

African American Burial Ground Project (AABGP)
African American Burial Grounds
Oral History Program
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

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Julie Buckner Armstrong (JA): Okay, we are recording. This is Julie Buckner Armstrong speaking with Mr. Mordecai Walker and Mr. Andrew Walker about the African American Burial Grounds and Remembering Project. This is March 28th, 2021, 5:05 p.m., and we are using the SquadCast audio capturing platform. So let's see—we have both of your names. I have a list of questions that I need to go over. So we have your names. Mr. Mordecai, can you tell us your place of birth?

Mordecai Walker (MW): Citrus Park, Florida, July the 4th, 1924.

JA: Okay. Perfect, perfect. And, Andrew, were you born in St. Pete?

Andrew Walker (AW): Yes.

JA: Okay. And what is your birth date?

AW: Five-nine, '59.

JA: Okay, 5/9/59?

AW: Correct.

JA: Okay, very good. Now, how long have both of you lived in the St. Petersburg area?

AW: You go ahead.

MW: Since 1958.

JA: Nineteen fifty-eight?

MW: I was living in Citrus Park till 1958, when I got married. I moved to St. Petersburg.

JA: Okay. And, Andrew, have you lived in St. Petersburg for all of your life except for—

AW: Twenty years in metro Atlanta, Georgia, seven years in Gainesville, Florida. A couple—two years in Tampa. A year in Tuskegee, Alabama.

JA: Okay. You have lived around. Good for you. So do both of you identify as African American and male? Is that correct?

MW: Correct.

AW: Correct.

JA: Okay, very good. Now, I know that both of you at some point lived close to the cemetery complex that's near Tropicana—where Tropicana Field is now and the interstate, so that would be Oaklawn, Evergreen, and Moffett. Can you tell me the address where you lived when you were close to the cemeteries?

MW: I lived at 1224 5th Avenue South.

JA: Okay, very good. And is that where you lived as a child, Andrew?

AW: Yes.

JA: Okay. All right. So can you tell me—either one of you—can you tell me what you know about that cemetery complex?

MW: Well, the cemetery was there—and I think they moved it because of the expressway—just where the expressway curves around and comes down to 5th Avenue. You know that? That wasn't there then. And then the cemetery was right at the Perkins House. The Perkins House is in the same place now, and the cemetery is on the northwest side of the Perkins House, which is there now. And a local mortician moved the bodies to Lincoln Cemetery.

JA: Okay.

MW: I remember that very well.

JA: Okay, and so the Perkins House is on 16th Street and—

MW: Fifth Avenue.

JA: Fifth Avenue South. So just north of that.

MW: Yeah.

JA: And then so you remember the cemetery being there. What do you remember being around the cemeteries?

MW: I'm sorry. Can you repeat your question?

JA: What do you remember? What did the area look like? What do you remember being around? So if people are listening to the recording—

MW: When I moved there, I just remember that the vacant space—it wasn't being used when I moved there. The cemetery was there, and then when the expressway came, that's when they moved it—they removed the bodies to Lincoln Cemetery.

JA: Right.

AW: Her question was, what else was around there? What was around there? You had the Perkins House. What other buildings, what other yards, what other things were around there?

JA: Yes. What do you remember seeing around the cemetery?

AW: So there was St. Augustine's church.

MW: The St. Augustine church.

AW: The Perkins House.

MW: And the Perkins House.

AW: Was there a gas station?

MW: There on the corner of—there was a gas station on the corner of 16th Street and 5th Avenue: Johnson Service Station.

JA: So did the cemetery—I guess, did the cemetery complex—did it back up to the property of St. Augustine's church? So if you were, say, you know, standing in the back of St. Augustine's, could you see the cemetery?

AW: Yeah.

JA: And what—do you remember what it looked like? Was it open? Could you see it? Was it closed up?

MW: It wasn't in use, but the cemetery was—it had—it was kept up. I don't know who was responsible for it, but it was kept up in pretty good shape. I mean, the grass was mowed.

JA: Okay.

AW: The grass was not tall.

MW: No, no, it was—

AW: Were the tombstones above ground? Were most of them below—at ground? What do you remember about what you saw?

MW: It just had markers. I don't remember any large tombstones.

JA: Okay. Was there a fence up, or a gate, or anything like that?

MW: No, no, there wasn't no fence—there was no fence around it.

JA: Okay. Now, some people remember at least one of the cemeteries being in a lot of disrepair, you know, having a lot of garbage and things like that. Do you remember that, or do you remember it being very clean?

MW: No. I don't remember it being in disrepair, in garbage collection.

JA: Okay. Did you ever go through it, or did you ever attend any services there?

MW: I'm sorry, repeat.

JA: Did you ever attend funerals there, or any burials there?

MW: No.

JA: Okay. Did you ever—

MW: No, it wasn't in use since I came to St. Pete.

JA: Okay. Did you ever walk through there or go inside the cemetery?

MW: Well, I walked near, but I wouldn't say I walked through the cemetery.

JA: Okay.

MW: I was living right down the street from it, so—

JA: Okay. And I know—were you a member of St. Augustine's at that time? Or did you—

MW: No.

JA: Okay.

MW: No, I was a member of First Baptist at that time.

JA: Okay. Where was First Baptist located?

MW: On 16th Street and 3rd Avenue North.

JA: North?

MW: Yeah.

JA: Okay, so a little bit up from the cemetery. Do you know anyone or anyone who has family who was buried at that cemetery complex? Any, you know, church people or neighbors or—

AW: Julie, on that address—that would have been 3rd Avenue South.

JA: Okay, I can't hear you.

AW: That would have been 3rd Avenue South.

JA: Oh, okay. So First Baptist was south. Okay, so it was right there.

AW: But his wife—my mom—went to St. Augustine's. He went—did you visit St. Augustine's?

MW: Yeah. Yeah. I had to take her.

JA: Okay. So Mr. Walker visited St. Augustine's. And, Andrew, your mom—and Mr. Mordecai, your wife, Anna? Is that correct? Was that her name?

MW: Yes.

JA: Okay. And so she was a member of St. Augustine's. When did you start going there?

MW: Right. Yeah, she was a member when we got married.

JA: Oh, okay. So when did you start attending St. Augustine's?

MW: Nineteen seventy-nine. I was a member.

JA: Oh, okay.

MW: She was a member of St. Augustine's all the while, and I just joined in '79.

JA: Okay. And so when you—the people you knew at either First Baptist or at St. Augustine's or any of your neighbors, do you remember anyone who had family buried at either of those cemeteries?

MW: No.

JA: Okay.

MW: Wasn't anyone buried there after I came to St. Pete. It had been closed down. I don't know for what reason, but no one was buried there.

JA: So do you remember the bodies being relocated, or did that happen before your time?

MW: No, it happened during my time. Yeah, I remember when McRae Funeral Home—Monroe was the manager, and he had the job to relocate the bodies.

JA: Okay. Do you remember anything specific about that? Did you see any of it?

MW: Yes. They dug the bodies up by hand, and those had a—well, I'm going to say a sheet of canvas that—the coffins, that was before the concrete—

AW: Vault.

MW: Yeah, that was before the concrete vault time. And they picked them up and put them in a canvas-like sheet to move.

JA: The coffin and all? They picked up the coffin and all?

MW: Yeah.

JA: And then how did they—

MW: The remains of the coffin.

JA: Okay.

MW: They used hand labor. They dug it up. Wasn't no equipment. And they just put it in there and put them in another casket and took them over to Lincoln Cemetery.

JA: Okay.

AW: It sounds like you're saying that you saw the actual bodies, either not in the casket or the casket—

MW: The casket deteriorated, because without the vault—

JA: Okay. So, yeah, Andrew, I'm having trouble understanding you, but let me see if I can repeat this back. So you remember seeing—they dug up the caskets by hand, and the caskets were deteriorated, so they put them out on a canvas and then put them into another casket for transport?

MW: Yes.

JA: Okay. To Lincoln?

MW: That's right.

JA: Okay. Now, how did they get them there? Did they load them into a truck or—do you remember that part?

MW: I don't remember. No, it wasn't a truck, but I think they used the hearse.

JA: Oh, okay. So they would do it one by one?

MW: Yeah.

JA: Okay. And how many—okay, so let's say if they would send a crew out there to dig up the body, about how many people would that be? Do you remember how many people?

MW: I think it was 19. This is my remembrance. It was 19 bodies that was buried there that they moved.

JA: And how many people did the work?

MW: I don't know. I don't know. I imagine it was about six people working for Monroe [at] McRae Funeral Home.

JA: Now, I have on my schedule to talk to Mr. Bell—Mr. March Bell. Do you know him? And do you know if he was one of the people who helped?

MW: Who was that?

JA: March Bell.

MW: Yeah, I know him.

JA: Okay. Is he one of the people who helped, or do you know?

MW: No. I never worked—I knew him, but I never did work with him person to person.

JA: Okay. Well, I'll ask him about that, because that—

MW: I think Bell worked with Monroe after that time.

JA: Okay. Afterwards, okay.

MW: Yeah, that was afterwards. Bell wasn't in the picture at that time.

JA: Okay. Well, that's helpful to know. Thank you. Do you remember how people reacted, or what was the reaction in the community when the bodies were being relocated? What were people saying or talking about?

MW: Well, I don't remember any dissatisfaction in the community. I would think they all appreciate the idea of being moved in a permanent cemetery. Because that one wasn't used anymore [as] an active cemetery. Yeah, that's just my opinion. I've never asked that question before.

JA: Okay.

MW: That's my opinion from just general observation.

JA: Well, that's good to know. And that actually raises another question. What reason were people—did people think the bodies were being relocated back in the day? I mean, did people think it was—like, what reason was given for the cemeteries relocating? Is it because it wasn't active anymore, or were there other reasons?

MW: No, I think they all appreciated it because they could use that land and—where the cemetery was.

JA: Okay. Okay.

MW: And that was before the expressway was put through there.

JA: What did they use the land for?

MW: The expressway. That's what they use it for. That's currently the expressway on 5th Avenue.

JA: Yeah.

MW: That's where the—the cemetery is right through the—right where the curve goes onto the highway.

JA: Okay. And I think, also, there might have been—I think before the Tropicana Field—so the cemetery sites, the expressway runs through there, and the Tropicana Field parking lot is there, and I think there was also some housing, apartments, or low-income housing, or something like that before the Tropicana Field went in there. Do you remember seeing that at all?

MW: First Baptist was located where Tropicana Field is now, down 3rd and 16th Street.

JA: Right.

MW: And I was a member, and then the city—they paid a good price to First Baptist when they bought the place: \$778,000. And we were able to buy where First Baptist is located now, 3rd and 3rd—3rd and 4th.

JA: And so—

MW: And then we were able to—we were able to—four different people—four different owners owned the property and the city. And they gave—I was a licensed real estate broker, and they gave me permission to negotiate with the four owners and the city, because it wasn't—in other words, it had to be 100 percent agreement, or the deal was off. But the city and the four owners agreed, and we paid each one what they asked for that parcel of land.

