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**DTB 033 Hazel H. Fournier**  
**Down the Bay Oral History Project (DTB), Acc. 757**  
**Interviewed by Kern Jackson on June 22, 2022**  
**2 hour, 6 minute audio recording • 48 page transcript**

**Abstract:** In this interview, Hazel Fournier is interviewed by Kern Jackson at her home in Mobile, Alabama. Ms. Fournier describes her experiences growing up in the Down the Bay neighborhood, and some of her family history. She describes the landscape and character, the cultural and social dynamics of Down the Bay. Ms. Fournier also describes some of her experiences as one of the only two Black truant officers in Mobile County. She also offers memories, histories, and reflections of the dynamics of race and racism in Mobile, and discusses the impacts of urban renewal on Down the Bay and the changes the community has faced over time.

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 033 Hazel Harris Fournier**  
Interviewed June 22, 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.

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DTB 033

Narrator: Hazel H. Fournier

Interviewer: Kern Jackson

Date: June 22, 2022

F: —and be done with it.

J: Right.

F: But they don't know, and it really doesn't make them any difference any more.

J: Well, that's an interesting topic. I got two projects going. One is out—one is Down the Bay, looking at life and culture Down the Bay. They going put a new bridge over.

F: Yeah.

J: And that's why we got a little money to do this research. But the other project I'm doing is out in Plateau.

F: Okay.

J: Yeah, out in Africatown. And so, been dealing a lot with the County Training School alumni and that sort of thing. And they're real ate up with articulating the values of the school. What were the values of these—not only the instructors but the parents, and the whole community, for the children to go through Whitley and County? And sort of thinking about, you know, when I talk to some folks, they like, "Well, you know we used to have uniforms; used to have to wear a tie, and used to have a lot of"—

F: It was standards.

J: Standards. Standards.

F: Standards.

J: So ultimately, all my interviews really come down to thinking about and talking about standards. I don't care if we're talking about food or leisure activity.

F: There's a standard.

J: But they're standards, right. So, in part, that's what I'm trying to talk about in this project, and find out about in this project.

F: Now I'mma have to sit on my stool. I don't sit on my low chair.

J: Okay. You sit here? Okay. I'mma get over there, then.

F: I don't sit on these low chairs, because I can't get up.

J: Can't get up.

F: [Laughter] You already knew the answer!

J: Yeah, I know.

F: You can't get up!

J: Well I mean, but Mrs. Fournier, it's a blessing to be able to do.

F: Well, you know, as I said, I'm just 93, and so—going on 94; I just had my birthday last week.

J: Oh, happy birthday.

F: But I feel good. I can't walk as fast as I—. Now that little black dog, I used to walk her 10 blocks a day. I can't do that anymore.

J: That's fair.

F: Around here, you know, we don't have any sidewalks. And people don't drive like they used to. They don't always slow down for people like me. And so, I don't walk. I walk in my yard. I got a deck out there. And I got—it's paved around the deck. I just got it closed because of the sun and everything. They say close your blinds, keep the heat out. But I walk around the deck three or four times a day, and that gives me my walking. But when you said standards, you see, that's what made the—I'm a product of the Mobile County public school system. I went to Emerson school.

J: That's the congregationalist folk, right?

F: That's right, they founded that school. But when I went to it, in the first grade, the Mobile County public school system had taken it over. But there was a minister there and there were standards. Dr. E.B. Goode and his brother attended Emerson school. If you planned to go somewhere higher than just school, you go to Emerson. And then there was Council. My parents—my mother went to Council. And because she went to Council, all the Otises went to Council. I had a superintendent—again you probably already heard it, but I worked for the system for 37 and a half years. Then I went on the school board for 18 years.

J: What's that? That many? Wow, didn't realize that!

F: I served on the school board for 18 years. I served on the school board from 1990 to 2008. 2008, November of 2008. That's 18 years. So, when we started, you know, I worked in desegregation. I worked with Title IX. I was an old-fashioned truant officer.

J: Oh, really?

F: Yes, old-fashioned kind. When there were only two Black truant officers in Mobile; there were six white ones. But I had half of Mobile County, starting on Government Street, and I went all the way to Dauphin Island. You'd be surprised, even what the school board did—or would do. We had two Black families that came out of Washington County to move into Mobile County, and guess where they couldn't find anywhere to jump off to?

J: What do you mean they were trying to move from Washington County?

F: They moved from Washington County to Mobile County, and they landed on Dauphin Island. [Laughter]

J: How'd they get all the way down there?

F: In a truck. See, a man—we were offered that job: "Come on down here, we got a job for you." They didn't tell them that each one of them—one had five children, the other one had six. And I was sent to Dauphin Island to see why those children weren't going to school. They weren't going to let them in Dauphin Island school. So, they had to go from Dauphin Island to Dixon down in Irvington; drive 18 miles to get to school. And believe it or not—this is before desegregation, anything—the assistant superintendent told me, said, "Now, you go down there and tell them they can go ahead and enroll their children in Dixon, and we going to reimburse them for their gas money every month." Now, this is unheard of!

J: They going to reimburse them for driving into town?

F: They reimbursed them for the gas, on a daily basis. Once a month they got a check for the gas. Now, people don't think we did things like that in Mobile County. But I'm a witness! [Laughter] I know we did them, because I—

J: Those types of accommodations?

F: That's right!

J: This here is my microphone.

F: Okay.

J: I'mma put it on you. But go ahead. You were saying—

F: But you know, if you tell people that went on before we desegregated the schools, they'll say, "I know we didn't do that. We did whatever we wanted to do"—to keep us in our place.

J: Right.

F: [Laughter] They did what they wanted to do to keep us in our place. And it worked. The people were happy. So, you know, I'm a product of Down the Bay. What have you found out about Down the Bay? You know that we had the Catholic school. But we also had the public schools.

J: Right, I know about Peter Claver, Emerson Institute, Council school; and the thing about Council that's so interesting is who it was named after, and who one of its initial principals was: W.H. Council?<sup>1</sup>

F: Yes.

J: And to think about him, he's sort of a rival to Booker T. Washington. And becoming president of Alabama A&M. That sort of is—all of these schools seem somehow connected to A&M or Tuskegee, or something like that.

F: They're inspired by the leadership in those schools. And when you go out to Mobile County Training School, you find out that that was the first public high school in the state of Alabama that was accredited for Black people. And County has a rich, rich history. But W.H. Council is—and you know, if you went to W.H. Council, that principal down there, his daughter taught in the public school system. So, those are the standards that had. You're supposed to be something. Down the Bay was special. Where I was reared—I wasn't born, my mother and father lived almost on Virginia Street. But I was reared, my grandmother and them, when they moved up on Selma Street; on Selma and Cedar, we had streetcar tracks down there. Streetcars ran right on the corner from my house. And I tell people: Down the Bay, the streets were paved. I never walked on a dirt street Down the Bay that I can remember.

J: Was that because it was integrated Down the Bay, or why do you think?

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<sup>1</sup> William Hooper Council; his surname is spelled with two Ls, but the eponymous school in Mobile is spelled with a single L.

F: It was highly integrated. I had a doctor, N.L. Brown. A lot of Black ladies went to N.L. Brown. He was a gynecologist. And N.L. told me he was reared around on Charleston Street, right off of Selma where I was. He said, "Well you right around the corner from me!" I know they probably told you that the Black boys and the White boys played ball together in Emerson schoolyard.

J: No.

F: Yes sir. Because on Charleston Street—see, you had Canal Street. Where we lived was on Scott Street off of Canal. You had Canal, and then you have Palmetto, and then you have Charleston. White folks live on Charleston. Where we lived on Scott Street, we had a white neighbor.

J: What his name was?

F: Huh?

J: What was his name?

F: I can't even remember that lady's name, but she lived right across the street. Nobody would—. [Laughter] My brothers would go to the store for her as quickly as they'd go to the store for the Black neighbor. You right: Down the Bay was more integrated than the north side.

J: Right. And this might've had something to do with streets being paved?

F: I think it did. I really think so. We, like I said, now, you have to remember that—I know you heard of the word Monroe Park?

J: No. Where's Monroe Park?

F: Down the Bay.

J: Right.

F: It was below Virginia Street, below Virginia. But see, all Down the Bay—Down the Bay start up there on Government Street or Dauphin Street, and walked all the way down to Virginia. And it is so interesting that when we desegregated Council school, and we put the magnet school down there, the parents said they didn't know the neighborhood down there was so nice. But you had homeowners who took pride in what they had. And I don't mean you didn't have them on the north part of town, but I think the standard might've been a little higher: "Do something with yourself." And you had big churches. You had Big

Zion, you had Peter Claver, you had Bethel. Most of the people belonged to—who wanted to be something, what we call, “You going be something,” you got to go to one of these churches. They had some standards. And of course, naturally, we had Heart of Mary. But that was Across Town. And if you graduated from Peter Claver and you wanted to go to Heart of Mary—and you know what? I know you don't want to hear this, but Heart of Mary as a Catholic high school is gone. We have, I know right now, at least three or four Black families who are sending their children to UMS.

J: Oh yeah.

F: And not sending them to Toolen.

J: Mmhm. Right.

F: Because McGill-Toolen want money and football players.

J: From Black people.

F: That's exactly right! That's exactly right. You got to have money, and you got to play football. “If we can't use you like that—”

J: “—we don't want you.”

F: “—we don't want you.” And, I'm sorry to say, I think our archbishop promotes it. You think about the number of schools that he has closed, and they been closing them even in the white community. But he's putting money over in Baldwin County. St. Michael's is a school, up and coming school, now in Baldwin County. Baldwin County's where the money is going. And I understand he doesn't—somebody told me he doesn't even live downtown in a house. That he's out West Mobile in a house; I don't know that. But I guess I've been challenged all my life. I went to Emerson school, and I went to Dunbar. But if you lived Down the Bay, you had friends who were Catholic, and friends who went to public school. But everybody expected the children to be somebody. And that was something we had a saying: if you did anything wrong Down the Bay in the street, your momma would know it before you got home.

