

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project

Milton P. Crenchaw
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
October 27, 2009
Little Rock, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 16th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
 - annotations for clarification and identification; and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Milton P. Crenchaw on October 27, 2009, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: We're in Little Rock, Arkansas, at—uh—721
Abigail Street . . .

Milton Crenchaw: Seventeen.

SL: Seventeen twenty-one Abigail Street in—uh—Little Rock,
Arkansas. I'm talkin' with Milton Pitts Crenchaw. My name is
Patrick Scott Lunsford. Today's date is October 27. The year is
2009. Um—Mr. Crenchaw, I'm gonna ask you if it's all right with
you that the Pryor Center—uh—videotape and audio-record this
interview and that we archive it and use it for educational
purposes at the University of Arkansas—uh—housed in the
Special Collections Department. Is that okay with you?

MC: That's okay with me.

SL: That's a great answer. [*Laughs*] Well, all right. Now, we're
gonna—um—talk about your life, and I'm gonna go back to your
earliest memories, and I—first of all, I want to know when and
where you were born.

MC: I was born here in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1914 Dennison,
January the thirteenth, 1919.

SL: And who were your mom and your dad?

MC: My dad was the Reverend Joseph Clark Crenshaw. My mother was born—maybe in Alabama. Her name was Ethel Pitts, and then she—when she married, she married my father, and—and she was—uh—Ethel Pitts Crenshaw.

[00:01:28] SL: Okay. And do you—uh—kn—kn—know your grandparents' names?

MC: Just enough. There, my grandfather was Milton Crenshaw, born somewhere—maybe in South Carolina or in Tennessee. And I'm—he—he was born in 1852 in slavery.

SL: And what about your grandmother on—on your daddy's side?

MC: My grand—I don't know where she was born. Uh—he was remarried and [*unclear word*] in Memphis or else down in Marianna, Arkansas. That's all I remember.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Do you—did you know her maiden name?

MC: No, I didn't.



SL: Okay, now, what about your mom's grandparents or your mom's parents?

MC: My mother's was named Pitts, and they came from the Sessions out of Alabama—uh—off of the—off of the—born in—in slavery.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: And—uh—the Sessions [*unclear words*] was—the—was, I guess, the ma—master at that time, and when he sla—after slavery, he changed his name to George Pitts Washington. G. W. Pitts.

SL: Now, Sessions was the name of the slave owner?

MC: Slave owner. Same one that's—that's the senator now. He came off his plantation.

SL: Is that right? And—uh—your—uh—father's father was also in slavery. Was his—his—he was a slave, and what—do you know his slave owner's name?

MC: I don't know his slave owner's name. Only thing I know that they—uh—left maybe Tennessee or somewhere, and when they got as far as Memphis, Tennessee—uh—his—all his family died from the black plague or blu—bubonic plague, except him. And the white people took him in, and he stayed on their plantation until he was of age . . .

SL: Uh . . .

MC: . . . and then he moved cross the river into Lee County.

[00:03:24] SL: Now, when you say "of age," do you mean . . .

MC: Um—well—well up in—between—um—seventeen and twenty, I imagine.

SL: I see.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Young adulthood.

MC: Right.

SL: Um—and did you ever know your grandparents at all?

MC: No, I didn't.

SL: You never met 'em?

MC: Never met them.

[00:03:39] SL: Um—do you remember your father ever talking about his mom and dad?

MC: Yes, he's—his father was a—a good worker, but a short man, and then my father was tall, like, about six feet and—but his father was short. And I—may—I guess he had a limp or something like that, but he was a excellent individual that—a sharecropper. And he worked to take care of his family. Musta been about eight or nine of 'em in his family.

SL: And—um—did he ever talk about his mom? Did your father ever talk about his mother?

MC: No. Well, I met his mother. His mother—named Mary—and I don't know what her last name was before she became a Crenchaw, but it's a whole slew of 'em down in Marianna that I'm kin to . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: . . . yet. And I've gone down there—I haven't been down there

the last twenty-five or thirty years, but we used to go down while she was livin' and while he had some brothers down there.

SL: So you remember meeting her, then?

MC: Oh, yes. I slept in her bed with her when I was a little boy.

SL: Is that right?

MC: Mh-hmm.

[00:04:41] SL: Well, did she tell you any stories? Do you remember any conversations you had with her?

MC: I don't remember anything about her, but she was a good-lookin'—look like an Indian lady that—uh—was a—a good cook and—and stout.

SL: And stout.

MC: Mh—mh-hmm.

SL: Uh—do you remember—was it her house that you visited?

MC: It was a . . .

SL: Was it one of her kids' houses?

MC: Well, that was of an—I guess she got it from her husband. I'm—he wasn't livin' when—when I—my—I—I remember when he died and my father had a—a—just a few dollars and he rode the bus down to—to bury his father. Now, my father left Marianna when he was twenty-eight years of age. He come to go to school here at Baptist College sometimes around—hmm—1907

or something like that.

SL: Mh-hmm. Uh—do you remember much about the house—your grandmother's house?

MC: No, I don't remember anything anymore than I was a—I was a— couldn't've been over six or seven, if a—if that age.

SL: Uh-huh. Was it in town . . .

MC: ?A wooden house.?

SL: . . . or out in the country?

MC: Out in the country.

SL: It was?

MC: Mh-hmm.

[00:05:42] SL: Um—so did you visit her in the summers, then? Is that . . .

MC: I've gone down—I guess I went down there three or four times with my father.

SL: Uh-huh. And—um—so was it still a working farm at that time? Did they . . .



MC: He—he sharecropped for—he was on some white person's—uh— farm.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: And he was a sharecropper. Never made anything. Just—he ended up in September or—or October getting enough to—to

tide 'em over the—the winter.

[00:06:17] SL: Mh-hmm. Do you remember—um—uh—any of the farming activity when you used to visit your grandmother?

MC: No, I never paid any attention to it at the time there because he would go up in the woods and cut trees down and—they call it makin' new ground. So in the wintertime, that's what they would lay it by and go up there and cut the trees, and my father would go up there with him.

SL: Okay.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Uh—makin' new ground.

MC: New ground. Mh-hmm.

SL: Uh—is it—so they would plant that, or they would . . .

MC: They—they were—they were workin' on somebody's farm.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: They were just—mh-hmm—sharecroppin'.

SL: Um—was there a—um—a creek or a river on the farm?

MC: Yeah, [*unclear words*] it ran through there. Um—I don't even know the name of it there, but—uh—it's on this side of for—ran out through Forrest City on down to Helena and ran through Marianna and a whole lots of little towns that I can't remember now, but I remember then that—um—didn't have paved streets

like we have goin' 40—goin' to Memphis. Uh—they had dirt, and my father went down one time, and it took him almost two weeks to get his car through, because it had rained . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: . . . and it got stuck and broke an axle. Had to send to Memphis to get one, and then somebody had to come by and—and fix it for him.

[00:07:42] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, did your grandmother's house have electricity?

MC: No, they didn't have no [*laughs*] electricity. No outside—everything was outside toilet. It was just primitive.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Uh-huh.

SL: Uh-huh. So—uh—but you were usually there in the summer, then, I bet.

MC: I imagine so.

SL: So you . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: It was never too cold when you were there.

MC: Yeah, I never paid any attention to it. [*SL laughs*] The weather didn't ever affect me. [*SL laughs*] Uhn-uhn.

SL: You were ready, whatever the weather was.

MC: Whatever—whatever it was . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: . . . I was ready for it.

[00:08:11] SL: Um—did the house—um—was it just a—a—a
four-room house, or did it . . .

MC: I—I don't remember that. Only thing I remember that when I'd
go down there, she had a big—uh—bed that had about six or
seven inches of feathers in there, and I enjoyed getting in there
and just sinkin' on down in—in that feather bed. I enjoyed that.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Did they have a—a sleepin' porch? Do you remember a sleepin'
porch or . . .

MC: I don't know. They may have had one for the summertime,
because, generally speaking, the wind would bring breeze
through from the front door and straight on through the houses.
And if you had two or three rooms, and then you go right on
through the back door. And I remember that, see, 'cause you
could run straight through the house. Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah, they did that . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . so the ventilation would be good.

MC: Right.

SL: Keep it cool . . .

MC: Right.

SL: . . . uh—in the summer.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: And I bet it helped it in the winter . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . when they closed it up and . . .

MC: They'd close it up there and then . . .

SL: . . . the rooms would stay a little warmer.

MC: . . . and then you had—you'd keep it—if you had wood co—
wood—uh—fires—you'd keep—you know, when it was real cold.

[00:09:21] SL: Do you remember her cookstove?

MC: Oh yes, I remember that. I don't know how it looked; the only
thing I know that I enjoyed—she could cook well.

SL: Did the—uh—dining table have chairs, or did it have benches?

MC: I don't remember that.

SL: You don't remember that?

MC: No.

SL: Um—what about—do you remember any livestock there on the
farm?

MC: I don't remember nothing but just—I guess when I was so small,

I went there to play.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And then just to be with my grandmother.

SL: Were there other kids there when you'd come?

MC: I imagine so. My father had—it was nine brothers and sisters, and they lived somewhere around there. I didn't know anything about them, but I . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: . . . all I just knew—I knew her.

[00:10:03] SL: When you went there with your father, di—you traveled by car?

MC: Well, after—after I got large enough, he—um—he had a little old Ford. Didn't have any windows in it—had no heat or no nothin', but just—it was whole lots better than ridin' in the wagon down that way.

SL: Now, did you used to go there in the wagon before you had the car?

MC: I never did go there.

SL: You never did that . . .

MC: But that's the only way—I don't know how they'd travel between Little Rock and Memphis, but whatever it was, he'd catch it and go as far as Forrest City, and then I guess they'd walk down

the—the—the ten miles or so.

SL: Wow.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[00:10:37] SL: Um—well, do you remember any of your dad's brothers and sisters?

MC: We had one that came up here. There's several brothers came up after he had his—uh—he—he put two years in Baptist College, and then he went in the business of—of—uh—tailoring and cleaning clothes. And he stayed there sixty-five years on Ninth Street.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And then he started preachin' when he was about in his seventies or somethin' like that. Good man all the time, though.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Real good.

[00:11:14] SL: Well, let's go ahead and talk about your father, then.

MC: Okay.

SL: Um—you said that he—uh—left the farm and came to—uh—Little Rock . . .

MC: Little Rock.

SL: . . . to go to Baptist College.

MC: That's right.

SL: Uh—so I'm just gonna guess that Baptist College was an all-black college.

MC: All-black school and . . .

SL: And . . .

MC: . . . almost the same—oh, I imagine—and—and he may have been fifteen or twenty years of age. I don't know when he started, but he came here 'bout 1907.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:11:44] MC: And then—of course, it was the best thing that he'd ever seen, see. Mh-hmm. In fact, he had never seen [points forward] pants like that where you—the—on the farm, the white fellow would send his clothes to Memphis to get 'em cleaned and pressed.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And my father always liked that because he looked, you know, neat, and he—he decided that when he sh—got old enough, he was gonna buy him some clothes. And that's the reason why he went in the tailorin' business, I imagine.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So he wa—he was a tailor . . .

MC: Yes.

SL: . . . before he went to . . .

MC: No, he was—he came up here to go to school.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: He didn't—he was—he was twenty-eight years of age when he came out of the country. He stayed down there and—and worked with them . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: . . . until he was twenty-eight.

[00:12:29] SL: And that—let's see, now, where—where was it that he was workin'?

MC: Mari—Marianna.

SL: Marianna.

MC: Mh-hmm. In Lee County.

SL: And—um—he was just a—he was a—a farm . . .

MC: Yes, a sharecropper.

SL: He—he helped—he worked the farm.

MC: Right.

SL: Sharecrop.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, but he had—did he go—he went to the schools.

MC: Well, the schools would be—say, like, this is November or October, and that's when—after they got through pickin' the

cotton and all like this, this is—and then maybe a few days of—
of basic elementary school. That's about all back then that they
got—if they got that.

SL: Mh-hmm. Did he ever take you back to Marianna and show you
where he went to school or . . .

MC: No, he never s—he never—and when he left there, he left for
good.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: He didn't bring anybody with it.

[00:13:19] SL: Now—um—had he already met his wife—your mom—
by then?

MC: No, my m—he met her at Ninth and—702 Ninth Street. She was
goin' to school—was goin' to church up at—between Seventh and
Eighth on IZARD Street. We belonged to the Church of Christ
Holiness.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: And she came down to the drugstore, and—uh—that's where,
you know, people would congregate at places like that. And he
saw that nice-lookin' yo—young lady and—and—um—he just
made up his mind that he would—uh—asked her later on, I
believe, if he could come out and see her.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[00:13:55] SL: Um—and so your mom—uh—was she living in town,
or was her . . .

MC: [*Unclear word*] . . .

SL: . . . family outside of town?

MC: . . . they lived right in the—it may have been outside, but it was
1914 Dennison. My people came over from Alabama, and there
was, I imagine, seven or eight wagons, and they left there, and
nine months later, this is as far as they had gotten from—uh—
hard—Hardaway, Alabama, right out of Union Springs. And they
stopped here in Little Rock, I guess, on the way to Oklahoma—
uh—goin' somewhere. But they stopped there, and they have
been here ever since.

SL: And so that was your mom's folks.

MC: My mo—my mom's people.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: And—um—so her parents were—uh—were they farmers, too,
or—do you—do you know what her parents did?

MC: Well, I knew what—and she was a—she's a—General Johnston
was her grandfather—my—and my great-grandfather in—in the
Confederate Army. So, I mean, they were prosperous people,

and the—the white ones are still out in the cemetery on Barber Street, and the—and the colored ones—they are—they [*coughs*] are on this side over where the black people are. But they are in that same area, but both of the cemeteries are together now.

SL: So—um—her grandfather was . . .

MC: General Joseph Johnston.

SL: . . . General John—Johnson.

MC: That's right.

SL: A—a white general.

MC: They didn't have nothin' but white people at that time.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah.

[00:15:23] SL: Uh-huh. And—um—um—so when her folks settled here in Little Rock, were they—were they farmers, or do . . .

MC: No.

SL: . . . you know?

MC: See, they owned—owned the—um—when my people left there, they were white, Indians, some ?blacker?, and all of 'em did work like—that is—um—uh—carpentry work, painters—didn't have too much plumbin'. But whatever it was, they did the work. They came here with trades.

SL: Mh-hmm. Okay. So they were—they—uh—were—uh—they

were craftspeople.

MC: Craftspeople. That's right.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[00:16:13] SL: Um—well, so—um—did she go through—um—
college, too? Did she—your mom . . .

MC: I doubt if she did. No, she didn't, and—uh—all the people on my
mother—on my grandmother's side were really a—I imagine—I
call it the master and the father. General Johnston was the
master and the father of a whole slew of people on the farm.
These left comin' this way—I imagine going down towards—
'cause some of my people went as far as Oklahoma.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: But we are scattered from Hardaway, Alabama, goin' to
Oklahoma.

SL: Okay.

MC: Mh-hmm. And Oklahoma was a freelanced territory then, see.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Mh-hmm. Um—so—uh—your daddy met your mom . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . at church, then.

MC: At—yeah. He wasn't goin' to that same church, but he met her when she came down to maybe get an ice cream cone down to the . . .

SL: At the drugstore.

MC: . . . at the drugstore . . .

SL: I see.

MC: . . . on that Sunday afternoon, and he saw her. And—uh—I guess he sat up there and said, "Well, that's the kind of person I'd like to—to—to marry."

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[00:17:30] SL: Well, do you have any idea how long it . . .

MC: Don't have . . .

SL: . . . took him to convince her?

MC: It didn't take her long. That—see, in other words, at that particular time he was a nice-lookin' man to start with. And then one of the thing that he didn't was a education. But my mother did [*coughs*] beauty work, and she'd had—may—had, I guess, till the sixth grade or somethin' like this. But—uh—my people were superstitious and religion, because, oh, in Macon, Georgia, some of 'em migrated from Alabama—in Georgia and Alabama, and then there was a bunch of 'em came through here. And you

have a—a mixture of great people.

[00:18:13] SL: Um—so let me think now. Your—uh—you think that your mom probably made it through about sixth grade . . .

MC: About . . .

SL: . . . or so.

MC: I imagine so.

SL: And—but your father was—um—uh—now, was your mom already doin' the home beauty work when she met your dad?

MC: I think she picked it up over in Macon, Georgia. I heard her say that she was in Macon, Georgia, and she had a premonition that her father had gotten sick, and she told them that she was comin' home . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: . . . because something told her that she was needed here in Little Rock.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm. And she came home. But she was doin' beauty work over in Macon, Georgia . . .

SL: I see.

MC: . . . from what I can—from what I think. Mh-hmm.

[00:19:03] SL: So she had a—she got a feeling that she needed to come home there, a bit.

MC: Yeah, that's right. She got that feeling.

SL: And I bet she got here and her dad was sick.

MC: She sure about did, and he was sick and he died.

SL: But she made it back in time.

MC: Made it back in time. That's right. And she told him that she would take care of her mother and the rest of 'em as long as she lived . . .

SL: And . . .

MC: . . . which she did.

SL: Which she did.

MC: Yeah.

SL: Um—how many—did—did she have a lotta brothers and sisters?

MC: There was about nine in the family.

SL: Nine. Mh-hmm.

MC: But the thing about it is when they left out of Hardaway, Alabama, I don't know how many wagons they di—they came. But I know one thing about it, it was like a—a—a travelin' train on h—on the—I imagine, all of 'em on their way to—out of the South goin' on to Oklahoma. Free land.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And some of 'em got, you know, detoured on as they—as they left.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And then some of 'em stays different places.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:00] SL: They'd find a spot.

MC: Yeah, they—wherever they—that's where they stayed.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So she comes back home, her father's sick and her father dies,
and she . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . vows to take care . . .

MC: And—which she did.

SL: . . . of the family.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: And so she probably just continued her . . .

MC: Beauty work.

SL: . . . her beauty work.

MC: That's right. Mh-hmm.

SL: And so she was at the drugstore one day . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and your father was at that drugstore . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . that day and . . .

MC: And they met.

SL: . . . he put his sights on her.

MC: That's right. Mh-hmm.

SL: And so it wasn't long . . .

MC: Hm-mm.

SL: . . . before they got married . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . and they started their own family.

MC: They started their family. That's right.

[00:20:37] SL: And so they were married while your daddy was still
at Baptist College, then.

MC: Right. I imagine so.

SL: And he was—was he working on his divinity degree or . . .

MC: No, no, no, he hadn't started it. [*Unclear words*] a good man,
but he didn't [*unclear words*] the preachin' that came after he
was sixty, after a . . .

SL: I see. Okay.

MC: . . . a long time—later on. Uh-huh.

SL: So what was he studyin' when he was in college? Do you
remember?

MC: Well, I imagine learnin' how to read. [*Laughs*] Whatever—

wasn't too much that you could do.

SL: Yeah.

[00:21:05] MC: And he remember when Booker Washington came down here, and then you had school, I imagine, down at Pine Bluff, and they were Branch Normal—see, meaning that they did agriculture and then a few of the chores of taking care of houses. Fixin' roofs, painting, carpentry. I doubt if—they didn't have any electricity back then at that time, I don't think.

SL: So when he got done with Baptist College, what did he do?

MC: He went into business of fixin' clothes. See, now, he had learned—he had seen the white owners in Marianna that looked like he was wearin' new suits all the time, but he would have 'em cleaned . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . and pressed. So that impressed him, and he wanted to look like that, too. So he went in there where he could do that. And I helped him when I became large enough.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So he had his own tailor shop, then.

MC: That's right, down at 702 West Ninth Street.

SL: Here in Little Rock.

MC: Right here in Little Rock.

[00:22:13] SL: And so how many kids did your mom and dad have?

MC: Four.

SL: Four. Are you . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: Were you the oldest?

MC: No, I wasn't. I'm the third. I had a brother named Joseph Crenchaw, after my father, and my sister was born two or three years later, named Elvie, after my mother's mother's mother, and then I had me third—the third child, and then they had another named—a brother named Charles, two or three years younger than I am.

SL: Now, what was your sister's name again?

MC: Elvie. *E-L-V-I-E*.

SL: Elvie Crenchaw.

MC: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: So did your older sister and older brother help in the tailor . . .

MC: No.

SL: . . . shop, too?

MC: I'm the only one that did any work in it. I—nobody did anything—I cut the grass yesterday. I'm ninety years old, and I cut the same grass in twenty minutes that I used to take a week

with a swing sickle. Didn't have no—the be—the first lawnmower I had was a—one of those rollery-type that, you know, but I can cut with the gasoline type, and thirty minutes later, I'm back in the car at ninety, and I've been doin' that from the time that I was, oh, seven years of age, off and on.

[00:23:32] SL: So, well, let's talk a little bit about the tailor shop there. Was it a stand-alone building, or was it in a row . . .

