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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
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[Transcriber's Note: For most of the interview, a radio or television set is on in the background, making some words difficult to understand.]

Cheryl Rodriguez: A lot of the things that you're telling us are in the book¹, right?

Bettye Davis: Yes.

CR: Okay. And I can't remember what we did, uh—

Susan Greenbaum: Well, we'll manage. (laughs)

CR: Yeah, we will. I'll remember. A lot of things you're saying I'll remember. But it sounds as if he really employed a good number of people. He provided jobs.

BD: On Central [Avenue] I remember him having like a cook, a chef cook. My mother also cooked. And then he had waitresses. Uh, he had barmaids. And some of the barmaids—um, Sadie Martin, I think, and Bar—where is she living?

CR: Oh, yeah.

SG: In Plant City?

BD: Plant City—

CR: She still—used to (inaudible) the mayor.

BD: Her sister was one of my father's barmaids.

¹ Davis wrote a book about her father, called *My Father, Lee Davis*. Mr. Davis owned a number of businesses, including Lee's Pool & Billiard Parlor, the Paradise Bar & Lounge, and Lee's Laundromat.

CR: Oh, (laughs) that's interesting.

BD: (laughs) And I managed to see a lot of the people that used to work for my father. They're still alive.

CR: Uh huh. That's really interesting. So, when he realized that Central Avenue was going down, he moved to Twenty-Second [Street].

BD: Twenty-Second. Um hum.

CR: And what happened after that?

BD: He stayed on Twenty-Second till he retired and he sold his places, I think, starting in like 1970. He didn't want me in the bar business. He said, "No, you don't have any business in the bar business." So he sold the bar. But he kept the rest of the buildings. I just got rid of the rest of the buildings a couple of years ago.

CR: Um hum, um hum. What's your understanding of why Central actually—other than the fact that—you know, urban renewal, and—

BD: Um hum.

CR: —people leaving? Did you—

BD: It started off when—

CR: —think that there were some other reasons why?

BD: Okay, black businesses started going down. We had integration that come through. It started, and so a lot of people said, "Oh, well, I could go out on Dale Mabry [Highway] to different stores and different places, so let's go there." And that's what they started doing, and the black businesses really started suffering from that, cause you didn't have people saying, "Well, I'm going back and stay, spend my money in the black area."

CR: Right.

BD: And they started going other places. That's what happened.

CR: Yeah. And I guess the newness—

BD: And then Central Avenue, they want to tear everything down anyway in that area. They want to just start everything over, you know, make it a park. I think that's what they put there. (laughs)

SG: There were people who were staying. Were they—

BD: That's my dad. He did not want to close up his poolroom. (laughs)

SG: Right, right.

BD: He was one of the last people to sell his land. I think Mr. [Moses] White² held out for a long time, and they gave him—he was the only one I know got a large sum of money for his land on Central Avenue.

CR: The other people didn't?

BD: The other people didn't. They got like maybe twenty thousand or thirty thousand dollars at the most, but I think he got way more than that.

CR: Uh huh, uh huh.

SG: Were people hoping, do you think, that it would reverse itself, or that—for example, there was a proposal to use the money from urban renewal to fix up businesses, rather than just tear things down. And they actually had a commission and committees, and went through at least the motions of talking about that.

BD: They had the motions and everything, and they did not do anything. They just—to me they just came through and said, "Well, we got these people's land. We're gonna just pay them for it and get 'em out the way." And that's exactly what happened. Then after that, a lot of the people didn't have money to go any place else or relocate. I think Mr. White was able [to relocate]. He went on Main Street.

SG: Right.

BD: And he opened up a Cozy Corner on Main Street. But it used to be another man that had a Cozy Corner, also; I think he opened up on Thirty-Fourth Street for a while. Then your black bars—my father was the only one that opened up another bar on Twenty-Second Street. And then you had the bar that's over in West Tampa now. I think it was the Zanzibar—well, I know Zanzibar there.

CR: Zanzibar, um hum.

BD: And then you have Grace's Place. But how many more do you have?

CR: Right.

BD: There's no more.

CR: Um hum.

² Owner of the restaurants Cozy Corner and Palm Dinette.

BD: And now it's only black—owned license. I think you have Bernard, Jordan, and who else? I can't remember exactly who else now that really owned their own license. I think Grace still own her license on her site. But other than that, everything else is like, you know, there's no other black people owning any liquor license at this time.

CR: What do you think the role of city council was? And what happened on Central?

BD: On Central?

CR: Um hum.

BD: Same. They just said, "Well, we'll take the businesses." You know, "Give us the land. We'll buy it from you." And they just, like, used—you remember the row houses they used to have right off of Central?

CR: Um hum.

BD: Well, they went through and they got rid of all of those, and they put the projects there.

CR: Right.

BD: So, of course they were gonna come back and say, "Well, we gonna get rid of these buildings." Cause a lot of the buildings were old. People didn't really keep 'em up. So I think that was one of the reasons they wanted to condemn everything, get rid of it. Fire marshal; it wasn't up to code. When I was a little girl I remember the wooden—they didn't have sidewalks. They had—either it was dirt in front of your building. He had like a little wooden—

CR: Um hum, planks.

BD: —planks that you walk on, you know, and that was it.

CR: Yeah. Did you feel like, um—or did anybody around you feel as if blacks were supportive of—I mean, did blacks have a voice in—?

BD: No. They didn't. I don't remember any of 'em saying anything about they had a voice. I know Mr. White, he was fighting to the end, to try to save Central Avenue.

CR: Um hum.