J: So, the standards were, in part, in terms of having appropriate behavior, knowing how to interact with your elders.

F: We were a village. And I remember the worst thing that ever happened to me. We ran out in the street going to the ice house at night, to buy a block of ice.

J: The Crystal Ice House?



F: The Crystal Ice House. That was the ice house—see, it was right around the corner from where we lived.

J: What was the—well, this is as good as a place to do a formal introduction as any. Today, the 22nd of June, we're sitting here with Mrs. Hazel Fournier in her home out in Toulminville. And I want first to say thank you very kindly for having myself, Kern Jackson and the oral history project of Down the Bay, to come and visit and talk with you. There's so many topics that we have in common and know about and whatnot, and it's just a blessing. It's a blessing.

F: Thank you.

J: But yeah. What was the street and the address of your homestead Down the Bay?

F: 260 South Scott Street. Block from Canal Street. And our house backed up to Emerson schoolyard. And it was a true village; the whole Down the Bay area was a true village. If they didn't know you, they asked you who your folks were. That was the word they would use: "Who are your people? Who are your folks?" And they would make a connection like that. "Oh, I know them." My mother came from a family of 10. They were Otises. They played football, they played basketball; 10 Otises. So, you got 10 people living Down the Bay spread out like that. Got a lot of cousins, all around. [Laughter] And I came from a family of six. I was inspired to do something by my stepfather.

J: This would be—okay.

F: I've got to tell you about my stepfather.

J: No, now first go back to your mom?

F: My mother.

J: Okay, what's your mom's name?

F: Her name is Gertrude Otis Matthews. She married a Harris; that was my daddy, and they were divorced.

J: And your daddy's name Harris, Mr. Harris?

F: Nathaniel Harris.

J: Okay.

F: I knew him as my father, but he was not involved in my life like my stepfather was.

J: And your stepfather's name was?

F: Clarence Matthews.

J: No! Not the boy scout man?

F: Yes sir.

J: Not the one that went to Washington DC.

F: Yes sir.

J: Oh, my goodness!

F: That was my stepfather. And he had standards.

J: Tell it.

F: Yes, the boy scout man.

J: The boy scout man.

F: Uh-huh. And so, I tell people when I left high school—I'mma tell you this story, because we talk about standards. When I left high school, Mr. Powell, who was my principal, made a statement one day: "Everybody planning to go to college, come on down to the auditorium. I'd like to see you." Well, I had a teacher that knew my family very well. And I happened to be in her room at the time. And when I stood up to go, which, "Everybody go into the auditorium, you may leave now." When I stood up to go, she said, "Honey, where you going?" And I said, "I'm going down to the auditorium to see Mr. Powell." Her reply to me was, "You know your family can't afford to send you to college." You want to know what my reply was?

J: What?

F: "He didn't ask who could afford to go. Who he asked, who planned to go." And I said that to let you know: getting tuition wasn't easy. Because my mother worked in the Saenger Theater, and dusted all those seats up there. But it wasn't integrated at that time. She dusted seats on the first floor. I had an aunt

who worked at White Swan Laundry, and she was instrumental in getting me a job at White Swan Laundry.

J: Where was White Swan Laundry at?

F: White Swan Laundry was on the corner of Springhill and Broad. Back there now. But I could iron. I did the family ironing, so I could really iron. And I went in White Swan Laundry to finish little girl dresses, because people were putting their whole laundry in there—those who could afford it. I said all that to say this: if you plan to do something, you work toward your plan. And I saved my money for my tuition. Now you have to remember, Bishop State's tuition was 25 dollars a quarter in 1947.

J: The Branch?

F: The Branch.

J: Got it.

F: 25 dollars a quarter. And so, I made it; paid my tuition that year. The next year, I was fortunate enough to get a job nursing [inaudible 15:57] in Perdido Bay, 65 miles from Mobile, 24 hours a day. But I went. I went. Now, you need to know that they gave me a place there; I had a room. I was supposed to have a room to sleep in. The first night, the little girl had company and they were sleeping in my room. And they gave me a bed on the wrap-around porch. [Laughter] I didn't sleep at all that night. I cried all night long. I cried, because I said my momma didn't know I was sleeping outside looking up at the stars! [Laughter] It didn't stop me from keeping that job. I worked that job for the next five summers, because I was getting paid so much a day and so much a night. And so, by the time I got to Alabama State at Montgomery, I had my tuition—

J: Paid for.

F: Paid for. Oh yes, I had saved it. Now don't get me wrong: my mother and father, Daddy Clarence, they sent me spending money. But those were standards. If you want something, work for it. And it didn't hurt me.

J: Right.

F: Now, have you ever seen the magazine that had Daddy Clarence in it?

J: No, I haven't. That's it?

F: This is it. There it is.

J: Yeah.

[Phone rings]

J: You can go ahead and get that.

F: I can?

J: Yeah, please.

F: I don't need that. It's toll-free.

[Phone rings]

J: Oh, okay.

F: I have a picture out here on the wall.

J: *1977 Reader's Digest?*

[Phone continues ringing]

F: I can't stand it.

J: I know, they do that all day when they find out you at home.

F: I just blocked it.

J: This came out.

F: Oh yeah, I have a picture of him. That's Daddy Clarence.

J: I'mma take a picture of that after we get through.

F: And Daddy Clarence said—let me tell you about Daddy Clarence: you had to register to vote the day you became 21 years of age. It wasn't 18 then, it was 21. And you couldn't miss an election. You had to go to the election. Whenever there was an election, you went to it.

J: When you first started voting, what was your polling place?

F: Right there on the corner of Government and Dearborn. On that corner, that was my polling place.

J: Across Government and Dearborn. Yeah.

F: Right across from where the McDonalds is. Mmhm. Yeah, that was my polling place. And we paid poll tax.

J: What was—what's a poll tax?

F: You never heard of a poll tax?

J: I have, but I sort of just want to get it on recording.

F: Poll tax is what you paid every year. And you had to have your receipt that you had paid your poll tax in order to vote. That defrayed the cost of taking care of the poll workers, and printing the ballots and everything.

J: What, Black people and white people?

F: Everybody paid the poll tax.

J: I thought it was just Black people paid the poll tax.

F: No. And if you showed up to vote and didn't have your poll tax receipt, you couldn't vote. And my sister had to go back to the polls to vote one time, because she didn't take her poll tax receipt. And Daddy told her, "Well, you take it on back up there and vote. Don't come back until you vote." So, he had those kinds of standards. And you did the right thing. Because somebody worked hard for you to have that right to vote. In Mobile, we were lucky.

J: What'd your momma and stepdaddy do for a living?

F: He was a chauffeur.

J: For who?

F: The Cochranes.

J: The Cochranes? Like Cochrane Bridge Cochranes?

F: Yeah. That's who he worked for. This article talks about that chauffeur that he was for the Cochranes, those people. And when he left there, he sold insurance. And from there, he worked at the Elks. The Elks up there on the corner of Warren and State.

- J: State? When he was selling insurance, which company did he work for?
- F: Unity Barrel. And I know Alex Herman was there, somebody else; but he sold insurance. And this article will tell you—you probably already read the article—he had a fourth-grade education. But he could out-read me.
- J: No kidding.
- F: Oh yes.
- J: Was he from Mobile?
- F: Yes, born and reared in Mobile. He said his mother would send him down to the meat market every morning to get a nickel's worth of liver. [Laughter] He would not eat liver. He said, "I won't eat it. I had to walk down there every morning to get a nickel's worth of liver, because she used to have grits and liver." You know. And now you can't buy anything for a nickel.
- J: No.
- F: No. No, you can't buy anything—. [Laughter]
- J: In fact, when you was coming up, where were the stores were y'all bought foods and sundries and such?
- F: Oh, my store was right there where the auditorium is now on Canal and Lawrence. There was a large Delchamps. Right there on that corner. And a block from there was Southside school. But all of that's gone with the wind now.
- J: Was Bethel Church originally over there, too?
- F: In that vicinity, yes.
- J: In that vicinity.
- F: Yes. But urban renewal came along and took that street for auditorium and everything, and Bethel moved Down the Bay.
- J: Oh, wait! Back up. So, urban renewal was an excuse for the building of the auditorium as well?
- F: Yes! Yes!
- J: So, all them folks who didn't meet the building codes standards according to—

F: Were displaced.

J: Were displaced. I never made the connection. Now, I could see the further south in Down the Bay. I could see how that happened there. But no one ever has made the connection between the auditorium and—

F: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Uh-huh. And so, you know, you paid your dues in more than one way.

J: What does that mean?

F: Well, now that you have a vote, you have to be careful what you vote for. And ask what is the meaning. You say you paid your dues, you made those sacrifices. Because when my mother's house was taken for urban renewal, I found her a house on Charles Street below Virginia. But what urban renewal paid her was not enough for her to buy another house. So, she had paid her dues for the first house she had, then she had to turn around and buy another house with money that they gave her, but it wasn't enough. So, you paying twice.

J: So, a second mortgage. A second mortgage.

F: That's right! She had a second—she didn't have a mortgage. She had already paid the one off before Scott Street.

J: And are you saying that people voted for this? They voted for urban renewal?

F: The people in public—you know, not the general public, but the representatives did. Your council members did. Now, you have to remember when that first urban renewal came along, you didn't have many Black council members down there. That came about under Mayor Zoghby, that said that, you know, got to have some representation. You at the mercy of The Man. You heard that phrase—

J: Yes, ma'am I heard it.

F: [Laughter] The Man. "The Man is coming." "Who is the man?" You know who the Man is! So, to vote your best interest. Now my concern now is, you know, they've done away with the Orange Grove. They got the senior citizens over there. They've told the people on Michigan Avenue in the projects, they got to move.

J: R.V. Taylor Home and all that, mmhm. Birdville.

F: Gone. But I want to know why didn't they do something on Baltimore Street with that broken-down old—you know what I'm talking about?

