

CHAR 4

Interviewee: Isaac Anderson

Interviewer: Vernon Peebles

Date: July 6, 2000

P: This is an interview with Judge Isaac Anderson in his office in the Justice Center in Fort Myers on July 6, 2000. Judge, what is your full name?

A: Isaac Anderson, Jr.

P: When and where were you born?

A: I was born July 11, 1946, here in Fort Myers, Florida. I was delivered by a midwife by the name of **Maola Wells**.

P: That is amazing that you remember who...?

A: Well, I do not remember her being there at the moment that I was born. However, I know that she delivered me. She said so, and she still has grandchildren or great-grandchildren around here. **Lovy Wells**, who works for the school board, his father is her son.

P: Was it typical at the time for babies to be delivered by midwives in Fort Myers?

A: I imagine so. It would not be unusual to have midwives deliver babies at about that time because delivery at the hospital is really a recent thing. When I say recent, I am talking about 1950s and 1960s and 1970s and that sort of thing, primarily in the 1950s, but I was born before then.

P: Where did your family live at that time?

A: We lived in an area of Fort Myers that was called **Johnson Quarters**. I remember growing up on **Cuba Street**, which is on the eastern edge of the city of Fort Myers just across the **Ford Street Canal**, which is a major drainage canal that runs north and south. Cuba Street is just parallel to Ford but on the east side of it, on the eastern edge of it. I grew up in that neighborhood.

P: To what degree would that neighborhood at that time have been segregated?

A: We were partially desegregated. Occasionally, a white guy would come by and pick up industrial insurance policy payments, but other than that, I mean, to the extent that it was desegregated, that was about it. No, it was a segregated community.

P: What were the names of your parents?

A: My father's name is Isaac Anderson, obviously, and my mother's name is

Margaret Davis Anderson. Margaret, my mother, is from Dawson, Georgia. She had several children, **Mary Francis, Viola**, and then me and **Linda**. There were four of us initially. Later on, she married again and she had three other children who were killed in a house fire. Francis and Viola are still alive. Linda was killed in a train-car accident out off **Hanson** and **Metro** there, near WMR radio station, where it used to be. I think it is still there. At least, the towers are still there. That is basically the family there.

P: Where was your father from?

A: My father was from South Carolina in a town called Johnsonville. His mother was a Barr. Barr was the family name, and she lived to be 104. I think she died in 1984. She had three different families. She outlived three different husbands. Let us put it that way. My father was in the second group.

P: What did your father do?

A: My father was a truck driver, primarily. He was a labor _____ truck driver. Eventually, he retired up in Webster, Florida, where he lives now. He was working for a fruit company. I am not sure what the company was, but he lives there now, he and his wife and three adopted children. In other words, I have a brother who is seventeen and two little sisters who are fourteen. They are twins. At any rate, that is where they live now.

P: You have quite an extended family.

A: Yes.

P: Was your mother employed?

A: Yes. She did domestic work for a while, quite a bit of her working life. However, she also was a cook. She cooked at various places. I know there was the lady that works for **Patty**. She tells the story, she says that my mom gave her her first job when she first came to town. My mom was in charge of the kitchen down on the beach. I have forgotten the name of the place. It was a restaurant hotel there.

W: [Woman] **Judy Jefferson**.

A: Judy Jefferson, right. Judy saw me one day in Publix there on 41, and she said, you do not remember? I said no, ma'am, I do not remember you. Of course, she proceeded to tell me the story. I said, I still do not remember you. I think that was about 1952 when she came here, and I guess I would have been about six about that time. But that is what she did.

P: When did your parents move to Florida?

A: Early on. My mother and her family, **Mary Cooney Jones**—she is my maternal grandmother, Mary Jones—they moved down here, I think it was, in the early 1940s, or maybe it was in the late 1930s. I am not sure, but it was about that time.

P: Were your parents married before they came to Fort Myers?

A: No, they got married here in Fort Myers. I do not know the date, but it was in the 1940s. My middle sister would have that information. She has got all the details. I do not have it. I am sorry.

P: What education did your parents have?

A: High school. My mother went to high school. She did not finish. My father also did not finish, and my oldest sister. As a matter of fact, I was the only one in my immediate family to have graduated from high school. That is basically it.

P: What do you attribute the fact that you were the only one in your immediate family to graduate from high school and then go on to college?

A: Any number of things. Well, not any number of things, but my mother primarily. I remember growing up in Fort Myers and as a young kid coming home many evenings. Abe Lincoln had nothing on us with his oil lamps. We had them, too. I mean, it was a carry over from one century to another. We would sit around, and she would tell us stories. I mean, a great storyteller, and she would read to us. That was the most important thing to us, I thought, is that she would read to us all the time. She always impressed upon us that you do not have to do what I am doing. She said to me, I remember her telling me distinctly, you will not do exactly what I am doing because you do not like to do anything I tell you to do. It was her way of saying that I was kind of incorrigible. That is a nice spin, I suppose. But I think that was the most important thing that impressed upon me the necessity of an education. I also remember a man by the name of **Talis Knight**. My father was gone when I was kid growing up, and this man, Talis Knight, we called him Poppa. He was more or less like a fixture part of the family. He was much older than my mom and the rest of us, but he was there when we needed him. He could not read. I remember as a youngster that he would get a letter or so from his daughter up in New Jersey, and he would, come on, boy, come on down here with me, I want you to read this letter to me. I would go down, and I would sit in the front yard with him. He would have his little fire set up on the rocks with a black cast iron skillet with cheese and eggs and onions and everything just bubbling just right and the fire on the outside. He said, okay, boy, read to me, I know you can read. I was just as proud as I could be, and I would read to Poppa. I would read his letters, and I would write his letters. I would help him compose his letters. That really gave me a sense of accomplishment, and I

became very proud of myself. He was always one, as well. He was proud of me, too. He would drag me around with his buddies, **Old Ben, Joe and Clark** and those other guys. He would tell them, you see my boy, he can read. You jokers can't read. That sort of thing. It is a lasting thing.

P: Any relationship to Dr. **Ann Knight**?

A: Talis? No, none whatsoever. Different family. But those are the things. It was a very competitive little neighborhood. My aunt lived across the street, **Stroth Lee Clark**, she and all of her children, and then I had my grandmother, Mary Jones. She lived next door. Then we had another set of cousins who lived down the way from us there. We all lived on the end of Cuba Street, and there was a bunch of us. It was not like three or four or five or six. It was like ten, twelve, fifteen, or twenty of us. We pretty much made up a block.

P: No one was likely to undertake an assault on the entire family.

A: Usually, they picked on me. The women in the family would pick on me because I stood out. Of course, the grandmother would come after me because I would win sometimes. No, I say that tongue in cheek. No, I agree with you, Vernon. That generally did not happen because it was a mob.

P: How would you describe your life before you were six years old?

