

# KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

WARREN BUFFETT INTERVIEW  
*BECOMING WARREN BUFFETT*  
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

BERTIE BUFFETT  
**October 8, 2015**  
Interviewed By: Peter Kunhardt  
**Total Running Time: 34 Minutes**

## **TITLE**

Early memories

**13:47:33:05**

### **BERTIE BUFFETT:**

My early memories are—are just from 53<sup>rd</sup> street because we moved there when I was not quite three years old so. It was a homey place, a place where you could ride the bus or the streetcar, which I did as a young kid, and feel perfectly safe and school was walking distance. Things were safe. My grandfather ran a grocery store, and we'd go to his house for dinner on Sunday. It felt very homey I would say, in a way that I don't know if places feel that way any more because of the changing times. This was in the 30's so. It gave you, as a child, it gave you both a feeling of freedom and a feeling of security, and that's a nice combination to grow up with.

## **TITLE**

Their grandfather's grocery store

**13:48:46:20**

### **BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Yes, yes. I spent time there but especially I spent time with my grandfather 'cause he was a grandfather so you know, it was fun for him. He taught me how to play cards and I loved going over to his house and he'd have me over to spend the night. I sensed with my grandfather at a very early age that he loved me, for who I was, you know sort of unconditionally. Even as a little kid, I kind of knew that.

He never told me what to do or corrected me or anything so that was a wonderful place to go and I still think about him with very fond memories.

**TITLE**

On their father

**13:49:51:05**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

What I remember was, he had an investment company and sometimes we'd go down there on Sunday and we could play with the adding machine and it was a stock and bond company which he started in the depths of the depression. Which, as an adult when I look back, I thought, "wow did that ever take a lot of nerve." 'Cause he lost his job and they'd lost their savings in the bank and all the things that people suffered from during those times. And he—he always seemed like an important person, because he did a lot of things. He taught a class—an adult class—a bible class at the church. He was an elder at the church. He was—served on the Omaha school board. He was a mason and I think he got to be a Shriner, you know those were kinda mysterious things that I didn't know much about but—but at the same time, he—he always had time for us, he read us stories. He was sort of the fun person in the family. My brother and I on Sunday mornings would go down and get in bed with him and he would tell us ghost stories which we loved and he had a sense of fun about him as well as being interested in the important things in the world. It was a—it—he was a terrific father.

**TITLE**

On religion during their childhood

**13:51:13:22**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Yes, yes it was. It was a religious household. But you know my parents, with us, went to church every Sunday. They didn't smoke, they didn't drink and we grew up with a sense of purpose in that you were

supposed to be making the world a better place. Now that sounds like a big thing but it—it was there and my dad—those were my dad’s ideals and my mom supported him in those but he was the one that really had those intentions.

**TITLE**

On gender inequality

**13:52:24:20**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

I think there was the sense that if you were a boy or a young man, you were expected to make something of yourself and for a girl, you were supposed to get good grades, be polite, be helpful, look pretty if you could and your highest calling would be to find a good husband. I mean—and you know, that’s their world. And later as a grown up, I’ve looked back on that and—and I understand, that was their—their world. But we did get a good education I mean, and I went off to college and—there was always an emphasis on education so I—I had the benefit of that but in a sense, when I was growing up, my highest ideal was to marry someone who would do good, you know, like a minister or a doctor. I ended up marrying a medical student but anyway—but because I had this—any sense of missionary ideals or making the world better would be accomplished through my husband. I changed about that but—but that’s—that’s what I grew up with.

**TITLE**

On their mother

**13:53:48:12**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Yes. My mother was a hard worker, a very good manager, had—had a lot of ambition and competitiveness but there wasn’t an easy place to express that except through her husband who was achieving that but—and also through her children. And probably with my brother, he needed to make something of himself. I mean, Doris and I had other—you know, another agenda given to us and I think my brother Warren got a lot of his extreme competitiveness from my mother

actually. I think my dad accomplished a lot but—but—it—she had that kind of real driving edge—of wanting to be the best, perfectionist in some ways.

**13:56:10:08**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

By the time I came along, in a sense I—I—you may have noticed as a parent yourself, you tend to be the most uptight about your first child and then it lessens until your maybe just gonna have fun with the last one. It wasn't quite like that with my mother; she still expected a lot from me and I also could see what was happening with my brother and sister so I always tried very, very hard to be a good child, you know and meet her expectations and not—you know not do anything that would embarrass her. It was very important to her how we looked to other people.

