

MATHESON HISTORICAL MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interviewee: J. Leslie Cosby, M.T.

Interviewer: Ann Smith

Transcriber: Ruth C. Marston

March 3, 2004

S: My name is Ann Smith. I'm at the home of Mrs. Cosby, interviewing her for the Matheson Historical Museum, and the date is March 3, 2004. Why don't you give me your full name?

C: J. Leslie Cosby.

S: Does the letter J, your first initial, does that stand for something?

C: Yes, it does. It's private.

S: And it's nobody's business what J stands for.

C: If you know it, you know it.

S: And if we don't, we don't need to.

C: That's right.

S: That's a good answer. Where were you born?

C: I was born in Tampa, Florida.

S: Would you mind telling me what year?

C: January 6, 1926.

S: Were you the firstborn of your family?

C: No, I was sixth out of seven.

S: Tell me about your parents. What did your father do?

C: My father, Dr. J.A. Parker, was a general practitioner here in Gainesville.

S: Really? But you were born in Tampa.

C: Well, my parents were both born here in Gainesville. My daddy was actually born in this house. However, this house was down on the other end of the property. In 1925, he moved to Tampa, and I was born in '26. We stayed there from 1926 until 1933. In 1930, my father came back to Gainesville because his mother was blind and didn't have anybody to care for her, so we had a weekend father. He came back just to be in the house with his mother.

S: Did he still practice medicine?

C: Yes, he still practiced medicine. He practiced in Tampa and when he came back, he resumed practice here in Gainesville.

S: Was he a longtime Gainesville resident?

C: He was born here in this house on February 28, 1877.

S: Where did he go to medical school?

C: He went to medical school in Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, the same place my husband went to dental school and my daughter went to dental school and I went to medical technology. My daughter very proudly says she is a third generation Meharrian.

S: Absolutely! I bet the alumni society just loves to see your name come up. One whole family. That's wonderful! Your mother was a fulltime homemaker?

C: No. My mother taught school, elementary school. My mother was born in a house that has a storefront. The original house is there on Main Street. I've forgotten the name of the building now. It's some kind of printing company on N. Main Street between 6th and 7th Avenues. She was born June 10, 1892 in Gainesville. She taught first in Georgia for about a year before she married my father. For a while she didn't work because she had seven children. When the last one was old enough to go to what was called nursery school then, we were in Tampa at that time and she started substitute teaching. When she came back here, she started fulltime and she taught until her 70th birthday.

S: Isn't that wonderful. Now tell me, did they tell stories? Did your folks talk about what life was like in Gainesville? Do you know how they met? Did they go to school together?

C: No, not necessarily, because my father was considerably older than my mother. My daddy was 45 years old when he got married. He always used to say that he would be content to die when we were all educated. To my father, education didn't mean book learning. Education meant a degree from the college system. When he died, all seven of us – well, it was six of us at that time – had at least two degrees from somewhere.

S: Did that strike you as just phenomenal? Did your family feel highly unusual at that time?

C: We didn't really think about it.

S: It was just a family value.

- C: Yes. We knew from the time that we were old enough that we were going to college, unlike children today, we couldn't afford to major in college. If you've got three children in, you've got four years in and four years out. Most of the time, there were at least three of us in school.
- S: I cannot imagine. Let me pursue that a little bit. Where did your father get such a strong feeling about higher education?
- C: From his mother.
- S: His mother was educated?
- C: I don't really think so. His father was an M.D. Unfortunately, because he was much older than the average person when he got married, then you didn't stop and think about a lot of things that they do now. Now you're into family history and things like that, but I didn't get the idea that his mother was a formally educated person. However, she wanted that for her son. Because of that, he wanted that for us.
- S: Did you know your grandparents?
- C: I knew my grandmother but I didn't know my grandfather.
- S: What kind of a woman was she?
- C: Well, by the time I knew her, she was just an old lady. I was about two or three years old, and you just think that this is an old lady. I don't really remember too much about her, but I did know her.
- S: Think about what Gainesville must have been like when you were little and when your parents were growing up here.
- C: Actually, the part of town that I'm living in was Gainesville. Between here and Santa Fe Community College down the street were blackberry fields.
- S: Really!
- C: Of course, it wasn't 8th Avenue. It was Boundary, but it stopped at 6th Street, which is now 8th Avenue. Well, it wasn't 6th Street then. I don't remember all the names. There was very little north beyond that. There were homes but they were more like in the rural area.
- S: Sure. They would have been considered in the country.
- C: Yes. You walked mostly. Gainesville downtown was just around the square.

S: What buildings do you remember downtown?

C: There was Wilson's. There was Cox Furniture Store, Baird Hardware. Where the clock is, there was a drug store. Two doors down was Phifer Bank. Across the street from there was where Baird Hardware was. Down the street was McCrory's. Then there was another bank that later became the bank that's now where Rod Smith is, the State Attorney's office. The bank moved there and then it merged with what was then First National.

S: That's right. Now, did you go to grade school here in Gainesville?

C: When my mother started work, I was about three years old. She carried me to nursery school. I had a sister, who is now deceased, who went to school.

S: She was older than you?

C: Yes, she was two years older than I was. I would not be separated from her. I wasn't supposed to be in the school part but in the nursery part, but they would let me sit at her feet as long as I kept quiet. They didn't teach me, but by observation I learned what they learned, and when she graduated from third grade and going to fourth grade, I went to third grade. You see, I never went to first and second grades.

S: Isn't that wonderful. That's a wonderful story.

C: My mother would give my sisters money to ride the streetcar because they picked me up and I wouldn't have to walk home. They would take the money and buy candy, and so I wouldn't tell, they made a game of it. When the sidewalk was in squares, okay? One on one side and one on the other, I would walk one square and then they would take my hands and then I would skip the other one.

S: How fun.

C: But one day they forgot whose turn it was to pick me up. Mother came home and I wasn't there so she had to ride the streetcar to go back and get me. When I was on that streetcar coming home on the back seat where we had to ride, I spelled this word "colored" and my mother said, "My God almighty, this child can read." I was three years old.

S: Isn't that amazing!

C: So I went to third grade when my sister went to fourth grade. She took sick midway the term, and mother didn't have any way of sending me to school, so someone came and stayed with me. Now I never finished third grade, but when my sister died, mother said she didn't want us separated from our father any more, so in '33 she moved back here to be with the family. Daddy was in Gainesville

- and we were in Tampa because she wanted us to live down there, but she decided it wasn't worth it to have us away from our father. The first day of school, I said if I had been in school, I would have been promoted so I took me to fourth grade. Here they had a system. You didn't get promoted the last day of school; you got promoted the first day of school. I'm in fourth grade so they put me in fifth grade. I stayed there a week and I got scared because the children were so much larger than me. I went and told the teacher that I should be in fourth grade.
- S: Well, you just jumped around all over, didn't you? Isn't that something?
- C: Yes. It wasn't that I couldn't do the work or anything because I don't guess there was that much difference, but the children were so big. So I got scared and I went back to fourth grade.
- S: You were already skipping way ahead!
- C: I went to what was Lincoln then. We had first through twelve at Lincoln. I went from fourth through twelve at the same site.
- S: Let me ask you about your sister. Now, you were real close to her.
- C: Yes. You see, there were seven of us – six girls and one boy. So we were more or less pairs. My oldest sister, Carolyn, had Mary. Martha had Juanita, and there was the last one named Gloria. Well, Gloria died. Therefore, my partner was dead and they would go off and leave me, so I stayed home and read. My brother tolerated me for a little bit, but you understand boys and girls.
- S: That never goes well, does it?
- C: I was all right as long as we were in the house, but he wouldn't take me anywhere with him. They would go off and leave me, so I spent my time reading.
- S: When your sister got ill, do you know what was the matter with her?
- C: Yes, she had appendicitis. The reason she died is because she didn't have proper medical help. See, Daddy wasn't there and she just didn't receive proper medical treatment.
- S: What do you remember of that time? Do you remember her being sick and seeing your mother's concern?
- C: I remember when they finally took her to the hospital. Mother went to the hospital and stayed with her, and there was a cousin of ours who came down to stay with us. Mother came home one day and my little brother had spilled rice on the floor and she made him get on the floor and pick it up grain by grain, so mother sent her home. Somebody from here came down and stayed in the house.