J: Mm-nm.

F: There at the Baltimore and Broad, right off of Baltimore and Marine, you got some projects there. They were *their* projects before they became *our* projects. When they opened the projects on the north side of town for Black folks, the White people were down there on Baltimore Street. You can see the difference.

J: Yes.

F: And Baltimore is still standing now. They are not in it, we're in it.

J: Right.

F: But Baltimore wasn't nearly as old as down on Michigan Ave. It's much older. But they say they need that to have a straight line to the airport.

J: To Brookley

F: To Brookley, mmhm. Yeah. And they going need that, because they going to build that bridge over the bay that they've been trying to build for the last 10 years. I don't understand why it takes that long to get consent to build a bridge. I think they're on their way now.

J: Yeah. Full disclosure, some of that grant money is what's funding this project.

F: Uh-huh. And they doing some excavation down there, looking at the soil and everything.

J: That's right. I got a group of archeologists; Dr. Carr and them from the archeology program are down there digging, and you know, trying to do their best to figure out what's historical and all this type of stuff.

F: And when you going to get on it and cross over?

J: Right there at Virginia and Conception?

F: Mmhm, yeah.



J: Now you told me that the Government Street to the north, the river; the bay to the east; how far south does Down the Bay stretch? Does it stop at Virginia Street, or does it go further?

F: No, it stops at Virginia Street. That's Down the Bay.

J: Well, what's the neighborhood on the other side of Virginia Street?

F: That was Oakdale.

J: Oakdale?

F: That was Oakdale down there. And then when you left Oakdale, you stretching out going out to Williamson, you know, out there where—

J: Maysville?

F: Maysville. Uh-huh, yeah.

J: Okay. And Michigan Avenue on the west side was the boundary? So, Down the Bay included the cemeteries there?

F: Yeah! Oh yes. Down the Bay was the cemetery, and you had—right there, that's where all your senior—. Daddy Clarence is buried out there in Magnolia Cemetery.

J: In Magnolia? Mmhm.

F: Yeah, Magnolia Cemetery. Mmhm.

J: That's a pretty historic area. I know one of the—maybe you've heard of this before, but where they have the police—

F: Precinct.

J: Yeah, and the mounted police and the horses and stuff? They say—some people say—that underneath that property is where the paupers' graves used to be.

F: They were. That is the truth. That's where they buried them, you didn't have any burial. That's where you was put. And that has gone from one thing to the other, and so now it's police precinct. Then you got the cars down there; when they had impound your car, you got to go down there to get it. [Laughter] The point is, they not tearing that up to put anything permanent down there. That's

just, it's a mind thing. But then, the national cemetery is across the street from that, and it's beautiful. But of course, now we have no national cemetery in Mobile. The national cemetery is not in—the new one is over the bay.

J: Over the bay. Where they put deceased soldiers and whatnot?

F: Yeah. That's where they have it now, in Baldwin County. I'm still trying to find out how we got a new, Bradley Burns—and I'm going call Bradley—he's chairman now of the thing for businesses and things in Mobile. Bradley was in Mobile living right off of Dauphin Street. And when he ran to be a representative on the state Board of Education—and we worked for him. Once he got on the state Board of Education, he had to move to Baldwin County.

J: Because?

F: Well, it's because he was becoming a Republican instead of a Democrat.

J: Oh, he started out as a Democrat?

F: Yes. Yes, he did.

J: And so, he cut his political teeth—

F: He was a Democrat, uh-huh. Just like Homer Session was a Democrat. But now, it's popular now to be a Republican. So, he became a Republican. My question is with all of the people in Mobile, couldn't you find somebody living in Mobile to be head of Chamber of Commerce? So, you got a man now who's going be head of the Chamber of Commerce in Mobile, Alabama, but living over the bay in Baldwin County. That's the—you know.

J: Well yeah, all of those rules have changed. I mean, at our university, we have a former congressman as our president. And he doesn't have a PhD, or a terminal higher degree. So, the rules seem to be changing.

F: They've already changed to accommodate them.

J: Yeah, I wonder what if every Black registered Democrat turned around and registered for the Republican party, and started running candidates in the primaries.

F: Well, it wouldn't hurt to give me somebody to vote for.

J: Right.

F: Because I don't have anybody to vote for right now.

J: Right.

F: And why not? But I don't want any Herschel Walker.

J: Yeah, yeah.

F: I mean, that's the chance you take. But I don't want Herschel Walker, you know. He doesn't mean me any good.

J: Tell me about the Otises. Tell me about your grandparents. What were their names?

F: Ed Otis. I'm glad you asked me about the Otises. The Otis, there were five boys and five girls. And the boys, Ed Otis was, I guess, the most renowned one of them. Well, it depends. Because Ed Otis named all his boys after one of his brothers. So, one or the other. But I can tell you—and I'm not being braggadocious—we have an Otis that served on the Federal Reserve. I done told you enough, have I?

J: Mmhm.

F: We have an Otis that played ball. Finished from Williamson.

J: That Amos?

F: There you got it. Now, there three Amos Otises. His daddy, Amos Otis that played ball, his daddy's name was Ed Otis. There was a Amos Otis in Detroit by way of Mobile, Mississippi, Montgomery, and Detroit, who was a tailor. And he had a son named Roscoe Amos Otis. I'mma show you something from Roscoe. Roscoe Amos Otis is the one that served on the Federal Reserve. Now, I don't know what it takes to get on the Federal Reserve, but I know one thing: they never asked me to serve on it! [Laughter]

J: I never heard of no Black man on the Federal Reserve.

F: Okay. You know, you came to talk to me—okay. This is he. Here's a good picture of him.

J: Okay, then.

F: [inaudible 38:36]. Amos Otis.

J: And he lives in Virginia now?

F: Yeah, he lives in Virginia now. You got that in a hurry. You picked it up in a hurry. And he owns—

J: But he's from Mobile? Or his people are from Mobile?

F: Yes. He was born in Montgomery. But his daddy is the one that died in Detroit. So, but he's a Otis. Ed Otis is dead. He's got a son who was a fireman, he's retired. He's got two daughters living in California. One, Andrew Otis died in Texas. Henry Otis died on a ship, he fell overboard or something. Eldridge Otis died here in Mobile. Ed Otis—and I must've missed one, it was five boys. I think I got them all. Eldridge, Amos, Uncle Ed. And Uncle Ed is the one that named all his boys after his brothers. [Laughter] So. Now, the girls were Lucy; Norwood, and she moved to Louisiana; Janie Young, she died out in West Mobile; Ira Lyons, who died here in Mobile. She's over there in Oaklawn. Then my mother, and then I had an aunt younger than my mother. My mother was the oldest living one of the girls. She lived the longest. And Amos Otis, his daddy lived to be either 99 or 100 in Detroit. Died about four, five years ago. So interesting, because he had to go—he looked after him, and he said he had him cremated because that's what he wanted. But that tells you that he is successful. If you put your mind to it and you make the sacrifice, you can be successful in whatever you do. Now, he and his wife are building a building at Tennessee State.

J: The alma mater, yeah.

F: Yeah, they putting a whole building up there.

J: Good! They need it.

F: Yeah, they need it! But what do you call it? Paying forward. And he has two children. His son is interested in Broadway. His son moved to New York. The daughter's interested in his business. He has businesses in—I can't tell you how many businesses he has. His business, let me tell you what he does: he examines the mail for the White House. [Laughter]

J: Examines it to make sure of what? That it won't explode or something?

F: Mmhm.

J: What is it—? Okay.

F: Mmhm. That kind of business. And—

J: There's a lot of men, males, from Mobile who end up in that kind of field. I wonder what the attraction is with security and law enforcement—

F: Well, he was in the Army—not Army, what you call them? He paid his dues in the Army first, and then when he got out he decided that's what he was going to do. So.

J: It was lucrative.

F: Yeah. Yeah. So, he went to Catholic school, and he endowed things up there, but that shows you the groundbreaking at TSU. So, but any of them; Amos, the one that played baseball—

J: Baseball.

F: Mr. Keeby put him out of Williamson. And then, Mr. Keeby called me up and told me to go get him. Because I was a probation officer for Williamson school. Because Mr. Keeby had taught me. Mr. Keeby said, "Ms. Harris, go get him. Go tell that little boy, tell his momma and daddy to bring him on out here to school. I'm going make some out of him." But that's the kind of expectations we had. If the principal would put you out of school, then they call up the probation officer, me, to go get you and bring you back to school.

J: So it would be a lesson?

F: It would be a lesson. And now, I didn't use the telephone to check on my children, because you don't know who you talking to when you call them. I went to the homes. And I never feared going into a home. And I became a crossover attendance worker. And I know you don't know what that means, but—

J: What do you mean? When integration came?

F: They gave me five white principals. [Laughter] And I still had seven Black principals; I had five white principals.

J: What did the white principals see in those first days when they see you come into the office?

F: Welcome me.

J: They did?

F: They welcomed me.

J: Okay.

F: They hadn't gotten to know me; they had known of me, and I guess my success in dealing with the parents. So, they did not—because I would come home and take my children's clothes and load a bag of groceries if I found a hungry family. I did something that I'm not necessarily proud of, but it worked. I found a family living on the north part of town—now, in Orange Grove only the policy lady, the school teacher, and the welfare worker felt—

J: Comfortable enough to go up in the neighborhood.

F: That's right. Little Korea, they called it.

J: Why they call it Little Korea?

