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**DTB 027 Erica Thomas Maull**  
**Down the Bay Oral History Project (DTB), Acc. 757**  
**Interviewed by Jada Jones and Ryan Morini on June 8, 2022**  
**1 hr, 37 minute audio recording • 34 page transcript**

**Abstract:** In this interview, Erica Thomas Maull is interviewed by Jada Jones and Ryan Morini at her home in Mobile, Alabama. Ms. Maull discusses growing up Down the Bay, and relates some of her family history—including her parents' florist shop, which they built in their backyard. She also discusses some of the businesses she remembers, both downtown and Down the Bay, and describes how her family navigated the segregated Mobile she grew up in.

The Down the Bay Oral History Project focuses on the historic Down the Bay neighborhood on the south side of Mobile, Alabama. Led by Drs. Philip Carr and Kern Jackson of the University of South Alabama, in collaboration with the McCall Library, the project took shape in conjunction with archaeological mitigation work for the I-10 bridge expansion. Down the Bay is a historically Black and Creole neighborhood, and a central focus of the project has been to document the constant threat of gentrification and the legacy of urban renewal.

**Preface:** This is a transcript of an oral history recording archived at the McCall Library of the University of South Alabama. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word which has been minimally edited for readability.



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**DTB 027 Erica Thomas Maul**  
Interviewed June 8, 2022

This is a verbatim transcript of an oral history interview recording, composed and formatted in accordance with the McCall Library transcription style guide.

Verbatim transcription is a style of representing as closely as possible the exact wording and phrasing of the speakers on the recording, though false starts, repetitious phrases, and other minor edits have been made as needed only for the sake of clarity and readability. Readers of this transcript are strongly encouraged to listen to the recording.

Please note that if any text is **bolded** in the transcript, this indicates uncertainty of either spelling or accuracy of transcription regarding what was said. Italics indicate emphasis, or are applied to titles and similar proper nouns.

This interview was transcribed by:

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DTB 027

Narrator: Erica Thomas Maull

Interviewer: Jada Jones and Ryan Morini

Date: June 8, 2022

RM: So, this is Ryan Morini with the McCall Library Oral History Project at the University of South Alabama. Today is June 8th, 2022. I'm here with my colleague—

J: Jada Jones.

RM: And—

M: Erica Maull.

RM: Thank you for joining us today.

M: Mmhm. You're welcome.

RM: Can we start with where and when you were born?

M: I was born in 1961, and I was born here in Mobile at St. Martin de Porres Hospital.

RM: Okay. And where did you grow up?

M: I grew up Down the Bay on Elmira Street. Actually, 805 Elmira Street.

RM: Okay. What do you remember about that house?

M: That's the only house I knew in my, you know, younger years. It was home. It was—when we were younger, it was—it was a wood house. We had a big yard, fenced-in yard. I remember sneaking out to go down the street to play with my friends. You know, riding the gate. We had a gate with two, the fences back then had—we had two dogs on the front. I don't know what the name of the fence company was, but I would sit between those two dogs and just ride. [Laughter] And ride the gate! But we really had a lot of good times in that home. I remember my parents remodeling it in in the [19]70s. They remodeled and built a upstairs. That may have been done, you know, in the late [19]60s, but then I remember them remodeling it again in the [19]70s, and opening it up, putting them a room downstairs, because they couldn't go up and down the stairs anymore. But it was five of us, and I was the youngest. [Laughter]

RM: And who did the remodel? Did they do it themselves, or they get someone in the neighborhood, or what was—?

M: Well, I think he lived in the neighborhood. I think they knew him, the man that did the remodeling. The upstairs part was remodeled by a man named Earl Ponquinette. And he lived, they lived Down the Bay also. But they lived on the other side of Broad Street, right next to a corner store called Cox Drugstore. It was—the store was on the corner of Marine, and I don't know if it was Augusta or Savannah Street. And then, the second remodel, I remember was done by a man named Floyd Collins. And he lived on Dearborn Street. He was also Down the Bay. I think it was between Selma Street and Augusta, I think.

RM: Okay. And, so what was the—did your parents keep a garden or anything outside? What—

M: They did their own. They did their own yard. So, all the landscaping was done by my mother. I'll put it that way. She did it! [Laughter] He would help. He cut the grass, and he would help keep it up, but the yard and everything—once the house was remodeled and bricked, they did a circle drive in the front, and she always had a—I don't know if you call it—we didn't have a fountain or anything, but we had a big palm tree in the front that always had flowers around it. So, she did all the maintenance herself until she couldn't do it any longer.

RM: Okay. What flowers did she grow out there? If you remember.

M: She had—well I remember, the entire yard was trimmed in monkey grass. The the driveways and everything was lined on both sides with monkey grass. She had pansies and tulips around the palm tree. And she would change it from time to time. Sometimes she had those things, look like little cabbages? [Laughter]

RM: Oh yeah.

M: I can remember that. She had those around every now and then. So, she would change it from time to time.

RM: Okay. Did she like working out in the garden?

M: Oh, she loved it. She did. She'd be out there all day long. Pulling weeds, have us out there pulling weeds out the monkey grass. [Laughter] She loved it.

J: How did she get into it? Do you know?

M: You know, I don't know. I know my uncle—her brother lived in Los Angeles, and he was a landscaper.

J: Okay.

M: And she—I remember her, when we were little, sitting in her room taking classes through the mail. She took classes through the mail and she got her license to be a florist.

J: Wow!

RM: Okay.

M: I remember her—it was some kind of little cards that had pictures of flowers, different—she knew everything. She knew could look at it and tell you what it was. But she did that. And then, she taught my dad. And so, they worked together.

RM: How old were you when that happened, do you remember?

M: I was maybe six, seven. No, I might've been younger than that. Because they started the—well, they opened the shop before I was born. So I don't remember, you know, how she actually started it. But I do remember her taking those classes through the mail. Now, my sister may know a little more than me in that area, but I do remember her going, you know, to school through the mail, and got her license to do the floral arrangements.

RM: That's very cool. Do you have any idea where she was getting those—

M: I have no idea. I surely don't, yeah. Somewhere through the mail.

RM: And we haven't asked yet; can we ask your parents' names?

M: James Thomas was my father's name. James Patrick Thomas. And my mother's name was Helen—she was a Pinkney, her maiden name was Pinkney—Thomas.

RM: Okay. Is that—Pinkney -N-K, or -N-C-K?

M: -N-K.

RM: -N-K. Okay, yeah. And where were they from?

M: They were from Mobile. Yeah.

RM: Okay, so they were born in Mobile?

M: They were born in Mobile. They lived on, they grew up on Selma Street, which was the next street over from Elmira Street. [Laughter] So, I guess when they got married and they found a house around the corner, and they moved—you know, they stayed in the area. So, I knew that they grew up Down the Bay also. My grandfather was Raymond Thomas, and he used to maintain St. Vincent's Catholic Church. It's on Lawrence Street. And when he was unable to continue to work, my dad used to go and do it for him. And he would go up every evening and ring the bell when it was time for Mass, and maintain the church. And we went to St. Peter Claver Catholic School and church that was there. It was on Palmetto right off Washington Avenue. And in 1971, the Archdiocese closed the school. I was in the 4th grade. And we merged with St. Vincent's. And we had a procession from St. Peter Claver down the street to St. Vincent. It was Christmas of 1971, I think. Which is now Prince of Peace Catholic Church. Which I'm still a member. So.