BD: And he and my father was the only two that was holding out, you know, on their property. Everybody else just gave up and said, "Oh, well, forget it." They tore everything down. You remember the cab stand they had on Central?

CR: Um hum.

BD: Used to have your own little black cab stand. Now you have only Yellow Cab, whatever else, but it's not black-owned.

CR: Um hum.

BD: So, you know.

CR: You know that in our project, we're going to highlight certain businesses.

BD: Um hum.

CR: If you were going to do something like what we're trying to do, which—what businesses do you think were among the most—the more popular ones on the walk?

BD: On Central?

CR: Um hum.

BD: Um, Mr. White's business.

CR: Um hum.

BD: My father's poolroom. (laughs)

CR: Yeah, that was real popular.

BD: Yeah, cause they used to stay packed all the time. They used to play dominos in the back, and the men would always go over to shoot pool.

SG: Was there music playing in—?

BD: They had jukeboxes.

SG: In jukeboxes.

BD: Um, Mr. White had the Peppermint Lounge [Pepper Pot Restaurant], I think, at one time, cause he kept renaming everything over in that area, you know. I can't remember exactly. I know I think they had the Peppermint Lounge, and he would bring in entertainers all the time.

CR: Yeah.

BD: They would have entertainers. And at the Pyramid Hotel, they would have entertainers to come in sometime and sing. Who were the people—like Sam and Dave, and they had different ones—

CR: I heard that Ray Charles—

BD: Ray Charles, yeah. Ray Charles was always on Central, I think, whenever he would come in town. Uh, Bobby “Blue” Bland I think was in town, and just—B.B. King. People like that.

CR: So the poolroom and Mr. White's place—

BD: Mr. White's place. Another nice restaurant was the, uh—the Harris had a real nice restaurant—

CR: Yeah.

BD: —cause I remember the inside of there; it was real nice. At the Harris restaurant.

CR: Yeah, I did an interview with Mrs. Harris. She's very nice.

BD: Oh, okay. Um hum. Arthenia [Joyner]'s father was popular. The Cozy Corner.

CR: Cozy Corner.

BD: The hot dogs. Oh, I mean, it was like I couldn't wait to get out of school. I wanted a hot dog from Cozy Corner every day, or either a chicken wing. You know I had to have it. (all laugh) And then the Greek Stand, because it was always open. And they had the greasiest sandwiches in the world, but you would have lines around that building.

SG: (laughs)

BD: I remember that, cause my mom used to send down for a ham sandwich. Although we had a restaurant, she wanted a ham sandwich from the Greek Stand. So you have to put the Greek Stand in there. That was like, uh—it's a place in Atlanta that has little greasy sandwiches now, but it reminds me of the Greek Stand. (laughs) It stays packed all the time. People used to stay on that corner, and (inaudible) lines at night.

CR: It was just a little—

BD: It was just a little tiny place.

CR: Um hum. Yeah. Everybody that we've talked to mentions the Greek Stand.

BD: The Greek Stand, yeah. They was famous for—it was like a Cuban sandwich, but it was a little different than a Cuban sandwich. They'd make sandwiches there. It was—they were really good. Everybody remembers the Greek Stand. (laughs)

CR: Yeah, everybody does.

BD: And I remember the drugstore on that corner. But it wasn't black owned. I remember that drugstore.

CR: It was not?

BD: No.

SG: No, that was Palace—

BD: Um hum. Palace Drugstore. I remember Kid Mason, because I remember him and his little hat and his little shorts. This man never had long pants on, even in the winter time. I remember him and his shorts and his long socks and his little cap. I remember him. And I remember his place, because in the front he sold candy and potato chips and ice cream and everything, and then you go in the back and I think he had like a little private lounge or something like that in the back.

CR: Um hum.

BD: I remember that.

CR: How about the Lincoln Theater, the theaters?

BD: The theaters. There was two theaters.

CR: Okay.

BD: Was the Lincoln Theater. And that other theater was closed before I got old enough to go on Central to the theater. (laughs)

CR: Cause we can't—we've had some conflicting—um, I guess—

BD: Names on the theaters?

CR: Yeah, people say that there was one called Macieo, or something like that. Isn't that the one that people told us about?

SG: It's in the city directory. I don't know if anybody's actually told us, but I think it goes back pretty far. And it must have—

BD: My aunt was talking about it. She knows the name of it. But when she told me the name of it, I can't remember.

CR: Oh, okay. So that doesn't sound familiar.

BD: Cause she was—she knows. I don't remember her saying Macieo. But I could find

out from her, and, uh—

CR: Okay. Do you remember the Lincoln?

BD: The Lincoln? Yes, I remember the Lincoln Theater. That was the Lincoln Theater. I remember *The Ten Commandments*. I think I went there to see *Ten Commandments*.
(laughs)

CR: Yeah, I remember that. I remember going to see that. (laughs)

BD: You know, and on the weekends, you'd go to the theater. Oh, that was a big thing, to go on Central Avenue and go to the movies. (laughs)

CR: What was it like on the weekends?

BD: Crowded. It was always crowded on Central Avenue on the weekends. Friday, Saturday, it was packed. Cause I know my dad used to stay down, close up. You know, my mom would go down, and she would work also. And I would be in the back somewhere playing, and they would be saying, "Can't you play (inaudible)." (all laugh)

CR: So you lived a real good part of your life—

BD: With them, every place, yeah.

CR: —of your childhood on Central Avenue.

BD: On Central Avenue, um hum. I got a chance to be in both businesses, the ones on Twenty-Second and the ones on Central.