MC: It was in a three-story building owned by somebody else, and the druggist was at the corner of 700 West Ninth Street. My father was next door to him. And then from there they had maybe shoe shops or pawn shops or all kinds of places that would come and go up and down Ninth Street. That was the main drag for the seventy-five years until the freeway came—630—and that put about everybody outta business.

SL: Yeah. So the top two floors—did they rent . . .

MC: Rented . . .

SL: . . . out to people to leave?

MC: . . . rented out to people to live.

SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well, what do you remember about workin' in the shop? Tell me about that a little bit.



[00:24:29] MC: I was in love with my father, and we would clean clothes, and we had this Naptha for cleanin' 'em, and then we

would—had a easy 'old? part of the washing machine—the part that would sling the fluid back in the tub. Then we'd hang 'em up to where they would air out for a couple of hours, and then you had a little dryer with a stove in it. Sometimes it'd catch on fire if you didn't hang 'em out long enough. You know, we had eight or nine or ten fires while I was—in the—when I went to Tuskegee in 1940, I went over, naturally, to see a guy that had a tailorin' and pressin' shop.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And I saw he—what he had—a small room, but he had a machine there that would wash 'em with the Naptha, extract the fluid out, and dry them in the same machine. So I said, "That's what we need." So when I came back home in 1945, I told my father—I said, "Well, this is what we need." A fellow came through from Dallas, and he had pictures of the same kind that they had over in Alabama, and he—my father said, "How much that cost? How much I have to pay for these?" He said, "I want a thousand dollars." He said, "What?" And he didn't have but ten dollars. I said, "How long fore you could bring it up here?" He said—I said, "Put it on—when I go back, I'll put it on the truck and set it up here if you got the money." And I gave him a check for a thousand dollars. And my father thought, "Where'd

you get that money from? You didn't have anything [*SL laughs*]
when you left here a few years ago." Uh-huh.

[00:26:21] SL: That was a proud moment for him.

MC: Well, he was sittin' there, wondering, "Where did this guy get
this money from?"

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, that's a great—that was a great thing you did for him.
Let—so you would—I'm tryin' to picture—when you—well, let's
just go ahead and talk about your upbringing now. Let . . .

MC: Okay.

SL: . . . let's talk about your house and where you grew up. Did you
just—did you always stay in one house? Did y'all ever move
when you were growin' up?

MC: No, never moved. I stayed in the one house until I went to
school—college—in nineteen thirty—1939. I left . . .

SL: What was the address of that house?

MC: Nineteen fourteen Dennison Street. In other words, it's halfway
between Barton Stadium and the Central High School. It was a
dirt street when my father—there because he said the first time
he came down wanted to look nice and had his shoes on like this
[gestures toward the floor] and had it all through that mud.

And, my God, that mud been there for seventy-five years, I guess, but he went down there [*door squeaks*] not knowing that it was gonna be—where he was gonna be for eighty-five years. Mh-hmm.

SL: Let's see, we've got a door opening here.

MC: Okay, I hear it.

SL: Should we take a break?

[Tape stopped]

[00:27:36] SL: Okay, we're continuing—we're still continuing on tape one. We had a little break here. Now, what were we talking about when Mr. Davis came in?

MC: Well, we were talkin' about . . .

SL: You'd just bought your dad a machine . . .

MC: Yeah, a . . .

SL: . . . that would . . .

MC: Yes, that's right. And, in fact, I bought him the first cleaning piece of equipment that he had ever had, see.

SL: Uh-huh.



[00:27:58] MC: And the reason why I bought it there because I had gotten in this job—went to school down there in 1939, and at that same time it—the whole world just start changing there, because every other month somebody was up there. But we

were under the segregated-type system. And they only had this ROTC in a few black colleges. And then they decided because of people goin' there, since we were get—fixin' to get into this war with Hitler and the rest of the people like that, and all of these things that were happenin' real fast. And we finally got it to where we were able to start a flight school at Tuskegee and started a flight school at Howard University and one at A&T—all black—five black . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . colleges. And this one at Tuskegee was—we called it the apex there, the main one. And that's the one that I started on, and I was fortunate enough to get trained down at Maxwell Air Base. I was—we would go to Garner Field, but we had all—everything was associated with the Maxwell Air Base. We got everything from them.

[00:29:09] SL: Okay, now, let's get back to your father and . . .

MC: Okay.

SL: . . . and his shop now.

MC: Okay.

SL: So he didn't—had not comprehended that when you went off to school—to flight school—that you were gonna be makin' this kind of money or you would be able to save some money to help him

out with his . . .

MC: No, no.

SL: . . . with his shop.

MC: No, he couldn't even buy—I could buy a nickel Co-Cola when I



got to Memphis there, but he didn't have nothin'. So all at once where it says—just like—that—was sayin', he told me when I started down—he said, "If you ever get into trouble, just call on God" . . .

SL: There you go.

MC: . . . "and tell Him He owes you." [*SL laughs*] And so I had to call on God, see, because when December the seventh, 1940 or [19]41, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. And I had walked—since I didn't have any money, I hitchhiked from birm—from Tuskegee to Birmingham—about a hundred and twenty or thirty miles, maybe. And I'm gonna take a flight test. A man told me to come up there to take the flight test, and I said—he said, "I can't do it because we're at war. Where you been?" I said, "Tryin' to get here." And he said, "Well, I'm sorry, I'm feel—I"—you know, I mean, his unit—it called him to come back to Miami because he was, you know, in the service.

SL: Yeah.

[00:30:34] MC: And that's when I talked to God and told Him I didn't

have nothin'—not even—I didn't—now, I had to be stupid to go to Birmingham to take a flight test and didn't have no airplane. So He—that afternoon, some kinda way—I always put it on God—that He manipulated around to where He had this fellow to come back to the airfield rather than goin' and catch his plane and goin' down to Miami. And he came in and said, "I'll fly you." Now, what happened like that, I'm not gonna try to put somethin' together that I don't really know what happened. But then he says, "I'll fly you." It was twenty-five white fellows there and me. Then I had to come to ?you? and try to rent an airplane. I come in the office, and a young lady says, "What do you want?" I says, "Mr. Black told us he services Tuskegee, and if we ever needed anything to come to his office and that you would look out for us." So she said, "Wait. Let me go back here and talk to the—you know, the head pilot." And he said, "Boy, what you want?" I told him what I wanted, and he s—thought a while, and he said, "Well, okay." I went out there, and the inspector said, "Well, you have to go back and get a parachute, 'cause you can't take a flight test without a parachute." Then I had to go back and tell the same lie all over again. I—so I figured that they figured, "This sucker's crazy. [*Laughter*] Somethin's got to be wrong with it." [*Laughter*] But he did that,

and I betcha I didn't fly fifteen minutes and he came back and said, "You okay."

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh!

[00:32:17] MC: And I gave him that license, and I skipped on back there. Now, that's part of it. Now, you don't realize how much sweat I put into that hour or two from the time that he left to go turn in the truck and came back in somebody's airplane just to fly me. But that's—I just said that was God.

SL: It was a blessing.

MC: Mh-hmm. Blessing from God. Okay.

SL: All right. Let's get back to Little Rock and your growin' up there and helpin' your dad at the shop.

MC: Okay.

SL: And so you told me that he had a ?stow? or a . . .

MC: Yes, a cleanin' . . .

SL: . . . fire . . .

MC: . . . cleanin' place.

SL: Cleanin' place and . . .

MC: Yeah, but it had—very crude tryin' to do something. If the weather was bad like this, you could imagine it'd take all day tryin' to clean four or five suits at fifty cents a suit. So when this fellow came through from Dallas, I said, "Well, bring us one of

those," 'cause I'd seen it down in Tuskegee . . .

SL: Yeah. Huh.

MC: . . . see. And I said, "That's what we need." [00:33:17] So it'd just so happened that we had some Italian people after we—see, I started off with Mr. Wren down at Montgomery. Had three white instructors down at Garner Field. That's right outta Maxwell. And then when we—they stayed for a while, but they got so much business until they couldn't come up to Tuskegee to help us and all, so he had Mr. Washington—and when I say "he," talk about he was the—in charge of the industrial arts department. And he went up there and got some Italian boys to come down there, and they were for teachin' flyin' and all. They had their license and everything, and they started workin' with us. So by the virtue that the real people that worked—like a—if a fellow was in industrial arts, a hundred and twenty-five dollars, that was top money.

SL: Yeah.

[00:34:15] MC: And by gettin'—to get these Italians to come down there, they had to pay them two-fifty and up. So by the virtue that when I came in there—later on, after I got my instructor's license, and the way I got it, I knew right away those guys didn't want to do too much work, so I would ask them if they wanted

me to fly in their place, and they'd all give me two or three dollars, see. So that kept me with a little pocket change.

SL: That's right.

MC: And then when I got my license, after the—in December the seventh, I was an instructor just like they. But the people that had been there before were only makin' anywhere—seventy-five, a hundred, and not over a hundred and a quarter. I—he paid me . . .

SL: That'd be a month?

MC: A month. Yeah, a month.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. And he said, "Well, I'm gonna pay you just like I pay those other guys." And we were gettin'—startin' off at two fifty, but he said, "Don't tell anybody, because what you'll do is start all young studs and all at once, here you are startin' off twice what they make."

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And then I saved my money and so forth.

[00:35:16] SL: And so that let you come back and help your dad.

MC: Yeah. So when I came back and I told [*unclear word*] my father what I had saved, and he looked at me, and he sit up there and said, "I hope so. I hope so." See, so the . . .

SL: Well, so your father got into that business 'cause he saw the way
the white folks would . . .

MC: Yeah—oh, yeah. Right.

SL: . . . have their clean, pressed clothes.

MC: Right. He liked that.

SL: And he wanted to dress like that.

MC: That's right. He did. Mh-hmm.

SL: And he did.

MC: Yeah, when he was older. Mh-hmm.

SL: So—but at fifty cents a suit . . .

MC: Oh yeah, well, not much.

SL: . . . and he—was the stove a wood-burning stove . . .

MC: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . that he dried stuff with and cleaned stuff?

MC: Uh-huh. Mh-hmm.

SL: And he'd have—y'all would have to hang that stuff up to dry?

[00:36:00] MC: Have to first hang it out to air out, see, 'cause it had
that Naptha in it and you couldn't put it in there with that—with
the heat like that; otherwise. . .

SL: 'Cause it'd . . .

MC: . . . it'd blow up.

SL: . . . blow up.

MC: Yeah.

SL: So were the lines outside the building . . .

MC: Yeah, they was outside . . .

SL: . . . or did you have—out. So . . .

MC: And it was like this . . .

SL: . . . it was . . .

MC: . . . you couldn't do nothin' but just sit there and look at it.

SL: Business was totally on good weather.

MC: Totally. That's right. So when this guy came in here with this equipment and he says, "That's what I want." I said, "Send it up here." And he wanted to know, "Where'd you get that money from?"

SL: Yeah.

MC: I said, "Oh, I got it from God. Pretty good God." [*SL laughs*] Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah. He didn't believe it, but [*laughs*] he didn't—I imagine he went home and told my mother, "If this guy isn't crazy—I hope he hadn't robbed a bank down there or something."

SL: Yeah. Well, let's talk about home a little bit, then . . .

MC: Okay.

SL: . . . growin' up. The house that you lived in—it was on
Tennison?

MC: Denison. *D-E-N* . . .

SL: Denison.

MC: . . . *I-S-O-N*. It was first—it was George Street, and then they named it to—renamed it to Dennison. *D-E-N-N-I-S-O-N*. Now, they got it *D-E-N-I-S-O-N*. Denison Street.

SL: And . . .

MC: And I was born there.

SL: Well—so was that a stand-alone house, or was it br . . .

[00:37:07] MC: No. So my—I said my people were craftsmen, so by the virtue that they were craftsmen, they built—my uncle did all the building, had one of 'em that did all the movin'. One that lives up here on this other street—this house right here [points behind his right shoulder]—they all looked white, see. So they had all kinds of ins, and they did all—they didn't go—some of didn't never go to church, but they would hunt with the whites, you know, because it was all—they were white just like you are, see. So it was just one of those kinda things that—you don't do a whole lots of mixin' when people may not like you because you're not lookin' like they look, see.

SL: Right.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So they just kinda fit in.

MC: Yeah, they just fit in. Uh-huh.

SL: And they were accepted.

MC: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: And . . .

[00:37:49] MC: Accepted there because they did all of the—I call that craftwork. In fact, I have one that's named—he became a coach, and then he played baske—baseball with the Kansas City Monarchs there—Mex Johnson. And all of 'em lived out in this section [points behind his right shoulder]. We lived over there [points to his left]. But they were born over there on Dennison, or else in that area. When they came here in 1870 or right after the war was there. So I didn't mind workin' and all, and I did a whole lots of odd jobs in order to do things like that, and . . .

SL: So would you work with . . .

MC: My father?

SL: . . . with your father only, or did you also learn to do carpentry and . . .

MC: No, I didn't do nothin'.

SL: . . . any of the craft stuff?

MC: I just went there to take up auto mechanics. When I went to Tuskegee, I thought that's what it was—a mechanical there . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . in fact, right around the corner here [points behind his right shoulder], the Rutledges—well, they had gotten there before, and they were a big family—you know, good-lookin', Indian-lookin' people. And, in fact, he was—he finished in plumbin'. Came back here and opened up a plumbin'. Had some ?Lambs? that went to Tuskegee and came back and opened up carpentry and then electricity and then some in printing and all kinds of things in industrial arts and all.

SL: Industrial arts.

[00:39:03] MC: Mh-hmm. So I had picked up a whole lots of nice, you know, points on things like that, see. So . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And, plus, the fact that I enjoyed it.

SL: So the house that you grew up in . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . when you were born . . .

MC: My grandfather . . .

SL: . . . did it already have electricity and . . .

MC: No, no, no.

SL: No.

[00:39:20] MC: Didn't have no telephone. Didn't have no electricity. Didn't have no—toilet was on the—way on the outside on the

alley. They—you know, they come by and picked the stuff up once a week or so. I don't know how, but I knew it was like that, and we'd wash and hang 'em up on the lines out there when it was—when it—when we'd wash. And we wash, you know, like this, and then after a while, you got one of those easy washer with the wringer.

SL: With the wringer in it.

MC: Yeah, and that was just . . .

SL: But you remember the washboard, though.

MC: Yeah, the washboard—everything. I came up the hard way but loved it.

SL: And was the heat wood . . .

MC: Yeah, wood heat.

SL: . . . wood heat?

MC: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: And . . .

MC: Lamps.

SL: And what, now?

MC: Lamps.

SL: Lamps.

MC: Uh-huh.

SL: Lamps. Were they coal-oil lamps or . . .

MC: Coal-oil lamps. That's right.

SL: Yep.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Uh-huh. So, let's see, how—when—what year was it that you left that house?

[00:40:14] MC: I left that house in 1939.

SL: Well, by then . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . it had electricity.

MC: It had electricity then.

SL: Do you remember the day that the . . .

MC: No, I don't remember that. The only thing I remember that somebody came in there and wired it, see.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Yeah. See, my grandfather had more than likely built it, because all of 'em was doin' that type of work, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And they'd work for each other and all. Mh-hmm.

SL: So do you remember how old you were when the electricity came to the house?

MC: I don't have any idea. Only thing I know, I was about eighteen—I musta been about seventeen when I went to

Tuskegee, 'cause I—see, what I did—I finished in 1936. And then I went to junior college, and then I went—took auto mechanics. So I took a four-year in—the—in two or three years, and I've finished Dunbar in 1939, and I took off right after I graduated. I went right on to Tuskegee.

[00:41:13] SL: Now, it seems like I read that there was a Dunbar High School, but there was also a Dunbar prep school. Is that right, or was it all just one—the same school?

MC: It was one—same school. Elementary—well, that was, like, Gibbs. And then the junior high, and then you had the high school. And on the other end you'd have junior college—Dunbar Junior College, and down there—we worked out of Central on doin' printing, plumbing, carpentry, and auto mechanics. And I took auto mechanics.

[00:41:50] SL: When you were growin' up, were you a pretty good student?

MC: No, the girls told me I didn't do nothin'. They was—they didn't think I was smart at all.

SL: Did you do homework at home?

MC: My mother would read to me like that. I guess I did. But I wasn't as smart as her husband was. We all came up together in the same church.

SL: So, now, you were talkin' to me about your mom reading to you.

MC: Yeah.

SL: Tell me that story again.

MC: Well, she was like—when she'd come in by workin' for the wealthy white people and . . .

SL: She would do . . .

MC: Hair.

SL: Fix their hair.

MC: Fix their hair.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And go to the house, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And fix it up, and they always had some real nice books, and they knew that she enjoyed reading because she'd read to them, and she was real smart, see. And she'd bring 'em home, and I'd—like Gaston Means all like that about Coolidge and Wilson and everything—this was back from we'll say 1913, when the *Titanic* went down. And I enjoyed her—just reading. I'd—if she'd ride the streetcar [*coughs*] up home, I'd go up there and wait till the streetcar would come and—just so I could get there, and she'd read a page or so to me. I enjoyed that. Mh-hmm. Didn't know what I was doin', but I just enjoyed bein' with her.

SL: You enjoyed her reading the stories to you.

MC: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:43:23] SL: And so you don't remember when you were goin' in grade school—did you have a favorite teacher that you liked?

MC: No. Didn't have nothin'—none—ain't nobody that I really catered to. Like, my mother was smarter than all the rest of 'em, see, so it's hard for you to like somebody when you are in love with your mother. [*SL laughs*] Yeah, see. So I'd sit there . . .

SL: You judged everyone against how good your mom is. It is hard, isn't it?

MC: Yeah, she was brilliant, see.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: So did she help you with your schoolwork?

MC: Yeah, I guess she did. I—in other words, I must—and the girl told—I just told you that hundred and sixty-five, and they said I was the worst one in the school. [*SL laughs*] So if you—if they had a half a dollar or—and says, "Do you think he'll make it?" They'd say, "Well, now, I know he won't make it 'cause he didn't even get his lesson."

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[00:44:23] SL: Well, so—but you ended up with some kind of diploma, didn't you?

MC: Yeah, I graduated with them, but I was at the bottom, I guess. I don't know. That's what she's told me. Hurt my feelings when—last year when I was down there [*laughs*] at Butler Library. I said, "Well, if you had smarts, you woulda helped me out a little bit more." [*SL laughs*] Well, I—you know, but what I told her—I said, "But when I crossed the Mississippi River goin' into Alabama, I didn't take none of you girls with me, did I?" She said, "Yeah, but you more than likely found some just like us [*SL laughs*] 'cause you didn't do nothin'." And so I laughed at her. Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah. That's kinda funny. Well, so do you remember listening to the radio for the first time?

[00:45:14] MC: We didn't have a radio at the time, but, see, if somebody in the street would have, and when Joe Louis came on in, say, [19]35 or [19]34, fightin' Max Schmeling's, people would go three or four blocks just to hear somebody that had a radio, you know. So I didn't worry too much about it because I don't remember nothin' about that, you know, and it was just another fad that was out there. And I didn't really go there to take the flyin', tell the truth about it, but a fellow from Minnesota was

down there, and he couldn't get [*unclear words*] because you'd have to have—I had an associated degree from finishin' junior college. So I was ahead of the rest of the guys, unless they had finished college. So I was in the—able to get in the first class. And then I did fairly well there, see, because I had been out there workin', see, just like I told you. When these Italians came down here, and I've—I'm easy to look at you and figure you out right quick. How I can take advantage of the situation without makin' any enemies. So I would work for 'em, and they'd give me a couple of dollars for flyin' them—the black students. See, all of 'em black, see. But I worked my tail off in order to make me some extra money. Mh-hmm.

SL: So the Italians you're talkin' 'bout—were—they were black? No, no.

MC: Didn't have no black Italians.

SL: Yeah, I didn't think so.

MC: [*Unclear words*] Italians . . .

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

MC: . . . looked like you, see. [*SL laughs*] You know.

SL: Well. [*Laughter*]

MC: You'd have—you—like the man said, "You might not be smart, but you're not dumb," see. [*Laughter*]

[00:46:52] SL: So I'm tryin' to get a picture of what—can you describe the house that you lived in growin' up?

MC: It's still over there right now—1914 Dennison—same house that my grandfather built. Not so hot, but it's there, and the rest of the houses—much better than my house, but they're all gone and have torn 'em down and put a paved street in there, and it's just about three blocks—three or four blocks from the Barton Stadium . . .

SL: Okay.

MC: . . . on Twenty-fifth Street—Twenty-fifth and Dennison.

SL: Okay.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Did y'all have any—a piano or anything in the house?

MC: Yep. Had a piano. Yep.

SL: And who played the piano?

MC: My mother. Mh-hmm.

SL: Was it mostly hymns?

