WILLIAM WAYNE ASTON, BBA: a conversation with the editor

William Wayne Aston and William Clifford Roberts, MD

Joel Allison, president and chief executive officer of Baylor Health Care System, introduced Bill Aston this way:

Bill Aston is highly respected by his fellow board members, members of the medical staff, and the executive team for his dedication and commitment to Baylor Health Care System's mission and vision. As a trustee, Mr. Aston has been a strong advocate and champion for providing the highest level of safe, quality, compassionate care for all patients throughout the Baylor Health Care System. He has served tirelessly on several of the boards across our system and has been instrumental in many of Baylor's initiatives that are about making it better for the patient. Mr. Aston exemplifies all the traits and attributes of what one would consider the ideal trustee. He is truly devoted to meeting the health care needs of the community, and the Baylor Health Care System has been truly blessed to be the recipient of his time and talent.

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Bill Aston (*Figure 1*) was born in Irving, Texas, on 6 October 1927. He grew up during the Depression mainly in small rural towns in East and Central Texas and also lived in Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. He was the second of four boys, and his father was rarely seen. Money was in short supply, and by age 12 he was contributing much to the ability of the family to survive. Neither parent finished high school, but Bill was a good student. He was curious, responsible, talented, and honest, and he read a lot and had good instincts. After a tour in the US Navy for 12 months in 1945 to 1946, he came to Dallas and got a job with the Dallas Power & Light (DP&L) Company clearing the ground under major power line poles. By 1983, he was its president and chief executive officer and by 1986, its chairman. After working 40 years for DP&L, he retired in 1986 at age 59.

Not long after joining the company, he realized that the only way to rise in the hierarchy was to acquire a college degree.

Figure 1. Bill Aston in August 2009.

After taking several math courses at a local high school during the evenings, he enrolled in the night school of Southern Methodist University (SMU) and graduated 6 years later—at the top of his class. (He later received a Distinguished Alumnus Award from SMU.) At age 40 he had a heart attack, which changed his lifestyle immensely. He threw away his cigarettes, started running, and began eating a much healthier diet.

His volunteer activities for the community are legendary. After serving on the board of trustees at St. Paul's Hospital, he joined the board of trustees of Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas (BUMC) and the Baylor Health Care System (BHCS). He later became chairman of the BUMC board and is now chairman of the Baylor Heart and Vascular Hospital board. Mr. Aston also has served as chairman of the board of the Texas Healthcare Trustees and in 2003, in recognition of his role in health care leadership, he was recognized for excellence in hospital governance by the Texas Healthcare Trustees Foundation's Texas Academy of Governance. He has also received the Trustee of the Year Award from the Dallas County Medical Society and a Distinguished Health Service Award from the Dallas–Fort Worth Hospital Council. He has been chairman of the local, regional, state, and national American Heart Association (AHA), serving over 30 years on its behalf. In addition, he has served as president of the Rotary Club of Dallas, as governor of Rotary District 5810, and as a board member of Baylor University, Dallas Area Rapid Transit, the Greater Dallas Crime Commission, the Greater Dallas Planning Council, the Dallas Opera, the Dallas Symphony Association, the Better Business Bureau, the Children's Medical Foundation of Texas, the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, and the Cotton Bowl Council.

Mr. Aston has received many honors and awards for his commitment to volunteerism, community service, and patriotism, including the Dwight D. Eisenhower Volunteer of the Year Award from the Texas affiliate of the AHA, the Brotherhood Citation Award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the US Department of the Treasury Award for Patriotic Service. He is a Paul Harris Fellow of Rotary International and was SMU's Corporate Community Volunteer of the

From the Baylor Health Care System board (Aston) and the Baylor Heart and Vascular Institute (Roberts), Dallas, Texas.

Year. He was a volunteer driver of the McKinney Avenue trolley for over 15 years (*Figure 2*).

He and his wife, Evelyn, are the parents of two daughters and the grandparents of two. They have lived in the same house in Dallas (Lake Highlands area) since 1961. It was a tremendous privilege to sit down with Bill Aston and listen to this incredibly nice and humble man as he described his upbringing, his career, his interests, and his accomplishments. BUMC has been enormously fortunate to have had access to his wise counsel for 25 years.

Figure 2. As a motorman on the McKinney Avenue Trolley.

William Clifford Roberts, MD (hereafter, Roberts): *Mr. Aston, it's an honor to talk with you. Thank you for your willingness to come to my home. To start, could you talk about your early life, your parents, your home, and your siblings?*

William Wayne Aston, BBA (hereafter, Aston): I was born on 6 October 1927, the year that Charles Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic. I was born in an electric utility substation on the outskirts of Irving, Texas. My mother was at the substation only to have the baby. My family lived like nomads, and my mother was pregnant and had no place to go. My father was not a provider; he was virtually always absent. My mother's sister was married to M. D. Fulmer, who lived in a house owned by Texas Power & Light Company and was the "patrolman" who looked after the Norwood Substation. He turned out to be my only male influence until I was practically grown.

I was the second child. My brother, James, is 2 years older than I am. He had been born in Flynn, Texas (with a population of probably 50 people) in 1925 where my mother, maternal grandmother, and two maternal aunts lived in a little clapboard-type house, without water, electricity, or sewage. The house had been built by one of my mother's older brothers, a single man, a seaman who was usually out to sea. He sent enough money to my grandmother to build the little house, which cost \$500. (I have seen the paperwork.) My grandmother and two of my aunts were pretty destitute. My mother was there because she had no other place to go. That was the beginning of our family group.

My mother (Ada Brownie Graves) was born in Culleoka, Tennessee (just south of Nashville) in 1901. Her family moved to a little place called Bray's Hollow ("holler"—a little valley). Her father, S. J. Graves, and her mother, Nannie Crews, had 10 children, three boys and seven girls. My mother was the sixth child. There were few boys in Bray's Hollow. Three of the seven girls and two of the three boys never married. Her father

was a sharecropper. My mother's father decided to leave Tennessee in 1910 because they couldn't make a go of it anymore because the land was not productive. Her father had a relative who had settled around Hubbard, Texas, as a cotton farmer. My mother's father loaded the seven girls (the three boys had already left home) on a train, came to Hubbard, Texas, and became a sharecropper growing cotton. The first year he didn't make a very good crop, got discouraged, and moved the family back to Tennessee. After 1 year back in Tennessee, however, he decided to come back to Texas and again settled in Hubbard. He died in 1921.

Roberts: *When was your maternal grandfather born?*

Aston: He was born around 1856 and died—of a heart attack, I believe—in 1921 while working in the fields on a hot August day.

Roberts: *When was your maternal grandmother born?*

Aston: She was born in 1870 and died in 1958, at 88 years of age (*Figure 3*).