A: Happy, just as proud of myself as I could possibly be, and just having a generally good old time. Growing up down there on Cuba Street in that end of the street, it bordered on what is now Franklin Park Magnet School, and we were on the northern side of Franklin Park Magnet School. It would be the northwest corner where Cuba Street would intersect there, and that is where we grew up. In that area out there where Franklin Park is, we had a little area out there that was a farm, more or less. There were pigs, and they grew vegetables. I remember as a kid, we would grab those big old sows and hogs and just ride them around there. I mean, they were as big as Shetland ponies. So, as a kid, you would jump them and ride them. You never messed with those old big boars. Sows, maybe. I mean, you would do stupid things, dumb things that kids would do. When it would rain real hard, sometimes the canal behind the house would get high with drainage water flowing from the south to the north. I mean, that was a great place to swing with a rope or a vine across into the water, and do all the things that kids did. It was a good time for me. To say the least, we were not wealthy, but we were not starving. We were not poor, but we were not middle class either. We were somewhere in there. I do not know what it was, but it was a time that I have fond memories of.

P: How would you have differed from your neighbors?

A: Well, I would not have differed any. We all grew up basically the same because what was happening, Vernon, is that, you know, we talk about the pigs, they would slaughter a pig or something and they would share it, or a hog or something. I talk to my wife today about cleaning a hog, how they would take it a scald the hair or burn the hair off and all this sort of stuff. And she, do what? You know, it is a question, does not understand that. Or how the fisherman would come in. I mean, when I say fisherman, these are the guys who worked on the shrimp boats down on Fort Myers Beach or out where downtown Fort Myers used to be. You probably remember. There was a big dock area down here in this area where the Justice Center is, pretty much up here on **Monroe** Street. There are fish houses, cleaning houses where they clean fish and _____ and shrimp and what have you. But these men would come back to the neighborhood, and they would bring back baskets of shrimp and fish and all sorts of stuff, and it would be shared among the neighborhood. Out there on that little what I call a farm today, it was basically a very large garden, and people shared from it. It was a time when people took care of each other because you did not have a whole lot of government help, as I can remember. The government just did not have any help. If they did, it was a can of something. That was about it. You took care of yourself, and people took care of each other. We were all pretty much the same.

P: How important was the church or religion in your life during those formative years?

A: Church has always been important in my life, very important at that time, today, and as I said, always. I was, I guess, raised in a Baptist church. As I grew older, I became a little more independent, when we moved out of the neighborhood and I got a little more sophisticated. I studied with the Jehovah's Witnesses, and I thought I would like to become a Witness, and I was for awhile. I learned and I benefitted a lot from both. One of the things that I remember most and that stands out the most and is so clear in my mind from studying as a Witness is that as a young child, I was given an opportunity to speak at public gatherings, to read, to exercise those things that I had developed early on and that people were so proud of me and patting on the back and telling me that I could do this and do this well. I found that as a Witness, I was given opportunity to do that on a regular basis, and I got pretty good at it, I thought, and I think it served me well. So, religion, yes. From that point, it has been very good to me. I think God is very important in my life and all of our lives, and we need to have somewhere to go where we can seek a private audience with something that is greater than we are and feel comfortable in doing it. Religion is very important to me.

P: The churches in many black communities perform a function far greater than just nourishing the soul. How important was the church to you, other than as a religious experience, when you were growing up?

- A: It was a social thing. You learned so many things. You learned history, you learned family history, you learned to appreciate family, you learned to appreciate community through the church. Many times, it was an entertaining thing. We were not the nicest little boys. I mean, we would sit in the back of the Baptist church, and every time they would strike up that hymnal, Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound, you know, we used to sit in the back but they moved us down front because what we would do is we had our own version of that. We would sing, like, Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, the bulldog ran my grandma down. After a while, they picked up on it. They discovered what we were saying, and they carted us down front, mostly by the cuff of our ear or neck or something like this. They literally dragged us down front, and we lost out on that one. But God still loved us notwithstanding that some of the elder members of the church did not think it was right. From that experience, you learned that there are sometimes you best keep your thoughts to yourself, or you do not necessarily have to express them publicly. The church was a place for entertainment. You learned to sing, you learned to play the piano, you learned to play instruments. You participated in plays. I do remember at Friendship Baptist Church, the schools were so tight in terms of places to actually conduct classes. I believe I was in second or third grade [when] it was being conducted at Friendship Baptist Church. Our third grade classes were held there. I remember we had this great play, and, probably, this is why I am a judge today. It probably has something to do with this. I played the role of a law enforcement officer, the desk sergeant. They had this huge desk mockup thing that they had built for me to sit on, and they would bring the scurrilous reprobates and criminals in and they would tell their story to me. My famous line was, a likely story. I remember that. But what I found that was even more interesting was the process of getting there. I had the uniform or whatever it was, for whatever it was worth, but we needed a hat. We could not find a hat to fit my head. I had the biggest head in the class, and they called me Tankhead. **Carolyn Jo Hill**, her father was the Iceman. **June O'Neill** has nothing. The Iceman cometh. I mean, he truly came. Mr. Hill would deliver ice. Do you remember with those big tongs, and they would put the big hunks of 250-pound blocks on their backs or whatever it was, and they would literally with the **slicker** on their shoulder take it where it had to go. Well, it was a big debate, where are we going to find a hat to fit Anderson's head? And someone said, I know, Mr. Hill's got a big head. So, one of the kids asked for Mr. Hill's hat, and Mr. Hill graciously loaned us the hat. It did not quite fit, but it served its purpose. So, again, the church was a great place to learn and participate in things.
- P: It sounds like in your formative years, you grew up with some order and discipline.
- A: That is the way you put it today. You may call it order and discipline, but I think my parents and the people around me probably thought I was one of the most

obstreperous people they had ever seen. I was probably one of the most disorderly they had ever seen. I was not really a bad kid, but I was always questioning things, always into things, doing things differently, pushing the envelope a little bit. I had a lot of folks pushing me, trying to squeeze me back into the way I should go. If you want to call that order and discipline, okay fine.

P: Where and when did you start to school?

