

Interview with Mary Waters Spaulding, August 8, 2013

CRAIG BREADEN: My name is Craig Breaden. I'm the audiovisual archivist at Duke University, and I'm with Kirston Johnson, the curator of the Archive of Documentary Arts at Duke. The date is August 8, 2013, and we are in Lexington, NC, talking with Mary Waters Spaulding about her life and family, and particularly about her father, H. Lee Waters. For the recording, please state your full name, date of birth, and place of birth.

MARY WATERS SPAULDING: My name is Mary Elizabeth Waters Spaulding, and my place of birth was Lexington, NC, on May 14, 1942.

BREADEN: Can you describe what Lexington was like when you were growing up in the 1940's?

SPAULDING: I remember it as a small town, but a thriving small town. Probably the reason it was thriving was because of all the furniture factories in town, and that employed a lot of people and kept the town going. Of course, they're no longer here, but at that time, it was thriving with those. It was a very friendly town. My brother and I felt like we actually pretty much knew everybody in town, and a lot of that has to do with the fact that we saw so many photographs from our father, and we went with him on location to take photographs, and we got to meet a lot of people. It was just a very friendly town, and people were very kind, very thoughtful, and were always very cordial with our father, H. Lee. One thing is, I don't think any of us ever felt unsafe in this town; it was a very safe town to be in. We never felt threatened by anything. It was a very happy childhood living in Lexington.

BREADEN: Tell us about the rest of your family.

SPAULDING: My older brother is eight years older than I am. His name is Tom Waters. We had an older sister, who would have been thirteen years older than I. My brother is 8 years older than I. She was their firstborn, and she had an illness, she was epileptic at a very young age. She probably started having seizures at --

TOM WATERS: About six months.

SPAULDING: -- about six months old, and they progressively got worse. At that time in the '30s, they didn't have the medication to help with that. Probably just the phenobarb was all she was given. Her seizures became more severe as she grew. She got to be a larger person, and very difficult to handle this, my parents had difficulty with that. The seizures got so severe that they just could not manage it, so they took her to a state institution in Raleigh, the state hospital, and that's where she stayed until she died. We were allowed to visit her, like only once a month, because they wanted that to be her home, and they didn't want her to want to go back home with us. So, if our visits were more frequent, she would get more used to our being there and miss us more, I guess. She contracted tuberculosis while she was there, and died at the age of twenty-four. I can't remember how old she was when she went there. I would say she was a

teenager, like fourteen or fifteen, so she was there that long. I think it was '53 when she died there. I don't remember, but she was twenty-four when she died. Our mother, who played a large part in our family, she was H. Lee's, our father's, partner in many ways. They worked together, she worked at the studio. She helped him with the photographs. She helped him with the sittings. She would help pose the brides in their dresses and their veils, and fix their hair, and help them get their makeup just right. She would also retouch the films by hand. She would also color-tint photographs to make them look like color, with oil. And later in years, she learned how to do the heavy oil application to the large portraits, that actually looked more like paintings than they did photographs. They were quite a team.

KIRSTON JOHNSON: What was your mother's name?

SPAULDING: Mabel Elizabeth Jarrell was her maiden name, and of course, Waters. I have my Elizabeth is from my mom. Mary Elizabeth is from Mabel Elizabeth.

BREADEN: How did they come to meet?

SPAULDING: That's an interesting story, rather comical. She was actually trained to be a nurse, and she was doing some training there in Lexington hospital. Our father's mother, Gertrude Waters, was in the hospital for pneumonia, and they were in the same room, and I guess it was a warm summer day, and they had a fan in the room, and the fan needed to be plugged in. Well, both of them got under the bed at one time to plug this fan in, and that's where they met. And the rest is history. (laughter) I think that's a cute story.

JOHNSON: Were they both from Lexington?

SPAULDING: No. Where was she from? He was from South Carolina, wasn't he?

WATERS: South Carolina.

SPAULDING: He was from Greer, Gaffney, that area. And he moved to Erlanger with his mom and dad in the thriving Erlanger Mill days. She grew up in the orphanage in Thomasville, because her parents died like a year apart while she was still small. She had older brothers and sisters who didn't have to, I think there were only three that actually went to the orphanage. So that's -- (Waters interrupts) Excuse me?

WATERS: Mills Home.

SPAULDING: Mills Home, okay. That's in Thomasville. She graduated from high school there, and then she went into nurse's training. Where they came from was... Wilmington area?

WATERS: Wilmington area.

SPAULDING: Wilmington area. That's where her family was from. And that's really pretty much

all I know about the background. I'm working on that.

BREADEN: Between them meeting and H. Lee Waters getting interested in photography and setting up his studio in Lexington, how did that come together?

SPAULDING: Actually our dad was an assistant or like an apprentice to another photographer who was in the same building at... 118 ½?

WATERS: 118 ½.