Roberts: *How much land did they have in Hubbard?*

Aston: None. My grandfather was a sharecropper. The land was black land, which apparently for a good while had produced a good crop of cotton. The family was almost destitute. The girls had to work in the fields. When Grandpa Graves died (which was before I was born), that left Grandma and four of the daughters alone. They were not able to stay on the property because they didn't have the wherewithal to farm. They stayed there long enough to bring in the last crop of cotton. One of my mother's sisters, Martha, had married A. E. Gormley, who was quite a bit older. He was a depot agent for the Burlington Railroad, and they lived in Flynn, Texas. (The little train depot was on a line between Dallas and Houston.) He had built a nice house there. When Grandpa Graves died, Uncle Gormley got in touch with my uncle Lindsey Graves, the merchant seaman who was at sea, and informed him that something needed to be done for his mother and sisters because they had no place to go. Uncle Gormley had some land which he set aside and built the \$500 house on it. That house was in close proximity to Uncle A. E. and Martha Gormley's house. Martha's twin sister, Mary, lived with A. E. and Martha.

Roberts: *Where was your father when you were born?*

Aston: All I knew was that he was not with my mother. My father was a worthless guy. My mother spent practically all of her life just "hanging on."

Figure 3. Nannie Crews Graves from Maury County, Tennessee (1870–1958). She came to Texas in 1910 and was the mother of three boys and seven girls.

Figure 4. The brothers: (a) Franklin Delano Aston (1932–1943) and Scotty Joe Aston (1937–2007); (b) Scotty, Franklin, and Bill Aston; (c) Scotty, Bill, and James as adults.

Roberts: *What was your father's name?*

Aston: James Franklin Aston. Everyone called him "Frank."

Roberts: *When did he and your mother marry?*

Aston: In 1923. The first son was born in 1925, I was born in 1927, the next son in 1932, and the last son in 1937 (Figure 4).

Roberts: *Your father was gone most of the time?*

Aston: Yes, practically all the time. He was a heavy-equipment operator, primarily doing road construction. During the Depression in the 1930s a lot of the farm-to-market roads were being built in Texas. He would move to an area near a 10- to 15-mile stretch of new road being built. When that stretch was finished he would leave and go somewhere else. We bounced from one place to another. He would get us to a place just about the time that stretch of road was being finished and then he would leave and we would be stranded. After some time he would get us to come to the next location about the time he was leaving that area. He didn't support his family.

I started helping the family at a very young age. One example: When we lived in Lockhart, Texas, I was 12 years old. During the summer my brother and I could make money caddying at the golf course. The only people who played golf were the businessmen who came out about 4:00 PM and played nine holes. They would pay 25¢ for a caddy, with maybe a nickel tip. But to caddy we had to be on the course by 5:00 AM to place our names on the caddy list and then sit there all day waiting for the golfers to come out. If both of us got to caddy we would end up with about 60¢. On the way home, we would stop and buy a loaf of day-old bread for a nickel, a dozen eggs for 15¢, a pound of the cheapest bacon (mostly fat) for 20¢, and a big can of pork and beans for 20¢. That 60¢ provided food for our family of five! For this reason and many more I had an intense hatred for my father. A lot of that feeling came from having to earn money that way (caddying) and not even having enough money to buy a piece of candy every once in a while because it all had to go to buy food for all of us.

Roberts: *The family at home at that time was your mother, you, Franklin, Scotty, and James?*

Aston: Yes. My father would appear occasionally. I didn't realize it at the time, but it became apparent to me when grown that he almost certainly had another woman somewhere. I

couldn't understand why my mother would let him come back and get her pregnant when she did not have enough to take care of the first two kids. But my mother was an uneducated woman who during the depths of the Depression couldn't get a job. She was a good woman.

Roberts: *How far did your mother get in school?*

Aston: I think to the sixth grade.

Roberts: *What about your father?*

Aston: He had about an eighth-grade education.

Roberts: *Were you able to earn money when school was in session?*

Aston: Yes. I worked at any job available to a 13-, 14-, and 15-year-old boy. I worked in a meat market, a five-and-ten-cent store, and a shoe repair shop; harvested peanuts; hauled peaches; loaded watermelons on railroad cars; shined shoes; worked as a bellhop in a small hotel; and sold frog legs I had gigged to restaurants. My most businesslike venture was catching and selling opossums when I lived in Arkansas. I could look at a tree in the woods and know if there was an opossum living in the hollow of the tree. (They leave little belly hairs on the tree bark when they climb up to their nest.) I would climb the tree and get the opossum. I kept the opossums in a cage until I could take them on Saturday to the African American part of town and sell them for 25¢ each. They would kill and then skin and dress it for their Sunday dinner, which they usually had with sweet potatoes. They knew how to prepare the hide and then would sell each for 25¢. This was a real win/win situation for everyone except the opossum, plus I didn't have to kill the opossum or prepare the hide. I had a regular route and I would hear some child call out, "Mama, here comes the possum boy."

Caddying was the only way for my brother and me to make money during the summer when we were quite young. Most of the time we had established credit at some little grocery store, and I guess out of the goodness of their hearts they would let us run up a bill. Then we would leave. We would rent a place, stay a while, and because we couldn't pay the rent, we would leave them holding the bag. Early on, despite being the second son, I became the spokesman for the family. My older brother was the shy one, and he still is today. Usually it was my job to go to the store and try to convince the owner to let us go another week or so.

Figure 5. Upon leaving boot camp.

My older brother didn't finish high school. He worked all his adult life (40 years) for *The Dallas Times Herald* and he had the same job the entire time. I think our early circumstances affected him differently than they affected me.

Roberts: *What was his name?*

Aston: James.

Roberts: *What happened to Franklin and Scotty?*

Aston: In 1936, when living in a little tourist court in Henderson, Texas, Franklin got sick. (Of course none of us had ever gotten medical care. I never saw a dentist until I went into the navy.) He went into a coma and was put in the hospital. The doctors couldn't figure out why he was in the coma. They did tests for meningitis, tetanus, and rabies, but they never could decide. Everyone thought he was going to die. After 5 days in a coma, he woke up and a couple days later he went home.

Roberts: *And he was all right?*

Aston: Yes, as far as we could tell. Thereafter, however, periodically he would have "spells." They were not severe and they did not affect his function. Later, I came to the conclusion that they were petite mal seizures (epilepsy). Five years later when living in Texarkana, Arkansas, the same thing happened. At the time I was working as a butcher's helper in an A&P grocery store. I was 15. Franklin got sick again and I thought his illness had all the same earmarks of the earlier one so I went to work. About 10:00 AM, I saw an ambulance with sirens go towards our house. Franklin and I were real close. Later in the day I learned that Franklin was taken to the hospital in a coma. All the same tests were done, and the physicians decided that Franklin had either tetanus ("lockjaw") or rabies or meningitis. This time he died. The diagnosis on the death certificate was meningitis, even though none of the tests for that were positive. We buried him in Hubbard. He was 10 years old.