A: Elementary school, I went over here at **Waver's Academy** for first grade, and then second and third grade, **Dunbar** Elementary. From there, we were the first class to graduate from Franklin Park. I guess it was an elementary school, and we graduated from there. From there, we went onto Dunbar High School, which was recently built out on Edison and which is now Dunbar Middle. That was the new Dunbar High School that was built, and we graduated from there in 1964. That is basically what happened there. Of course, when I left high school, I went to a small historically black college, Allen University, in Columbia, South Carolina. I went there my first year, and in January, I guess would be the second semester of my first year, my mother died. She was my support, and I had no other financial means, other than what I got from the school and what have you. I stayed there and finished off the year, and at the end of the year, I joined the Air Force. I did it for the very specific reason of continuing my education, being able to finance it. I figured I could do two things. I could serve my country rather than being drafted, select the road that I wanted to go rather than someone pushing again in the right direction. I chose the direction I wanted to go and used the proceeds from that to pay for my education. I spent three years, three months, and twenty-seven days in the United States Air Force. I did the Vietnam thing. I came back. I was stationed up there in Tampa at MacDill Air Force Base and signed up at Edison and started classes on September 10, 1968. I was discharged on September 10, 1968. I started classes that night. So, I drove from Tampa to Fort Myers and went to school at Edison for that year. In the meantime, I worked for the U. S. Fire Service. A fellow by the name of **George Mescaline**, who is a forester, a _____ culturist, I worked for George, and George helped me later on to get a loan to go off, to pay for the rest of my education beyond that. I was married the following spring to my bride, **Audrea**. She called me and she said, I think this is great. I am coming to Florida. I am going to graduate school in Florida. I said, oh wonderful, where? She said Miami University. I said, no, dear, I think that is the University of Miami. You read that again. It says Miami University. Read carefully. It says Oxford, Ohio. You are not coming to Florida. So, I finished Edison that year, and with the previous year I had spent at Allen, I had enough to transfer to Miami. I went to Miami for a year a year and a half, and I finished there while she was doing graduate work. It is an interesting thing, the river of life that we are sailing. I met that lady in South Carolina at Allen University. She is from Lee County, South Carolina, and, of course, I am from Lee County, Florida. When she started to tell me little things about her family, I

said that is nice. I knew that she was something special, or she was really after me when she told me she had a brother named Anderson. I said okay, right, sure lady, you are pulling my leg. And she does have a brother named Anderson Isaac. We were just made for each other, so to speak, and we have been married ever since. While at Miami, I decided to go to law school. A lot of experiences go into this decision process, but I interviewed with several young black lawyers from Ohio State University, and in particular, a man by the name of **David Wilmont Friedman**. We sat and we talked. He had come down to Miami along with maybe three or four others, and they talked the black student union, whoever was interested in law school, come on up to Ohio State. I sat and talked with him, we agreed on a lot of fronts and I decided that was the thing for me. Well, I had my fill of the "Midwest," so I did not apply to Ohio State. I probably would have been accepted there. But I was a little, as my kids would say, ego tripping. I applied to Harvard, Yale, Berkeley and Chicago in that order, law school. Of course, I was rejected at Harvard, Yale, Berkeley and Chicago in that order, probably not because of my lack of credentials or anything, probably because I did not send the application fee in. I was a poor student and arrogant enough to think that if they wanted me, they would accept my application and I would pay them later. But they were not interested, so applied to other schools. The University of Iowa was one, and American University. As a matter of fact, both of those schools accepted my application without the application fee. We went out to Iowa City. We drove from Oxford, Ohio, which is in southern Ohio, up across Indiana and straight up the interstate through Peoria, through wherever it is, the **quad cities** and old Iowa City. We got there. It is a beautiful campus, a neat little town. As a matter of fact, we liked it so much that we got an apartment and signed up, ready to go to school. I intended to get a law degree and an M. B. A., because they were offering that program. We drove back, and on the way back from Iowa City heading toward the quad cities, I did notice, I said, this is still the Midwest. I noticed corn. I mean, I do not know, I have never seen corn so high in my life. It was like driving down a tunnel, and this is on the interstate. Have you ever been on that road? You do not know. It is an experience, when the man from Oklahoma when corn is high as an elephant's eye, they were serious. Got back to Oxford and was accepted in American University. I said I do not know if I want to go back through those cornfields, so we packed up and went to D. C. instead, to American University. That is where I went to law school.

P: Let us go back a little bit.

A: I will get ahead of you if you let me.

P: No, you are doing great, but let us go back to when you were in high school and talk about that a little bit. Did you participate in athletics?

A: Yes. I was a pretty fair baseball player. I was a much better football player. I

thought I could play basketball. I do remember after football season going to the basketball practice, and the coach, **Jim Stevens**—who died recently, I guess what, four years ago?—he was my football coach and he was also the basketball coach. He encouraged us to stay in shape. Of course, I wanted to stay in shape. I played the season of football. Lo and behold, I went to basketball practice, and I think I hurt somebody, one of the regulars or something. He said give me my basketball and get off the court. This is not football. Get away. So, that was my career in basketball. I was not as good as I thought, but then, I was not too terribly thin either. But no, I participated in football, baseball, and I used to swim a lot. We had a swimming team. I did not participate in that competitively, but I used to swim a lot. But those sports primarily, football and baseball. I still got this thing about basketball. I should have been a basketball [player]. Michael Jordan would have nothing on me. **You are talking to the** shortest Michael Jordan in history.

P: What other activities did you participate in?

A: I used to be a pretty good little actor, I thought, until Mrs. Jones ran me off. She was an English teacher, **Mrs. Jamie Lee Jones**, the greatest English teacher that ever lived. We participated in several plays, and I did okay until I decided that I want to work. I had a job part-time, and I could not get to the practices on time. I would go to work, and I would rush back to the practices. Sometimes, I would be a little late. I do not know, to a kid, what is five minutes, half an hour. You know, what is an hour late? So what? I mean, to me, it was not terribly important but I was there. Well, she could not handle that. She had to go by the rules, her rules, and was quite strict. I do not blame her. I mean, the fact is _____, so she fired me. She ran me off. I used to also sing a lot, and I still do. I was on the choir, the Glee Club as they called it. **Shirley Robinson Baskin** and I did a couple of duets and all that sort of stuff. I had a baritone and what have you. But I did that, and I was pretty good. Anything else that I could get into that was competitive, I did it, yes. Ask me to sing what? No.

P: What type of work did you do?

A: It depended on the time of the season. For example, in the spring, watermelon season, I would wind up out there at the farmer's market loading box cars. They would bring in the truck, and you would load them from the truck back to the box car and stack them and that sort of stuff. Or you would be out in the fields, and you would load them out to the trucks. I did that. I worked in restaurants as a busboy, and I worked myself up to a waiter. If I am not mistaken, it was down near the intersection of College Park near **McGregor** where the Happy Buddha is, or used to be. It was called the Hideaway Restaurant and Lounge. It was tucked way back in there. I started out there bussing dishes and eventually became a waiter. I worked at the **Tasty Freeze**. You know, all the things high

school kids do, nothing in particular but anything that would pay.

P: Did you have time for a social life and dating?

A: Of course. Of course I did. You have to work it in somewhere. I did not say I worked all the time _____. I have a great story. I do. This is the best experience of my life. My wife hears the story, and she will laugh about it again. This young lady, her name was **Devotia Jewitt**. A great name, Devotia. I guess I was in ninth grade, tenth grade, and I was so hot to go to take her to the movies. The movies were on the corner of **Cranford** and **Anderson** Avenue, or MLK as we know it now, right near the corner. I had asked her and asked her and asked her. She lived with her grandmother, Mrs. **Logan**, and I knew from past experience that every time you went to the movie that was just a show thing. I mean, you just went with your girlfriend. You walked through all the guys who were hanging out like a bunch of ne'er-do-wells with nothing else to do but prowl the front of the movie, see who went in, who came out. Well, Devotia finally said yes. I got my little money I had saved up and went to buy these tickets. I went over and picked her up, and we were going to walk down to the movies. Well, we did, but to my chagrin, Mrs. Logan, her grandmother, was right behind us. She walked us to the movies and into the movies, and she sat right down. That was an experience, and that is why I am glad I never had girls. My buddies, I never lived it down. I think I suffered from that for the next three years in high school. Oh, taking Mrs. Logan to the movies again, huh, guy? All that sort of stuff. But yes, I had a social life.