SG: How about the library?

BD: The library? I remember Mrs. Peggy. And she was a little lady, and she was so fat and jolly. And she was always smiling and laughing. I remember her. She was so sweet.

CR: So she's not around anymore?

BD: No, but her grandchildren and her children [are]. I think she has two daughters. Mrs. Quarles is still alive, and what was her—Mary Morris; her last name is something else now. And one of the other granddaughters' name is Wilhelmina Alberry. They're still in Tampa.

CR: Mrs. [Essie Mae] Reed told me that one of the ways that she got started with being a community activist was that she used to take the kids from the neighborhood to the library.

BD: The library.

CR: And um, I guess my question is, was the library well used by the people?

BD: In that area?

CR: Um hum.

BD: Yes.

CR: Do you remember going there?

BD: Um hum. I used to go there. Cause I—she would always say, "Shh." She was real soft-spoken, she was real sweet, and she would always tell you, "Shh," when you'd go to the library.

CR: So how long was it there?

BD: I remember the library from when I was going to school at St. Peter Claver [Catholic School], and that was in the fifties [1950s]. Now when they tore the library down, I guess about the same time that Central Avenue went down.

CR: Um hum, okay.

BD: I remember Dr. Silas' office above, and what was the other dentist's name? Was another dentist up there also.

CR: Yeah.

BD: Dr. Irving was up there.

CR: That's right.

BD: And there was some other offices, lawyers?

CR: Um hum. My father³ had.

BD: Okay, yeah. Your father's office, I remember that.

CR: Yeah.

BD: Then downstairs was what, a barbershop, maybe? Was it a barbershop up in that area?

CR: I'm not real sure. I don't remember that. I remember when my father's office moved over to Harrison [Street], where the longshoremen's building is now.

³ Francisco Rodriguez, Jr.

BD: Um hum. Okay.

CR: That's where my memory starts.

BD: Um hum.

CR: Um, so I don't really know. But there were barbershops. There was at least one barbershop.

BD: There was a barbershop, a shoeshine place on Central. The other day I sat down with my aunt. We went down one side of the street and we came back up and went down the other side of the street, naming all the businesses, you know.

CR: Oh, gosh (laughs) that would be real helpful to us. (laughs)

BD: (laughs) And she remembered everything. I said, "Okay." (laughs) She say, "You don't remember this? You don't remember that?"

SG: I have that.

CR: You have that? Oh, good.

SG: This is for just 1949. (sound of rustling paper)

BD: Okay, you need her here. She would be able to tell you.

SG: This is probably more trouble than it's worth, but—

BD: She could name everything.

SG: We tried to lay out the street with all of the addresses.

CR: (inaudible)

SG: Like here's the Central Theater, and there's the Royal Palm.

CR: Um hum.

SG: And then here's the Pullman barbershop, which I guess is either upstairs or downstairs. It must be downstairs. And then Fairgood. This is all before your time—

BD: (inaudible) (laughs)

SG: —or enough before your time that you wouldn't probably remember.

CR: (laughs)

SG: The Palm Dinette.

BD: Yeah, cause she talked about that, and Central Fish Market. I remember the fish market.

CR: Way Cab Company.

BD: It was a little place that was—

SG: Here's Lee Davis car shop—

CR: Um hum.

SG: —and this says Moses Davis.

BD: Okay, that was my—his brother, that was, but he was my father. That was the little fat man; I just showed you his picture in the—

SG: Okay, so they're then brothers?

BD: Um hum. It's a pawn shop, but it was also—he had the restaurant right up in there, and he had the bar right up in there.

SG: Well, there are actually several barbers. Here's James Isaac.

CR: Um hum.

SG: Where's Kid Mason?

BD: Okay, that's going down towards the Greek Stand.

CR: And that looks like a barber up there.

SG: And that's the Greek Stand right there.

CR: Um hum. And coming back this way, you remember—um, what's his name?

BD: Shelly Green? He had a place on Central. Because he was one of the ones that end up moving out on Twenty-Second Street with my father. Um, Johnny Gray.

CR: Mr. Joyner's place, where's that?

BD: It was a little store right on the corner from my father and a lot of people. I can't remember the name. It was a club. And it was like a number. I remember it was either

400 or 200; it was some kind of number in that window. I remember it because it had light. The window had lights in the window, and that's what made me remember this from when I was a little girl. And it was like pink lights. And I always wanted to go in there, but I wasn't old enough, so I could never go. At night I would just sit there and look at those lights. They were so—you know. I can't ever remember the name of that place, but I know it was a number.

CR: Um hum.

BD: Nobody remembers. (laughs) I gotta find somebody that remembers the name of that place.

CR: I'm sure somebody would. So did these—

BD: But if you could—

CR: Um hum.

BD: You know who else would have a lot of information on it is Mr. White's son, Andre.

CR: Yeah.

BD: He's writing a book, and if you want his number, I could give you his number. I have his number.

CR: You know, I sent—he lives in Atlanta, right?

BD: Um hum.

CR: Yeah, Mrs. Reed gave me his number.

BD: Okay.

CR: And I might—if I can't find it, I'll call you—

BD: Okay.

CR: —and ask you.

SG: But he's writing a book, also?

BD: He has a paper. Like the *Florida Sentinel* [*Bulletin*]; he has *Atlanta Sentinel*.

CR: Yeah, he has *Atlanta Sentinel*.

SG: Oh.

BD: But he did the book on—um, what's the name of the street? In Atlanta, the famous black street in Atlanta? He did a book on that.

CR: Oh!