F: Was a shantytown back there. Those people had apple boxes. And so, when I would go—but I wouldn't take my pocketbook, I'd have a clipboard. That's all right, you can tell them where they are. That that school teacher. Let her go on back there and see them. But I found a family where the parents opened the refrigerator; she say she didn't have any groceries. I said, "Well, let me see what you have." And she had a bone from a cow that was truly a bone, wasn't any meat on it. And that was in there, and some water. And I said, "Ma'am, where is your husband?" She said, "Work." This on North Lawrence Street. I said, "Where does he work?" She say, "Shipyard." I say, "What time will he be home?" "He be here about quarter to four." I said, "Okay. I tell you what, I'll see you at quarter to four this evening." And my sister was visiting me then from California, where she had moved. I said, "Come on, go with me. I got to go back over in the Grove and see a man about his children. They don't have any food in that house." I grabbed the man by his collar. I said, "You didn't feed your children! What are you doing?" I never had to go back. I never had to. He say, "Yes ma'am." I say, "If I ever come back here and don't find these children with food, and your wife with groceries? You going not to jail, you going under the jail. Try me." I had established a relationship with the deputy sheriffs and everything, that if I told them something, they knew it would be true. Because in Grand Bay, I found a refrigerator, I found the children eating off the Dump. And their mother and father had chained the door of the refrigerator so that they couldn't go in there to get food. The Deputy Sheriff Dees. I left, drove down to Bayou La Batre and found Deputy Sheriff Dees, and I told him what I'd found. And I said, "You want me to stay down here till it"—parents were working in Ingalls—"until they come home?" He said, "No ma'am, Mrs. Fournier. If you said that's what it was, that's the way it is. You don't have to come. We'll go tonight when they home. I'll see to that." And the judge gave one of them a month in jail while the other one went to work. He said, "When he finishes his month, you going, because you are part of not feeding your children." But you see, it was

what Daddy Clarence instilled in us: do your job and do it well, be dedicated. Whatever it is. You know, I know what Martin Luther King said about being the best ditch digger. My daddy had taught about that: do it well or not at all. Because my mother, when she would come home at night, she would open the drawer where the spoons and things were. And my brothers were supposed to be washing the dishes. I didn't have to wash dishes. I did the washing and ironing, that's what did that. And she found one spoon in there half-washed, she took the drawer and emptied them out. And then she'd wake you up and say, "Now, get up and wash them clean." Now, you don't have to get up in the middle of the night but two or three times and wash them dishes clean to you wash them clean.

J: Till you learn how to do it correctly.

F: Do it right. Do it right or not at all.

J: Do you think that has something—talking about values again, it always comes back around to values. Do you think that had something to do with what they saw with their parents and grandparents? If they saw anything from their grandparents.

F: Opportunity. That's all the world owes you is an opportunity. I was told the world doesn't owe you a living; the world owes you an opportunity to make a living. And that's when I say we paid our dues. We paid our dues for the opportunity. And when you given the opportunity, you perform like nobody else can do your job better than you can.

J: I don't think a lot of today's teachers do that. I don't think they—

F: I know they don't.

J: I don't think they go to the mat over the values. No one's checking refrigerator doors. No one's engaging parents in their home. And no one—it just strikes me the way you describe being an educator as being a vocation, just like you a pastor or priest.

F: Do it well or not at all. And you need to know when I started teaching in 1951, my salary was 160 dollars a month. That's all. And my first check, I went to Mobile Gas Company and got us a hot water tank, because we were heating the water to make—. But the opportunity to get it was there. They sold it to me. But when I say we paid our dues, we had paid—you know, people don't realize what you've been through and the people you have to deal with now. I had to get a new hot water tank for my mother's house, and it was electric. So, I went to [inaudible 51:09]. I went to Alabama Power Company to get this new hot

water tank, and this has been in the last 10 years; maybe seven, eight. And the lady said, "Oh, fill out the papers. Well, you got to get your husband to sign for this, because this bill is in his name." I said, "Ma'am, I just paid the bill. I wrote the check to pay the bill. Husband's dead." She said, "But as long as this bill is in his name"—she saying to me, "You can't buy anything in your name. This is Alabama." I'll tell you about that. "He has to consent for you to buy." That's what she's saying to me. I said, "Well, fine. I'll tell you what you do. You go get his signature, and you call me up and let me know when you get it. Or you send somebody to get the signature, because I can't get it." She said, "Well, tell me why you can't get the signature from him." I said, "Because the last time I heard of him, he was out there in Catholic Cemetery." [Laughter] Now you see, Alabama had a law—and it may be still on the books—that the women in a family could not make debts without the husband's approval. Probably still on the books. Somebody just told me you got to honor that, forget that. They'll sell you anything you want now. But she thought because that Alabama Power bill was in his name, I could not sign for the hot water tank. And I'm paying for it! The water company? The same thing. "Well, if the bill is in Mr. Fournier's name." I said, "Well, you put it in whoever's name you want to. I'm paying the bill." So, some of my bills still come in his name and some of them still come in his name. But that's a old-fashioned thing that women don't have the right—I can tell you. I know that when I got ready to go to Southern Cal, to work on my masters, I had a savings account in Merchants National Bank. I was married. Leo was in Tuskegee. I was helping him go to school. He was finishing that year, his bachelors. And I said I wanted to borrow some money against my savings account. But I had his name on it. She told me I couldn't tie up that money by borrowing against it, because Mr. Fournier's name was on it. I said, "But it's my money. My check comes to this bank every month, and you're taking that deduction." I'm not saving a lot. What is 30 dollars a month to save? But I had 500 dollars there, and I come in wanting to borrow some money against it. But leave that there. I know you could do things like that. I said, "Well, let me ask you this: I can't borrow against it?" She said, "No, ma'am." I said, "Well, since my name's on the account, can I take it out?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, give me all my money. Give me every penny of it right now." How stupid do we get? But those of the kinds of things—when I said we paid our dues, those are part of my dues that I've had to pay. I've had to fight a battle for my money when I should not have had to do it.

J: Mm-nm. It was your money.

F: That was my money. But here I am a Black woman, and I got to go get permission from my husband to get my money out of the bank. Those are dues that you pay. That's comparable to the master concept: you can't do it until the master allows you to do it. I'm not a big proponent of—I wasn't out celebrating Juneteenth. I knew all about it, I had read all about it. And Sunday's paper, if



you didn't read it, was interesting. They said there were 20 other celebrations of freedom before we got to Juneteenth. I understand that. Because states did it as they saw fit to do it.

J: Right.

F: And that was fine. But they forgot to tell some people. Even after Juneteenth, some of those states say you got to work until you 28 years old before you can get any freedom.

J: Keep moving back the goal line.

F: Yeah. Yeah. And if you lived to get 28.

J: Now, you was born later than this, but did your parents and them ever talk about knowing people who had known slavery?

F: Oh, yes!

J: What they say?

F: It was cruel. You asked me about the Otises. Ed Otis came out of Selma, Dallas County.

J: Dallas County, mmhm.

F: And he moved his family to Mobile. He was fortunate enough to be working for a white man who owned some property. And my grandfather was a carpenter. And so, he moved him with him to Mobile to take care of his property. His sister, **Aunt Offie**, talked about how hard it was. That you couldn't satisfy them; you worked from sunup to sundown. And don't expect anything. And they would tell you that. They would tell you: "Boy, you think it's hard now, you ought to see what it was like in slavery time days." So, and my aunt, you had me call her name; her name was Ira Lyons. She could use that word: "This is not slavery time days." [Laughter] You know. Now, her husband, she married Jesse Lyons. Her husband looked like a white man. And he worked in the shipyard. And he got burned at his job. And they took him to the hospital, City Hospital. And when she went up to see him, they didn't want her to see him because she wasn't white enough.

J: There her husband is, sitting up there burned half to death, and she can't visit her husband?

- F: No, because she didn't look like she was white enough. You know, they didn't expect for you to complain about anything. Just, whatever they gave you, you took it. Now, that's something that Daddy taught us, and Mother too. Mother would say, "Now if somebody going give you something, it may not be worth a dime and you don't want it; just thank them for it. One day they'll give you something that's got some that's got some silver or gold in it. Keep going. Just thank them for it and keep on going." But they would give them things that were castoff. They said they didn't want it. And they'd worn it out when they'd give it to you.
- J: That is very interesting. I been calling that other people's leavings. Other people's leavings what you get on a job like your Perdido job or whatever. And what you try to recycle or refashion usage out of. And you're saying just take what you get, and keep on keeping on.
- F: Keep on going. One day, they'll give you something of value. But those, "I don't want it." Take a "thank you," keep going. And I think my children know that, and my granddaughter does too: always say thank you. My grandson hasn't learned it yet. He hasn't learned to say, "I don't want it. Ain't no sense in me thanking them for that." But you thank God for everything. Don't care what it is, it's some good'll come out of it. Just thank Him and keep going. Now, I can't understand, we don't believe—now, the young people. These are values. You hold that door open for me? Turn around and say thank you. You didn't have to do it; you did it out of courtesy. The young men now, if I'm going in the bank and they see me coming in, a lot of them will hold the door: "Thank you." You didn't have to do it. Some of them are white, and some of them are Black. "How you do, Granny?" "Fine, thank you." It's still manners that we've lost. Like you to talked about the teachers; we don't have high expectations. Whatever you expect of me, that's what you going get. When you look at me, say "You not going be nothing?" I ain't got to be nothing, and all they told me I was going be nothing! I don't have anything to prove to you!
- J: The instilling of an expectation.
- F: That's right. Where, we're dealing with a family member, and she got several—finished from Baker—several scholarships offers. And I asked her, "You decide where you going to school?" "No, I haven't decided." "Well, what are you doing now?" "Well, you know, I'm working at this Burger King. Well, I'm going to work at this place." You got scholarships, you finished from Baker with honors. But her mother doesn't have the same expectations that I have. I asked her last week—which was my birthday, and we were all having dinner together, restaurant. I said, "Did you get registered?" "Yes, I got registered." Because she turned 18. I said, "Did you vote?" "No, I didn't vote." My daughter said, "What you mean you didn't vote?" "I don't know, I just didn't vote." Well, what good

was registering if you not going vote? You don't have to stand in the long lines that I had to stand in to vote.

J: Right. Right.