P: Where else did you take a date?

A: Actually, there were not a whole lot of places. You could go to the drive-in, which is out there in the center of the city's business development center now out by the Orange Oil place out there off MLK. You could do that, or you could go down to the beach, **Bunts Beach**, which is down off whatever the road is there. Those things, or you could go to the little Lovers' Lane if you had a car. It was kind of hard walking up there. That was another story.

P: When did you have your first automobile?

A: Did I lead you into that, or did I lead you into that? I think I was a junior in high school. Some friends of mine, **Clarence Hill**, **Freddy Ross**, and I, we bought this 1949 Plymouth. It was battleship gray, and we painted it red and white with brushes. It was a great car. We knew a little bit about auto mechanics, and we fixed it up. We painted it. It looked terrible. Everybody hated it, and they laughed. You know, it was like a gang of flies. We were all packed in there, you know. We were the only ones who had a car. I remember once we got it just right, and we decided we were going down to Miami to Joe's Chinese Restaurant along 7th

Avenue. We drove down 41, actually, up to Immokalee, down 29 and over that way. Of course, when we got down 29 to 41, the old Plymouth was running hot. We filled it from the canal with coke bottles of water, and somehow or another we got there. It kept running, and we got to Miami. When we got over there, the little money we had, we had used it all up and we did not have enough money to get back home. Adventurous? Yes. Smart? No, but we did it. Somebody remembered that we had a friend or somebody who lived over there, and we found them. Their mother sort of laughed at us. She said I **ain't gonna** to help you. Get your tails out of here. She was laughing, and we were out there getting our little heads together trying to figure out how we were going to get this Plymouth back across the state to Fort Myers. She gave us \$5 or \$3 or something, and we had gas. But that was not the end of the adventure. We left Miami, and we came up through Lauderdale. We came back over through **Palm Beach Boulevard**. Of course, I guess the statute of limitations has run out so I can tell this story. We got along to about where Riverdale High School is, and the car caught on fire. The wires burn out. Of course, we pulled over and let the smoke clear, and we got where we trying again, being the mechanics that we were. We saw this little service station, I guess gas station, you know, with the one light out front. This was 1:00 in the morning, and there was an old Cadillac over there. We took the wires off the Cadillac and put them in the Plymouth. Somehow or another, we got back home. So yes, we were adventurous, and that was our first car. I think we paid \$75 or something, all of us, maybe \$100. We put all our money together. I think we sold it for \$125 or something like this, I do not know. We made money on the deal.

[End of Side A1]

P: During those years that you were growing up in Fort Myers, were either of your parents active in the community?

A: Not really. No, they were not. My mother was too busy working. She had a little business. She was the entrepreneur. She sold cosmetics, called Sweet Georgia Brown Cosmetics, out of a little case like the _____. I remember as a kid, I used to sell those things for her. She would say, all right, I am going to work. You have to sell those things. Of course, I would always go around, and all the little ladies in the neighborhood just thought I was the cutest little thing to see this little boy coming with a **bag** to try to sell me cosmetics. Mrs. _____, you look good with this. Try it. I had quite a few sales.

P: Who would you say during that period of time exerted the greatest influence on your life?

A: I still say it was my mother. Obviously, I am looking back now. You look at the conditions and the circumstances that she faced, they were not insurmountable.

It was just something that happened. You had to deal with it, and you could confront it. She confronted a lot of adversity, and she dealt with, and she had all us little hungry brats running around there. I tell you, that really impressed me. I am still impressed by it, even today. That is why I have so much difficulty when I see people today saying, well, I can't, I can't do this or I need that. I take the attitude that people will offer you a handout to help you. They will help you help yourself, but if you do not try to help yourself, so what? That is the attitude. My mom always took the attitude, I do not need your help, I will do it my damn self. She said y'all listen to me, y'all can do it, too. And we did. So to answer your question, my mom.

P: Were there other people in the black community who impressed you?

A: Oh yes, there were a number of people who impressed me. **Dr. Gilmore**, for example, with the NAACP and the things that he did. **Marvin Davies**, who was here at one time. He used to be on Governor [Bob] Graham's [of Florida, 1979-1987] staff. He now lives in St. Pete, in that area. Marvin did things with young people, young fourteen-, fifteen-year-old kids like myself. At that time, helped us get focused and really politicized us to some extent. Showed us that there were other things in life you could do. You did not have to relegate yourself to wherever it was that you were at that time. If you had aspirations of moving on, then certainly it was there, you could do it, but you had to be tough and tenacious and just do not quit. That is what many of us did. And we listened. I know that there were people in my class, like **Jay Sullivan**, he is a doctor or a principal or something. But we have medical doctors, we have principals, we have lawyers and judges come out of that little old graduating class of 1964 at Dunbar. We probably had a total population graduating class of sixty-four in 1964. We had people around us who would push us, people like Martha Williams. She is a retired math teacher from the Lee County school system. She had a sense about her. She could laugh with us, she could joke with us, but we knew that there was a limit, there was a line. You know when **Big Mart** drew the line, you did not cross that line. She knew how hard to push us, and we knew how hard we could push the envelope that way. But she knew also that there was a lot of potential there, and she encouraged us. The important thing about her is that what she would do was pat you on the back. Not literally but, you know, one big **atta-boy** to you, son, or daughter. That was more important than being able to winning it all, to have someone encourage you or to tell you that you can do it, or you are doing a good job. That meant a lot to many of my classmates. There were small businesspeople in the community who did well, **McCutchin** and those folks like that. They just did what they had to do, and they did very well. There were many successful businesses on MLK or Anderson Avenue at the time that are no longer there because of, I think, government intervention, where the government went through and any number of changes were made. For example, they took away the on-street parking, and they made it no parking. If your businesses are

right up to the sidewalk and you do not have parking behind you, where are you going to go? Where are your customers going to park? Are they going to block away and come back? No. They will go park at the mall where they can walk right out the door and right in or go to a strip shopping center where they walk and walk right in. But those folks struggled, and they did well. The myth of the highway that is coming that has finally gotten here in 2000, I mean, when I was in high school, they were talking about widening Anderson Avenue. That was in 1964. Good Lord, Vernon, this is forty years ago, thirty-six years ago, whatever it was. But it is here. So, it was pressures that were there that made those people who succeeded, I think they were sort of like heroes. They were strong, and they were adaptive, and they were able to survive some way or another under those circumstances. People like that, those are the kind of people. We had the ministers. We had those folks who made a difference in people's lives.

