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### **Profile Biography Instructions**

**Read all of the instructions before beginning. Please note due dates posted in the module.**

#### **Picking an interviewee**

Select someone in your world that you would like to interview. It needs to be someone who has lived some life. Now, a 12-year old who was lost in the woods for three weeks alone clearly has lived some life. But generally, you probably need to consider someone a bit older. On the other hand, it does not have to be an Olympic champion. A mother who has raised five, healthy, successful children is a champion of another type.

Your job will be to find “the story” in an everyday life. So your paper will end up being part narrative and part characterization, in other words, presenting what type of person this is through his or her life experiences.

**Restrictions: Do NOT use your family - parent, sibling, significant other (boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, etc.) - for the biography.**

#### **Background research**

You are going to interview someone you know. But, you still need to do a little background research. Find out when and where he or she lived, what was that area like during the time your interviewee lived there, what broad historical events took place during your interviewee’s lifespan. Talk to other people who know the interviewee, Google the person’s life time period or town, or do some research in the library.

#### **Supplies**

Recording device - You can use a smart phone or digital recorder to make a digital recording that can be downloaded or emailed to your computer for transcribing purposes. Make sure it is charged or you have a plug.

List of interview questions (more about this later)

Notebook and pens/pencils

#### **When and where and what**



Speak to the person you are interested in interviewing. Explain that this is a class assignment and that you will be writing a paper to share with others. Find a time that works with his or her schedule. Pick a location for the interview that is relatively quiet. You want to be able to hear well, and you want to be able to make a clean recording. You should begin the recording as soon as possible when you meet and allow it to run the entire time. So make sure your phone or recorder is charged or plugged up.

### Questions and other things to say

Your interview should not run more than 30 minutes. Feel free to respond that something is interesting, etc., but don't try to carry on a conversation. You are there to listen.

After turning on the recorder, make sure it is recording. Then give an introduction to the interview. This may seem awkward, but it is beneficial information for later. Begin with something like this: "Today is June 10, 2020. I am with Coach Jake Sims, my high school baseball coach. We're meeting in his office at Shamrock High School in Decatur, Georgia."

Make a list of questions before the interview. Generally, ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with yes or no or a single word. Open-ended questions explore how and why and require the respondent to provide more information and feelings and thoughts about the topic.

### Sample Questions

Where did you grow up and what was it like growing up there?

How did you get your name?

(Be sure to ask how to spell names of people and locations. Do not assume.)

What was your first job like?

Where did you go to school, college, etc.? Why?

Why did you choose your career?

As you ask these questions, carefully listen for the story of the person you are interviewing. *Hint: In fiction and in real life, a story is usually about someone wanting something – a goal or a dream – and overcoming obstacles.* Listen for this. That is where you will find the story of your interviewee.

Certain things will stand out as important. Jot down notes as you go when something stands out. But make them quick and keep your focus on the interview. Ask follow-up questions about these things that seem important.



Honestly, I often begin by saying tell me your story. With some people, this is great. They know their story. Others will be less forthcoming or think they have nothing to share. But everyone's life is interesting. You just have to find the story.

Note: Sometimes in an interview, something will be shared that the interviewee wishes to keep private or off the record. Do not include this in your transcription or your paper.

### **Transcribing and analyzing the interview**

After the interview, transcribe the most important parts of the interview word for word. This will probably 1,500 to 2,000 words, possibly more. (The final paper must be at least 500 and no more than 1,000 words with 700 being the likely target number.)

This is the website that I use for transcription <https://otranscribe.com/Links to an external site.>. You upload your digital file to it. You can play the file, audio or video, and speed it up or slow down as needed. Also, you type on the same screen. Then copy the transcription to a document and save it.

After you transcribe the interview, review it along with your notes. Find the story of the person you interviewed. Your biography will be part narrative and part character analysis.

Upload your transcription in the assignment link provided. It does not have to be in any particular format. Just make sure it contains everything important from the interview.

### **Writing the biography**

Narrative – The story of your interviewee will emerge from the interview. Some of your paper will be narrative, that is, events in his or her life that are important to tell. You can chose to write the narrative or events in chronological order or in what is sometimes called artistic order. With artistic order you might move things around, for example, have a flashback. You could also begin at the end of his or her life and work back in reverse chronological order. You do not have to tell every event. But you should share the ones that matter, the ones that reveal something about the person you interviewed.