BD: And it's a real nice book. I used to carry it around with me, but I don't have it today.

CR: So he's writing one about Central?

BD: No.

CR: Oh, okay.

BD: I mean, he did one about the street in Atlanta.

CR: Oh, okay.

BD: It's a nice—it's a street in Atlanta where all the black businesses was located, where Martin Luther King used to live, in that area.

CR: Yeah, uh huh.

BD: And he did a book on that. Since he's been there (inaudible) remember the name (inaudible). And that's on Central. There was a little lady had a drugstore, some little kind of sundries place right up near my father's place, too. It would be going (hisses).

SG: Marie Brown.

BD: You got the camera shop somewhere?

CR: There was a camera shop?

BD: Um hum. My aunt knows the name of the name that had the camera shop. Cause I remember the camera shop. It was on our side of the street first, and then it caught on fire and they moved it across the street, on that side of the street. It was between—okay, this was the poolroom, so it was like, right up in here somewhere. It was some more little buildings. It wasn't, you know, like when you got to this little corner here; it was a little building. And there was a camera shop there.

SG: These are just in one year. And there were—people would change places and—

BD: Um hum.

SG: —and things would change names.

BD: Um hum, change. Constantly.

SG: So it's hard to get a good snapshot of the—

BD: Um hum.

SG: But this was what we chose just sort of arbitrarily as late forties [1940s], early fifties [1950s].

BD: Because like the fish market, I don't really remember the fish market. So I must have been—I don't remember smelling any fish, (all laugh) put it that way. I remember that Way Cab place. Then I remember the Harrisons being right here, somewhere up in here. Where do you have them, their restaurant?

CR: You mean the, um—

BD: Mrs. Harris—

SG: Rogers?

CR: Rogers Dining Room?

BD: Rogers. I meant Rogers, yeah.

SG: It would be in the Pyramid Hotel.

CR: There it—well, here's Rogers Hotel. And Rod—oh, here it is.

BD: Okay.

CR: It's right here.

BD: But there was another little place up in here, too. You don't know anything about the Harris or inside?

CR: Yeah, I remembered it being close to Harrison.

BD: Um hum.

CR: You remember Phil Zbar?

BD: No.

CR: I remember him. He had, um, a clothing—he had a clothing store. So, he has here—um, Susan, two different businesses. So does that mean in one year there were—

SG: I think it probably means there were two that were in that same building.

BD: Uh, same, okay. So it may have had an upstairs and a—

SG: It may have had two separate storefronts, or an upstairs and a downstairs.

CR: Oh, okay.

BD: I see a lot of the buildings were—they had things upstairs and downstairs. Like right here, you could see upstairs and downstairs.

CR: Oh, okay.

BD: You know, if we get a magnifying glass, we could see what everything was on this little corner.

CR: Um hum.

BD: There was something down there. And here's another view. There was things upstairs and downstairs, besides the Pyramid Hotel.

CR: Now, you said earlier that your father started the health clinic.

BD: Um hum.

CR: How did that come about?

BD: Well in the early—I say fifties [1950s], late—well, you'd have to say early fifties [1950s]—was epidemic of social diseases at that time. I think it was TB [tuberculosis], syphilis, gonorrhea, and there wasn't any place for the people in this area to go. They had to go all the way downtown to the clinics, and a lot of them didn't have transportation. So he decided—he had some land and he decided to donate the land to the city for a clinic for the people in the area, especially for the black people that was living in the area.

CR: Uh huh. So it was right—it was on Central?

BD: No. This land was located on Twenty-Eighth Avenue and Potter [Street], on Twenty-Fourth Street. And on Central they would have like a car, or transportation to carry people to the clinics. They would have free health testing for the people in the area.

CR: They had that at the hotel, you say?

BD: That was like—I remember the car being parked in front of his bar, and in front of the poolroom. They would just go up and down, and they had one of those blow-horns and they would talk. And if you want free transportation to the clinic, or health screening, they would carry people to the clinic and to the health screening programs.

CR: Was it fairly successful? Did people do it?

BD: Every year I remember them carrying a lot of people to the doctor or to the clinic or wherever they needed to go. Cause you only had Clara Frye Hospital—

CR: Yeah.

BD: —and they had no place to go for that.

CR: I remember that there was, um—seems like there was a tuberculosis?

BD: Um hum.

CR: I remember when many people had tuberculosis.

BD: Yes, it was like—

CR: And, um—

BD: They had the tuberculosis hospital.

CR: There was the tuberculosis hospital.

BD: W. T. Edwards is there now.

CR: Um hum. So, I have a memory of that, of being scared.

BD: Uh huh. "Don't cough around me." (laughs)

CR: Yeah, it was—my mother used to tell us to, you know, cover our faces.

BD: Cover your faces. Yeah.

CR: But he was instrumental in getting people to—

BD: And go up to the doctor, to the clinics. And that's why he wanted—went ahead and opened up the clinic in that area for the people, you know, cause there wasn't anything around. And too many people were sick at that time. There was a lot of people sick. And they didn't, you know—

CR: And they didn't have adequate health care

BD: They just didn't go to the doctor, no.

SG: Did he get any help in terms of the funding of that from the health department—

BD: For the clinic?

SG: —or the county, or the city, or—?

BD: The county donated the land that's in here on this little deed, where the deed is located in this book right here. Anyway, he donate. I remember the do—you know, him doing the land and everything and they put the sign out there, and he said, “As long as you use it for a clinic or use it for a facility to help the people, that's fine, but once if you don't do it—” you can read it on the deed, that it will automatically go back to the—you know, to the estate of his family.