P: I know that you were young, but when Brown versus Board of Education decision came about, do you have any memory of...?

A: No. I do not have any memory of that as such, but I do remember in terms of education, I do recall the stories of reality. A guy named **John Nightingale** who used to live up in Charlotte County. They used to bus the black kids all the way from Charlotte County to Fort Myers because Dunbar was the only high school in this area. Charlotte County got smart. They said to hell with that—excuse my language—we are going to stop shipping those black kids down here. We are going to keep them up here and get their fees for them up here in Charlotte County. That was long before **Blalock** versus Lee County School Board, which was in 1968. I think Charlotte County got smart in 1958 or 1960, whatever the numbers were. But those are the people from Charlotte County, from Punta Gorda and **Folktown** and Immokalee and then down in Naples. They would bring kids up here because of school boards' attitudes about desegregation. Rather than do what was required, they would pack everybody in here. That is what we had to deal with. But as far as Brown versus Board of Education, I do not know. I guess I probably would have been six or seven years old at the time.

P: To what degree were the public schools of Lee County segregated by the time you graduated from high school?

A: They were thoroughly segregated. The black kids went to Dunbar, Dunbar Elementary or Dunbar High School or Franklin Park Elementary, and the white kids went to Fort Myers High, or I guess Cypress High was built then, or North Fort Myers High. Those were the schools. You know, I am not counting all the elementary and Sanibel Elementary, those schools. I am talking about the major schools. But they were segregated, period. We knew that the schools were segregated and we knew that things were not right. We knew that the law required something different as students. But I guess in a false sense of bravado,

we sort of patted ourselves on the back and said, hell, we are better than all the little sorry butts over there at Fort Myers High. We are so much better than those kids. What do you mean we cannot go there? Notwithstanding the fact that we got used books or whatever, equipment and all that sort of stuff. But we did that, and we got it ourselves. We believed it.

P: Certainly, Dunbar did exceedingly well in athletics.

A: Yes. Dunbar did very well athletically. As a matter of fact, academically, we did very well too. I believe that the year I graduated or my junior year in high school, we had two or three kids who did exceptionally well on the national merit scholarship test. This is national, not even talking about the state of Florida, we had two or three kids from Dunbar who did exceptionally well. Some folks were even questioning, how did you cheat? How did you get that? But, you know, that just did not happen. The kids just had that ability. They did very well, and they knew how to take tests.

P: During that period of time, do you recall any people in the white community who you particularly respected?

A: There are a couple of families, in particular. When you say respected, it carries a connotation that I disrespected a lot of others, and I know that is not what you mean. But the fact of the matter is, **Phil and Melva Morse**, Phil is probably now a retired postman. Phil and Melva live down in **San Carlos** where they used to, last I knew of them. I have not seen them in years, but they had two boys, **Randy and Ronald**. I remember them [from when] they were that tall. Now, they are grown men. They were called the **Aquanuts**, but that is a whole different story. But I respected Phil and Melva. They were very good friends. **George and Patty Nesterman**. I consider them to be very good friends. Patty and George are divorced. They have gone on and live different lives, different families, but I consider them to be very good friends. I remember when I left here in 1969, George was at the U. S. Fire Service. George and Patty had me over one day. They had met Audrea. Patty said, if you were to move in the neighborhood, we would be the first ones over with a chocolate cake to invite you to the neighborhood, welcome you to the neighborhood. I said okay, sure. That is not going to happen. That will never happen in this lifetime. So, when we did move back here in 1978, we bought a house in **Prince Field**, which is in south Fort Myers off College Parkway and **Winkler Road**. George and Patty lived down off Winkler Road near where **Clancy's** is across over the **Whiskey Creek Bridge** there as you head up McGregor? Right to the left there, they lived down at **Edgemere**, down at the end of the there right on Whiskey Creek. George knew I was back, and lo and behold, one day, we were messing around in the hot spring

or something or whatever it was, and here comes George and Patty with a dripping chocolate cake. Those are the kind of people you grow with. Yes, you know those people, you respect those people. There were other folk coming up as a child whom I knew, I met. Young white kids, we played together. They would go on with their life. I went on with my life. We were just kids doing whatever kids did. But the community was thoroughly segregated. But there were some good people, a lot of good people. But you got so many people who would go with the flow. They were afraid to stand up and be counted. I tell my sons this, to do it all the time. I say I am always getting in trouble, but I am able to sleep at night and I feel comfortable when I go to bed at night. A couple of examples since I have been a judge. Most recently, they have this judges' conferences, and at the judges' conference, they split us into two groups. Actually, we all met in this big room, and they put a divider in the room. They gave some blue cards and some red cards. Then they showed a vignette on a television screen over here and one over here, and this group could not see what this group was doing. Make a decision, etc. The first vignette was a black guy who was charged with a crime. I am in the blue group, and of course, that is what I see. People on the red group, they had a black woman who is charged with a crime, and you had to make a decision as the judge. Well, we all made decisions, and then we discussed it. I asked the chairman of the conference, why is it that whenever there is a crime, it has to have a black face? He said, well, we did not mean that. I said, well, no, you did not mean it but that is perception that is out there, because I have been doing criminal work for the last eight years and I know by the sheer numbers that is just not the case. You know it is not the case, but that is what you are portraying. You are purveying this attitude out there, and what you are telling 500 judges in here, this is what you are going to see in a criminal circumstance, whether it be a black male or female. If it is crime, it is going to have a black face, period. He was very apologetic, and the room got quiet. Everybody kind of avoided me from that point. I said gee, guys, I shower. I am clean. At any rate, the point is you just cannot go with the flow for the sake of going. Some folk would rather not rock the boat. I guess I am used to living in choppy water, ever since I was a kid when they were trying to get me some direction in my life. But I do that, and that is what I try to impress upon my children, my young men. If you believe in something, say it. If you see something wrong, try to do what is right to make it right. Otherwise, you just feel bad about yourself. When you get up in the morning, you look in the mirror and you drop your head. I do not like that.

P: Going back to your high school days and earlier, were there any family celebrations or traditions that have stuck with you?

A: Birthdays. No, I say that [in jest]. We did not do the things like Kwanza. We did the things like Christmas like everybody else, you know, the holidays of the 4th and Christmas and that sort of thing. One thing that we did do, and fortunately my wife has raised these two young men to experience it, and that is we always,

at least once a week, we sat as a family and we ate together as a family. It was a dinner, and we did it at least once a week, sometimes twice or three times but she had to work and that sort of thing. But we do the same thing. Audrea grew up in a family of nine children, and mom and dad were there and they raised them, and that is what you did. You sat down. My two sons sat down to dinner, and we did it two and three and four days a week at the house. We sat there and we had dinner together, and we talked about what is bothering you or what was good and what was bad or just talked. That is important, because what it does is it allows a child to get a sense of family. It allows the child to have a sense of belonging. It even allows them a chance to vent. Sometimes things are bothering your children, and you never know that something is bothering them unless you give them an opportunity to say it. Unfortunately, my youngest one, he has a habit of starting. When we sit down, okay, Justin, it is your turn. He will say, well, I was born on September 10, and he goes forward. So, by the time we finish the fourth bottle of wine, he is finishing.