SPAULDING: 118 ½ Main Street.

WATERS: The whole top floor.

SPAULDING: The whole top floor of that building on the corner of Second Avenue and Main Street. I can't remember the gentleman's first name.

WATERS: Hitchcock.

SPAULDING: Hitchcock was the last name. Mr. Hitchcock was a photographer, and he kind of took our dad under his wing and offered him an assistantship or apprenticeship, and he loved it so much that he wanted to be a photographer on his own. So, when Mr. Hitchcock retired, which was shortly after that --

WATERS: About a year.

SPAULDING: -- about a year after that, my father's mother helped him buy the studio, so that the two of them financially went together and bought the studio.

WATERS: Financial documents of that transaction are down here in the archives (indiscernible).

SPAULDING: All the equipment, and -- now, of course that top floor they rented, they didn't own the building, but he bought the photography business from him.

JOHNSON: So all the equipment, everything...

SPAULDING: Everything, all the cameras and everything, darkroom, chemicals, so it was already pretty much set up, and then it grew from there.

BREADEN: Did you ever work with your father in his studio?

SPAULDING: Yes, I did. I can't say I spent numerous hours there as a small child, but I remember going up and just enjoying being in the atmosphere of the photographs and all the hustle bustle of taking the sittings, down to developing the negatives, to printing, drying the

photographs, proofing. And when I got to be in junior high school, I would actually, over the holidays, like Christmas and Easter, anytime I had free time, I would go up and help them, and they would give me an allowance accordingly. But I was kind of a combination of receptionist, cashier, I would proof the photographs -- in our front window out front of the building, the old proof frames that you used to use with the negatives and the proof paper, you put it under the sun, and that's how you got your proofs. So that was one of my jobs. Then I would dry the glossy prints on the big drum dryer, take those off and put them under glass with weights to make them flat, because they come out and they're a little bit curled. I would also do dry mounting, putting the dry mounting paper on the back of the photograph, place it on a larger format mat, and using the dry mounting machine, would do that. And that took a little practice to get that straight, but I learned how to do that. And that's probably about all I did, but I would come home from college and work during the holidays up there, to help them with that-- because it was a mad rush at Christmas time. There was a lot of business, so they needed some help.

JOHNSON: Was there walk-in business, or for the most part, did people make appointments with your father?

SPAULDING: There was some walk-in business. There was some. Well, he had a showcase down the steps -- this was all second floor -- and down these long, straight steps, the main entrance to the studio, there was a showcase on either side of the stairwell, with an awning over it. And he would, maybe every couple weeks, change the photographs. So people just walking on the streets would see these and say, "Oh, maybe I want my photograph taken. This looks really cool; this looks good." So they'd go up, and they would talk to him, and when you walk into the showroom, he had photographs everywhere. Framed and unframed. So, that's where he got, I'd say, a lot of his business from walk-ins. But then, word of mouth: this person would tell their mother or father, or their children, or their cousins, and the word got around that this was where to go for good photographs. So, some of that was word of mouth, and others would call them on the phone and ask them for appointments.

BREADEN: When you were working for him, did he talk about his time making films in other communities, in the '30s and early '40s?

SPAULDING: You know, he really did not. I don't understand that. I read that question and, thinking, he was so concentrated on what he was doing at the studio at that time, that was kind of the past, until the '70s. I was not around then, but he started talking to us about taking these films back to the communities, showing them at the civic clubs, and the civic clubs would buy them for the community from him. So he wanted to see that they got to where they should be, that these people would see them again, that they weren't just sitting in our garage forever. That was probably his first step of sharing those photographs with families and generations to come.

JOHNSON: I have another quick question before we move on: Since you were working for your father, can you talk a little bit about how he interacted with his clients, what you remember about how he worked with his clients? I think that it might shed some light on how he interacted with

the people --

SPAULDING: He was just a very friendly person. He liked people. He liked talking to people. So it was very easy for him, because of his personality, to approach someone, and for them to approach him. And in the studio, he would talk to them about, "Well now, what kind of picture do you want taken? Do you want your child's picture, would you like a very casual attire? Do you want serious ones?" Depending on the subject -- like wedding pictures, the brides liked to look very sophisticated, happy but not laughing. He had the kind of personality that he loved taking children's pictures, because he was kind of a big kid himself. He liked to be a little goofy with the kids and get them laughing, and he could do that. Some of the expressions that he got from children were phenomenal, if you see those prints. But as far as adults, they felt very comfortable just talking to him. And a lot of times when mother and he were taking the photographs, they would just talk to them, and then he would be snapping away. And they weren't even really posing at times, because you get a more natural look if they're talking to you.

WATERS: He was a charmer, yet very professional.

SPAULDING: Yeah, he was a charmer, I think so. You could say that. But he had no problem interacting, and people felt very comfortable with him.

BREADEN: At what point did you first learn about his movies of local people?

