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**James Hargrett, Senior:** I went through the eighth grade in Appalachicola, after which I went to Florida A & M High School<sup>1</sup>. I completed the twelfth grade there, then entered into college at the same place. And I finished four years of college. Then I came to Tampa and began workin' as a teacher for two years, then went to Key West, came back to Tampa the next year and worked in the school system for three consecutive years. Then I went into the housing projects as a maintenance superintendent, after which, I saw what I thought was a good idea for a fellow to go in business.

Lookin' across the street—I was in West Tampa at the housing project in West Tampa—I looked across the street and I would see immediately in front of that housing project. I saw the Latins doing business. And they were doing quite well, I thought. And when I found out that this housing project was going to be built out in College Hill, by my being in the know of the business of housing and just where it was going to be located, then I immediately got busy to see if it was possibility of my getting a little business started in this area. And, of course, I did come out buying a piece of land which was on sale. And I bought this piece of property.

**Herbert Jones:** What year was this?

JH: This was in 1944. And I built myself, with my knowledge of industrial arts, the training that I'd received from A & M [Florida Agricultural and Mechanical] University, I built this—a small business, a sundry store. And I put it within that part until 1948. Then I expanded it into a large grocery store and called it Howard Supermarket. And from that time through 1959 I operated this business, after which I sold the business out. And I kept the building. And it changed hands maybe two or three times. I took one portion of the building, I built it into— After expandin' I'd say that I left enough space there so as to be able to operate a laundromat, have a beauty parlor, barber shop and my shoe repair shop.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a school at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. FAMU High School was its former name; its current official name is FAMU Developmental Research School.

I saw the need of those kind of things around, and that's what I finally did.

After havin' gone in that direction, so far as business was concerned, I thought in terms of real estate. Then I went to school with (inaudible), real estate school on Thirty-Fourth Street, and I completed the salesman's course and worked with her for a year, and went and took the broker's examination and I passed the broker's examination. After which, I bought and sold properties—and, of course, I operated the laundromat also, which I retired from that. And, of course, I keep my license alive as of right now.

So, I think that gives you a brief resume of my activity in the business world.

HJ: Okay, where was your store located?

JH: The store was located at 2409 E. Lake Avenue.

HJ: Is that that the store that's on the corner now? With— Okay, there's a grocery store right on the corner, used to be a grocery store on the corner of (inaudible).

JH: On Twenty-Second [Street] and Lake?

HJ: And Lake.

JH: No. This was at Twenty-Fourth [Street] and Lake Avenue.

HJ: Oh.

JH: This was immediately across the street from office of the housing project. That's where I bought my property. That's where I started to build. From then on, I just moved on (inaudible).

HJ: What were the conditions of, say, a black buying property during that time?

JH: Well, if you had a little bit of money and had ideas, you could buy a lot of property. But if you didn't have any money, then you were in a bad shape so far as trying to buy anything was concerned. Because banks would not lend you anything to build anything with. And these properties that were on sale, I think I had—I bought two lots and made it there across—that's where this housing project office was going to be put—and I paid \$240 for those two lots.

I saw the county had—the city had those lots on sale. They were trying to sell properties that had been lost by various people for taxes, and they were trying to sell these properties. And of course, I, by my knowin' where the project was going to be built—and before that happened I went across the street from there and bought this property. I went downtown to the courthouse, and these properties were being offered for bid—were up for bid. And, of course, the beginnin' of the bids was \$40. And, of course, I—

There was an opponent there who didn't know what I knew about what was going to happen. And it was the person of—Brown. I don't know whether you know Joe Brown, who did own that place that's back there—College Hill Pharmacy, bought as an addition to their place. Well, at any rate, he was in the lumber business on Twenty-Second Street. And, of course, he didn't know that this project was going to be over there and so— But, at any rate, he was— He had a little bit of money, and he was attempting to buy all of the properties that he could buy. So he was my opponent in biddin' on this property.