P: When you graduated from high school, you went to college. Was there any particular reason why you chose the college that you did?

A: Yes. I chose Allen University because of Jim Stevens. Jim Stevens was a graduate of Allen University. Actually, it was Allen University and another school, but he knew that he could get me in there and with the financial assistance that I needed. Academically, I had no problem. I could have gone anywhere. If people were paying for that, it did not matter. If I went, they would pay my tuition, but I had to live and all those other things. I just could not afford it, so I went to Allen. That is why I went there. Jim was very instrumental in that.

P: Was that a pleasant and enjoyable experience?

A: College is always a good experience, especially just getting away from home. Get your kids away from home if you can. You have some who are on the way. Send them away, please. They will enjoy it. It was a pleasant experience. It was a learning experience. You learned how to deal in different circumstances that growing up at home in an insulated society, I mean, you are dealing with people from all over the country, all over the world, in a whole different ball game. It is a whole different ball game, and you just have to learn to adapt. You have to learn to cope with all sorts of things, and you learn.

P: Did you learn about Columbia?

A: Yes, I learned about Columbia. That was the first place in my life I had ever seen snow. But of course, I went to Columbia with my Florida overcoat, which was a windbreaker, and I froze my **toches** off out there. I learned in a hurry you needed more than just a windbreaker. Columbia, yes, it is a good town. It was at that time

and still is today. They have Fort Jackson there, and everybody who has ever been in the Army has gone through Fort Jackson at some point or another in their life. The city itself, the University of South Carolina is there. You D_____ College across the street from Allen University. There were so many things you could do in and around there.

P: How did you meet your wife?

A: Do you want the official story, or do you want the truth?

P: "You could not handle the truth." The first time saw her, we were taking a battery of exams. They kind of **carted you all into this** _____. Allen is a church school, a Methodist school. They have you all in this big old auditorium where you have to have chapel, and we were given a battery of tests. I saw this tall good-looking girl. She came down the aisle to my right and sat in front of me, or was it behind me? I think she sat behind me. That is what it was, because I was always looking around just trying to see what was going on. That was the first time I saw her. Of course, I made it a point to get in her way so there I could catch her attention somehow or another. She sort of ignored me initially. I do recall I was on one of the benches along the sidewalk that led up to **Coppen Hall**, which was one of the girls' dorms, where she lived. Of course, I had staked this area out. I knew full well that she would come by there eventually, and she came by. I do not remember what I said, but it was something outrageous, something like I know you want to talk to me. It was something like that, and she ignored me. But eventually, we started talking to each other, and one thing led to another and we are married and we have all these wonderful children.

P: Were you married before either of you graduated?

A: Yes. She was in graduate school, and I had not graduated. See, when I came back to Edison, I had gotten out of the military and I had basically two years under my belt. I had to finish. I was a rising junior when we got married, and she was in graduate school. That is the way it was.

P: Was this a difficult time financially?

A: Not really. As a matter of fact, I thought we were doing quite well. I never realized how poor we were. I thought we were doing quite well. She had a graduate assistantship. I had my GI bill benefits. I had a part-time job in a little grocery store **Charles Ruleman Supervalu** Grocery Store in Oxford, Ohio. After _____ making hamburgers, I decided I would never eat another hamburger in my life. It was one of those little corner stores in downtown Oxford, Ohio, and all the college kids went in there. I helped in the butcher area and everything else. I did it all, but Charlie _____ the hamburger.

P: How was **Miami of Ohio**?

A: It was an experience. It was very difficult for me to sort of make a transition. Going to school at Edison was fine. I was working during the day. I was going to classes at night. Most of the people who took night classes were young adults. They were not the really competitive little cut-throats, little darlings, I saw at Miami. Then I get to Miami, and I get these little bright-eyed gleaming little kids right out of high school who are sharp as a tack and gleaming like a saber. I mean, they are coming at you. It is just going to be tough, man. I really had to compete with these kids. It was a different type of competition, intense, but I rose to the challenge. It was just a different experience, but a good experience.

P: How about law school?

A: I found law school to be fun, and I mean it literally. I was older than most of the kids who were coming into law school. Most of them were coming right out of college. They were twenty, twenty-one years old. I had been in the military for three years. In that three year **interim**, I had been through boot camp, and your first year in law school is sort of like a boot camp. They grind you and they beat you. Have you seen that silly movie called the Paper Chase? It is very similar to that. They grind you, and if you are not up to it, you just will not make it. You will either wind up falling off by the wayside or committing suicide or doing something else. I decided that is where I wanted to be. I did not want to commit suicide. I was too chicken for that. I did not want to do anything else but that, so I stayed. I made some very good friends there. As a matter of fact, one of my best buddies, I met him in undergraduate school. He was one of those kids from **Powhatan, Ohio**. His name is **H. Douglas Spuletech, III**. I met him at undergraduate school at Miami. He and his fiancé, Jane, they went to George Washington Law School in D. C., and I was at American University, Audrea and I. We communicated back and forth as best you could. Even today, we communicate every now and then. If we happen to see somebody at an ABA conference, or if he has got a problem down here and he needs some information or a reference to someone, he calls, or I will call him. That is a lifelong friendship.

P: Your first job as a lawyer?

A: I think a much more fun question would be my first job out of law school, or in law school. I worked for the Federal Trade Commission, summer job, and I just knew I was hot stuff. I was good. That was at the time they were doing the investigation on eight major oil companies. Remember way back when we had the oil embargo and cars were lined up and all of that sort of stuff back in the 1970s? I was there. Not only was I there then, but I was also there at the time that the Watergate hearings and all that stuff was going on. One of my law school professors was _____ **and sued** by the Nixon people. **Judge Sewicker** was

represented by my law school professor, a guy by the name of **Professor Horning**. He went over to represent Judge Sewicker and _____ action that the Nixon people had **filed**. Anyway, that is another story. It was a great experience. But my first job, yes, I worked at the Federal Trade Commission, and I just knew I was God's gift to the legal profession. I was so sharp and erudite and just prepared and ready to do the things that all lawyers do. My first job, they assigned me to a secretary, and she gave me a bunch of toting and lifted to do. I carried a lot of boxes for the longest period of time. It was a humbling experience, but eventually I got out of that and got into to doing the actual research and the writing involved in that matter. My first job out of law school, we moved back to South Carolina and I worked for the South Carolina State Department of Education. Audrea worked over at **Dent** Junior High in Columbia, and I had worked in the legal research and writing department up there for a man by the name of **William Buzby**. He was the state superintendent of education. William may not be right, but his last name, I know, was Buzby. It was primarily giving the board legal advice and research and writing and doing little books like *Student Rights and Responsibilities*. That is a misnomer. Students did not have any rights. That is what it was called, though. I did that and stayed there for a year, and that is when I came back home.