Characterization – Thought characterization is most often associated with literature, but we also make judgments about others in real life by their actions and their responses to situations. Your biography will present character traits. But show these more than tell. For example, if you think the person is caring, you might describe his interaction with someone, for example, how a husband every year gave his wife roses on their anniversary and continued doing this by putting roses on her grave after she died. Someone might be heroic, show her defending her children from an angry dog that tries to bite them. You do not have to say she is heroic. It is apparent.



Use the interviewee's words to give a feel for the person and provide color to the story. Follow the appropriate guidelines for punctuating quotes, but do NOT use in-text format in this case. You can ellipsis long quotes or adjust verb tenses in brackets, etc., as needed for clarity and coherence.

Titles are important. Select a title that reflects your paper and brings the reader into the story.

**Note: Do NOT interject yourself into the essay, even to mention where you conducted the interview or a question you asked. When you mention yourself in the interview, you inadvertently shift the focus from the interviewee to yourself.**

### **Works Cited**

If this were an article for a popular magazine, you would not have a works cited. But since this is in an academic class and the point is to learn as much as you can, you need to include a works cited. So include a works cited that cites your interview. See the web link on how to cite personal interviews.

### **Peer review and final version**

Approach this more like a magazine article, though you should follow MLA page formatting. This is not a formal essay, so you will not necessarily have a topic sentence and, paragraph development as strictly as you would in a formal essay. Also paragraphs might vary in length from relatively short to long, which is generally not the case in formal writing.

Make a final decision about the important ideas from the transcription of the interview and your notes or ideas about it. Inevitably, you will have to leave some interesting things. Decide the order of the material you want to present. Stay out of the paper. Do not, for example, write I think or I feel this or that about the interviewee.

Put the biography together and make necessary edits and revisions. Post it for peer feedback

After you get peer feedback, make any final edits and revisions. Upload it in the assignment link provided by the date indicated.

Updated October 2023



# SEVENTY-EIGHT

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Profiles  
Jun 9

## The Life and Times of Charles "Butch" Hill



"Retire early and get out and travel and trust the Lord!" - Charles Hill

Charles "Butch" Hill sums up his life quickly:

"I grew up on the Bryan Road in Sumiton, finished high school at Dora, went to Jacksonville State and played football. The day after I graduated, I joined the Marines. When I got out of the Marines, I went to work for State Farm and I've been here 51 years."



He sighs. "I guess I've had kind of a boring life."

But the details of his life and times are far from boring.

Sitting at a desk in his Jasper office, Charles reminisces about his younger days. Back then, he was known as "Butch."

"Everybody across the river knows me as Butch," he begins. "The night I graduated high school and walked across the stage, they called out 'Charles Gary Hill.'"

He pauses for a moment. "Some people didn't know who that was," he says, smiling.



Charles enjoyed powerlifting. It wasn't infrequent to see him at the local workout place, Bunk's Gym.

His roots are in Creel Town, a community in the Empire area named after the family of Millie Creel Hill, Butch's grandmother. Creel Town, Charles says, was a "tough community" where life was far from boring.

He relates an incident that occurred during a mine strike. When a coal company brought trucks in to load coal, one of the miners “mounted a machine gun on the top of the hill and shot a line of trucks up.”

Mine strikes and machine guns aside, this was also a community of close friends and family. “It was rural, and everybody knew everybody,” he says.

Even when Charles started school, he didn’t get away from family. His dad, James, was a high school chemistry teacher and football coach—and Charles’ hero. “He played college ball, fought in the Pacific,” Charles says. “The whole time I grew up, he never laid a hand on me.”

That’s not to suggest that discipline was frowned upon in the Hill home. “Now, my mother didn’t spare the rod at all! “Charles says, grinning. “I was in her room in the third grade in Dora. She liked to have beat me to death. She was afraid if I did anything and she didn’t paddle me, the other kids would think they could get away with it.”

Charles survived and eventually moved on to Dora High School, where he played football. After high school, he enrolled at Jacksonville State and played football for Coach Don Salls. “Well, I wanted to play football, but I wasn’t big enough or talented enough to go in the SEC, so I walked on at Jacksonville [and] played inside linebacker,” he says.





He graduated in 1966, at the height of the Vietnam War, with a degree in biology. Many attempted to avoid military service, but not Butch. "I joined the Marines the day after I graduated college," he says. "I was an officer and did my training at Quantico."