RM: That's quite a transition. What was that, like moving—

M: I can vaguely remember it, but I do remember it was—they made it a fun thing for the kids, the school kids, because, you know, we had a big—it was kind of like a parade, somewhat. But it was a procession from the school to the old church, to the new church. We didn't want to—. [Laughter] We didn't want to move, but it was just something that the diocese did. St. Peter Claver was a predominantly Black Catholic church, and St. Vincent was a white Catholic church. So, they merged the two churches together, and they closed St. Peter Claver. I remember my father saying that, you know, they worked to build that church, that St. Peter Claver school. And they would go—I know the kids, some of the kids from down on the island, Mon Louis Island, they would go pick them up and bring them to school.

RM: Wow!

M: To get them there.

J: That's far!

M: That's a long ways. But they would do it. And he told me he would let the nuns borrow his car sometimes to go down there, and you know, minister to the kids

and do whatever they needed to do. And, but sometimes— they eventually got a bus, and the kids would be bussed into the school. But they closed that school, [19]71, and then I went to St. Matthew's; that's down on Broad Street right at the interstate. And I went there till 7th grade, and then they closed that school! [Laughter] So I went to St. Joan of Arc on the corner of Elmira and Ann Street my 8th grade year. And then after that, I went to McGill-Toolen.

RM: Okay.

J: So, you've been all around down there! [Laughter]

M: I jumped from school to school. It was not from my choice!

J: Okay.

RM: Where any of those transitions difficult, or did you just kind of—?

M: It was difficult because, you know, anytime you the new person at a school, it's difficult. But a lot of the other kids transitioned, too. So, some of the same kids that I went to school with went to the same schools. Now, we did separate: some went to St. Mary's, some went to Heart of Mary. But several did go; you know, we all went together. So, I still had some kids that I was familiar with. So, it wasn't really that hard.

RM: Okay. Were there rivalries between the schools, or—?

M: Not that I can remember.

RM: Okay.

M: I've never had any problems in school with, you know. Other than little kid stuff, but no, you know, animosity or anything because I came from another school. So everything was good.

RM: That's good.

M: Yeah.

J: What was St. Matthew's like? Because that's not a school that we've heard much about. We hear about Heart of Mary and Peter Claver, but I don't think anybody's really mentioned St. Matthews.

M: Well, St. Matthews was—you know, it was—it was a mixed school, you know. It was a mixed school. So there were—at that time it was, you know, things were kind of tough as far as racial issues. But I never had a problem, you know, going to school. But I mean it was, it was just school. We just adapted, and everybody got along, so. But it was a—it's still there, by the way.

J: Mmhm, Garrity and Broad Street.

M: Yeah, it's still there. And I think that we had a—I wasn't able to attend, but they had a reunion maybe a year or two ago of everybody who attended St. Matthew's. But it was a big lot, open lot; the school, you know, was like a L-shaped school, and we would go sometimes from class to class, but most of the time we were all in the same classroom. We didn't change classes like they do now in middle school. Everything was in the one class, and you know, sometimes the two classes would get together and watch movies or do something, but it was a lot—I don't know how Catholic school is now, because my kids went to public school, but it was fun. It was a lot of fun. It was hard: we had nuns, and they were strict, but that what I was used to. So, it didn't seem difficult to me, because that's all I knew.

J: I read somewhere that the Klan used to rally in that lot at St. Matthew's.

M: I never experienced it.

J: Okay.

M: I don't know if they did or not. I never experienced it to say that I knew that that's what they were doing, if they were doing it. I really don't know.

J: It would've been, I think, maybe late [19]20s, early [19]30s.

M: Okay.

J: So, I just keep asking to see if somebody—

M: It was in the [19]70s when I was there.



J: Okay.

M: So, it may have mellowed out some. You know. I don't remember of that. Mm-nm. I don't have a memory of that.

J: Okay.

RM: And I wondered, because I guess you were born kind of in the heart of the Civil Rights Movement. So, there's a lot of stuff changing while you're growing up. Do you have any memories of the Movement or anything that was going on?

M: Mmhm. I remember a lot of my teachers were arrested. [Laughter]

RM: [Laughter] Okay!

M: When I was at St. Peter Claver.

J: Really?

M: Yeah, a lot of—I know they had rallies. I remember there was a—what was it called? The push, I think it was? I can't remember.

J: Okay.

M: But I do remember that we were having class, we were at school, and we had to have a lot of substitutes because the—nuns included—my teachers, some of them, were arrested because they had a march. And they arrested them. So, you know. That's all I can really remember. I do remember hearing talk of them having rallies, but my dad kind of kept us out of that. So I wasn't, you know, real familiar with it. Like I said, my sister may know a little more. She was a little older than me. But I think she was in the 8th grade. She was the last class at St. Peter Claver when they closed it. I was in the 4th grade. She was in 8th grade. And my brother had already left. And my oldest brother and sister went to Heart of Mary, because they were a lot older than me—I know they went to Heart of Mary when it was a high school. I think they went to St. Peter Claver when it was an elementary school. But yeah, they did, because I have pictures of them. We all with our uniforms on. I don't know if I have mine on or not, but I know they do. Like I say, they may know a little more than I do.

RM: Did your parents go to Peter Claver? Or, where did they go?

M: My mother went to Dunbar.

RM: Dunbar, okay.

M: She went to Emerson. I don't know what grade Emerson went to. I think it was more like a elementary school, middle school.

J: I think so, too.

M: It was Down the Bay. And then, I know she graduated from Dunbar. It was a high school then. And she went to Dunbar. My father? I don't know. Because he didn't go any farther than the 7th grade. So, I don't know where he went to school. But I remember him telling me that his dad got sick, and he used to, you know, work with his dad. I know he was in the military, but I don't remember him ever talking about when he went to school.

J: Okay.

RM: Did he talk about his military experience?

M: No. No, the only thing I knew is that he was stationed a lot in New York. And I think he and my mother were married then, because she would go and meet him when he was in the Navy. When the ships came in, she would go to New York. He had a sister that lived in New York. And I remember them saying that they were there. But he didn't really talk about it much. I don't know why, but he didn't. Maybe it was something he wasn't too fond of.

J: Right.

RM: Yeah.

M: But I don't know. But I do know he was in the Navy.

RM: Okay. And did you know your grandparents?

M: I knew my grandmother on my mother's side.

RM: Okay. What was her name?

M: Her name was Amelia. Her middle name was Tarleton, and her married name was Salvant. S-A-L-V-A-N-T. And I knew her. She lived—she passed away in 1988. So, you know, I grew up with—I don't know my father's parents. I know their names, you know. My grandfather on my mother's side was Henry Pinkney.

J: Do you know anything about the Pinkney family?