CR: So now where did you say this, where is—

BD: This is located on Twenty-Eighth Avenue, and—well, the little short street is Potter Street. But if you go down Twenty-Second Street going south and make a left-hand turn on Twenty-Eighth Avenue, it's like the third block over. It's on the—I think the Tampa Urban League has something there now. I noticed a sign up said Tampa Urban League.

CR: Um hum.

BD: And I used to just call it the O. Lee Davis Neighborhood Center.

CR: I know where that is.

BD: Okay.

CR: Because, I got—I was—I don't know, I got lost one day and I saw that. I saw equipment. I think it even said the O. Lee Davis—

BD: It has a little plaque, yeah. On the wall.

CR: Okay, um hum. Yeah.

BD: Talking about. It's right there.

CR: That's not the original?

BD: That's the original Lee Davis Clinic.

SG: That's the original one?

BD: Yes, the original one. That front building is the original building that was built there. All the other little parts, it's like portable parts that they brought in and added on.

CR: Uh huh. Yeah. And so when that big building—when the big clinic was built—

BD: That was in, yeah—

CR: —um, that was after he died?

BD: Um hum.

CR: Okay. That's the one that's the big clinic, that's there now?

BD: That's there now. Um hum. Yeah. Right on this side of the street.

CR: Um, what else did I want to ask you? Oh, I know. We were looking at these and I was asking you to maybe point out some of the businesses that you do feel we could highlight. We have—you know, we have ideas of which businesses we've heard were the more popular ones.

BD: Okay.

CR: But if you have some ideas about ones that you think we shouldn't—

BD: Of course the Greek House—I mean, the Greek Stand, Mr. White's place [are] the ones that I remember people talking about a lot. Um, the cab company, because that was black-owned and that was like the first little transportation in that area that was going around. What else? Watts Sanderson, I remember them talking about them a lot. The Pyramid Hotel. That was like, "Oh, we have a hotel." You know, they were really proud of the black hotel they had in Tampa.

SG: That was bought by the Pyramid Investment Corporation. Did someone in the corporation own it originally, and did—

BD: The Pyramid Corporation? Now you have—

SG: —or did they get together to buy that, or—?

BD: I really don't—I—

SG: That's probably in—

BD: I want to say that they got together and, you know, purchased the Pyramid Hotel. That's the way I'm feeling about it. But I would have to ask some of the other people. But these are people that was on there. I think everybody's gone now.

CR: Do you know how that company came about?

BD: The Pyramid Hotel?

CR: The invest—uh huh.

BD: The investment company? I don't have any idea. This is Mrs. Stone. This is Dr. Sallers. And, let me see, this is Mrs. Rogers. All of them was black people who owned businesses in Tampa. And they, you know, got together and they started it. Mrs. Gardner, um, Mr. Gardner that lives on Palm Avenue still. You know the Gardners? He still lives on—

SG: Robbie Gardner is—

BD: Um hum. That's his mother. So he may have some information, also, about it.

CR: Do you know anything about, about what they did in terms of investments?

BD: No, let's see. Not really. I remember—um, what was the lady's name? In the end when everything was going out, I remember they was sending the money to all the investors. They was sending their share of the money. I remember my father getting a check. But how much it was I don't remember at that time. But I remember they was sending everybody their money from the business.

CR: Um hum. Did they invest in the businesses?

BD: The Pyramid Hotel itself, and they had Pyramid Hotel, and wasn't a bar there? I think they had a bar. Pyramid Club, or Pyramid something else they had. I think in the later years they had something else there, also, besides a hotel; downstairs.

CR: Do you have—what other information do you have on that?

BD: On this?

CR: Yeah.

BD: Just the pictures. The building. Pyramid Hotel building. And that was done in the fifties [1950s]. Okay, I have Pyramid Hotel Lounge, and the hotel. That was—it was both. On one of these signs you could see this little—you have to look real close. They had like a little umbrella chute out that would enter the club. And I remember people telling me about the club on the inside. They would go down Central and have parties at the club.

CR: Do you remember that Goldie Thompson did a radio show from—I think it was the—was it the Pyramid?

SG: No, I think it was Pularis Super Rent.

CR: Okay.

SG: Or at least that's what, uh—

CR: You remember Goldie Thompson?

BD: Yes, I remember Goldie Thompson.

CR: Yeah, I remember Goldie Thompson. He did a radio show from somewhere on Central. You don't remember that?

BD: No, I'd have to ask my aunt. (laughs) She would know. She knows everything—

CR: (laughs) Okay.

BD: —about Central Avenue; she could tell you everything.

CR: Ask her and see if she remembers that.

BD: Okay.

CR: Because I've talked to other people who remember him.

BD: Okay.

CR: And who—somebody even showed me a picture. Somebody even had a picture of where he was broadcasting. And it seems like it was somewhere in—

BD: In one of those buildings?

CR: —seem like it was somewhere in—uh huh. In this building.

BD: It could have been.

SG: I think Frank Lopez said it was right here—

CR: Yes.

SG: —cause he had a copy of this picture, also.

BD: I gave Mr. Lopez some of my pictures. I gave him the pictures. I had like three or four copies, and so he asked me for some and I gave them to him. I had them in NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] office and I was vice president at that time, so he used to sit there and look through the pictures and he say, "Oh, can I have one?" and I say "Go ahead." (laughs)

SG: Oh, he loves history.

CR: You have been very generous with your pictures. You have quite a few that we haven't had access to.

BD: Okay.