[00:47:41] MC: Yeah, that's all we—we didn't know about nothin' but church. I'm—I came up in the church. See, when you come up in a sanctified church, you don't hear nothin' about stuff that Michael Jackson sings. That wasn't—everything that I know about was church. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that

saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found" . . .

SL: "Found."

MC: . . . "was blind, but now I see." So I—and I'm able to quote anything, just like I was tellin' you about this . . .

SL: In Deuteronomy.

MC: . . . over here, see.

SL: Yeah. The—so all the music was church-related, then.

MC: As far as I was concerned.

SL: And . . .

MC: Now, I'm not the only—see, the other folks didn't—wasn't nobody like me [points toward himself] but me. And I just—and I'm ninety, and I still go over there and teach Sunday school, see. ?Because what?? I like it.

SL: Oh, yeah.

[00:48:35] MC: ?I've prospered?. How good's God been to me?

Yeah, He sit up there and told 'em—He says—Deuteronomy or Malachi—"I am the Lord, and I change not." And He says, "And I'll open up the windows of heaven and pull you out a blessin', but, Milton, you got to do something." So you got to read back and find out, "What does the Lord want me to do?" He want me to believe in God and help the poor people—those—and I'm a teacher, so I taught some guys to be like I was—a good pupil. I

didn't send 'em over there half-cocked. In other words, everything worked out for me when Dorie Miller—he was a mess sergeant there because that's all we had in the services at that time in [19]36 and thirty—and [19]40. But he got behind that machine gun and shot down a Jap plane, see. And that's the reason why they just set up there and Mrs. Roosevelt came down there and it just happened—I helped strip—strapped her in there, and she called back—the Secret Service didn't want some black boys flyin' the president's wife. And they called back to the—asked Mr. President if it was okay. He said, "Well, whatever she wanna do, she gonna do it anyway." [*SL laughs*]
See. So . . .

SL: He's a man who knew his limits. [*Laughs*]

MC: Ain't that right?

SL: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

MC: Yeah. And that's what he said, see.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

MC: See, he was comin' down to Warm Springs there with some lady that had been workin' with him and goin' with him for a long time—died down in Warm Springs, Georgia.

[00:50:03] SL: Let's talk . . .

MC: Okay.

SL: . . . about bein' around that piano in the house.

MC: Yeah.

SL: And it—so was your mom the only one that played the piano?

MC: I imagine she had some of the rest of 'em. They had four or five good-lookin' sisters and all, so . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . somebody may have, but I didn't.

SL: So when she was playin' the piano, did some of the family members gather around and . . .

MC: Yeah, they . . .

SL: . . . and sing the hymns . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . that she was playin'?

MC: Yeah.

[00:50:25] SL: Was your father active with that? Was he . . .

MC: No, he didn't. He belonged to another church up in Mount Pleasant, see.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: And that's Baptist church. They had a different method in the Baptist than what you have in what I call these little half-sanctified-lookin' churches, see. You're like—just about like Harry Caldwell and those kinda—we call 'em now a ?copy?, and

one like down there at Dallas there where Joey and all those people nowadays made a big name . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . outta church.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Fantastic outfit. But, at first, whatever the people could give 'em, that's all they could bring home. But that's—it's up in the—where he's got a fear of airplanes, ?lets alone? cars. Mh-hmm.

SL: So I'm getting the impression that religion was very much a part of the home.

MC: Oh, yeah.

SL: But it—what kind of influence did your father have? I mean, he was goin' to a Baptist church.

MC: Yeah, yeah.

SL: But your mom was goin'—still goin' to a different church?

MC: Yeah. Oh yeah, always.

SL: So you kinda got it from two different perspectives.

MC: Well, I got it—yeah, and then my father had his cleanin' business down there, so that meant that I would go with him to a bunch of churches and—because he's—you know, he's spreadin' out there getting clothes from everybody, so we had to kinda go around to different churches as a way of makin' sure we collect

members from the different churches and all.

SL: Well, their Sunday clothes.

[00:51:58] MC: Right. Sunday clothes. Yeah. So—and I'm the only one that helped my father. I had two brothers and a sister, but nobody came down there except me. And the one that—my little daughter that just called, I sent her here to stay with my mother and my father, and she graduated over at Horace Mann. And she ate 'em up there just like a rabbit eatin' up a carrot or something. [*SL laughs*] She loved 'em.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: That's good.

MC: Yeah.

SL: So you passed somethin' on [*Trey Marley coughs*] . . .

MC: Yeah, I passed it on.

SL: . . . there. Yeah.

[00:52:30] MC: And all these guys that we taught to fly. I only had one standard: superior. And then I came back here, and I went to see President Harris, president of . . .

SL: At Philander Smith.

MC: . . . at Philander Smith College. And it just so happened that Miss Torrence's brother-in-law had married the lady that was in

charge while the president was out collectin' money to keep the college going. And I went up to see her. See, I'm, you know, a guy that's thinking, because I—that's what—see, her husband—we all came up in the—that church together, and then they had a Boy Scout ki—group there, and I belonged to the Boy Scouts. So I went up to—up there. When I got back in and talked to 'em, I said, "I'm a Tuskegee airman." Well, that didn't mean nothin'. And then I told her to talk to the president, because what we had—the people could get GI money for goin' to college and they go to school, too, and so I would go out and got him to go with me out to the airfield. Never been to the airfield. And it just happened we stopped at Central Flying Service and saw Mr. Holbert, and he said, "Well, okay." So they built me a little segregated place down below the fire station. And that was my office, and then he set it—Mr. Harris—President Harris set it up there and all like that, see.

[00:54:02] SL: So when did you join scouting?

MC: Well, I imagine when I was about nine or ten years old. See, because I imagine either my father's church, Mount Pleasant, or else the—and the one that I belonged to was down at Wesley Chapel, and my cousin lived right in this house right here [points behind his right shoulder], and there was about eight or nine of

'em, see, and he was a scoutmaster. In fact, the other one that did—had trucks, and he worked for Tiller on Eleventh and High, where they'd move old houses and take 'em to other places, like out at College Station, and set 'em up on the pillars?

SL: Yeah.

MC: And, you know, change houses around there . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . and that was a good business there—a whole lots of things. So all these are kinda things that I would try to help people do because I'm out here to—tryin' to make a few dollars if I possibly could. Mh-hmm. And it paid off.

[00:54:59] SL: So, nine or ten years old, you join Scouts through the Mount Pleasant Church. Is that . . .

MC: I imagine so or else—my cousin here was—he was the scoutmaster. And then we would go—every sun—summer we'd go over to Hot Springs and stay over there for a week. And then sometimes we'd have outings down here on the Arkansas River. In fact, we'd go over that [*unclear word*] heights or wherever those big heights are—go out like that number 10, and you go up on top of that hill and then you . . .

SL: Yep.

MC: . . . got to drop down to the river.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And we'd go down there and stake it off. The—when I say "they," talkin' about the scoutin' masters, and he had two or three assistants to—for—so—to teach us how to build fires, how to do things there what scouts are doin', see.

SL: So did you ever—I mean, I'm just assuming that that was segregated as well.

MC: Oh yeah, the world was segregated. See, we . . .

SL: Back . . .

MC: . . . yeah, when you go down—downtown and—whatever you come up with, that's a part of what you are. Then somebody that hadn't come up like that, he'll come down here—down South—and then he'd say, "Well, that's not the way they do down"—or wherever he came from, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: So I never paid too much attention to it because I didn't have any money anyway, so I couldn't . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . buy nothin'.

[00:56:23] SL: Well, when you were growin' up as a kid, did you ever have any run-ins with the white . . .

MC: Whites?

SL: . . . folks or . . .

MC: No, no.

SL: . . . it was just a way of life.

MC: Yeah, see . . .

SL: It was accepted and . . .



MC: See, I went to Capitol Hill, and you say, "Where is that?" That's Eleventh, and let's make like it's Wolfe Street, and it's over—right now, it's where there's one of those high-rise for people that can't half-pay, you know, and you say we come to Battery Street, which was the street over, and then you'd come down to Wright Avenue, but it was Central white school there, and let's make like it's on Battery, and make like it's started off between Fifteen and Sixteen, so that means that we'd have to pass this white school and, naturally, they're gonna rock you and run you and do everything they could, so you have to run like everything. They didn't—they—we didn't have Central then, see. Central came in around 1927 or [19]28.

SL: Right.

[00:57:25] MC: Mh-hmm. But you get to used to what you are doin', and that's the same thing that you would've come up here and say, like Obama, born in Hawaii, educated in Indonesia, and you come up and say, "Well, what kinda education did he have?"

"Well, that's a Muslim outfit." But the best educational system, I imagine, over there. And then his mother—I guess she came back. His mother's white. So they moved to Kansas, I imagine. His mother died at fifty-four, and then I imagine they left, 'cause when his grandmother died in Hawaii, he went over there, didn't he?

SL: Yeah, he did.

MC: Yeah, he went over there.

SL: Yeah, I was proud of him for that.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: What about your brothers and sisters? You keep sayin' that they didn't work at . . .

MC: Well . . .

SL: . . . work at the shop at all.

MC: . . . they never worked at the shop. Well, see, there are some people that will sit around the house and ad-lib.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. And I never paid any attention to 'em. My father would sit up there and tell me to cut the same grass I cut yesterday, and I'd cut it in a half an hour, 'cause I got the best equipment you can buy.

SL: Yeah.

[00:58:36] MC: And I—but I—then I had that dern swing sickle, and it could take a whole week, and then by the time it'd be out there [points to his left] like those leaves then when you look out there. Those leaves just came from Sunday.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And they just—Tuesday or Wednesday or whatever. And if I was to get a boy to come out here and rake 'em up, this time next week they'd be wantin'—down again, see.

SL: That's right.

MC: Yeah. And that's the—you know, you repeat, repeat.

SL: Yep.

MC: So—and if your mind's with blinders on like that, you don't pay much attention to it. I didn't argue with anybody. They—if they didn't wanna come down there and work, I never said a word to them.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm.

TM: Scott, we need to change tapes.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:59:14] SL: There's a couple questions I wanna . . .

MC: Okay.

SL: . . . ask you before we get back . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . into where we were. You've mentioned a couple—three or four times "Indian-lookin' folk."

MC: Yeah.

SL: Now, are these—who are you talkin' about when you're talkin' about Indian-lookin' folk?

MC: Well, it's . . .

SL: And why do you describe them in that way?

[00:59:35] MC: Okay. See, in other words, when you start talkin' about people . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: Now, if you start talkin' about the difference in the Greek people, when Alexander the Great came there in 325. Okay. Here comes the Romans in 58 BC. The Romans comin' over there—they're speakin' Latin. All pau—all Gauls is divided into three parts, so they didn't know nothin' 'bout no Greek. And then the Italians came there, and then the English came there, and then the French went all different places. Each person has a concept and something that he stands out with when he's there with that. Now, if people come from Africa, generally they're black. See, like in Deuteronomy there, He says, "Don't bring those

Canaan"—they call 'em Canaanites. But it was a whole group of people and—that came. All of the Jews, Africans, the Egyptians—all of 'em came outta Asia or Africa. So wasn't nobody else there that had crossed that water at that particular time in history. So when it comes up here to where my people were born in Alabama and some of 'em born on the Sessions plantation, and if the grandfather is white, he's gonna come out there not black. See, you can't make no white person outta black paint, but you can mix 'em and they get brown. Some of 'em be light. So, therefore, Indians don't look like you, and they don't look like me. But it's a different way. It's a different—like Latinos. They have their own characteristic. That's the reason why you tell a person that he has a mixed bred of people. My people were mixed because we—if you stay down there for two or three hundred years in Hardaway, Alabama, and the master and the father are the same person, some of 'em gonna come out there brown skin, some of 'em gonna come out there like Indians, because the Indians were free and they could go out there and have Indian women just like they could have black women and all the rest of 'em they wanted. And it's been like that, and that's the reason why I said that they look like different people. See, in other words, you're not dumb. You're

smart enough to know that you see some black black folks and then you see some that are light skin and some of 'em you don't even know what they are.

SL: Right.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[01:01:55] SL: Well, the reason why this comes up is that, you know, the time that the folks are leavin' the Sessions plantation and moving west toward Oklahoma is also, we think, sometime around the time that the Trail of Tears is happening . . .

MC: Yeah, that's it.

SL: . . . for the Indian community . . .

MC: Same thing. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . as well. So is there—was there some racial mix . . .

MC: Yeah, all of it.

SL: . . . with Indians . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . and the blacks and the already . . .

MC: And the whites. Uh-huh.

SL: . . . ratio . . .

MC: Oh, yeah.

SL: They were all together.

[01:02:30] MC: From the time they got here in 1492 with Columbus

or whoever came over there—if they came from the Spanish, they were down there and started off, let's say, in Haiti, Cuba. Comin' up here from New Orleans, Napoleon sold it for \$15 million—the whole Louisiana Purchase—a steal. Arkansas, Kansas—right straight on up there, almost to Canada—fifteen million. And you couldn't buy the state of Arkansas for that now. [SL laughs] No.

SL: You can't get a building for that now.

MC: No, couldn't get a buildin'. No.

SL: So—okay. So you're not really—you're not literally saying that your ancestors from the Sessions actually teamed up with the Indian tribes on the Trail of Tears as a movement?

[01:03:19] MC: Some of 'em may have. See, you—what you find about people—and it doesn't realize—see, you stop and think about the way we—you and I look at Chinamens—squinch-eyes, and they have a characteristic—from facial expression and other things—all characteristics. Well, you don't care whether he came from Japan, North Korea, South Korea, or China, Mongolians—all of 'em got certain things. You can't fight over there for a thousand or two thousand years and there not be mixin'. The Mongolians and the other folks there . . .

SL: Right.

MC: . . . Genghis Khan. And we—see, we been here since—well, I guess, Columbus, there, see, so therefore you've had a mixture of people. But whether it's good, bad, or ugly, that's God and the way that He planted the—all of 'em belong to Him, see. So you tell a person like this—the characteristics are inherited. Whether you're talkin' about—except fingerprints. Everybody has a different fingerprint. But nobody has anything as far as blood or DNA that he didn't pick up from somebody way back. Is that 'bout right?

SL: Yeah, that's right. That's right. Okay. The other question is we've talked about Oklahoma . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and the free land in Oklahoma.

MC: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: And I'm assuming that you're talkin' about the land rush . . .

MC: Yeah, that's right. Land rush there.

SL: . . . that happened.

MC: That's right.

SL: And not so much that African Americans were any freer in Oklahoma than they were anywhere else, but it was more that the land was available for free. Is that . . .

[01:04:58] MC: Well, and not only that, but, you see, it wasn't any

freer for white. But more white went out there to—and, see, one of the nicer things about life is you can't classify and think all white are Christians goin' to Heaven and the rest of 'em are crazy. [*SL laughs*] But at the same time you felt like when they had that land to grab, at twelve o'clock, then, they started runnin' over there stakin' out. They didn't know whether there was oil under the ground. He just wanted some free land. And that's the way people have been ever since the beginning of time. Hadn't changed not one second. Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah. Okay. Well, thanks. I just wanted to make sure we—you and I were on the same page . . .

MC: Oh yeah, we're on the same page.

SL: . . . on that.

MC: Okay.

SL: And, you know, I've got folks that are paying attention to what we're talkin' about . . .

MC: Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . and sometimes . . .

MC: Well, you . . .

SL: . . . when I miss somethin', they'll come to me and say . . .

MC: Yeah, or ask you . . .

SL: . . . "We've gotta clear this up."

MC: . . . ask you—clear it up. That's right.

[01:05:48] SL: Yeah, yeah. Okay. All right. So I'm still gonna hold onto your childhood here a little bit longer . . .

MC: Okay, that's all right.

SL: . . . before we get any further. Now, we've established that there was a piano in your home . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and that there was music played on it.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: And that it was mostly if not all . . .

MC: All . . .

SL: . . . church-related . . .

MC: . . . all church.

SL: . . . hymnal stuff.

MC: That's right.

SL: There wasn't any . . .

[01:06:09] MC: No hanky-panky. [*SL laughs*] See, what you have is that black people are like "Porgy and Bess"—George Gershwin—and "Swanee River." They have—you know, you go down there and you listen to some stuff down in the real ghetto part of the blacks, they're gonna sing some crappy stuff. But at the same time, you have other folks that like nothin' but religion, and as

far as he's concerned, you drill that into a person's mind to try to make him like the Jews. You don't find no Jews goin' to prison. You stop and think about that. And less than one-half a percent of Jews in anybody's prison. And my folks—I got 65 or 70 percent. Mexicans, same way, always doin' somethin' wrong. Now, you say, "Well, why is that?" Nobody knows why people are like they are—I—as far as I'm concerned. But if you—my job is thinking, and I've mentioned this to you before—that Stephens—start him off with—right now, it's just his second year, at three years of age. Now, it isn't that he just likes little, old, young folks—black or white, I don't know what they are. But what he knows is that he's in the recruiting business. He's a billionaire, not a millionaire. And he's recruiting for his business. And one of the things about it is that he's gonna mold your mind between three and eight, and that's the reason why we got so many people black that are in trouble for the simple reason that they—see, you gotta ?you gotta play in that play?. Anytime you find a guy that says he's six years old and teacher had to expel him, he—that tells you he didn't have no home trainin' when he was born up till he was five or six, and so he can't help but go to the penitentiary, can he? 'Cause he's gonna sure do somethin' wrong.

[01:08:03] SL: So between the religious influences that you had at the house and the work you did with your father at the . . .

MC: Cleanin'.

SL: . . . at the cleanin' shop . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . at the cleaners . . .

MC: Uh-huh.

SL: . . . you kept pretty busy, then. You were occupied.

MC: That's right.

SL: You were not having any idle time.

MC: No idle time at all, no.

SL: And that didn't interest you in the least.

MC: Not at all.

SL: You were more interested in . . .

MC: Well . . .

SL: . . . grabbin' hold of everything that you could grab hold of as far as learnin' and helpin'. Is that . . .

[01:08:36] MC: Didn't—I didn't know it then. Like I told you, Gaston Means—you may have heard about him there—and he wrote the book about Warren G. Harding and the bad things that happened. See, just like you might have somebody that wrote about Nixon, somebody wrote about Reagan, somebody wrote

about Jimmy Carter. And all of these kinda different presidents, but at the same time, all were different. The Kennedys there—they have a lifestyle of their own because they're rich. You come up there and say, "What happened with Mr. Joe?" Fooled around and went over there as an ambassador and got hold of that ?pitcher? of vodka, wasn't it? Joe Kennedy.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. So naturally I—he starts off there. Okay, you come up there—the Italians there, they come out there and you say, "Well, what are they?" Well, as far as we're concerned, they're gangsters. May not all be, but that's the way we depict them.

SL: Stereotypical.

MC: That's right.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Okay.

SL: Yeah. Well, what about—you were active in Scouts.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[01:09:38] SL: Did you go all the way through scouting?

MC: I didn't go through—I didn't go any further than—like, the Eagle—I mean, the—is the top one, see.

SL: That's right.

MC: But you go through difference phases.

SL: First class . . .

MC: First class . . .

SL: . . . there's second class, first class . . .

MC: Second class. That's right.

SL: Let's see, Tenderfoot . . .

MC: Tenderfoot . . .

SL: . . . second class, first class . . .

MC: First . . .

SL: . . . then there's . . .

MC: Then they come out there and started gettin' something else,
and next . . .

SL: There's life, and there's . . .

MC: Yeah, that's right.

SL: . . . and I'm tryin'—there's one other one in there . . .

MC: Uh-huh, then . . .

SL: . . . before Eagle.

MC: Before you get to Eagle.

SL: Yeah.

[01:10:09] MC: Yeah. But, you see, what happens—by the time
that—you'll find that even with whites, it's just a last few that go
all the way through. Most people go to college and move
somewhere else. And then he takes up something else, see,

because—you stop and think now—we didn't have football, baseball, golf like we have now. And then if they did, it was totally segregated. Now—right now, just like McFadden. Now, he's got a \$300,000 Bentley and a house out there on the hill where we walked across that same Walton Heights, to go down there to swim. And he's got a million-dollar home out there. Well, you say, "How long's he gonna have it?" I don't know. If he's smart and if he's like the Manning boys, he'll have it forever, 'cause they—Archie Manning gave 'em a what? A good foundation.

SL: Yep.

MC: And both of 'em—all three of those boys. And that's what we want to do is use that as a model. And that's the reason why you see me workin' as hard as I do, is to make sure that—how did my boy get in med school at fifteen? Was just by the grace of God. But he was prepared, 'cause the lady said, "Let me see his transcript." All As, valedictorian, between fifteen and sixteen. She said, "Well, I'm the secretary to the school of veterinary medicine, and I'll tell Dr. Williams that I—we gonna just take him in there." And that's the way God works for good folks. Now and then, not all the time, but now and then.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[01:11:43] SL: So what about athletics? Did you ever do any athletics . . .