SPAULDING: It was probably after I graduated from college that it was even a subject of conversation. Because, he never really showed this to us as we were growing up. That was kind of his business at that time, but then when I was born in 1942, he promised my mother that he would stay home, that he would no longer be on the road. So I guess you could blame me for that, for him not taking them any longer. But that was on the road, that was traveling. And he would be gone most of the week, come home, and get the films processed, and then when he would receive them, he would edit them and take them back to the town. So he was on the road a lot, between 1936 and '42. But you see, I don't remember that because I wasn't there, I wasn't born. All I know is after he stayed home, he was with me. And like I said, I really never knew about these until probably the '60s. Then he didn't really talk about them that much then, it's just that he had them, I knew they were in the garage, but I didn't really know what they were, or how important they were at that point. And you know, as you're growing up, what your parents do doesn't quite seem as important as it really is. It's like, it's not that special, it's just he's being a father and he's supporting us. So at that point, neither my brother or I had any idea the impact this was going to make on the history of Lexington and all these cities and towns that he filmed.

JOHNSON: Later on, when he was going back to the small towns in the 1970s and screening the films again, did he ever talk with you about how he came up with this idea to start traveling around?

SPAULDING: You mean, to show them afterwards?

JOHNSON: No, the initial idea to even make them.

SPAULDING: No, not to me. He possibly did to my brother, but this was before my time, and maybe he thought there was no reason to share that with me until I got to be older. And that's what happened: I was out of college at the time, and it was explained to me then what he had done, and like I said, it didn't affect me at all, as far as him being away, because I didn't know that. All I knew was that he was around when I was a baby, and he kept his promise. As a matter of fact, he was on the road when my mother went into labor with me, and he was trying to get back before I was born, and he returned two minutes, near the delivery room, before I was born. He returned at 2:00, I was born at 2:02. So he did make it back. But he did continue making films, but mostly of Lexington and of family at that point. He just didn't do any traveling into other towns to make films.

BREADEN: And I want to ask you about that in a minute, but also, once you did start talking to him about these, did you get different stories from him versus your mother regarding the films?

SPAULDING: No, I don't remember my mother talking about them at all. I don't think she ever chimed in on that. And, as a matter of fact, I know, with that generation, sometimes you have to really pull to get information from them. Because, that's just what he did, that's the way it was. He wasn't intending to make a huge impact on the world; he was supporting his family. He was trying to get through the end of the Depression, and make it work for the family. Even though he had to be on the road. He was just a very creative person. I don't know if he knew of other itinerant movie makers. He possibly did through reading magazines and newspapers, but this was his ideas of going to the towns, and the way he edited films, that was pretty creative. He was just a very creative individual. And the fact that, how he advertised it, once he had taken the films, he would place a big poster, a placard on top of his car with braces. And he would ride around town with this poster saying "See yourself on the big screen," with certain dates, and he would also have a microphone hooked up with a speaker on the car. And he would be talking as he's driving around town, advertising this feature, and the fact that when they come to the theater to see that movie, they would also see themselves on the big screen. And that attracted a lot of attention.

BREADEN: You've said earlier, before we did the interview, I'd like to touch on this again-- when he came back, he brought that kind of big personality back with him, and applied it but at home. Can you tell us about some of the ways he followed events in Lexington, and how you might have been involved in some of those things?

SPAULDING: I don't think anything went on in Lexington that was of any size at all, that he didn't want a part of it, and he didn't want to record it, and to save that for the archives. In his mind, his photographs were his archives. He wanted to record the images of the town and the events, especially like when the servicemen would be bussed off to wherever they were going to be stationed and trained for the war. He would come to the depot and take a group picture of that group of men going that day.

WATERS: Sometimes on the steps of the courthouse.

SPAULDING: Yeah, and the exhibit that the Davidson County Museum had of, I don't know what they called it, the veterans gallery-- lots of veterans brought in photographs, and many of them were taken by our dad, and there were many photographs that he had taken of the servicemen before they left Lexington. And possibly, an observation I made by looking at these photographs, this could have been, for some of them, the last picture that was taken of them.

WATERS: There was a large billboard, where the Lexington State Bank is now, with the names of every one of the draftees. Hundreds of names up there, and three or four big panels, a giant billboard. It was the military honor roll. Any military of any kind, for any length of time, your name was on that list, (indiscernible) and at one time more than we did.

SPAULDING: Very possible. But anything that was going on, like the photographs -- I don't think he had any movies of High Rock Dam. Did he make all still photographs of that? High Rock Dam. He documented that from the time the ground was broken up through the completion of it.

WATERS: The little museum there has the very camera.

SPAULDING: Furniture factory parties. Any kind of event that he could record that and save it for that particular company or that set of people. I remember one instance, and I used to go with him to many of these parties, and just carry a bag or just go along for the fun of it, and just be with our dad. It was a lot of fun-- he was just a fun person, and one time we were on the stage of Lexington Senior High, which was at that time on which avenue, the big --?