CR: So, maybe you could ask Mrs. [Rowena Ferrell] Brady—

BD: Okay.

CR: —if we could—

BD: Borrow them, and make some extra copies and give them back to you.

CR: Borrow those, yeah. Um hum.

BD: You know, she's doing this book, I think, about Tampa, right?

CR: Yeah.

BD: The whole book is about all of Tampa, so you know she shouldn't say anything to that. (all laugh)

CR: Well, if you ask her. They're your pictures, so you can. (laughs)

SG: And we're not doing a book, so—

CR: No, we're not.

BD: Okay, cause I called her and I said something about the pictures, and she said, "Oh, I haven't finished yet, I'm sitting here working on it." And I said, "Okay, but I need to see the pictures for a little while."

CR: Well, you know, we're not doing a book. I would be very happy to help you—

BD: Okay.

CR: —you know, with what you need with this. But that's not our purpose, to do a book. We're just interested in doing this community project.

BD: After you look it over, see if you think that it would sell. I know it would only sell in Tampa. But you know, see what you think about it, and then whatever I could do or how or what I have to do to get it done.

CR: Yeah. Well, we have a—there's a graduate student⁴ who's working with us, and she's helping Mr. [Robert] Saunders with his book.

⁴ Ericka Burroughs

BD: Okay.

CR: And I'm sure that there must be some way to find a publisher who would be very open to publishing it for you.

BD: I work with little money.

CR: Hmm?

BD: I work with little money. (laughs)

CR: I think it's very interesting. I think people in Tampa would be thrilled—

SG: I think they would, too. I think they would, too.

CR: —to have access to something like this. I really do. People are becoming more interested in—

BD: In history.

CR: —in history. People are realizing that, you know, we haven't paid enough attention to what has gone on in our communities, and so—

BD: Because I forgot to put in there, I found some pictures of my father and Mr.—um, what was his name? The man that had the Harlem Review? Mr. [Leon] Claxton?

CR: Oh, Claxton. Yeah.

BD: And he and my father were good friends, and he used to bring the people out and they would practice at the house on Osborne [Street], you know. And I remember that, and I didn't put anything in the book about that. You know, different little things I start thinking of after I had done all of this real quick. I said, "Oh, I didn't put anything about that, and I didn't put anything about this. I forgot all about that."

CR: Oh, you should. What I remember about Mr. Claxton was going to his house—

BD: Um hum.

CR: —and that was the—

BD: Go down to the basement?

CR: Yes!

BD: The basement.

CR: That was the first time I had ever been in a basement in my life. I mean, it's frightening.

SG: Oh, that's right, they don't have basements here. (laughs)

CR: People didn't have basements in Florida. And I remember that very well. And I remember his kids. And more than anything I remember going to the Claxton show.

BD: Yes. (laughs)

CR: That was wonderful.

BD: The Harlem Review?

CR: Yes. That was—I used to just think that was wonderful.

BD: See those girls dance—

CR: Women dancing—

BD: And the jokes people used to tell.

CR: Yes, it was wonderful. So your father was friends with him?

BD: Um hum. They were real close friends, and I remember that, you know. And I say, "Oh, I forgot to put that in the book."

CR: Did they ever come down on Central—

BD: And come to his place on Central, yeah.

CR: —during when the fair was in town?

BD: Um hum. And they would always come out to the house when we moved on Osborne, cause we had a lot of room. And they would practice like in our back [yard], and around the pool or outside somewhere, so it was always, you know—they was over there almost every day.

CR: Uh huh. Do you ever—do you know anything about his kids?

BD: His kids? The oldest daughter, I think, is still in California. The baby girl, before Bob bought the house, she still had the house, cause she had moved away. She has about four, five children now. I don't know where the boy is. I heard he was in Tampa-St. Petersburg area.

CR: Uh huh. Yeah, you really should include that. That's such an—that's a real important part of Tampa's history. I mean, we didn't have people who did those kinds of—not very many people who did those kinds of things, you know. But people had a real strong attachment to that.

BD: You remember the mur—I think even now Bob still has—I think he refurnished the basement with the murals on the wall. Cause you remember he had the murals on the wall of the basement?

CR: I don't remember that. I just—

BD: He had the paintings of, like, about his dancers on his wall. It was real pretty.

CR: Yeah. I just remember being so fascinated to go into a basement. (all laugh)

BD: That's the way I used to feel. (laughs)

CR: That was fascinating. What else? You—

SG: At the end of Central Avenue, do you have recollections about that, about when the destruction came about—

BD: Destruction—

SG: —and how people felt to see it, and—

BD: I remember the destruction. Wasn't it in the—it was in the late sixties [1960s]? I think it was the late sixties [1960s].

SG: There were—seventy-four [1974] was when they actually bulldozed it—

BD: Right, everything was gone.

SG: —but there were stages of destruction in it.

BD: I remember things being knocked down. I remember the places on the side of us was gone. You know, like the buildings were burnt down. You know, they came through and they knocked them down, because my father had something like on both sides of his place. And that's basically what I remember. Now, you know, he had moved onto Twenty-Second Street so he didn't have too many problems, you know; he was still making money and everything, but a lot of people didn't have anywhere to go. And all the businesses were like, "Oh, well, it's no more." And now I feel bad, because you don't have anything to show your children. It's nothing there. I can't go back and say, "Well, your grandfather had his place right here," because it's nothing there. They'd say, "What are you talking about?" That's when they built a park.

CR: It's hard to even envision that.

BD: Envision that it was buildings there.

CR: Uh huh.