**13:57:00:07**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

I think both – Doris and Warren are—are in a sense both more entrepreneurial than I am. I'm—if you're talking about a jazz band or something like that, they would be the star singer, you know, they—and I would be in the back playing the drums or the piano or something like that and I would be happy to be back there and they liked to be in—in front and they're good at it, they're wonderful at it, both of 'em. And so, they—they were pushing the boundaries I think more than I was, so that—that was a big factor. And—And I—because I was probably able to conform to what my mother expected better, I probably got more appreciation and more even love, 'cause I did feel loved by both my father and my mother even though with my mother, I knew it was more conditional than with my father, but I managed that pretty well, but I did—no I'm aware of—yes I mean did experience that, yes.

**TITLE**

Doing the best they could do

**13:55:06:09**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

My dad, when we would bring home our report cards, and whatever and show him and we all did well and nicely in school so it wasn't a problem, but—and he—his response was always, "I want you to do the best you can." And he never said we had to get all A's or this or that or whatever, he—he never set the goals, he—he said, "I want you to do the best you can." And—and that has a big power over you. You know, 'cause then you try even harder 'cause it's—somehow someone gives you an assignment, you may want to rebel but he—he didn't do that. He—he—so he—he—he definitely was about what's going on inside and that was the most important thing.

**TITLE**

Their mother's influence on Warren

**13:58:38:03**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

I suppose so. You know, I can't imagine it didn't, we're all shaped by our early years, we have to be, and he's turned it into something incredibly wonderful, and my sister's turned it into something wonderful as well. It's what it was, but they made good things happen.

**TITLE**

Warren as a young boy

**13:59:08:08**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Oh, he was a—he was a nice little kid really. We had a lot of fun, 'cause he—he and I tended to play the games together. I think he chose me because I was three years younger and he always won at everything we did all these—ping pong, boxing; the biggest—the most interesting one was monopoly, because of what happened with him later but he always won and I noticed, he would buy up property and I would be sort of saving my money and then at the end of the game when he owned everything with houses and hotels and I was broke, I realized I should have bought properties. But—but we had a lot of fun, you know together. And he was always—he was kind to me and I'll tell you

one story that—that I love and I was probably about four, and I had a Dydee doll which at that time was a wonderful little doll and I always loved my dolls. And my mothers mad at me for some reason and I felt it was unfair and I couldn't you know, say anything or whatever so to show how mad I was, I put my Dydee doll in the wastebasket and I'm like four and I loved my Dydee dolls. One of my brother's jobs was to empty wastebaskets and so he see's it and he comes very sweetly and he says "you didn't mean to throw this in the wastebasket did you?" Of course I said "no, no." you know, and I was so relieved that he rescued that for me. But he—he was—he was a kind person basically. I mean he liked to have fun and liked to beat me in games and all that but he was basically a kind person, which he still is.

**14:00:56:22**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

He wasn't shy. He had a lot of friends, he liked to dress up in costumes, and he had all these interests that turned into business interests but no I wouldn't—I wouldn't say he was shy but he wasn't—he didn't like to get into fights with people but that's not the same as being shy.

**TITLE**

Their father's interests

**14:01:41:21**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Well, I think that h—I think my dad was an intellectual at heart and he was interested in so many things; and he started his investment business, he started his South Omaha feed store, he owned parts of farms, he trained himself how to play Piano, only on the black keys. Which I think—or Berlin did too, but I mean that's how he could teach himself, he taught himself to play the accordion, he liked Chinese rugs; he had so many interests in life, and always reading. And then of course eventually into politics, and—but those—those were his real interests. But he always provided for his family, he—and was very conscientious about that. But his goal was not to be rich, it was to have this full life of learning and intellectualism and giving back to the community. I think that—I mean just off the top of my head, I think

that Warren got this very, very high competitive streak from my mother, who was very smart and—and very, very competitive without a real avenue to express it. In making money, that’s—you know that’s—the world values that and you can add it up and—just, he’s also intellectual, my brother but somehow that’s all gone into investments and—not building an empire but something like that, you know, something like that.