- A friend of hers came and stayed with us. Mother spent all her days with my sister in the hospital.
- S: Aound the time she died, do you remember the family's reaction?
- C: Well, we were still little. I was seven and she was nine. Back then, it wasn't really a reality to us. I had never experienced death. Even though my grandmother was dead, she died when we were in Tampa, so I wasn't around her. You knew people died but you had no conception of what that meant. I remember the house we were living in. I remember being in the yard and playing. It was like a fairy tale.
- S: And when you're that age, too. I understand.
- C: We didn't expect her to die, so we weren't prepared. Nobody spoke in terms of what death meant at that time.
- S: Do you remember your older siblings, your older sisters, having a better concept of her not coming back home?
- C: I'm sure they did, because my oldest sister by then was finishing high school.
- S: What year was that?
- C: It was 1933.
- S: I am trying to think of the state of medical care then, if they knew it was appendicitis or if they would have operated.
- C: I'm sure they knew, but they didn't operate in time.
- S: So she had a ruptured appendix.
- C: Yes, she had a ruptured appendix.
- S: And died of peritonitis probably.
- C: Yes, after lingering a considerable time in the hospital.
- S: A long time.
- C: To me it was a long time. Whether it was three weeks or four weeks.
- S: That gets to be kind of fuzzy when you look back on it and you're little. Then, what year do you think you came back up here? In 1933?

C: Yes.

S: Partly because of all that turmoil and your mother thinking that you needed to be with your dad.

C: Yes.

S: From that time on in Gainesville, what are your memories in this house and growing up with your sisters and brother?

C: Oh well, we did devilish things. We'd go upstairs and go out the window and jump off the roof.

S: Oh.

C: Daddy's office was here in these two rooms right behind you. If there were patients, this door behind you closes and we weren't allowed to go through there if there was anybody out there in the waiting room. But if there wasn't and if mother and daddy was out, we would slide down the banister.

S: What games did you play as a little girl?

C: Hopscotch and dodge ball with an ice pick.

S: With an ice pick?

C: Yes.

S: How did that work?

C: The same way it does with a ball.

S: Oh! How you all grew up is beyond me – jumping off the roof and using an ice pick.

C: Nobody broke any bones or anything.

S: You were a wild bunch.

C: You see, it's just the first story right here.

S: I know but it sounds pretty wild to me.

C: Well not really. There were a lot of trees out there we'd climb, or play ball. We had to keep the house clean.

S: I was going to ask you, did you all have chores?

C: Oh yes. Everybody had a week to do something. Somebody was supposed to clean upstairs. You worked in pairs. You either made the beds or swept the floors upstairs and cleaned the bathroom, or you worked down here. There were two people in the kitchen. You cooked or you washed the dishes.

S: So you all had early training to be independent.

C: Yes, but I was the youngest, and I will never forget the time when it was my time to cook. Of course, we had chickens. It was a chicken farm right outside the length of the house, over on that side, and if you were having chicken for dinner, you had to go out and catch the chicken, kill the chicken, pluck the chicken, and cook the chicken. I didn't know you were supposed to scald the chicken to pluck it and I'm out there trying to pluck this chicken and just crying. Daddy said, "That's all right, baby. I'll do it for you." So he at least cleaned the chicken for me.

S: Being the youngest girl, did you get any kind of preferential treatment?

C: No, I don't think so.

S: With that many, everybody has to do their part.

C: Yes. Now, my brother didn't have a duty inside the house. His was the yard. We didn't have to do the yard.

S: What do you remember about school? Everybody at Lincoln was Afro-American, is that right?

C: That's right.

S: Do you remember interacting with the white population in Gainesville at all?

C: No, we didn't particularly interact even though at the time

S: In the early years, it was pretty separate?

C: Yes, but you see, out the back yard, to the left of us and right across the street and then down in the next block, that was all white. Now, at the time, these were sand streets here. The first street they paved was 3rd Street, which was then Arredondo, so if you got skates, we went down there to skate. However, we were heckled.

S: Were you? That was a perfect place, as long as that was paved. That was a good place to skate.

C: We had a right to skate down there. I don't know what the deal is now when a road is paved, but the thing then was each occupant paved one-third. They paved the side that they lived on, and the city paved the middle third. My father had to pay for that street to be paved.

S: Were there very many cars in town when you were skating down there?

C: There were cars, but you understand that this was a small town and you could walk mostly. The school was beyond 13th Street, but there were grocery stores on 13th Street, but west of 13th Street, all over in there, that wasn't particularly developed. Not too much beyond Depot was developed at that particular time. It went east. There were a few homes in the woods beyond Waldo Road. Most of the development beyond 13th and beyond 8th Avenue and Depot, and all these roads ended.

S: So, in 1933, there were just a few paved roads, is that what you would say?

C: That's right. We had University. It was paved. Like I tell my husband, all these three-lined streets they put in there. I can remember when East University from about 1st, which was East Main, out to the Waldo Road was tree-lined. Then they said to route traffic, they took all of that out. 8th Avenue, which was Boundary, was tree-lined. They took all that out to move traffic. The one place they didn't take out the trees was 1st Street east. Now, they didn't take the trees out in what was in front of the Catholic school on the corner of 8th Avenue and 1st Street. You see, they didn't take those trees out then. They left that, but all over town – I can't remember whether there were tree-lined streets west – but all up in here they were tree-lined streets, in the middle of the streets, islands down the street.

S: Oh, I see what you mean.

C: Islands down the streets. They were there originally.

S: Oh, I didn't know what you meant. It really was a tree city.

C: Then they took all that up to move the traffic, and now they want to slow the traffic. Some of these streets, I don't understand why they want to slow the traffic. There are no residential areas on some of these streets. Now, 8th Avenue from 9th to Waldo Road is not particularly residential, and children are not playing in the streets nowadays like they did, so really, as I read the piece in the paper, instead of putting all that out there, patrol the streets and you could control the traffic rather than that.

S: Let me ask you about when you were growing up, was religion an important part of your family life?

C: Yes, religion was a very important part of my family life. We went to Sunday School, morning church, and sometimes we went back to what was known as Epworth League.

S: What did that mean?

C: Nowadays they call it Children's Church.

S: A youth group.

C: Yes. This was in the Methodist Church.

S: So your father was Methodist and your mother was Methodist?

C: Yes.

S: Everyone went to Sunday church together?

C: We went to Sunday School and stayed for morning church.

S: Did your family say grace at suppertime?

C: Yes, we said blessing. We more or less had family dinner most days because Daddy was here. Mother taught school, and we went to school, so we were at home. Even in the evenings we sat down.

S: That was family time. When you came back from Tampa to here and your father had his office practice here, did you have indoor plumbing at the house?

C: Oh yes.

S: Did you have electricity?

C: Yes, we had electricity. We had to pay for sewage because my Daddy had to pay to run the sewage from 6th St. down to here. He had to pay for it personally to put the sewers in. Now we've got to pay for what he put in just like everybody else pays for it!

S: Yeah.

C: Everybody in the neighborhood didn't have indoor plumbing like we did, but we did. As far as I can remember in the neighborhood, there was indoor electricity. The nice thing is that because we were hooked up to the city electricity very early, when there was a blackout in the neighborhood, we were never bothered because we were on the main generator, which at that time supplied strategic places. The electricity next door goes out, but ours doesn't.

S: I'll be darned.

C: That house wasn't over there at that time.

S: So you had electricity for electric lights. Did you have a radio?

C: Oh yes, we had a radio.

S: You listened to what kinds of programs?

C: I don't remember way back, but I can remember in later years, but I can't really remember what was on the radio when I was a little girl.

S: What kind of a stove did you have? Did you have an icebox or an electric refrigerator?

C: We had an icebox.

S: Did you put ice in?

C: We put ice up at the top.

S: The iceman would come around?

C: Yes. Daddy had to go and buy the ice at the ice plant. I remember the wood stove.