JA: Okay. So who were—you mean the four people who owned the land where First Baptist was, or four homeowners around there?

MW: No. The land where First Baptist is now.

JA: Okay. And so that land was bought out—the First Baptist Church on 3rd Avenue South, that land was bought out for \$78,000? Is that what you said?

MW: Yes.

JA: Okay. And when was that?

MW: Oh, gracious, let me see. That, uh—

JA: That's okay.

MW: Yeah, I'm not sure, but I think it was '79. I think that's when that took place.

JA: Okay. And when did St. Augustine move? Was that before or after?

MW: I remember what they called Laurel Park apartments there, but they weren't there that long, because the expressway came through.

Track 1 ends; track 2 begins.

JA: Okay, we are doing our second part of the recording after we had an internet snafu. This is Julie Armstrong interviewing Mordecai Walker and Andrew Walker, okay, on March 28th at 5:29. So I believe that when our internet cut out, I was asking what year St. Augustine's moved.

AW: No. He was about—that was actually First Baptist, and your question was his remembrance of the apartments. So do you remember the apartments being there?

MW: Yeah, I remember the apartments because I was in the process of trying to be manager of the apartments. But that never took place, and for some reason, the apartment wasn't a success, and they tore them down.

JA: Right. So they tore down the apartments, and you were in the process—you were going to manage that? Is that—I mean, manage the apartment.

MW: I was thinking about it. Yeah.

JA: Okay. And that was through your job as a realtor?

MW: Sorry?

JA: Was that through your job, through your work as a realtor?

MW: Yes.

MW: No. Wait, wait, wait—

JA: Okay.

AW: No, no, no. Hold on. Did you have your real estate license during that time period?

MW: Yes, yes.

AW: Okay, what apartments are we talking about?

MW: Those apartments out on 5th Avenue and—right there parallel with the cemetery.

AW: Okay.

MW: Those apartments there. About 20 units.

JA: Right. Right.

MW: I don't know whether they—why they were torn down, but for some reason they never did—they were never successful.

JA: Okay. So you also taught school, too. Were you also teaching school at that time?

MW: Yes. Perkins Elementary.

JA: At Perkins, okay. So we talked about First Baptist moving. What year did St. Augustine's move?

MW: Nineteen seventy-nine.

JA: Nineteen seventy-nine?

AW: No, St. Augustine's.

MW: Say what now?

AW: St. Augustine's.

MW: What about it?

AW: When did it move? That had to be before '79.

JA: Did it move because of the interstate going in, or did it move for other reasons?

MW: They were able to—Melvin Jones Construction Company helped us obtain the land where St. Augustine's is now.

JA: Okay. And that's on—for purposes of recording that, where St. Augustine is now, is 26th Avenue South.

MW: Yeah.

JA: Now—so did it—did that church move because of the interstate going in, or did it move because it—for other reasons?

MW: I think because it was an improvement.

JA: Okay, okay.

MW: Yeah.

JA: Okay, just to have a bigger building, right?

MW: The little church is there now, but where St. Augustine was couldn't hold about 40 members.

JA: Right.

MW: Just a small parcel of land.

JA: Andrew, I'd like to ask you a question, too. Do you remember the land where the cemeteries were at all, when you were a child or younger?

AW: When I was older—10, 12, that age, I'd walk up there and that sort of thing, see what was going on, and then as a teen, being in that general area.

JA: Okay. Do you remember what the site looked like? So when you were in your teens, that would have been '70s, early '70s ?

AW: Yeah. Right. I don't remember seeing anything about a cemetery being there.

JA: Did you know there had been a cemetery there? No? Okay.

AW: Nope.

JA: Yeah, I was wondering if there was any kind of folklore or spooky stories or, you know, any of that kind of thing associated with that space.

AW: No. I think it was erased. Yeah, totally.

JA: What was there? The apartments were there?

AW: I remember going to the crab store. There was a crab store next to the Perkins House, and where that gas station, I think, was, in that area. Yeah, so going—going to Campbell Park for recreation, we would go across the street, and then there were apartments. I remember them being pink. Yeah, a bright color. I forget the exact name, but up until the highway came, there were apartments there, and there were friends that went to St. Pete High who lived in those apartments.

JA: So when you—if you were standing in the back of St. Augustine's church, what is the name of that—that building is still there, what is the name of the church that's there now?

AW: Oh, it might be a Holiness church.

JA: Yeah, I—

AW: Yeah, yeah. And then across the street is the Unity Church, the African American branch of the Unity Church. And yeah, that was—so that's pretty much what I remember. I don't remember any cemetery or having knowledge of a cemetery being there.

JA: So in the '70s, if you went to church with your mom at St. Augustine's—if you were, say, in the back of the church and looking north, do you remember what you would see?

AW: No. I—that—again, I think he had the date a little bit later. The church had moved before. I was a little kid when I went to St. Augustine's. I was confirmed there, and then that period—I have no memory of seeing a cemetery back there, even as a kid.

JA: Okay.

AW: Like, the Clowers—Debbie Clowers [Deborah Flanagan Davis] might have been old enough to have a better, you know, remembrance of that. Yeah, I think the cemetery—I mean, the St. Augustine's moved—he said '79, but I'm thinking he was talking about First Baptist.

JA: Right.

AW: That church moved prior to '79 because I attended the church over at its other location, in the mid '70s and earlier—at its new location, yeah.

JA: Okay. That's good. That's helpful. So, Andrew, I'll ask you this—a question—then come back to a question for Mr. Mordecai. Do you know, Andrew, when you first knew that there might be cemeteries there under the interstate or under Tropicana Field? Do you remember when you first heard about that?

AW: Oh, when—maybe a year ago when this issue came up, about a cemetery being there.

JA: Okay.

AW: Yeah.

JA: So, very recently, yeah.

AW: Right.

JA: Well, let's—I'd like to ask a few sort of general questions about cemeteries and about funeral practices.

AW: Right. Let me add this. I even worked for McRae Funeral Home in junior high, and there was no talk of that cemetery, just in casual conversation from my junior high years to high school.

JA: Okay, and when would that have been? Early '70s or—

AW: Yeah, early '70s. And I graduated in '77, and then came back during the summers and helped out.

JA: What did you do for McRae?

AW: I, as a kid, washed cars. Then, as I got older, go to the morgue to pick up bodies, work the funerals, if somebody needed to be at the building, you know, that sort of thing.

JA: Okay. Well, that's good. So did you wash the hearse?

AW: Yeah, I washed all the cars.

JA: Okay, very good. Well, that actually brings up a questions that's on my list here. Either Andrew or Mr. Mordecai can answer. Can you tell me about what might be a typical funeral or a typical burial practice from, say, mid-century or earlier?

AW: Mid-century—we're talking 1960s?

JA: Answer it however you remember it, is fine.

AW: Well, we would get notice that a family wanted the service to be done, and then we would go to the morgue and pick the body up. And then we had the embalmers, Ben Johnson, Monroe McRae—they would go through the embalming process and prepare the body, dress the body, present it for viewing. There would be a notice of viewing. Individuals would come from the community for a viewing. The family, as usual, would be first. There were more wakes then. There was no cremation at all that I—during those years—that I remember. It might have been one person. And then we would make the plans or have a routine to go pick the family up prior to the funeral. You know, we would make arrangements with the church.

And while I was a kid, I would sit and would drive in a car that, you know, wasn't with the family. And then later, I eventually started driving vehicles, and we would go pick the family up, take the family to the church. The family would be there, and typically there was a viewing prior to the service. And then we would have the service, and then we would wait outside for a portion of it. There would be other people that were helping out. Miss McRae always was with the family and did that sort of thing—was more of the host sort of person.

JA: Right. So was the viewing typically at the funeral home?

AW: Yes. At that period, there were no bodies at homes.

JA: Okay.

AW: I heard about that, but I—yeah.

JA: So the viewing would be in the funeral home, and then the funeral itself—would it be in the church, or would it be—

AW: Yeah, most of the funerals were at church. There were very few funerals at the funeral home, like a memorial service. But yeah, the great majority were at a church.

JA: And did you—was there also a graveside service, too?

AW: When you say a “graveside service,” that typically was a brief—words by the minister that the body—when the body was being lowered into the ground: “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” There was that, you know, common quote out of Scripture. And yeah, that usually was pretty quick, and then people would greet the family, and that was—you would go back home. Oh, also, I helped cut the grass at the funeral home—I'm sorry, at the cemetery—at Lincoln Cemetery before it changed hands.

JA: Okay.

AW: So McRae owned the cemetery also—Lincoln Cemetery.

JA: Okay, okay. And so—and then, after the graveside, then people would typically go back to their—go back to maybe the family's home?

AW: No. Go back to the church.

JA: Church? To the church? Okay.

AW: Mm-hm.

JA: And then there was—

AW: And that would be what—the repast. Yeah.

JA: Right. And they'd then have some food. Okay. So are there any—this is a general question for both of you. What are some of your beliefs about how individuals should be cared for after they are deceased?

AW: Well, my—she just asked about how should individuals be cared for after they're deceased. And I'll just share. It was a sort of sacred—I would say the word—that we were very careful when we went to pick up the body from the morgue, and we would—we had an entrance that was in the alley behind the funeral home. And yeah, we were very careful to back the hearse in and then lift the body out into the back of the funeral home. Yeah, that—so it was a careful, considerate process.

JA: Right. Was there usually one of you, or two of you, or how many people would go do that?

AW: Two of us. Just two, yeah.

JA: You know, I ask that question because McRae Funeral Home handled my mom's burial and cremation, actually. But just one person came to pick her up, and I wasn't in the room when that happened. You know, they—I was outside, but I thought—I was surprised that that one person could physically do the work, you know, so—anyway.

AW: Yeah. And—

JA: Anyways—were you going to say something?

AW: I think now that the—it's designed so one person can do it, because the cot can act as a support. It's more stable.

JA: Okay.

AW: Before, it was two people. You had to lift it up, lock it, and then transfer the body over. Yeah.

JA: Okay. So, anyway, we got off track. So you were talking about the level of respect that people brought to the body. So is there anything else you want to add to that, about burial practices, or cemeteries, or anything like that about, you know, respecting the dead? Any other words on that subject?

AW: Well, yeah, the—now, McRae was—I worked there, but my dad’s sister and her husband had a funeral home in Tampa. And then my best friend, Irving Sanchez, had a funeral home. Now, his father was well respected for restorative situations where—for example, I remember a gentleman was shot in the face with a shotgun.

JA: Mm.

AW: Or maybe—it might not have been a shotgun, but it was a high-caliber gun, and it destroyed quite a bit of his face. And so that took a lot—some extra restorative work. So, oftentimes, Mr. Sanchez would come over to McRae to do the exterior restorative work. He was a master at that.

JA: Okay.

AW: And what else? Miss McRae was a very caring person and made people feel comfortable. Mr. Sanchez was known for his oratorical skills, and there was a Greek poem—what was that poem? “Thanatopsis.”

JA: Right.