M: Yeah, we keep in touch, you know. We—I was a little older when they all started to come around, and keep in touch with—. My grandmother was very fair-skinned. My uncle, nobody thought he was a Black man because he was—my grandmother's father was white. And so, when my mother was born, my grandfather was very, very dark. My mother and my uncle were very, very fair. So, he didn't think they were his kids. So, he and my grandmother broke up. And my mother only saw him once. So, I don't know a whole lot about him, but his brothers, two of his brothers, kept in touch with my mother. And they, you know, kept her informed of the family and all. My uncle didn't want to have anything to do with any of them, but my mother did eventually come around and—because, like she told us, the ones that she grew up with had nothing to do with what happened between my grandmother and my grandfather. So, she couldn't hold them accountable for something he did. So, you know, we have reunions, and we all get together, and we do stuff. So, I'm familiar with that side, and I've learned the history, the family history from them. But I never knew him. And my father's parents both passed away early, so I never met them either. But this is—my grandmother was Viola Harris. —Thomas, because she married my grandfather. And she was—it's hard to explain, but the Harrises and the Pinkneys are both—I'm related on both sides. [Laughter] My grandmother's side—my mother's side and my father's side. So.

J: It happens.

M: So, we're all, you know, related there on both sides. So, my dad's dad, like I said, was Raymond Thomas. And I'm familiar with that side of the family, too, but not as familiar as I am with the Pinkney side. Because I helped create the family history. So, I'm into it a little more. But I do know that we were related on both sides. So. [Laughter] It happens; you know, it really does. It happens. So.

RM: Well, so you knew, you knew your grandmother Amelia?

M: Mhm.

RM: What was she like as a person?

M: She was great. She, she was great. She took us everywhere. Because my parents were always working. You know, the shop was at home in the backyard. So, they never—I never heard them say, “We’re closed.” You know, we took orders when anybody called; we took the orders over the phone. It didn't matter if they called at 8 o'clock at night; we took the order. And you know, they got up early in the morning, and they would stay out there all day long and make arrangements for people. So, if we wanted to go anywhere, or if things came up like when the fair came to town, my grandmother took us. And you know, not saying that my parents wouldn't, but they were always working. And so, she would take me places. I remember when she—she lived on Warren Street, Down the Bay also. And she went to Big Zion AME, Zion Church. I think she was Catholic at one time, and then when she married Mr. Salvant, he belonged to Big Zion. So, she converted with him. But I remember them living on Warren Street. I remember a little about him. I remember seeing him, but I don't remember a relationship, because he died when I was young. But my grandmother, we were close. And I would spend the night with her. You know, I remember the house. She lived in R.V. Taylor when they first built it. It was for seniors, and she lived on Flicker Court. And I would, you know, I met a lot of my high school friends in that circle. And we would catch the bus and ride downtown. She would take us to Kress's. We couldn't sit down, because they didn't let Blacks sit at the counter back then.

J: What place was this again?

M: It was Kress's Department store. It was like a Walmart? But you know, it was a big department store downtown. And they sold everything. And I think when the mall first opened, it was a Kress's in the mall. Right in the middle, where I think Foot Locker is right now or something. As soon as you walked in, it was right there. But we'd go down there. We'd go to Gayfer's and shop, and do things, and catch the bus, and go back home. I can remember riding the bus with her. And then, she lived in, I think it's Emerson Court. When they built that, she moved from down there because it was closer to us. And she could walk. She would walk from her apartment to our house. And I would spend the night with her there sometimes, and we had a really good relationship. She was great.

J: Sounds like it.

M: Yeah, she was. She went her—like I say, her son, my uncle lived in Los Angeles. So my junior year of high school, going into my senior year, I went to Los Angeles with her to visit my uncle, and that was great. It was an awesome trip. They took

me everywhere. And it was a lot of fun. So, we spent a lot of time. I guess I was the youngest, so I was a little spoiled. [Laughter]

J: What did you think about Los Angeles in comparison to Mobile?

M: Oh, it was huge. Well you know, it was fun because there was a lot of amusement parks. I went to Disneyland and Magic Mountain and all those places. We didn't have it here; you know, you always dream of going to Disneyland. That was the best place in the world. So, I got to go. And it was fun. But you always love home.

J: Right. Yup.

RM: Was that the first time you had really left Mobile?

M: Yes.

RM: Okay.

M: Yeah, that was the first time, you know, other than us going to Mon Louis Island, or Dauphin. My dad took us to Dauphin Island all the time, and just, he said he just had to put his feet in the water. [Laughter]

J: I understand that.

M: So, we would go. We would all pack up on Sundays and go. Half the time it seemed like he took most of the kids in the neighborhood. We would all be jammed in his station wagon. And wasn't any seat belts back then, so we just got in where we fit! [Laughter] Put blankets in the back, and we'd all sit in the back and just ride. And he would take us down there, you know, on Sundays, and we'd just have a blast. So, that's about as far as I went until I went with her. [Laughter]

RM: Did you ever go to Faustina Beach?

M: Yeah. Yeah, we used to go to Faustina Beach a lot when I was—I was really young then. I remember—what I remember about, seemed like we had to walk a mile to get to the water. [Laughter] Because it was very shallow, you know, right when you got in. And so, if you wanted to get in the waist-deep water or something where you could really swim, you'd have to walk to get to it. So, but you know, back then we didn't think about dangers; we just thought about water. But we did go. I remember there being a club on the beach—on the, wherever we went. Because

they—we couldn't go over that way. I remember them telling us, "Don't go in there; stay away from it." You know? Like, they had a club on the beach. And that's about as much as I can remember.

RM: I mean, that's great though. Thank you.

M: Yeah, yeah.

RM: Well, so we've—we talked a little about it, but on the on the tape I don't know if we specified what your parents did.

M: Yeah, they were florists, and they owned James Flower Shop. And it was the only Black-owned business florist shop Down the Bay. I don't—I knew of others, but they weren't Down the Bay. But you know, they serviced everybody—anybody who called. I can't ever remember them screening people or, you know, refusing to do work for anybody? It was all on the honor system. You know, you just called and placed an order; they made it, and then they would send the bill out. Or like I say, we would go collect the money. And that's something we did. My oldest brother and sister used to do it when they were in their teen years, and it just went all the way down to me. I can remember riding with them on Saturdays and Sundays, going to do that. And they would just give us the—it wasn't anything specific. It was, like, hand-written information on a sheet of paper, and we put it in a clip. We'd have them in order about where we knew the route was, what areas was close to each other. And we'd go from house to house. And you know, just tell them I was from James Flower Shop and I was there to collect. And the people would go get the money and bring it to me. [Laughter] It's crazy! When you think about it now, it's crazy the way we did it! I mean, we just walked up to the house. I can remember running from a lot of dogs! [Laughter] I can remember that. I remember jumping on top of my car with a plant in my hand. And my grandmother was with me that day. Every now and then, she would ride with me. And that dog chased me, and I jumped on top of that car with that plant. I was delivering that day. And the lady was saying, "He won't bite." "Oh, but he's coming at me!"

J: So, did they use all real flowers and plants, or was there like artificial arrangements?