MC: No.

SL: . . . when you were growin' up?

MC: I didn't have time for that. Nuh-uh. I had never even been to a dance and never even been to a basketball game till I went to Tuskegee. I didn't have time for nothin'.

SL: But, you know, even though your dad had his business—cleaners business—and your mom was doin' the beauty service in the homes, y'all were still poor.

[00:12:18] MC: Well, yeah. And see, in other words, what happens—even where I live on Ringo Street, my mother's sister married a doctor—was a dentist—Dr. Powell from down at Forrest City. More than likely finished over there at Meharry in Tennessee, see. And if you had a good farm—now, it's a difference in a good farm and a sharecropper. And we were poor, so that mean my grandfather didn't make any money. And some—and, you know, you come up there and said, "Well, look at my—how much your land cost?" Well, dern, the Ishkriegs bought all the land from the river all the way up here to Broadway—maybe fifty cents or twenty-five cents an acre.

Now, you go out there and buy three or four or five thousand acres of land, and then, after a while, they break it off into sections and then streets. And then you know what the land costs down there now. But, then, the Ishkriegs had that big farm and a bunch of 'em down there. And I worked—I dusted cotton down there for all those folks and made a whole lots of money, see. But not that kinda money where you gonna sit up here and buy no thousand-acre unless you made a whole lots of money. Now, if you go out there in—we call it new ground and, like, my father would have to break up some new ground, see. But ?the battle was? he was workin' for the white man, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And you have to just do what you can to survive. Crazy world, but that's the only one we got.

[01:13:54] SL: So [*TM coughs*] you're workin' for your dad . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . you're doin' Scouts . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . you're getting really thoroughly indoctrinated . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . into the church.

MC: Right. I loved that.

SL: And I guess this is your dad's church that . . .

MC: Yeah, I loved that. Uh-huh.

SL: And—but—and you make it through Dunbar High School . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and you decide that you want to go to the Tuskegee
Institute . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . and do [*MC clears throat*] industrial . . .

MC: Yeah, some more of the industrial. I didn't know what it was. I
just want to go down there.

SL: But you were particularly interested in auto . . .

MC: . . . that's right. Auto mechanics.

SL: . . . mechanics.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[01:14:48] SL: And so how did you—you talked to your mom and
dad about it, and they said, "Okay," or . . .

MC: Well, what happened—Booker T. Washington came down to this
Mosaic Temple there at Ninth and Broadway.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Three stories high. The tallest, best building owned by black
folks in Arkansas. Or else in the South, so to speak. So Booker
T. Washington came down here to speak. ?Yeah?. So when he

came down here in [18]98, my father was tickled to death there just to go and listen to a black guy that came up out of slavery like his father and opened up a school down in Tuskegee. So he wanted to go, but he didn't have the ingredients or the money or anything else, you know. But he [*unclear words*]*—*then he sent me down there.

SL: So it was kind of a dream . . .

MC: For him.

SL: . . . for him.

MC: Yeah, I imagine so, but I didn't know it . . .

SL: And . . .

MC: . . . at that time.

SL: . . . and—but you embraced it.

MC: Yeah, I embraced it. Mh-hmm.

SL: Big adventure for you.

MC: Yeah. Oh, man, what you talkin' 'bout? [*SL laughs*] You saw what he said, "If you ever get in trouble, just call on God."

SL: So what year was this when you . . .

MC: Nineteen thirty-nine.

SL: Nineteen thirty-nine.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[01:15:58] SL: Now, you guys have—you lived through the

Depression, then.

MC: Oh yeah, I lived through the Depression.

SL: Well, let's talk about the Depression before we send you off to the Tuskegee Institute.

MC: Okay. All right.

SL: Let's talk about the Depression . . .

MC: All right.

SL: . . . in Little Rock, Arkansas.

MC: Okay.

[01:16:11] SL: So what do you remember? Do you . . .

MC: I remember right where I'm livin'. I live 1516 Ringo. My mama's sister married a doctor—Dr. Powell—and he built—and he had his office in the Mosaic Temple down there on Ninth and Broadway. And Al Bush [*coughs*] lived next door to him. His father was out here on the other side of—oh, halfway to Bauxite or Benton or somewhere and musta bought some land. And he sold the land and built that building down there, and then he had a . . .

SL: The Mosaic Temple?

MC: Mosaic Temple. But where he got the money from—that they didn't have any insurance, so he had a fraternity where you pay a quarter or dime or fifty cents, and then if you died, they could

bury you. You had money to bury your in-laws. Whites the same way. So they got it from that and, see, and they worked there enough together to where they were able to teach this to where you were self-supporting. And we are living in a world that—ain't but one world, but it has a whole lots of steps goin' up, like goin' on up to such and such a way. And what you have to do is to be real careful that you don't allow another sucker there that comes in there named Satan. If you get too much, Satan takes over your lifestyle—white or black. Doesn't make any difference to Satan. He says—in Book of Job, he says, "Whatcha been doin', buddy?" He says, "I been goin' what? To and fro, seeking those that I could devour." That's Satan. So by the virtue that I saw women down there and all kind of gamblin' and none of it ever affected me because my mind wasn't even on that.

[01:18:02] SL: So you felt like during the Depression, then, in Little Rock, that evil proliferated.

MC: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: And you saw that on the streets and . . .

MC: Yeah, I saw how—I came up on the streets down there. Mh-hmm. Yeah, I came up on it. See, in other words, it's just like some things—some of it sticks to some folks like mud. And then

some of 'em can go around [*laughs*] and walk on the dry ground and don't get the mud on his feet. And you could—well, why is it some people are like that? You have to ask God. People not the same.

SL: What about—did you, I mean—let's see, you were—my gosh, you were—how old were you when—during the Depression, then? You were born in . . .

MC: Nineteen nineteen.

SL: . . . [19]19.

MC: And the Depression—let's make up this like this. Well, as far as I was concerned, it hadn't been nothin' but Depression, see.

SL: Yeah, you—probably about the time that you were really becoming aware of the world around you . . .

MC: Yeah, it was a . . .

SL: . . . the Depression hit.

MC: Yeah, right that. So that's all I knew. And—but I'm a survivor. I think you can understand this.

SL: Yeah.

MC: It's a whole lots difference.

[01:19:08] SL: Well, what about—I mean, didn't you have some school friends and—did you develop any friendships based around your schoolin'?

MC: I—evidently, I didn't. I just told you the girl told me outta a hundred and sixty-five, they said that, "Crenchaw isn't gonna amount to nothin'. Don't marry him. You don't even wanna look at him." See, because they figured that I was weird. "He's churchy," I guess—I don't know.

SL: Well, that probably did—that offered another kind of segregation.

MC: That's right. [*Unclear words*]. [*Laughs*] So I had [*laughter*] to deal with that, didn't I?

SL: Yeah.

MC: Uh-huh.

SL: Yeah, you did.

MC: I didn't have sense enough to know it, though.

SL: Well, maybe, maybe not. Maybe . . .

[01:19:50] MC: I didn't pay any attention to it.

SL: Yeah.

MC: See, one of the nicer things about it—it wasn't that I didn't see the ?bushes? and they would have this lodge—people have ?funeral? homes and some of 'em, like Dan Dubison, and then some had a whole lots of barber shops, beauty shops, eating places that's up on Seventh Street there where the Italians were. They'd cook a whole lots of that, you know, Italian-type

food. And on Eighth Street there, they'd—some other kinda folks'd make hot tamales and sell all like that. See, you could buy used oil for ten cents a quart and all that kinda stuff, see. And if you learn like the animals, they don't have to be taught, whether it's in the ocean or whether you were walkin' in the woods. He learns how to survive. As mother ?sends?, instinct. You can call it whole lots of different things. So as I would go through life, I'm pickin' up good quality points. And I was different from the other folks. Whoever heard of a guy ninety years old, go over there and cut the same grass I cut for a q—for nothin', and it took me a whole week cuttin' it down. I'd knock that rascal down and didn't even have a sweat on yesterday, after I had taken her to the hospital and stayed until 10:15 or 10:30. Mh-hmm. Sure, I went out there and—fore eight o'clock—and she takes a—you know, a treatment because she's got that dead shoulder now. I'll massage it and give it what I call the Crenchaw treatment [*SL laughs*] and, yeah—and get her where she be able to do all right. I'm a master in doin' whatever I think. How you think I taught those fellows how to fly? You know I didn't have the slightest idea of what I was doin'. But being a hustler and a good person—first thing I did, I says to Mr. Maruso, "You want me to fly your students?" Well, I knew he

was gonna give me a dollar or two, 'cause he didn't wanna work to start with.

SL: Yeah.

[01:22:02] MC: No, and he wasn't particularly interested, but he got two hundred and fifty dollars a month, see. So I said, "Shoot, man"—I needed some money, bad. I didn't even have enough money to—I don't know how I got back from Birmingham back to Tuskegee. I musta just caught rides. Somebody took pity on a poor, old, black boy and picked him up and take him on down the road somewhere.

[01:22:25] SL: Well, during the Depression here in Little Rock, did—I mean, your mom and dad were always able to put food on the table.

MC: Oh yeah, plenty. My mother—see, when you work for rich white people, and all of 'em out in the Heights—some of 'em there, like Miss Hill there on Battery Street and all of 'em—and the reason why you say, "What's the—what do you mean, Battery Street?" Well, that's the—all the Civil War, that's what they—that's the name of that street is Battery, and all those people that was into the farms come up here and build good houses. What? The kids could go to school . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . and do a whole lots of things that you couldn't do up in some of these other country places. So everybody takes advantage of whatever's out there for 'em at that time in history. You know, just like Iran. You come up here and you says, "Iran don't wanna give up what he got. He gonna fight like hell to try to hide what he is, so they gonna make him take it over"—you know, the—whatever the chemistry is that—to make the atom bomb or nuclear-type stuff. The guy's crazy. You can't have crazy folks havin' somethin' that [*SL laughs*] would tear up the world, could you?

SL: No.

[01:23:30] MC: So you have to be slick enough to give him a little satisfaction, 'cause it is his, but at the same time you have to put bounds on it. So that's why—that's all life is: knowin' how far you can go and what you can do and—within the—stayin' within the law. And that's the Christian principle. So by the virtue that this is all that I know is I been taken care of, 'cause of what the man said, "I am the Lord," in Malachi. "I change not," meaning that He's the same today as He was ten thousand years ago. I believe that, so I'm just stupid, but I get a whole lots of stuff 'cause I believe it. Whole lots of good stuff. Just like a little, old kid twenty-five years of age—sit up there and I

thought I did the worst thing in the world down—talkin' behind
?Tim Reid?—those movie stars. Talkin' about the Black Ball
Express that was Patton's army. Man, they—those are black
guys—they're still segregated, but they would come in on those
tanks and they started workin' on 'em all night long, 'cause
Patton didn't take no crap. He wanted 'em to be able to—"I'm
goin' to Germany," and that's the way he is. Somebody always
got a way out. He's a little bit off, you know, but he wanted the
people on there that he could drive, 'cause the blacks would
work all night because that's General Patton.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And the other folks just like him. Okay.

[01:25:00] SL: What about your—you know, let's talk about your
father and his . . .

MC: Tailor shop or ministry. That's all he was.

SL: Well, but he—there—he also was invol—he was active in the . . .

MC: NAACP.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Okay. Here's what happens. One hundred years ago, 1909, just
like I told you about William Nathan—Bedford—or Forrest—
Nathan Bedford Forrest. He was—his people made the Klu Klux
Klan. And the other folks did the same thing as well—throttlin'

blacks that they call bigoted here in the South.

SL: Now, you were tellin' me that Forrest City's named after his . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . family.

MC: After his folks. That's where the—first part, or that's what they told me.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Forrest City. But I do know this. They called him the Swamp Fox. He came by [*unclear words*] but musta been outta Mississippi—one of those places. But he was a fighter. But he took pity on me and said, "I don't even know you, but I like you for some reason."

SL: Now, who is this?

MC: Forrest. His granddaddy.

SL: His granddaddy.

MC: Yeah, his grandson. Yeah. His granddaddy was the one that was . . .

SL: The Confederate general.

MC: . . . the bad guy. Yeah, confed—yeah. [01:26:17] But there are certain people that you like. You don't know why sometime.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And there's certain ones that I like. Well, in the army, I like 'em

all 'cause this is where I made my money. I'm a money man. See, I can't send my kids to school or do this or do that because I didn't need the money 'cause I won't spend none of it. But I enjoy helpin' people. I'm a helper and love it.

SL: So you think you got that from your dad?

MC: I don't know where. I more than likely got it from my mother. See, my daddy and I got one of these just like this [points down] with him over there at Central High School.

SL: Yeah.

[01:26:57] MC: And one of the things about it is that he got it, as I told you, that when he was down in Marianna and saw that white fellow there that every time he'd look around, looked like a new suit. But he was sending 'em to Memphis and gettin' 'em cleaned and pressed. But my daddy didn't know it. But he liked it, see. And some things that you like and don't know why you like it, and that's the way life is, see. Then you find a whole lots of folks who'll sit up here and say, "Black folks like big cars." Well, it is kinda stupid, but, you know, you don't—I don't argue with him just 'cause he's stupid. [SL laughs] The only thing I tell a guy like this—what you have to do is be a mastermind like the Jew. And, you know, as I say, you don't find no Jews in jail. And you come up and you say, "Well, what are they?" They—we

make like they came from Adam—came from Abraham—and they're supposed to be the example for the rest of the world to follow—to follow j—God, if you wanna call it that. So they've been doin' a pretty good job of . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . doin' that, see, and I like 'em. I did. Mh-hmm.

SL: Well now, so let—let's get back to your father and his civic involvement with the NAACP. What—how did that come about? How did he . . .

[01:28:06] MC: He was—when he—I said he came in o—[19]07. So [19]09, they'd lynched some guy down by Elaine, down by—near Forrest City and those other places like this and—what you'll find in life is that some people don't like slavery, see. Now, you say, "Who are they that don't like slavery?" They couldn't make no Indians no slaves, 'cause they didn't like it. And you don't know whether he may have had enough Indian in him that he didn't like it, either. I don't know what he had in him, but I know he didn't like no slavery and he never said a word about it. And anything that he could do to destroy the slavery concept—that's what they would do. And then sometimes you'd ask them, "Do they know what they're doing?" No. It's just gut feeling. We're over there in Afghanistan and, you know, those folks over there

don't want you over there. Germans—no, the Russians stayed over there for eleven years—pulled up and went on back to there 'cause they couldn't do nothin'. Got all them air—all those helicopters shot down.

SL: Yep.

MC: Russian. And you come up there and you said, "What, do you think they're crazy?" Well, they aren't gonna let you come over there and take their country. I don't know what he got. I may be try—he's raised poppies and all and some kind of stuff to sell and to kill folks, as far as we concerned. And that's the way God put these people on the world. But difference of opinion, different minds, different thinking, and to keep up a bunch of hell. Some others are like us. Good. And get along—you'll learn how to get along, because you like folks.

[01:30:05] SL: Well, was your father president of the NAA . . .

MC: Yeah, and that's right. [*Unclear words*] . . .

SL: . . . during the [19]57 crisis?

MC: Yeah, fif—that's right—of the—uh-huh.

SL: Did he ever—you were over at . . .

MC: Alabama.

SL: You were in Alabama . . .

MC: Uh-huh.

SL: . . . at—what was the name of the base?

MC: Tuskegee.

SL: Well, there was a base there that you were . . .

MC: Yeah, I worked. Yeah. At [19]57 I had—I'd left here and . . .

[01:30:12] SL: Well, you were already over there in [19]53 or so, I think. You . . .


MC: Yeah, yeah. I went there to Oklahoma, out at Fort Sill. That's where that is. And the . . .

SL: Okay, but you ended up . . .

MC: And then I left Fort Sill in [19]55 or [19]56 and went to Camp Rucker down in Alabama.

SL: Rucker. That's what I was—couldn't remember.

MC: Yeah, and then that's why they renamed it to Fort Rucker and . . .

 SL: Well, was your dad—were you in touch with your dad while all that [19]57 stuff was goin' on here?

MC: Yeah. I had a guy look just like you came to my house, and he says, "How can you sit here and look just you lookin', and you layin' down in your house, lookin' down in your town, Little Rock, raisin' hell?" Eisenhower had—what—Brownell to send the 101st Army out of Carolina to this town to keep up the peace. My father was raisin' hell. He says, "And you sittin' up here just like

everything is okay." I said, "I can't do nothin' about it but pray."
I said, "It's in." And my father was arrested by Bruce Bennett
and put up that \$300, of which I got right out there and then
your girl got it out there now, on how he said, "We aren't gonna
give up the list because the NAACP, the—all these black folks
that worked for folks downtown," and, you know, like on Battery
Street, and all he wanted was the list so that he could get 'em
fired and seein' he could break their backs, and, see—so you
have to do a whole lots of prayin' when you don't have nothin',
and I told you I didn't have nothin' but God.

[01:31:49] SL: Well, it's—what—from what I know, your father was
breakin' ground . . .

MC: Mh-hmm. New ground.

SL: . . . on race—new ground.

MC: New ground.

SL: You were breakin' new ground . . .

MC: Yeah, I did. Yeah, and I . . .

SL: . . . in what you were doin' . . .

MC: . . . yeah, but I'm doin' . . .

SL: . . . over in Alabama.

MC: . . . yeah, ?right?.

SL: And you did it in Fort Sill.

MC: Yeah.

SL: And you'd already done it out at the Tuskegee Institute.

MC: Yeah.

SL: I mean, you guys were . . .

MC: Breaking ground.

SL: . . . you guys were breaking ground.

[01:32:12] MC: Yeah. Well, see, what happens in the—just like I

said—I showed you that thing, up from the long journey for my grandfather in [18]52. Abraham Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation we'll say in [18]60. Came in there—he says on the first day of 1863, those people that are in servitude won't have to be in servitude. Now—well, then we come up there and find out that in Texas they got Juneteen. They didn't tell 'em about it [*laughs*] for two or three years that they were free, see. And that's the reason why they—that's the reason why you celebrate, in Texas, Juneteen, 'cause then the white folks didn't tell 'em about—they had been freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. It didn't make that much difference 'cause they wasn't gonna ?do nothin' but? raise hell anyway. But what you have to do is realize that we are livin' in a strange world and each day is different from the last day. And you sit up there and you started to wondering, "How many times did France and the United

Kingdom—and they found a hundred years' war." They had the Italians, and the Italians—you say, "Well, who were they?" Well, we had wrong. All—all Gauls is divided into three parts there, see. And I'm meanin' that they were a little bit different from Alexander the Great where they had the philosophers there—when Paul went there and he says, "Well, here's a ?babble mouth?." Let's see—went up to ?Knox Hill? and he said, "I see that you have monuments, and you even have monuments to the unknown god. That's the God I'm gonna tell you about. In Him we live and breathe and have our being, meanin' that He's in charge of everything." So when a guy turns around and says, "Are you really in charge of everything?" You can't think of nothin' He ain't in charge of. [*SL laughs*] So all you got to do—but He told me my job is to help people that are less fortunate than I am. He said, "You got the brain, and your job is to help people and make sure this is a better world." So He told the same guy that looked just like me in the time of Noah, "He ain't got no sense. [*SL laughs*] Get rid of 'em now. I'm gonna wash 'em off the face of the earth." And Noah stayed down there for a hundred and twenty years buildin' a big, old ark on top of the—a hill. Ain't no water around there at all. [*SL laughs*] Ain't that something?

SL: Yeah.

[01:34:38] MC: Whether it's true or not, we don't know. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah. It's a good story.

MC: Good story.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Okay, next.

SL: Well, and it proves a point.

MC: Okay.

SL: So did your father—so your father got arrested . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . during the [19]57 crisis.

MC: Uh-huh.

[01:34:53] SL: Did—what—were there—was there ever any activity
outside your house—any threatening activity . . .

MC: Well, yes.

SL: . . . for your family back home?

MC: Not in my house, but in Daisy Bates there they'd drive by and
break her windows out on Twenty-eighth Street.

SL: Now, on Eighth Street?

MC: Twenty-eight.

SL: Twenty-eighth Street.

MC: Mh-hmm.



SL: Now, I didn't see this photograph, but isn't there a photograph of you and Daisy Bates sitting at a table?

MC: And, yeah, 'cause I taught her how to fly.

[01:35:20] SL: You taught her how to fly?

MC: I sure about did. Yeah. [*SL laughs*] See, they had the *State Press* right down there in the next block. So when I came up here after that and she . . .

SL: In [19]47?

MC: I came up in forty—'bout [19]47 or [19]46. Somethin' like that. And I taught her. She'd come out to the field, 'cause she and my father—she was the state president, and my father was the city president. And they worked together all the time, and she was crazy about me. And one of the nicer things about it, because I try to be a nice guy, see. But as far as thinkin' about certain things, you say, "No, you don't think about nothin' like that. You are"—I'm a helper. I don't do nothin' but just—I just—you saw those monuments there and plaques right on that wall there [points toward wall in front of him]?