AW: Yeah, he would recite that. So yeah, there was an art, you know. You know, most of the vocal expression, the presentation at a funeral, is done by the minister once you got into the church, and then the closing was the funeral director, and that’s when Mr. Sanchez—well, that was his trademark to—yeah.

JA: Thank you for that information. I’m going to interview Irving in another couple of weeks, and so—

AW: Yeah, that was a ritual process that seemed to exist, that the funeral home folks almost had this sacred duty. At least as I look back, that’s how I would describe it.

JA: Okay. I think—

AW: Now, it’s tough work. I don’t know the statistics, but there were—you know, it’s hard work emotionally. And oftentimes, there—in the funeral business—there’s a tendency to try to manage your emotions, sometimes in not the best way. You know, self-medication, that kind of thing. But that’s another part that has some interesting components. And they’re taught to deal with

grief, at least the ones that go to school. So if you become a mortician or you get a license to run the business, then you learn some of those skills.

JA: Well, if you were working at the funeral home and picking up the deceased and things like that when you were younger, did you get training in how to deal with families, or did you just pick it up along the way? How did you know what to do and say?

AW: Yeah, now that part, I picked up. But no, I actually did not get training—interesting—and especially on the psychology of it, as I look back now. I was interested in anatomy and physiology, and that allowed me to have an appreciation for what was going on.

JA: Right.

AW: Yeah. And because my family, like—again, I would go stay with my cousins at Wilson Funeral Home in Tampa. The mysticism was—it was demystified for me, but most of the people in the community didn't feel comfortable around the funeral home, except coming to the funerals. And that gave me some mischief. I could use that to scare my buddies and things like that, and come up with some stories. And also they had an old hearse that had the siren on the floor, so if you pressed this button, it would run the siren. And it was a—the gear shift was in the column, in the steering wheel, so I got to drive that around.

JA: So this was a manual?

AW: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. So I got to drive that around a few times and have some fun.

JA: Well, tell me—now that you've opened this line of inquiry, you know I will ask: What were some of the naughty things that you did to scare your friends, or stories that you would tell?

AW: Well, I actually let them—they would hear stuff, and I would just let them talk. And I actually didn't make up stuff. Now, some people would venture in the back of the funeral home, where I could actually hide and then scare them. But those were people and their kids in the neighborhood. That was pretty much it.

JA: So you would jump out from behind a coffin or something?

AW: No, just from a—from inside the garage.

JA: Okay.

AW: When they were unsuspecting, yeah. They would try to look in and see, and that kind of thing. There was one experience where we really picked up—we picked up a person that was a very large person. And we were coming across the Howard Frankland [Bridge], and we exited on 4th. And when you turn that curve, the body slid off the cot, so we had to really work to get this person back up. And it was quite an ordeal. Yeah, that was—yeah, that was a tough one.

JA: That is interesting. So I'm going to kind of go into another line of questioning for a moment. What do you think should happen—how do you think that Oaklawn and Moffett and Evergreen, these cemeteries that have been covered up—how do you think they should be remembered today?

AW: Oh. Well, the first thing that comes my mind is the work that I've done with the Community Remembrance Project, where a marker was obtained and stands now in memory of victims of lynching. So a marker of some sort—some sort of designation that that was done, especially since I was—we had to move because of the highway. And again, it's not—you know, this is, what, 40 years later or longer that I'm just hearing that there was a cemetery there.

JA: Right.

AW: Now, you know, I don't—again, because of my age, I didn't see it, so—but I didn't realize that. And the names of those cemeteries—I had no knowledge that there were named cemeteries at that time. And I guess the first time this issue of cemeteries, but more about bodies, was when I heard the story in New York.

JA: Right.

AW: About the apartments being on top, or some building that was on top of the—a cemetery in New York. I believe it was New York, or either DC. And so yeah, I think that there needs to be some sort of reconciliation of how those remains were—now, in this case, it sounds like McRae transferred them in an appropriate manner. I don't know if there were any other bodies that were left unaccounted for.

JA: I think that is being looked into. I'm not part of the group that's doing that, but it is being looked into. So you would like to see a historical marker at minimum?

AW: Yeah, something that designates that that was there.

JA: Right. Okay. Can you ask your dad what he thinks about that? You know, what he thinks should happen at those sites.

AW: Now, she wanted to know what do you think should be done at the other places, in addition to the 19 bodies, to remember that cemetery? Because I didn't know that it was a cemetery there.

MW: Well, I—especially referring to the cemetery out in Citrus Park, and my home, and the lady who bought the property didn't know a cemetery had been there. So it would be my thinking—I think it best of all to build a monument—because the church still has property there—to build a monument with the names of all the people who've been buried there. I can't imagine a better way, because you can't find the bodies, and they was there, and now it's a horse—I mean, it's a horse farm now. So that's particularly _____ (??) in Citrus Park, but I knew the cemetery was there.

AW: What do you think about the cemetery that was on 5th Avenue or that there? Because, again, you remember the bodies that Monroe took. And they transferred those, but there might be other bodies there.

MW: I think all the bodies that were there were removed.

AW: Did you know that there were two other or three other cemeteries besides that one that was on that property?

MW: No.

AW: Okay.

MW: Never heard that.

AW: That's what she's talking about.

JA: Yeah.

MW: I never heard about that, just about the one.

JA: So, definitely at the one in Citrus Park you'd like to see some kind of monument. So I think maybe both of you are in agreement that some kind of monument or marker is appropriate, right?

AW: Correct.

JA: Right. Okay. And let me just clarify one other thing. So back in the day, in the early—and we'll finish up in just a minute. Back in the day, in St. Petersburg, there was McRae Funeral Home in St. Pete, and then where was Irving's father—what was the name of his funeral home?

AW: That was Sanchez, and that was on 9th Avenue and 22nd.

JA: Okay, 9th Avenue and 22nd South?

AW: Yes, and then there was Creal [Funeral Home].

JA: Okay. And where was that?

AW: Creal was on West Street—19th Street—no, hold on. No, no, it was—

MW: Seventh South.

AW: Seventh and 19th Street?

MW: Yeah.

AW: Seventh Avenue and 19th Street.

JA: Okay. And then were there any others that you can remember?

AW: Was there another funeral home in St. Pete during that time period? Not—no. Not that I can remember.

JA: And then the churches around—the churches that you remember being around that area were, of course, St. Augustine, and First Baptist was new there. I think there was that Traveler's Rest. Do you remember any other churches right in the immediate—I know there were a lot in the community—but right in the immediate area of the cemeteries?

AW: The other church, there on the corner of 5th Avenue and 16th Street, was what? Second Bethel.

JA: Second Bethel. Okay.

AW: And that was Enoch Davis, right?

ME: Yeah.

AW: That was Enoch Davis.

JA: Enoch Davis was the pastor there? Okay. Now, was—the Davis House is right next to the Perkins House. Is that correct?

AW: Was Mr. Davis right next to the Perkins House? Was Reverend Davis's house right next to Perkins? Yeah.

MW: I don't remember. I don't believe so.

JA: That's okay.

MW: There wasn't room for his house next to the Perkins.

JA: We can look that up in a city directory, so that will be good. Well, before we close out, is there anything that you, Andrew, or Mr. Mordecai would like to say about the cemeteries, or the process, or the project, or anything you want to add?

AW: The cemeteries on 5th Avenue, right?

JA: Right. Correct, correct.

AW: Anything else you want to say about that? Anything you want to say about Monroe or what he did? Or—

MW: I think he was knowledgeable at his profession, so I can't conceive of anything that I would improve on. So I think everything went out well.

JA: Okay. So in terms of that process of relocating the bodies, you think everything went very well. Is that correct?

MW: Yes. Right.

JA: Okay. And is there anything else you want to add about the cemeteries themselves or—

AW: Anything else you want to add about the cemeteries themselves?

MW: No, I think everything has been well covered, so—

JA: Okay, okay.

MW: Yeah, I think everything is well covered. If I have a question, but I think it's in order.

JA: Okay. Well, thank you very much for—thank you both, actually, for talking to me. I don't want to—since we've been here for an hour, I don't want to use up more of your time, but I really do appreciate this. It's actually been very helpful, and I feel like I learned a lot about the relocation process, also about the funeral home industry, and so it's been a very useful interview, and I thank you both.

MW: Thank you.

JA: Okay, I'll drop this paperwork off by your house, okay? Okay. Y'all take care and have a good night.

AW: You too.

JA: Okay. Bye-bye.

AW: Bye-bye.

JA: Bye.

Track 2 ends; track 3 begins.

Antoinette T. Jackson (AJ): You guys ready?

MW: I'm ready.

AJ: All right. All right. Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you so much for enabling us to come to your house and your home and do this interview. Like I told you, I was so excited when

I heard your interview the first time, I wanted to come back and do some follow-up questions with Julie.

MW: All right.

AJ: So my name is Antoinette Jackson. I'm a professor of anthropology at the University of South Florida, and I am working—leading the project for—

MW: You have to repeat sometimes because I got my hearing aid, but I still don't hear everything.

AJ: Yeah, yeah. I'm leading the project team, The African American Burial Ground Project, that Julie talked to you about a couple of weeks ago.

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Yes. So we're going to do additional conversation about that. And Julie is my colleague, and she's co-PI on the project with me, and so we're working together on this project team. So we are looking forward to talking to both of you again. And then this is a—I have another graduate student on the project that's doing the video.

MW: Okay.

AJ: So do you have any question for me before we get started?

AW: Do you have any questions?

MW: No. Hope I got the answers.

AJ: Okay. So let's start out. I know you did this the first time but could you both just introduce yourselves and just say your name and where we are and, you know, your date of birth, just to get started, just for this segment.

MW: Well, I'm Mordecai Walker. My home is in Citrus Park. I was born July the 4th, 1924, on Lake Evans. And I went to school at Citrus Park School for Colored. I went to junior high school at Booker T. Washington, Tampa, [and] Middleton High in Tampa. Then I went to Cookman on an NYA [National Youth Administration] program, and I was drafted then went to the Army. And then I came out of the Army, and then I went to Tennessee State, and I finished Tennessee State in 1951 with a major in agriculture and economics.

AJ: Okay.

MW: And my first job—well, I taught a couple years at _____ (??) High School in Clarksville, Tennessee, then I came back to Tampa. That's when they had the strawberry schools. I taught one year at Seminole Elementary in Plant City. That's when they had what they called the “strawberry school,” yes. We got a new superintendent. He cut that out. He said—they had two

sessions, strawberry school and the regular school. He said it would just be one school, one superintendent.

AJ: Okay. So I'll come back to some of that.

MW: Okay.

AJ: And I'll let Andrew introduce himself, and then we can go on for more questions with you.

MW: Okay.

AW: Andrew Mordecai Walker. And I was born here, in St. Pete, and—what else?

AJ: Where are we today and—

AW: Oh, we're here in St. Pete—St. Petersburg—at our house here in south St. Pete.