Roberts: *What about Scotty?*

Aston: My relationship with Scotty was more like a father-to-son one rather than brothers because he was 10 years younger than me. I went into the navy and had to leave Scotty and my mother behind. I arranged for my mother and Scotty to return to Flynn, Texas, because my maternal grandmother and one aunt were still there.

Roberts: *You entered the navy in what year?*

Aston: In 1945 when I was 17 years old (*Figure 5*). It was at the end of the war after the atomic bomb had been dropped

in Japan. As a 17-year-old, I had two dependents, and I made \$50 a month. My family got \$28 of that and I got \$22. I was at the age that I wanted to go out and party but I did not have any money to do so (another chip on my shoulder against my father). My mother and brother stayed in Flynn until I got out of the navy in 1946. I came to Dallas and went to work for DP&L. Soon afterwards, I brought my mother and Scotty to Dallas. We lived in a little place on Travis Street.

Roberts: *How many months were you in the navy?*

Aston: Twelve.

Roberts: *How did you decide to get a job with DP&L?*

Aston: When I got discharged from the navy, I was in New Orleans. I had one little homemade suitcase and my sea bag. That was all I owned. I got on a train and came to Dallas and got off at Union Station. I bought a newspaper and started looking at the job listings. (Right after the war everyone was looking for people to work.) One ad was for Southwestern Bell Telephone Company located off Commerce Street. I walked in and told them I was looking for a job. I filled out a form and they said they would hire me but that I had to move to Tyler, Texas, to their facility there. I told them I didn't want to go to East Texas. They asked me to keep in touch over the next 2 or 3 weeks and something might open up in Dallas. I said I would. I walked out and immediately on Commerce Street I saw a sign for DP&L. Remembering that my uncle had worked for years for the power company and had both supported his family and helped us out a lot, I went to their personnel department. I told the gentlemen that I was looking for a job. He said that I looked big and strong and asked if I would like to climb poles. I said that if that was what they had, then I would take it. That was my resume—I was big and strong.

Roberts: *When were you hired?*

Aston: In August 1946.

Roberts: *What happened?*

Aston: I didn't really intend to stay in Dallas, but I came here because my girlfriend was living here. She and I had kept in touch while I was in the service.

Roberts: *How did you meet?*

Aston: My last year in high school was in Durant, Oklahoma. She was raised there and we met there. I was a senior in high school and she was a junior. When I came to Dallas I wanted to see her.

Roberts: *What is her name?*

Aston: Evelyn Louise Attaway.

Roberts: *You were 17 and she was 16?*

Aston: No, she was 1 year older than me. She was born in 1926. She is part Choctaw Indian and had enough Indian blood in her that when the federal government was giving out money to the natives, she remembered standing in line to receive some funds.

Roberts: *You met as a senior in high school in 1943? You graduated from high school in 1944 and then went directly into the navy?*

Aston: Yes, we met in school, but I didn't go directly into the navy from high school. I came to Dallas and worked for a while at Southern Aircraft making parts for the Grumman F4F fighter plane.

Roberts: *Was Evelyn here?*

Aston: No, she hadn't graduated from high school yet. Right after I got out of high school, I worked for Asplundh trimming trees for utility companies. (You see their orange trucks all around the city.) I had worked for them in Oklahoma for a while before I came to Dallas. Then I got the job at the aircraft plant. I was in Dallas probably from September 1944 to March 1945 and then joined the navy.

Roberts: *What did you do in the navy?*

Aston: I was assigned to an air-crash-rescue boat which was in the Mariana Islands in the South Pacific. The crashboat was a converted torpedo boat, with three 1500-horsepower Packard Marine engines, and it was fast. I also guarded Japanese prisoners for a short time, something hard to imagine for a 17-year-old. (Some people didn't realize that any Japanese surrendered, but some did.)

Roberts: *Once you joined the navy, how long before they sent you to the Mariana Islands?*

Aston: About 2 months.

Roberts: *What kind of training did you have?*

Aston: I went to boot camp in San Diego, California. I didn't have any specialized training. I had an interest in electricity even then and ultimately became an electrician mate third class in the Navy Reserve after I got out of the regular navy.

Roberts: *How long did you stay in the Navy Reserve?*

Aston: Altogether, my navy service including reserves was 6 years.

Roberts: *How would you characterize your experience in the navy?*

Aston: It was thrilling, exciting, and adventuresome. As a kid I had read every book written by Nordhoff and Hall, and most books that I had read were about the sea. It was exciting for me because I had never seen the sea. Even though I had Mamma and Scotty to worry about and part of my salary went to them, I was relaxed because I didn't have to worry about food, clothing, or shelter—something new to me.

Roberts: *You went to so many different schools growing up. You must have always made good grades? Did school work come easy for you?*

Aston: I did make good grades and school was fairly easy for me. I was always fortunate about that. The frequent moving could have affected me more than I realized. There were some things I didn't like: invariably, the school year would have started when we arrived, most schools were in little towns or rural areas, and the other kids had grown up together and had their own cliques. I was an outsider. In the classrooms all the seats close to the front were already taken by the time I would be introduced as the new student, and I would have to walk to the back of the room. Being the outsider, I had lots of brawls. In the neighborhood, my family was considered vagabonds or transients, and I'm sure the parents of the other kids were told not to get too friendly with us.

But I liked to learn and read, and I was always curious and adventuresome. Those features helped me to overcome shyness and be more outgoing. I had to win my way into people's trust. My older brother was just the opposite. His shyness hurt him

in school and as a result he didn't finish high school. He just quit. Moving around frequently during childhood is both a good thing and a bad thing.

Roberts: *Did you always read a lot?*

Aston: I read anything I could get my hands on. We didn't have any books, magazines, newspapers, or a radio growing up. My Uncle Gormley in Flynn had a little book about the Titanic. I bet I read that book 50 times.

Roberts: *Did you read fast?*

Aston: Yes.

Roberts: *You liked to study in school?*

Aston: Yes. At some point I came to feel that the difference between people who could be successful at something and people who couldn't was primarily tied to the ability to understand cause and effect. I was always curious about things—why it happens that way and what it causes. I had a lot of curiosity.