S: Do you?

C: Yes, I remember the wood stove in our kitchen, with the damper up at the top where you put the food to keep it warm. I remember that. See over there in the fireplace? Those are gas logs over there now. Somebody wanted to know, "Why do you have gas logs?" I said, "Because I remember when I was a child, all the bedrooms were upstairs. We had to stay up there in the bed, but Daddy would come down and open up the front of the house and open up the back, light the fireplace in the dining room and in here and then go on and shut the house up and then we could get out of bed."

S: Did he do that because of the draft?

C: He did that because it was cold.

S: Oh, it was warmer outside?

C: Well, it's easier to heat fresh air than it is stale air.

S: That's right. I got it.

C: So, if you open up the place and let it air out, it's easier to warm up.

S: Wasn't he smart. I'm going to have to remember that. Your fireplace is in both of those rooms.

C: Yes, back-to-back and then upstairs.

S: One chimney. Oh, do you have a fireplace upstairs or just the chimney.

C: The chimney goes up. We didn't put gas logs upstairs. We just blocked it off.

S: But there was a fireplace upstairs?

C: The fireplace is still there. It's just got a cover in front of it. Of course, it's just my husband and myself. We have separate heating systems upstairs and downstairs. Because I'm here mostly in the daytime downstairs, I don't need to heat upstairs. When we go upstairs, we're both upstairs, so we don't need to heat downstairs. It cuts down on the utilities bill.

S: I think we all do that, say we're only living in this part of the house. Another question I had for you was when you and your sisters and your brother were little, what kinds of illnesses did your family have? Do you remember? It's kind of nice having your daddy be the doctor. Did you have the usual childhood things?

C: Well, we had measles and mumps. I can remember we all had measles at one time. Of course, then they said you were supposed to be in a dark room so you wouldn't go blind and that kind of thing. My mother had a hospital room.

S: That's the first thing I thought of was your poor mother with four of you down.

C: She bathed us in calamine lotion and we didn't get any scars or anything, so it was very nice. Other than that, we weren't sickly. We didn't have colds and stuff like that.

S: What about injuries? Jumping off the roof and playing with ice picks, did anybody get hurt?

C: No, not from that. Nobody was injured by the stupid things. I say they are stupid things now. The games we played.

S: How do we all get to adulthood when you think back on some of the things we did? Did anybody fall out of the trees when they were climbing trees out there?

C: One of my sisters broke her arm. When she broke her arm, she was scared to tell our mother, so she went and hid. Then the pain got too much.

S: Did your dad treat her?

C: No, because this was while we were in Tampa.

S: What about extended family? Did your mother and dad have siblings? Did they live in Gainesville?

C: My mother was the seventh child of seven children. By the time we came into the picture, only one of her brothers was still living in Gainesville with his wife and four children. One brother was in Cleveland with his wife and daughter. One brother was in Miami with his wife and three daughters. One brother was in Orlando with his wife and daughter. I don't remember my mother's sister. I don't really remember when she died, but my mother's sister's children were living here. They were living with the grandmother.

S: Did you see them often?

C: Oh yes. We were a very close family. We visited the ones in Cleveland and Miami and Orlando.

S: When you first were in school here, what do you remember of events going on downtown? Someone told me that when there either prize fights or baseball games into the World Series that the *Gainesville Sun* building downtown would open up their speakers and broadcast that downtown.

C: I don't know where it was coming from, but I remember the Joe Louis fight. All we had was go out on the porch and listen to it.

S: That was such a hero thing, wasn't it? Everybody identified. Do you remember when you young events like the Homecoming Parade for the University? Did you go to see that?

C: Oh yes. We went to see it, but I really remember it later when my children were small. Our two younger children went to P.K. Yonge and they played in the band and that's why we were there.

S: Oh, they were part of it.

C: Yes.

S: When your father practiced here as a general practitioner, did he take care of patients at the hospital?

C: No. It wasn't until the 1950's when Dr. Banks came to town and shortly after my father retired. Banks must have come in 1949 because he was here when I brought my daughter back. My first child was born in '49 and he was here when I came. He was the first black that was ever admitted to the hospital. My father was never admitted to the hospital. He never had hospital privileges.

S: Did he apply? Maybe you don't know.

C: It just was really understood. I doubt very seriously that he applied. It just was a general thing. Some things you just knew. I never thought in terms of did he ever apply? No, he never had hospital privileges.

S: Were all of his patients African-Americans?

C: No. He treated anybody who came. At that time doctors made house calls. I don't know what he did when he went to other people's houses, but I do know that he did have some white patients.

S: Another thing I was going to ask you was if you had a telephone.

C: Yes.

S: Do you remember when you got a telephone?

C: Yes, I remember the telephone. The telephone system was, at that time, the first person in town who had a telephone had the number 1, then 2, 3. My father's number was 1877. That meant that of all the people in town that had a phone, there were 1,876 people ahead of him. Coincidentally, that was the year he was born.

S: That's right, so he didn't have any trouble remembering.

C: No, he didn't have any trouble remembering his number.

S: If patients had a phone, they would call?

C: Most residents didn't have phones. They would have to use public phones. They had to go to the corner grocery store, and there weren't phones all over the streets like there are now. You went to the corner store. There were some evidently because there were less than 2,000 phones in town and that means that not very many residents had phones, but there were some.

S: Did he have an automobile?

C: Yes, he had two automobiles.

S: Do you remember what kind?

C: He had a Lincoln, and he had a Ford. My mother wouldn't ride in the Lincoln because she said it reminded her of a hearse. It had jump seats in the back. He had a car that he said was big enough for his family, but my mother wouldn't ride in it! So he had a Ford with a rumble seat.

S: Now, this street or the streets all around you were not paved. They had rocks and sand in them?

C: Yes, they had sand. I don't remember any ruts or anything like that. They were well-kept roads, but they still weren't paved.

S: So, if he had to make house calls, he took the Ford, do you think?

C: I know he did, but in later years Ruth Ellington – this is Duke Ellington's sister – came to town and her bus broke down and she couldn't get it fixed. Somebody told her that Dr. Parker had a big car. He sold his car to her.

S: Is that right.

C: He sold it to her so she could get out of town. Now my father did home visitations in the county but he never took his car off the highway. If people lived back up in the woods, he would say, "Meet me on the highway, and I'll come." He was particular about his car. If a spot of dust got on it, he took his handkerchief and I can see my daddy now with his handkerchief wiping it off. He would not take his car back up into the woods.

S: That probably was a good idea. If they could meet him, why not.

C: He would say if they would meet him on the highway, he would go, but he didn't take his car.

S: Did he ever take any of you children on house calls?

C: Yes, I went with him sometimes, but I stayed in the car.

S: You waited until he was ready to come back. Did he always get paid, or did he sometimes get chickens?

C: Oh man, let me tell you. There was one white patient particularly that Daddy had and we used to call him the yap.

S: Because?

C: He always paid. Pay backwards is yap. He paid in money. Now, we ate good. He might get some sweet potatoes, or he might get some chickens or what have you from some people, and he accepted that. We ate good. This one man, he always paid so we called him the yap. "Daddy, the yap is here."

S: Was that somebody who lived in town?

C: I don't really remember. I don't know.

S: That's a good story. Now, when you got older, did you go downtown to shop or did you go down to the movies?

C: We always went to town to shop. Some places, like Wilson's in particular, you couldn't try on a hat unless you put waxed paper or a paper napkin or something on your head. But we didn't go into places where we couldn't try on the clothes.

There was no place other than downtown to buy clothes. No, we didn't go downtown to the movies. As a child, there was the Lincoln Theater and then there was the Rose Theater on 5th Avenue, but we weren't particularly theatergoers. No, we never went downtown. That was in the 60's when our folks went downtown.

S: Do you remember incidents when you were made aware of segregation when you were little? You talked about being heckled.

C: I can't speak for other people, but there were certain things that you knew. Certain stores you went in and they wouldn't allow you to try on clothes, we just didn't go back there any more. Of course, stores that didn't allow you to try on their clothes didn't thrive. It wasn't because we were boycotting. We understand that somebody other than us had to stop going in those stores, else it wouldn't have been effective.