After training, Charles deployed to Vietnam, where he served as a part of a tank crew. "Most people don't realize you can use tanks in Vietnam," he says, "but where I operated, you could in northern Vietnam from Chu Lai up to Fu Bai."

While serving, Charles was wounded three times, the last time severely. His military service ended with a tour of hospitals. "I spent eight and a half months in the hospital," he recalls. "I was in hospitals all over the world. I started out in Vietnam, went to a hospital ship, then spent some time in Japan in a hospital. I came to Portsmouth, Virginia, and stayed in the hospital there. Finally, I ended up in Memphis, Tennessee, in the naval hospital."

Charles was discharged from the military on December 31, 1968. On January 1, 1969, he took a position as an adjuster with State Farm Insurance. "Then an agency opened up," he says. He points to the desk in front of him. "I've been sitting behind this same desk all those years."







Butch's voice is weak but still full of vitality. He has health issues, he explains, that have put limits on him. Instead he gives advice to the next generation. "Retire early and get out and travel," Charles says, before quickly adding, "And trust the Lord!"

When asked about his own life choices, he responds in six words: "I would not change a thing."

That doesn't sound like a boring life at all. **78**

Words by Stephen. W. B. Rizzo

Photos by Al Blanton

June 2020





[Stephen Rizzo](#)

[See author's posts](#)

<https://78mag.com/blog/2020/06/the-life-and-times-of-charles-butch-hill>

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# Writer's Draft Version:

## The Life and Times of Charles "Butch" Hill

**"Retire early and get out and travel and trust the Lord!"**

**Stephen W. B. Rizzo**

Charles "Butch" Hill sums up his life quickly. "I grew up on the Bryan Road in Sumiton, finished high school at Dora, went to Jacksonville State and played football. The day after I graduated, I joined the Marines. When I got out of the Marines, I went to work for State Farm and I've been here fifty-one years" He sighs and concludes, "I guess I've had kind of a boring life."

*But the details of his life and times are far from boring.*

He reminisces about his younger days. Of course, back then he was known as Butch. He sits at his desk in Jasper and gestures, "Everybody across the river knows me as Butch. The night I graduated high school and walked across the stage they called out Charles Gary Hill." He continues with a smile, "Some of the people didn't know who that was."

His roots are in Creel Town, which was a community in the Empire area named after his Grandmother Millie Creel Hill's family. His description of life in Creel Town at the time is certainly not boring. "Creel Town was a tough community." For example, he recounts the events of a mine strike. The coal company brought trucks in to try to load coal. One of the miners, according to Charles, "mounted a machine gun on the top of the hill and shot a line of trucks up." But mine strikes and machine guns aside, this was also a community of close friends and family. He shares, "It was rural and everybody knew everybody."

Even when he started school, he didn't get away from family. Both of his parents were educators. His dad James was a high school chemistry teacher and football coach, as well as Charles' hero. He explains the things he admired about his dad. "He played college ball, fought in the Pacific. The whole time I grew up he never laid a hand on me." Then he laughs and says, "Now my mother didn't spare the rod at all! I was in her room in the third grade in Dora. She liked to have beat me to death. She was afraid if I did anything and she didn't paddle me the other kids would think they could get away with it." But he survived and eventually moved on to Dora High School, where he played football.

After high school graduation, he enrolled at Jacksonville State and played football for Coach Salls. Charles says, "Well, I wanted to play football but I wasn't big enough or talented enough to go in the SEC, so I walked on at Jacksonville [and] played inside linebacker." He graduated in 1966 with a degree in biology and at the height of the Vietnam War.

Many attempted to avoid military service, but not Charles. "I joined the Marines the day after I graduated college. I was an officer and did my training at Quantico." After training, he deployed

to Vietnam, where he served as a part of a tank crew. "Most people don't realize you can use tanks in Vietnam," but explains Charles, "Where I operated you could in northern Vietnam from Chu Lai up to Fu Bai."

While serving, he was wounded three times, the last time severely. So his military service ended with a tour of hospitals. "I spent eight and a half months in the hospital. I was in hospitals all over the world. I started out in Vietnam, went to a hospital ship, then spent some time in Japan in a hospital. I came to Portsmouth, Virginia, and stayed in the hospital there. Finally I ended up in Memphis, Tennessee, in the naval hospital."

After the military, he began his career with state farm. He was discharged December 31, 1968. January 1, 1969, he took a position as an adjuster with State Farm. "Then an agency opened up." He points at the desk in front of him. "I'm been sitting behind this same desk all those years."

