is your full name? Why did your parents pick that name?

William Noble Brown: William for my paternal grandfather William Henry Brown and Noble for my maternal grandfather Noble James Wiley

- Do you have brothers & sisters?

One half-sister Hulit PRESSLEY Taylor, daughter of my mother's first marriage to Milton Hughes Pressley who died in a military air crash in 1944.

- When and where were you born? How did your family come to live in DC?

I was born May 5, 1950 at Georgetown University Hospital and, curiously, I have designated the GU Medical School as the recipient of my whole-body donation upon my death.

My family has always lived in DC. I'm a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Washingtonian

- What is your earliest memory?

Until I was two years of age, we lived in the Davenport Terrace apartments on Connecticut Avenue and Davenport Street, NW. I vividly recall looking out our window down into the parking lot area between the apartment buildings and seeing a yellow Griffith Consumers coal truck delivering coal into the building.



*Figure 1 in front of Davenport Terrace with my Mom. c.1952*

- Describe what your siblings were like. Who were you closest to?

My sister, Hulit, was 11 years older so I was often quite the pest to her and her teenaged friends. I was 7 when she went off to St. Lawrence University so I “inherited” her 3<sup>rd</sup> floor living space in our house on Surrey Lane, NW. I had a two-bed back room, study area in the middle of the floor, a sitting/entertainment room in the front and a full bath. Quite a suite for a pre-teen!



*Figure 2 With Big Sister Hulit, c.1955*

- Describe the house you grew up in. Describe your room.

See previous for my living “quarters”... the Tudor style brick town house, built ~ 1928 or so by Boss & Phelps, was on the corner of Surrey Lane and Greenwich Parkway, diagonally across the street from the home that my paternal grandparents purchased in 1926 for \$8,600. The house had an unfinished basement, laundry area and toilet and an indoor garage, used for storage. A large unenclosed back porch (no stairs to the yard below), a galley type kitchen, living room, dining room, brick vestibule (which the previous owner, Mr. Whitcome, built because he hated his next-door neighbor, Judge Rutledge, and didn't want to have to see him coming and going from his home).

The second floor consisted of three bedrooms and a bath.



*Figure 3 My "recording studio"/"man cave" in high school.*

- Describe your neighborhood.

Foxhall Village was a small “suburban” Tudor style conclave of brick townhouses begun in 1926. There were about 200 townhouses that made up the triangle bounded by Foxhall Road to the west, Reservoir Road to the north and 44<sup>th</sup> Street & Glover-Archbold Park to the east. There were a number of families with kids my age but most were ‘older,’ settled residents a number of whom had lived there from its beginnings. The Hardy Elementary School served the neighborhood just across Foxhall Road on the SW corner of Q Street, NW and the playground area, now Hardy Park, didn’t really begin to see activity until DC constructed a Field House there in the late 50’s or early 60’s.



*Figure 4 A c.1930 photo showing our house pictured here on the right before Mr. Whitcome built that vestibule.*

- Where did you shop? How far away were these shops and how did you get there?

There were three small retail stores on the east side of Foxhall between Q Street and Greenwich Parkway: Doc Crofton's "Foxhall Pharmacy," a lady's beauty salon/hairdresser and the Safeway/Sanitary Market operated by Raymond Reagan and his wife. Mr. Reagan was also a developer and built a number of homes in the Palisades. Their son, Ronny, was a year behind me at Hardy and through Western High School, but as they lived at 48<sup>th</sup> & U near the MacArthur Theater and later the Safeway, we never were close friends.

- What were your duties around the house as a child? What were the other children's duties? How did duties break down by gender?

See Chores below

- What did you do for fun when you were young? Did you have a favorite toy?

I grew up in the days of B&W television's Superman, Wild Bill Hickcock, Roy Rogers, Sky King and Gene Autrey. If our bikes weren't

horses or airplanes, our long dishtowels pinned to our shirts allowed us to leap off the many brick walks that adorn the village and allowed us to “scale tall buildings in a single bound.”

- What chores did you have? Which chore was worst?

I don't really remember a set of chores for me to earn my miniscule allowance... probably keeping my room picked up, taking out the trash and helping with the family pets (a series of cats over the years).

- Did your family attend church? How did religion affect your family? What do you believe now?

Yes, regular attendees of the local St. Patrick's Episcopal Church at the top of Greenwich Parkway bounded by Foxhall Road and Reservoir Road. I (begrudgingly) attended Sunday School, was baptized (late as a 7-year-old), and was Confirmed (Protestant version of First Communion). Later as a pre-teen plus a couple of years, I along with several friends were acolytes or “altar boys,” assisting behind the rail, trying to stifle a growling stomach from not eating a sufficient breakfast and on more than one occasion passing out during the service.