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: That'd do—those—these ?stars? were smart. I was smart enough to stay close to them. [*SL laughs*] See, I didn't have nothin' so—or you have to make sure if you don't have anything,

you better stay with somebody that got something.

[01:36:19] SL: So you had Daisy Bates as a student.

MC: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: And how she'd do?

MC: Did all right. Now, I'm a teacher.

SL: I mean—so she could fly a plane by herself?

MC: No, I didn't let her fly . . .

SL: No.

MC: . . . by herself there, see. She said in that book, that the insurance was so high until they told [*laughs*]—"If you start flyin' and fly—wanna fly by yourself, you better have a whole lots of insurance or a whole lots of money to buy insurance."

SL: Yeah.

MC: Uh-huh.

[01:36:47] SL: Well, that's a good story. Now, what was her husband's name? I've forgotten.

MC: L. C.

SL: L. C.

MC: Yeah.

SL: Did he take lessons, too?

MC: No, he was a older man then. See, I imagine he'd had two or three wives before. She came outta Memphis. And she—young,

good-lookin', thin girl. Real nice.

SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, they had pretty good hearts, though.

[01:37:09] MC: Oh yeah, good hearts. But then on top of that, life is so crazy—until you have guys like Alexander the Great that came down here and saw this—these Jews with the—in Hebrew and, you know, they didn't know about no Hebrew, but the Jews—the Greeks were philosophers. Meanin' that they talked about the stars and the planets and all kinda bull stuff like that, see. And, naturally, when he came over here and he saw like this and he was inquisitive, so I imagine he sent back to—Greek—and they call them the boat folks, see. Nobody else hadn't started marchin' on the, I mean, you know, on the ships until then. And then they came over there, and they said, "Well, look here. In order to find out what these crazy folks got, we'll have our philosophers to interpret the Bible into"—and they rewrote it into Greek, and so that's the reason why you have the Greek Bible—ended up for the next thousand years until King Philip in England decided that he wanted to get some—another way, and so he had 'em to write in English. [*SL laughs*] Or rewrite it. [*SL laughs*] Ain't that right?

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. Paul was down there in Rome, there, see, so he says, "What are we gonna do about that?" He says, "Oh, we'll write it in Latin." [*SL laughs*] Ain't that fair enough?

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah, so that's the reason why we got 'em. Now, we got the different versions of the same Bible. The—that book that I had in there, some white fellow had gone through the whole Bibles, all of 'em, and has tried to make something that makes some sense. Mh-hmm. But all of it talks about bein' your brother's keeper. Your job is here to help your brother. And if you don't forget that, then you get to be ninety or a hundred and don't get mad at nobody. [*Laughs*] You don't have to be worried about that. I got all the stuff I need. I don't have no ?gas? in there, but I got the rest of it out there. Ain't that right?

SL: Yeah.

MC: Uh-huh.

[01:39:06] SL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, okay, so I'm tryin' to—let's see, your daddy in [19]57, how old was he then? He was . . .

MC: [Nineteen] fifty-seven?

SL: Yeah. In 1957 . . .

MC: I don't know whether . . .

SL: . . . he would've been . . .

MC: Let me see—he was old. Yeah, he was old, but at the same time, you figure like this that—he may've been in his seventies.

SL: Yeah. I . . .

MC: Yeah. Somethin' like that. Yeah.

SL: That's pretty old to be in the thick of that . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . [19]57 crisis.

[01:39:39] MC: Now, ain't—let me tell you this in all fairness.

SL: Okay.

MC: There are people on this planet that don't like slavery.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Don't like no master over them. He happened to be one of 'em.

He didn't know what that white fellow had. He thought he was just gettin' new suits every month. But he was gettin' 'em cleaned and pressed. And my dad may have, you know, had a bad lemon in his mouth, because here's a white guy, and he's—and his father out there doin' all the work on the plantation.

He's a . . .

SL: And this fellow's . . .

MC: . . . right . . .

SL: . . . wearin' clean, pressed pants.

MC: Yeah, wearin' them—good plan. And you never know what makes a guy think like he thinks.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm. And, like I told you before, we got people that are like Bart Farr from down in Mississippi. And he don't need to be out there playin' with the—in Minnesota. But the thing about it, he's a competitor. It's fun to him. Archie Manning come outta Mississippi. It was fun, but he taught his kids how to love folks and to work with folks and to—not only that, but when they win a game, take 'em on out and buy 'em a steak dinner. [*Leans forward and slaps SL*] That's where you make sure he gonna take out for you, ain't that right?

SL: Yeah.

[01:41:04] MC: Yeah. You got to be a shrewd guy, but you have to be taught how to do these kinda things. So my thinkin' is that it's just like I saw this kid here. That sucker sit up there, and I'm seventy-five years older than he is, but he saw something in me that he didn't get when his father had him.

SL: Yeah.

MC: He saw me there, and, "That's the kind of daddy"—and didn't know nothin' about me. But I put—appeared to him to be somebody of means. That you, mother?

Unidentified Speaker: Mh-hmm.

[Tape stopped]

[01:41:39] SL: Okay. We just had lunch, but we're still on tape two.

MC: Okay.

SL: So we've been talkin' a little bit about NAACP and your dad's involvement.

MC: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: We've been talkin' about the Depression era . . .

MC: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . in Little Rock, which you grew up in.

MC: That's right.

SL: And that's kind of what you knew . . .

MC: That's all I knew.

SL: . . . before you ever live . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . left Little Rock.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: You were still surviving the Depression.

MC: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

[01:42:11] SL: Now, you know, one of the things that—the folks that had farms during the Depression . . .

MC: Right.

SL: . . . they did pretty good.

MC: Yeah, 'cause they . . .

SL: 'Cause they were already . . .

MC: . . . they could feed themselves.

SL: . . . they were feedin' themselves, and so they didn't . . .

MC: Uhn-uhn.

SL: . . . feel that Depression . . .

MC: Right. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . as much as the folks in the city did.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[01:42:28] SL: But you were tellin' me that y'all never went hungry
during the Depression . . .

MC: Hm-mm.

SL: . . . and it was—your dad had a cleaners business.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: And your mom was doin' folks' hair.

MC: That's right.

SL: Beauty service.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So y'all were able to deal with the Depression.

MC: Oh, yeah.

SL: But you saw it on the streets, didn't you?

MC: Oh, yeah. Many, many more. They couldn't do any better. Meanin' that many people that went through the high school couldn't go to college. That's one of the reasons why they came up with the junior college as a—for an associate degree as a way of—you could teach after you got out and then make a little money where you could go somewhere and finish it up. There is always a way. You don't care how bad it looks. There's always a way to get by.

[01:43:25] SL: Now, you were—let's see, now, let me think. Did you see any soup lines or any of that kind of stuff during the Depression? People . . .

MC: No.

SL: . . . in line tryin' . . .

MC: See . . .

SL: . . . to get fed or . . .

MC: No, see [*clears throat*]*—actually, to tell the truth about it, as you said, most of the people were from out of the country or had people in the country that would—they could go down and get vegetables, chickens. They had pigs about this time they could, you know, kill hogs and so forth. And you become associated with people doin' things that are not in the soup line. Now, when you start talkin' about big places like Saint Louis, Detroit,*

Chicago—once they get in a tight—like they're not makin' cars in those places, then you'll find the soup lines will start openin' up because there isn't any work. Even if you'd asked a question about, "What's gonna happen in the next twenty-five years," see. And I would tell you that the way I see it, that there are some people we call Latinos, and they think this is the promised land. So as fast as he can get over here, he's comin' whether you like it or not. Can't speak any English, but he knows this, "I may not ever learn English, but my kids will." And he becomes—is saturated with livin' the good life. And this is the promised land.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm. And he's comin'.

[01:45:11] SL: Yeah. Well, that's part of the American dream.

MC: Well, that's the dream.

SL: Work hard.

MC: That's right. See, in other words, a guy turns around and says, "Where'd all the other people come from where Columbus came from?" Over there somewhere. Spain and Portuguese and places like that. And they went around the world. They could—after when she started becomin' the boat people, see. Now, you come up there and you says, "What about the Romans?" Well,

the Romans had walked over everywhere, and everywhere they went they conquered. And—but the Greeks, there, they were on the water. Italians and all those kind of folks—they were up there beatin' tails everywhere they'd go. And there was—and when you stop and think about how they had to have slaves down there rowin' all over that same big ocean. You say, "How they'd do it?" Well, they survived.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Feed 'em slop or somethin'. Mh-hmm.

[01:46:08] SL: So you graduate from Dunbar High School, and your dad had wished that he had been able to go to the—to Tuskegee Institute . . .

MC: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . as a kid. He'd seen Booker T. . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . talk early on. And so when you came of age, you—the family was pretty much 100 percent behind you goin' out there, weren't they?

MC: Well, yeah. See, my sister's two years older than I and went to Hampton, and that's where Booker T. Washington went to school at Hampton, from—right out of Virginia there, see—in Virginia. And people started to goin' to school, and you gonna always

have poor people—white and black. You don't have to worry about that. There will never, never be a time when one group of people goin' have everything and the other group have nothin', even if you go to Africa, if you go to Japan, go to Korea. And I haven't said nothin' 'bout China yet, see, where you got a billion folks. So what you're doin' is that you are lookin' to how far the future is over there on the other side of wherever you are.

[01:47:32] And that's like I told you with the commander—sat there and he wrote that little skit out because he'd looked on the Internet and he said, "Here's a ninety-year-old fellow, and he's totally been a carin' type and has a good attitude—can just sit there and talk 'bout good things—positive things." And it shows the resistance of it there. And then you have the energy in that you are able to go further than—kinda like a football player—you're tired, but you still throw that ball. And if you have a guy in there like Moss that can run faster than anybody else, he's down there to get it. So the coach, whether it's baseball, football, or whatever—basketball—each coach is lookin' for that little extra. And that's what we are lookin' for. We wanna make sure that we become a part of it there because, let's face it, whether you think about or not, you'll be a minority in just a short time, whether you believe it or not. You don't know you're

runnin' out of existence in this country. That's hard to believe, isn't it?

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And you come up and said, "How long?" I don't know. I'm not in charge of nothin'. But the way it has come, that's the way it's goin'.

SL: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

MC: Okay, now.

SL: I think everybody sees that.

MC: Oh yeah, they see that.

[01:49:07] SL: Before I get you outta Little Rock and over to Tuskegee, when you were growin' up, did you ever have to do any—did you ever run in—across any fights that you had to be a part of? Did—would you ever have to—any physical stuff that you had to get involved with?

MC: No, I didn't. I tell you what—you'd have to buy your milk, so ?it'd be? maybe three cents or a nickel—somethin' like that. And you got big boys would know that you were comin' there with a little money. And they be waitin' on you and take it. Just take it away from you. And you're almost afraid to say anything, 'cause they wanna jump on you then. Meaning that there will always—there are and have been bullies, and bullies of the world go

around and wanna take something belong to someone else. So I had to put up with that. Goin' to school, guys take my money. Mh-hmm. It wasn't but three cents or a nickel.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So you just kinda turned the other cheek, then . . .

MC: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . with the bullies. And you [*laughs*] . . .

MC: You—mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah, if he take it away, then I wouldn't go that way tomorrow. Go somewhere else, or ask the teacher, "Can I erase all the blackboards to stay in here?" And, you know, there was always somethin' that smart guys can do that can help the teacher. To survive. Mh-hmm.

[01:50:39] SL: Okay. Let's get you over to Tuskegee now. You—how do you get there? How do you physically get to Tuskegee?

MC: Either on the train or else on the bus. If you go from the bus, you go over to Memphis, and then from Memphis to Alabama. And then if you're on the train, then you'll get on the Chehaw there where you can catch the bus down here for maybe a few dollars. I mean, not the bus, the train. But you still got to go to

Memphis. And then to Montgomery, Alabama, and from there you go forty miles up to Tuskegee, and the train comes through on Chehaw and you get off there, and about eight miles from the town.

SL: Chehaw. [*TM coughs*]

MC: And it was a—just a little drop-off like you got in—say, in, like, Fayetteville. You got some places between Fayetteville and Oklahoma. That's where I usually—see, I was stationed at Fort Sill, and sometimes I'd go to Oklahoma City and come through Fort Smith. Other times I'd go down and drop—'cause you come west out—come east out of Lawton, Oklahoma. Twenty-nine miles straight there, and then I'd almost hit Arkansas there in—what—Enoch or somethin' like that.

[01:51:49] SL: [*Clears throat*] So when you were—this is 1939 that you're headin' to Tuskegee?

MC: Tuskegee.

SL: So you're probably sittin' on the back of the bus.

MC: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: And on the train . . .

MC: Same way.

SL: Same way?

MC: Mh-hmm. Poplar Buff—if you come outta Saint Louis, you'd

have to change at Poplar bus comin' this way where it was all—is totally segregated on—at Poplar bus, Arkansas or Missouri.

Whichever one it is.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm. Some people liked it; some could care less, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[01:52:30] MC: And I'm the type that didn't put up a whole lots of beef about nothin', because there will always be, as long as God is God, that somebody will come to your rescue sooner or later if somebody else is doin' you wrong. That's the way—the na—that's the nature of God, in that He doesn't allow anybody to stay always in charge. That's the reason you have the different games, some of 'em rougher. Hockey—that's a tough game.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. They come up there and they hit you, and then you know you got hit.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm. [*SL laughs*] Isn't that right?

SL: Yeah, that's right. I've seen it. [*MC laughs*] I've never felt it, but I've seen the . . .

MC: No, but you've seen it.

SL: Yeah, I've seen it.

MC: You've seen [*coughs*].

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[01:53:16] SL: [*Clears throat*] Okay, so you get to Montgomery, Alabama, and then it's another forty miles . . .

MC: Yeah, up to—over to the . . .

SL: . . . to the institute.

MC: . . . right, over to the institute.

SL: And you take a bus up to there?

MC: Yeah.

SL: And you get there and you probably don't have much money, do you?

MC: Didn't have nothin'. Hm-mm. Didn't care. See . . .

SL: You're gettin' there thinkin' auto mechanics.

MC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SL: Okay.

MC: Well, see, the thing about it is—guys say, "Well, how do you do?" Well, I mean, you don't have any money. Well, they have a five-year plan. You might work a year full time before you st—maybe take a couple of night classes. But you work, work, work, then you go to school. Mh-hmm, and I didn't mind that, see, 'cause I like to work.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So you get to the institute, and you sign up? I mean, did they even know you were comin'?

MC: I imagine so, but at the same time, everybody's got to come through the registrar's office to put your name on the list and find out what you're gonna take. And then they wanna know what—if you have any money. I—well, if you don't have any money, you come up here on the five-year plan fore you leave home, you know, and that you're gonna have to go there and work. Mh-hmm. All normal-type schools like that, you'd have to work your tail off in order to survive—not that I cared at all.

[01:54:45] SL: Uh-huh. Well, so what'd they have you do when you got there?

MC: Well, see, the thing about it, they have all kinds of jobs. I may assign you out there where you were at the horse farm, so that way you got to feed the horses and do a whole lots of things out there. Yeah. If you are down in the mechanical part there, you might get in there where you take care of the girls' dormitories—always toilets stopped up. And you got a good job there where it's a continuous effort of unstoppin' the plugs. Then if you turn around, someone else has done something that you have to go

out and—it's just like in the printing outfit. You have people down there where the printers are always bringing up with exam—tests and examination things that you workin' there. Mr. Rutledge that lives right around on the next street over there—he was the plumber. So when he got out and J. T., his brother, with the—he was there when I got there. So by the virtue that he was off on another street over here, he could show me the way, tell me who to go to see. "Now, if y'all want, go see Mr. Rabb, and he'll get you a job." "So what are you goin' be doing?" "Workin' dinin' hall." But if workin' dinin' hall, you goin' be eatin' all the time, see. And so that mean you get up at three o'clock in the mornin' to go up there to help prepare breakfast for the kids. And you learn how to survive. Now, if you were on the *Titanic*, [SL laughs] there wasn't any survivors.

SL: Right.

[01:56:22] MC: Yeah. See, in other words, you come up there, and you say every once in a while you run into a situation that you have to really figure out, "How am I going to survive?" And you turn around and you say, "Wherever you are"—and it doesn't make any difference what period you in, whether it was 335 when Alexander the Great came from Greek over there, he sent back and got the philosophers, and he didn't know anything

'bout the Hebrew language. But he had them to translate it.

How they did it, I don't know. But you always have somebody to help you do whatever you wanna do.

[01:57:00] SL: So they—when you signed up at Tuskegee and you didn't have any money, they just kinda—there was always work to be done.

MC: Oh yeah, always work. Yeah.

SL: And they just kinda rotated you.

MC: Yeah, rotated. That's right.

SL: Wherever the work had to be done . . .

MC: That's right. Had to be done.

SL: . . . that's where you worked.

MC: Yeah.

SL: And so you really got a pretty broad exposure . . .

MC: Yeah. That's right. Worked . . .

SL: . . . of different activities.

MC: . . . on the roads sometimes. Yeah . . .

SL: Yeah . . .

MC: . . . or else you worked down in the boiler room. Or else you work in the laundry, see. There always plenty of things to do.

Now, lazy folks—they say, "Now, I don't see nothin' to do."

Well, I wasn't lazy, 'cause I'd been here workin' all the time.

And I might've been gettin' prepared.

SL: Yep. You didn't know it at the time, but . . .

MC: Didn't know it at the time.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So . . .

TM: Scott, we need to change tapes.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[01:57:47] SL: We're now on tape three.

MC: Okay.

SL: We're talkin' about you arriving and . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . signing up for the work rotation . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . that Tuskegee Institute had to offer folks that didn't have
the money for tuition.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So you were in that rotation.

MC: Right.

SL: You were doing whatever work needed to be done.

MC: That's right. [*Belches*]

SL: And some of the work ethic that your mom and your dad had given you and that you had embraced . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . in your upbringing kinda prepared you for always workin' on somethin'.

MC: Didn't know it at the time, but I was bein' prepared from the time that I walked out of the house at 1914 Dennison.

[01:58:25] SL: Let me ask you this.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Another element in your growin' up at home was your almost fierce embracing of Christianity and the church.

MC: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

SL: How did that play at Tuskegee? Was there—did you go to church services? Were there folks around you that you . . .

MC: Every day.

SL: Every day.

MC: Every day.

SL: What—how did that work? What . . .

MC: Well, see, Booker T. came from Hampton. And more than likely, most of those type of churches or schools are connected with some church. So you have some . . .

SL: Affiliation.

MC: . . . Baptist church or Methodist church or whatever it is, they have schools there that will look out for you and take up money to help poor people. And you don't think that you're poor at that particular time in life, see. You come up where they—I don't care where it—whether you're up at the university at Fayetteville—and I've been up there, see, because the ?Manley people?—you know, I'd take them back up to Fayetteville, and they were not—the cheerleader's father—football—there. They came out of Conway, Arkansas. And I'd take 'em back up there, see.

SL: M'kay.

[01:59:40] MC: And I did this—it's just like I told you, the Italians came down from New York, and the first thing about it is they'd tell Mr. Washington, "We wanna go down to Montgomery to see some girls." See, they're Italian. They wasn't goin' be up there lookin' for the girls, so I—he said, "Crenshaw, will you take the instructors down to Montgomery—wanna go see the girls?" And then they might follow me down to the—see, I remember one time distinctly, I was on the Washington Avenue where Mr. King's church is. Right in—down in town, about two blocks from the state Capitol. And he hit the horn. I said, "That you?" "Yeah." "Come over here." "Where are the fellows?" "Oh,

they're down the street." "Well, where is the car?" I said, "I got it parked up there right by the church where they'd be easy to find at eleven o'clock." I said, "I told 'em to come on back so I could get back to Tuskegee." And, now, they gave me five dollars to drive 'em down, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[02:00:47] SL: So you—there—church was every day at Tuskegee?

MC: Yeah. See, there . . .

SL: What kind of affiliation did they have? Was it a Baptist affiliation or a . . .

MC: I don't really know, tell the truth about it. The only thing I knew that most churches are connected, either with the Methodist . . .

SL: Most schools or . . .

MC: Oh, schools. That's right.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm. And it's like over here at Philander Smith College. United Methodist.

SL: Right.

MC: That means that he's connected with the white church. Then you have the African E. Methodist separate from the whites. They don't get much money, but any of 'em that are

connected—like, Philander Smith up here on Eleventh and State—well, they knew they were gonna get money because it's a big organization.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Dr. King was down there Midway, Georgia, and I imagine it's one of the different churches that sponsored that down there, because he'd go down there on the retreat to teach people how to be nonviolence.

SL: Right.