His voice is weak, but still full of vitality. He explains how he has health issues that have put limits on him now. So he gives advice to the next generation. "Retire early and get out and travel." Then he quickly adds, "And trust the Lord!"

When asked about his own life choices, he responds, "I would *not* change a thing." That doesn't sound like a boring life after all.

After you read the writer's version, read the editor's version.

What changes were made? Why?

Do they help or hurt the article? Why?

This process is like what I am asking you to do with your peer reviews.



## Editor's Version:

### The Life and Times of Charles "Butch" Hill

"Retire early and get out and travel and trust the Lord!"

Words by Stephen W. B. Rizzo

Charles "Butch" Hill sums up his life quickly:

"I grew up on the Bryan Road in Sumiton, finished high school at Dora, went to Jacksonville State and played football. The day after I graduated, I joined the Marines. When I got out of the Marines, I went to work for State Farm and I've been here 51 years." He sighs. "I guess I've had kind of a boring life."

*But the details of his life and times are far from boring.*

Sitting at a desk in his Jasper office, Charles reminisces about his younger days. Back then, he was known as "Butch."

"Everybody across the river knows me as Butch," he begins. "The night I graduated high school and walked across the stage, they called out 'Charles Gary Hill.'" He pauses for a moment. "Some people didn't know who that was," he says, smiling.

His roots are in Creel Town, a community in the Empire area named after his grandmother Millie Creel Hill's family. Creel Town, Charles says, was a "tough community" where life was far from boring. He relates an incident that occurred during a mine strike. When a coal company brought trucks in to load coal, one of the miners "mounted a machine gun on the top of the hill and shot a line of trucks up." But mine strikes and machine guns aside, this was also a community of close friends and family. "It was rural, and everybody knew everybody," he says.

Even when Charles started school, he didn't get away from family. His dad, James, was a high school chemistry teacher and football coach—and Charles' hero. "He played college ball, fought in the Pacific," Charles says. "The whole time I grew up, he never laid a hand on me."

That's not to suggest that discipline was frowned upon in the Hill home. "Now, my mother didn't spare the rod at all!" Charles says, grinning. "I was in her room in the third grade in Dora. She liked to have beat me to death. She was afraid if I did anything and she didn't paddle me, the other kids would think they could get away with it."

Charles survived and eventually moved on to Dora High School, where he played football. After high school, he enrolled at Jacksonville State and played football for Coach Salls. “Well, I wanted to play football, but I wasn’t big enough or talented enough to go in the SEC, so I walked on at Jacksonville [and] played inside linebacker,” he says.

He graduated in 1966 with a degree in biology, at the height of the Vietnam War. Many attempted to avoid military service, but not “Butch” Hill. “I joined the Marines the day after I graduated college,” he says. “I was an officer and did my training at Quantico.”

After training, Charles deployed to Vietnam, where he served as a part of a tank crew. “Most people don’t realize you can use tanks in Vietnam,” he says, “but where I operated, you could in northern Vietnam from Chu Lai up to Fu Bai.”

While serving, Charles was wounded three times, the last time severely. His military service ended with a tour of hospitals. “I spent eight and a half months in the hospital,” he recalls. “I was in hospitals all over the world. I started out in Vietnam, went to a hospital ship, then spent some time in Japan in a hospital. I came to Portsmouth, Virginia, and stayed in the hospital there. Finally I ended up in Memphis, Tennessee, in the naval hospital.”

Charles was discharged from the military on December 31, 1968. On January 1, 1969, he took a position as an adjuster with State Farm Insurance. “Then an agency opened up,” he says. He points to the desk in front of him. “I’ve been sitting behind this same desk all those years.”

His voice is weak but still full of vitality. He has health issues, he explains, that have put limits on him now, so he gives advice to the next generation. “Retire early and get out and travel,” Charles says, before quickly adding, “And trust the Lord!”

When asked about his own life choices, he responds in six words: “I would *not* change a thing.”

That doesn’t sound like a boring life after all. 78

After you read the editor’s version, read the published version.

What changes were made? Why?

Do they help or hurt the article? Why?

One change the publisher made was alternating between the names Butch and Charles. I am still not sure if I like that or not. Since this was a work that I was being paid to write, the publisher had the final say. On the other hand, you will have the final say on your paper. Take your peer reviews into consideration. But you make the final decision.



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