Roberts: *Your teachers must have been impressed that you were a good student?*

Aston: Yes, they were. Certain teachers really made a difference in my life. In one school where four grades were in one room, I got promoted twice. My class, which was on one side of the room, would do our work and then we were supposed to study while the teacher taught the other side of the room, which was the next grade. I would listen to what the other side was learning, and when I got to the next grade I already knew the material. I made straight A's practically all the time. At SMU's business school, I made Beta Gamma Sigma, which is the same thing as Phi Beta Kappa in the arts and sciences school. I did well at SMU, graduating with honors even though I worked full-time, supported a family, and went to school at night.

Roberts: *When you were going to the various junior high and high schools, did you have any time for outside activities, such as sports?*

Aston: I didn't get to participate in any sports because I always had to work to help support the family.

Roberts: *Did your mother encourage you in school?*

Aston: I think my mother considered her job to be ensuring that I was clean and that my behavior was good. I rarely remember any of my family encouraging me to make good grades. When I brought home report cards I don't remember getting praised, but I realized I wasn't being scolded. I was mainly self-motivated.

Roberts: *Did your father smoke and drink alcohol?*

Aston: Yes.

Roberts: *Do you think he was an alcoholic?*

Aston: No. He could not afford that much alcohol. But I wasn't around him much. I rarely remember ever talking to him.

Roberts: *You don't remember any event with your father?*

Aston: I remember some events.

Roberts: *Like what?*

Aston: One time we were living in the house of an elder woman. I was about 10 at that time. My father came in drunk one night and was mad at the older woman. He wore high-top laced boots and had taken the boots off. He was cussing at her and took one of his boots and threw it at her through a partition.

It missed her but it scared her enough that she ran out the back door and got the police. The police arrested him and took him to a lockup area consisting of a cage that sat outdoors near the city hall. I was concerned that the police were going to shoot my dad in the cage because I had remembered that that had happened before.

Roberts: *What city was this?*

Aston: Hubbard.

Roberts: *What was your father like?*

Aston: He wasn't a mean person. I don't remember ever seeing him abuse my mother physically or us kids. The only thing I remember where I was involved with my father was one place we lived where we had a cow. The cow was sort of feisty. I was with my dad when he was milking her, and she kicked and overturned the bucket, spilling the milk. He got a chain and started beating the cow. I thought that was wrong. I ran and got Mamma, and she came down and made him quit. Then he beat me for being a tattletale.

Roberts: *Was he aware of your good grades in school?*

Aston: No.

Roberts: *When did he die?*

Aston: 1963 or 1964.

Roberts: *Did you see him at all after you had grown up?*

Aston: One time.

Roberts: *How did that go?*

Aston: While at my desk at DP&L, my phone rang, and it was him. He said that he was close to my office and would like to see me. I told him not to come to the office. I asked him where he was and he indicated that he was on the corner of Commerce and Akard Streets at the Baker Hotel. I met him there. We shook hands. He asked me how I was getting along. I told him I was getting along very well, probably much better than he was. He asked if there was anything that he could do to be of help to me. I told him, "Hell no." He said he had heard that I had a daughter and asked if he could see her. I told him no. In fact, I told him to turn around and go that way and that I was going to turn around and go the opposite way.

Roberts: *And that was it? What year was that?*

Aston: It was 1955 or 1956. He died in Alaska about 1963. I received a call one morning from a man in Alaska, and he asked if I worked for a power company in Dallas. I said that I did. He then informed me that my father had died that morning. I thanked him and hung up.

Roberts: *How big were you when you joined DP&L in 1946?*

Aston: I was 6 feet 2¾ inches tall and weighed about 190 pounds.

Roberts: *What happened initially there?*

Aston: I was on the payroll within 3 days. Four of us were loaded on a truck carrying hoes, the ones used to hoe cotton. We were taken to Mountain Creek Lake where DP&L had a power plant. A high-voltage transmission line begins there and travels around the lake into Grand Prairie and served the aircraft plant—North American—where they built the P51 airplanes. This was August 1946. Dallas was experiencing a draught, and the grass was growing up too close to the poles. If a fire started

it would burn the poles. Our job was to take the hoe and cut the grass back from each pole. Hoeing grass in 100-degree weather was not particularly easy, but it was a necessary job. (Years later when I was president of the Dallas Advertising League I was given a gold-plated hoe in appreciation for my service. They called it the Golden Hoer Award.)

There was a manual labor hierarchy at the company: tree trimming from the wires truck, to the pole-setting truck, to the hole-digging truck, to the pole-hauling truck, to a lineman climbing poles. I did all those jobs. Once I started climbing they wanted me to be a foreman for the various truck shifts.

Roberts: *You were the boss for the crews?*

Aston: Yes. Back then it wasn't unusual for the foreman to be the biggest and the toughest. I really enjoyed that kind of work, and it didn't take me long to learn the culture. I was amazed at how these people were like family. I kept learning more about Dallas and made the decision to stay. That desire was solidified by an experience working 14- to 16-hour days during an ice storm. Our lines were down from the ice. While working in an alley near your house after midnight, a tool had gotten loose above me on the pole and it hit me right between my eyes. It knocked me out. While I was laying in the grass, a woman came out of her house, found me, and called an ambulance, which took me to the emergency room of the old St. Paul Hospital on Bryan Street. I could hear people talking and could see them out of the corner of my eyes. They were waiting for a specific doctor to look at me. He got there early in the morning and he did a great job on my face. I had a scar for a long time but it's practically gone now. The doctor told me that I might have some difficulty breathing through my nose thereafter. That episode told me that DP&L was an outfit that really cared about its people. They went to the trouble to bring in a specialist to see me. That sealed my debt to stay with DP&L.

Roberts: *Was your forehead dented in or just your nose?*

Aston: The cartilage was pushed back to my cheekbone. The thing that bugged me while working during that whole ice storm was that I was the only employee who got hurt. I felt bad about that—as if I had been careless, but I had not been.

Roberts: *When you joined DP&L, how many employees were there then?*

Aston: Between 1200 and 1500.

Roberts: *How did things progress? You started with a hoe, became a foreman for various crews, and then became a lineman?*

Aston: I did all of that for about 18 months. When I was climbing 75-foot poles on cold winter days putting in transmission lines (Figure 6), I would watch the lines being put into place and redirected them if they got snagged. I would be freezing with inadequate clothing, and my legs would be so numb I was concerned about climbing back down, and I started thinking that this was not something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I was told that I couldn't go any further in the company because I didn't have a degree. I decided to enroll in the International Correspondence School, but after looking at their courses I realized that I needed a whole mess of math. (Moving from one school to another, I had always seemed to miss the math

studies.) I decided to go to Crozier Tech and get the necessary math courses. When I signed up I told them that I worked full-time but needed to take all the math courses that they offered at night. I took algebra, trigonometry, and geometry.