AJ: All right. So mainly I'm going to center on several things, mostly your growing up—where you—at your house here in St. Pete when you first moved here before this house, okay. And then we're going to talk about your churches, the Oaklawn Cemetery, and some other things like that.

MW: When I moved over here, or moved to St. Pete?

AJ: Yeah. When did you first move to St. Pete?

MW: In 1958. I got married in 1958, but we lived on 5th Avenue South. Then when the expressway came through, the expressway took priority there, so we moved over here. I had never heard of Driftwood. I was all the way to Tropical Shores, accidentally turned down Bay Street, and then circled around, and this house was for sale. So I was a real estate salesman then. I wasn't a broker at that time, so I bought the house through Jack Steely, who's my real estate broker.

AW: The house on St. Pete—did you—it was already built. You moved in or—you moved in with grandmother and grandfather on mama's side?

MW: On 5th Avenue.

AW: Yeah. So that house was already constructed?

MW: Yeah.

AW: Okay.

AJ: What address was that?

MW: Huh?

AJ: What address was that on 5th Avenue? What address? Do you remember?

MW: Twelve twenty-four—

AJ: Yeah, could you describe—

MW: Fifth Avenue South. Yeah.

AJ: Could you describe the area?

MW: It was a one-way street, yeah.

AJ: Okay, a one-way street. What else was—who were your neighbors, what was next door?

AW: Next door was Miss Jones.

MW: And McRae Funeral Home was on the corner. It was almost at the corner at—Walker, no relation, had a store right on the corner.

AJ: Okay.

AW: Yeah. That neighborhood, that was Campbell Park, but it was nicknamed Sugar Hill, right?

MW: It was Sugar Hill, then right to the southwest we had—called Forty Quarters.

AJ: Forty Quarters?

MW: Yeah. It was about eight houses, there were structures—I don't know what the guy made them—I guess he made them for low rent. But they called it Forty Quarters.

AJ: Could you describe—so they were two-story or—

MW: Two-story houses. Eight of them.

AJ: Eight of them. Okay.

MW: Yeah.

AJ: What else was near there?

MW: Huh?

AJ: What else was next to those? Was it a store, or a gas station, or a railroad track? What else?

MW: Well, Campbell Park School was further over. Forty Quarters was just a little section with those eight big houses there.

AW: Was that across the street?

MW: No, it was behind 5th Avenue—south of 5th Avenue South.

AW: Okay, south. Okay.

AJ: Behind your house—

MW: And it would have been north of Campbell Park School. Just a section of the block—it had those eight big houses.

AJ: Okay. And your house, how—could you describe your house? Was it two story, one story?

MW: Where we lived?

AJ: Yes.

MW: It was one story, three bedrooms, a one-way street.

AW: It was a ranch-style house.

MW: Red brick.

AW: Yeah, 5th Avenue was a one-way, with a hill coming down.

AJ: That's why they called it Sugar Hill? Was that the high point up?

AW: Yeah. Now, the name Sugar Hill came from what?

MW: I think that's just a slang they picked up, because the four or five—I won't say well-to-do, but the educated was right there. Dr. Ponder, Dr. Jones, Bill Williams. I would say—

AW: Dr. Leggett(??).

MW: Dr. Leggett(??).

AJ: All were around—

MW: All right there together, so I think that's why they called it Sugar Hill.

AJ: Who were your parents? You said you moved into a house that your parents owned?

AW: No, he moved into his in-laws.

AJ: Oh, in-laws. Okay, your wife.

AW: So he moved from St. Pete—I mean, moved from Citrus Park to St. Pete.

AJ: Okay, who was your wife?

MW: I got married in 1958, so I moved in my wife's parents home.

AJ: What was her name?

MW: Anna.

AJ: Anna? What's her maiden name?

MW: Anna Maria.

AW: Polk.

MW: Anna Maria Polk.

AW: Polk.

AJ: Polk, okay.

AW: P-o-l-k. And Andrew Polk and Mary Agnes Polk lived in that house.

MW: Yeah.

AW: And that's where you got married also, right?

MW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: That's where the wedding was.

MW: Yeah.

AJ: In the house?

AW: Yes.

AJ: Okay.

AW: Let's see, other things unique about the neighborhood. Anything you can remember that was unique about that neighborhood? It was a mixed neighborhood, so even though it was called Sugar Hill, I did not grow up distinguishing between people. Everybody played together. We

mingled together, especially at an early age. And I went to camp—I went to—there was a kindergarten and pre-school.

AJ: Okay. What was—

AW: And so that was—what was that?

MW: Allen's kindergarten.

AW: Who's that?

MW: Miss Allen ran—

AW: Okay, Miss Allen—Allen's kindergarten. And—

AJ: Was it a barber—did you—barbershops? There was gas—what was it—do you remember?

AW: Yeah, I could walk to the barbershop.

AJ: Do you remember the names of the barber?

AW: Who was—what was the name of the barbershop? Mr. Al and—

MW: James Cromer.

AW: Okay. And there was a neighbor behind us who sold what we called “flips.” You flip, you know, your frozen Kool-Aid cups—

AJ: Oh, right. But we called them different than that.

AW: —and you flip them up and suck at them.

AJ: We called them “huckabucks.”

AW: Yeah. That's what they look like, a huckabuck.

AJ: That's what they call them in Louisiana.

AW: Mango trees, avocado trees, chinaberries. You know, Campbell Park was a place we went and did recreation—tennis courts, swimming, and that sort of thing.

AJ: When he was—

AW: Well, not when—I don't think—the swimming pool wasn't there when he moved in. It probably came later, but Campbell Park rec center was there.

AJ: And did—insurance companies or restaurants?

AW: This was strictly—mainly residential. And so there was—the funeral home was one business on that street. There were two or three grocery—corner grocery stores. Corner stores where you got the one-cent coconut cookies and the honey buns and the Nehis and peanuts and—yeah.

AJ: Do you remember the name?

AW: Yeah. Floyd Grocers and Walker's Grocery Store were two right on down the street from us.

AJ: Were they connected to you? The Walker—

AW: No. Mr. Walker was a different—no family connection. He also was a cab driver, or a jitney guy. And that was it for businesses, and then we could walk—

MW: He also had a daughter named Anna. One or two times, they got the houses mixed up.

AJ: Okay.

AW: Yeah, yeah. I worked at the funeral home as I got older.

AJ: Yes. I'm going to ask you some more questions about the funeral home.

AW: The barbershop was maybe three blocks away.

AJ: And there was a church? I was listening to the—

AW: On that street? There was—well, the alley behind us, in the street, was Mr. [Frank] Cubby's—Reverend Cubby's church.

AJ: What was the name of the—

MW: Galilee.

AW: Galilee Missionary Baptist.

MW: Yes. Galilee Missionary Baptist.

AW: That was the closest church to us.

MW: That was right in the back. We lived on 5th Avenue. They were on the next street.

AW: And then down on the corner, on 5th Avenue, was a what we call a “sanctified” church, right? Apostolic or Pentecostal. Down at the corner by McRae.

MW: Yeah, you talking about—

AW: Yeah. I forget that name. And then up the corner was Enoch Davis's church, which was Bethel.

MW: Second Bethel.

AW: Second Bethel. And Second Bethel was across the street from the Perkins House. And the Perkins House, right behind it would have been that cemetery.

AJ: Okay. So in the Perkins House, you could walk to that? That was right around the corner, you said, from your house.

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Okay.

AW: We could walk up the street, about three blocks.

AJ: Up the street? Three blocks, okay. All right. And the Perkins House is still there today?

AW: Yes.

MW: Yeah.

AJ: So what was unique to you about the Perkins House? What was the Perkins House to you at that time? What did it mean? Who was it?

MW: Well, I don't know. I just liked the neighborhood and the way it was built, so I just—

AW: Who were the Perkins?

AJ: Yeah.

AW: Who were the Perkins?

MW: Well, the Perkins—he was the—well, he was the principal at Gibbs at one time. And he had two daughters. And that's where they lived. One of the daughters—McMurray—her husband ran a meat market on 5th Avenue and 9th Street.

AW: What else about the Perkins? You mentioned Miss McMurray. The other one was Miss Perkins—Louise or Lucy—

AJ: Eloise?

AW: Eloise. Yeah, yeah, Eloise Perkins. So it was a stately house, also like a Sugar Hill kind of large house.

AJ: Do you know the people living there now?

AW: He actually bought the house later.

AJ: You bought it?

AW: You actually bought the house later, and you sold it to the people that are in it now.

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Okay. When did you buy it, and when did you sell it? And you sold it as part of your business when you were a realtor?

MW: Let me see, I bought it—I moved here in '79.

AW: Eighty. Let's see—'90. That must have been '98 or so. In the '90s, right before the financial—

MW: Before the expressway came.

AW: No, no. Not before the expressway, before the financial drop. You bought it right before the financial decline, and you bought it because you hoped to get your fraternity to make it into a fraternity house. And that—

JA: Were they on 16th and 5th?

MW: But we did have—we had some meetings in it.

AJ: So what was your fraternity?

MW: Omega Psi Phi.

AJ: Okay. All right. And who did you sell it to?

MW: Huh?

AJ: Who did you sell the house to, after you—

MW: Scott. He's a white fellow. He's still got it.

AW: He's from Atlanta. And he wanted a larger house so he could bring his mother from Atlanta down, and they all live together.

AJ: So you don't know the last name of Scott at this point?

AW: Off the top of your head, what's Scott's last name? You always called him "Scott."

MW: I think Scott is his last name.

AJ: Okay. Okay, Mr. Scott. Somebody. Okay, well, I didn't realize that you actually owned Perkins House.

AW: Right.

AJ: But you never lived there? You didn't live in it?

MW: No, I never lived in it.

AJ: Okay. All right. So you gave me all the churches. So the churches were Galilee, the Pentecostal church. Any other church that you remember in that area? Any other church?

AW: St. Augustine's would have been—

AJ: That's what—yeah.

AW: Yeah, that would have been the other church.

AJ: Where was that one?

AW: That was behind the Perkins House.

MW: On 6th Avenue. In fact, it's still there. I think some sanctified group got it now.

AW: And then the Unity Church is—

MW: That's where St. Augustine was when we got married.

AJ: All right. Okay, so that brings me into the other part of the conversation: the Oaklawn Cemetery. Now, you could see the cemetery—from your house, or from where?

MW: The cemetery was right—the Perkins House is still there. The cemetery was running north—running east and west. And I imagine it was just about—they got rid of the cemetery—I said "got rid of"—to build some apartment houses there. They built the apartment houses, and before they got occupied, the expressway came through.

AJ: Oh, so no one ever lived in the apartments?

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Could you describe the apartments, and I'll go back and—

MW: Never lived in the apartment houses.

AJ: Could you describe them? Were they pink, or were they a certain color? How big were they? The apartments—could you describe them?

MW: They were two-story long block houses—I think there's four of them.

AJ: Oh, four?

MW: Uh-huh.

AJ: And what color? Do you know?

MW: At that time, I was thinking about seeing if I could become manager of them, but they never did materialize because the expressway came through and changed everything.