F: But it's expectation. Not only do I expect you to register, I expect for you to cast your vote. Now, did I go yesterday? No. But my daughter did. She said, "I went for Republican. We didn't have anybody on the Democratic ticket." I said, "Okay, fine. But you went." But we expect you to go to the polls. Now, at my age and my condition, a lot of people say, "Well, did you vote absentee?" I voted absentee one time. I said, "No, I'm going to the polls." "Well, why do you struggle to go to the polls?" I need to be seen. Because I can inspire a younger person to go to the polls. I don't need to stay home, I need to go to the polls. Because I may inspire one more young man to get up and go to the polls. And I always call them "young man." My sister—she died, bless her heart, last year—she told me, "Hazel, you going get in trouble. Somebody's going to curse you out. You bothering these young men." I say, "Young man, I can see your underwear." "Oh, I'm sorry ma'am!" I told him I could see—I didn't call him "boy." I called him "young man." Then I expect you to act like a young man; I don't need to see your underwear. I don't need to see your underwear. But go to—I don't go to Sam's. It upsets me. They go in their pajamas in the morning. They go in the flip flops, and they show me their underwear. I don't need to see that. So, I don't go there. It upsets me.

J: You know the cost of it.

F: And I paid some dues to be able to go in that store, and I paid the dues to help you to be able to go through that door. And they don't realize when they go into Sam's, they're not getting the best price they can. They getting the volume, but they going pay a little bit more for it. They don't realize; "Go to Sam's." And they sell, they will sell you those food stamps. I would be ashamed to buy food stamps from you to go—. Because I've taken food stamps, I've already paid for those food stamps. You're paying for them every day when you pay your taxes. You paying for the food stamps for them. They're selling the food stamps so they can go buy something else that the grocery store doesn't sell. And yet, we haven't taught them that. They yours; you're supposed to do what you want with them.

J: Well, what'd people do Down the Bay when you were coming up, when they were in that situation where they—

F: We didn't have any food stamps.

J: What you have?

F: We didn't have anything. You go to work. You got money, you went to work. I remember people knocking on my mother's door saying, "Ma'am, can I get a sandwich?" My flower bed out there needs cleaning right now. Some of those folks on those food stamps, do you think I could get them to clean flower bed?

J: No.

F: See? We expect a handout. But we don't need a handout, we need a hand up. It's a difference in a handout and a hand up. A hand up will help you eat today and tomorrow. A handout feeds you today, and that's the end of it.

J: Right. You and your classmates and y'all was at Emerson school, and what kinds of things did y'all have going on for leisure, for fun?

F: The schoolyard. [Laughter]

J: What y'all do in the schoolyard?

F: Played ball. Played tag. The shade tree. Everybody took a—you even had a bag lunch, most of us had bag lunches.

J: What y'all have for lunch?

F: You know, we make that sandwich at home. And when we got to high school, we had two ladies that ran a kitchen and they would sell hotdogs 20 cents apiece, and you get a drink for a dime. We didn't worry about being fed well. But look where we lived; and it's just like, you know, you got to have a balanced meal now. We only ate collard greens, and we survived. We ate turnip greens; we survived. We ate sweet potatoes; we survived. That was stable. Now, we got to have lettuce and tomato. [Laughter] We got to have a green salad for something green. Because you got to have some green stuff every day. It was green, but they were collard greens; but they were cabbage; they were grown in the backyard. You know. My husband said you took peanut butter and jelly; I wasn't a peanut butter and jelly person. But if you didn't take your sandwich, you didn't have it.

J: Right.

F: Because not many people had a quarter. When Daddy Clarence would give us money to go to school, he would say—wake him up in the morning, because he was working that night at the Elks. "Give me my glasses." "Here your glasses, Daddy." "Give me my pants." "Here your pants, Daddy." A quarter. We asked for it every morning. How far was that quarter going to take you? And we

walked to school. I walked from Canal and Scott to Dunbar High School where Central is now, every single day.

J: That's a long way.

F: Well it wasn't too bad, because you had friends, and they'd come through the schoolyard, and they holler: "Hazel!" That mean, "I'm coming!" So, by the time you got to school, it would be five or six of y'all. You'd be picking them up on the way. We had the Electric Maid baker, where you could get donuts for a nickel. Gone with the wind. We had Albright & Woods; Electric Maid Baker was on the corner of Government and Broad. Across the street from that was Albright & Woods. Now, I have something to tell you about Albright & Woods.

J: I thought that was a pharmacy.

F: Drugstore.

J: Yeah, drugstore.

F: Okay, drugstore. But they had a coffee bar, snack bar and that, for them. Not for us, for them.

J: Segregated. Mhm.

F: But this fellow came down from Washington to see the school system. And they had funded it with some federal funds for a summer program. One lady over the summer program. And Hazel Fournier was her assistant. Well, you know what he looked like. And she told me—since we're supposed to been desegregating, what we were doing that summer—I was to take him to school sites. The first thing about it, I had never been to Chickasaw school, Hamilton out there. Hamilton in Chickasaw. And that was one of the sites. I had to take him there. She told me, said, "You going meet him at the school board in the morning, and you going take him to these sites." The first thing he wanted to do was to get a cup of coffee at Albright & Woods. He said, "Let's stop here, get a cup of coffee." He knew what he was doing. And I knew, too. I said, "Okay." He sat down, he say, "You ever had a cup of coffee in here?" I said, "Nope. But I'mma have it today. Let's see how you going do." But I tell people this about Mobile: the reason why we didn't have a Birmingham in Mobile. We didn't have Birmingham in Mobile. The people in the other race knew when they were being tested. But this was a seaport town, and this was a Mardi Gras town. And this was a Bellingrath Gardens town. And they didn't bite every test. He sat down; I sat down. "What you having?" He said, "I'd like to have a cup of coffee, and give her one too." What they did, they put his coffee in a china cup, and they put my coffee in a paper cup! [Laughter] But I accepted the cup of coffee; we

drank the coffee, got up, and got out. And everybody else in there looking at us: "What y'all doing? Y'all know y'all ain't supposed to be here drinking no coffee together." But if you did it to me, you had to do it to him, because he's white. You didn't know who he was; he was from the federal government.

J: Right.

F: They didn't know that; I knew that. And that was his test. That's part of the write up. I had to take him to A.F. Orange. And I know you heard about A.F. Orange, because the dump was over there. They closed that school the next year, because he said, "Those children shouldn't be over here in this school with them running in that garbage all day long, and all night long."

J: Down in the Dump.

F: On the Dump. On the Dump. And then, I had to take him out to Peter Joe Hamilton. Out there in Chickasaw. We got there, he say, "You ever been in this school?" I said, "No." He say, "You came straight to it." I say, "I know it; I came out here last night and found it." [Laughter] I wasn't going to blunder around in Chickasaw, looking for my—! I wanted to know where I was going in Chickasaw. Because when I was growing up—you probably never heard this: said, "When you come through Chickasaw, read and run; and if you can't read, run anyway." Now, that's—don't be caught in Chickasaw at night unless you working for a white man. And he could rescue you. Now if you go out to Chickasaw, all those houses and things out there? 95 percent of it's Black. Right now. We out of it. We moved to Saraland and Satsuma.

J: That tickles you, huh?

F: It run you every time. It's remarkable how powerful the color of your skin is, that if you move in a certain area, people move out. Now, we don't sleep together; you got your house, I got mine. But I had my own niece ask me, she said—because her daddy brought some property out here; she lives over there off of Craft Highway. Well, she said, "Did y'all—were these white people living in these houses out here, or did you all build them?" I said, "We built our house." But up there where LeFlore is, and on going up? All of those are white houses, all up there where Stanton Road—. That was a white school for white children. But they just moved out. Couldn't live next door to you.

J: Well, that's interesting, because that seems to be happening in reverse in Down the Bay now.

- F: That's why they moving you out; to make room for them. It's expensive with the price of gas. And it takes time off the hours, so they're going down, they're coming down there; you right. They're moving in.
- J: I'm blown away by the number of loft apartments and things downtown now.
- F: That's right!
- J: And they not cheap!
- F: No. But that's where they want to be now. That's where they want to be, you're right. And even the school property that's down there, which is Calloway-Smith; I understand somebody offered something, they wondered, "Could we buy that, because we can put some apartments down here." But they wouldn't be for us.
- J: Mm-nm. Yeah, I mean, I think that part of the values system—like you were saying: pay it forward, like the man here—part of the value system is to leave it for the better for the next group to come along. Which is fascinating to hear about Mr. Clarence Matthews being a chauffeur for the Cochrans, because—at least, the folklore about him is that he was the man with the Boy Scouts and everything—that would be Walter Samples, and T.N. Weed, and all these type of folk—they looked to him as an example of how to carry yourself with pride. And for him to be a chauffeur, to walk that line, right? Mobile's funny. Y'all's parents—
- F: It's what you just said: Mobile is funny.
- J: Mobile's funny. Because y'all's parents knew what their parents had gone through in the 19th century, and they were born in the early 20th century—your parents were. And they wanted to construct a version of society. And sometimes, particularly the Mardi Gras stuff, sometimes they *called* it "society." And some of y'all stayed, and many of y'all went away. And didn't want to be bothered with that. [Laughter] But some of y'all stayed and tried to sort of navigate whiteness and Blackness in ways—you know, Mobile got more in common with New Orleans and Tallahassee than it do with Montgomery and Birmingham.
- F: Oh, yes! Mmhm.
- J: Because of the water. But when you're at Perdido Beach taking care of those children, you got to have a little bit of—you got to know who you are, because them folks'll try to treat you any old kind of way.

F: They didn't treat me any old kind of way. I told you what I told that teacher at Dunbar: it wasn't who could afford to go; who had planned to go. When I started working for them, I was working for Dr. Sidney Van Antwerp and Emily Van Antwerp. And that's who I was working for. They wanted me—they had one son and one daughter the first year I worked there. And then the next year, she had another child. And then two years later, she had another one. And I worked for them for four summers. But I could read to the children. I could brush kids' hair. I stopped and bought ribbon and put on her hair; Momma didn't never have to comb her hair and tie it up with a ribbon.

J: How come Momma didn't know?