I bid up to the amount of \$225, and I didn't have any more money. And, of course, there was a lady who was well steeped in the buying of property and so forth, and she encouraged me to go on and bid further. And I bid \$240, and this fellow wouldn't go any further above it. I had to go home and try to find some more money to go back down there to pay for this property. So that's the way that that happened. And, as I said, I bought various pieces of property.

I found houses in the expressway. I bought property and I moved the—and when the expressway came along, I bought houses from off—out of the path of the expressway. You could buy them very, very cheap. And I had some land. I'd been buying land. And I bought these houses out off the expressway and moved them onto the land that I had. And I sold those houses and made a very good profit on them.

I also built some apartment houses. I don't know whether you know or not, but I built some projects on Thirty-Fourth Street in 1958. I built two four-unit apartments. And they're still in fair good shape. We'd built one or two other buildings, business buildings, and I sold them. So that more or less tells what I have done so far as the real estate.

HJ: Okay, during this time, was there a thing where other blacks would help other blacks get stated in businesses?

JH: I think that the people thought, at that time, that if you were a teacher—if you were a doctor, or if you were you a big time gambler or an undertaker, then you would be considered as someone who people—our people—would help, maybe, to move. But if you ventured out into the field of business during that particular era, then you were considered as somebody who was either—either had more nerve than anybody else, or else was crazy. (laughs) But that was then. That was—

### ***Side 1 ends; side 2 begins***

JH: —but I think that I did more—a lot of things to prove to the people that business could be profitable. I had a store that was thirty feet in width and ninety feet in length. And, of course, I kept it clean. I had the frozen foods. I had fish. I had fresh meats. And I served in schools with the lunch rooms. I served Lily White Hospital and various institutions, and I did exceptionally well. Say, I think that my first in business—I think in the grocery business, I grossed approximately \$125,000.

HJ: In the 1940s?

JH: In the 1940s.

HJ: That was a lot of money. (laughs)

JH: In the 1940s, yes. And I think that the people began to open their eyes and see that these things could be done, but we were being extremely cautious people. So much so until we— We're so much until it would be an envy, I think, with those people who did have—who're supposed to have been and able to do a lot of thinking. They showed a lot of— There was a lot of envy. And the political system that that involved, that had to do with the businesses and so forth, and the fact that we—

*pause in recording*

JH: We went to great extent in advertising. That's something that hadn't been being prevalent. And we had an IGA [Independent Grocers Alliance] store. And our store, the prices and the merchandise and everything came out in the [*Tampa*] *Tribune* paper weekly. And I had radio advertising. And I would have sound trucks with—what's that thing that was—? I can't think of it right now. And Bixley was one of my right hand men. You know Bixley over at (inaudible)?

HJ: (inaudible)

JH: At school?

HJ: Oh.

JH: And as a matter of fact I had a close associate too, who—we organized Little League baseball, and that's part of the advertisement, back in the fifties [1950s]. So those were some of the things that we did.

HJ: Okay, what with the trading with blacks, did you have a lot of crediting?

JH: No.

HJ: No crediting.

JH: Very, very little crediting did I have. And we gave food stamps, also.

HJ: Are you familiar with the soup line?

JH: Hmm?

HJ: Soup lines?

JH: No. I'm—

HJ: Okay. Did you come into contact with any of the white establishment about the way you would run your stores, or the way you was expanding your operations?

*pause in recording*

JH: I needed finance when I thought in terms of expanding my business. I needed financing, and I had built a house and I had that store—had the small store that I'd built myself in 1943—and I had another piece of land that was sixty by ninety feet, but I couldn't borrow a dime in Tampa from any of the institutions. I had been grossin' about \$35,000 per year in the sundry store, and I had these properties. I had the house, I had the little buildings and a piece of property, but I couldn't borrow any money. None. All the banks would ask you, "Do you have an automobile? I can lend you \$100 on it." And that was the end of that kind of money that they would lend.