WATERS: State Street.

SPAULDING: State Street, okay. And we were on stage, and there was a Christmas program. Santa Claus was in a huge box, and my job for that little assistantship, was to hold these two flashes, photograph flashes that you use for taking photographs. But this wasn't taking a photograph. The purpose of these flashes was to blind, momentarily, the audience, so that they could not really see Santa Claus popping out of the box. And when I got the signal from him to push the flash button, that's what I did. That was just a fun thing to do. So, different things like that. Sometimes, some of these memories are so deep, that as I'm talking with you, they're hidden until they start coming to the surface, just like in a computer, it's not right at the top until you start digging a little deeper.

WATERS: That's the emotional rollercoaster. Going through all these things, and finding out things we never knew. We didn't discover a lot of the genius that he really was until we dug deeper.

BREADEN: Many people have noted that your father filmed in black communities in the towns he visited when he was making his movies of local people, almost as regularly as he filmed in

the white communities. Did he ever share with you this aspect of his work, or what that might have meant maybe in a larger sense?

SPAULDING: You know, I can't say that he shared it with me. I became aware of this as my brother and I were unearthing many of the photographs that he had taken. This has been in the last ten years as we've gone through so many photographs. And, he never really talked about, "Oh, I went into a black community today." He never mentioned that. He never said 'black,' he just said "I went to this party," or this event. There just isn't a lot in my memory about him talking about that. It was just natural for him to do it, because they were people and it was an event, and he wanted to be a part of it. And he was invited possibly, because they felt a connection to him, with his personality, and the fact that he was not there to be intimidating, or to be, I don't know --

WATERS: He wasn't exploiting them.

SPAULDING: No, he wasn't exploiting them. It was just, they liked being on camera. And probably, possibly, maybe not a lot of black people had cameras, or at least video, film cameras. But you can see by looking at the photographs that they're really happy to have him there. That you'd never guess that he was a white person taking pictures of a black community.

WATERS: Some of the greatest smiles I've ever seen are in those black pictures.

SPAULDING: Yes, they were just happy. Happy to be in the pictures.

JOHNSON: I wonder about his studio photography business, and black communities in Lexington, North Carolina. Did you find that he was photographing black communities, black families, just as much as, as early as the 1930s, '40s?

SPAULDING: Yes, we found that in our dig, that many, many black families, and reunions, and birthday parties, and church reunions, like outside churches -- you could see the church in the background, and it was like homecoming day for the church, you could see the whole community of the church in front of the church. He was invited to do that. Not that he really searched that out, but once people found out that he was an excellent photographer, they did. That's what they wanted, was a group picture. Or families would come in, like grandparents and grandchildren, and mothers and fathers, and have a group picture taken, or just individuals, like servicemen. We found a lot of servicemen's photographs. Black, and white. So, he had a really good business in both aspects.

BREADEN: As time moved on, you mentioned earlier that he and your mother would go to workshops to get adopt new techniques. Can you talk about that a little bit?

SPAULDING: Yes. I even went to one with them, or maybe more than one. I remember one specifically. I was probably nine, ten, or eleven. We went to Chicago. It was a convention, and what I meant by workshops, it was probably workshops within the convention. And they would

have on stage a professional photographer posing and showing different techniques of taking the photographs, different ways of styling them, of styling the fashion and the hair, and how to light and basically how to take better photographs. And I think each time they went to one of those workshops and conventions, they brought back a lot of knowledge. Because, they were serious, they didn't go just for a good time. They went to research. They went to be educated.

WATERS: One time he was president of the North Carolina Photographers Association.

SPAULDING: I forgot about that. Yeah.

BREADEN: When was that?

WATERS: I'm not sure of the dates.

SPAULDING: I would say it's probably in the '50s. But, he also gained many friendships that way, of other photographers, and you know, as an artist, artists learn from other artists. You can't reinvent the wheel. You've got to share your ideas, and you can't be selfish about that. Because, you can take what that person taught you, and do that as well as go a step further. And whatever was out there to learn, he wanted to learn more about photography, and how to get the best portraits and the best photographs that he could take. Again, our mother went to workshops to learn how to do the color tinting, and how to retouch. So she was willing to study this to make it better. So, it wasn't a fly by night operation. It was a lifetime commitment to this. I wouldn't say it was really a job for him. It was entertaining for him. He just loved it so much. It was a passion, and yes, it was hard work-- weddings especially. I went to many weddings with him, and that was really hard work. That's very difficult. But he just loved what he did, and what he made financially was kind of the tip of the iceberg for him. There's so much enjoyment and pleasure from it, too. I'm not saying he didn't have bad days, we all have those, but basically, it was fun for him to be a photographer. And if we can all say that, that our job is fun, that's a blessing in itself.