M: I don't ever remember them doing artificial, unless somebody specifically asked for it. But they were all live flowers, plants. Some of them were heavy, because they would put the—especially the, like the sprays they made for the casket, sprays that sat on the casket. If it, you know, was going to be something like they had a wake

that night, and then the funeral the next day, she would put the flowers in tubes that had like a pick on the end, so she could stick it in the styrofoam and arrange it how she wanted. And we had to sit out there and fill all those tubes of water! That was our job, to fill tubes. I hated that. But we had to fill the tubes and put the little rubber stopper on top. And we stuck them in a piece of styrofoam, so she could just reach and grab it. And she would put the flowers in those tubes so they would last longer. And I can remember breaking several. [Laughter] I can remember breaking several flowers, and I have to turn around and go back and say, "Momma, I broke it." And she'd pull it out, and fix another one, and stick it in there; I go. But it was it was an experience. You know, when you doing it, you don't think that it's—you know, you hate it. You can't go with your friends because got to do this, or you got to deliver flowers, or—. But you know, I wouldn't change a thing. It really made my work ethic fantastic. And you developed customer service skills, and things that I didn't know at the time that I was getting until I went to work. And then it dawned on me that I wouldn't have that experience had I not done that for them. So, it was an experience. It was great. But we all did it, you know? And like I say, I was the last one, so. Even after I was grown and married, they would call us and say, "We need some flowers delivered." We'd say, "Okay, we'll be there." And we'd go and do it on—as a matter of fact, when I had my oldest daughter, I was, it was right—no, my baby girl. It was February. She was born on the 16th. And on Valentine's Day, I delivered flowers all day long. [Laughter] I delivered all day long. And I went in the next night, and had her on the 16th. So we, it was a—like I say, it was something that we did until we couldn't do it anymore. Because once my father passed away, and she was by herself, then she would have a lot of work and it was really hard for her to—you know, she was getting up in age, and she couldn't really keep up. But I would go. I would get off work, and go stay there with her till 10, 11 o'clock at night, until we got the majority of the things done. Where all she'd have to do was get up, put the ribbon in, and, you know. We couldn't deliver, because we was working. A lot of times, the funeral homes would work with her, and they would send people to come pick them up. Because they knew—she didn't drive, by the way. I didn't mention. She didn't drive. My dad would do all the driving until we started driving. So, once she got to where she was by herself, we had to work out how to deliver. So, my sister was right over me; Ann, she was an insurance agent. And sometimes, if she had a break in-between, you know, her visits—doing what she had to do, she would stop by and deliver something for them. And my brother worked at Bender's. Sometimes he would come before he went to work and do it. Whatever she needed, we just pitched in and helped, you know, much as we could. So.

J: What funeral homes did she work with?

M: She worked with Christian Benevolent. She worked with Hodge's. I remember us going from time to time to Azalea. I don't even know if that's still in business now or not. She worked Beloved's, but in the last, I'll say three or four years, she did most of her work with Small's. And she was his main source of flower arranging for any—and I don't think—I don't even know if they had a contract. I don't think that they did, but he had just opened, and he worked with her. She did the majority of his work. And whenever he needed something, he would call her.

J: And these are all primarily Black funeral homes?

M: Mmhm, yeah. I can remember us going to Radney's every once and a while, but not very often.

RM: Where did you get the flowers?

M: There were several wholesalers that were here in Mobile. One was right there on the corner of Springhill Avenue, and right before you get to Broad; not far from the post office. I'll tell you what's there now: Gwin's Printing. It's there. It's a—because we park cars during Mardi Gras, and he works for my church organization, the Knights of Peter Claver. And the man at Gwin's Printing allows us to use his lot to park cars, and we split the profits with him. So, that's why I know what's there now. [Laughter] But I think that was M&M Wholesale Florist that was right here. And they would get the flowers from there, and then there was another one kind of downtown off of St. Anthony Street. I think it was Mobile Wholesale. I remember those two, because we used to have to go pick up flowers for them all the time. And I remember it being—to me, I think, because I was around my mother the most—the longest, I'll say—and I drove her everywhere. So, that was always exciting to me when she would go to Mobile Wholesale, because she picked up everything. She—we walked every aisle; she looked at every bolt of ribbon. Any little piece that she could make something look different. When all the high schools had their proms, they ordered all the corsages and boutonnieres from her. And she would make them up, and she would try to put the little pearl sprays in them or something, to make it look dainty. You know, the little wristband things, she would buy, so she—anything special, she would pick up. And that was always a treat for me to go with her when she was doing that kind of stuff. I don't think my other sisters cared for it too much. [Laughter] But we were the shopaholics. So, but we did do that. They would call her for—you know, I'm sure the parents called and ordered the corsages, and the boutonnieres, and she would get them all ready.



And the kids would come by and pick them up, sometimes on their way to the prom. And I remember that a lot.

J: What schools. Do you remember?

M: Williamson was one of the main ones. You know, Toulminville. Back then it was Toulminville before it was LeFlore. So, some would come—we used to service the Toulminville area. Sometimes, we'd go in Prichard. So kids from, if they wanted to come that far, from Blount, they would. But I do know she did a lot of Williamson, B.C. Rain; you know, high schools like that down in this area. I've seen—every now and then, she would have Murphy. I guess when got older, Murphy was a more of a mixed school, so you know, she would have kids. But it was mostly Black kids that would come and get the boutonnieres and corsages from her.

J: Okay.

RM: And it sounds like she was always kind of innovating, or kind of finding creative ways to—

M: She could do anything. If she could vision it, she could make it. She just did. She was also a seamstress. She sewed. She made curtains; she made bedspreads; she made all of the—you know how you get the things from the, I don't know, I'm trying to say, like, Bath and Body Works? But the things to go in your bathroom, to cover—she covered everything. The toilet; she would cover the back of it, so it wouldn't be cold, you know? [Laughter] Who touches that part? Other than to flush. But she made everything: the rugs, she made the toilet seat covers. I can remember her getting newspaper, and cut—she made a fish for me, for when I was in elementary school. And I won an art prize for it. But she made, she drew it on newspaper, and she cut out the fabric, she sewed it together, and stuffed it. [Laughter] She just was so creative. She could do that kind of thing. She would—she made everything. I cannot remember her doing a lot of weddings. But I do know that she did them, because I have silver that she purchased years ago that's candelabras, and I have a silver champagne bucket. Where I know that she used them for weddings, but I can't remember her—other than mine—doing the flowers for a wedding. I know my brother and sister, she did theirs as well, but they had smaller weddings than I did. [Laughter] So you know, she did that kind of thing. She did a lot of arrangements for churches. She kept—our church always had flowers. I miss it so much now, because we have greenery. We don't have the big floral arrangements, like at Easter and Christmas. It just seemed like we picked up a million poinsettias, and we'd have the church full on Christmas. They had the

Easter lilies for Easter, and we'd take them to the cemeteries and put them on, you know, after my grandmother passed away, or whoever was there. Or my father's mother. We'd always go to the cemetery and put flowers for Christmas and Easter. She just did. And you know, whatever she wanted to do, my dad did it. Because he was the driver, so he had to take her. [Laughter]

RM: As long as you got a system, though.

M: Yeah, they had a system, and they worked it out. You know, they did it well. When he passed away in 2000, in March, and their anniversary was on the 9th of March, and I think they had been married 57 years when he passed away. So, they worked it out. Evidently, it worked well, because they had it going.

RM: Really, wow. Did they ever talk to you about how they got started in the florist business?