**TITLE**

Warren’s difficulty with the move to Washington

**14:03:25:13**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Yes I do remember him going through that hard time and it was hard for him. He w—he was in junior high and he—he just hadn’t found his niche kind of you know, it wasn’t—he wasn’t a big sports person, which often is for boys to be one of the gang you know. He had other interests; he was on the golf team but that’s—that’s not you know, the real sports thing. And I think it just was an awkward time between being—having something that the world appreciates you for and he was having to find that and—and you know, there’s a time when you’re growing up I think kids can get kind of rebellious or want to somehow be more than what they are, and there was a time when he was trying to find that.

**14:34:46:19**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

We actually moved to Fredericksburg when my dad was elected to Congress because it was wartime and it was hard to get a house or whatever and they knew someone in Fredericksburg so we spent a short time in Fredericksburg before we got do DC. But—but that was even worse, because then my dad was living in Washington and we were with my mother and we’d see him maybe on the weekends and whatever but it was so lonely and different than Omaha, and both Warren and I were very homesick. My sister was having a great time because she happened to fall in with some nice kids and she was older and glamorous and she was having a great time but he and I were

pinning away for Omaha. And—and—and he—he developed this, you know Asthma or something and he couldn't sleep and—and so he was sleeping standing up or something and my parents felt very sorry for him and my grandfather who lived here in Omaha who ran Buffett's grocery store agreed to take Warren back. So Warren got to go back to Omaha and then I was left and it was even worse, I was all by myself and I was wanting to get back to Omaha but it didn't work, my grandfather only had room for one. But anyway—

**TITLE**

Warren's social life

**14:04:49:04**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

You know, I never looked at it that way because he was my brother, and you know, he's just who he was and he did all these wonderful things and I didn't think of him as having any deficits, you know, of any sort particularly, but it's true. He wasn't as social in junior high or high school as some kids are, you know there's quite a range of kids in those days. So looking back on it, I can understand—you know I had glimpses of that but he was my brother and I just accepted him for who he was and I probably didn't realize his struggles were as big as they were.

**TITLE**

On being roommates with Susie

**14:05:58:08**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Yes, yes. Well we—my dad had lost the election in 1948 so we moved back to Omaha from Washington, and so I spent the last half at Benson high school and I wanted to go to Northwestern. In those days, it was actually easy to go where you wanted to go. So anyway, it turned out that I found out that Susie who went to Central high school, and I just knew her in a very, very slight way was going so I thought it would be fun if we were roommates. She thought so too, so we became



roommates at Northwestern and we'd known each other slightly but not well because we went to different high schools plus I was in Washington. But anyhow – And she was a very, very special person and because we were roommates, we were seeing more of each other and Warren was around when we were home and—and that's—that's essentially how they really met was because we were roommates so that turned out to be a wonderful lucky thing. And I remember I felt so lucky when she married him because I thought, oh good, I'll—I'll be close to her all my life.

**TITLE**

What made Susie special

**14:07:13:19**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Well, Susie was ahead of her time in that she understood the importance of feelings back in the fifties, when, at least in my family or a lot of people's families probably, nobody even talked about that. You—you know, that just wasn't—it's so different than what it is now and—but she was ahead of her time and—and—and she understood that people's feelings were important and she cared about other people and she had a knack for really connecting with people at a level that didn't happen usually. And so people loved her and wanted to be around her and she understood people and I mean my brother found that really—magic and— but most people did.

**TITLE**

Warren and Susie's wedding

**14:08:51:21**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

There was a question of—Warren was in the National Guard, because in those days, you had to either be in the service or the National Guard or something or you would get drafted and sent to Korea or wherever it was. And he was in the National Guard and the Missouri River was flooding and they were calling up the National Guard and it was—I—it

was the only time I knew my father to use his influence for something. And—and he—he was a congressman and he used his influence so that Warren could be at his wedding on Saturday. Good thing he did I think.

**TITLE**

Warren's gift for numbers

**14:09:42:09**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Yes, yes I did—I mean I did—at the same time I took it for granted but I did know because I remember at one point he said to me, “I’m going to be a millionaire,” which a millionaire in those days was huge, you know it’s like a billionaire now at least. But anyways, he says “I’m going to be a millionaire by the time I’m 30,” or something like that and I was probably about 12 when said that to me, and I thought, “yeah he will be.” I mean—you know I mean it was totally outside anything my family had experienced. But I just—he just, he just was unusual that way. He just was someone that was good at business and even as a kid I could see that and I had confidence that if he said that, he would do it and he did. He—actually I think he did it earlier than what he s—he announced but anyway, he did it.