I am now an avowed Atheist.

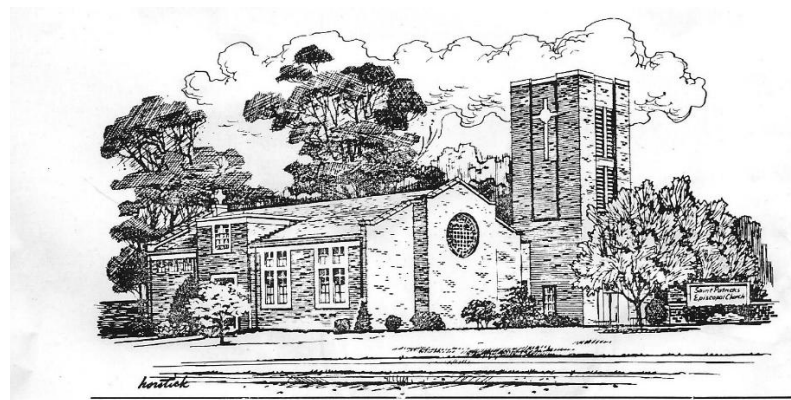


Figure 5 Graphic of St. Patrick's from their newsletter, "The Shamrock."

- Where did you go to school? What was it like?

I attended Rose Lees Hardy Elementary School at Foxhall Road and Q Street from Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I recall each of my teachers by name even today and certain quirks or characteristics about each of them (see below).



*Figure 6 As the Safety Patrol Lieutenant along with Patrol Captain Ronny Levin in front of Hardy School. c.1961*

- Was there a graduation ceremony?

I honestly don't recall...

- What were your favorite subjects in school and why?

Math and science. I was not a good reader.

- Who were your favorite teachers and why?

The kind ones, which most of them were in those days.

Mrs. Smith, Kindergarten... it was only ½ day with mornings in the fall, afternoons in the spring... daily "polio naps" on ratan mats, our own "cloak room" and toilet.

Mrs. Gaffney, First Grade... lived in the Palisades, she and her husband ran a summer camp in southern Maryland on the Potomac.

Mrs. Quaid, Second Grade... lots of sitting in circles reading out loud.

Miss Wilson, Third Grade... wore those "old lady" shoes, had to teach a combined 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade and always wanted to know who was bringing the "gin-ja-ale" to the party.

Miss Korn, Fourth Grade... straight out of teacher's college, very nice and caring.

Mrs. Hardy (no relation to the school's name), Fifth Grade... was patient and kind despite having to deal with those pre-teen 10-year-olds.



*Figure 7 Fifth Grade teacher Mrs. Hardy... at Hardy.*

Miss Gibson, Sixth Grade... she was a tyrant. If she liked you (I was liked) she was very nice and accommodating. If you were on her hit list, well... you got yelled at every day. She did a great job preparing us for what was to come in junior high school.



*Figure 8 Miss Gibson in front of Hardy. c. 1961*

- Who were your friends and what did you do when you got together?

Since age 5: Buzz Berky (Radford) – cowboys & Indians, Superman, Sky King; later Snookie (Claire) Henline (one of 8 kids), if we were playing Sky King, she was Penny; Alice Reynolds, very busy with equestrian stuff but loved to hike and goof off in Glover-Archbold Park.



*Figure 9 Buzz Berky and me with my Grandfather "Pop," William H. Brown. Easter, 1955*



*Figure 10 Alice Reynolds and my Dad, 1961*



*Figure 11 Alice Reynolds, me and Buzz Berky prior to a concert. Possibly, "Spirit" in Annapolis, c. 1966*

- Did you have any hobbies?

Played (at) the piano from age 7; riding my bike; the above fantasy activities; pestering my teenaged sister and her friends

- Favorite stories? Favorite games or make-believe? Favorite toys?

Mostly Golden Books early then Danny Dunn and the Homework Machine and Tom Swift and His Magnificent Flying Machine. I also recall the Trollycar Family. I had an American Flyer train I enjoyed but it usually only came out at Christmastime.

- What did you want to be when you grew up?

Not much thought given to it until I had to come up with something for my high school yearbook: Airline Pilot. Never pursued the open skies.

- What were the different groups at your school? Which did you belong to? How do you think you were perceived by others?

High school was the first place where cliques began to emerge: the sport folks/jocks; the music/theatre folks; the eclectic types (counterculture, marijuana smokers); several schisms of Black groups;

and, those involved with the ROTC. Of course, there was a lot of overlap, too. At Western, we weren't permitted to wear blue jeans; so, I caused the administration extreme cognitive dissonance by wearing blue jeans... with a coat and tie!