S: They just weren't customer friendly.

C: Yes. It wasn't one of those things if you said, "I'm going to boycott," like they did in the 60's and 70's. It wasn't one of those types of boycotts. It was an understood thing, that you just didn't go in. I don't remember particularly any animosity growing up here.

S: It's like so many other things. We all have different experiences and the person standing right next to you may have had some bitter memories.

C: Well, there are certain things that you do to protect yourself. Now, when I had my three young children, I went in Woolworth's, but going from here we didn't go in the first door. The lunch counter was right there. I decided it was expedient for me not to have to explain to my real young children why they couldn't sit at

that lunch counter because I didn't want them to grow up hating anybody, so we just didn't use that door.

S: That was a conscious decision.

C: Yes, that was a conscious decision. They didn't know there was a lunch counter in there. We went in the corner door. It was Subway's for a long time. It's a sandwich/soup place now down on the corner of Main Street and University. That's where Woolworth's was. Woolworth's was the 5 and Dime. We just didn't go in the first door. We went in on the corner or the one right on the side.

S: I know what you mean.

C: I didn't put myself in a situation where I didn't want them to be. I remember my oldest child was five when we came back from Germany. We were downtown. They tore the building down now, but my daughter spoke to this older white gentleman. She said to me, "Momma, I spoke to that man and he didn't speak to me." I said, "Well, baby, maybe he didn't hear you." This was a possible answer. There were other possible answers. There was another instance where somebody called her the N word. She looked at him and she said, "Santa Claus." He had a long white beard. He turned red as a beet. Yes, he did. I kept walking. He was about six years old. Other than incidents like that, Gainesville was never to me an unfriendly place. It's just that some people looked out for you and others didn't. They had their world and I had mine. My children knew that they were somebody and they knew that they were loved.

S: They were important, valuable people.

C: That's right. They weren't looking to anybody for anything.

S: It's certainly a good way to raise children, to not look for the confrontation scene.

C: It has paid off. My oldest child went to P.K. Yonge at 4th grade. She was the only little black child in her class. The only one until she got to 9th grade.

S: Did she realize that?

C: Well, Sudha, who was from India was darker than my child was and, of course, the little girls that looked out for her, if there was anyplace that they went on a field trip and they looked at Sudha and wouldn't allow her in, they didn't go in.

S: So she had a positive experience all the way along.

C: Yes, she did. I remember one incident. My daughter came home with this permission slip to join the Brownies. The leader called me that night and said because of where she lived, she didn't think my child would be welcome in the

neighborhood, so I didn't sign the permission slip. The next afternoon, after school, when my husband went to pick Jean up, the whole class was out there on the sidewalk crying. They were crying because my daughter couldn't go with them. Of course, nobody knew why Jean didn't have a permission slip. The leader was there, so she told Cosby to let Jean go and when I got out of school to come by the Girl Scouts Office, and the less said the better. Now, I allowed my child to go. I went and signed the permission slip. She wasn't going to have a troop if my child didn't go. Nobody said to these little 4th grade children, but they were not going without Jean. When Girl Scout cookie came and she couldn't find anybody to be chairman, she called me and asked me. I volunteered. I accepted it. She said I was the only mother that wasn't working. I was the only mother that was working.

Now, when Jean went back to her class reunion this year, a little friend said, "We remember your mother being chairman of the Girl Scout cookies. She sure did have things organized." I took time to separate the cookies and I took them in my car and took them around to the Girl Scouts. They said, "Your momma had those things organized, altogether and everything."

S: You know, all those little things, all those little nuances, make me think that woman got an education about life.

C: Yes, but my children benefited from my approach because they were able to go to school. My middle daughter went to Princeton University, second class of women, and she was one of the first females. There wasn't toilets on campus. Remember now, this is an all-male school.

S: I know, but they have to go, don't they?

C: They had to run across campus to the dormitory.

S: No, what did they do?

C: My daughter made friends with the hired help because her mother told her that hired help, all they want is respect, so she would speak to these people so she had access to any bathroom anywhere she wanted. They had hired help that were female, and they had facilities for them, but they did not have facilities for the women students when they were admitted to Princeton. They've got them now.

S: But she was in the year of the double whammy. She was female and she was black.

C: They had had blacks before.

S: But that was still a real minority at Princeton. I can imagine she had to be kind of creative.

C: So she was able to go there, and she said, "Mother, now these people are the people who are going to have money later in life when I get out. Some of my friends" She has never had to call on any of her friends for anything, but nevertheless.

S: And she got a wonderful education.

C: Yes she did.

S: What was her major?

C: Well, when she went she was going to major in French, but in her sophomore year, she said, "What am I going to do with this French?" so she switched to pre-med and she went into dentistry.

S: Did she?

C: Yes, she did. That's what her father did.

S: I bet her father was proud.

C: Yes, he was, but we would have been just as proud if she'd finished in French. She could have been an interpreter or language something, maybe teaching French in some college, but she said that wasn't the life for her.

S: Well, I think people decide once they get their degree.

C: At P.K. she had a wonderful background. When she went to college, she didn't have to start off with French 101 and she was just going to major in it because that was the lesser of evils. Then she stopped to think, "What am I going to do with this?"

S: How do I make a living?

(Pause between here and reverse side of tape.)

C: They had it papered, and in the 1940's, Mother had somebody come in and strip the paper and she had it plastered in every room but the kitchen. Of course, this was someone who knew something about plastering, and he said, "Now, plaster will eat the paint." For ten years, the walls were white. Everything was white. The woodwork was mahogany. After that, she painted it. It just lasts and lasts. I can't remember when this room was painted last.

S: It really is a nice house. Do you have memories about any times when the country was at war? Did your brother serve?

C: Yes, my brother went into the service. However, he never went overseas. He was at Fort Benning, Georgia. I was married then, so this would have had to have been during World War II. This would have had to have been then because he went in just before the Korean conflict.

S: Did he? Which branch of the service?

C: They were both in the Army. My husband was able to, during the time that he was of draft age, his alderman said because his children weren't doing anything in school, he said, "All right, as long as you make your grades, I'll defer you." Naturally, that was an incentive, not that he wasn't passing anyway, so he went to college and then dental school, and when he came here, he was beyond the draft age but because of his profession or whatever, when he was called to service in 1953, his folks said, "Well, doc, if you don't go, we have to go," so you know who went. Now, he went to Germany.

S: He was a dentist at this time?

C: He was a dentist at this time.

S: So they were getting a dentist.

C: They were getting an allied medical professional.

S: Whereabouts in Germany did he go?

C: He went to Heidelberg and then to Karlsruhe.

S: Were you married at the time?

C: We were married, and by the time I went over, I had two children. I was expecting our second child. The second child was born the night that he was shipped out from New Jersey to go overseas. For three weeks, because it took them almost that time on the ship to cross over, every time he'd get somewhere and they would ask him to fill out papers, and they would ask for children's names, all he could say was "Baby girl Cosby" because he didn't know. Though we had agreed upon a name, he didn't know that I had named our child what we'd agreed upon. Finally, when his mail got here, it was kind of sarcastic. I could tell he wasn't getting my mail.

S: That was the only way you could hear.

C: If he's on a ship in the middle of the Atlantic, how am I going to hear from him and how's he going to hear from me?

- S: That's right. Your letters caught up with him when he got to Europe.
- C: Yes. Then he knew what his daughter's name was. She was born in March, so he went over in March, and in August they allowed me to join him.
- S: Was that a good experience?
- C: Yes, it was. It was a very nice experience. I was allowed into the part of Germany where he was. They were used to brown babies, children of black military and German females. Their children looked like me, but they had never seen an adult who looked like me. They would ask me these questions. At first, I didn't know what they were talking about, because I didn't speak German. I didn't study German, so I had no idea. They would say, something, but I didn't know what it meant. They assumed I was from Italy, I was from everywhere. They couldn't figure me out. I would go walking with my children, and I would look in the glass and I would see somebody's hand almost to my head. You see, I was an oddity. Of course, my hair was long then. They had never seen anybody like me. I could see that hand almost want to feel my hair.
- S: Is that right?
- C: My children – they assumed what they were.
- S: But they didn't know about you.
- C: Well, in a country like that, if you've never been to America where we are all colors of the rainbow, so to speak, there's nowhere in the world that people are the colors that we are in America.
- S: So they were having a little international education. Now, when your children were born, were they born in the hospital?
- C: Yes, all of them. My oldest child was born in a hospital in St. Louis. Dr. Banks, who lives here now and is now retired, delivered my other two children.
- S: Here?
- C: Yes, we were living here at the time.
- S: That was at Alachua General probably?
- C: Yes, at Alachua General. We were all on one ward.
- S: Tell me about that.
- C: No matter what you had, we were all together.