MC: That's right. And they'd—he gave 'em classes in res—"Don't try to resist. Just fall down. Might get the snot beat out of you a few times, but your job is not to fight back. Nonviolence." Mh-hmm.

[02:02:09] SL: So did you—was it required attendance to go to church every day at Tuskegee?

MC: No. Guys'd slip through there, but at the same time, we would go out and would have some type of religious service over in the chaplain. And it wasn't nothin'—maybe fifteen minutes, maybe half an hour. And then you'd go on back. But, at the same time, now, I imagine, all of us wore that blue uniform at Tuskegee like a—looked like a soldier, but in a blue. And I imagine as long as they got that, they may have gotten some

money from the government. I don't know where they got it from, but somebody always has ways of helpin' poor people.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So you were—you went there thinking auto mechanics, but . . .

MC: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . somehow or another aviation entered your life. Now, how did that happen?

[02:03:05] MC: Everything is a streak of luck.

SL: Yeah.

MC: You either can miss the iceberg, or else you can run into it. [SL



laughs] I went there and what we had was ROTC. And they had a few schools—black schools—that had kinda like a junior ROTC, and then that's what—maybe that's the reason why we wore that blue uniform, see. And then they asked the Congress of the United States about maybe goin' into the flyin' business. Now, here's what had happened. All over this country—Lindbergh went across the ocean in [19]28. And then they was tryin' to help civilians to fly across country—fly people across. See, they think just 'cause you white that twenty-five or forty years ago—everybody been flyin'. Flyin' just came in—you remember when they had those tri-planes . . .

SL: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

MC: . . . three motors. And then they would turn around and fly across the ocean. And then he sat up there and said, "Well, what we'll do—we'll put in what they call civilian pilot training and select a school—five for blacks and maybe a bunch of 'em for whites" . . .

SL: Right.

MC: . . . "and all over the South and everywhere else." This helped places like Adams Field with Holbert and those kinda folks to teach flyin' down in Arkansas, I imagine, and up to Fayetteville and everywhere else. [02:04:39] I flew the Finkbeiners up to Fayetteville because he—you knew fi—you heard of him, Finkbeiner?

SL: Hm-mm.

MC: He had a meat place down here. And he had—would supply everybody in Arkansas with meat.

SL: Hmm.

MC: And other places there would—would si—was supplyin' with other things, just like up there you got Tyson now up in that section that will have chickens going all over the world now, even in China.

SL: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

MC: So we spread out as we go, and we have to do this thing. So they—the word—Congress did that, and just like you see this right here . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . where Mrs. Roosevelt comes up there—that's her—came—just happened to come to Tuskegee [shows newspaper clipping to SL], and Chief Anderson here asked her would she like to fly in a little Piper Cub. Well, the Secret Service wasn't gonna let her fly in no Piper Cub, and she sit up there, "Well, I'd like to fly." So they had to call the President Roosevelt in order to get permission to let her fly. And I guess they were all like this [braces himself in his chair] hopin' that nothin' happened. And when she got back there, I guess she just told the president that—she wasn't pretty, see, and then she had her black friend named Mary Bethune, had Bethune-Cookman College down in Florida, and they kind of ran together. [02:05:50] So with plenty of money like the Roosevelts had, they'd let 'em do what they wanna do. So they convinced the Congress to set up some of these schools in five colleges for black folks. And I just happened to be at Tuskegee, and I took the first course, and that's where—I took it not in Tuskegee, 'cause we didn't have a field. But I went to Garner Field, which is right outta Maxwell Air

Base, to take my first training. And the rest of it is . . .

SL: So you just kinda signed up.

MC: Yeah.

SL: Brand new program.

MC: Yeah, brand new program.

SL: Just the right place at the right time.

MC: Just like throwin' the dice on the line and they come up there
snake eyes, see.

[02:06:29] SL: So who was it that [*car horn honks*] trained you?

MC: I said the white—Mr. Allen down in Montgomery. See, we had to
get trainers, and they trained—they got in a contract with
Tuskegee to train that down at Garner Field right out of Maxwell
Air Base, right by the river. I never will forget it, 'cause he flew
up to Tuskegee one time and told—"Crenshaw, can't you follow
that river down to Montgomery?" I said, "What river?" [*SL
laughs*] It looked like a little stream out there. I said—he said,
"Can't you see that thing?" He got mad, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: So I said, "Oh yes, sir." But the river looked just like that line
there, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: So I ain't—I'm not stupid. All I had to do is just follow that line,

and it went on down in there. I looked over there and saw
Garner Field, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And, see, because I had never been there before, I didn't know
about followin' no river [*SL laughs*] or nothin' else. Mh-hmm.
So you . . .

[02:07:20] SL: Well, lots of people early on—they'd follow the
known highways or . . .

MC: Ain't that right?

SL: Yeah, that's how they navigated.

MC: Mh-hmm. See, when Mr. Eisenhower came back from over in
Germany and saw the autobahn, that gave him an idea when he
become president that he'd put in these super highways, and I
was ridin' up to—with my pastor, and he says, "How do these
guys got these things numbered?" I said, "It's 95 over from
Miami all the way up to Connecticut. Eighty-five comes through
Atlanta, Georgia. Fifty-five from" . . .

SL: New Orleans.

MC: . . . "we'll say to New Orleans; Jackson, Mississippi" . . .

SL: Saint Louis.

MC: . . . "Saint Louis and then on up like that." And each one. And
then he sittin' around—he says, "Number 10—that's down there

from Miami, cuttin' across New Orleans, goin' on over to Dallas or somewhere. And then 20—you'd get on 20 and you said it was over—maybe over in Carolina, and it come through Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; and then hit Dallas. And then when you go 40, and there's Route 66." Do you remember that a long time ago?

SL: Sure. Absolutely.

[02:08:32] MC: And all these kind of things there where it took 'em a long time, see, in order to set 'em up, but they were not just haphazardous but . . .

SL: Right.

MC: . . . they had plannin' to it. And that's what we are sitting up here sayin' God's got a plan for all the things that's gonna happen forty years from now. And you said—as I told that guy out there that—"You don't think these Latinos are comin' here just 'cause this is a good place to work. They gonna take over" . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . "whether you like it or not. They gonna take over." Now, you turn around, and you said, "Well, I don't like black folks." Ain't 'em—whether you like 'em or not, they—you gonna have to tune up with 'em to keep those suckers from coming here takin'

the country away from us. [*SL laughs*] Isn't that fair enough?

SL: Yeah, I see that. Okay.

MC: Okay.

SL: So you get your training.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Now, there's a war rampin' up . . .

MC: Yeah. We didn't know that then.

SL: . . . while this is goin' on.

MC: That's right.

SL: Hitler's makin' rumbles over in Europe and . . .

MC: In Eur—that was Hitler.

SL: . . . and by—so from—so when did you get qualified to fly?

What—when did you get that license?

[02:09:41] MC: Well, I was in the first course, and I was fortunate enough to get thirty-five or forty hours. Took my test and passed it.

SL: And you passed in [19]41. Is that right?

MC: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Mh-hmm.



SL: And so now you're—by luck of it . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . your training . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . positions you . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . to start training black pilots . . .

MC: Other people. That's right.

SL: . . . for the war.

[02:10:06] MC: And there wasn't no war then. See, what happened—Dorie Miller on a ship and all the people that—like my brother—my oldest brother was a mess attendant. Dorie Miller—when the Japs hit Pearl Harbor, he got out of the mess hall and out of his comfort zone and got behind a machine gun and shot down a Jap plane. So that gave Congress some guts there to where they sat up there and said, "Well, we might"—like it—I got out—back there, and you don't realize how the—the United States consti—Congress and everything else said Negroes couldn't do nothin' but menial kind of stuff like this, but it started talkin' 'bout flyin' an airplane or bein' in charge of a ship or a submarine. And he said, "That's bullcrap. They would never learn that." Yeah, and my father left Marianna—if anybody had told him that he would get a car when he got up here to Little Rock, he'd've thought somebody was crazy.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm. And here I am down there flyin' an airplane—came

home—and maybe that Christmas—and may have had—looked something like that [shows his jacket] with a coat on that says [laughs] "Tuskegee," you know.

SL: Yeah.

MC: I couldn't fly a kite, but at the same time, there's nobody know it but me, see.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm. And the rest of it's history.

[02:11:23] SL: So when did the [TM coughs]—when did you actually start training fighter pilots?



MC: Okay. After we got in the Pearl Harbor deal, and as I told you, that I went—I walked up to Birmingham to take my instructor's license—I had to have to be an instructor.

SL: Okay.

MC: Have to pass through the inspector, and he'd give you a license on there that you have qualified to be an instructor at Tuskegee, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Here in Little Rock they had maybe—now, let's put it this way—a hundred schools just like mine. Mine was the 101st, meaning one black and the rest of 'em white—primaries. See, I'm a primary instructor. So we started off there, and then after we'd—they'd leave and go to the PT—to the AT-6s. It's a large plane with one wing on it. And

then they had white instructors over to the air base to do that. Gunnery would be down in Florida down—gunners—what—at one of those fields down there where they could fire out in the ocean and all, see. That gunnery down there. And before they go overseas—and then they would do a whole lots of other thing. But my job was turnin' out primary—I'm a beginner teacher. And my job is to make sure that they can do everything right so they can go to the next phase. You got three phases you have to go through.

[02:12:50] SL: But were you instructing only African Americans?

MC: Yeah. Oh yeah, 'cause I had to be. See, the whole world was predicated on separate but equal. And that happened up until Eisenhower said, "To hell with all this bull stuff," and he sent the 101st outta Carolina down here to Little Rock, Arkansas, with them and set up there and said, "This is the way it's gonna be." Truman came on in 1948, and Truman is this guy that told Douglas MacArthur that "You're not over. You're not goin' into China."

SL: Yeah.

MC: "You come home. I run this show." Like Obama gonna do somebody pretty soon.

SL: Yeah. Yeah. [*Laughs*]

MC: See, that's the way—well, that's the way life is.

SL: Yeah, yeah.

MC: Whoever's in charge, he runs the show.

SL: Yeah.

MC: So by the virtue that he'd sit there in 1948 and sign that executive order—but, see, I was under the order—separate but equal in 1896. And then if you come up and said, "Well, what's anything fore that?" Yeah, 1856, there, when my grandfather—if he had slave and had gone across the Ohio River into free ground, and the white farmer could come back there and go get him, because that was—wherever he was, he still belonged to them. So all of my folks was down on this side didn't like it, like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth. But he said, "Don't worry. The world ain't come to an end. Just wait. God always got somethin' for somebody to do. He'll make some fools slip up and make a mistake and let these black guys in." And I—well, you know, we come in on the back door, but that's the way we got here.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Okay.

[02:14:57] SL: So you got your instructor pilot on the . . .

MC: Right.

SL: . . . civilian side of stuff.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: So when did you—again, when did you start training fighter pilots?

MC: I started right here. [Stands up and walks to the left]

SL: Let's see.

MC: See, that's my discharge paper right there. [Shows papers to SL] And I guess she got it back there. Which I'll show you here.

SL: Now, that's the discharge, but . . .

MC: That's right, so I had to go in. You don't get discharged unless you been in.

SL: Yeah.

MC: See, you got to sign up to get in.

SL: Right.

MC: Okay. Well, that—so that tells you—she's got it back there [points forward]—when I . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: But that just shows you that that is our discharge there from that so that I wouldn't have to go as a private into the service.

SL: Okay.

MC: Mh-hmm. [Looks at newspaper clipping] Okay.

[02:15:36] SL: So—well, it—I guess what I—where was it that you

actually did the training . . .

MC: Right same place.

SL: . . . for the fighter—at . . .

MC: For—at Tuskegee.

SL: At Tuskegee.

MC: What happened—well, you didn't have to go down to Garner Field anymore. That was a civilian field. Well, once you sit there and you look right along there [indicates toward paper SL is holding], and it tells you that the government bought land up by—right out on the outskirts of Tuskegee and built that field for us—for black folks. And I was the head man because I was the number one that had—not the head 'cause there was somebody over me, but I'm talkin' 'bout head workin' horse.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah, instructor.

[02:16:19] SL: Well, now, the guy that was over you . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . was that Anderson?

MC: Yeah, that's Anderson right there. [Points toward SL's papers]

Flew . . .

SL: Now, let's talk a little bit about him.

MC: Okay.

SL: Now, didn't he get his license, like in 1929 or . . .

MC: Yeah, 1929.

SL: He was, like, the first . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . African American to get it.

MC: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.



SL: So tell me about him. What . . .

MC: Okay.

SL: . . . what kinda guy was he?

[02:16:41] MC: He—well, he's just one of those kind of guys that had a whole lots of nerve and whites wouldn't teach him up in phila—in Pennsylvania. And he just bought him a plane maybe for two or three hundred dollars, but, naturally, you tore it up and bent up and cut his head all up there [motions toward forehead] because y—flyin' is not like drivin' a car. [Laughter] See, you can get out on the sidewalk and in a ditch, but in the air, you in the air.

SL: Yeah.

MC: You're separated from the ground.

SL: Right.

MC: But then, after a while, somebody may have gone up there and taught him a few lessons to keep this fool from killin' himself.

SL: Right. [*Laughs*]

MC: And [*laughter*] he went up to Howard University in Washington to start their program off first, and then he came down, 'cause we were goin' into the secondary program, which is a different plane that I [*unclear words*] [*looks around to his left*] . . .

SL: That's okay.

MC: You saw—yeah, I saw the—somewhere—but I was just gonna show you. But each one has a phase of doin' it. And when he came down, he was in charge of the program because he was the highest-ranking black person with a license and came to Tuskegee to teach us how to fly there. [02:17:50] And we flew up to Auburn, Alabama, off of their field because they had a runway—paved runway, and we were in—only eighteen miles from Auburn. And they had a program. So they—we could use their ground school instructor because they had one there that had been to the navy, and Mr. Pitts, who had been teachin' aeronautical there at Auburn University, and he would come down two nights a week 'cause he—to teach the blacks at Tuskegee—ya, ya, ya, ya—which we appreciated. See, when you out there in hell, whether you're on the *Titanic* or not, you are lookin' for a rowboat to come by and help you. See, 'cause you gone far as you can go, and that's the way life has always is

and always has been and always will be.

SL: So what was Mr. Anderson's full name? It was . . .

MC: It's Charles A. Anderson.

SL: Charles A. Anderson.

MC: Yeah, Chief Anderson. We called him Chief Anderson.

SL: Chief Anderson.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: [TM coughs] So was he good to work with?

[02:18:52] MC: Oh, yeah. See, in other words, you comin' down there like this—well, I'm in college. All the rest of the guys—he hadn't been to college nowhere, so only thing he could do—he could fly an airplane, but if he—I don't even know if he got to the tenth grade or not, see. But the whole essence of it was that we needed some pilots. And they say, "Well, we'll just give these black"—didn't wanna do it, but you're almost forced to do certain things, whether it's today with Obama. He's the head dog, and whether people like it or not, that's the way we operate this world, whether you like it or not. And therefore I know it, Obama knows it, the whites down here don't wanna know it [SL laughs], but they got to accept it.

SL: Yeah.

MC: The system operates there like the *Titanic*. If it's an iceberg

ahead of you, if you don't have sense enough to turn left or right, you are gone.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Next question.

[02:19:55] SL: *[Laughs]* Well, so I'm tryin' to figure out—first of all, how many guys do you think you trained?



MC: I would say that the washout was about 40 percent. So if we turned—we sent overseas 968, so that means maybe four thousand may have come through or five thousand that didn't make it.

SL: Now, that's just through Tuskegee.

MC: Through tu—that's the only one we had.

SL: Ah.

MC: Uh-huh. The only—that was the only black school in the world right there at Tuskegee. And I happened to be one of the first ones that got there, and in—fortunate—everybody else is gone except me. I'm the only one livin' that started there in 1940.

SL: Hmm.

MC: Isn't that somethin'?

SL: That is somethin'.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: But—so all the airmen are gone.

MC: Everybody's gone that started with me.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Now, you have some fellows that came in different classes, and we had 'em—still, like you said, when we went up to the inauguration, old guys that looked older than me, but they don't look—they didn't look like me. And I got pictures right back there to show you how they will look, 'cause, you know . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . that time will take its toll on anybody.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm. Even me, sooner or later.

SL: Time and gravity.

MC: [*Laughter*] That's right.

[02:21:30] SL: Well, were there—did you have any really favorite students that you connected with?

MC: No, I didn't.

SL: Or you just didn't—you didn't have that luxury, did you?

MC: And, see, it's like Houston Nutt—you don't have the nature. Now, Houston Nutt—I'm just a—just like when he was up there—well, Petrino—all of 'em the same—they got a battery of coaches. They got coaches there for wide receiver. They got coaches there for the center. They got coaches for the

quarterback. And his job is to be able to get this Manning boy to where he can sit up here and know it's gonna take maybe a few seconds and he's got to get rid of that ball. And he knows some of those big guys on there are comin' there to get him.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Because they been coached, too. And what you're doin' is you're pitting your weight against the mind.

SL: Yeah.

[02:22:27] MC: Or the brain, and that's all flyin' was. And that it wasn't that we were any better than the Germans. It was there that we had good aircraft and we were fortunate enough—like Patton had the tanks—and it wasn't any—the Germans didn't have any good tanks, but we had the Red Ball Express. And like I was tellin' you that Tim was there down at Philander and I had to talk behind him, see, and he was tellin' about this Red Ball for Patton, and they'd ride—work all night tryin' to get those tanks there ready, 'cause Patton was goin' on to Germany. He said, "I'm gonna—I—and I don't want you guys stoppin' me."
[*Unclear words*] he might cuss 'em out a little bit, but they worked like everything all night long tryin' to get those tanks ready to roll, but he was a tough sucker, and I was 'bout as tough as he was. [*Dog barks in background*]

SL: [*Laughs*] Hey, just one moment.

MC: Okay.

SL: What is that sound?

Joy Endicott: Dog.

[Tape stopped]

[02:23:25] SL: Okay, we're still on tape three.

MC: Okay.

SL: So about nine hundred or so you sent overseas.

MC: That's right.

SL: Their record is pretty good. [MC nods] These were fighter pilots.

MC: Fighter pilots.

SL: And their job was to protect bombers.

MC: The ships, just like you see that thing back there? [Points behind left shoulder toward airplane figure in background]

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: That white fellow was—came up here and told me that—and he had those red tails on top of 'em . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . to keep the Germans off of them. That's their job.

SL: And they did a pretty good job of that.

MC: Pretty good job. Uh-huh.

SL: Maybe lost one or two planes.

MC: Oh yeah, we lost some, and some of 'em ran outta gas. See, what happened . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: Somebody would come up and says, "Look here. Now, what we'll do, we'll put tanks out on the end." We called 'em wing tanks.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And we'd fly as far as we could. And then time you would intercept the enemy, drop those tanks off. That way you could do your fightin' and then get back to your base in Italy or west Africa. Mh-hmm.

SL: Uh-huh. What kind of plane was it that they were trained to fly?

[02:24:38] MC: We started off on the P-39 and then the P-40, the P-47 and the P-51—that was the last one we had.

SL: Those were fast planes.

MC: Yeah, very. Yeah, they were fast planes for propeller-driven. See, four or five hundred miles an hour. And then here come the Germans—they're comin' out there with that . . .

SL: Stuka?

MC: . . . jet. Mh-hmm.

SL: Oh, the jet.

MC: Jet, uh-huh.

SL: Yeah. Now, were those fighter planes—until jets came along . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . were they the best machines out there?

MC: Well, the Germans made the best watches. They make the best everything.

SL: Ah. Well, I kinda remember Stukas. Those were dive-bombers, weren't they?

MC: That's right. Mh-hmm.

SL: But that's really—I'm not really familiar with any of the other . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: And, course, there were Zeroes on the . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . on the Japanese side.

MC: The Zero. That's Japanese, see.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Yeah. Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[02:25:29] SL: You felt like when you sent those kids over there that they were well trained and they were well equipped?

MC: Didn't know.

SL: Didn't know?

MC: See, in other words, it's like when you throw the dice out, you

don't know what's comin' up.

SL: Yeah.

[02:25:41] MC: See, in other words, life is like that. And you don't care whether you're Napoleon or Alexander the Great or the Romans—everybody thinks he's the best at that particular time in history. And what you do—you go out there well fortified and prepared, thinkin', "I'm gonna kick tails wherever I go." So my job is to make sure that this guy didn't go out there and show me up that I didn't do him right . . .

SL: Right.

MC: . . . see. And you don't thi—you don't realize that you have a congressman that's sittin' back there that didn't want them to succeed to start with. D. O. Davis there had to come all the way from North Africa to come and talk to the Congress, even after President Roosevelt had done all—but the Congress runs everything. And if they say, "Those blacks aren't shootin' down nothin'," they don't let you inf—get involved with nothin'. You can't shoot down what you don't see. But they didn't intend for 'em to shoot 'em down. And—mh-hmm.