**TITLE**

Warren's food likes and dislikes

**14:11:19:04**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Well, he—he’s always liked simple—you know, sort of straightforward food, yes, yes, always. I’m somewhat that way myself, not as much as he is but yes, and that’s what we had around the house so it wasn’t all-bad, it wasn’t all that unusual around our house because we had kind of straight forward as well.

**TITLE**

Warren and Susie's life in Omaha

**14:12:46:02**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Well I—I was—I was away at Northwestern, because Susie was with me at Northwestern my roommate and she got married her sophomore year and didn't come back that sophomore year. So I was off but they seemed to be a happy couple and Susie had very lovely taste, and--and did things like got some more modern furniture that was new at the time and—and Warren seemed happy and his business—they seemed very happy together to me.

**TITLE**

On their father's political views

**14:13:54:17**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Well actually, my father was a conservative republican. He was a conservative republican, not so much like a conservative republican today but more, someone who wanted individual liberties for people to you know express themselves as much as possible without harming other people but—and my mother wasn't that interested in politics but—it—it's interesting because we—he changed and—and I grew up in that household and I remember I registered democrat, you know, and tended to see things from that side.

**14:15:03:07**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

He was very much for thinking for yourself and he—you know I think—he—he died when I was about thirty years old so I—so probably my development politically wasn't that far along at thirty so I never had any open discussions with him, I—you know I—I went towards democratic things after he died and—but I think he—he was for—for all of us to think for ourselves. I think it would be ok. I think I could sit down with him, you know, now, and have a conversation about those things and he was very intellectual, I mean he—he would understand I think.

**TITLE**

On their mother's political views

**14:16:34:09**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

She was very loving and caring about other people and I think that—that her political beliefs grew out of that. So, you know, her—her arms were wide open and it was more about the individual, being empathetic and understanding other people and what their needs are. So that—you know, that was— I think that was her take on things and in terms of—that took her away from maybe then—the—then—the direction that the Republican Party was going. It's—it's—it's—the Republican Party's changed over the years and when my dad was a republican in congress, it wasn't nearly the same look as of the party in more recent years.

**TITLE**

On Susie leaving Omaha

**14:18:34:09**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

I think that it was you know, a time in general where there was a lot of changes going on in society and—and—that we were all affected by and—for her, she'd always liked California and sort of the freedom of California. I think she just needed—she needed to be there and have some space and—but they loved—my brother and Susie loved each other very much. They always retained a closeness—is—it—it was—it was hard to explain to other people but they always did remain very close.

**TITLE**

How Warren and Astrid met

**14:20:46:01**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Well, my version is that when Susie got the apartment in San Francisco, she'd wanted someone to take good care of Warren and she knew Astrid and she thought Astrid would be a good person to do that. I mean it's such an unusual thing; I'm—when I'm saying this, I think you know, most people wouldn't get this but anyway—and you know sort of, maybe not picked out Astrid but I mean, you know, it—it—that—she wanted that, Susie wanted that 'cause she didn't want—I mean she wanted Warren to be happy too, you know? She wanted Astrid to be happy—I mean—she—it's very unusual, it's hard to explain but that's what happened.

**14:22:04:03**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

And it only worked because of the individuals involved but it—it—you know, each of them and—but it—it did work. And It—it only goes to show me that people arrange things in a lot of different ways if they can, you know.

**TITLE**

Warren belonging in Omaha

**14:22:49:17**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Warren—Warren likes a simple life around him. He has this incredible brain and runs Berkshire Hathaway and—and—and is a genius at what he does but in terms of his own life around him, he prefers that it is kept simple and—and—and comfortable, and Midwest values or—you know, he's not someone that wants to go out and party and you know, that kind of thing. So Omaha is a place that's supportive of that in him and it's a wonderful place for him.

**TITLE**

Staying in touch

**14:23:49:07**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Yes, we do. We don't—you know we don't have set times for calling each other on the phone or something like that but I feel in touch with him and if I wanna talk to him about anything, I would just pick up the phone and you know I think we understand each other with few words passed you know, between us or whatever and we look out for each other—it's wonderful.