P: How did you decide to move back to Fort Myers?

A: Here is that fellow again. Jim Stevens keeps coming up. He was working at the time for **Oscar Corman**. Oscar was mayor of the city at the time. His son now, Tommy, is a circuit judge here in Fort Myers as well. Oscar, they had created this office called the Office of Community Relations, and it had to do with civil rights regulations and implementations within the city. They needed a director of that office, and Jim knew that I was in Columbia and knew that I was eventually going to come back home. He said look, why don't you come on back down here and we will give you a job. We can pay you some money, and you can study for your bar and all that sort of stuff. I said I do not know. I thought about it for a while, and eventually I am back. I worked over there for a year, and then I moved over to the county where I worked for less than a year. Then I got my license, and that is when I opened my practice. So, that was Jim Stevens again. He was instrumental in my coming back to River City.

P: Let me go back to your family a minute. You mentioned that you have two sons. What are their names, and what years were they born?

A: **Isaac** was born in December 4, 1974. He will be twenty-six this year. **Justin** was born September 10, 1978, which makes him twenty-two this year.

P: Have they gone to college?

- A: Yes. The oldest one is a graduate of Princeton University. He graduated in the class of 1996. The youngest one would have been in the class of 2000 at Princeton, but he decided that he wanted to “find himself,” and he dropped out for a while. He went to school at Florida State and took a lot of classes and was getting within X number of hours of getting a degree and decided that, well, I cannot live with myself if I do not graduate from Princeton. I have got to go back. I have got to get my degree from Princeton. He sat down, and he had that conversation with me and his mother. I told him, I said, son, I am really proud of you. I mean, that is great. That really shows maturity on your part, but my only question to you is how are you going to pay for it? So, he is now scurrying. His mother gave me that look. If you have been married, you know the look. He will be going back in the fall to finish. I told him he would be the only six-year senior in the history of Princeton University.
- P: You have observed race relations here from a totally segregated society to whatever degree of integration that we have now. What would be your overall analysis of how far Fort Myers and Lee County have moved?
- A: I think Fort Myers and Lee County have moved long ways, have made tremendous progress and strides, and I am proud to say that I am from here. I know there was a time when I was practicing law, there were a lot of young black lawyers all over the state saying, man, how can you practice in Fort Myers? I said it is the worst place in the world, you cannot make any money, they treat you like dirt. It is a rotten place to be. I was lying because I knew I did not want their competition. Since then, I just look at things around me. I know there are a lot of instances where bad things happen to people. Some people do bad things to other people, and their reasons for doing them are just awful. They may be racially motivated, some are, and they just do it to people because they do not like them or because they have the power and the authority to do it and they do it. They misuse and abuse people. Overall, I think Fort Myers has come a long way, but you got to understand—and I say this to any minority person who wants to live here—if you have a strong sense of self and you know who you are and what you are all about, this other stuff does not matter. It is just fluff. I mean, it is a great place to live. You can raise your family here. You can make some money here, if that is what you are all about. You can make some good friends here, and you can have a good time with your friends. You can have a pretty good life. You may not make a whole lot of money. It all depends on what you are doing, though. Socially, there are stupid things people do. My wife and I will go to a place, and people will stand there and stare. I mean, white people stand there and stare. I say, gee, is my fly open? And I look around. It is rude to stand and stare at somebody, but that is home training. I cannot stop that. As I said to Audrea one day, you know, I must be quite an impressive guy if ____ people are

staring. So, it is all about our attitude, but I think we have come a long way. I know we have got a long way to go, also. About elected officials, I think some of our elected officials, what they do is, you know the whole expression, they lick their fingers and see which way the political winds are blowing and they go that way. But they have got to show leadership. They have got to be strong because that is what people expect of you. They elect you to lead. If you can show that and you can rationally explain what you did, people accept that. I say that, and I look at my career as a judge. I was elected originally back in 1980. I got 78 percent of the vote here in Lee County, right here in Lee County, a little old **berg**. I do not think anybody has ever gotten anything close to that since. I had a guy come tell me, a white fellow, all right, I like you. You are my friend. I have given to your campaign, I am helping you, but let me tell you something: do not buy any television. I said why not, Ed? He said, man, you do not want them to know you are black. I said, Ed, they know I am black. I am telling you, Ed had the best of intentions, but Ed has been getting some bad reads from some bad people that he has been around. He was doing it to help me, God bless him. But the fact is that if I could change everybody's mind and make everybody Miss Goody Two Shoes, I would do it, but it is not going to happen. Because we are so different, and that is what makes us strong. But I also believe that you have got to show strength of leadership. Again, since I have become a judge, I know that over the years I have made some decisions in some cases that have frosted some people's toenails, as the expression goes. But I also know that the decisions that I make, they are well-reasoned. Probably some of the most controversial decisions I have made are decisions regarding, you know, everybody is in favor of the "death penalty." I have had cases where people have been charged and convicted of capital offenses where the jury has recommended the death penalty and I said no, and the reason I said no was because the law and popular opinion at the time—the vote, that seven to five majority vote there—were different. Then you had the executive branch, or the prosecution, saying you got to follow what the people say. No. Because we always did exactly what the people. Well, I would not be here. I mean, literally, I would not be here because we would still have separate but equal facilities under **Plessey** and all those other cases. So, you have to show leadership.

P: When you became a circuit judge, it was by appointment?

A: No, it was not by appointment. I was originally appointed as a county judge and then elected. I had to stand for election. They changed the rules. When I came along, you had to stand for election at the next available election after your appointment. But now, apparently, it is my understanding that if you get an appointment you have to have at least one full year in office before you can stand for election. Boy, that is a deal. I wish it had been that way for me, but it was not. At any rate, back to your question, when it came to the circuit judgeship, well, there were a couple of judges and there were a couple of vacancies, three as a

matter of fact, that had come up. Governor Martinez was the governor at the time, and he had his committees or his people on his committees, and my name was submitted to him three times, for three different circuit judgeships. Lo and behold, he did not see fit to appoint me. So, I said that is fine. I think it was **Mr. Fred Dudley** who had the...

[End of Side A2]

A: As I said, I know the sequence of the **weather** around here. When it rains, it rains in the afternoon. Well, we had an announcement. We were going to make the official announcement for the position. We had lined up everybody, and we were going to do it on the courthouse steps like everybody does. We had about fifty people out there with placards and signs and had called in all the media and everything. We set this for, like, 1:30 in the afternoon. We knew it rained at 2:00 everyday in the summer in Fort Myers almost like clockwork. This particular day, everybody was there at 1:30, and I was supposed to come out and start about 1:25. Boom, downpour, and we all have to rush inside. We are in the lobby of the county commission building over here. Now, fifty people with placards and with the TV lights and cameras, it looked like there were 1,000 people when they showed it on television. I think one of the television stations reported the lead-in with something like Anderson campaign got off with a bang or something, and they said with thunder and lightning or whatever. But the fact is there was a fellow who had indicated that he was going to run as well. I said that is your problem. You know, I have run before. I do not care, do what you got to do. We are going to run, etc., etc. He decided he did not want to do it after that, after he saw that. So when qualifying came, no opposition, I am circuit judge. That was two terms ago. I am at the end of my second terms. That is the way it happened.