M: No, not that I can remember. I don't know where the idea came from to do that, or if it was something she, you know, had a passion to do. I don't know. I know she talked about she used to work at—when Hamell's was downtown years ago, before it was Gayfer's. She used to work there doing alterations. And she worked at Metzger's. She worked at Metzger's doing alterations, before they started the shop. So, I can remember her talking about that, but I don't remember where the idea came from to start it, if it was his or hers. I don't know.

J: And so I'm wondering, too—because you talked about them working on the house over time. But they ran the business out of the house, is that correct?

M: Well, they built a shop in the back of the house. So, it was in the backyard. So we could walk out the back door and walk straight into the shop. [Laughter] And it was, you know, they—I didn't run across that, but I do have some pictures where they were building it, of my dad standing in there before it was completely built. And so, I can't—I don't remember being present when they were building it. What I only remember, it was always there. You know. But it was just a—like I say, it wasn't anything where they displayed a lot. Although she did have shelves in the front where she would make—now, she did make some artificial arrangements that she would have sitting out on the shelves for people to come by, I guess to see what she could do. She did have some sitting out. She had vases and everything out that she would use, that people could see. She had a display table that was two-tiered, that they would put the potted plants on for people could—I remember she used to—I used to call it a “dish garden,” because it was like a garden in a dish.

She would have several different plants in one dish that people would take to hospitals. And you know, she would dress it up before they took it. Put some ribbon in it, make it a little cuter. But they could pick out, you know, what size they wanted, or—. But it was nothing fancy. It was just the front area where she worked, and then it was another back area where he worked. And that was it. It wasn't, you know, dressed up or anything like that. But it wasn't—it was just a building. It was no bathroom out there. I guess they came in the house when they needed to go to the bathroom, because it was just them. We had one lady, I remember, that worked for my dad when I was young. Her name was Ruby Overton. And she eventually started her own florist. And it was Skyline, I think. It was in the Skyline shopping center off Highway 90. And she ran that for several years. And then I think she did worked out of her home too, from time to time. She was on Marine Street. So you know, I do remember us having one—him having one employee.

RM: How old was she at that time? Was she a like a teenager, or was she—?

M: Mrs. Ruby?

RM: Mrs. Ruby, yes.

M: I think—oh, I have no idea. I think she may have been like in her 20s, 30s back then. Because, you know, to me, she was always a older lady. Because I was young, and she was a grownup, so that's the way we saw it. But I don't know. I'll say she maybe was in her 20s or 30s when she worked for him.

RM: It seems like being a florist—because I hadn't really thought about it until you've been describing all these things—like, being a florist, you're really on call, kind of. I mean, you've got to—

M: Yeah.

RM: You've got to have it set up that night for the next morning. You got to have it set up that morning for the thing tonight.

M: Right.

RM: So, that's a—I mean, how did they juggle that? How did they—

M: I don't know. People would call in, and he would ask—you know, I remember them calling in and ordering flowers. And we would ask when the service was, and they

would tell us. He would get the newspaper and find the obituaries to see where they were: you know, what funeral home had the body, and what time the service was. And then he would put them in order as to what days, which one came first, who ordered first. You know, he would put it as the way they came in, and you know they would have a—I think they had a—I remember them having on one of the shelves in the front office, where my mother was, there was windows. And it was, she would line the orders up on the shelf. Because we would stand out there and write the cards that went into the arrangements saying who it was from. So, we would do the cards; we would stamp “James Flower Shop” on it; we would write who the person was and what funeral home had it. And we’d have them in order as which one came first. And they would fill them, and when they fill it, they would take the card off from under—we’d have it sitting on top of the order. They’d take the card, put the card on the flowers, and write “filled” on the thing, and slide it in a little compartment they had so that he could, you know, write out the bills for it. And that’s the way they did it. They did it until they were done. And then if they had some—if that was a Friday; mainly, they had the most on the weekends. So, if it was Friday, everything for Friday was out. Then they’d line it up for Saturday, so they would know what they had to do on Saturday, and do it all over again.

RM: So that, yeah. So, that means the weekend weren’t really the weekends for you.

M: No. Weekends was work. Yeah.

RM: Yeah, when were there better days for resting? Was that like Monday and Tuesday kind of thing?

M: Yeah, through the week. Most of the time, through the week they had more hospital deliveries. We had hospital deliveries mainly through the week, more than we had funerals. Now, some people had funeral things through the week. It depends. I don’t ever remember them being a day where they had nothing to do. It was, you know, they may have had something small, but seem like they always had—before they put the flowers things in the grocery stores. That hurt them a lot, when they started doing that. Because people didn’t call for flowers to go to the hospitals anymore. They just went, picked it up, took it. You know. So that hurt them a lot. Then their business became mainly for funerals. And you know, unless they had somebody special that ordered something for a birthday for somebody, or—. We would do that. But they worked it out. We would get the hospital stuff out first, unless there was something that was early in the day. And back then, most the hospitals had flower rooms where you could just take it to the flower room and drop it off, and *they* would take it. But a lot of times, we’d have to go up on the floors to

the room and deliver it, if they didn't have a flower room. Some funeral homes did that as well. But a lot of them didn't. We'd have to just take it in to a funeral home, or the church. Sometimes they had, you know, the services at the church. Once or twice, I've had to go to somebody's home, where they had the funeral or the wake service at the house, and deliver flowers. But, other than that—. And people always ask me, "How did you do that? How did you—you know, weren't you scared?" And I'm like, "No." He always told us the ones that was living is the ones you need to be scared of! [Laughter] The ones that was dead wasn't going hurt you. So you know, it was just work for me. It was something I got used to.

J: So, economically speaking, do you think that your parents owning their own business made you better off than your friends or neighbors? Or was it just, they mostly made enough to cover the bills?

M: Well, I think at one time, it made us better off. They were able to do things for us as far as our home life. You know, we always had a nice house, and they continued to improve it over the years. I can remember a lot of kids growing up would tell us, "Oh, you think you better than everybody else." Or, "You—." "No, I don't. I don't think, I just—we just kids." I mean—. [Laughter] But I didn't look at it like that. And I was never taught to see myself as better than anybody else. We just worked.

J: A lot.

M: Yeah, we worked a lot! And, you know. They still let us be kids. We still were able to go places, go to parties, attend school functions. You know, they didn't stop us from doing that. Now, it depends—sometimes they did. But my dad was the kind of person: if you didn't go to that school, why are you going to that function? If it wasn't my school, I couldn't go. I have an entire football ticket from Williamson. I think it was a Williamson-Vigor game that I was going buy the ticket so he'll let me go. I still have the whole ticket! [Laughter] It didn't fly. He wasn't having it. But he was strict, but he was fair, you know. And we understood later why he did some of the things he did. Because there was still—back then, people fought. It wasn't like it is now—thank goodness. But it was a lot of fights, and to keep us out of the confusion, if it wasn't your school you didn't go. So, you know, we always had nice cars. So it was, he had to keep cars because he had to make deliveries. So, you know, he did what he had to do. But he was the kind of person that would help anybody. And if anybody needed anything and he had it, he would do it. So, you know, I can remember when people borrowing the cars to go do stuff. Like I say, he used to let the nuns at the church borrow the car to go where ever they needed

to go, and do different things. I do remember that. So, you know, he wasn't anybody who thought he was better either. So, it was good.