AJ: Okay. You didn't know the name of the—

AW: What were the name of those apartments?

AJ: No, that's okay.

AW: Not Royal Court.

JA: Laurel Park?

MW: I can't think of it now.

AW: I think Laurel Park was a little bit further, but yeah.

AJ: Was it Royal Palm?

AW: No, that's the name of a cemetery. No, not Royal—yeah.

AJ: Royal Court?

AW: What was name of the gas station that was right there on the corner?

MW: Johnson Service Station.

AW: That's right. Johnson Service Station.

JA: Which corner?

AW: The corner of 5th Avenue and 16th Street, where the skateboard place is now.

JA: Oh. So—okay.

AW: Is this the curve?

JA: Yeah. So it would have been—would the gas station have been on top of Moffett?

AW: On top of what?

JA: The cemetery.

AW: We're at the—

JA: This, of course, is a map from memory, so—

AW: Okay. Perkins, okay. This is 16th Street, and then this is 5th Avenue?

JA: Right.

AW: Right. It would have been right here. The gas station.

JA: So is the Perkins House further down?

AW: Yeah. It's a little alley right here, and then—yeah.

JA: Okay. All right.

AJ: So the cemetery—how big was it? Like, could you describe the cemetery? How big, approximately, was the area?

MW: Before they moved, I would guess it was about—it was a rectangle about 60 feet wide and about 100 yards long, narrow. And when the Monroe Funeral Home—he had the job of—

AJ: Relocating?

MW: Yeah, moving. Relocating, yeah.

AJ: Could you describe that day that they relocated the bodies? Did they—was it—what happened? Was it one day that you saw it? Did you witness anything?

MW: If I remember—I think—because he'd had hand labor. They didn't have machines.

JA: Yeah. But did you—what day was it?

MW: And they had canvas—see, there wasn't no vaults then. They'd dig them up and pull them up and put them in those canvas.

JA: Was it one day that you saw them moving or—

MW: It was probably about three days.

AJ: You watched for three days?

MW: Yeah.

AW: Did you watch it for three days, or did you just see one day?

MW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AJ: You saw all three days?

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Okay.

AW: And how did you happen to see all three days?

MW: I was staying right there, and I could see it. It was right down the street. The cemetery was where the brick house is now. The cemetery was right behind there—a rectangle.

JA: Where were you standing?

MW: And I used to drive when I—I was teaching at Perkins, so I used to come by it every day.

AW: Oh, okay.

AJ: Okay. So the days you were watching, you were at Perkins?

MW: Yeah, yeah. I was teaching at Perkins, so I would come by two or three times a day.

AW: All right. Perkins is different from the Perkins House.

AJ: Oh, okay, okay.

AW: Perkins—

MW: Perkins Elementary.

AW: Yes. Say the whole name: Perkins Elementary. Because it's the Perkins House, and it's Perkins Elementary.

AJ: So you saw it from Perkins Elementary, or—

AW: No, he would drive from work.

AJ: Okay, where were you standing when you saw—

MW: I taught at Perkins Elementary.

JA: So, what direction did you go to work?

MW: That was my first job over here. I had been teaching in Sun City, Hillsborough County, then I taught at Middleton, in Hillsborough County. Then Fred Burney—he was the principal—I wasn't certified in elementary, so he got a special permit for me to teach, because he wanted a man in each grade group. And he knew my wife's parents from way back. So he got me a—

AW: Coming back to the story—she's trying to get you to tell this like a story, all right. So you would get up in the morning, on the way to Perkins—would you drive by that site, or would you come back home and drive by it?

MW: It was a one-way street, so I would come back in the afternoon.

AW: Okay.

MW: Because, see, I came the other one-way streets. I came around them, and I'd go to Perkins. Then I came around there and turned down, went to go down, uh—

AJ: And so that's—

MW: I don't know if it was one-way in the afternoon when I'd come back down the one-way street.

JA: Did you go up 16th, or did you go up 22nd? Did you go up 22nd, or—did you go up 16th Street on 5th or—

AW: On the way to work.

MW: Yeah, because Perkins was on—

AW: Eighteenth and 22nd Street—18th Avenue and 22nd Street.

MW: Yeah, back behind those apartment buildings.

AW: Yeah. And so then, on the way home, did you come down 18th Avenue, or did you go down 22nd Street home?

MW: Yeah, 22nd Street to 5th Avenue.

AW: To 5th Avenue? And that would bring you right by the site?

MW: Yeah. Bring me right by there.

AW: Okay. Now, would you get out of the car and stop? Remember, she's trying to tell this as a story, okay. She's trying to get you to kind of recount this experience.

MW: No. I didn't—I don't remember any special reason I had to stop.

AW: Okay, but you—okay. What do you remember, as best you can? I know it's a long time ago.

MW: They had a hamburger place they called The Plowboy.

AW: That was years later. That was years later. That was years later. I remember that, and I don't remember seeing the cemetery. That was years later, because I used to go there. I used to ask to go there after church on Sundays. So going back and putting all this—you know, I know it's a long time ago.

AJ: Yeah, it was a long time ago.

AW: Did anything mysterious—I mean, it was kind of odd seeing—I'm thinking of the *Twilight Zone*. You know—

MW: Thinking about what?

AW: The *Twilight Zone*—you know, thinking of this funeral home has been given this job to go and get these bodies up. Did you ever go and stand and look down in the graves?

MW: No, no. I didn't—no, I didn't get that.

AW: So all your observation was from the car?

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Oh, okay. Okay. Were other people watching as well? Did you see other people watching what was happening?

MW: Yeah. I guess people didn't know what was going on. I guess they were curious about seeing these canvas whatever, and there are no bodies in them, and taking them up and taking them to—

AW: Lincoln, right?

MW: Yeah, Lincoln Cemetery.

AJ: But you saw it from the car, and you saw other people watching as well?

MW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I guess people didn't know nothing about St. Pete—what was going on here.

AJ: Yeah. And so when did you find out what happened? When did you realize what was happening? Did somebody tell you?

MW: I don't remember having a conversation. I guess it's just observation again.

AJ: Okay. So did you talk to anybody about the removing of the bodies, or did any other people comment about anything when that was happening any other time? Did anybody ever say anything to you about it that you recall? Just in casual conversation.

MW: I don't remember anybody special that I talked to.

AW: Did you talk to Monroe about it at all? Do you have any kind of—you just saw Monroe doing this work?

MW: No. I never had a conversation with Monroe about removing the bodies. No, we talked because, you know, the funeral home is right down there. We talked, but we never talked about removing the bodies.

AJ: Yeah. So after those three days, you never saw anything else happening at the—nothing else unusual happened at the cemetery?

MW: No. No, _____(??).

AJ: Okay. So that's all you remember about it?

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Now, I remember you said something about a church parking lot, and you were standing in the church parking lot. Did you see something from the church parking lot? You used to be able to—

MW: The Galilee was right behind—

AW: No, no, not Galilee. This would be St. Augustine's. If you wanted to look at the cemetery, you would look from what church to—what would be the best view?

MW: Take a look from where?

AW: Say you're at the Perkins House and you wanted to get as close to the cemetery as possible, would St. Augustine's be—would have been the best spot to look at that cemetery?

MW: No, I guess the Perkins House.

AW: Because it was up tall—it was high?

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Okay. All right. So did you know anybody who was buried at Oaklawn, or did you know anybody who knew—had any association with that cemetery?

MW: No, because it wasn't used after I came to St. Pete. They stopped using it. They just had to move the bodies.

AJ: Okay, so nothing else you can remember about that day. Did you see caskets? You saw headstones? Did you see anything like that?

MW: I can't recall anything right now.

AJ: Okay. But you saw a canvas, something with canvas? Was that the tent? You said canvas.

AW: No, these were body bags, right?

MW: Yeah, body bags.

AJ: Oh, the canvas was a body bag. Oh.

MW: It was body bags, yeah. It was body bags, yeah. I didn't know what they called them.

AJ: Oh, okay. So you saw some of those?

MW: Oh, yeah.

AW: Did they have—were they trying to be private about it? Were there—because she makes a good point. She thought you were talking about putting up canvas to stop the view.

MW: No, no. He had—I don't know—three or four men. I passed by them. I never stopped to go look, but I know they were digging up—and it wasn't in the vaults. They put those body bags and took them out.

AJ: And put them in a car?

MW: Yeah.

AJ: A hearse or—

AW: Hearse, yeah.

MW: Yeah.

AW: Was it a hearse?

MW: What's that? To move the—

AW: They would put them in the hearse and take them—

MW: Yeah.

AJ: But the casket itself, was it just left on the ground? Like, they opened the casket and took the body bag out? Like, I'm not—there were no caskets, just the bags?

AW: So what she's trying to—

MW: That was before the days of the vaults.

AJ: I'm just curious about—I'm just trying to—

MW: There wasn't any vaults, so it was just the wooden caskets. And they put them in the body bags and picked them up. See, there wasn't any vaults then.

JA: So were they in the casket, in the bag? Or just their body in the bag?

MW: Say what?

AW: Okay. The way you're telling it is a little interesting. Were the bags covering the casket, or were they covering the bodies? Or you don't know? Were you not close enough to see?

MW: Not really. I think—I said it wasn't no vault.

AW: Got you.

MW: And the wooden casket, I think, had rotted.

AW: Deteriorated.

MW: And they put them in the body bags. That's why they had to have the body bags.

AW: So that's your best memory?

MW: Yes. Yes, because —

AW: Without going and inspecting directly, that's kind of how you saw it?

MW: That was before the vault law came out.

AJ: Yeah, I got you. Yeah, that's interesting.

JA: And visceral.

AJ: Yeah. So the cemetery ground itself, what did it look like? It's trees? Lots of trees or just—what was the landscape? Trees?

MW: There wasn't any trees at all there.

AJ: Just flat?

MW: Just flat.

AJ: Okay. And was it clean or nice looking?

MW: Grave markers—it wasn't any big tombstones or nothing like that.

AJ: Really? Okay. But the graves were nicely kept, or lawn was cut and—

MW: Yeah. Just cut the grass.

AJ: Who cut it? I mean, do you know who cut it?

MW: I don't know who cut it, but it was kept cut. I guess Monroe hired somebody to cut it, I imagine.

AJ: Keep it up.

MW: Yeah.

AJ: Okay. All right, so that's helpful. I was just curious, because that is quite an oddity to see that which you described. So thank you. So just going back to your real estate business, what was the name of your real estate? You said you were a realtor at one point? A realtor?

MW: Yeah. Triple Rose Realty.

AJ: Triple Rose Realty? Okay. And your realty company was one that sold—you said something about sold a church? Which church did you sell to the city? Oh, you have a picture.

MW: I had a card.

AJ: Oh, a card.

AW: He's retired, and he's still carrying the card. Realtor emeritus now. He has a free membership. They gave him a free—he doesn't have to pay for—

MW: There's my card.

JA: I have one. Yeah.

AJ: Triple Rose. Thank you.

JA: He looks like you in that photo.