BD: Like in Ybor City they saved a little section, you know, where they have the tobacco. You still have the buildings and everything. So, you know, that was saved. But Central Avenue, the black history's totally gone.

CR: I know what I wanted to ask you. About the riots, what do you remember about the—

BD: The riots?

CR: Uh huh.

BD: I don't remember riots on Twenty-Second—I mean on Central. On Twenty-Second, yes.

CR: On Twenty-Second?

BD: Um hum.

CR: But there was rioting on Central.

BD: I don't know, maybe I blanked it out my mind (laughs) for some reason. I know my father's places wasn't touched.

CR: Mrs. Harris told me about how—about the way she was—she would—she was in her restaurant and praying that nobody would throw a brick through her window.

BD: Really?

CR: It was a real tense time. But you don't have any recollection of it?

BD: That must have been like in the last part of Central Avenue. I don't remember anything about being a riot.

SG: It was sixty-seven [1967].

BD: Sixty-seven [1967]? Okay, I wasn't there. I had gone to—

CR: Oh, okay.

BD: I was in school, or either I was somewhere in the world. Chicago, cause I lived in

Chicago for a while.

CR: I was here, but I don't—my memory of that is very vague.

BD: I don't remember that.

CR: Um, I just have—

BD: I remember Twenty-Second Street. (laughs)

CR: Yeah, but there was rioting on Central.

BD: Oh, that's okay.

SG: Well, the Palace Drugstore was burned down during that riot. There were a number of buildings that were burned down.

BD: Okay, that—

SG: But not—

BD: I don't even know why.

SG: —not all of them at all, um—

CR: You remember that a young man was killed by police officers? Martin Chambers?

BD: Oh, yes, I remember that. Oh, that's when it was, during that time?

CR: That had something to do with at least one rioting or something.

BD: Okay.

CR: So you remember that part?

BD: Yeah, I remember that.

CR: But not in any real great detail?

BD: No, not in great detail.

SG: But your father's business was still standing in the early seventies [1970s]?

BD: Um hum. The poolroom. Only the poolroom. He left everything else, cause Michael was still over there with the poolroom at that time.

CR: What about Kid Mason Recreation Center? You remember how that was used?

BD: Um hum. Going there, Kid Mason, the recreation center, the kids from high school, they would love to go there on the weekends.

CR: Right.

BD: And they had the little lady there—

CR: The dances.

BD: Yes, the dances. I remember that.

CR: Yeah.

BD: You couldn't go out the door. (laughs) Once you went in, you stayed in until the dance was over, you know. I think the lady name was Ms. Jenkins?

CR: Yes.

BD: Uh-huh.

CR: Have you been in there lately?

BD: No. Haven't been back.

CR: Well, we have our meetings there, our planning meetings for this project, and there's a picture of her, of Mrs. Jenkins, up on the wall.

BD: Oh, really?

CR: And I remember her. And part of our program will be there. We're gonna have a photography display—

BD: Oh, okay, oh.

CR: —we're gonna have a panel discussion, um—

BD: Let me know when. I would love to come.

CR: Oh, you must! (all laugh)

SG: Certainly.

CR: You have to come. Um, what was I—well, how long—when did you leave Tampa?

BD: Sixty-four [1964] I went to Hampton, and then I came back to Tampa. I went to Bethune-Cookman [College] for a while and then went to Chicago to DePaul [University], and I came back to Tampa. I would always move away, get married, move away and come back, you know, so I ended up staying here for good, like, in sixty-nine [1969], I came back.

Unknown Man: Here, there's a comfortable chair. (sound of chairs moving)

CR: Oh, okay.

Unknown Man: Now, now, everybody about (inaudible) right there. I know. Them right there, excuse me. Them right there I'm talking about I'm borrowed out. Well—I'm so hungry right there, too.

BD: You hungry?

Unknown Man: Yes, ma'am.

BD: Okay, well, you go up there and see what you want to eat, and then I'll come up there and pay for it, okay?

Unknown Man: Ma'am, I can't (inaudible) down. I'm borrowed out of here.

BD: Okay, what you want to eat?

Unknown Man: Uh (inaudible) right there, ma'am.

BD: Huh? Just tell me what you—I'll buy you some food, but I won't give you any money.

Unknown Man: I don't want your money.

BD: Okay, what do you want to eat?

Unknown Man: Honest to God, I don't. Oh, Lord, thank you.

BD: Tell me what you would have to eat.

Unknown Man: Right there, anything that good that you would buy me right there. Anything that you would buy me right there would be good, right there for me.

BD: Okay, you like chicken?

Unknown Man: Yes, ma'am.

BD: And mashed potatoes and gravy? Okay, all right. I'll get him some food, then.

Excuse me.

Unknown Man: I know, I know it's (inaudible). Thank you.

CR: Sure.

BD: You can come over here and sit over here and eat, okay?

Unknown Man: Okay.

Pause in recording

CR: Desktop publishing. We were talking about this, your book.

SG: The reasons for doing the project are to let people who never had an opportunity to see Central Avenue know what was there. What kinds of things should we tell people about that? What would you tell people, or what are the important things about Central Avenue that the younger people who didn't know it ought to know?

BD: Okay. They need to be able to identify and know that they did have black leaders, even during that time, because a lot of people don't know anything about any of the people—

Unknown Man: Thank you, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. I know right here I'm just annoy—

Pause in recording

BD: Okay. And so the children, um, younger people of today would have a chance to know their history, and that we did have someone in Tampa that started out early in the twenties [1920s], and that it was businesses here that they, family of the four—you know, people in the back—that did have things.