RM: I mean, it seems like it's a very community-centered business that they had going on.

M: It was. It was a community-centered. He was big into the church. When we were younger, I don't remember them going to church, but they made us go to church. [Laughter] We had to walk. Sometimes, we would walk to church and back, especially if they had work. We would—it wasn't that far. It was closer when it was St. Peter Claver, but we still walked to Prince of Peace and back, especially during the summers. They would have summer programs and we would, you know, go to the church. But he, whatever the church needed, he did. You know. And there were a lot of churches in this area that wasn't our church, but I know that he would, you know how the church would have a function, the church anniversaries, and he would always purchase ads. I can remember ladies coming to the house and getting the ads from him to put in their booklets for their church, and you know, different things. They ordered flowers from him, and he always gave back. So, I do remember that. You know, him doing it.

RM: Well, and the—I mean, I guess the car was a necessary to pick up flowers when you're bringing large quantities back, but your mother didn't drive. Was it easy to walk around in the neighborhood? Did she do a lot of walking, or—?

M: Yeah, she could. She could do. Now, when she was young—I don't remember her—well, when she was younger, I do remember her telling me that she walked everywhere. That, you know, before her and my dad got married, and then when she was early, early on, that she walked a lot of places, especially when he was in the Service. Wherever she needed to go, she walked. I remember her saying my grandmother used to do laundry for people. I can't remember the lady's name that my grandmother used to work for, but I remember her saying that it was a white family. Her saying that the lady had a daughter, and a lot of the clothes she would give, send to my mother. But my grandmother used to walk there to do the work. And so, everything was around in that area, Down the Bay area, that they used to do. I think the lady lived closer to Ann Street, where she used to go and do work. So, I think it was walkable for her. I know they used to walk downtown and do different things. So, I don't—you know, like I say, when I was younger, I really don't remember my mom going anywhere. She was always home to me, because I used to be irritated because a lot of my friends would come home from school and they could do what they wanted. Because they parents was at work. But mine was

always home! [Laughter] I'm like, "Man! I can't just come in and throw my books down!" You know? I always had to put them up in the right place. But, you know, I appreciate that she was there with us. But it was—you know, it was an experience.

RM: So, who did the cooking and all of that stuff?

M: She did.

RM: She did. So, she was cooking and doing all that.

M: She would put food on, she would go in the shop; she would come back and check her food. She—. [Laughter] She did! She did it all. I can remember her doing that. She put it on, and she'd be out there working, and a while later she'd come back in and check it. And then when I got a little older, I think my sister—I have two sisters and two brothers. And my brother, my oldest brother, was always gone. He graduated when I was born. So, he went in the Navy, and then it was just the three of us. Well, my oldest sister got married, and she wasn't there a good bit of my younger years. So, my sister Ann right above me, she would help cook when she got of age. I don't remember her cooking any full dinners, like on a daily basis, though. My mom did all that. But every once in a while, like on Sundays, she would let us cook. That's when I started cooking for her, was on Sundays. I would do stuff. But she cooked every day. We always had a cooked meal.

RM: What were her best dishes?

M: Oh! She cooked everything was good, to me. She made—well you know, back then, they made a lot of beans. Red Beans and rice was good. I loved them all. Black eyed peas. She cooked everything. I can't think of anything that she cooked that wasn't good.

RM: Did you have a favorite?

M: Well, I liked food. [Laughter]

RM: I hear that.

M: Well, I'll tell you—but I'll tell you this: I used to joke a lot about it, because when I was, like, maybe four or five, I wouldn't eat. I guess I just wasn't hungry. But she would sit there and make me eat. She would sit there and force-feed me until I ate. And then they had my tonsils out, and I just ate everything. [Laughter] I told her it

was her fault, because I never stopped eating after that. And I just blew up! But she—the only thing I remember not liking when I was young was okra. I did not like it. But I learned to love it, you know, once I got of age, and she cooked it. But she would make—she would do stuff, and we wouldn't know what we'd eating. And we just ate it. She made squash. But she made pudding—like, it was like bread pudding, but it was squash.

J: Oh wow.

RM: Wow.

M: And we had no idea we was eating squash, until we grew up later and she told us. [Laughter] You know?

J: Wow.

M: She would cook eggplant, but she would make it like dressing. And again, we didn't know it. So, she had her ways of doing things to get us to eat healthy stuff that we didn't have a clue.

RM: How'd she learn to cook like that? Was that—?

M: I don't know. I don't know if she learned from—my grandmother was a good cook. Now, she made with—my mother made some awesome, too, but my grandmother made gumbo. She made gumbo and fruitcakes. And every year, she would make a ton of fruitcakes, and send them to my uncle in California. And she had a best friend that lived in Baltimore. She would send stuff to her, and she would get this big—like, one of those old wash tubs? And she had it full of batter and fruit. [Laughter] And at that time, I don't think it came cut up. So, we'd have to sit there and cut fruit and crack pecans. We would crack—we had a pecan tree in the front yard, and we'd have to get those pecans, and she'd crack them. And the man next door had a fig tree, he used to give us figs. And the lady on the other side had a plum tree, and she was always making stuff. But she made the gumbo, and she made—I've never seen it since—she made a oyster gumbo.

J: Oyster?

M: Mmhm.

RM: Wow.



M: That, it wasn't like regular gumbo where it's got the okra and the tomatoes and stuff. It was more like a soup. It was thinner, but it had oysters in it. And it was so good. And I haven't had it since she passed away. And that was in 1988 that she passed away, so. But she would make an oyster gumbo that was awesome.

RM: Did she make that for special occasions, or just every so often?

M: They used to make it for Mardi Gras.

RM: Ah, okay. Okay.

M: We always had gumbo for Mardi Gras. We had food—we had the regular meal, too, but we also had gumbo. And I can remember making it during the winter, the winter months. Christmas, Mardi Gras; stuff like that. That's when they would make the gumbo.

J: Was your family big into Mardi Gras?

M: Oh, yes. [Laughter] Again, my grandmother took us. They were always working. So, my grandmother took us. And we would walk from Elmira Street all the way to Government Street. And at that time, Dearborn Street—well, Jefferson Street is next—we were between, it's Broad Street and Jefferson Street. And then, our house was in the middle. Bayou Street was the next street. But Jefferson Street was open all the way to Government Street. So, we walked straight up Jefferson Street, and we stand right there by where Greers is now?

J: Greers?

M: On the corner of Government and Broad Street? Well, we would stand right there and watch the parade. And turn around and come back. [Laughter] And on days when it rained, and the parade would come on TV, and we would sit in the living room and watch the parade, and she would throw candy from, in front of the—and we would scramble on the floor like little idiots! [Laughter] I remember her doing that. Because we couldn't go, and she would sit—there was a chair, the TV, we had a big picture window. The TV was in front of the window, and it was a chair next to it. And she would sit in that chair, and when the float passed on the TV, she would throw candy on the floor. And we'd scramble and pick it up like we thought we had something! [Laughter]

J: That's great!