Then I decided that if I really wanted to make progress in the company, I would need a college degree. SMU had a campus downtown on Akard called Dallas College. By then

I was a supervisor in the commercial department, a high-pressure job. But I could run up the street and make the evening classes and get out at 10:00 PM. At first, they wouldn't let me take more than two courses per semester until I proved that I could make good grades. Then, I was able to take three courses each semester. I wanted to take courses year round, but I didn't have the money. I talked to a banker at the Mercantile Bank and proposed a deal to pay the bank on a monthly basis if the bank took care of my tuition and books. The banker agreed. It took me 6 years to get a degree and 8 years to pay the loan off. I graduated with honors—Beta Gamma Sigma. I didn't know what that was initially, but they had a ceremony and showed me the book that named all those before me who had received this honor. There were not many!

Roberts: *What was your degree in?*

Aston: Business administration management.

Roberts: *How old were you when you got your degree?*

Aston: I graduated in 1961, so I was 33 years old.

Roberts: *What was the reaction of the company? You didn't tell them right away that you were going to night school, did you?*

Aston: By the time I started night school at SMU, the company knew it. DP&L didn't have a tuition aid plan at that time. (I was very much committed to a tuition aid plan, but I wasn't going to push it while I was enrolled in classes because it would look like self-interest.) The day I graduated, I launched my proposal for DP&L to have a tuition aid plan. Southwestern Bell Telephone at that time had a tuition aid plan. The next year we put in a tuition aid plan at DP&L.

Roberts: *By the time you had graduated from SMU, what was your status in the company?*

Aston: I was a departmental manager. I wasn't a vice president yet. I became manager of a department, then manager of our advertising and public relations, and then vice president. I had already started moving up in the company when I was going to SMU.

Roberts: *You were a busy man. What time did you get to work?*

Figure 6. At the top of an electric utility pole, working without a net.

Figure 7. In 1968 with Dr. Howard McClure, while recovering from an acute myocardial infarction. At this time, Bill Aston started his program of exercise and a sensible lifestyle.

Aston: About 6:30 to 7:00 AM daily, and I always took work home. We lived in a little house on Centerville Road that had a one-car garage and a little storage area in the back of the garage. I built a small office in that storage area. When I got home from night school at 10:30, I would work in the office until 2:00 AM on assignments and then go to sleep. Classes were usually two nights a week, not every night. All that time I was a heavy cigarette smoker—three packs a day. In 1967, at age 40, I had a heart attack.

Roberts: *How old were you when you started smoking?*

Aston: Around 13 or 14. Initially I smoked mostly cigarette butts because I could not afford to buy cigarettes. I got hooked. The heart attack occurred 6 days after my 40th birthday. I was taken to Presbyterian Hospital because I had worked on their fundraising drive to build their first coronary care unit, so I knew about it. I was taken to the emergency room and then down to the coronary care unit on a gurney. The nurse who was walking alongside the gurney smelled like a cigarette so I asked her to light up a cigarette for me and let me have one puff. That's how addictive tobacco is. She said she couldn't do that because she would get fired but I told her that no one would know. I wouldn't even hold the cigarette, but I wanted one puff. And she did! In 1967, of course, there were few smoking restrictions.

Roberts: *How did you quit?*

Aston: I just quit. Dr. Howard McClure became my doctor (Figure 7). I was already involved with the AHA. I knew that cigarette smoking was a no-no. I was in the hospital for 3 weeks and then I was off work for another 4 to 5 weeks.

Roberts: *You had an acute myocardial infarction?*

Aston: Yes. By then I knew enough about the business world to know my opportunity to make progress in our company was limited. Back then when people had a heart attack, company

officials almost considered them to be invalids. I felt that when the next consideration for a promotion to a higher-level job came about, I wouldn't be in the running. But I set out to disprove that view. I began to eat healthier food and to exercise to prove that point, and, as a result, the heart attack never put a damper on my progress.

Roberts: *Would you say that your heart attack was probably a wake-up call and that your health has been much better ever since?*

Aston: No question about it. I went from being a person who did everything wrong to one who tried to do everything right.

Roberts: *Have you had any more heart trouble?*

Aston: Yes. I've got atrial fibrillation now. For my age, I feel that I am in pretty good health.

Roberts: *After the heart attack and making those changes in your lifestyle, how did it affect you at DP&L?*

Aston: It did not. I became one of the four vice presidents. I started taking on more responsibility. I became the spokesman for the company during the time when we were constructing our nuclear power plant. I dealt with the media, intervention-type people, and environmentalists. The media were always jumping on anything related to the nuclear plant. Once, a report indicated that during an inspection they found one weld in a pipe that wasn't right. The newspapers jumped on that incident with big headlines. I received a call from an elderly lady who lived in Glenrose, Texas. She told me she was 84 years old and had lived there all her life, and that if I had just called her she could have told me that there wasn't a single welder in Glenrose who knew how to fix a plow, much less a pipe in a nuclear plant. She was so sincere! I didn't have the heart to tell her that we had hired welders from all over the US and that their competency had been tested.

Roberts: *When did you become president and chief executive officer?*

Aston: In 1983.

Roberts: *How did it come about?*

Aston: The president of our parent company, Texas Utilities (TXU), at that time was retiring. The president of DP&L was going to take his place, so our presidency position came open. Several of us in DP&L were under consideration for the position, but others outside the company also were being considered. I was called in by the board and told they would like to name me president and CEO at the next board meeting and would I be interested? I said yes.

Roberts: *How long did you hold that position?*

Aston: Until I retired in 1986.

Roberts: *In 1986, what was your age?*

Aston: 59.

Roberts: *Why did you retire so early?*

Aston: DP&L was very good over the years at encouraging people like me to go to seminars to improve management skills. I went to one at the University of Michigan, and at the time management by objective was the in-thing being preached. I was there for a month. The more I studied the management-by-objective theory, the more I realized that it also applied to

my personal life. I needed to function the same way—to know exactly where I was going, when I was going, and why I was going. In that process I decided that I was going to work 40 years for DP&L and then leave. My fortieth year was 1986. I stayed one month longer to train my successor and then left.

Roberts: *In retrospect, are you glad that you made that decision?*

Aston: Yes, absolutely. I felt that I had exceeded my expectations by becoming head of the company and I was very proud of that. I knew the day I retired it was going to be hard for me. I had fulfilled all my working goals. There wasn't anything else left. I retired on Friday and Saturday morning I was on a plane to Bonaire, off the coast of Venezuela, to take advanced scuba diving training (night diving, search and rescue). (I had learned to be a scuba diver just before I retired.) From there I just kept doing other things, and it has worked out fine. I left not because I hated the work or didn't want to put up with it anymore. I was proud of what I had done and left the company in good hands.