**TITLE**

How Warren will be remembered

**14:25:55:13**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Well he's brilliant; I mean he's brilliant at running companies and—for me personally, I remember—he's my big brother and he's always been my big brother and—and it's wonderful. You know that's—that's a wonderful thing; he's been a wonderful big brother so that's—that's first and foremost how I remember him. Now how other people will remember him is that he created Berkshire Hathaway, this incredible company and he makes it all work and he's—he's a brilliant person, really. I think they'll remember him as an incredible financier or investment you know, person, I think, I think, I can't imagine they wouldn't.

**TITLE**

Warren's gift to the Gates Foundation

**14:27:17:18**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

No, I wasn't surprised, and I wasn't surprised because he's always thinking outside of the box and I knew that if he decided that, it must be a great idea because he's had that track record you know, as far as I'm concerned and also, I thought it—it lets him do what he does best which is doing business stuff you know, and then he knows—he respects Bill and Melinda Gates and what they do in the field of philanthropy and he trusts them, and then he can concentrate on-on what he does best. So I thought yea, it made sense to me, it made sense to me.

**TITLE**

Warren's ability to focus.

**14:28:12:06**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

He's really good at that. He's extremely good at focus. I mean yeah, incredibly. I mean I'm sure that that's a huge part of his success, besides his ability to make investments and financial thinking and all that, but his ability to keep it simple and know what he can do and how he wants to do it. And at the same time, he's nice to other people. He doesn't trample on other people. You know, he's good at avoiding catastrophe's of any sort, right? Right. No he's wonderful—I mean amazingly good at that, yes.

**TITLE**

Warren as a valuable piece of American culture

**14:30:30:23**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

Yes, I—I agree with that because he's managed, it's—it's very hard. I woul—he's managed—I mean for most of—but he's managed to live his life honestly and keep his principles and make it work and that's—that's—that's really amazing. I mean, he has very high standards for himself and he's kept to those and without a lot of people getting real mad at him or anything, you know. I mean It's—it's—that's an amazing ability that he has, yeah, to do that.

**TITLE**

Warren's ambition

**14:31:30:23**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

I think one thing that I would say to you is that—and—and this is unusual 'cause you only grow up in your own family, you know what I'm saying? You don't know what it's like to grow up in anybody else's family. But I—you know I always thought from the start that he would

be very successful and make a lot of money—I don't even know why because that wasn't my dad's—my dad was more interested in politics than making a whole lot of money although he certainly provided for us in a very nice way and all of that, but making a lot money wasn't his thing but—but—but Warren, he just had this, I don't know, just his own self and he was always having these businesses and always moving ahead, and just kind of his own phenomenon kind of.

**14:33:11:08**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

He did collect bottle caps, which I remember. He would go around to the gas stations. At that time, gas stations sold pop, you know, and it was in the thing and, you know, the bottle cap fell in the container below it and he would go around town and collect all those, and nobody cared. They'd be happy to give them to him and he'd bring them home and spread them out on a piece of paper—newspapers in the living room and—and—and divide them all up. And he was making essentially a mark—what we would call a marketing report. Well he knew he was making a marketing report but to find out what was the best sellers, just to satisfy his own—you know, he wasn't—he was a kid, he wasn't selling anything.

**TITLE**

Warren and statistics

**14:36:29:05**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

He knew people's batting averages and all of that. I mean he was big on all kinds of statistics, yes definitely.

**TITLE**

Warren as a big brother

**14:36:44:16**

**BERTIE BUFFETT:**

As his little sister, is sometimes he would fool me out of getting out of the chair that was by the radio, that was the best place to sit 'cause



you could listen to the programs, we didn't have TV, you know it was just radio. And—and I—I was younger so I would be listening to Little Orphan Annie or something and he'd want that chair by the radio. So he'd entice me somehow into the kitchen to get something, you know, and then he'd go running to the chair and it wasn't just once I fell for that, I fell for that several times. Anyway, I love him because he's my brother, he's my big brother and I've always felt a big bond with him. And that's the really big thing, you know, probably—I'll probably cry thinking about that, because that's the big thing. And then there's also he's had this incredible success and—and I'm proud of him and you know, it—It amazes me in a way. You know, I still haven't gotten used to it and it's made my life much easier in so many ways; I mean it made a lot of peoples lives easier in so many ways. First and foremost, he's—we love each other and that's more important than anything else really.

**END OF TRANSCRIPT**