F: Because *she* wasn't taught to do anything; she was multi-rich.

J: Okay.

F: She had had—they'd had a nanny all her life. Her momma didn't comb her hair; she had somebody to comb her hair for her.

J: Got it, got it.

F: Mhm. Yeah. She didn't have to do that.

J: Do you think there's something to the whole thing, like, your reading to them, knowing exactly who you are, is an act of civil rights advocacy.

F: Yes. Yes, because they couldn't treat me like—I didn't "yes ma'am." When I had to do that I considered that the worst thing I had to do: her mother, Emily's mother, would come over the bay and stay two or three weeks at a time. And this old lady would take a cocktail every afternoon with a fresh package of cigarettes; she smoked. Not old; fresh package. And they had a dining room, and then they had the den, which was recessed. And they would be down in the den. And every evening I'd have to go there, and I thought this was the worst thing in the world I'd have to do: I'd have to walk to the door like this, and say, "Dinner is served." That means that the dinner was on the table for them to come eat. Every evening: "Dinner is served," at five o'clock. Now why did I have to say, "Dinner is served"? But I did it. The bottom line: they paid me by the day and the night. So, if I stayed over there a day, I got one thing per day. Because you didn't come home but sometimes; I'd stay over there sometimes two weeks. So, I'd come home, I'd have checks, sometimes 200, 250-dollar check. And you know, that was paying a price for what I wanted. I didn't mind saying "dinner is served" if you going pay me. But I didn't cook. I didn't wash and I didn't iron. All I had to do was look after the children. And put on my apron and said, "Dinner is served." [Laughter] Because the young man who was doing



the cooking, he was handicapped. But they loved him; looked after him. And Dr. Sidney Van Antwerp was a dentist. And he said, "Hazel, before you go to college, now, come on, let me check your teeth." And you know it's like, "Well, Hazel can read," "Hazel can do this"; this kind of thing, you know. And I guess there wasn't—Mobile is funny. I had a professor in Montgomery. He was from Wilcox County, and he told us in the classroom: "You folks from Mobile don't know what it's like to live in Alabama. You all are not Alabama people." He said, "Now, you folks from Mobile just remember this: you're from Mobile. You don't do things like we do them. You all down there, you sign up to vote, and you go out and vote. You don't even know how to stand in line." He was telling us in Wilcox County, they couldn't vote.

J: No.

F: He said, he told us, "Y'all got it good down there and don't know it. They're different." And you said we're different. The people in Albright & Woods when we were drinking that coffee; they're are different. Weren't going let me cause no disturbance, that's what that was all about. This is a Mardi Gras town; don't cause any disturbance.

J: You're the first person who I ever heard equate the civil rights struggle in terms of Mardi Gras. I thought I was the only person thought like that.

F: No. Because I went down one night on the corner of Government and Bayou to pick up some candy, and when I bumped head with somebody, it was the superintendent of education.

J: Bending over to pick up the candy?

F: He was bending over to pick up the same piece of candy. And let me tell you something: when the children had confrontation in the public school system, when they fought at Vigor in the daytime; the same children would be downtown on Government and Lawrence at night with the children from Murphy and the children from Vigor. And guess what?

J: They were doing the same thing.

F: They were doing the same thing, and they weren't fighting. They weren't fighting. That's interesting! I understand—I haven't seen this; you may want to check it out—I understand that Murphy got its first Black principal.

J: Is that right?

F: I was told; I was told. You better check it out.

J: I will!

F: And he came from B.C. Rain. But that man at B.C. Rain was doing a job down there. I mean, everybody I heard of said what an excellent principal he was. So, you know, it's the time in which we live. But this is Mobile. Ain't nobody going—them White folks at Murphy high school not going move out because they got a Black principal over there now.

J: No, they not.

F: [Laughter] They not going move off of Government Street.

J: That's a whole other story—

F: That's right.

J: —the development of Midtown.

F: Oh, yes!

J: That is a whole history into itself.

F: That's right!

J: Because I'll tell you a story; I'mma put it on camera. My granddaddy was about to pass. He was concerned about my finances, because I had had some health issues. And anytime you have health issues, that's your pocketbook—

F: That's right.

J: —being stretched. And he called me over to his hospital bed at the house. And he said, "Come here." I said, "What?" "Go over to that closet." Went over to the closet. "What you want me to get?" "Get that white coat, that short white coat. Bring it here." It had no collar on it. To the waist. He said, "If you get in a tight, wear the coat." "What?" "If you get in a tight, go bartend and supplement your income."

F: My husband did it.

J: Until you can get yourself right where you don't need it anymore; or even if you do need it—he didn't say the rest of it, which, it was implied: even if you do need it, put it in your savings account. Stash it away somewhere.

F: Yeah. Yeah, my husband did it.

J: Yeah. And Lord have mercy if it didn't come down to pass; I had to wear the white coat.

F: That's right! My husband did it when—because, you know, when I married Leo, I was teaching. But he was at Brookley. And he decided he would get out of that going to school.

[Phone rings]

J: That might be important. That's a cell phone.

F: Excuse me then. [Break in recording] Thank you for telling to take that.

J: Yeah! If it's wireless it ain't a solicitation.

F: No. Tell you what: I'm still involved.

J: Yeah. You have to be.

F: If you've read—I'm sure you've read about Bishop State.

J: No. No, I haven't been paying attention to Bishop State. But I know it's growing, and—

F: And you know they've had five presidents in 10 years.

J: Yeah, that's not good.

F: Mmhm. And you know that *Lagniappe* put an article in the paper, and wrote down all the—you heard me call the name Sanford Bishop, Dr. Bishop's son. We got a letter; he wants me to send that letter to Sanford Bishop.

J: Okay.

F: So, I'll get my granddaughter to do it.

J: What is *Lagniappe* saying about the school, though? What are they saying about Bishop State?

F: They're not saying much about the school. They're saying more about Dr. Baker up there in Montgomery who is assigning these people like it's a revolving door.

J: To try to make the school less successful.

F: In my opinion—and nobody pays me for them—but I think one day, he'll probably put somebody white there. Now, the man that they wanted to put there as an assistant to the president had a B.S. degree; was going make one hundred and forty some thousand dollars a year; and what I understand—even reading the Lagniappe, what I understand—he was assigned down to Bishop, but was working for the man in Montgomery doing *his* bidding. I don't know how that works, now. But this is a man that worked for Bonner. Now, my suggestion is, if you worked for Bonner and y'all want to make that kind of money? Mr. Bonner, you take him.

J: And—yeah.

F: You take him out there with you and make him your assistant. And I know he did work for Bonner. So, see? I'm going call Bradley Burns, because—

J: That is very Mobile, though. That's crazy! We have people with no degrees and with BAs leading higher education? That's not merit.

F: Well, I saw where the children—some of the children picketed; they didn't want David Bonner out there. But you see, that's politics. Because he'd been up there with his sister, had been up to the University of Alabama.

J: That was a done deal.

F: Yeah, it was a done deal! Mmhm. And this man Baker, who's over the junior college thing I think, he's just shifting—what Lagniappe is showing, that this turmoil was going on in all of these community colleges, I guess, in Alabama. I guess; I don't know. But that's not stability.

J: Education: one thing it require is stability.

F: You need stability. And Bishop State doesn't even have a choir now. That gets next to me. I can't sing, but I appreciate music. Of all the things; see, Mr. Baker doesn't realize that Fisk University was built with the choir singers.

J: The Jubilee Singers.

F: See, that's my history. I know that. I appreciate the song. We'll go out to hear you sing, when we won't go out to vote. But them folks going sing, and we going be there and encourage them. And they don't know. They don't know. He doesn't know my history. He doesn't know that when you got ready to go to college, when you in one of these Black churches, somebody said, "Well you

know, she's going to college next week. Let's pass the plate, let's give the girl something."

J: Wait, did they do that at Peter Claver and Big Zion?

F: Didn't do that at Peter Claver; they did that at Bethel.

J: Bethel?

F: Yeah. Yeah. Somebody going to college, "Got something, give this child some money. Let's help them." And when you come back: "We're proud of you. Tell us about your—this life." That's supporting the community. Expect for you to go out and make something of yourself. That's what they would say: "Make something of yourself!" [Laughter]

J: Literally!

F: Yeah!

J: That's the value: "Go make yourself."

F: That's right! Make something of yourself. That's right.

J: That's it.

F: And we had that value. That we had that value; Daddy Clarence had that value. It wasn't the amount of money he was making for the Cochrane. But what you realize: the experience that he got in being a chauffeur; he had driven all the way down to Mexico; he had driven those people to New York. He had been where I had not been, and I still haven't been.

J: And that's how he could get those boys to DC. He had gone there.

F: Yeah. He'd gone there. He knew that. See, you got to be inspired. You can't tell me—you can't show me where to go where you haven't been. Now, think about that: how you going show me the way if you haven't been there?

J: Show the way. Whenever Mr. Samples was in—I'm not old enough to been in a lot of meetings with him. But Mr. Reed, I was in a lot of meetings with. But whenever they were in a meeting and they had something to say, they would stand.

F: That's right.