Roberts: *How many employees were there when you left?*

Aston: About 1800. We had \$1 billion revenue.

Roberts: *Going back to Scotty, you said that your relationship was more father-to-son. What happened to him?*

Aston: My grandmother, mother, aunt, and Scotty were living in Irving together in 1950. At that time, Scotty was 13. I sort of looked after Scotty. Scotty and Mamma lived with me for a while when I lived on Travis Street and then with Evelyn and me shortly after we got married. Scotty was a good student, smart, and we had no problems with him. He was a typical kid. He told me after he was grown up about an incident that made a huge impression on him. He had a little BB gun. I had come home from work one day and he had shot a bird. The bird's wing was broken but the bird was still alive and he was holding it. I told him that he had to pull its head off because that bird could not survive, so he needed to put it out of its misery because he was responsible for its condition. As a result of that incident he never hunted or killed anything else in his life!

Scotty and I always had a good relationship. I encouraged him to do things for himself. In high school he worked at a hamburger joint after school. After graduating he went to work for United Plywood as a general worker unloading boxcars. Apparently, they took a liking to him, and he was able to start doing other jobs in the company. Georgia Pacific (GP) decided to move into this market. The person who was hiring for GP heard about Scotty and offered him a job with a bigger salary. He was only 18 or 19. Scotty asked me what I thought about the offer because he really liked working for United Plywood but GP offered him much more money. I told him to go to his boss at United Plywood and tell him about the job GP was offering and his need for more money. His boss asked how much they were offering him and then said that they would pay him the same amount because they did not want to lose him. Scotty went back to the fellow from GP and told him that he was going to stay with United Plywood because they were matching the offer. Then, GP raised its offer. Scotty then asked me what he should do. I told him that since the money was the

main issue to think about this scenario. Because GP was a new startup company and was investing a lot of capital in the new facility it was building, the opportunity to be on the ground floor might be a leg-up for him. He thought about it and went back to United Plywood and gave his 2-week notice. His boss told him to forget the notice and leave that day. Scotty was now unemployed and the new job wasn't going to start for a while so he was at a loss for money. I told him to go to his new boss at GP and tell him what had happened. He told him he would put Scotty immediately on the payroll even though they weren't open for business.

Scotty was an entrepreneur and was motivated particularly by money. He could be a real wheeler-dealer but he was honest. As a result, he ended up running Metro Wholesale Lumber and was very successful. He did really well financially, much better than I was doing at that time. Scotty and I had an agreement on family matters for the Irving household (bills, repairs, health issues). I had the same conversation with Evelyn before we got married about what we would be dealing with. She agreed to it and has been wonderful. Lot of times I paid off hospital bills and/or funeral bills even when I was barely making my way. Scotty bought some land in Rowlett, Texas, and built a big Victorian house and called it Aston Acres. He was single at that time. About 4 or 5 years ago he developed non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and Dr. Joseph Fay did a bone marrow transplant. He struggled along for another 3 years and died in 2007.

Roberts: *Is James still alive?*

Aston: Yes, he is, but his wife died in 2009. They had been married a little longer than Evelyn and me, which is 60 years. James and I did not have the same type of relationship that Scotty and I did. James was a dyed-in-the-wool union man, and we didn't always see eye to eye. Our relationship was not close. I promised myself that when I retired I would spend more time with James. His only outside interest in life for years was playing golf. I played golf with him occasionally and slowly we have become closer, but not like Scotty and me.

Roberts: *How did you get started in your enormous contributions as a volunteer in so many different community and then national activities?*

Aston: I have thought about that. My gypsy background had a considerable effect on my social and cultural feelings. Whenever we moved into a new town or area, one of the first things I would do was go to the cemetery and look at the biggest tombstones. I would connect the names to businesses in town because these people were the ones who had the most control in the town. Once they held positions of authority they would use their influence to build the city the way they thought it should be. So the younger generations had to either buck the system to get things done or move out. Also, the company I worked for was a geographic territory operation, so as its territory goes, so goes the company. In addition to an obligation, it is good business to do what is needed to ensure that the area is healthy and growing. My company encouraged me and other employees to do things for the community. I decided that I wanted to support several areas: higher education, performing arts, health care, and general areas (United Way). If someone

asked me to serve on a board, I would usually agree. The strong part of it was that my company didn't discourage us from being involved with community activities.

Roberts: *When you were president and CEO of DP&L, what time would you get to work?*

Aston: Around 7:00 or 7:30 AM.

Roberts: *What time would you leave?*

Aston: It varied but usually about 7:00 PM. I usually worked 12-hour days.

Roberts: *Would you still take work home?*

Aston: Yes. Work was always pretty heavy on my mind.

Roberts: *Did you go in on the weekends?*

Aston: I usually went to the office every Saturday but not more than half a day; infrequently on Sundays.

Roberts: *What was the first volunteer activity you got involved with?*

Aston: The one that began to take a lot of my time was when I was on the cancer society board and I had a disagreement with them. Then, after my heart attack I switched all my time to the AHA. I had been involved with the cancer society because so many of my relatives had died from cancer. My disagreement was not anything of a major consequence but more the way they were fundraising that didn't seem on the up-and-up to me. I told them my opinion but they didn't pay attention. My involvement with the AHA started at the local level. I became the chairman of the Dallas board, then chairman of the Texas affiliate association, and then chairman of the national board. I spent about 20 years highly involved with the AHA.

Roberts: *What year were you the national AHA chairman?*

Aston: 1988. The national association has a nonmedical chairman of the board and a medical person who serves as president. The medical person takes care of the medical aspects. Both serve a year before and a year after the chairmanship and presidency, so it is a 3-year commitment in all.

Roberts: *Who was president when you were chairman?*

Aston: Dr. Bernadine Healy. Bernadine and I were yoked together for 3 years.

Roberts: *She has a strong personality.*

Aston: She was difficult to work with. I was chairman of the local Red Cross and the man who ran it came to me when Bernadine became the paid executive of the Red Cross and I told him to be on his toes and he later agreed. She didn't keep that position very long.

Roberts: *You mentioned that you were on a plane once with Dr. Paul Dudley White?*

Aston: Yes. I visited with him shortly after President Eisenhower had a heart attack. That's when I first became aware of his name. He was very humble. I was really impressed with him. Unless you knew his background, you would never know how important he was.