MW: That's a rose for the seller, the buyer, and the broker. Three roses at every closing. I called Tallahassee and asked was that a good fictitious name. They said no one had it.

AJ: It's all yours.

MW: So I got it registered.

AJ: So you said you sold First Baptist Church to the city?

MW: I joined First Baptist—married in—I joined First Baptist in '58.

AJ: Okay. First Baptist or First Institution—

MW: First Baptist Institutional Church.

AW: The official name. Most people just call it First Baptist.

AJ: Yeah, I see it on some records as—

MW: Right where—it's on 3rd and 6th, 3rd and 16th Street.

AJ: Okay, so that was your church?

MW: The city bought that, and that's when we—I was a realtor. And where First Baptist is now, there's four different people who own it, and the city owns the alley.

AJ: Oh, the city owns the alley?

MW: So, being a real estate broker, I was able to—I had to talk to each one of the four owners, that the city needs to vacate the alley. There's four different owners, and we had the cash money. And I told them, I said, you know, if the four of them didn't sell, it wouldn't do no good, because we had to have three acres to build a church on. But all four of them agreed. And I went to the city, and they vacated the alley. So that's where First Baptist is now, because you have to have three acres. The city required it. And the nearest three acres was way out—we looked at some

properties way out on 46th. But just lucky that they would get that location, which is a good location, where First Baptist is now: 30th and 3rd. And when the city bought, they paid us cash—\$778,000.

AJ: Seven hundred and seventy-eight. Yes. Wow.

MW: And we were able to build the church where First Baptist is now for \$550,000.

AJ: Okay. Who were the four families? Who were the four people who sold the plot? Do you remember the names?

MW: Name of who?

AJ: The families that sold the plot, the individual lots. You said it was four people, four groups. You remember?

MW: No. I know one was—one of them was a real estate—

AJ: Another realtor?

MW: —agent. I can't—no, I can't think of who owned that property.

AJ: Okay. Did you own or sell any other thing that was really important in that community? And what was the area called, anyways? Sugar Hill? And what other communities did you work in as a realtor? What other communities in St. Pete did you sell property? Did you—what was the communities called—

MW: No, I sold some property down on—

AW: We drove by one today on 22nd, 22nd Avenue and 16th Street, the house there.

AJ: Oh, it's still there?

AW: Yeah.

JA: That's a big house.

AW: You sold that house, right? Not the one around the corner, but on Trelain and 22nd.

MW: Then I had rent houses.

AW: Did you sell—who were some of the other people you sold—did you sell—whose houses sold to your customers, that you sold houses to?

MW: I can't—

AJ: That's all right.

MW: I can't think of it now. But I sold—I bought six of those old houses and had a fellow that renovated them for me, and I sold them again.

AJ: The old houses? What do you mean?

MW: Well, they were—the city had—they hadn't condemned them, but I kind of upgraded them.

AW: Where were these houses located?

MW: Uh.

AW: This is in Gas Plant, or someplace else?

MW: No, it was further down. Southside area.

AJ: Do you know anything about any houses near the railroad track or anything—any houses around the railroad track, or businesses around the railroad track?

MW: Say what now?

AJ: Railroad tracks. Did you know anything about houses or businesses along or near that?

AW: All right, the railroad track would have been over on the north—you're talking about Gas Plant?

AJ: Yes.

AW: What do you—what's the landscape? What's the scenery along the railroad track? I remember the railroad track because the circus would come into town on that railroad track: Barnum and Bailey. What else was around the railroad track?

AJ: And you're talking about near the Tropicana—

AW: Right.

AJ: That's when—that's why—

MW: At 5th Avenue and 22nd?

AW: No. Well, yeah.

MW: Yeah.

AW: No. No, 16th Street and 1st Avenue. That railroad track. That's where Barnum and Bailey would come in.

MW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AW: Okay. What else was along there? It would go along Webb—that went on the north side of Webb City, I believe. That was to the north side of Gas Plant. What else was along there? That was north of the church by, what, two blocks?

MW: There's a church over there. Then Brown had Better Way Cleaners. It was back in the back, over there.

AW: Okay. Not by the railroad tracks. That would have been two or three blocks over. Brown was on 3rd.

MW: Yeah.

AW: Okay, so 3rd, 4th. Wait, wait. No, it's decreasing. It would have been 3rd, 2nd, and then 1st.

MW: Yeah, yeah. It's a double block in there. It was 3rd. Wasn't no 4th Avenue. Then 5th after 3rd, then the big block and 5th Avenue.

AW: But we're going north on 16th Street. So 5th Avenue, 4th Avenue, 3rd Avenue, 2nd Avenue. The church was between 2nd and 3rd, right?

MW: Yeah.

AW: Okay. Was there a meat market?

MW: Yeah. Pinellas Meat.

AW: Across the street from the church?

MW: Yeah. It's still there.

AW: Still there, okay. Did the trains stop and make deliveries in that neighborhood, or did one of the tracks cut over in the Gas Plant?

MW: No, I don't remember a train stopping there. No.

AW: Okay. So the only time the train really was of significance was with major events like Barnum and Bailey.

MW: Yeah.

AW: Okay.

AJ: But those old houses—I was just trying to get the old houses that you're talking about. Were those the old railroad—where the rail—okay, this is a whole different type of house, okay.

MW: Say what? What did they say?

AW: That's all right.

AJ: All right. Do you remember anything about Tropicana Field when it first started to be built?

MW: Yeah. When they first started, the city built a—when they were buying the property, they built a little stage. And Corinne Freeman was the mayor. And Jack Highsmith—we donated a dollar each, as a token, to buy his property. But Corinne Freeman was the mayor, and Jack Highsmith was a deacon in First Baptist. So was I. So they had this stage there, so both of us—each one of us gave a dollar apiece as a token to buy First Baptist Church on 3rd Avenue.

AW: All right now. Something's missing in this story. Something is missing in this story. You got to have, like, the beginning—something is missing in the middle of that story. What's your point? You trying—this was trying to be funny? Was that—was it an experience where you were trying to make a joke out of what happened or what?

MW: No, no. Just telling it like it is.

AW: So, what's the point, though? You got two dollars—

MW: I called myself answering the question.

AJ: You did, you did. But I need more.

AW: Okay. So one day, you got the mayor to come over to the church? How did that even happen?

MW: Wait. Wait a minute now. Let me start at the beginning now.

AW: Yes. There you go. Start at the beginning.

MW: When the city was going to buy the Tropicana Field, that's when they had to build the stage and the platform.

AW: Oh, they were doing a press conference or something?

MW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: Okay. All right, so this was supposed to announce—

MW: Yeah.

AW: Okay. And so you pulled a couple of dollar bills out of your pocket and gave it to Corinne Freeman, and she gave it to you guys to—

MW: No, Corinne Freeman gave a dollar too. She was the mayor. And Jack Highsmith we gave those dollars just as a token. I don't know what the—I can't think of what the background [was], but it was a token to help purchase the land, help purchase First Baptist Church. They had built that stand, right there, on the corner—on 3rd Avenue and 16th Street.

AW: I think there must be something else to this story, because it's not making sense the way you're telling it, but it sounds like—

MW: I'm telling it like it is.

AW: Well, yeah, but that might be all you remember or all you saw. But I think there was a big—this is more like a prop. That's what I'm guessing. That they were trying to replicate—they were trying to stage an event, and maybe you didn't get the whole background of it. But what's another event that happened?

AJ: Anything else you remember?

MW: I don't know exactly—we completed the transaction.

AW: Did they give you the deed on that day that you had the—when you gave them the dollars, did they give you a deed? Did they take a picture of you guys doing that?

MW: You mean the people who sold the property? No, the title company did that. All I did was—

AW: I think there's some elements missing in this story.

AJ: So do you remember anything else that you want to share with us about that time, about the cemetery or about your neighborhood, or anything that you want to talk about at this point? I don't have any more. I'm going to ask Andrew a couple of things, but—I mean, I really learned—again, you knew more about the area. But do you have anything else that you remember? Did you fish? Did you have recreation? When you were growing up, what did you like to do in terms of recreation?

AW: Now, growing up—

AJ: I mean—sorry—after you moved to St. Pete and lived in your house, in St. Pete, in Sugar Hill, what did you like to do for fun?

AW: She asked you, “Did you go fishing?”

MW: No.

AW: Well, thinking about fishing, I learned how to swim—

MW: I remember taking you because you used to like to go fishing. We'd go out on—

AW: The Skyway and Tierra Verde.

MW: —Tierra Verde.

AW: Yeah, and then down to the pier.

MW: You used to like to fish.

AW: Yeah, yeah. But there was no fishing on Booker's Creek. And then down to the Spa Beach, and what is now called Demens Landing is where you taught me how to swim, right?

MW: No, I thought out at Walker's Lake.

AW: Okay, yeah, you might have started me out to Walker's Lake, but what I remember was actually learning how to swim down at the Spa Beach.

MW: Yeah?

AW: And also, that was called the Black beach. Or what was the nickname for it? That part of the—it became Demens Landing. What was it called before Demens Landing?

MW: I can't think of it. I'll think of it after a while. Yeah, it had a nickname.

AW: Right. And that's where I learned how to swim.

MW: You had to go across the bridge.

AW: Okay, no, you're getting—that's another story. The Black beach also was across the Skyway, right?

MW: Well, they had the Skyway colored.

AW: The Skyway colored.

MW: The Skyway beach for colored. After you go across the Skyway, on the left, about 150 feet, said "colored"—"Skyway beach for colored."

AW: Now, that's my first time hearing there was a designated area actually called "Skyway beach for colored." It was labeled.

MW: Yeah, it was labeled.

AJ: Oh, you saw a sign?

MW: Yeah. Yeah. It had “Skyway beach for colored.” And the colored are—because it was rocks—you couldn’t—there wasn’t no beach there. They had a designated—you could drive off the road, but it wasn’t no beach.

AW: Just like it is now.

MW: You had big old rocks and all that kind of stuff.

AW: Yeah, this was a jetty and that kind of thing. Like it was down—the Spa eventually became open to African Americans, but on the south side of the pier was where there was the Black beach, right? If you go to the pier, on the south side of the pier—

MW: Yeah, but you had to go over in a little bridge. I forgot what they called it, but you had to go—I remember the bridge going on to—I forget, but there’s a little area over there that—

AW: Well, now it’s called Demens Landing.

MW: No. It wasn’t—no, it wasn’t—

AW: Okay.

AJ: Were any of the other beaches labeled “colored,” or did they have a sign on any of the other beaches?

MW: Yeah, they had a sign, yeah. They used the word “colored.”

AW: Other beaches—for example, if you went to St. Pete Beach—first of all, when you moved here in ’58, you weren’t allowed to swim in St. Pete Beach, correct?

MW: No.

AW: Did they have signs, “whites only”? Was it understood, or did they have a sign saying “whites only” at St. Pete Beach?

MW: I don’t remember about on the beach, but I know on those benches on Central Avenue was for whites only, because I’ve got one of them out there.