- Were you involved in any extracurricular activities? What were they?

After I ended my ROTC activities at the end of my junior year (it was before school and after school), I became the piano accompanist for the school's music teacher Charlotte Bostic. I spent many hours after school, during school and in between... often being excused from regular academic classes because I was "needed."

- What were your plans when you finished school? Education? Work?

Finish school, attend college locally and not giving much thought to a career path.

- Did you have jobs during your teenage years? Doing what?

As a 14-year-old, I was an afterschool "shelver" at the newly opened Palisades Branch Library.

For a couple of weeks in high school, I was the switchboard attendant at the Arva Motor Motel on Arlington Boulevard across from the Pershing Gate of Ft. Myer. It was quite sleazy with the manager holding poker games in his back room... who knew what else was going on?

- At what age did you begin dating? What kinds of activities did you do on dates? Describe your first date.

I started dating a neighborhood girl around 14 but then got too busy with school stuff. Later, we usually "dated" in groups.

- What books did you read? What music did you listen to? What sports did you play? What crafts did you participate in?

Probably didn't read anything I wasn't required to read... sadly. No high school sports. Piano lessons because I "had to..." and as a 16/17-year-old played keyboard/organ (a Farfisa to be exact) with a "garage" band, "The Tangerine Flake." We had quite a few memorable gigs at Georgetown garden parties, arriving tour groups at Dulles' Air France Lounge, and a day of Rock n Roll at the National Cathedral.



*Figure 12 The Tangerine Flake in rehearsal. (L-R) Jamie Alonzo, Howard Carr, Taylor Alonzo, me, Ricky Patterson, and Bill Skinner.*

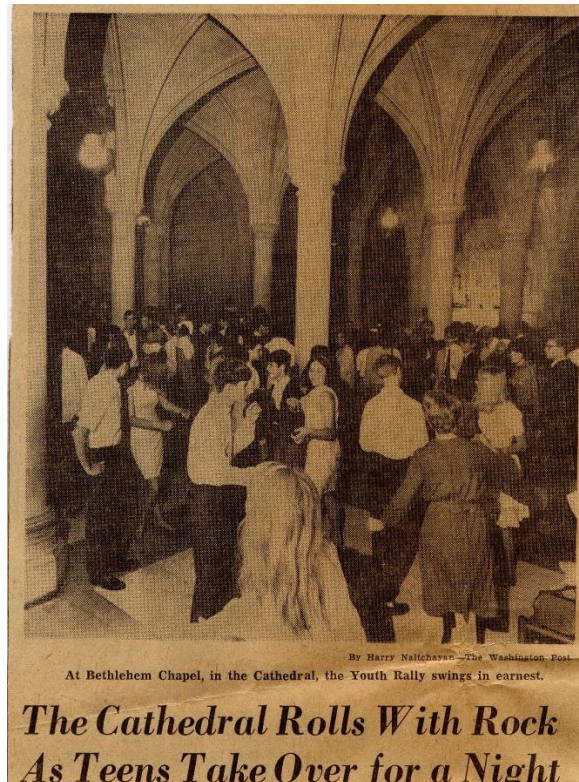


Figure 13 Rocking out at the National Cathedral.

## Relatives

- Tell me a story about your mother/father that shows what kind of person they were. [working on it...]
- What was your mother's maiden name? Hulit WILEY
- What type of work did your parents do?

My mother was the parish secretary at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church and my father was the Northern Virginia Salesman for the Burrough's Business Machine Corporation.

- Where is family buried in DC? Paternal side at Rock Creek; maternal side mostly at Arlington National Cemetery.

- What did your grandparents look like?



*Figure 14 William H. Brown, c. 1962*



*Figure 15 My grandmother Sadie Louise THOMAS Brown, 1954.*

- Did your grandparents tell you any special stories?

Not really... was too young to appreciate them. My grandfather would mention from time to time some incident in Georgetown or at one of his construction sites; but most paternal side family memories come from my father's oral history that he recorded c. 1974.

- Do you know anything about your great-grandparents?