JOHNSON: Did he have any hobbies, or passions outside of film and photography that you remember? Just thinking about H. Lee Waters at the end of the day or on the weekends, not doing his --

SPAULDING: Well, he did like to ride his motorcycle. He had many motorcycles in his time. Now, we're not talking about the big Harleys, we're talking about little Hondas, that didn't go real fast, and you could ask anyone in the community that remembers him at all, they remember this little icon riding around in a three-piece suit on his motorcycle. He didn't wear jeans, he didn't wear casual shirts, he would wear a three-piece suit, riding on the motorcycle. So he really enjoyed that.

WATERS: That's in the old days.

SPAULDING: And he liked to go visit the orphanage home in Lexington, and I would go many

times with him to do that. And he would take -- this is all things that I'm just starting to remember -- he would buy huge, 16mm films of feature films that the children would enjoy. He would take his projector and have a movie night, either outside or inside, for the orphanage. And he just loved entertaining the orphans. He would even take some of them some days. I would go with him, or he would go with them, and he would take them on rides in the little scooter, or Honda, that he had. In those days, we didn't have to have helmets, and we could ride on the gas tank, we could ride behind him. You know, it just wasn't the same. Probably not real safe, but that's the way it was. He loved the church. One of his hobbies for the church, he thought was his mission, was to distribute tracts. Are you familiar with what tracts are?

JOHNSON: 'Tracts' with a 't'.

SPAULDING: Yes. He would distribute those throughout the town, actually. The train station, the bus station, the post office, where else would he have done that?

WATERS: He would on an excursion on the trains sometimes, make sure everybody on the train got one.

SPAULDING: Oh yeah, he would hand them out, you know, or he would leave them. He was just a very spiritual person, he and our mother both were very spiritual. And he loved the church, and he loved to do things for the church. So yes, he did have hobbies, he did have a lot of interests other than photographs and photography. All of that has to do with the complete person, and that has to do with how kind he was to people, and how he felt that it was important to treat people equally, and to not discriminate.

WATERS: I can remember him taking gift baskets at Christmas around to these needy homes. One young boy, he started a friendship with, he asked him to go to church with him. The little boy didn't have any church clothes, so my dad bought him a church suit, and took him to church with him. And just spiritual little things like that, just little tidbits, little hiccups along the way, a little comma here, a little semicolon there, and something in parentheses after what his main body of movement is. These little incidences show the depth of his character.

JOHNSON: And he really made a living from doing things for other people, doing things for the community, documenting the community, and giving back to the community by screening those films.

SPAULDING: Yes, he did.

BREADEN: Did you have movie night at your house?

SPAULDING: Oh yes!

BREADEN: What was movie night like?

SPAULDING: Well, movie night was when he took those same kind of feature films, I remember one specifically was called "Shriek in the Night." It was a horror movie. Now, nothing like our horror movies today, but at our age, it was a horror movie. It was scary. But he would have movie night for the neighborhood. We would advertise it with posters on telephone poles. Come to 405 for movie night. We would make homemade ice cream. We had a swing set. It was just a total entertainment night, so we'd pop popcorn, or serve the ice cream while they're watching this movie. In the backyard now, in the summertime. It was only summer. And I can remember one time when he showed that "Shriek in the Night," Tom did something really strange, I can't remember exactly what it was, but he tried to scare everybody. I mean, we're sitting there -- he's eight years older than we are -- and here are these little 5, 6, 7 year olds, and we're scared of this movie, and he comes around and spooks everybody. You don't remember that, do you?

WATERS: No.

SPAULDING: Well, I do. Because we just jumped out of our skin, and it was just fun. It was fun growing up in that household, because he always had something fun going on. We would even have circus night. You don't remember this, Tom, because this was after he left, but all my friends in the neighborhood, we'd come up with some special talent that we had, or some special thing that we wanted to do a circus act. From trapeze, to ballet, to tap, to acrobats, to being a clown, or whatever, so we'd have circus night. He would provide the spotlight -- it was after dark -- he would provide the spotlight. He had an arc light spotlight, and he would play music, he would also do drumrolls because he was musical. Oh, I forgot about this. He was a drummer, and he played the vibraphone and the...

WATERS: Marimba.

SPAULDING: Marimba, yes. And the trumpet, didn't he play the trumpet?

WATERS: Yes, he played the trumpet.

SPAULDING: So he was very musical.

WATERS: He was in one of the earliest Erlinger bands there was.

SPAULDING: So he would accompany the circus, along with some 78 records. And he would put the spotlight on us. And the drumroll when I was on the trapeze, but it certainly wasn't anything dangerous, but he made it sound dangerous. (Laughter) And I think he enjoyed it as much or more than we did. This is just the little kid in him, and we were always doing something fun. We had lots of animals: we had chickens, and roosters, and ducks, and cats, and dogs, and fish, and I think we had one goat. So he loved taking care of animals, too, he loved animals, and he's passed that on to us. And I love animals.