P: When you came back here to practice law, who were the circuit judges at that time?

A: **Jack Schunover** from Punta Gorda. **John Sheer**, my best buddy, old Florida cracker. He and I fish all the time together. **Judge Wally Pack**. This was here in Fort Myers. Who else was here? **Judge Gerald** was still on the bench. I think that was it.

P: Did you ever have a case before Judge Gerald?

A: No, I had never had a case before Judge Gerald, but **Mrs. Pickering**, let me tell you about her. Greatest lady in the world. She was his secretary. I remember one day I was up there doing some research, and I made the mistake of coming in and trying to walk through there at lunchtime to get to the library. Well, in order to get to the library, you had to go past Mrs. Pickering. [Grunt.] I said, excuse me, ma'am, I am sorry. I did not mean to come through here. I apologize profusely.

And I got out. I was telling some of the guys, and they said you are crazy, you do not do that. I mean, who am I? I am a young, dumb, stupid lawyer, right? I just do not know any better. So what I did was, I went across the street to this little restaurant at the time called **Pate's**. The next day, I was over there at lunch, and everyday on the table, Pate would have a little bottle with a chrysanthemum in it. Of course, when I finished my lunch that day, I took that mum with me. I went up to Mrs. Pickering and I said, Mrs. Pickering, this is for you. Thank you, young man, you are so sweet, or something to that effect. I will tell you, I could go in that library anytime I wanted to from that point on when nobody else could get in there. She was a great lady. But no, I never had to practice before Judge Gerald.

P: He had a reputation for being stern.

A: Oh yes, I have heard that. That is one of the things they said about me at some point or another in my career, but I have had sort of a make over or something. I have changed a little bit, I think.

P: What type of cases have you generally heard since you have been a circuit judge?

A: I have heard them all. I have done it all. I have heard from capital murder, rape, robbery, mayhem, I have done for the last eight years, to multimillion dollar civil claims to injunctions to mortgage foreclosures to landlord/tenant cases to you name it, to glorified small claims cases. I have heard it all. It has been a varied experience.

P: In your judicial career, have you ever been threatened?

A: A couple of times. Even as a lawyer, I was threatened. You know, you were talking about a segregated society. I represented a young man, one of four, who were accused of assaulting and raping three women, and one of them worked in a prosecutor's office. Needless to say, they were gung ho to get the rascals. I represented my client, did what I had to do notwithstanding the results, but the fact is that when it was over, or even before it was over, I got letters. You know, in Chicago or Philadelphia, we hang your kind. I got that stuff in the mail. So, I sort of chuckled because I gave it to another lawyer who was representing one of the other defendants in the case and he said hey man, I am walking on the other side of the street of you. I do not want to be seen with you. I said, there is no honor among friends here, among lawyers. You guys hurt my feelings. But that sort of stuff. Then once I became a judge, I received threats in cases where security has been beefed up and which we thought were pretty credible threats. So yes, it has happened, and it is not something that you look forward to. I also have learned that you cannot let other people define your life, but you do not live foolishly either. You cannot let them pin you or put you in a box because,

otherwise, you will not be able to live. I live my life considering the quality and the seriousness of the threats as pretty much the same, and we modify, we do some things a little differently, but basically it is the same.

P: In the courtroom, do you feel that you have an equal amount of respect as other judges, even though they may be of another race?

A: Yes. I do not think that is a problem. Some people have attitudes, but that is their problem. I do not have a problem, see, because I have the gavel. I have the final say so. I have the ultimate power. I can exercise it, or I do not have to exercise it. I think a lot of times, not exercising that power of contempt, you know, because it is awesome, the power that you have as a judge. It is incredible. If a lawyer or _____ does something contemptuous, I can lock them up right then and there. Put them over there with Bubba. I mean, you do not want to go with Bubba in the jail. You just do not want that. That is awful. By the time it got up to the district court of appeals for some sort of writ, well, he has been over there or she has been over there a while. The knowledge that they know that I have that kind of authority, and I rarely use it, it is just something that just has not happened. I mean, I have had people go nuts and go crazy. Sometimes they lose it, sometimes they want to vent. There was one judge, he is on our state supreme court right now, **Major Harvey**, he says, you know, once I have sentenced a man to death, he has five minutes to vent his _____. I mean, you could bring _____ everyday. Once you have decided against a person and they lose, let them vent. Let them say what they have to say because, a lot of times, that is what it is. Then you cut it off because if every time somebody vented you hammered them or put them away, there just would not be enough room over there. If someone breathed the wrong way or looked askance, well....

P: How do you feel about the effectiveness and fairness of our judicial system?

A: I think our system is effective. I think the fairness of our system is only limited by the types and quality of the people who administer it. By that, I mean if you have got a judge who has some sort of an agenda, he is just not going to be fair, or he is going to figure out a way how to give the appearance of being fair when in fact he is not. I think that is a pretty fair way of describing our system. There are limitations. See, the good thing about being a judge, Vernon, when you make decisions, if you know....for example, I have got this case right here. I wrote some stuff up in here, and I am just sitting on it. I am letting it just kind of stew over here, sort of like making a soup or stew pot, just let it sit there and stew for a while. Save it a day or two. It gets better. The thing about a judge is this. If you make a decision and you are wrong, and you know you are wrong, you have to have the integrity and the personal strength to be able to go back and correct that, and a judge can do that on his own motion without one of the litigants having to come forward and say, judge, you made a mistake. You know from

your own experiences, when you have flubbed up, you know it. Instinctively, you know it. Sometimes you just have to suck it up and go over there and do what you have to do and take the heat because that is what it is all about. I wish I was perfect. I mean, I keep telling my wife that, but she does not seem to believe me. She has convinced me that I am not.

P: Is there anything else I should have asked you that I have not?

A: Gosh, I did not know you had so many questions. You talked me dry. I have gone through a cup of coffee, and I could use another one right about now.

P: Well, it has certainly been a great pleasure to have the opportunity to interview you.

A: It has been fun talking to you. I mean, there is so much in there. We will talk about it later when you do what you have to do. Do your thing, and we will sit and we will talk.

P: If you had a copy of your family genealogy, that would be great to include. If you do not, I understand.

A: I do not know. We have a family reunion that is coming up here, up in Lee County, Georgia. There is that Lee County again. Believe me, I am serious. My wife is from Lee County, South Carolina, and I am here in Lee County, Florida. I will tell you what, I will let you have this, I will let you look at it. This is my grandma. This is her daughter, **Stroth Lee**, who had a daughter, **Ann Evy**, who had all those children. She had her oldest daughter, **Charlie Lou**, who had all those children. Anyway, it starts right here.

[End of Interview.]