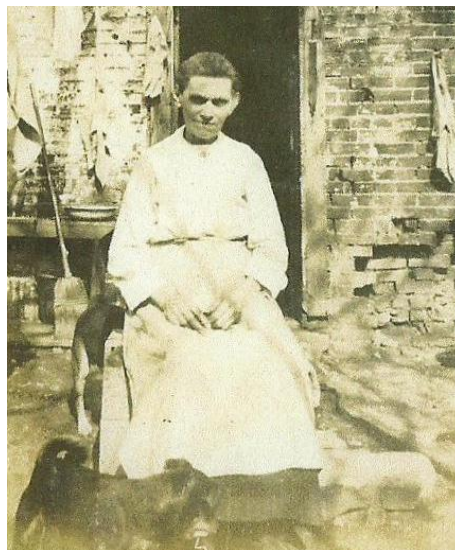
My paternal Great-grandmother was a naughty girl and had two boys out of wedlock before settling down. In my 60's, I learned via Ancestry DNA and an astute researcher in RI to learn that, in fact, I am a King and not a Brown.

- Can you tell about any “black sheep” in the family?

Given the preceding, I'm thinking my Great-grandmother Josphine Coxen was the family's black sheep.



*Figure 16 Josephine Coxen as a teen, c. 1977.*



*Figure 17 Josephine Coxen Cady tending her chickens on 8<sup>th</sup> & O Sts., NW, c. 1930*

- Can you describe the personalities of your aunts and uncles?

Maternal side uncles and aunts were career military folks and I didn't spend much time with them. Likewise, their kids – my cousins – either lived abroad OR were a slight “generation off” for me to hang out with them.

My paternal Aunt Thelma BROWN Myers and her husband John returned to the area in 1957 after he retired as a Senior Vice-President for the Westinghouse Corporation. They were very kind, he was a practical joker... not having any kids of their own, it was always off to FAO Swartz or some place for me to “pick out” my Christmas present.



*Figure 18 Thelma and John Myers with her Dad, William H. Brown, c. 1961*

- Who was your favorite family member and why?

I think my paternal Grandfather as he was always around. I once got in a snit and ran away from home... to his house across the street! I don't recall becoming particularly excited upon learning that any out-of-town relative was arriving. My maternal Grandfather, Noble J. Wiley, was kind of grumpy guy. He had a cute little Manchester dog, Cinqcum.



*Figure 19 Noble J. Wiley "Gaga", Cinqcum and me, c. 1955*

- Did you or anyone close to you serve in a war? What do you remember of that experience?

All of my maternal ancestors served in the military. Spanish American War (Ariosto Appling Wiley – the Troy University founding member guy); World War I – Noble J. Wiley; WWII and Korea – my maternal uncle Noble J. Wiley, Jr. “Buck.” They never shared any stories with me.

- Were there any special family foods or recipes? Do you still make any traditional family foods?

Meatloaf was a favorite and my mother used to make individual meat loaves in Pyrex custard cups; short ribs; spaghetti. Everything was from scratch... no frozen food entrée except for the occasional TV Dinner IF the parents were going out.

- What activities did the family do together?

Sunday drives to Great Falls and other points of interest. Occasionally a trip to Deale, MD to visit my father’s childhood friend. Later, my dad bought a small, wooden runabout with an outboard that he kept

at Deale which we'd occasionally take out before he donated it to a nearby Boy Scout camp.



*Figure 20 Fishing at Buster Beall's in Deale, MD. c. 1956*

- What did you do on Christmas? Thanksgiving? Birthdays? Other holidays?

Until my grandfather died in 1963, we always had Thanksgiving it seems at his house across the street. Having been a butcher (“baconer”) in the late 1800’s he was quite adept at cooking a large dinner and, of course, carving it expertly.



*Figure 21 My Grandfather, me, a neighbor's kid and Buzz Berky, c. 1957*

My folks always had an “open house” after the midnight (actually 10:30 or so) service Christmas Eve service at St. Patrick’s which made it difficult to get them moving on Christmas morning.

Easter was always dress up time for the “grown up” look.

- Are there any family letters, photos, recipes, or other heirlooms that have been handed down to you?

Between my wife and me, we have a lot of Asian art and furniture pieces from my mother’s family’s military service in China in the 20’s and my wife’s parents’ assignments in Japan and Okinawa in the 1950’s.

A large collection of my maternal great-grandfather’s memorabilia, papers, scrapbooks, etc., of Ariosto Appling Wiley were turned over to Troy University in Alabama as before he became a US Congressional Representative, he was an Alabama State Senator who facilitated the founding of, then, Troy Normal School which is now the

huge Troy University. The Wiregrass Archives accessioned all his materials and created a separate collection in honor of one of their founders.



*Figure 22 Being feted by Troy officials Dr. Chris Schaffer, Dean of Libraries (far right), Dr. Marty Ollilff, Director of the Wiregrass Archives and my cousin Neal Brantley in Troy, AL. 2022*

- Do you have any objects or photographs to share from your past? Do they have any documents, such as a birth certificate, marriage license, or old yearbook? Do you have a family tree?