CR: Um hum.

BD: Cause they don't know anything about it, you know. Mention Central Avenue to my children, and they don't know anything about Central Avenue. So I think it's really great that you're doing something and let people know that it was black businesses in the twenties [1920s], and that black people did have something. You know, they didn't go from slavery to integration. They went from slavery to—

CR: That is a very good point. (laughs)

BD: —a period of time that they had something that they owned and that they were proud of and could say, "Well, I have my own business," you know. Now it's not that many people say they have their own business anymore.

CR: Yeah, that's true.

BD: Especially if they're black, they're working for a company. Or they're working for anybody, you know. It's still the same. "Well, I own my own business," you know. Unless you are a doctor or a lawyer or something like this, you know. So—

CR: Do you hear people saying that one of the bad—I guess results—of integration was that—

BD: Was that—

CR: —people did lose—

BD: —yes, um hum.

CR: —a lot of what they had.

BD: The black businesses. Yes, because then people stopped supporting the black businesses—

Unknown Man: Whatever you are mention right there—

BD: —and that's why they went out.

Unknown Man: —goin' whatever you mention right there, you gonna be successful in your life, you know why? You right there, you trust. You gave me something right there where nobody else did. You gonna be successful right there, and I'm telling you these things—

BD: All right. Thank you.

CR: So, go ahead. You were saying about integration?

BD: So integration did play a part in a lot of losing black businesses in the area. The children don't know anything about anything anymore, you know, saying their black leaders in Tampa. They just see everybody gettin' up going to work every morning. "So what?" they figure. You know, even when I had the places open on Twenty-Second Street, I had a restaurant going for a while, I would try to tell the young people, "Don't be out there selling drugs," you know. And I would even give 'em jobs, little things to do, you know, like come in and deliver the food, or come in and just help me clean the crabs.

One little guy I remember, he said, "Well, why should I do this when I can go out there and sell drugs and I could make da-da-da amount of money, and you only making this amount of money." I said, "But I'm not going to jail and I'm making an honest living, and I'm not gonna have to go take a chance on my life and being shot out on the street

because I'm out there with some drug dealer." And so he looked at me, he thought about it, and he said, "Oh, okay, lady." (laughs) And he would come every day just as nice. And I would give him a meal and he would help me around the place, and I would give him—at the end of the week he would get paid. And he's still in school; he's doing great. You know, it was just someone that—the child didn't have any identity with anyone, you know. And he felt really bad, but he was a very intelligent little kid and he wanted to know why shouldn't he be selling drugs.

CR: Yeah, so you told him.

BD: And I felt like I saved one person from being out there on the streets selling drugs, you know. If there was more black people in the areas where these kids really need them, I think a lot of them wouldn't be out there now. I feel bad; a little boy got killed about his gold chain. And then like, you know, that was horrible. That's just bad.

CR: Yeah, well—

BD: And like the little man that was hungry, my father always said, "Feed people. If they're hungry, you feed them." I said, "Okay, suppose I don't have any food to eat, Daddy?" He say, "You will get some food—"

CR: You will find it.

BD: "—you just feed these people." (laughs)

CR: That's right.

BD: And always be able to help someone.

CR: Well, it's great that you have tried to continue that spirit of Central Avenue. And as Susan was saying, one of the ways that you can help us—you've helped us tremendously—is just—

BD: I remember—excuse me for cutting you off. I also remember Mr. White on Central. He would feed everybody on Central, you know, all the—whenever the other people didn't have restaurants anymore, he would always cook food, and he would bring ribs and he would bring this and that. He would always have food. If you had a business on Central, they always had food, you know; among themselves they would feed each other, I think. So they kept—you know them, they were very close. You know, the closeness in business people. I don't see that closeness anymore. Look like everyone in business now, they're out to stab this one, they're out to stab that one. So they don't have that closeness anymore.

CR: Yeah, yeah. Or just out to help themselves, and not really help anybody else.

BD: Uh huh, not really help anybody else.

CR: Anyway, what I was saying was that you can help us by just letting us know if we're doing an accurate presentation of things. And when we get our project in a little bit more shape, we'll let you know what it is we're doing.

BD: Okay. Let me know if I can come to any of the meetings or anything I could do; just let me know.

CR: We have some elaborate plans so (laughs) we'd like for you to just advise us.

BD: Okay, as much as I can. I'll bring my little aunt with me. (laughs) And she will sit there and talk you to death about Central Avenue, like she did me the other day when her husband was having heart surgery. She was telling me all. I'm saying, "I gotta know some more about Central. Talk." And she just started talking and talking. I said, "Wait a minute. You need to be there when they are there." (laughs) She said, "Oh, okay, I'll be there."

CR: So, well—

BD: She'll be able to tell you a lot about, you know, especially with this layout.

CR: Uh huh.

BD: She probably could go down the line and tell you.

CR: Did she work on Central?

BD: She worked for my father. She started working for my father in 1944. And she put her age up. She's not really my aunt, but you know, she's with my father before I was born, so I call her my aunt. She's been around for a long time, so she'd be able to tell you a lot about Central.

CR: Okay. Well, that's—you have been extremely helpful.

BD: And she would tell me how she would sneak into different little places on Central when she was underage. (laughs)

CR: Yeah, we hear those stories, too. (laughs) This has been extremely helpful. I'm gonna read this over the weekend.

BD: Okay, all right. Okay.

CR: And I will give you a call.

BD: Let me know whatever. How we could get it published, or—

CR: Yeah.

BD: —get a few copies made so I could start off.

CR: Okay.

end of interview