M: I do remember her doing that. That was a good—we laugh about that all the time. We do, because I know my grandkids would look at me like, “Really?”

J: You should do it!

M: But back then, it was just—you know, it was Mardi Gras. They were. They were big into it. They went to a lot of balls and things like that. So, yeah. It was a lot of fun.

J: Sounds like it.

M: It was. It was a lot of fun. And you know, we had those hardwood floors, so we'd be sliding everywhere. [Laughter] Yeah. And everybody knew everybody. That was a good thing in the neighborhood: everybody knew everybody. I don't know if you remember, or know from Facebook—she said that she did an interview—but a lady named Ms. Rice?

J: Oh, Jacqueline Rice.

M: Jacqueline Rice? Well, we knew her, and I think at the time Ms. Rice lived across the street from us. They had a big house. I don't know if that was—yeah, that was them. I know the man's name was Pepper Rice. All I remember was “Pep.” Pep Rice.

J: I've heard of Pepperhead.

M: Pepperhead Rice.

J: Okay.

M: And they lived across the street from us, because they had two big dogs that looked like greyhounds, and they used to chase me all the time. And I'd be standing in between our doors, our screen door and the front door, screaming! [Laughter] Because they would get loose and run across the street. And I couldn't, I could not—oh, I hated dogs back then! But they lived across the street from us, on Elmira Street. And I remember her mentioning that she had had an interview—well, her daughter did. But yeah. It was everybody; everybody knew everybody. It seems like they all were friends. Everybody grew up in the area, and they stayed there,

you know. So, it was a lot of fun growing up. But everybody knew my daddy. Everybody. We couldn't go anywhere without somebody telling something. So, you just knew ahead of time, you can't—[Laughter]

J: You got to be on your best behavior.

M: You got to be on your best behavior, because he is going to find out! [Laughter] He is going to find out. And you know, adults were always right. So, you couldn't argue.

RM: Just to backtrack a little bit—so, where did you get food from? Like where were the grocery stores that you went to?

M: Well, the Greer's that's on Government and Broad, it was called National Big D. It was a grocery store way back then. And the Greer's on further down Broad Street that's close to Virginia? It was Winn Dixie back then. I remember it being there when I was coming up. I do remember those two stores being there. That's where we shopped, and there was a, right on the corner of Texas and Broad Street, there's a New Orleans Furniture store. Well, next to it where the car wash is, it was a fruit stand. And like I say, my sisters can go into more detail about the fruit stand, but I do remember it being there. And we used to go over there and buy fresh fruit and produce and stuff. And right behind our house on Texas Street, where I think it's some apartments right now, it was some kind of a meat place that sold—I know we used to go around there and get bologna. Bologna and salami. And they would cut it. It was long things, and they would cut it for us. I can remember that being there. There was a corner store on the corner of Elmira and Washington Avenue. Was Soto's Corner store.

J: Ok.

M: And across the street—now, I may have my streets wrong. But it seems like it was across the street. I know Pope's Lunch[eonette] was down there. And then, on Selma Street, there was a movie theater on that corner. But see, they were all closing up when I was young. So, I can't necessarily—I can't say that I remember what the name of it was.

J: I think it was the Harlem Theater. We have a picture in the archives. So I think it was the Harlem Theater, and then Pope's Luncheonette. And they were like right across the street—

M: Yeah, right across the street from each other. I remember. I can remember my dad going to Pope's and making me sit in the car until he came out. And he would always come out with those little cherry sour things, I guess to say I'm sorry for making you sit in the car. [Laughter] But Mr. Pope that ran that luncheonette, his daughters were singers. And I don't—Miss, what was her first name? Odile, I think. She used to play organ for us at our church. She played for us at our church. And Mrs. Eoline Pope, she lived over on Marine Street. My dad's sister lived down the street from her. So like I say, everybody kind of knew everybody, around in the area. And we used to—I do remember when St. Peter Claver was still open. And we used to have our lawn festivals every year. And it was huge; it was a huge thing that we had. And everybody would come and participate. We used to have—there was a lady, I can't remember her name. She used to make dolls.

J: Really?

M: And they were like those antebellum dresses, that she would make them and put them on her dolls, with the little hats. And that was my favorite booth. [Phone rings] That's my sister. Excuse me one moment, because she might—she may still come.

RM: Let's see if I can—okay.

M: Hello?

[Break in recording]

RM: All right, we're going again.

M: Okay.

RM: Oh, one other—what about seafood? Where did you get seafood from? Do you remember that?

M: You know, I don't remember? I know my grandmother remarried, and she—her second husband owned a fish market. And it was on the corner of Bayou and Selma Street. And I know we used to get fish from there. But I, you know, I don't remember right off. I do know when I was early middle school age—well, high school—we used to come down to Marine Street and get fish from, it was a fish market there right before you get to Baltimore. We used to get some seafood from there. And we stopped going there, because my father found out the man that owned that fish market had something to do with the death of Michael Donald.

J: Okay.

M: And so, he stopped. He stopped doing business there. And then, I remember him going down to a place by where Bender Shipbuilding used to be? There was a Star Fish and Oyster. He would go down there and get seafood from there. But when I was real young, I don't remember. I just ate it. I didn't know where it came from. [Laughter]

RM: Did you ever catch your own on those trips to the beach and things like that?

M: Never. I never went fishing.

RM: Never. Okay.

M: My dad told me he went fishing one time, and he swore he'd never go again. [Laughter] He said they went out, and they talked him into going. He didn't swim. And they went out one night, and they had a flashlight taped to a pole, and they stuck it there so that they could find their way back. And the light went out. And they couldn't find they way back. And they sat out there all night long. He said, and when the sun came up, they were right next to the pole! [Laughter] He said he swore he would never go again. So, he never went fishing.

J: I wouldn't go again, either.

M: He said he wouldn't—he said he was so ate up from mosquitoes, he would never go again. Because he didn't plan on being out there all night. So, he was just stuck. And—. [Laughter]

J: What did they do while they were out there?

M: I have no idea! I don't know. I was like, “Did you just sit and wonder, what—?”

J: Man.

M: I have no idea what they did. But he told me that he was not a fisherman, and he would never go again. So, he didn't. And you know, people used to always say stuff about going to the country for the summer, and picking greens. I told them my greens came out the frozen food section. I know nothing about the country, I never had any people in the country; we always stayed home. [Laughter]

RM: And so, you mentioned Pope's Luncheonette. What kinds of restaurants do you remember, especially that you might have gone to sometimes?

M: We didn't.

RM: Just didn't?

M: The only place I can remember going to is Burger King. And we would go, we would all go and sit in the car eat.

J: Which Burger King?

M: Right there on Government. Right off of Broad Street. It's a Chinese restaurant now. But when it first opened it was a Burger King. That's the only place I can remember going, because there weren't a lot of places then that we could go. There was a Fletcher's Barbecue on Washington's Avenue, and we weren't allowed to go there. Because we could only go to the back door. So, you know, my dad didn't allow—we didn't go.

J: Okay.

M: But that's all I remember. I don't remember any other restaurants. We always ate at home.

J: I think it's interesting that your dad would not allow you to go to a place where you wouldn't be treated fairly.