S: "We" meaning all of the black community.

C: Were we black then?

S: No, you were probably not.

C: We were Negroes then.

S: I'm always incorrect.

C: No, it doesn't really matter. However, there's no way you can mess up the word "black."

S: That's true.

C: You know, the way some people say "colored" and some people say "Negro", God rest their souls, I remember this lady, never mind. There are all kinds of ways you can mess up those two words, but there's nothing you can say but "black." In the 40's we were "colored." I don't remember when we became Negroes. I really don't, but I remember we became "black" in the 60's.

S: Was it 60's?

C: Yes. "I'm black and I'm proud." I remember that.

S: So many of us that lived in that period of time, if you were trying not to offend, you wanted to use the proper word, but frequently I will talk to somebody who is of another generation and know that they're trying not to do anything wrong, but it's just what term they learned when they were growing up.

C: I started teaching, and one of the biggest problems was the different complexions of the children. If somebody would come up to me and say, "Ms Cosby, he called me 'black'." Of course, I'd look down at my shoes, and I'd say, "Baby, are you that color?" "No, ma'am." I'd say, "Well, go sit down." That was one of the biggest problems, but now if you call somebody black, it's all right because that's what we're called – "black." We're called Afro-Americans, Negroes, colored. I think these names evolved because of the way the people used them.

S: That's right. With the intent.

C: What are you going to say but white? There's no way you can mess up that word and insult somebody.

S: When I came to the south, I was from the Midwest, and there were people who thought I was rude because I didn't say, "Yes, ma'am." Mother was trying to

- make me act respectful and then I took a job here in Gainesville, and my boss said, "You need to be careful if you say 'yes, ma'am' because a lot of people say that and they're being hostile and sarcastic."
- C: Well, when I taught school, I told my children they could call me anything -- dog, cat, anything -- but do not say, "Yes, ma'am" to me.
- S: You considered it disrespectful?
- C: I did. Now we didn't grow up saying, "Yes, ma'am," and "No, sir." I took my grandson to the barbershop this past summer. The barber asked my grandson a question and he said, "Yes." The man said, "Yes what?" He said, "Yes." He insisted that my grandson say, "Yes, sir." Now, we didn't grow up in this household saying, "Yes, ma'am" and "No, sir," and I didn't teach my children that and I do not "Yes, ma'am" and "No, sir" anybody. I don't feel it's disrespectful. I don't say anything but these were children and they were impressionable. Later when I went to the high school, I also told them, "Don't 'Yes, ma'am' me." I'm not a ma'am. I'm a Mrs. You may say, "Yes, Mrs." There are some people that wants you to say that and I guess you have to find out who they are, but I think it's better to start off not saying it than it is to say it. If people are sincere, you can tell and it doesn't really matter. They don't go out of their way to try and mess up things.
- S: I agree with you. That's what I meant. It's intent. You can tell regardless of what their words are whether they're trying to be respectful or not. I have another question. When you were growing up, do you remember major weather events, like hurricanes or storms?
- C: Only once do I remember the schools ever being closed on account of a hurricane. I don't think we had tornadoes here at that time. I don't remember any. It's only in recent years that I know of. Weather has changed throughout, and they have tornadoes here in Gainesville reportedly. I remember hurricanes and I remember hurricane season, but only once do I remember one being close enough to close the schools.
- S: When it came through, was there any damage?
- C: The back yard didn't look much different from what it looks today with last week's strong winds.
- S: Limbs down, and that kind of thing.
- C: Yes. Now, you know there have been tornadoes when all the trees come down.
- S: Now did you tell me where you met your husband?

C: We met at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. We were both in college at the time.

S: Was it a party or class?

C: No. He was one of the waiters in the dining hall. You see, when I went to Fisk, there were less than 500 students. It was small. For Sunday dinner at Fisk, we had a sit-down dinner. The bell rang and you went in and you sat down to your assigned table and the headwaiter came and carved your meat. You had to take your own cloth napkin from home. There were eight to a table and the headwaiter came in and carved this little meat off the bone. They carried the rest back, and they had a feast back there. They served you a little bit of meat off the carcass and they get to keep the rest.

S: So he was one of the people that served the tables?

C: Yes. He was a junior.

S: And you were a freshman?

C: Yes.

S: Did he ask you out?

C: I wouldn't go out with him my freshman year because when I first went there, he had been going with a young lady who was a member of the sorority that I was aspiring to join and I didn't want that person to blackball me. It wasn't until my sophomore year and enough time had elapsed between their breakup that I started going around with him. From my sophomore year until a year after graduation, we more or less were exclusive, and then in 1947 we married. I graduated in '46 and in 1947 we were married. He was a dental student, and I was in medical technology at Meharry.

S: Did you live there in Nashville?

C: Yes, we stayed in Nashville. My course was actually two years. I did it in eighteen months instead of two nine-month segments. I went to school over the summer. I finished in December but the graduation exercise wasn't held until June, so we graduated at the same time in 1948. We were married and we lived there.

S: Did you get married in Gainesville?

C: Yes. I got married in the church of my choice. The reception – of course, we didn't have no public places to have a reception – was right here. Here is the wedding party.

S: I was going to ask you about that picture, as a matter of fact.

C: There I am right there, and there he is.

S: Oh, I can recognize you both.

C: Most of those people on there are deceased.

S: Who is this little guy?

C: This is Stacey Jones. He is in Miami. His mother is Mrs. Crystola Jones. They were in the teaching profession. Mr. and Mrs. J.F. Jones at the time.

S: When you got married and went back to Nashville, you had a little apartment?

C: Yes, we had an apartment. We started out in a 2-bedroom apartment. We shared it with two young ladies. They had one of the bedrooms and we had the other. Kitchen and parlor were common areas. For a time, we split everything half and half.

S: When you both graduated, then?

C: He went to St. Louis upon graduation and I came here and visited with the family for a month and then I joined him in St. Louis.

S: Did he set up a practice?

C: No, he did an internship and a residency in dentistry. He never took the Boards, but he was Board Eligible in Oral Surgery. He didn't take the examination because he would have had to limit his practice to oral surgery, and he didn't think that was economically feasible at the time.

S: It probably wasn't. It was probably a good decision.

C: In later years when people found out his qualifications, he actually worked over at the dental school in oral surgery. He is now on the Board of Admissions. He was a part-time instructor until somebody decided to cut back and they did away with all the part-time people.

S: That happens. I know what you're talking about.

C: He was there for over ten years, so he was vested.