SL: How did the—was the red tail identifier—was that just an arbitrary thing? How did that come about?

MC: Well—and see, what happens—I imagine you'd go to North

Africa, and you might sit up there and say, "Where you from?"
"I'm from Fort Hood." Other guy says, "From—I'm down here to Louisiana." So he said, "Well, we gonna make us a blue tail."
And they may have decided that they were gonna make themselves the red tail because Patton had the red tails on the—I mean, the Red Express on his tanks. And I don't know why they just happened to do it, but they all—everybody would do it to be i—what? Identified.

SL: Yeah.

MC: That we are here and we are here to fight.

[02:27:27] SL: So anytime someone saw a fighter plane and it had a red tail, those were . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . Tuskegee Airmen.

MC: Tuskegee boys. Uh-huh.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah.

SL: That's good.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, did you—after the war, did any of the—did you ever keep in touch with any of the pilots that you trained?



[02:27:46] MC: I didn't have time for that. I came right here. See,

my mind is I'm a money man. I came right back home—went to see President Harris at Philander Smith College. It was—her sister—well, they had married one of those—Andrew—one of those boys that—and her brother-in-law had married a girl that ran Philander Smith College, a Methodist school. I went to see her. I knew the Torrences 'cause I came up and 'scamped' with 'em. And I told 'em that I'm a Tuskegee airman. And I says, "And I would like to have one of these military-type programs that they are havin'—GI programs to go to school and gettin' paid at Philander." And I was fortunate enough to where she talked with the president, and we went out there to Central Flying Service, and the rest of it is history. They hired me, and they think about me just like I'm hell on hot water. [*SL laughs*] Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, I mean, it was good for Central Flying Service. It was good for . . .

MC: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: . . . Philander Smith. It was good for the GIs . . .


MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . 'cause it was the GI Bill comin' back.

MC: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

SL: So everyone—it was a win-win deal.

MC: Ev—a win-win deal. See, in other words—and I'm a pretty nice fellow. No trouble to them. I just worked, worked, worked. Segregated, but it was all right.

 [02:29:02] SL: Now, you were tellin' me that you used to be—you'd do some crop-dusting, too.

MC: I crop—that's right.

SL: Did you do that outta Central?

MC: Right outta Central there. In other words, I sat there, and he told me—I went up there—asked him about that, because where you make ten dollars an hour teachin' flyin', but I could make seventy-five dollars an hour crop-dustin'. So he sa—Mr. Holbert told me that he didn't want me to do that. I'd make too much money and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So every once in a while when you get a shortage and a guy name Floyd Fulkerson down here at Scott, Arkansas, called up there to Central and told 'em that he want some of his cotton dusted, and they called and asked me if I'd go down there and do it. And then he worked for—his father-in-law was named R. L. Dortch. Dortch owned everything from here to Lonoke. And he came out there—big, white moustache, and I'm black. He says, "When you gonna be through?" I said, "I have about half an hour." He said, "Well, I'm R. L. Dortch down here at Scott, Arkansas. I

want you to go with me, and you're gonna be my pilot." And once I got up there, man, I was just makin' money hand over fist. And once I did that, I picked up all the people down in the Scotch, Stuttgart, there, Lonoke—everywhere. And I'm a-raisin' sand. But I'm learning, which I didn't know, because when I went to Fort Sill, I was teachin' low-field landings, there. See, because what they would do—they would have watches for the artillery. And you'd—and send the planes—teach 'em how to go out—spot to where they need to lower the artillery to fire, and then come back and make a short-field landing. Well, that's all dustin' is—landin' short or takin' off and goin' over the trees, so I was bein' prepared by God for different things.

[02:31:06] SL: So the dustin' business was real good for you, then?

MC: Oh, my God, yeah.

SL: Did you own your own plane?

MC: No, I worked for Central. They had gobs of planes. I'm not—I'd just go up there and if I saw somebody, like, if you—and you had a good plane—if I'd fly that rascal, I'd sit up there and tell the mechanic, "I want this plane." And they didn't—and nobody ever gave me any trouble. I got the best of everything.

[02:31:29] SL: That's good. Okay, now, so what about your—what about your love life? What's goin' on with your love life now?

MC: Well, now I had a wife and three kids.

SL: And when did you get married?

MC: I got married in Tuskegee in [19]42.

SL: And who did you marry?

MC: I married a girl from right down here—Ferda, Arkansas. I didn't know it. She just happened to be a student there, but I would go down there now. And you come up there and you say, "Well, how were they?" Well, they were light-skin people down in that area. All of 'em look like Indians. And then on—marry some people that were dark, so that mean that you had a mixture of some darker people and some black skin. And the light skins have done extremely well in ministry and so forth. And all of 'em looked good. Good-lookin'. Must've been—well, you know, a family of smart people, let's put it that way.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Mh-hmm. And so what was your wife's name?

MC: Ruby. Ruby Crenchaw. And she was Hockenull at first.

Hockenull.

SL: Harkenhall?

MC: That's an Indian name, see.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[02:32:44] SL: So she was part Indian, then?

MC: Oh, I imagine so. In other words, the thing about it is that all of her people from down in that area—Scott, Arkansas—not Scott, but Sherrill—that's right 'bout ten or fifteen miles southeast of Pine Bluff.

SL: Okay.

MC: And so we all down in there—I go down there, just like they named the airport after me down there right now. And the guys come up there, and they said, "Well, how'd that happen?" [*SL laughs*] That happened there because they felt like—just like you put out the Wiley Post from over in Oklahoma who flew with Will Rogers and those kind of folks—things just happen—certain things.

SL: Yep.

MC: Mh-hmm. Amelia Earhart, who flew in—fell in the water over there somewhere fifty years ago. Life is funny.

SL: Yeah.

MC: But good.

[02:33:38] SL: So you—let's see, about what year was that that you married?

MC: I married in [19]42.

SL: [Nineteen] forty-two.

MC: Uh-huh.

SL: So that's—gosh, that's right when—she was over in—by
Montgomery then . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . when you—when y'all met?

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: How'd y'all meet?

MC: It was always some guys down there that when you go to dinin'
hall and the girls are sittin' there lookin' at guys—well, I had—
you know, I'm in uniform by Maxwell Air Base, and you look
good, and everybody—when you look good, girls look at you.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. [*SL laughs*] Isn't that right?

SL: That's right.

MC: Yeah, that's—and the rest of it's history.

SL: That's right. I understand that.

MC: Well, yeah, that's—it hadn't ever changed.

SL: Yeah. Right.

MC: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

[02:34:23] SL: So did you-all start havin' kids right away or . . .

MC: No, it's—he was—when I br—came back here in [19]45, he was

about three years old. And I went there—she got out on a basketball scholarship. So when he was three and she was up there at the Baptist College, right where Ed works, and shootin' ball. A lady came over there and says, "How's this guy?" "You're talkin' about little Milton. He's just a little guy." She says, "Is he smart?" She says, "Yeah." She said, "Well, look, I'm cleanin' up over at St. Bartholomew Catholic Church right across the street. And if you want me to, I'll put him in the Catholic school at three." So when he got six years old, he's already in the fourth grade.

SL: Wow.

MC: And when he finished school there now—I'm goin' to Oklahoma, back to here, back to Alabama, and then to Fort Stewart, and when he was between fifteen and sixteen, he had graduated from high school—valedictorian, all As, and I took him and put him in the school of veterinary medicine, and with all As, so life's been pretty good to him. He's up in St. Paul, Minnesota, and he's about old as you right now.

[02:35:31] SL: So is that the only child y'all had?

MC: No, I had an—I had a daughter that just called me a few minutes ago—wanted to know what's happenin'. She grew—she was born at Tuskegee, and she graduated with him at Tuskegee, and

she's a—the—in charge of the school at Booker T. Washington, Atlanta, Georgia. In other words, she's a register. That's right. The register.

SL: Registrar. Mh-hmm.

MC: So I told her that when you got through with all this, I'll send her a copy.

SL: Yeah.

MC: She likes everything that—all this stuff like this—she's the one that came down here and took me to Washington to the inauguration.

SL: Okay.

MC: Yeah. And she flew down here and I got everything squared away and we went on up there together. And then when Miss Torrence got hurt, she flew to Houston, Texas, and came on up here, 'cause she can't come straight from Atlanta to here.

SL: Yeah.

MC: But you can go to Houston then come up this way on a Delta or Southwest. I think it's Southwest—and to see 'em. And that's just like a mama to her. Yeah. And you say, "Well, how old is she?" Hmm, sixty-two. [*SL laughs*] Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. But that's her mother.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. [02:36:39] And then she turns around, and if I'd call her right this moment—see, just like she called me and said, "Daddy, come up here." I says, "What you want?" She said, "I just want you up here, and I want you to be here at eight o'clock tomorrow," just like she's the boss. [*SL laughs*] So I had to drive all night long. And I got up there, and she still didn't say anything. So after we started over there, she said, "Tracy didn't pass mathematics, and I want you—I wouldn't ask my husband, but I want you to go over there and—and get it straight," see. Had eight black kids in the mathematics class, and all of 'em flunked.

SL: Hmm.

MC: So I went to see you. I says, "You gave my granddaughter in February an outstanding. In March, you gave her an F, but did you write a letter to my daughter?" "No." "Well, then, I don't need to talk to you anymore. I'm goin' to see your principal." "Oh, okay." The principal had to change the ?example? because you have to follow procedure in anything you do in a college or else in a high school and let you know what she is. And she went to Howard University, took math—down in Houston, Texas, right now workin' for Pfizer—\$300,000, see. Now, otherwise,

she'd've been at McDonald's slammin' and flippin' hamburgers.

SL: Cookin'. Yeah.

[02:38:04] MC: And that's the way life is, is that God is good. How much? All the time. To who? Some folks. He ain't good to everybody, but He's good to those that He likes. Next question.

SL: That's a great story. So let's see. I'm—is there anything else you want to say about your wife . . .

MC: No. I don't go around braggin' on people, in that nine times outta ten, that my wife was almost like the Jewish people that didn't even know it. The Jewish people never talk about the foundation—how they teach their kids. But they don't go to prison.

SL: Right.

MC: Yeah. But 70 percent of my folks do. So that tells you that there's a difference in the . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . teachin'—classes between three and eight years old.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Well, my wife taught this boy. She didn't realize what she was doin', but she'd read a Baby Ray book to him, and just like he sees this—see that airplane right there? [Points down to his left]

SL: Mh-hmm.

[02:39:21] MC: Well, he put 'em together. So when she would read to him—"Baby Ray's do so and so and so and so"—she'd flip the page the next time, and he would remember, "That's an airplane right there." And it talks about so and so and so and so—he's flyin' over in Germany or flyin' in North Africa. The next thing—we go down somewhere else, and he would look at that picture and was able to associate. So when you go to a school of veterinary medicine, you are able to sit up here and—don't know what's goin' on. You just readin' a book. But you remember. And if your remembrance is that well, then what do you do? You go take the test and you max it. And you know he doesn't know nothin', but at the same time, he'll learn. You learn by bein' with—what you call him—?petrist?—or else or Houston Nutt—how to make sure that if you're playin' football, you play—you use the techniques. Wide receivers. You have a center that's to throw you the ball. You have the big linemen there to hold the men back. And you don't need but "one, two, three, four, five," and that ball better be out somewhere.

SL: Yeah.

MC: That's the nature of everything.

[02:40:29] SL: That's kinda interesting. It sounds like your wife provided . . .

MC: She didn't know it. See, she just happened to master that technique.

SL: She—it sounds like she was providing the same sort of attention to your kids that your mom did you.

MC: [*Word unclear*]. That's right. I didn't know it at the time.

SL: Right.

MC: Uh-huh. But what you do—you'll find out if you feed the kids at three, like Mr. Stephens is doin'—see, he's happy when he—you know, he had a little—his corn flakes in his stomach. Milk. And then he could go in the room and do—but if a guy hadn't had any breakfast, he ain't gonna learn anything.

SL: Yeah.

MC: He's mad anyway because, "What you get me up early in the morning for?" But what you have to do is to fool an animal or fool a kid into make sure that he likes what you think you're doin' for him. [*SL laughs*] Is that pretty good?

SL: That's pretty good. [*Laughs*] And it's pretty accurate. That's right. Well, it's not—I don't know if it would be called foolin' 'em, but, you know . . .

MC: Well . . .

SL: . . . there are rewards. There are rewards.

MC: Yeah. Yeah. See, rewards are . . .

SL: May not understand them . . .

MC: No.

SL: . . . may not . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . know what's going on . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . but if you—if your intentions are good . . .

[02:41:46] MC: Well, see, what you do—we have mastered the technique of trainin' animals. And let's play this kinda game. My people would be out in slavery, and all the horses were wild, runnin' all over everywhere—Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, and et cetera. You go out there and you get those horses and corral 'em—bring 'em down there, and the old Indian ?with that would? sit there and said, "Get that, Milton. Get that one, so and so and so and so. You pick out the good one, and when it look—you know, it's good. Good stamina to it."

SL: Yeah.

MC: And then you sit there and bring him on down there and put him in the mud and let him stay there 'cause he can't be runnin' all over the world until he find out that you're his friend, see. And once a guy or a horse finds out that you are his friend—that you're not gonna hurt him—he's wild. He becomes to where he'll

come to you and he'll eat outta your hand, and then you know right away that if this horse got stamina and got the right blood in him, you can train him.

SL: Yeah.

[02:42:49] MC: And that's not just for horses. That's for everything.

SL: Yeah.

MC: The world is—you can fool 'em on anything you want to if you want—if you're smart.

SL: Well, it's almost releasing their potential . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . really.

MC: Yeah.

SL: Recognizing their potential.

MC: That's right.

SL: Yeah.

MC: See, now you get the old horse, he ain't gonna learn nothin' [*SL laughs*], is he?

SL: No. [*Laughs*]

MC: No, he's not gonna learn to be . . .

SL: No.

MC: . . . Bart Starr unless you came up like Bart.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And, see, Bart showed you the other day that anytime a son of a gun can—and that other guy that threw five touchdown passes there . . .

SL: Favre.

MC: Yeah.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Those guys are somethin', aren't they?

SL: Yeah.

MC: They have mastered the technique.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Can't count 'em out.

MC: That's right—they have mastered the technique. And that's the thing about it is that we want to make sure that our people are masters in every position. But we have to stay on top of the world, and that's what my job was—to make sure that I did my part.

SL: Okay. Let's get back to—you've—you go to Fort Sill . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . after you've come home from Tuskegee.

MC: Yeah.

SL: And you've set up this program kinda through the GI Bill . . .

MC: Right.

SL: . . . at Central Flying Service and Philander Smith.

MC: Uh-huh.

SL: It was an aviation program.

MC: Uh-huh.

[02:44:02] SL: Lasted, what, five or six years?

MC: Right. Mh-hmm.

SL: And . . .

MC: I went there in [19]53 . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . to Fort Sill.

SL: So you go to Fort Sill . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and you're really kinda there to integrate Fort Sill.

MC: That's right.

SL: Is that—that's . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . that's what's really goin' on.

MC: That's what they sent me there for.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And you can imagine, like this—like the generals told me, "Not on my watch. You won't be [*laughs*]"—he may be the president,

but you not comin' down here to do nothin'."

[02:44:28] SL: So how did that work out? I mean, what happened there? I mean, obviously, you were there for how long—a year or two?

MC: Two years, and then we got transferred down to Camp Rucker in Alabama.



SL: Yeah. So how—tell—let's talk a little bit about Fort Sill.

MC: Okay. Okay. I went in there—young—and I got there 'bout four o'clock in the mornin'. So a white guy was at the gate 'cause the gate was closed. And he said, "Where you from?" I said, "Up Little Rock." I said, "Where you from?" "Stuttgart." He says, "What you for—down here for?" I said, "I'm takin' test for flight." And he says, "You got one of the tests?" I said, "No, what you mean?" He said, "I got one out in the car—a written test." He said, "You're gonna have to take a written test, a oral test, and a flight test, and I got the written one in the car, and I'll let you, you know, cram up on it." And I said, "Oh, I sure would like that. I haven't had a test in ten years, so"—so he went out to car and got it. And I went in—had to take the test. And then the next thing they do—I had to take a flight test, and then he said, "You have to take an oral test to see if you can speak good English and be able to teach these people," 'cause

there's white and black and Indians, I guess.

SL: Sure.

[02:45:43] MC: So this guy came up and told me—musta hearin' me out there talkin' loud and all like this, 'cause I was young and a little bit off. So he said, "My name is Nathan Bedford Forrest." I said, "Yeah?" I didn't know who he was or wasn't. And then I finally got a thing right out there [*words unclear*] and Nathan Bedford Forrest started—his grandfather started the Klu Klux Klan, but he was a general in there with General Lee. And my grandfather was named General Joseph Johnston. My father's father's father and the master of that farm over there in Hardaway, Alabama, and these two guys met a tough sucker named Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant.

SL: Mh-hmm [*laughs*].

MC: And Grant had a guy on there named Sherman that went to the—through Atlanta right through to—down to the sea, and they met on that in 1865 and stopped that war. And their grandchildren met at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Most amazing.

SL: How 'bout that? That's amazing.

MC: And fell in love just like that [*snaps fingers and points forward*], and he didn't even know me. But he said, "Something about you I like."

SL: Hmm.

MC: Isn't that amazing?

SL: It is.

[02:47:03] MC: Mh-hmm. And my whole life has been that story like that. Somebody took pity on me or something and—or else—when I went out there, the Holbert—you can imagine what they gonna say when a darkie out there talkin' 'bout he gonna be a flight instructor . . .

SL: Right.

MC: . . . at Adams Field.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, you know, it's interesting that Adams Field was—I mean, was it—do you think it was just a dollar deal, that they saw a potential for [*slamming noise*] . . .

MC: No, they didn't . . .

SL: . . . federal money comin' in?

MC: . . . they didn't need no money. Look here, man, they had all the money. They had bought up all of the planes and had 'em stored somewhere so they could be sellin' 'em down in South America and everywhere else. You know, engines for airplanes.

[02:47:43] But life is summit—is subject to where from time to

time, from the time that Alexander the Great came outta Greek, and his father's name was Philip, and somebody killed his father and he took over at twenty-one, and the rest of it's history. I mean, he sat up there and got over here on this side and found out those Jews had a Bible—Hebrew with no vowels in it—come from right to left and everybody else had been wri—I guess writin' from left to right. So he had to send back and get philosophers to come over there and see if they couldn't decipher . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . that stuff there. And that's where—you come up there with the West and the East meeting together, there, see, and like that. And it went like that for a number of years. And when the Romans came on the scene there—we'll say 58 BC—the Romans didn't speak Greek; they spoke Roman. They spoke Latin. All Gauls is divided into three parts, so that means that Paul and them had to sit there and decipher that. And for another thousand years until Philip came, then they just—you have the English Bible now.

SL: Yeah.

MC: King Philip. Now, we'll get another one there that's gonna be like that one right over—right in the room in there. [Points to

his left]

SL: Yeah.

MC: Where it's a really slightly refined Bible. And you'll keep on movin' to the point of tryin' to make sure that men understand that all of us got the same blood, the same DNA, the same kind of diseases—whether it's this cancer or whatnot—everybody that breathes God's air—he got some of those things in his DNA. And all of 'em got one of those five pieces of blood. Not what color it is, but the blood is all the same. Isn't that amazing?

SL: It is.

MC: Okay.

[02:49:39] SL: Fort Sill and your friend Forrest. Now, what—tell me, was Forrest over at Fort Sill?

MC: He worked for the general. He was the . . .

SL: He was workin' for the general that . . .

MC: He said, "My name is" . . .

SL: . . . that was givin' you grief about "This ain't gonna happen on my watch."

MC: No, that was the general. And so Forrest said, "My—I'm Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest." That didn't mean nothin' to me, 'cause I didn't know either—his grandfather had started the Klu Klux Klan.

SL: Yeah.

MC: But he said, "I kinda like you. I like your attitude." And he says, "And I'm gonna talk to him." I never saw him again in my whole life.

SL: Ah.

MC: Now, come on the scene one time, and he actually . . .

SL: He straightened out the general.

MC: . . . he straightened [*words unclear*]. He got me a job, that's the only thing I know. And he went somewhere else.

[02:50:26] SL: Now, what happened to the general? I mean, did he just . . .

MC: I never saw him. I imagine . . .

SL: You never saw him again?

MC: No, and I—see, what happens in this great army system—people come on the scene just like we had peoples that—what, McCaskill or whatever his name is in Afghanistan. And he wants forty thousand new men.

SL: Yeah.

MC: That's today. That's not some history.

SL: Yeah.

MC: He wants 'em now. Now, you turn around, and whether he gets 'em or not, you started thinking, "What is he gonna do with 'em?"