JOHNSON: Sounds like you two had a wonderful childhood.

WATERS: (coughing) In fact, I remember (coughing) quite frequently. And it was an outgrowth of what he'd done (coughing). He'd show them in the top window up there in the front of the building where he made the proofs, at night he would set up a projector in that window and shoot it across the street, to a giant screen over the building next door over there, not next door but across the street. He got permission from the building owner to put this giant screen up there, and show it right across Main Street, and he did that for I don't know how long, until the police made him quit, for making a traffic hazard. People were standing in the streets down there, parked their cars, and have an outdoor theater. Show movies with local people in there, another one was "Ten Laps to Go," I think we may still have one of those. (indiscernible)

SPAULDING: We probably do. And then he used to show -- what were the funny movies? Did he show Abbott and Costello? I think he owned one of those.

WATERS: Felix the Cat.

SPAULDING: And Felix the Cat. The cartoons of the original Mickey Mouse. So he would purchase those and show them on movie night for our pleasure.

JOHNSON: Was he a movie-goer? Do you remember him going to the theater?

SPAULDING: No.

WATERS: Before your time, he went to the theaters a lot of times. He bought the most war bonds for one particular time period, for a contest, and won the pass to the theater for a year. So, he'd see just about every movie that came on screen.

SPAULDING: I did not know that. I guess I was his entertainment after I was born.

JOHNSON: Can you tell us a little bit about your mother? She was such an integral part of the photography business, and as you said earlier, they were partners in many ways. What was she like as a person? Did she have hobbies outside of being a mother and working with your father?

SPAULDING: She did, but I didn't realize there were hobbies until I was in high school or college. Her hobby was me growing up, I guess, because I was eight years behind him. I do remember when she was learning how to do, or doing the color tinted photographs, she would stay with me at home, and do that at home. I remember sitting there with her as a toddler, or six, seven, eight years old, and she would give me another print and let me do it, too. So I would color the prints right along with her. And that's how I got interested in my art career. And she also loved flower arranging. She loved growing African Violets. She had one whole room with lots of natural light in it, that she grew African Violets, just award winners. She even --

WATERS: Cross-pollinated.

SPAULDING: -- cross-pollinated ones to come up with new ones. I mean, that was a hobby

during all this time. Plants, and especially African violets, and flower arranging. And then, in the '70s, she took a painting course from a local artist and did paintings not from photographs, but just paintings. So, she was a true artist, in every way. A very low key person. She was gregarious, she was friendly, but not as outgoing as he was. I think that generation, the mother and the wife didn't feel as free to be as outgoing as they are now. Because they weren't as worldly. But she really enjoyed doing what she was doing at the studio. But as far as her personality, she was just a real sweet lady. Never went into nursing after they got married, because shortly after they were married -- did he go into the business before they were married?

WATERS: He went into the business in 1926.

SPAULDING: Yeah, so maybe he went into business shortly before they were married, so she assisted him.

WATERS: They were married on Christmas day.

SPAULDING: Yes, they were married on December 25. But she was pretty much the backbone of that studio as far as --

WATERS: (indiscernible)

SPAULDING: -- keeping him organized. You know, she was really good at that.

BREADEN: Did she keep the books?

SPAULDING: No, she didn't keep the books, did she?

WATERS: I think they both did.

SPAULDING: Yeah, I don't remember that. I was just having such a good time, I didn't go into all of that. (laughter) Why would I have to worry about the books?

BREADEN: He did some very striking work at High Rock Dam in the 1920s, and obviously when he came back to Lexington. Did he ever show any of his still photographs around town at all?

WATERS: Oh, yeah. A whole bunch of them. Turned them over to Catherine at the High Rock Dam Project, at the museum, but they got misplaced or something. I don't know what happened to them. But he made over a hundred pictures over a period of two and a half years, parts of '26, '27, and '28. I can still remember the print number 106, 107, 108. So he made well over a hundred. And he'd go down there once a month and take a series of them. Almost didn't get back one day-- started snowing while he was down there. He got stuck in the snow and started walking back to Lexington, and no roadsides to be seen -- it was all white. So he found the railroad tracks, and he knew the railroad tracks went to our house up in Lexington. It's the one

that goes by our house right now. Well (indiscernible). He followed the track and came across a farmhouse and knocked on the door, and he asked if he could use the phone. But I don't think they had a phone. They asked him to stay the night. He had to get out of there in the morning. And he basically got his car back, I don't remember all the follow-up details, but if these people hadn't taken him in, he might have been caught in that blizzard and that'd have been the end of H. Lee Waters Studio, but to hear him tell it was a rather -- it was a life experience, you don't mind going through it once, but don't want to go through it twice.

BREADEN: He would have examples of his photographs in the windows of the shopfront below?