Roberts: *You have been involved with BUMC and BHCS for years. What do you feel have been your most important contributions to BUMC?*

Aston: I have been asked what I look for when putting a board together and kiddingly say the three W's—*wealth, wisdom, and work*. My most important contribution to Baylor

has been *work*. Before being on Baylor's board, I was on the board of St. Paul's Hospital, a part of the Daughters of Charity hospital group. Previously, their board of directors was always limited to the sisters. Sister Damian ran St. Paul Hospital. I knew her only vaguely. She came to me asking for a favor. They were going to open their board to include two outside business people, and she wanted me to be one of them. I told her that I wasn't Catholic. I was Baptist. I asked about the other person they were going to ask, and she said it was Jim Moroney. (He was part of the *Dallas Morning News* family, and he was a very active and devout Catholic. I think he had even been knighted by a pope.) She understood and wasn't concerned that I wasn't Catholic. So I agreed. Jim and I joined that board, and it was a great and enjoyable experience. Once I went with Sister Damian and a couple of other sisters to the regional headquarters in St. Louis to present some budgetary items to the head board, consisting of sisters essentially all >80 years of age.

Boone Powell Jr. came to see me and asked me to join the Baylor board. He knew I was on St. Paul's board at that time. I told him that I was flattered that Sister Damian came to me and I enjoyed working with them, the bishop, and others on ethical conduct issues. I also knew Boone Powell Sr. I finally said I would do it. (I ran into a sister in Austin a few weeks ago and asked about Sister Damian. She had moved to St. Louis to a facility that is almost like a retirement center and was doing well.)

Roberts: *At BUMC, I hear that you ask the most penetrating questions at the board meetings, that you get right to the nuts and bolts of issues. What do you feel you have contributed most?*

Aston: In both cases I feel that I have played a role in ensuring that all patients, regardless of who they are, receive high-quality and safe care that is delivered with love and compassion. Early on I was a proponent of the centers of excellence concept. I still feel that we haven't moved far enough in that direction. A concentration of experts produces a better product generally than that produced by experts scattered out. I am disappointed when I find that somewhere in the Baylor system an evidence-based proven protocol is not applied.

Another concern I have is the maximum utilization of resources. Capital dollars are limited and are not best used when we put them into bricks and mortar and equipment and then not use them to the maximum. That type of utilization is not best for any community. The health care industry continues to make decisions based more on competition in the geographic area than on community needs. Not too many years ago the industry had to have certificates of need; they had to prove that an area needed more hospital beds.

The USA is now spending 16% of the gross domestic product, or about \$15,000 a person, annually for health care. How much can we afford to spend on health care? When I was working, a group of CEOs in Dallas would discuss how much our country spends on health care, and the consensus then was no more than 10% of gross domestic product. We are now at 16% and growing.

Practically every health care decision in America is unduly influenced by some regulatory or legislative process rather than

being driven by the quest for higher quality, safer, and less costly health care.

Roberts: *It intrigues me that you have been so committed to these voluntary activities to improve our community, yet growing up you never saw a physician or went to a hospital or knew there was a national association for cancer or heart disease or attended a symphony or opera or wandered through an art gallery. All these things have come after you were 30 or 40 years of age. You didn't retire from work; you just changed hats. What do you do for fun?*

Aston: I am an adventurous person. Things I consider fun, for example, are getting on a freighter in the Gulf of Mexico and traveling to Europe or going to South America. For me traveling that way is great. If the captain is aware that I know something about shipping and that I have a real interest, I get the free run of the ship—to stand on the bridge, check out the navigation system, etc. I've worked on shark expeditions, activities associated with my scuba diving. I have done manatee research. Recently, I went on a whale expedition and had what I considered a religious experience, putting my hand on a 70,000-pound whale in the ocean. Those are the types of experiences that turn me on.

The other week when it was snowing, Evelyn and I took the DART train from one end of the line to the other just so we could watch the snow. I had to go to Chicago 3 weeks ago and instead of flying I took the Amtrak train. Great fun.

I've always had an interest in animals. I used to be on the Committee of the Zoological Society when it bought and sold the animals for the zoo. That was fascinating for me. Do you know what a bongo is? It's a very rare animal that they found 60 to 70 years ago in the Congo. Nobody even knew it existed. It's a type of antelope. Back at that time, the Cleveland Zoo was the only place in the USA that had a pair of bongos. We purchased one pair of bongos and they were in quarantine in the Congo when the Congo Revolution started, and they were killed for food. Our big silver-back gorilla, Ombom, was a beautiful male gorilla, never bred, so he never had any offspring. I came to feel that he knew me because I would go there a lot of time early in the morning and spend enough time with him that he recognized me.

Figure 8. The *Sea Q*, with a classic wood boat in far North Canada on Bill Aston's and Dr. McClure's 6000-mile journey.

Figure 9. Bill and Evelyn Aston in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Figure 10. A family gathering up north. Front row, left to right: Caitlin Aston Johnston (granddaughter), Evelyn Aston, Samuel Schumaker (grandson), Bill Aston. Back row: Melanie Aston Schumaker, Chris Schumaker, Larry Wilson (friend), Adonica Ann Aston.

Roberts: *You and Dr. Howard McClure went on a long boat trip together. What was that like?*

Aston: Yes we did, 6000 miles. Every day was an adventure. When waking every morning wherever we were anchored, we checked the weather. We went on Howard's twin diesel 42-foot Grand Banks power boat (*Figure 8*). Howard was the skipper and I was the first mate. The miracle of that 6000-mile trip was that we didn't kill each other because we are both strong willed.

Roberts: *Where did you go?*

Figure 11. Melanie and husband Chris Schumaker.

Figure 12. Ruth Graves King (aunt, deceased), daughter Melanie Jane Aston Schumaker, wife Evelyn Aston, daughter Adonica Aston, and mother Ada Brownie Aston.

Aston: We left from Mobile, Alabama, jumped across the Gulf to Tampa Bay, then to Lake Okeechobee, then around Florida's southern tip to its east coast, and then up the entire East Coast. We stopped at many different places. We powered up the Potomac River via the Chesapeake Bay and spent a couple of weeks in Washington, DC. We had motor scooters and bicycles on the boat so we could visit in the towns. We visited Baltimore and then went up to New York Harbor and up the Hudson River. Finally, we went into the St. Lawrence Seaway and followed that through the Trent-Severn Waterway up into far northern Canada. We exited around Lake Huron. We visited Mackinac Island and went down the east coast of Lake Michigan to the Chicago River, Illinois River, Ohio River, Mississippi River, Kentucky Lake area, and Tom Bigby Waterway back to Mobile, Alabama. We were gone 8 months. Sometimes we would stop and Winona, Howard's wife, would join us. I would come back to Dallas periodically to be with my family and then we would get back together and take off again.