S: That's wonderful. I was trying to think of other places I might ask you about in the early days of Gainesville. The very first interview that I did for the Matheson

- Museum was Louis Pennisi. Do you remember Louis' Lunch downtown, the hamburger place?
- C: Down by the water place?
- S: Yes.
- C: My husband and I were talking about that the other day. My mother loved his sandwiches.
- S: He was such a dear man.
- C: I remember Louis' because that was the only place in town my mother could buy Cuban sandwiches. See, she lived in Tampa in the Cuban neighborhood, and she was used to Cuban sandwiches. At that time, he was the only person in town who made Cuban sandwiches. He would make those and there's another sandwich that Cubans make – guava jelly and cheese – but they made it on Cuban bread. He was across from the bus station. That's the area where the bus station was once upon a time. I can remember Sunday night when my sister was going back to Tallahassee, the bus station was over in that area. We would put her on the bus and Mother would make Cosby go. He had a cutout window right on the side where he would serve us. My mother wanted one of their sandwiches, and there was nothing my husband wouldn't do for her.
- S: He told me about that window. He said that when his place opened there was a lot of activity going on. I think it was Charles Chestnut, who was a good friend of Louis'. He said that some of the neighbors, some of the other merchants around him, came in and he said he kind of suspected that they were members of the KKK. He said they told him, they warned him not to serve any more. If you ever talked to Louis, you would know that he had kind of an accent, but he also had a speech impediment.
- C: I didn't know him, but Mother wanted a sandwich from there and Cosby went to this little window, like a little walk-up window around on the side. Cosby did that for his mother-in-law.
- S: They were real close, it sounds like.
- C: Sometimes I'd tell my mother, "You think that's your son, but I'm your daughter."
- S: There's a strong connection sometimes, isn't there.
- C: Yes. She would do anything for him, and he would do anything for her. They got along so well. She even went on family vacations with us. We would drive. I talk about my middle daughter, how much stuff she takes. I say, "Now, I carried

the three of you, Cosby and myself and Mother in one car, and we had space enough in the back to put our feet. Now we'd be gone for three weeks. My children might be in a stage of development. Here you are, you come here for a weekend and you can hardly find space in the back."

S: Where did you go on vacation?

C: Yes, we motored ultimately between here and Chicago or here and New York. Chicago we took three days because he is from Chicago so we would spend our vacation time mostly going back to Chicago. We would leave from here, go to Atlanta because there was a commercial place we could stay. That's not very far to travel if you're going to Chicago, but we would go from here to Chicago, stay in a motel and go see our friends around town. Then we would leave Chicago and go to Nashville, which is just about four and a half hours. We'd spend a few hours in Nashville and then go into southern Indiana because there was a commercial place where we could stay. Now, we couldn't stay in northern Indiana, but we could stay in southern Indiana, and the next day we would get up and go into Chicago. That was out route. Or, we would leave here and go south of the border. When we were going to New York, we would go a different route. We'd go out 301 and up through South Carolina. There's a place in northern South Carolina, just below the border of North Carolina, and we could stay there. Sometimes we'd get up the next day and we could actually make it to New York or we'd go to North Carolina. There was a place south of the border in South Carolina that we could go and there was a place in North Carolina that we could go. Of course, it was a longer ride but we could make it to New York. It would be after dark, but we never went into Chicago after dark even though my husband knew Chicago. I guess because we'd stop in Atlanta and Nashville going up, we'd make that in three days, but going to New York we made it in two days.

I remember one time we were going to Chicago and we wanted to stop in Kentucky because we had heard there was a place there we could stay, but by the time we got there, it was out of business. We didn't know where we were going to stay, so I said, "Cosby, find a railroad track, and on the other side of the railroad track, ride around until you find a funeral home. They'll know where to tell us to stay. On the other side of the railroad track is our neighborhood." Then he found a funeral home and sure enough, when we asked them about a place to stay, there was no hotel or motel but he said he knew a nice family where we could go and spend the night. So they took us. Somebody from the funeral home took us there. We had already eaten so all we wanted was to sleep. The next morning, the lady was going to fix breakfast for us, but we said no, we would just get in the car and ride down the highway and find a place to eat breakfast and we kept on going.

S: Did you ever have any trouble stopping to get something to eat?

- C: No, because in the daytime we had an ice chest and took things with us. We had an ice chest that had a liner so we could keep our meats and stuff. We carried bread and sandwich stuff and mayonnaise and salad dressing and stuff. When you travel with little children, "Daddy, I'm hungry." The only thing we had to stop for was to go to a restroom. Some places that posed a problem. However, we got to one place, Standard Oil, and they wouldn't let us use the restroom, so Daddy told us, "Go around behind the car and do your business." We usually timed it, you know. Of course, having gone to Fisk University, our song says, "From north and east and south to west, Ethiopia's children are gathered here." That's the school song, and you never travel unless you had a Fisk Directory.
- S: Oh, good idea.
- C: If you had a Fisk Directory of everybody throughout the United States, any Fisk student would welcome you into their home to sleep or to eat or to go to a restroom, and then you're on your way. You never traveled without your Fisk Directory.
- S: What a nice little security net. I bet it was pretty comforting to have. That would be pretty important to have, just in case, particularly with your family.
- C: Everybody, every Fisk graduate from their conception to now, this is everybody who was living at that time who answered the survey. You carried your copy with you. In the 80's when my daughter moved to Kansas City, I went out to Kansas City with my Fisk Directory to introduce her to children of my contemporaries because she didn't know anybody.
- S: There are three Cosby's in here. You already told me about those. That is wonderful. That makes perfect sense. Just think about people who didn't have college education.
- C: If you were going somewhere, you asked who do you know who lives where.
- S: You had to have a network. You had to have a point to shoot for.
- C: Yes. People have come here and said, "So and so sent me." They were welcome for a rest stop or something. That's why our telephone is still in my father's name. He died in 1954. It's no longer a necessity now. Most of the people who knew him have gone on, but there are less people who knew Cosby as being from here than those who know me as being a Parker and my father was Dr. J.A. Parker, which is easy to remember. Of course, he was listed in the Yellow Pages. He is listed at this address now because at one time the dental profession said he had to list his residence. When he first came here, he didn't have to. Well, you paid for a listing, when everybody who knew him, knew he was Dr. Parker's son-in-law, so we put that number.

- S: I was going to ask about Chicago. Was he from the south side of Chicago?
- C: Yes, he was from the south side.
- S: That's where my family grew up. When I'm trying to look up some of the things in my own family history that I keep working on from time to time, my grandparents lived around in the Beverly neighborhood. I thought I could probably compare notes with the south side of Chicago and some of that business. Back to Gainesville, you probably remember when Shands started their construction.
- C: Yes.
- S: What do you remember about that? Do you remember it being in the newspapers?
- C: Yes. By the time they started their construction, my husband was practicing here. At one time he was on the staff at Shands and Alachua General.
- S: When he came to Gainesville, he applied for practice privileges?
- C: We were here six years before he was granted privileges.
- S: Was he given a reason for that?
- C: I don't know the outright "reason" but his was denied. He had been a part of the Dental Society here. They would have courses and, of course, he couldn't take them until he finally said, "You know, my education must be better than your education. If you have to go back to school and I don't have to go, then that means my education is better."
- S: Who would he say that to?
- C: I don't really remember, but he said it in the Dental Society meetings.
- S: Was he the only black person in the Society for a while?
- C: Yes.
- S: He was the only black dentist in town?
- C: No, he wasn't the only black dentist in town. When we came here, Dr. Debose was still practicing. Dr. Stafford died just before we came here. He went into the facilities that Dr. Stafford made.

S: How did you all decide to come back to Gainesville? When he finished his residency in St. Louis, did you just kind of understandably think that you would come here?

C: No, this was a financial situation. Now, you understand I'm from here. Daddy said, "Come back here," so we ended up back here. You know, folks say, "I'm going to help you do this and help you do that," and you realize they don't have anything to help you with. It would have been a hardship for him to have stayed in Chicago.

S: So when you came back to Gainesville, where did you live?

C: Where I'm living now. When we came back here, my mother and father and one of my sisters was living here. It's five bedrooms upstairs, so we didn't displace anybody. It wasn't too long after we came here that that daughter who was living here left. She got married and moved to Miami. They didn't need anybody living here, but as it turned out, they were never alone. My mother was able to take care of herself until she died, so she would have been all right other than she would have been living in this house by herself. We just lived here and didn't think anything of it.

S: Your husband's dental practice – did it start out slowly?

C: I guess it did. He was going into an office that was already set up for dentistry. There were certain things we didn't have to do, so money was no particular problem. We didn't have to pay rent. We were just living here. We provided certain things and my mother provided certain things, but we didn't have to outright pay so much for rent and utilities and phone and everything like that. That was already here, so we just moved in here. It wasn't one of these things like you owe me this or I owe you that.

S: When you got your technology degree, did you ever work in that field?