- J: Get the attention. And then they would begin.
- F: That's right.
- J: And then, upon closing, they would conclude with the saying of respect to the group. Which was an example of, "Go make yourself—
- F: —something."
- J: Something. "Be something."
- F: You ever think about Walter Samples on that mail route; like, Emily Van Antwerp that I worked for. Her mailman: Black. When the mailman came—because she lived out on Hunter. I didn't work on Hunter, I worked over the bay. But when the mailman came to Hunter, they had the downstairs toilet for him. And a place for him to sit and drink and eat his lunch in the cool. Because that was the mailman. You respect the mailman. He wasn't making that much money, but you respect the mailman. And we haven't taught that kind of respect of folks.
- J: Well, it's the components of the village.
- F: It's the village. It's the village.
- J: And the components of it, so that you understand—this is an educational philosophy, isn't it?
- F: Yeah.
- J: You have to have a reason, there's a reason behind the giving of the respect.
- F: That's right. He's paid his dues.
- J: Right.
- F: You respect a man who has paid his dues. You listen to Mr. Samples, because he's paid some dues.
- J: He started a bank.
- F: Yeah. [Laughter] Like I tell my grandson: "A nickel saved is a nickel earned, child." My daddy told me, "You save 10 percent of every dollar you get." Now, think about that. I did some math the other day and I said, "I'm paying that insurance company 400 dollars a month; I could've put that money in the bank,

and now I would have 144,000 dollars as long as I've been paying it. But the insurance is worth 200,000. And I don't have any guarantee I would have lived as long as I did, and I'm going pay it as long as I'm living. But I guarantee whoever I leave it to will get the 200,000 dollars—which is more than I'm putting in right now. And you know, for me to live that long—because some of that money has to go for insurance on my life. We're not teaching that kind of thing now. You're not saving—"How much you save?" Now, I have a granddaughter; my sister died last year in February. She didn't have any children. She left my granddaughter her two houses. Paid for in full. But my granddaughter buying her own house, and she said—I asked her, I said, "You finished paying for it yet?" She said, "No, I haven't finished paying for it, but I could finish right now if I wanted to. That's all I got I can claim." She's not married, she's single, she's working; I understand that. But my sister selected her to leave her property to. That was my sister's wish. She left me to be the administrator of the will and pay her bills! [Laughter]

J: Well, that's okay.

F: Yeah. Because she knew that I was going pay her bills. And of course, when she had to go in the nursing home, she didn't have no long-term care or anything like that. But she knew that I was the one was going to—I'mma see that the bills are paid.

J: How many sisters and brothers do you have?

F: I had one sister. I had four brothers.

J: What was your sister's name?

F: Claudette Daffin. My brothers—

J: Wait was she related to the man Daffin that cut the hair?

F: She married into the Daffin family, uh-huh. Her husband's dead.

J: Okay.

F: My oldest brother was Nathaniel Harris Jr. He's dead. And I'm second, then my next brother was Willie Harris; he's dead. Clarence Matthews, the baby brother, he lives here. He's 80. And John Matthews, next to Claudette. He's out in California. So, there three of us left.

J: Is John the one that started that picnic on Fourth of July?

- F: Yes. That's right, that's my brother. He's out in California.
- J: I sure would like to know who organizes that now.
- F: Well, the Down the Bay Reunion.
- J: The Down the Bay Reunion.
- F: That's right.
- J: Let me write that down.
- F: Down the Bay Reunion.
- J: How did that get started?
- F: He started it. He said that—see, he's like Daddy Clarence. "Got to pull them all together. Y'all get together once a year. We going cook, and we going have a good time." And a lot of things that Mickey would do, he would be like Daddy. He would say the children in the neighborhood, somebody got to do something for the children. "We going have a penny fair. I'm going have a penny fair for the children. Pop some popcorn, and give them some peanuts; we got to do something." He was like that, now. He's got his hearing problems, serious hearing problems. But I send him his Father's Day cards, put a little change in there for him. So. And wish him well. But he was the one that did the Down the Bay Reunion.
- J: And that's almost as big as people coming home for Mardi Gras.
- F: Oh, yeah. Come down here for Down the Bay Reunion.
- J: Where would the penny fair be held?
- F: In the yard. In y'all front yard. Take two card tables outside, invite all the children to come to the penny fair. Because the children is hot; nobody is doing anything for the children. And he believed in doing things for the—like Daddy Clarence: do something for the children.
- J: A lot of that money stayed in the neighborhood. What was some of the other businesses—because from what I understand, where Texas Street is now used to be a corridor of business not unlike the Avenue.
- F: It had businesses on Texas. Texas and Washington Avenue, going—that was a business place. That's where you had shoe shop down there; you had to go



down there to get your shoes repaired. You had various businesses who would—of course, it's all gone. Gone with the wind.

J: Where everybody go when urban renewal came through? Where'd they go?

F: A lot of people moved Down the Bay, went down further down. Like, my mother moved on Charles Street below Virginia. And when she moved down there, at least three or four people from Down the Bay moved on Charles Street. And they down there on Marine Street like that, but—and then gradually, they died out. And they're gone. Like the Cooks; you probably heard about the Cooks. A big family, the Cooks. And they were only—and I tell you where you really find that you know they're gone: the churches are not full. Big Zion doesn't have—and even our church. You know. Ms. Jesse Mae Coleman with six children? I don't know if we got any of them coming to Prince of Peace. I know Vernon when I see him; he doesn't come to Prince of Peace. I think he's over to Little Flower.

J: Close to the house.

F: Yeah. But I go the Prince of Peace, because I was reared in Big Zion but I became a convert when I got married. Why? Because I had to sign a statement that said any child born of the union would be reared in the Catholic faith. And I made a decision: I would not have my children going to one church on a Sunday morning, and I was going to another. We'll go together. That was my own personal decision; Leo didn't press me to do it. But I felt—that was my faith.

J: What's the connection between Down the Bay and the island?

F: Well, the Catholic folks from the island moved up Down the Bay. If you going come off the island you have to go somewhere where you'd have some people who would think like you think. Well you know, if people lived on the island, they really didn't know that they weren't Black. They were Creoles. I know you've heard that word. So, the funeral I had to go to, Emanuel Fournier's son. Emmanuel was Leo's brother. Emmanuel told us he was not Black. He said he was a Creole. And you have the Creoles who went to school; they had a class for them, they were admitted to Barton Academy. Yes, there was Creoles they allowed them to come to Barton Academy, but they weren't Black folks.

J: Well, I mean, isn't Creole by definition being betwixt and between Black and white?

F: It's between, betwixt and between. How much of which 'twixt you got.

J: And how it looks on you.

- F: That's what I'm saying: how much you got. If you got enough to look white, you did it. And if you got enough to look Black, you Black. Betwixt and between.
- J: And were there Creole enclaves Down the Bay? I mean, were there Creole neighborhoods within the neighborhood?
- F: No, not many. Just two or three folks in it. You know, you felt comfortable being around them. But I—you know, like the Dembos. Do you know Ms. Dembo? That's a good example. You know, they from down off the island. But look: the white folks buying that property down there. They had a couple of clubs, Black clubs, that had bought some property down there, and they've sold that property. So they going take it all back when they want it. Or pay you enough for it. Yeah.
- J: The parents of the children in your neighborhood around you and your brothers and sisters, where did most of the folks work? Where did most of the men work, I guess I should say.
- F: Well, if they making what they call a good living, they either worked for the post office or they went to the shipyard. My neighbor right in front of us, her husband was a postman. And when he died, she said, "The goose that laid the golden egg is gone, but the egg is still there." [Laughter] He was on retirement. But that was it. If you were like Daddy Clarence, you were well-respected, but they knew you weren't anything but a chauffeur. And he was a chauffeur. But now, you just got to remember this: chauffeurs wore ties. And in your attire, there was some respect. And Daddy told us you don't need but 11 shirts to be clean. One on, and one off. Eleven, he used to call them. "You don't need but 11 shirts to be clean. Wear one and wash one." That's sweet living. "Make all those shirts you own white. You don't have to have a colored shirt; just be sure you wear white ones all the time. All they can say about you—they can't say you wear the same shirt every day."
- J: Was that also a belief of Mr. Keeby, you think?
- F: Mr. Keeby's was a tie thing. Mr. Keeby was a tie thing. But now remember, Mr. Keeby came out of Plateau. That's where he was from, Plateau. And at Mobile County Training School they wore uniforms. And it's something about a man—a man doesn't fight in a tie. You pull your tie off when you got ready to fight. And you call him "mister," if he had on a shirt and tie. And they would tell us, "Now, you can't do what that man does. A man can do what he wants to all night Saturday night, get up on Sunday morning, put on a shirt and go to church, and they call him mister. Now if you a lady and you do all you want to do on a

Saturday night and think you going get up and put on a shirt, and somebody going trust you; you not going—.” I think that's Obama.

J: That's Obama.

F: I don't know what he's talking about.

J: Biden's proposed gas tax.

F: Oh, yeah. He proposed 18 cents would come off. For 90 days.

J: That'd be good.

F: Yeah, for 90 days. Eighteen cents a gallon.

J: Mmhm. But yeah, what were you saying about the women who—

F: You can't do anything you want to all night long. And get up and put on a dress on a Sunday morning, and go to church; they not going call you “Miss.” They going call you—you see, that's why I was looking at the—yesterday. That crazy man from New York. Oh, well no it wasn't. It was former president that referred to that Black women as a hustler. Now, what little respect I might have had for him left. He didn't know her like that. He didn't know; she owned her own business in Georgia, in Atlanta. He called her a hustler.

J: Oh, the woman who's running for office.

F: Nope.

J: No.

F: No, this woman and her daughter, they were poll—

J: Workers. Oh, and they testified in the insurrection.

F: That's right.

J: Okay.

F: They testified.

J: And how they got people chasing them out of town.

F: That was, you know. Giuliani with that nasty mouth that he has, and lying, and you know. What little respect—I didn't never necessarily, you don't have to respect the person, but you've got to respect the position. He was the—wasn't he the governor of New York at one time?

J: Mayor.

F: Mayor. New York City.

J: Mmhm. Yeah, no he—

F: Doesn't even deserve that.

J: No, they clearly have lost their mind. Was Down the Bay ever called “checkerboard?”

F: No. But I could see why it would be. [Laughter] I could see why it would be.

J: Prior to urban renewal, and they justified the tearing down of the houses, what were those houses lacking? What was the issue with those houses?

F: Well, what they looked at: what would it take to bring it up to—like Ms. Mattie Alexander that lived directly in front of my house; her house is still standing. And she had two bedrooms, and bathroom, living room, and dining room. And that house is still there, I see it every week when I go to church. Our house right across the street from her, they said it could not be repaired in what they wanted. But you have to remember where mother's house was. Because I was at Emerson's School, see? Our house was over here, and this was the schoolyard and they took all of that. They bought all of, it wasn't hard to buy that from—by Emerson School, from the county. And that was a big piece of property. And they just called themselves standard; they took them. Have somebody go down and say, “You need to do this, that, the other.” You know, we can evaluate your house and tell you—they can come in here and evaluate mine right now and say, “Well, Mrs. Fournier, you need this floor replaced.”