WATERS: Sometimes. I don't know that he ever made a full display of the High Rock Dam Project. He was working for Alcoa, and he retained the films, made the pictures, and put them in albums once in a while to show his scenes of the construction around town. He made some of the textile mills. One thing that came to mind is that a number of what we call cotton mills, textile, and besides the furniture factories, there were about six or eight of those. There were also about six or eight textile mills.

SPAULDING: I forgot about those. Especially Erlanger.

WATERS: That's what brought them up here. Jobs in South Carolina were scarce, so they put all three of them to work up here at Erlanger. Dad worked for fifty cents a day, and my grandmother sewed in labels, and his dad worked on the machinery, the looms, and was a general technician. But they were totally involved in the community of Erlanger there. I think he took quite a few pictures of the midway up through Erlanger, if they had a picnic day or whatever.

SPAULDING: As a teenager he was interested in photography.

WATERS: Yeah, he had his first dark room in the basement of the house they lived in. It was the second house off the corner of Highway 52 North, Old Winston Road. My grandfather, Thomas Butner Waters, he bargained for the house. They wanted to get the Waters family up here as fast they could. They built the second house for one of the top management people, maybe the superintendent, but he said "No, that's the house that I want." And they bickered and argued back and forth a little bit, and finally he got that house. They actually built the last one-- but he got it-- and that's where they set up his first dark room in the basement of that house. They had a little self-player piano-- he played piano too, by the way-- as well as the drums and the marimba and xylophones. But he could play the piano, and I remember he used to play along with the hymns at church, when (indiscernible) was here, not too many years ago, and he started playing one tune, and he would change the key to G, or whatever it was--

SPAULDING: He would transpose.

WATERS: Transpose, yeah. And it was absolutely amazing that this old man with no music at

all could sit there and transpose from one key to the next, and go right along like nothing had happened. He knew music.

SPAULDING: You could probably describe this as Renaissance man. Pretty good description of him?

JOHNSON: I would say.

BREADON: Did he and your mom both keep going to the conferences and workshops over time, like after you left?

SPAULDING: You know, I really don't know that. I think I remember them occasionally going to one. Some of them were just like workshops, they weren't the conventions. Some of them were just the workshops, where maybe there was one on a particular subject that they wanted to learn more about, and they would go. But once I left for college in 1960, I don't know how many more they went to. I would imagine they did, because they kept wanting to do better what they were doing.

WATERS: They had one of their conventions right here in Lexington.

SPAULDING: Oh, did they?

WATERS: The studio was the host of (indiscernible) and I don't remember if it was for lighting or posing, or what it was, but they taught one of the courses there.

SPAULDING: Ok. Yeah, they were always seeking to become better at what they were doing.

BREADON: Was there a point where they decided to wind down the business?

SPAULDING: No, there was no point. It was a gradual transition. Now, my mother died when she was 66. Actually, she died in Pennsylvania. She had a heart attack in my home, right after our last son was born in '74, and she was in the hospital for about a month. After the heart attack she had a stroke, ten days after that, and then from there they were going to move her to our house until she could be flown home, but she didn't last that long. She died a little less than a month after her heart attack on Mother's Day in our house. But she had semi-retired at the time. She had taken up gardening-- she loved gardening-- and the first real garden she had was that summer, right across the street from their home. She was using a tiller, and it probably was just too much for her. She wasn't a real physical person. She wasn't like today, where people go to the gym or they walk or run. She seemed healthy, but I think she must have had some heart problems, and they were possibly--

WATERS: Angina.

SPAULDING: Angina, and they didn't treat them the same way that they do now. If she were

living in this decade, she probably would not have died at that young age.

WATERS: Her twin sister lived until she was 95.

JOHNSON: She had a twin sister?

SPAULDING: Oh yes, she did. She lived to be 95.

JOHNSON: I see. And they were in the orphanage together?

SPAULDING: Yes, they were.

WATERS: And then there was the younger sister Vivien.

SPAULDING: Yeah, Vivien. There was three of them; the twins and one younger one, and there were three older siblings.

BREADEN: So after 1974, then your father ran the studio on his own.

SPAULDING: Yes, but even by that time he was winding down. He would just go up when he felt going up, and would just take appointments by phone, and he didn't do weddings anymore. He gradually just wound down to accommodate his aging body.

WATERS: The dementia was setting in by then too. He'd get tired quickly.

SPAULDING: So it wasn't just that one day he decided not to do it, it was--

WATERS: He pushed as long as he could. And then I advised him very strongly, I said, "Dad you don't need to be doing this." But then he was getting his orders mixed up, and one Saturday we had the children up here and an half of them over here, and I remember the last part of that time thinking (indiscernible) locked off one end of it.

SPAULDING: Yeah, it was just time.

BREADEN: Was it at that point that he started looking back at these older films, and trying to get them back to their communities, or was it before that?

SPAULDING: It was before that. I don't think he did anymore of that after she died, did he?