C: Yes, I worked in that field. At Meharry from January to June when I graduated, and then when I went to St. Louis, eventually I worked there. When we came here, they didn't have fair employment practice. Most places that would have hired me, the old excuse is that my training was superior to anybody on that staff. Now I did work for Alachua General in the lab, but when I got pregnant with my second child, I didn't have maternity leave or anything like that so I was asked to resign. Of course, when I decided to go back to work, that possibility wasn't available, so since I had a four-year degree from a liberal arts college as well as my two-year degree in medical technology, the State of Florida said that if you graduate from a liberal arts school, you can go anywhere and teach anything and you have three years to become certified in your field. I didn't work the first year after I got my temporary certificate, so it expired before I finished, but the person that I was working for assured me that when I did get certified that he would take

me back. I went up to FAMU that summer and then I went to the State Department and I showed them my credentials and they decided that they would accept. Originally, my material from Meharry was not accepted, when I started to get my teaching certificate. The State of Florida works in quarter hours, semester hours, whatever, and Meharry worked in time – so many quarters. It was the way that you earned so many hours. Time rather than semester or quarters. When I'm standing up over you, it made a difference. In that one summer, having taken observation and participation and all these other things, they accepted that for an internship. Then they accepted my other credits so I got my certificate, so from June until school opened, I didn't have a job but when I came back from summer school, I went back to my principal and I walked into the same classroom that I had left.

S: Sort of a win-win situation, wasn't it.

C: Yes. By going up there and talking to the person, they could see, and they said, "We will give you credit for this." It was just a matter of somebody looking at something and converting it. If you're standing up over somebody, I was explaining to them how the classes met and it was qualified different, then I got my certificate. That meant I went right back into my job.

S: Did you enjoy that?

C: Yes.

S: Would you have preferred working in medical technology?

C: Yes, I would have. I'm not particularly a people person and I would have more enjoyed working with test tubes than people. I started out in the elementary school. The first year the principal put me in 4th grade because for that year my mother was still working and she was teaching 4th grade. He said if I had any problems with lesson plans or anything, she could help me. At the end of the first year, realizing that I was proficient in math, he needed someone in the office. Principals didn't have treasurers in the office, so I kept his books. In 4th grade, I would have gotten out an hour later, but in 2nd grade you got out an hour earlier. The little children got out earlier than the big children. That extra hour that I had to stay on campus I kept the books in the office. Then after six years I was transferred to G.H.S.

S: What grade did you teach there?

C: I taught Advanced Algebra, college prep.

S: Did you like that?

C: Yes.

S: You were there for how long?

C: Twenty-five years.

S: Oh, my goodness.

C: Now you understand that I was the first black to teach in Gainesville High School.

S: How did that go?

C: For three years I was the only black. It went well. Yes. If the powers that be want something to happen, it happens. They had been prepared for me.

S: And they probably chose very carefully.

C: That's an ego thing to go that route.

S: But that's the realistic thing if anybody's smart.

C: The first two years that I taught at Gainesville High School, no math student was allowed to drop the subject and elect to go to another teacher. You could drop a subject and take it the next year.

S: Not allowed to drop it.

C: You weren't allowed to change from one teacher to another teacher for three years. You can understand that. Everybody in my class would have wanted to get out of my class.

S: They made a policy.

C: They made a policy and they stuck to that. Now, if it was an administrative decision – if you got assigned to two classes in the same period. No system is perfect. People would get to school the first day and find they've got two classes the same period. The administration has to do something about it. Well, they could reassign that student, but that student couldn't elect who they wanted to go to. That was for my protection. The powers that be wanted integration to work.

S: They wanted it to happen.

C: That's right, and they did not know if the situation could happen here. Because of the University of Florida, a lot of things have gone over much smoother here than in other places.

S: I think you're the first person who has put it in words.

- C: The powers that be want to preserve the University of Florida always.
- S: Did your colleagues receive you well and welcome you in the teachers' lounge?
- C: Well, I'm not a lounge person. I went down to the lounge. You understand the classroom that I had between my room and the other room, the person to the right of me had been in on the design of G.H.S. and they were asked what did they want? What they wanted was for their office to be between the two rooms and you could go out the back door of your room and go through into the back door of the other room, so if you ever needed to ask a question you could go through here without going out and you could go in the office and consult with the other teacher.
- S: I hear you. I know what you're talking about.
- C: Consult with the other teacher, and the children don't know what's going on.
- S: Yes.
- C: I didn't have any problems, and I had fewer referrals. My students were college preparatory students. Now you understand nowadays students figure, "I can do something else." Back in '66, these kids who were in school for college preparatory knew that was what they wanted to do and they couldn't afford to lose a year. They knew that this became a part of their permanent record and stayed on their record for years.
- S: So they were motivated and wanted to do well.
- C: That's right. Usually first-year teachers are given the bottom of the barrel. You know the system. I wasn't given the bottom of the barrel. I was given the top of the heap. They knew what was expected of them.
- S: It must have been an exciting time.
- C: It didn't bother me, because, as I said, my friends and colleagues call me Silent Yokum. I was going to explain to you about this office area. The teacher before me had a sofa in there and, of course, we had a radio in there. Well, we didn't start out with a microwave, but we had an icebox, so if I wanted to go to the lounge. . Now the faculty was all right during the week.
- S: But that wasn't your main source of friends.
- C: When my mother taught at Duval and the faculty said to her, "Parker, if we see you downtown, you speak to us, but we're not going to speak to you because we

- don't want to be insulted." They couldn't tell what she was. But they're not going to get their feelings hurt speaking to this lady downtown.
- S: Incredible.
- C: They called my mother "Parker". If you want us to speak to you when you're downtown, speak to us first. We know who you are. She taught in an all-black school. Now, my situation was when I went downtown, I knew them but if they didn't want to speak, I just passed them by. They didn't bother me. After a time, we had these sessions where you get up and say what's on your mind and I remember somebody saying that when I came she looked at me and she was mad because my tan in the winter didn't disappear. When she went to the beach and came back after a day or two her tan was gone.
- S: And yours wasn't.
- C: I didn't hold it against her. I didn't really have time. I would come back home and talk to the children and we laugh and talk.
- S: Well, you sure have seen a lot of changes in things over your lifetime, haven't you?
- C: Yes, my mother's favorite eating place after desegregation was the Primrose Inn, and she said there was a restaurant Park Lane in the Gainesville Shopping Center on Main Street. There was first a one-price store there. You came out of Belk's, right up there on that corner. Right up in the corner, where Cox Cable was at one time, but it moved next door. First it was one-price, then it was \$6, then \$7; anyway, that store was up in there. It doesn't really matter to me because I can be by myself. If you notice, I don't have any of these TV's, radios, noise in here. When my husband leaves in the morning, I cool down the house and cut off all the noise.
- S: What do you like to do? Are you a reader?
- C: I am a very prolific reader.
- S: I would guess.
- C: I work crossword puzzles. Every morning – well not every morning – I walk down and pick up my *Alligator* and if it doesn't have a crossword puzzle in it, I throw it away when I get home. I work puzzles in the paper and I know I could use the library but I buy books. I've got bags and bags of books that I just hate to throw away. Sometimes I send them to a friend of mine in Chicago or to my daughter in Kansas City. I send her my old books and she sends me her old books. I send them out of town, because I don't want to go to the book sale and buy these. For a long time, I could just look at a book and tell whether I've read it

- before but I've read so many and if you look at the back and if you're reading a series of books written around the same time, you look at the back and you may or may not have read it. They have the same plot. A lot of books have the same plot.
- S: Are these novels?
- C: Some of them. I read romance. I read mysteries, just about anything. For Christmas my daughter gave me two books. One of them she said she gave to me because the heroine was called Leslie and the other one because of the area. The background was Gainesville. I read Barbara Cartland. I read 18th Century.
- S: You're just interested in everything.
- C: I don't sew any more. As I tell everybody, I do enough housekeeping to keep the spider webs out. I'm deathly afraid of spiders.
- S: Are you? What's that from?
- C: I just can't stand the creepy-crawlers. I had to go to a neurosurgeon because I was having problems with my wrist. He asked if I had seen a particular show on TV. Anyway, he said I reminded him of one of the characters. Then my grandson said, "Grandmother, three people played that part. The first person died and then someone else played his part, and then another person." Anyway, I sat through this movie on TV just to see this person who he said I reminded him of. They were in bed and people would look like insects and stuff, and I had to sit through all this horrible stuff. I had to sit and watch it because this person didn't come on until the story was about three-fourths over. I'm sitting through all this. Of course, I have to go through that every summer when they come. They're old enough now when they come this summer, I can just drop them off and pick them up, but I had to go through all this stuff when I take them to the movies.
- S: They like all that kind of movie stuff. I know there are a lot of young people in the theater.
- Well, I've gone through all of my questions for you. Have I forgotten some major part that I should include in this about Gainesville or about your life?
- C: According to me, my life was uneventful. Like I said, I've lived here for 33 years, graduated from high school in '42 and went to Fisk and graduated in '46, went to Meharry and graduated in '48, stayed in St. Louis until 1950 and then came back here and have been here, except for the two years in Germany with my husband, I've just lived right here in this spot. Because of the one-way streets up in here now, we don't have all of that hustle and bustle through here.
- S: Do you like it better when it's quiet like that?