AJ: How did you come to get the bench?

MW: When they—in ’69—when Lyndon Johnson—when they—’69 is really before integration really came. And they had a senior citizens building, and they had all those—those benches they had on Central Avenue, they piled them up there for anybody, for the scrap. I got five of them,

and I gave Earl Davis one. And I kept the one out there, and the others, I don't know what happened to them.

AJ: Wow. Okay. All right. So, again, do you have anything else to say? One more question I have about churches. Sorry, I have to go back. How many other churches did you visit and actually go to? Like, when you went to—did you visit different churches other than your own church—the church that you attended? Did you go inside or go to service?

MW: During that time?

AJ: Yes.

MW: I remember Second Bethel, what I call Reverend Foles(??) church, and another church on—see, First Baptist—see, my father-in-law and mother-in-law belonged to the First Baptist Church when we got married. And then—but I remember going to—see, I was a Baptist then, and I went to First Baptist—Second Bethel. That was Davis' church.

AJ: So you went there sometimes?

MW: Yes.

AJ: Okay, cool. All right. So do you have a question for me?

MW: No, I guess. No, I guess I—what are you going to do with this information? What's the—

AJ: That's a good question. We hope to tell the story—mostly about the cemeteries, and then also about the communities associated with the cemeteries. So we'll make sure you are okay with it before we tell it, okay?

MW: Okay.

AJ: Andrew, I'll go a couple more with you. So you were—when were you born? I mean, you were born in—

AW: Nineteen fifty-nine.

AJ: Yeah. And you grew up on—

AW: On 5th Avenue.

AJ: Okay, so the same residence, right? So can you describe the neighborhood for you at that time? What was around? What was in walking distance? What did you see? What schools did you go to?

AW: Yeah, I went to the daycare and the kindergarten—I forget the name of it.

MW: Allen's kindergarten.

AW: Okay, Allen's kindergarten. You were coming to get me and walk me home, or grand-daddy would walk me home, right?

MW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: I remember I would—every day, almost, I had holes in my pants because I was sliding a lot and that kind of thing.

MW: There was a preacher's name that had a place over there.

AW: I don't—yeah, I don't remember. But I would go to Floyd's Grocery Store and get those—

AJ: The huckabucks.

AW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And the pickles and the coconut cookies and oatmeal cookies and honeybuns, and—boy, I mean, all that sugar, goodness gracious. And then at McRae Funeral Home, I would stop and get a Coke because she had a Coke machine. So they treated me, yeah, to a Coke. So I was running up and down the street as a kid.

AJ: Do you remember about any of the other neighbors?

AW: Yeah. Miss Jones was next door. There was Miss Jones next door, and then also Jones across the street, right?

MW: Yeah, Miss Jones.

AW: Who was next door?

MW: Miss Mays.

AW: Miss Mays. And she had a little cat.

MW: She was an old lady.

AW: Yeah, with a cat.

MW: Single lady.

AW: Yeah. And we had the avocado tree in the backyard, and we climbed that a lot.

MW: In fact, the avocado tree is still standing there.

AJ: Now where?

MW: On 5th Avenue, right?

AW: It's on 5th Avenue, yeah.

MW: The only tree in there.

AJ: Really? You've seen it lately?

JA: Yeah, it's still there.

AJ: Yeah? Wow.

AW: Now, I'm not sure if that's the tree that was in our yard. I think—see, I'm not sure. You believe that's the same tree that was in our backyard.

MW: It wasn't in our backyard, it was in the Mays backyard.

AW: Okay. All right. Got you.

MW: It was Miss Mays, but it wasn't our backyard.

AW: Because I remember that. It didn't look like our tree. But yeah, we took a picture a couple years ago—Tom and I. And there was one avocado—

MW: They were a one avocado family.

JA: That was Miss Mays's tree, not y'all's.

AW: Exactly. Exactly.

JA: The plot thickens.

AJ: What else do you remember? Gas stations?

AW: Dunmore Avenue, Elmore Avenue, the flip lady, getting pickles and the flips. Crabs—the crab place was where the gas station was. And then there was a couple of crab places, so we would go up to the rec center—Campbell Park Rec Center—and then for lunch, go over to the crab shop and get crabs. Yeah. So the pear trees, mango trees, a lot of fruit, those kind of things. So I hung around the funeral home a lot. Yeah, and then next door, when I was growing up, was Reverend McAdams. Reverend McAdams lived next door, and he was a minister.

AJ: Which church was he in?

AW: What church was he—

MW: Presbyterian.

AW: Okay. He was in the Presbyterian church, he and his wife, and next door. They were originally from South Carolina, right?

MW: Who's that now?

AW: Reverend McAdams. McAdams was from South Carolina, I believe.

MW: Yeah, South Carolina.

AW: So I used to go in and out of houses, visiting people. Just—yeah, it was a free-flowing neighborhood. Beaver, or Calvin—

MW: Calvin, yeah. His nickname was Beaver. I don't know why they called him Beaver.

AW: Right, right, right. So he was one of my friends. David Williams was a friend. Donnell Stewart(??) was a friend.

AJ: Are these folks still around the area, or—

AW: I think—well, David Williams moved—yeah, he's here. He's around the area. Calvin used to work for the St. Pete *Times*. It became the *Tampa Bay Times*, so he's still, I think, with them or probably retiring. Donnell became a policeman. So he was a trumpet player. His brother had racecars. You know, just get these old Chevys, you know, and put the big wheels on them and all of that, and so we looked up to him. Because they would drag race down 5th Avenue. Yeah, and—

AJ: So what years were that, about, that you're—like, what year?

AW: Those were probably—I was born in '59, so that was probably like '65 through '70s. Yeah, those were the soul music days. Yeah.

AJ: Did you go to concerts or—

AW: They would have—the rec center would have some concerts. Did James Brown come to the rec center?

MW: Who's that?

AW: James Brown. Did he come to Campbell Park?

MW: He came—there used to be a place on 16th Street, the Roseland. It was a dance hall—the Roseland—right by where the post office is now, on 16th Street. Yeah, that was James Brown because I went to see him there.

AW: Yeah. Growing up—well, early on—playing school was—_Robin Stewart_ (??) Donnell Stewart's oldest sister, was the teacher, and we were the students. We did that kind of thing. And I remember hitting the baseball. We played baseball in the alley behind the house, and I hit the— or either threw the ball into the church window and broke the window and—

AJ: Which church was that?

AW: On record, that was Galilee Missionary Baptist Church. I would go up to Campbell Park during the summer, and we played basketball and tennis. And there was a—we had a dance group, and so I joined the dance group. I guess I was the only—wait, there was another guy. There was two of us, and the rest were girls, so they had to fit us into the presentation for the end of the summer program. So Mahala(??) was a dance instructor. I remember that name. But also at Campbell Park was where—it was a Negro League, minor league baseball team that—do you remember the name of the Negro League baseball team that played at Campbell Park? But yeah, they were there.

MW: James Oliver, I think.

AW: Yeah, Oliver. Mr. Oliver's team.

AJ: Okay.

AW: Did any of the famous Negro League players come over there?

MW: I don't remember now—that would have been before I came to St. Pete.

AW: Okay. But they were a minor—like Grapefruit League of the Negro Leagues, right? They weren't a real—they weren't in the main Negro League circuit.

MW: Who's that?

AW: Oliver's team. Or was he?

MW: Yes. Yes, the main Negro League, yeah.

AW: Okay. All right. I know over in Tampa, that's where—

MW: The Kansas City Monarchs and—

AW: They came over to Tampa.

MW: —the New Jersey—yeah.

AW: But they didn't come to St. Pete?

MW: I wasn't living in town. I was living out in the country then, but they might have. I don't remember. I wasn't living in St. Pete then.

AW: Well, I guess they did, because Miss Ponder used to host Negro League baseball players, right?

MW: Miss?

AW: Miss Ponder.

MW: No, it wasn't Miss Ponder, it was Bill Williams.

AW: Bill Williams hosted who?

MW: Kept Negro—James Black. One of the first Black baseball players.

AW: Wait, wait, wait now. Are we talking Negro League, or are we talking about the majors?

MW: The major leagues. James Black was the first—

AW: After Jackie Robinson?

MW: They stayed downtown, and he couldn't stay down there.

AW: "They" being the white players.

MW: The white players stayed downtown, and he stayed there at Bill Williams's.

AJ: And Bill Williams was your neighbor?

MW: Yeah. And Juanita Johnson used to cook for them.

AW: Okay.

AJ: That was another neighbor?

AW: Yes. That was a good friend. That was my godmother.

AJ: Okay.

AW: So who—besides James Black—did Jackie Robinson come through? Bob Gibson?

MW: No. That was before Jackie Robinson's time, I think.

AW: No, it couldn't have been before Jackie Robinson's time. No. It had to be after, because Jackie Robinson integrated—yeah. So it had to be after.

MW: That was '47, when Jackie Robinson started playing.

AW: Right. But if Jackie Robinson was already in the majors when—what you're talking about is Black baseball players who were in the major leagues—not the Negro League, they're in the regular majors.

MW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: Do you remember any of them, besides James Black, coming there? But—okay, do you remember—you don't remember the names?

AJ: He doesn't have to worry about that.

AW: Okay, that's good.

AJ: Yeah, so anything else for you? Like, you worked at the funeral home. I think that was the last thing I brought up. You worked at McRae how long? When did you start? And—

AW: I started probably in seventh grade. Yeah, when I could really work. So I started off washing cars and going out to the cemetery, to Lincoln Cemetery, and cutting grass.

AJ: Okay. And what was the condition of Lincoln? What year, what years are you talking about, and what was the condition of the cemetery in general? Lincoln Cemetery.

AW: I mean, we kept it up pretty well, especially during the summer. We were out there every day cutting grass. Yeah, it was in pretty good shape then.

AJ: Oh, go ahead.

AW: But I was kind of in between with growing up. That was during the Black movies like *Shaft* and the kung-fu movies—Bruce Lee and all that stuff—and I would walk down to the State Theater, which is back open now as some other thing. And they had concerts there, too. Yeah, but the funeral home during the '70s up until, you know, I went to college.

AJ: And then I heard on the last interviews you were driving. You used to go pick up bodies as well or—

AW: Yeah, I got one point—yeah, as I got older, I could drive the hearse. And this was a—stick was in the column, like a three speed, and then it had like a little pedal you could push and that—you could make the sound of an ambulance. So yeah. But yeah, I would go with them to pick up bodies and—yeah.

AJ: So which churches? So you didn't hit a lot of churches, and—what, you went to people's houses, or you also went to—

AW: Before my time, they would pick the bodies up directly, you know, if it was just a customary death. But we would go to the morgue to pick up the bodies. Most of the funerals were done at the local churches, so yeah, I would—you know, we would visit.

AJ: But did you have to deliver the bodies to the churches on the day of the funeral?

AW: Yeah.

AJ: Okay.

AW: Yeah, as I got older.

AJ: Okay, so which churches did you actually—

AW: I mean, First Baptist. Yeah, all of those churches.