Is he gonna make me look bad and get me where I can't get the second term?" You see, everybody's always lookin' out for number one first.

SL: Yeah.

[02:51:11] MC: And what you have to do is that the dern Russians went down there in the same Afghanistan, Pakistan, and all these other places, and they stayed there over ten years, and they just pulled out and left. They wasn't—they were tryin' to put a pipeline, I guess, goin' across Afghanistan on down to the Persian Gulf there where they could be sh—sellin' oil. Now this has to go, what, across the Black Sea.

SL: Right.

MC: See, and all of these kind of things like this—and life is predicated on how God puts together certain problems for mankind to work out. And mankind is not gonna work 'em out good, because it's not his nature to be submissive to do anything . . .

SL: Right.

MC: . . . as a whole. And whether they like it or not, He's—when He—when He sit up there and told Noah, "I want you to build an ark," and 120 years later, here comes the water. [*SL laughs*] And where he [*laughs*] built it there wasn't no water. [*Laughter*]

Man, he sat up the . . .

SL: And everybody thought he was crazy.

MC: Well, they knew he was crazy.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Uh-huh.

[02:52:17] SL: Okay. So you spend a couple years at Fort Sill.

MC: Right.

SL: You break that barrier there.

MC: Yeah.

SL: And then you end up—where do you go after Fort Sill?

MC: Camp Rucker down in Alabama—lower part down there—Dothan.

And . . .

SL: And what—and let's see—now what year is that? That . . .

MC: That musta been about [19]55 or [19]56. Uh-huh.

SL: So civil rights is heatin' up.

MC: Yeah. Well, they havin' a whole lots of hell like this, because,

let's face it, we hadn't gotten to [19]58, where Central High

School tore up the whole world as far as we were . . .

SL: [Nineteen] fifty-seven. Yeah. Mh-hmm.

MC: [Nineteen] fifty-seven.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[02:52:52] MC: And then my father was there as the president of the

local chapter of the NAACP at the time, and you can imagine he may have had a little bad feelin' in him because he came off the farm.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Saw that white fellow with that suit on every day.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And whether he liked it or not—I doubt if he did, tell the truth about it. And people have a pet peeve about some folks—just because he wore a good s—good clothes.

SL: Yeah.

MC: So when he got from down in Marianna up here, that's the first thing he wanted to get him some good clothes.

SL: Sure.

MC: And he went in the clothing business.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[02:53:28] SL: So what I'm seein' is a little bit of a parallel here. I mean, whatever the motives were of your father and what's in reality or the bottom line is, is that your father is active in the du—NAACP. You have just busted a barrier in Fort Sill. You've already busted a barrier over at Tuskegee Institute.

MC: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: And now you're headed for—to Fort Rucker.

MC: Yeah.

SL: And it's in the mid-[19]50s.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Civil rights is startin' to really heat up.

MC: Really—raised ugly heat.

SL: You've got *Brown v. Board of Education* heating up . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: . . . in Kansas. And so the—I kinda see you and your dad on a kind of a parallel path, doing what y'all had in front of you.

MC: But we didn't know it, 'cause we wasn't together.

SL: That's right.

MC: Uh-huh. And the Lord separated—I always remember this. God knew that I have a—kind of a temper, and He s—got me out of Little Rock for some reason. Now, my father may have had a pet peeve that he saw a guy wearin' a suit. And every time he see a white guy with a suit on like that, it reminded him of that white guy down in . . .

SL: Marianna.

MC: . . . in Marianna.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Whether he li—he may not admit it, but that's the way life is. It

puts a seed in there, and it started growin'. And he said, "If I can ever do anything about it," whether he liked it or not, it was just somethin' to irritate the sucker that he didn't like, to tell the truth about it.

[02:55:13] SL: Let's talk a little bit about your anger.

MC: Okay.

SL: Now, you hadn't really mentioned this . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . but you think that it was very fortuitous that you weren't in Little Rock during the time of that [19]57 crisis.

MC: The Lord took me outta there for that same reason, because I'm the type of guy that enjoys a fight. He don't care whether it's up there with the Germans or whether it's with the Japanese or anybody. Just to have a good fight is made to order for some people. Indians was like that. They didn't care nothin' 'bout nobody. They—you come up there and said, "Now, here's some suckers that come over here and taken up all the land. And now here comes another sucker fixin' to come over here right now and just—he'll be over there like the bugs that we call 'em—like the boll weevils.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Those kinda things that just comin' in.

SL: Yeah.

MC: That's the Mexican—those Mexican folks. [02:56:10] Now, you come up there and you say, "Well, are they rightful there?" Well, the whole world is for folks.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And we all got enough room. But if we don't like somebody, we'll—just like he may not have liked the guy 'cause they was a—had a suit on with a crease in it. And that might've—it bugged him, I imagine. He never said nothin' . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . but I can feel—see, I can feel—and lookin' back in there at that student to tell what he's thinkin'.

SL: Yeah.

[02:56:35] MC: I've come down here to dust some cotton for white people down in Scott, Arkansas. And if I saw the guy smokin' and he's sittin' up there lookin' at—hard at that airplane like that, I—he told me without tellin' me, "What you're doin' isn't right." So I'd stop and come up—"What's goin' on, chief?" He said, "It's early in the mornin'. Dew is on that cotton. Bring it up there two feet. Hear that?" The other time ago—somewhere else he says, "And the wind is blowin', and I don't want it blowin' over in your field." He said, "I—and I bought this poison, and I

expect for you to put it here. Hear that?"

SL: Yeah.

MC: I said, "Yes, sir!" See, I'm makin' fifty dollars an hour. What the heck I care?

SL: Yeah.

MC: Uh-huh. And he's payin'.

SL: Yeah.

MC: So what you have to do is be able to read the minds there.

When the man said, "Cap'n, iceberg ahead!" The captain said, "Man, are you a fool? This is unsinkable." [*SL laughs*] *Titanic* there kept on goin'.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And life is just like what we just talked about. Whether you're playin' football or whether you're playin' basketball or whether you're sitting up here playin' like Tiger. Whoever heard of a man from somewhere going to Augusta, and up until he got there, no blacks had ever been there, see.

SL: Yeah.

MC: You know, and so you come up and you say, "Well, how'd that happen?" In the right timin', certain things happen. Somebody came to his rescue and gave him a chance.

SL: So what does it—what was it that you did . . .

TM: We need to change tapes, Scott. Excuse me.

SL: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[02:58:12] SL: Okay, we are now on tape four.

MC: Okay.

SL: And we're—we've been talkin' about your dad's work with the NAACP . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and the looming [19]57 crisis at Central High. You are on your way over to Fort Rucker.

MC: Well, I . . .

SL: Or Camp Rucker. Is it Camp Rucker?

MC: I more than likely was on my way to Fort Stewart.

SL: Fort Stewart.

MC: See, yeah, I had a whole lots of different assignments.

SL: Okay.

[02:58:42] MC: And I—and you sit up there and say, "Well, why is it like that?" Well, Colonel Wright from down in Texas had taken over Fort Stewart. That's over there near Savannah, Georgia.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Biggest place in the world except Fort Benning. And I'm his chief pilot, see. He had kind of a heart disease. He had to always

have a pilot with him. So I'm riding for him and all, and I'm not the type of guy that—some people says, "Turn the other cheek." Well, you can look at some folks like this and said, "To hell with that. I ain't turnin' nothin'."

SL: Yeah.

MC: "I'm goin' straight on through, see."

SL: Mh-hmm.

MC: And that's the way I am, so that was the Lord sayin', "This crazy guy—I'm gonna send him down to Savannah and let him stay down there in the wilderness, see." [*Laughter*] I'm assuming. I don't know what God said. But I always put everything on God.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

SL: Well, it may be like that thoroughbred sit . . .

MC: Yeah.

SL: . . . standin' in the mud, waitin' . . .

MC: That's right.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Ain't that right?

SL: Yeah, yeah.

MC: Yeah, so you stay right there. You can't do nothin'.

SL: Yeah.

MC: And so after a while you can train him. And then you take him and give him somethin' to eat. Next thing about it is he lets you know, "Well, this is kinda not so bad."

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

[02:59:51] SL: So what did you do at Fort Stewart?

MC: Same thing. I was teachin' some phase for the army. I don't know. We been—we'd move all around all the time, see, but . . .

SL: Now, were you—when you did this teaching at both Fort Sill and Fort Stewart, were you teachin' blacks only or . . .

MC: No.

SL: It was . . .



MC: When I—once I left here, and what the commander would do—he'd line 'em up there, see, and give each instructor three students. Just one, two, three. If your name was Blakely, another guy's name Allen, another guy's name Crawford, well, I get those three. So you don't ca—know whether they all white or all black. They don't—all he does, just give 'em to you. So had a guy down at Fort—well, it was Fort Rucker, maybe. He came to my house and told me—I said, "Where you from?" He said, "I'm from Minnesota." And he says, "I think the commander has done me a wrong." I said, "What is that?" "He

ga—I'm the only black here, and you're the only black instructor, and he gave you—he gave me to you, and I don't like it." And I said, "Well, look, all you have to do is go and tell the commander that you want a white instructor. You ain't gonna get through, but if you tell him that, he'll give you one." I said, "But I don't lose nobody. I'm the best in this business. I am absolutely the best instructor in this bu—I don't lose nobody. Gettin' me is like puttin' on that pinstripe and goin' to get the job with the New York Yankees. That's how good we are." [SL laughs] That's what I told him.

[03:01:27] SL: [Laughs] What'd he do? [Laughter] Did he phase out anyway?

MC: Yeah, I—yeah, I don't know whether he did. But, see, here's the—here's what I was explainin' to him. White people are strange, fella. You get out here and you get to be a first lieutenant or a captain, and you gonna be over some white troops, and that's the last thing they really would like to see a black guy in charge, like Obama.

SL: Yeah.

[03:01:53] MC: So I said, "But I don't lose nobody. I'm the best on this field, whether I believe it or not. I don't lose nobody. I teach you the procedures, and the procedures are that you say,

'I'm an art man.' Well, your instructor gave you *a, b, c,* and *d* in how to draw a picture" . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . "on paper or on whatever it is." And we are—we do that in every facet of life. Knowin' how to do *a, b,* and *c.* And if you're followin' Jesus Christ there, you turn around and you says, "Well, how does that follow Jesus's teaching?" He sits up there, and he tells you the certain basic things there. He says, "I'm goin' away, but I'm gonna send a comforter to you. Now, the comforter will give you instructions in what? All things." That's what Jesus told his disciples after he'd—had risen from the dead. And that's what happens all of the time there. You see, somebody will sit up there and said—like Obama—"Is he smart?" "Is he what?" He says he's smart. You say, "Now, nobody finish Harvard University at the top of his class in the debating class and gonna turn around and get some Southerners to be able to sit up here and unfrock him.

SL: Right.

[03:03:10] MC: See, the system operates on—like the quarterback. The Manning boys were taught by Archie, and he's a what? A pro. That right?

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah, so the . . .

SL: The kids are, too.

MC: Ain't that right?

SL: Yeah.

MC: That's the way the system operates. And that's the way I taught. To make sure that when you got out there, you took care of yourself. Don't care whether you're with Patton—if you're with Patton with the Red Ball Express, I expect for you to have—expect for you to have the machine ready to go. "We goin' to Berlin." That's what Patton said. "And I don't want no stuff." And that's the way I was.

SL: So how long were you at Fort Stewart?

MC: I was at Fort Stewart for about four or five years. I was—put in forty-some years in the army [bends forward] as a civilian instructor. See, right like this. [*Shuffles through papers*] That's the [hands paper to SL] . . .

SL: And after Fort Stewart you went to . . .

[03:04:06] MC: Back to Fort—up to Fort Rucker—went back to Fort Rucker, and here's what happens. Black people couldn't get houses. If you couldn't get on the post there, you couldn't get 'em out in Enterprise, Ozark, or Dothan without havin' a whole lots of static. The families I'm talkin' about.

SL: Yeah.

MC: So my job was to intercede—to go to them and talk to them and see if they couldn't accept 'em. And—but at the same time, I'd make sure that these blacks not gonna get out there and act a fool.

SL: Right.

MC: Right. And that's how I have to work my business, see.

SL: Uh-huh.

MC: Yeah. Mh-hmm. So all in all, you . . .

SL: So you were really—you were makin' it work, basically.

MC: Well, that's my job. I didn't know it, though.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. Napoleon didn't know it. Alexander the Great didn't know it when he came across that and changed the Hebrew language into Greek. And you come up there and you say, "Everybody that ever came on this scene"—now, whether he was Paul or not. Paul had a Roman for a father and was educated down in Tarsia—was able to go to Jerusalem under Galilee and learn the system of what the Jews were supposed to be for. And the Jews are for what's right, I guess, and he mastered that. He wrote thirteen of the books—twenty-six books there, see, so, I mean that in his time he must've been a genius . . .

SL: Yeah.

MC: . . . of bein' able to do things.

[03:05:32] SL: Yeah. [*Sighs*] So what did you do after your military career?

MC: After I ma—I came back here, and I started workin' in the community of doin' certain things and all. The thing about it is that just like—this was when I retired the first time [motions toward paper]. Now, I've got another [looks around on his left]—I guess she got it back there—from General Merryman from Hot Springs, Arkansas. He's my boss down at Fort Sill—for—I mean, down at Fort Rucker. And he gave me one of those fantastic write-ups there, see, when I was discharged after forty years, see. So you come up here and you say, "Were you nice?" I said, "I did what the army wanted, and they wanted to get some changes. And I'm a change man." Yeah. But I'm a Christian. See, now, if you do it [*unclear words*] where you don't go out there with your ?bag? hangin' down and . . .

SL: Right.

MC: . . . actin' a fool and always in trouble there. Well, you're goin' out to Las Vegas, and you—I don't gamble. I don't do nothin' but just teach people how to be good. Ain't hurt me at all. Oh, and you can go back there and just read that stuff there—back

there from—or you can go and see those—David Pryor down on the street, and he'll tell you that I'm not easy. I've gotten him to pass a law to where he's gonna give these five churches or schools around here x amount of money as a way of tryin' to bring 'em up to where they can teach kids to be quality kids.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: Yeah, I read that.

MC: Mh-hmm. He's something.

[03:07:14] SL: Yeah. So after you—what was it that you—what'd you have done in Hot Springs? What were you workin' on—same thing?

MC: Same thing. In other words, I go around speaking, just like I went over there to the commanding officer at the air base and had his birthday, so he invited me to come over there and help him cut the cake. And I sat out there with his wife. And she said, "You want to go up to fort—Colorado Springs? I'll send you up there in a C-130J. That's the finest 130 we got out here at this air base." I said, "Well, Miss Torrence was feelin'"—this was just 'bout last month—and I said, "I can't afford to let her—you know, be without her and all, but I can go sometime there." They—the army goin' somewhere every week. [03:08:03] And

the main thing about it is that they know they can depend on me because I'm not gonna let 'em down. I try to be a quality man wherever I go. And just like some people don't like Houston Nutt. Houston Nutt is a genius, far as I'm concerned.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Yeah. Isn't that right?

SL: Yeah. Yeah, he's good.

MC: Yeah, I like him. I like people . . .

SL: I like him, too.

MC: . . . whether they're strong, but I want 'em to be fair. I want them to know that this is the greatest country on the face of the earth, and what we wanna do is to make sure that everybody recognize who we are. And I don't intend to let 'em down. Not on my end. And if they want—if anybody else wanna come over here, he's in trouble. [*SL laughs*] He's in trouble.

[03:08:47] SL: Hey, now, listen . . .

MC: Okay.

SL: Lookin' back over your—all your life.

MC: Yeah.

SL: And we've covered some ground here, from you visiting your grandma and sleepin' in her feather bed . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . and all the way to the work that you're still do . . .

MC: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . doin', really, speaking engagements now.

MC: Yeah.

SL: You're a popular guy now. You're . . .

MC: Yeah, that's right.

SL: . . . you're a good example of somebody that's worked hard and made a difference in people's lives. Lookin' back at all your career, is there any point in your life where you—something [*snaps fingers*] clicked for you, that . . .

MC: Like, good, bad, or ugly [*words unclear*].

SL: Well, the path. What was it that got you goin' on this path?

[03:09:37] MC: Nobody really knows. See, as I told you, I ran into a guy named Colonel Forrest, and that was by chance. But it wasn't really by chance. My book says that when Jesus Christ in Jerusalem—and He went down to ?Sater? and ?Tyria?, and He may have gone down there because it was the will of God. Then He may have been goin' down there to have some—on an excursion there. You know, out scoutin' out for new converts, or else He may have went—may have gone down there to rest. We aren't quite sure why He went down there. But here comes this cana—this girl from the Canaanite, which was the black tribes.

SL: Af—yeah. Mh-hmm.

MC: Africans. And she was tellin' Him that her daughter had one of those diseases there that needed some help there, and when you're filled up with demons and so forth. And He said, "I didn't come down here to fool with—like, I'm really on another mission." She said, "Yeah, but even the dogs can get the crumbs from the table—at the master's table." And he said, "Well, I tell you what. You go back home, and because of your faith"—that's in Mark, sixth chapter—"your daughter is made whole." Now, what He's tellin' her is that "I and my father are one." And as He told His disciples, "When I get ready to leave here, I'm gonna send the comforter, and the comforter will teach you all things and will give you" what He called the reason of why you are here. And you wanna know why we're here? To serve each other. To help each other. To die for each other, if necessary. That's what we here for. And I use that as my motto.

[03:11:27] SL: That's a beautiful motto. Is there anything that you wanna say to your kids—say to your . . .

MC: I don't ever tell them anything. See, what I—you come up there and you say, "Well, how do they look at you?" Different ones look at me . . .

SL: Different ways.

MC: . . . different ways. I make sure that I satisfy God, and He isn't easy to satisfy.

SL: No. [*Laughs*]

MC: No.

SL: You gotta pay a price to do that.

MC: You got to pay the price.

SL: Yep.

MC: So I'm here, and this lady right here [points forward and to his left]—her arm is paralyzed. In the mornin' at eight o'clock I'll be back over there to the place to get treated. Twelve o'clock I take her to another specialist to get somethin' else. I don't even care what it is. Guy said, "Well, does it cost you money?" Everything costs. Not always money, but time. And your energy and all these things that go along. But at the end, you know, you come up there and you say, "Well, listen here. I have fought a good fight. The course that was laid out for me—I completed my course. Now, come get me." That's fair enough, isn't it?

SL: That's fair enough. You told me that her husband was your best friend.

MC: Yeah, one of 'em. Yeah, that's right.

SL: One of your best friends. Is it . . .

MC: Yeah, he—we were in scouts together.

[03:12:52] SL: Do you wanna say anything about him?

MC: Well, actually, to tell the truth about it—as I told you—the girl told you that I was the worst that finished Dunbar.

SL: Yeah.

MC: Her husband was smart. All the Torrences are over here. They are brilliant people. And not only that, I'd hang out up there, see, 'cause I could eat up there.

SL: Yeah.

MC: I didn't just go up there to eat, 'cause I didn't really have to do anything. I could go around and pick up cigarette butts, and I'd have one of those Bull Durham packages, and just like—I'd have that package just like this, see [takes out pouch from pocket], where I could get those butts and put 'em in here, and then I'd take 'em down on Ninth Street and sell 'em—you know, make me ten cents for a package of cigarette tobacco.

SL : Yeah.

[03:13:49] MC: Now, I'm always on a hustle of doin' something that's gonna help somebody else. I don't need nothin'. I don't need anything. All I do is just [*unclear words*] and wanna know "What else, God, do you want me to do?" And I enjoy it. And

that's the reason why—just like I said I—when I went over to the air base—you know, that man—that commander didn't know me. But he had just come here from Spain. And he just sat there and looked at me, and I was sittin' up there at his table, and he was tellin' me 'bout—he says, "I don't need—you don't need tell me nothin'. I got a machine that tells me what all you've done. I know you. I know your whole record. Care. You're committed. Good attitude. Reliable. And God knows you got the energy."

SL: [*Laughs*] All right.

MC: Was that good?

SL: [*Laughter*] Yeah, that's good. That's good. That's good. Well, thank you so much.

MC: Write it up good.

SL: We'll write it up exactly the way it was said, okay?

MC: Well, you see, one of the things about it—we don't know—God—we don't know—God told a whole lots of stuff in there in the Bible.

SL: Yeah. There's—and that's fine.

MC: Yeah, and what you tell a person is this. That the way you see it and the situation that we are in, we expect for this country to grow, grow, grow. And it won't grow by itself. Our job is to help

each other make it grow and make it grow better. That's what I'm here for, and that's the reason why the Lord took me away in [19]57 to make sure that I didn't get on the wrong track [*laughs*] and make a fool of myself.

SL: Well, you've had a magnificent life.

MC: Thank you.

SL: Thank you.

[03:15:32 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]