We operated the engines at about 1700 rpm. Our speed was about 10 knots. We moved 10 hours a day, or about 100 miles a day. We stayed a month in Longboat Key, Florida (near Sarasota), getting ready because we had to avoid the hurricane season. We also avoided the cold weather in the North and the in-country river systems during flood season. Howard supplied the boat and I handled daily expenses (food, fuel, tie-ups, etc.). Howard got

Figure 13. Grandchildren. (a) Samuel Schumaker with Duende and Caitlin Johnston with Camelot, at the San Antonio Show, February 1999. (b) Granddaughter Caitlin, chosen queen at school. (c) Grandpa and Grannie Aston with Samuel Schumaker, headed to Chicago on Amtrak in June 2002. (d) With grandson Samuel Schumaker.

rid of the boat after we got back. We have gone on many trips as couples. Howard has always had some kind of boat.

Howard and I became friends when he was my physician at the time of my heart attack. He is a remarkable guy. I was in the new coronary care unit at Presbyterian Hospital in 1967. Dr. McClure, unknown to me, was on the cutting edge of treating patients with heart problems nonsurgically. He told me that we should handle my problem by behavioral modification: i.e., I should quit smoking, change my diet, reduce salt and cholesterol intake, exercise, control blood pressure, and reduce stress. I was convinced and strictly followed a new lifestyle. Forty-two years later, Dr. McClure and I are still close friends.

Roberts: *When you first met Evelyn, what was it about her that attracted you to her?*

Aston: Evelyn is a quiet, humble, soft-spoken, nonobtrusive, caring, and nurturing woman (Figure 9). She is a perfect match for me. She has been very supportive of everything I do, even when she thinks I shouldn't do it. She realizes that I probably will and if I do then she is supportive of it. I give her total credit for raising our two daughters. When they were young, I was at the stage in my career when I was going to school and working, so I didn't spend a lot of close personal time with them. I've learned more as I've gotten older, and I realize the mistake I made. I was brought up to think that a male should not have much influence on female children because a man will take away their femininity.

Roberts: *Your daughters were born when?*

Aston: Adonica Ann was born in 1951 and Melanie Jane in 1958 (Figures 10–12).

Roberts: *Do they have children?*

Aston: Adonica has one daughter, Caitlin, and Melanie has a son, Samuel (Figure 13).

Roberts: *Do they live here in Dallas?*

Aston: Adonica lives in Houston and Melanie lives in Akron, Ohio.

Roberts: *Do you see your kids and grandkids much?*

Aston: Yes. My granddaughter just graduated from SMU—summa cum laude (Figure 14)—and I see her frequently. She is going to pursue a master's degree. I see my grandson frequently also.

Roberts: *What is your home like?*

Aston: It's a house that Evelyn and I bought in 1965. It's a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house.

Roberts: *Do you have lots of books and magazines around the house?*

Aston: Yes. My children tell me that I need to get rid of them and get on the Internet. I buy books all the time.

Roberts: *How many books do you think you have?*

Aston: Hundreds but I don't think thousands. I get rid of some periodically. I kept some from my college days and others I pass on.

Roberts: *Has religion always been a major part of your life?*

Figure 14. Granddaughter Caitlin Johnston, graduating from Southern Methodist University summa cum laude.

Aston: Yes. I have been a Baptist all my life. Among my earliest memories was a small country congregation where a traveling preacher would come every other Sunday. My job was to take the songbooks from a locked container where they were stowed to keep the opossums from eating the bindings. (They probably liked the glue.) I wasn't one to be at the church every time the doors were open. I think I have lived a Christian life, and my feeling of justice is very strong. I don't beat the drum or evangelize. I accept the scientific evidence that the earth

and living creatures have been here for multiple millennia, believing it was our Divine Creator's plan.

My wife and I are longtime members of the Park Cities Baptist Church (*Figure 15*). Some of the most religious people I have known are there, including Joel Allison. Bob Floyd was a real inspiration as the Sunday school teacher in a class that Jon White, Homer Stewart, and I attended, along with many others. His class was called the "Floyd Faithfuls," and it is still a popular class even though Bob died several years ago. Since his death I haven't been as faithful in my attendance.

Roberts: *You said you played golf. What is your handicap?*

Aston: Not low. I mainly do it for the exercise. Now I walk, but I used to run at least 10 miles a week.

Roberts: *How much do you walk?*

Aston: I try to walk every day about 30 to 45 minutes.

Roberts: *Bill, is there anything that you would like to discuss that we haven't touched on?*

Aston: I feel I have had three families that heavily influenced my life: first, my biological extended family; second, my DP&L family, and third, my BHCS family.

My extended biological family helped me through some dire circumstances when I was too young to help myself. When I was able, I was the one they could depend on, and I continue in that role when needed. My Uncle Marcus was the only father figure in my early life.

My DP&L family gave me the opportunity to grow and take on more and more responsibility, for which I am grateful. At DP&L, I joined a group of hardworking, honest craftsmen who were dedicated to the company and the betterment of the community. Another father figure/mentor was Les Burford at DP&L (*Figure 16*). I greatly respected him. He and I used to go boating and camping. He had two daughters too. I see one of his daughters several times a year. One motivation for our river trips was that Les's ancestors had a plantation outside of Atlanta, Georgia, when the Civil War began. The Yankees did bad things to them, and the grandfather said he would not swear allegiance to the United States so he took his family to Central America.

Figure 15. In New Orleans doing clean-up after Hurricane Katrina with a group from Park Cities Baptist Church.

A couple of the children died there from yellow fever, and they were reduced to eating monkey meat. He finally decided to take his family back to the US. He would frequent the wharf where the sailing boats were docked. He made friends there with a Swedish captain. When the captain came to New Orleans he brought the Burford family to New Orleans with him. With financial help from the captain they continued up river via Jefferson City and then migrated up to Cookville, near Mt. Pleasant, in East Texas. He started farming and became very prosperous, and his family ended up owning the bank, the cotton gin, and several businesses in town. These were the forebearers of Burford. The lesson I got out of this is that a person whose entire livelihood was destroyed can struggle and come back and be successful again.

When I was asked to become a member of the BHCS family, I soon found a culture of caring among a talented group of people who really believed in providing high-quality, safe, and compassionate care to the sick and suffering. Under the leadership of the capable Joel Allison, his management team, the medical professionals, support staff, volunteers, and board members, the people of this area are in excellent hands in their time of need for health care. I am proud to be a part of the Baylor family.

Roberts: *Bill, I want to thank you on behalf of BUMC Proceedings for pouring your soul out, so to speak. The readers will be most appreciative to hear about your inspiring life. And thank you for all you do for Baylor and this community!*

Aston: Thank you.

Figure 16. Les Burford, a long-time employee at Dallas Power and Light—Bill Aston's boss, friend, teacher, and mentor. Using small boats, they ran rivers together: the Red, the Mississippi, the Ohio, the Atchafalaya.