WATERS: No, he didn't.

SPAULDING: It was sad because they worked together, they lived together. It was his best friend, his partner, was gone-- and he was very lonely. I'm sure it was heartbreaking just to go to the studio without her. So at that point I would say he was pretty much done at that stage.

JOHNSON: That really covers many of the questions that we have. You answered one of our questions earlier. We wondered if you thought your father ever considered the movies he made would have a life beyond their immediate purpose that they had at the time. Do you think he knew the documentary value of what he was doing?

SPAULDING: Well, foremost, he was looking for a way to support the family other than the studio. They were not getting the people to come into the studio -- people did not have the finances to do that, so he was looking for a creative way to support the family, and make enough money to support us. That was probably the initial reason. But then I think as he became involved in it, he realized what he was doing. I don't think he had any idea that it would be to the realm that it has become now. I really don't think he knew the impact it was going to make, but because he liked being a part of history and a part of everything that was going on around him, he wanted to document that. We are very fortunate-- because of that we have these films. I think he did realize somewhat what he was doing, and that's why he went back to the communities to share them again, to make sure those communities were able to enjoy these. That was probably the first stage of his sharing and passing this on to future generations. But he had fun too.

WATERS: You can watch the progress, the development, of his techniques, his way of setting up scenes, and the type of things that people responded to. The audience helped in regards to his style and technique as much as anything. Their response to what they were seeing, and to hear about how it developed along those lines. They would get more crowds and get more applause, and they would write about them in the papers, as it were. Patron saints and (indiscernible). And they watched his movies and saw some of the first commercials this country has ever seen. And you notice that in some of the (indiscernible) you look through there-- (indiscernible). The mechanic would be working on cars, the grocer would be selling groceries, the beauty parlors would have the electric curlers come down like this curling their hair, the mailman would be delivering mail. Then, of course there would be certain dairies, the hardware store--

SPAULDING: And didn't he sell the commercials, using those images to put on the screen?

WATERS: Yeah, he did. Back in the 30s, that wasn't unheard of.

BREADEN: Did he talk to you about when he started getting attention -- Tom Whiteside made his film, and he was on the TV news-- did he talk to you about that much?

SPAULDING: No, I wasn't around. I was in Pennsylvania.

WATERS: (indiscernible) We knew they were starting to get attention. And we saw the movies and the end product. But he never never thought about it, didn't mention it. He didn't see it as a bragging point. He wasn't that kind of person.

SPAULDING: No, he didn't brag about it. I think he just kind of, felt good about it though. I think he felt honored, but he didn't make a big deal of it. I don't think he really knew how much publicity he was getting. But it was nice that that happened before he died, and that he saw that people really did appreciate his efforts, and his images. And I think also at that point he realized the impact that was coming. That he was passing along a real heritage there, not just to our family, but to many families.

WATERS: He understood and appreciated Duke's financial thrust in getting and collecting his movies and restoring them. He understood that quite well, and he thought it was an honor that a large institution like Duke would begin on work like this. He was all in favor of continuing.

SPAULDING: But he didn't like being in the limelight. He really didn't. He was a humble person. This was just kind of fun, to see this happening for him, but he didn't feel any more special because of it. Even though he was, and is.

BREADEN: Have we failed to cover any ground here that you can think of?

SPAULDING: Well, let me see here. Many of these questions that you had asked my brother, of course, I wouldn't have answer to them, because I wasn't around. Like what life was like when he was gone.

WATERS: She was just meticulous in detail. And one of the things that showed up, that wasn't related to the studio at all, was making clothes for her new daughter. She made many clothes that Mary wore. Little fine embroidered work on some of them, sewing buttons on. I don't see how she did it, but that was her style. Anything she turned her attention to, that she made, she made perfection out of it. Raising flowers, pollinating the flowers (indiscernible). Fish, same way. Raised tropical fish for years. And when it came to making crafts like a pine straw basket - remember that?

SPAULDING: I have that!

WATERS: Pine straw. She got that pine straw and she made the most beautiful hand purse and basket that you have ever seen. If we took it to a trade show, it would bring quite a few dollars in, if someone knew what they were getting. That kind of meticulous detail, got into every phase of her life, in every hobby she got into. And she was meticulous in other ways, other avenues, activities. She had her own unique creativity. And it came out in her work in the studio. And it's the very creativity that came out in the movies. In some ways you could call them a perfect match.

SPAULDING: They were. He was just a very creative person, and she was too in different ways. It was a good marriage in more ways than one.

WATERS: They set a good example for us.

JOHNSON: Well, thank you very much. This has been a pleasure, and very interesting.

SPAULDING: Thank you! It's been fun to talk about our family, it's always fun. Like I said, it brings up memories that you didn't realize were there.

WATERS: As you go through these pictures, these movies-- it brings back memories you thought you had totally forgot about. It triggers them.

(end of interview)