I have all of the above cataloged, linked to Ancestry.com accounts, stored in acid-free containers, many up-loaded to YouTube as narrated slide shows or movies, and documented when/should my adult son care to deal with it.

## **Adulthood**

- Did you come to DC as an adult? If so, what brought you here?

Always been here...

- Where did/do you live in DC as an adult?

While a student at American University, I lived at home and commuted. I later moved to A.U. Park with two work associates as an early 20-year-old. Later in 1973 or so, I moved into my paternal grandfather's house on Greenwich Parkway which my father and his sister had rented out for the previous 10 years.

- What was your first job?

As a communications major at A.U., I casually left an edited version of one of Susan Stamberg's on-air contributors (who was terrible and filled with gaff, guffaws, and throat-clearings) while hanging around the student station on a Friday evening fulfilling a class-required assignment of doing two "rip & read" newscasts on Friday evenings. I left the edited tape for Mrs. Stamberg with a note as to what I'd done without modifying the original. At 9:25 that Monday morning, while still in bed, my father is yelling up the stairs, "Wake up! Some woman is on the phone for you!" Susan offered me an assistant producer position at \$1.25/hour for 10-hours per week. My first paid position in my first of three careers.



*Figure 23 The Broadcast Center which housed WAMU-FM in the 60's & 70's.*



*Figure 24 Susan Stamberg at a WAMU-FM reunion, c. 2015*

- How did you choose your line of work?

Serendipitously... while passing through home on her way to California, my sister insisted that I couldn't take just 4 classes as a first semester Freshman (after I'd successfully dropped French) and steered me toward 17.100 Introduction to Mass Communications.

- Did you serve in the military? No, though I was an ROTC Cadet as required in my sophomore and junior years of high school.
- Do you have a partner? How did you meet them?

Married a WAMU-FM coworker, Bluegrass music enthusiast

- Where did you go on dates?

Movies and, reluctantly, Bluegrass music clubs (I wasn't a fan!)

- How were you affected by large historical events (WWII, civil rights movement, 1960s counterculture)?

Avoided the Draft with a student deferment. I dropped my deferment after the 'new' lottery system went into effect and I was like 26/365 – letter of the alphabet/birthdate – so I was never going to be called up and wanted to let my eligibility expire naturally.

While I wasn't an ardent protester, I participated in several Stop the War protests and in 1969 or so was "Director of Strike Communications" at American University at the time the true activists were closing down traffic at Ward Circle.

- Did you participate in, or do you have any memories of any of the movements that came out of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, such as the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, or the gay liberation movement? Not other than stated above.
- What is the greatest challenge you have faced?

I have had a couple of health challenges beginning at age 53 and while worrisome when first diagnosed, I survived them and have maintained a relatively healthy life.

Some of my biggest challenges, I suppose, were standing up to authorities, elected officials during my 25 years as a law enforcement officer, supervisor, and executive with the Fairfax County Police Department. There were similar challenges at AU... standing up to authorities (personnel directors, bosses, the University Senate) and in my third career calling out injustices, wastefulness, and safety issues as a seasonal Park Ranger with the National Park Service on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal NHP in Georgetown for 10 years.

- What has been the best day of your life so far?

I suppose on March 31, 1981 when our son was born.



*Figure 25 Chris and his maternal Grandparents, George and Bea Meloon.*

- Why live in DC?

I've never considered moving away. With my serendipitous landings of jobs, volunteer work and lack of interest in 'traditional retirement activities,' I've felt no need to relocate.

- What's your favorite place in DC and why?

Probably the two major venues, attractions that my paternal grandfather had a role in building: The Lincoln Memorial and Meridian Hill Park on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW.

- How has DC changed since you've lived here?

Public Works projects have greatly improved over the past 30 years (e.g., since the 'imposition' of the congressionally imposed Financial Control Board)

- What were the biggest challenges living in DC growing up or as an adult and what are they now?

The lack of representation has been and continues to be a big issue. It may sound selfish but, "Why should I pay huge amounts in federal

taxes every year and yet have absolutely no say in how that money is spent... here, anywhere?”

For the many years that I’ve been politically “aware,” I was in support of either Statehood with two Senators and a Congressional representative OR “No Vote, No Tax” and forgive us paying federal taxes. Sadly, it seems that no matter who is “in charge” among those in power who might see this through – Clinton, Obama, Biden – it never happens and probably never will. I’m throwing in the towel and leaning towards carving out a federal enclave around the Mall, White House, Capitol and Federal Triangle and retroceding the rest of the city to the state of Maryland. At least we would have representation as a Maryland county.



*Figure 26 Showing my DC pride at 4425 Greenwich Pkwy., NW*

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