M: Right. He never talked to us about prejudice. He never made us aware that we were different. But he would tell us it was places we couldn't go. And we knew, but we didn't—we just weren't taught to treat people different. Everybody was the same. Because when we went to school, we were in mixed company. We all were together, and they were just, you know; we didn't have any animosity. I'll put it that way. We didn't know to be hateful or mean to anybody, and if they were mean to us, then we were taught just walk away. So, you know, he—but like I say, there was places we knew why we couldn't go there. But you know, we just didn't go.

RM: And so, the—I mean, Mobile has been very segregated, but also has kind of a complicated history. A lot of people have described Down the Bay as being

“checkerboard.” Like, segregated, but also kind of more mixed than some neighborhoods. What are your thoughts on that?

M: Yeah, I remember the—like I told you, the store that was on the corner of Elmira and Washington Avenue that was called Soto’s, because I thought that was the funniest name in the world. But it was called Soto’s, and they were white people that ran that store. So, you know, there were certain places where we’d come in contact with white people, but we weren’t told to be—you know, we weren’t disrespectful or anything. We went in there and did what we needed. We went all the time and got nickel candy. You know, I’d come home with a bag full of candy for a dime. You know, because some of the pieces were a penny. But you know, nobody mistreated us that I knew of. We didn’t mistreat anybody else, either. I knew it was Mrs. Soto, and we went and got what we got, and came on back. So, I cannot recall of any disturbances or anything in that area. Now, I knew when the Movement was going on, and people were protesting and marching, I knew—I was aware of it. But we weren’t able to—I don’t think my dad participated. I think he just kind of stayed neutral. I don’t know if it was because he had a business, you know, that he was trying not get mixed up in anything that would be misunderstood. So, he just kind of stayed neutral.

RM: Another kind of thing that was a big change around, I guess when you were little, but I-10 coming through the neighborhood. Do you remember, or do you know of any impacts from those of that that you saw, even though, again, you were probably very small when that—?

M: I remember. I remember it coming through in the area on the other side of Washington Avenue, where my grandmother lived, on Warren Street. They told my dad or my grandmother that they were building a school. They told her that they were doing something. And they were tearing down homes in that area for that. And so, that’s why they bought her house. She moved, and then they didn’t do it. And that’s when the interstate came through. And I think in that area now is where James Seals Park is. But that’s all that I can kind of remember about that. I do know that my grandmother’s home was, you know, she had to move because of it. And I can remember hearing him talk about different things. But see, they didn’t let us—we didn’t get into conversations like kids do now. [Laughter] Grown people? We didn’t know. We were clueless, you know. They only told us what they wanted us to know, and that was it. So.

RM: Was your grandmother sad about leaving that house, or—?

M: Yeah. I think she was. I think she was sad about it. But then, she was kind of getting up in age, too. So, she was—she wasn't as able to keep it up like she had in her younger years. So, I don't think it was as hard of a decision to make because of that. But because I kind of remember her being out of it before that, because my oldest brother was out of high school. And I remember him staying there a little while before they tore it down. So, I can't say that she was upset or not, because I don't remember.

J: What was her name again?

M: Her name was Amelia.

J: Okay.

M: Amelia Salvant.

RM: Did anyone do anything for Juneteenth when you were growing up?

M: I didn't. I wasn't aware of Juneteenth until—ooh. I was married before I really knew what it meant. I wasn't aware of it. And we—when I was in the choir at church, and I remember us going to Prichard to sing in the Juneteenth celebration. And then I was like, “What is—?” [Laughter] “What is Junete[enth]?” And then, I found out what it was all about, you know. But I was grown before I even knew what Juneteenth was.

J: Where was the celebration in Prichard? Do you remember?

M: Somewhere near the Prichard Mall. That's been some years ago. Because I don't even think I had children then. And my oldest daughter is 33. But you know, it's been a while ago, but I was grown before I found out what it really was.

RM: Newspapers in the home: so, did you family read the *Mobile Beacon*, or did they—?

M: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

RM: Okay.

M: They read the *Beacon*. Seem like there was another one.



RM: *Inner City News*, is that—?

M: It may have been *Inner City News*, yeah.

RM: Okay.

M: But I know they read the *Beacon*. But mostly, we had the *Press Register* because of the business. They had to—you know, we got papers every day so that they could keep up with the obituaries and know what was what, and who was where. And every now and then, some of the people, I guess they weren't in the *Press Register*; they would be in the *Beacon*, the obituaries. So, we would have to get each paper so that they would have, you know, the information on everybody.

J: We read somewhere that the *Beacon* was printed Down the Bay, but haven't been able to substantiate that yet.

M: I don't know.

J: You don't know.

M: I really don't. The only place I can remember is in Toulminville, where the *Beacon* was. But it may have been printed Down the Bay, but I'm not aware of it.

J: Okay.

M: I'll ask one of my older siblings and see if they remember.

J: Mmkay.

RM: I think we covered most of the questions I had, I don't know about you.

J: Yeah, this has been wonderful.

RM: Yeah it has.

J: Absolutely wonderful.

M: I hope I've helped! I mean—

RM: You've helped a lot!

J: Yeah. And in terms of your own personal family archive, I think this is going to be great for you to have.

M: Oh, thank you! Well, great. That's great.

RM: There is one more question that I forgot.

M: Okay.

RM: People have different kind of answers to this: what is Down the Bay? Like, how would—if you were putting it on a map, where would you say it begins and ends?

M: The area?

RM: Yeah, the area.

M: I would say it begins kind of like maybe from Ann Street? Ann Street all the way over to—past James Seals Park now? That area? Because, I think over further, they called it the Bottom. A little further than that. Like, kind of under the interstate, past that way, they kind of called it the Bottom. I know—I don't know if you familiar with what I'm about to say, but over where I-10 Social Club was—have anybody mentioned that to you?

J: Mm-nm.

M: It was a—it's kind of like on the other side of, I'm trying to think of the name of the street. The other side of the interstate. Like, if you go under the I-10 interstate, it was a club over there called the I-10. [Laughter] Because my cousin used to stay over there all the time. And they called that area the Bottom. But I would say before the interstate—before you get to the interstate, all the way back to Canal Street? It's more Down the Bay area to me, as far as I know. I don't know if they consider where St. Matthew's Church is Down the Bay area?

J: Depends on who you ask.

M: Yeah, it depends. Because a lot of people say, you know, that they from Down the Bay too, and that that's the area. [Laughter] Yes, Pumpkin?

Child: Can we go home?

M: Give me one minute. Everybody's waking up.

RM: And so, when you were growing up, people called it Down the Bay?

M: Yeah.

RM: Okay.

M: Yeah, they called it "Down the Bay," yeah. Yeah, and I love it. I wish I was still Down the Bay. [Laughter]

RM: Well, I think that's everything we've got. If there is something else you would want to put on the recording before we stop it?

M: Nothing else that jumps right at me right now. I think I've—I have been talking! [Laughter] I told you I talk a lot.

RM: We appreciate it. Thank you.

J: Yeah, really. Makes our job a lot easier. [Laughter]

M: Well great. I'm glad. I'm glad.

RM: But, thank you very much.

M: You're welcome, you're welcome.

[End of recording]

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