AJL You can name some, though.

AW: Yeah, it's hard for me to remember. I mean, there were a few outstanding experiences.

AJ: I heard some of the stories.

AW: Yeah, picking up bodies, and bodies coming off of the gurney. We would pick the bodies up and then bring them in the back of the funeral home and that kind of thing. Yeah.

AJ: So how many people worked at the—like at McRae, did he have more than one place?

AW: So there was Miss McRae—Mary McRae—who had been married to the owner, and the other co-owner was Monroe.

MW: Monroe, yeah.

AW: Yeah. So I think the three of them owned it together. Edward McRae was Mary's husband. He had passed on by the time I got of age to remember. And so it was Monroe and Mary. Ben Johnson—I remember him. Willy Whiting and a couple of other—Johnny Whitehead. Those guys worked there. And yeah, so like on a Saturday, I would be there pretty much all day. You know, in the morning, getting everything prepared, washing the cars and that sort of thing. They would have gone and maybe had a wake on a Friday night then the funeral on Saturday morning. Saturday afternoon—you know, I'd—we'd go pick up the family. I was driving one of the cars, just more of—hospitality was one of the key components—helpful. Dealing with the flowers, that kind of thing.

JA: Did Irving work there then?

AW: No, Irving had Sanchez Funeral Home.

JA: Okay, so I thought that he might have worked there as a teenager since that was his—

AW: No.

JA: Oh, okay.

AW: Yeah, his father had another business, and that's—we were friends because of that. And then his father was an expert in restoration.

JA: Yeah, that's right. Now I remember.

AW: Yeah, so one case where there was a shotgun altercation, I remember that, where he had to come in and do that.

AJ: I'm sorry. It's getting late. I know. So I want to—

AW: Oh, I'm good.

AJ: Oh, okay. But one final thing I want to say. You were around when they relocated—when you had to move because of the interstate, right?

AW: Yeah, so in 1980 I was in the University of Florida, in Gainesville. So finally, I came home, and they were in the process of moving.

AJ: And where were you living when you said “came home?”

AW: I came home from Gainesville.

AJ: Okay, back to—

AW: To 5th Avenue, yeah. But prior to that, the highway had come through, and so we were waiting for quite a while there to move. But even then, the team was not official. You know, there was this promise of having a baseball team, and it wasn't until years later—I was still away from home—that they finally signed a baseball team. So the idea was to build it and they would come, and it took quite a while.

AJ: And how did you get notified that you had to move? Did they buy the properties from you, or how did that whole thing happen?

AW: They did eminent domain.

MW: Yeah, the city bought—we had to negotiate because they had to buy the house. At first, they had offered us about \$43,000 for a three-bedroom brick house. And their lawyer—so for about six weeks, they had a Black lady in charge of—I can't think of her name—of negotiating to buying your property. So after school, about three weeks, I would go to the office. She said, “You could sue, and they'll pay for the lawyer.” She said, “Why don't you go on and sue us?” I

said, “It’s still going to be your lawyer, so why can’t we just go and negotiate?” So I got a CPA to—but I finally got—

AW: You got a CPA to do what?

MW: To appraise the house. And see, he went from \$43,000 to—oh, it was much more than they had promised, and then they had to give me more money. They gave me the salvage rights to the house. So it had those special slate shingles, kind of expensive. I sold them to a company, and we—everything there, I sold it to some company that—and all the bricks, the plants, everything.

AW: So you—they started off with one price—how many—how often did you go down to the city to try to negotiate a better price?

MW: I went every afternoon.

AW: You went every afternoon for how long?

MW: About three—

AW: For how long? How many—how long did you go every afternoon?

MW: About three weeks.

AW: Three weeks of every afternoon? So you wore them out?

MW: Yeah.

AW: Like they said in the Bible.

MW: Because she said—because she got tired of bargaining. She said, “Why don’t you go on and sue, and we’ll pay for the lawyer?” I said, “No, just give me a fair price.”

AW: Okay.

MW: She said, “You overbilled.” I said, “You got to”—we had added an addition to it. A four bedroom, two bath.

AW: Three baths.

MW: Yeah, and we had a special bathroom built. I said, “We’re just going to—I don’t want to sue. Just go on and give me a fair price.” But they gave me salvage rights.

AW: So in addition to the final price you negotiated, which was more—at least double what they offered?

MW: Yeah.

AW: Okay. So you negotiated that, then you—in addition, you negotiated salvage rights for the property?

MW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: Okay, so you were able to sell off and make a profit off of that?

MW: Yeah, off of that. Yeah.

AW: Okay. And then you were able to bring the bathroom from the house over there over here?

MW: Yeah, it's over there now.

AW: Yeah, so there's one piece of this house that was added on. And whatever you could bring, you brought over here?

MW: Yeah.

AW: Okay. So that's why you were industrious in making that happen.

MW: Yeah.

AW: So your perception of the benefit to you, in moving over here, is probably different from other people. Because other people probably didn't navigate all of that, so you came out—

MW: Yeah, by being a broker.

AW: Yes.

AJ: You knew.

AW: And the story was, when you came to close the deal here, the people were shocked when you walked in because your name was Mordecai, which is a Jewish name.

MW: Yeah, and they—in fact, it wasn't legally, but they really—there wasn't no Black on Driftwood. My next door neighbor told me that. So if my name had been like Charlie Brown or something like that—but they said, “Mordecai?” When I walked in there, she was shocked. In fact, she walked out the room and came back in there.

JA: Oh, that's fabulous.

MW: Yeah, she came in there and saw Mordecai, she walked out of the room. She looked so disappointed.

AW: Did you already sign the paper?

MW: Yeah, yeah. Everything.

AW: The cat was out the bag at that point. Out the bag, yeah.

AJ: So how did you—

MW: Because really, I had never heard of Driftwood. And we knew we had to move, so I was going to Tropical Shores because I had a friend who lived down there and liked Tropical Shores. But somehow, we turned too quick and came down here—no outlet—and looked up and saw a sign, “For Sale.” So that’s when I went into—

AW: Went into action. Went into action mode then.

MW: Yeah.

AW: They did some teamwork then. What did Mama say when she saw the house?

MW: “Let’s check it out.” She’s the one [who] noticed it was for sale. And it had one cracked window, right there by the front, and they said, “We can’t close today.”

AW: Oh, they tried to hold the closing out because of that?

MW: Yeah.

AW: Because of the cracked window.

MW: One cracked window. I said, “No.” So I called the window man. They closed it for two o’clock.

AW: Oh, you were closing that morning, and then you went and took—they said you couldn’t close, and then you said “no”?

MW: One cracked window. I wanted to go and close it. So we closed that afternoon.

AW: Okay.

AJ: How did you feel about having to move? Like, from your original house to here? Like, being forced to moved?

MW: Well, really, I liked 5th Avenue. But I wouldn’t swap this location. No other location in St. Petersburg, including Pasadena, is anywhere identical. See, I don’t think a car has passed by since you’ve been sitting here. It’s nice and quiet. And Driftwood has been a historical designation.

AJ: Yes.

MW: They have a Driftwood parade every year.

AW: Yeah, so he's the honorary—I think he likes that more than anything.

AJ: So how did you feel when you heard that because of the development, you had to—people had to move and be relocated and all that? Did you have any—

AW: The first thing now—I mean, at that point—

AJ: You didn't? Okay.

AW: Yeah, at that age it was more of “What's going on?” And so I would say sad looking back.

AJ: Right.

AW: I felt it was such a long a time before they got a team. So hindsight, like, why it took all this time. And now, looking back, and looking at the history, and looking at the so-called promises that were made—so I'm looking back at it, and that's where I'm coming from now.

AJ: Yeah. And what are you thinking about it now?

AW: Well, it's a dream deferred, you know. Sure, we came out great on paper. But community-wise, it—you know, there was a community. There were communities there. Yeah, I'm not sure what would have happened to that community going forward. If it had remained, there were pockets that would have been challenging.

AJ: And what do you think—I know you answered this for Julie—but what do you think should happen now in honor of that or in memorialization of those neighborhoods themselves?

AW: I hadn't thought about it until I, I think, we talked last time. But yeah, some kind of marker about this neighborhood being there. Now, the marker for the remembrance of lynching is right on that same area. Yeah, I read the article, and it seemed like one model makes sense. Yeah, I don't know. Some sort of designation or marker of what used to be there. And then, as much as possible, something that a lot of people could benefit [from] and use. Yeah, I didn't get into public health until later. I would imagine there probably were higher levels, or higher illness—certain illnesses of people there that we didn't know about. Certain illnesses, certain types of cancers being in the Gas Plant area. I'm assuming—now that was a gas plant, but that was not petroleum gas, right? It was—

MW: It was also—I guess there'd been a leak through the years. That gas—when they tore that building down, they had to haul the contaminated soil way over in Hillsborough County to a special dump, because the soil was contaminated. So the health problem, too, that—nobody ever mentions that. But see, we stayed right there on that contaminated soil for a long time.

AW: So again now, that's positive to get people out of that.

MW: Yeah.

AW: Yeah. So—

MW: I guess we had gas—I don't know how long they'd been using that gas tank there. Evidently, there must have been some seepage somewhere that contaminated that soil.

AW: What kind of gas? They called it a gas plant. Was it petroleum? Or was it a storage for motor vehicle gas, or was it—

MW: No, it was storage for petroleum. Yeah, the gas plant? Yeah. It was a big tank where they stored it.

AJ: A couple of them, right?

AW: Yeah.

AJ: Did you used to live in Tampa, or do you know anything about Zion Cemetery in Tampa?

MW: About what?

AJ: Zion Cemetery in Tampa.

AW: Robles Park [Village].

JA: Yeah. Do you know about that?

AW: Did you know the Zion Cemetery?

MW: No. I just know about the cemetery at Citrus Park.

AJ: Okay. So maybe they had another Walker. Somebody thought it was you.

AW: Now—

MW: A cemetery where? In Tampa?

AJ: Yeah. Did you know anything about any—

MW: Well now, we had a problem—I won't say it's a problem, but Citrus Park School for Colored was here. And about 200 feet, the school probably joined the cemetery. And there, by the cemetery, there was a lake. After three or four ownerships, the cemetery started getting smaller and smaller, and then—because I went to the Army, I went to school, and I came back in nine years, and the cemetery was gone. And it's still gone, so they—the case hasn't been settled now yet. A lady bought it and made a—they call it the Horseshoe Farm, where she raises horses.

AJ: Okay, that's something else. Okay. Yeah, so it's a different place.

MW: Yeah. Mm-hm.

AJ: Okay. Well, I really thank you for your time, and for all the good information this time around, especially even more additional stories. That's very helpful. You know, add to the interview that Julie did already, so it's very helpful. When we start slicing the videos and using the interview, we'll definitely show it to you and share it with you guys before we disseminate it.

AW: Oh, sure. Yeah, yeah.

AJ: But I really thank you for your time. It was really fun.

AW: Yeah, we better sign these so you can actually have them.

end of interview