J: Right.

F: And what am I going do if I can't afford to replace it?

J: Right.

F: Or they say, “Well, we can give you something for it, and you'll get this for it.” So they call themselves evaluating it. She was so nice; I'm still here. My dog came up for me to pet her. [Laughter]

J: I guess the last thing I sort of wanted to ask you, and I—this is not on my list of questions, but I'd like to know some of the women you watched coming up that you admired, and that made you want to go into leadership.

F: Ms. Mamie Johnson.

J: On Costarides Street?

F: Yeah, she's dead now. She lived on Scott Street.

J: Did she? She was Down the Bay girl?

F: Yeah! She lived on Scott Street. She lived on the other side of Scott Street. Her momma lost her house, too. That was one. And you heard what I called her: Ms. Mamie Johnson. I didn't say "Ms. Johnson." Ms. Mamie Johnson. Ms. Celestine was on the corner across from the Ice House. And went around there and told my momma that we ran out in front of a car. And that we were going to get runned over, and gates going have a bill because the children ran out in front of a car. Now, we were going to the Ice House, and she walked to Emerson schoolyard at night in the dark to go to my momma's back door to tell her that we ran out in front of a car. Ms. Mattie Alexander, who would—oh, she was so prissy. Oh, tell you how to dress. And she was a hairdresser that did wigs for white women. She was a hairdresser. Then I had my own aunt, who was the baby aunt. My baby aunt, the one that died first. She was the one in the family who had finished high school. Her name was Vickie; Aunt Vickie. My mother went to the ninth grade, though. Should've stayed in and finished it; said no. But they left school, because it was time then to get a job and go to work and help the family. But my English teacher was Ms. Naweta Pinkney Brown—Naweta Brown Pickney.

J: What school was this?

F: At Dunbar High School. Who told me that English was to be spoken as well as it is to be written. She said, "You think because you can make 100 on the test, you can say anything you want to. But you got to speak it." And I could conjugate the verb "to be"; I could conjugate any verb, and I still can do it. Children don't even conjugate verbs like that. They don't even know what conjugation is. But the very fact that she said, "English is to be spoken as well as it is to be written." Here I am now, 93 years old; I still remember English is to be spoken. And then of course, you know, I was president of my senior class.

J: At what school?

F: At Dunbar High School. The last class that finished from Dunbar. And I was the president of the class, so I think I had a mouth. I had more mouth than I did anything else. And if it was wrong, I would tell you it was wrong. And you know, like, I had my boss—one of my bosses, in a meeting, ask me—when we had broken up A.F. Orange school, and we sent those children to five different schools under desegregation. And we hired community workers to go down there; every school where they went had a community worker. That community worker was at the school, paid for that with federal funds like—that would be there to be a bridge between that child and his house, where he came from. From those buses. If he took sick, we couldn't expect for his mother to come go down Dauphin Island to get him all the way down Dauphin Island Parkway from those schools down there to pick him up. **Odelia Williams** on Dauphin Island, below Interstate 10. So, we had community workers. And I interviewed them and hired them all myself. Told them what I expected of them. That was looking after the family that we had broken up. But I had my boss one day ask me something that they wanted. Because when they had PTA meeting, I said, "You run the bus at night to pick up the parents and take them to the PTA meeting, because they don't have any cars."

J: Transportation, right.

F: That's right. So, I had one to say to me, said to me, "Well, what do they want? We've given them all we can give them." And I guess you could say I turned out the meeting in a nice way. I said, "You want to know what they want? They want what you want for your child. No more and no less. Ask yourself, what do you want for your child? And then say, 'Oh, they want that, too.' That's what we want."

J: That simple.

F: That simple. And the man who was really the boss—and it was integrated meeting, Black and white folks in there—he said, "Meeting's adjourned."  
[Laughter]

J: Well, I want to thank you. I mean, that's the point: everybody gets the same.

F: Yeah, that's all it is. But I always say, we don't owe you a living, we just owe you—give me the same opportunity. And that's why we—you know, if there was any reluctance about the sports world. You got some of these football teams that are 90 percent Black. And so, you pay them to play. You pay them to entertain us. You pay them to do what you would pay them to do. And respect them for what they can do. And I'm so proud of those now who have begun to set up foundations to help the children in the communities where they've come from. That lets me know you know they're there. You know they're there. We

got to do for our children. We got to. And me, I'm too old to go back in a classroom; I'm not too old to do a workshop, but if I had to do a workshop for teachers, I would say the first thing you ask yourself when you see those children: what do you expect of them? If you don't expect everyone, everyone that you're looking at—I don't care if he's Black, brown, gray or yellow—to excel, and to get what you're teaching, you're in the wrong profession. You can't teach me if you don't believe I can learn it. [Laughter]

J: Yeah, don't come here to warehouse a kid.

F: No. No. Now, I'm not going to ask you to teach me how to fly a plane. I don't want to fly that airplane. But you may have a child in there who wants to fly one; tell him he can fly it. If you want to fly, you can fly. But you got to want to first.

J: And that's your job as a teacher.

F: That's my job as a teacher. Jimmy Knight just died this past year, and I had taught Jimmy Knight at a school called Dawes-Union.

J: Where was that at?

F: [Laughter] Down in Grand Bay. Taught, had 10 of us down there. Two cars left to go down there. And the cars wouldn't pick you up at your house; you had to go stand on the corner in the rain and the cold to get your ride to go to Dawes-Union school, which was 26 miles from Mobile. Highway 90 hadn't even been built down there. We went out Government Street until we could get to the Dawes Road, out there by the airport.

J: That's a whole 'nother level of paying dues there. That's paying dues.

F: That's right. Oh yes, because my principal told me—told all five of us, everybody; there were nine teachers there with the principal—“You got to visit the child's home. You got to see what he looks like at home. You got to see what's he's living in at home.” And our children came from other side of Cody Road. The other side of Cody Road. And they came on five or six buses. And so, what you do, you get on that bus two days a week, and you get off at the furthest stop, where that bus stops. And you visit those houses where those children are. And she would come through and pick us up and bring us home. But you got to see where that child has to come from before you can appreciate him wanting to come to school. I didn't even know what chopping cotton was. The children would come to school and, “Well, why were you absent yesterday?” “I had to chop cotton.” “You had to do what?” “I had to chop cotton.” Have you ever chopped cotton? You know what chopping cotton is?

- J: Sticky. It's very sticky.
- F: No, when you chop cotton, you getting the weeds from around it. You take the hoe, and you chopping the weeds.
- J: So the plants can thrive and produce.
- F: That's right. You chopping cotton. And so, when it comes down to chop cotton, you got to miss a couple days out of school. Because when the rain comes, everything's not going wait for you to come to school and learn and get home in the afternoon and do it. Didn't have daylight savings time. So, he stayed home to chop cotton. I didn't even know what cotton looked like. But I found out. Mhm.
- J: You got to know your student.
- F: You got to see what he's going through. So you can appreciate the fact that he got up and came to school in his 11 shirts. [Laughter] See, it's a whole new world out there.
- J: Well, I mean, but you're talking about you got to respect the nobility of how people survive.
- F: Yeah.
- J: You know, my grandmother used to talk about teaching at A.F. Orange school. And she said no matter how hard it was to get up and get fully dressed to the nines to go into that room, she had to do it.
- F: She did it. And she did it with class. Oh, she did it with class! Yes ma'am. She had so much class. And that was an inspiration to the other young ladies: "I can be like Ms. Esther." And it's a whole new world out there that we got to turn these children around.
- J: Well, what I hope is that by doing oral history, we can be reminded of some of the values that are required. It's required.
- F: It's required that if your momma dumps all the dishes out, silverware out, for you because you half-washed them; and the way she taught you a lesson, woke you up out of your bed one or two o'clock in the morning: "Wash them over." "Wash them over."
- J: The village has to teach.



F: That's right. And the village has to tell that young man, "Young man, I can see your underwear." But you didn't call him a boy; you called him a young man. That in itself made him recognize the fact that, "Oh, she looks up to me. I'm a young man and she expects something of me." Like I told a young man the other day who was out here doing my yard with his uncle; I said, "When you tell somebody who you are, look them in the eye. Don't drop your head." I said, "You must be a man, and you're now becoming a man. So, you look them in the eye and say your name like it's yours. You own it. Don't mumble your name like you're ashamed of it." My name is Hazel H. Fournier. And so, I'm proud of my name. That tells me who I am. And who are you?

J: Yeah, Kern M. Jackson.

F: Yes. Yes. You're Esther Lang's grandson.

J: That's right.

F: I'm Gertrude Matthews' daughter. And Clarence Matthews' daughter. So, you know.

J: And that's why you got to know, when people say who your people is, you got to have an answer.

F: That's right. That's what they mean, who your peoples are. Because you see, they tell me who your peoples are and I know what you doing. And I could look you in your face and say—

J: You know better.

F: You know—you got the word. You know better. You know better.

J: And we'll end our interview on that lesson.

F: The minute you walked in here, I said, "You are a Lang." [Laughter] Look at my dog, now. And where's my other one? She went on back in the back, the little black one. The big one's right up under my leg. Look, see her tail? She's right here up under my feet. [Laughter]

J: I'mma get that microphone off of you.

F: Oh, okay. You well prepared!

J: Oh yeah! Well, I have to—I have a team of students, and I call them "baby professors," because they just got their PhDs recently. We got a team of people

who are working on the Down the Bay project. And I've never had 16 people working on a project before.

F: That's a whole class you got to keep up with.

J: That's a whole class. And it's a business, you know. I got to make sure they get paid—

F: Oh yes.

[End of recording]

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