C: Well, really, not particularly because I just enjoy the activity, people walking by, people driving by.

S: When you're out on your porch, there's still some activity.

C: Yes, there's still some activity. Some people still coming and going, you know. People end up in here going to or from whatever. All of these were two-way streets and now they are mostly one-way. Downtown they say they wanted to revive it, but they say no parking on the street and now they've got parking on Main Street. They have things and then decide to do away with it and then they want to bring it back.

S: They change it back and forth.

C: Yes. The University is growing all over.

S: How was the thing at the library? I wanted to go to that exhibit.

C: I was really shocked at the turnout. They had quite a few people there.

S: This was at the library east or Smathers?

C: It wasn't Smathers.

S: It was just a couple of weeks ago?

C: Yes.

S: It was a collection of all African-American history of Gainesville?

C: From the early 50's. My husband took some pictures of everything. We had a daughter in the band at Lincoln and he would go to the Lincoln parade and take pictures of that, and he would take pictures of the University parade, and people would have things around town and he would take his trusted camera and he took pictures until he had quite a large collection. Joel prevailed upon him to donate his collection to the University of Florida.

S: This is Joel Buchanan, who works at the library.

C: Yes. Cosby had pictures of when we were in college, and we have pictures of our vacations that we went on. He just took his camera everywhere. We've just got pictures, pictures, pictures all over everywhere.

S: That's such a wonderful record though.

C: If he didn't see one of his children until they were ten days old, for six years, would he recognize that as his child like this lady did recently? He said no, but I said this one right here I'd recognize her. This one looks like me, but there are so many other people that she could look like. But this child looks like her daddy, and I couldn't mistake her for anybody. Of course, he doesn't see it. Most people don't see it when a female looks like a male.

S: That's true, too. That's probably exactly true. I think over time, like there have been periods of time when my sister was very young that she looked like one member of the family. She resembled my uncles when she was a certain age, but then she kind of grew out of that stage and looked like somebody else for a while. When I look back on those photos to see the family resemblance.

C: I say, "Cosby, that couldn't be nobody's child but yours."

S: He may have trouble seeing it because it is him. Those are great pictures.

C: What kind of questions do you have for the interviewees?

S: Well, a lot of the same ones because this is supposed to be about Alachua County. It is supposed to be about people who have lived here over the span of time and I am always interested in not just the buildings that were here because we have records and photos and things, but I guess I'm more interested in the cultural things, like what did kids do for fun and that kind of thing.

C: We went for a walk. Walking to nowhere. You went to visit your friends and when you got there and were ready to leave, they would walk you half the way home and then you would walk them half the way home. Of course, you had to be home by dark. Don't let the streetlights catch you!

S: What kind of a nice girl was out after dark, for heavens sake?

C: If streetlights came on, you ran.

S: Uh huh, you were in big trouble.

C: That's right.

S: What have we left out? If you look back on your time in Gainesville, what memories do you have that are the most vivid?

C: I remember in Tampa getting up and walking to school and walking home, and, as you say, we were devils. We had to pass a cemetery and when we got to the cemetery, they'd run off and leave me. Of course, I wasn't going to no cemetery. I knew the way home. All I had to do was go down this street and make one turn, and I could see the house from this street that we were walking on. They would

- run off and leave me and run through the cemetery. I was not about to go through the cemetery by myself. I have kind of jumpy feelings now.
- S: Now, we've got spiders that make you squeamish and we've got cemeteries that you don't like.
- C: It isn't that I don't like them. I don't know. It's just a feeling that you have.
- S: Well, what do you think are the most miraculous or the most outstanding things that have changed in Gainesville over the time you've been here?
- C: I think really the most outstanding change is acceptance of people. I didn't get the idea when I was growing up that we weren't accepted because I never thought about it one way or the other. I lived in my world and you lived in yours. Of course, I still live in my world and I wouldn't live anywhere else but here because frankly I couldn't afford to build what I have now.
- S: Oh no.
- C: You just have a feeling you can go places and be accepted to go to mixed parties, cocktail parties, and things of that nature. My husband is very well thought of in his profession. As you know, I must have been well thought of by somebody to never having taught a math class, to be asked to go from one day teaching 2nd grade, somebody must have had confidence in my ability. Mr. Talbot said that if you have the desire, you can be taught anything.
- S: That's a good philosophy.
- C: They have that today really, because college graduates when they leave, they send you somewhere for five months training.
- S: That's right. Now that's got to be one of your proud moments, to have been promoted into that and asked to be the first.
- C: Now it's all right, but then it wasn't. Of course, I'm proudest of my children and my grandchildren.
- S: That's a pretty big accomplishment.
- C: Yes. We've kept on the tradition. My children have graduated from college, and the two grandchildren that are of age have graduated from college and the next two are looking forward to it at this point. Now I realize that is not the end all be all, and they'll never make as much money as some of these other people like Bill Gates didn't graduate from college. My grandson works for him, but he is the richest man in the United States, but they don't have that kind of thoughts or

- anything, but they'll live a comfortable life and do the things that they want to do, like I have done.
- S: That probably spells happiness.
- C: Yes. I spend money all the time to pay my bus fare to Atlanta to see my grandchildren and then looking forward to the summer when they can come and spend the summer with me. As I said, Gainesville is uniquely different. There is hatred, and there's bias on both sides. I'm not saying there isn't, but there isn't the overt things here that go on in other places of the world, whether it's north or south.
- S: I agree with you.
- C: You take Boston. That's one of the most – I don't know what to say about Boston. Recently, in the school system, they've had trouble. Some of the things that go on. I'm not sure about this business or need to know because you see it happen so much. I'll never forget the 70's. If this school had a bomb threat, they closed down for the rest of the day. The next day another junior high school had a racial uprising. Then the next afternoon it would be somewhere else. I guess that's just my opinion. Newspapers gotta sell their papers, and radio's got to have ads, but when you broadcast it. But I do feel that in spite of everything Gainesville is a much more peaceful place.
- S: And you think some of that is the University influence.
- C: A lot of it is not necessarily University influence, or the people who are employed by the University. I don't think the University – I won't say they don't think about the town, but there are people who do think about the town. If there is an uprising or whatever in town, then that's going to affect the University. It's going to carry over. In order to preserve that, they have to preserve this.
- There are a number of private citizens that consider the University of Florida sacred – more so than any other university. Look at how the town turns out in orange and blue for all home games. All of the people that endow the U. of F. are not grads of the school.
- S: Do you think some of the kind of a community we have is because this is a relatively small town?
- C: Yes, but it's not as small as some of the other university cities.
- S: That's true.
- C: Most universities are more or less out in the boondocks, but that's all it is.

- S: Well, I just can't thank you enough. I've enjoyed this so much.
- C: I know when you go home or wherever you're going, you'll sit down and think that we rambled.
- S: No, this is not true. One of the things is that the person who does the transcription enjoys these just as much as if she was sitting here with us. I officially just want to thank you.