So it just so happened that I had a cousin who was with the Afro-American Life Insurance Company in Jacksonville. And so I went to Jacksonville. And they sent a man down here, one of their agents down here to check out, to see what properties I had, and so forth. They made me a loan for \$5,000, and with that I was able to make the necessary expansion that I wanted to make. The whites wouldn't do anything for you so far as their institutions were concerned.

And, as a matter of fact, I did have some of the "numbers men" come in and almost—to want to force me to sell *bolita*—and get into rackets. The policemen in the town wanted that to happen. But I refused all of that.

And so, other than that, they didn't bother about my expanding or anything. As a matter of fact, without a—I was able to do some building and was given a contractor's license for the length of time that I was doing my building. And I think that the white people, more or less, respected you for trying to do something. And if you did a good job. We had a lot of salesmen comin' in wantin' to trade Amour or with Swift, or Coke, or Lykes Brothers and various other packers and the IGA stores and so forth. So we were very well respected. Wore our white aprons and so forth. We were clean at all times. And we didn't owe anybody. And I think that that gave people the belief that we were tryin' to be—we practiced after somebody else who had done well in the business.

I might go back to say that during my early childhood, I worked at a market; they had what they called meat markets that sold nothing but meats. And, of course, I learned how to cut meat and I learned how to make sausage, and how to make hog-head cheese—things of that sort which helped me quite a bit in my business.

HJ: Were you instrumental in helping anyone else, any other blacks in Tampa start a business, maybe financially, or just giving guidelines or something like this?

JH: Yes, as a matter of fact, I started Robert Cole off in the barber business. He didn't have any money and it seemed like he wasn't gettin' any help, so I gave him the

opportunity of renting a place from me, and that included the entire barber shop for \$5 a week. I also had put two young women in the dressmakin' business. I started them off with tryin'—workin' with them for a length of time, but they eventually moved out and went their separate ways.

I put another place up and I put a beautician in there and had a beauty shop goin' on in that building. And, of course, I charged them \$2 a week. And I also sought around until I found a shoemaker and I started him off in business. And, of course, I just asked him for what he was able to give me for that, you know, during his early stages. I built another building and I did put a fellow in a barber shop. I put a fellow in business in a pool hall. And I put some fellows in a club in business.

So far as this barber shop, there were no black barbers in town that were available. And I built on Thirty-Fourth Street a big buildin' out there, and I couldn't find any barbers anywhere, so I went to Tallahassee and got a fellow and brought him down to Tampa. I bought him chairs, razors, clippers, everything that needed to be bought in order to operate. I bought 'em and—

*pause in recording*

JH: There was something else that I thought of telling you about, and that was the organizing of a black chamber of commerce. As a matter of fact it was the first (inaudible) Black Business League. And after that expired—Mr. Rogers was the president; he was once the president of Central Life Insurance Company—and then it was changed to the Negro Chamber of Commerce. And he was president of that for awhile. And afterwards I took over the reins of the Negro Chamber of Commerce.

HJ: What was the function of the Chamber of Commerce? What were some of the things that y'all did?

JH: Well, the functions when I was with the Chamber of Commerce was to get all of the black businesses to participate in the program so far as gettin' 'em all together, each—every black business that we could find that would be that would be a part of this Chamber of Commerce, we would (inaudible) that. And the idea behind it was to put on as many various types of projects that we could have, say, coming into town that we— If we were able to encourage the teachers association to meet in town.

We went on to show that whatever business that you were in, if any outstanding events came into the city they gave everybody a little bit of the business. You had the few liquor businesses (inaudible). You had grocery business. You had sundry business. You had shoe shine parlors. They had barber shops. They had restaurants. They had a hotel. And we had a guest houses and things of that sort. And whenever any that we would try to bring things in town, and whenever we'd do things like that everybody would be able to profit by it.

Of course, you'd have to be— You'd have to be kind of on the intelligent side to be able

to see and to know that these things would be helpful, but they were helpful to all of us. Any time that we got ready to try to start a new enterprise, well, I'd call all of the black businessmen together and we would try to help to put on whatever projects that needed to be put on. And we would have speakers to come in and speak to us and tendin' to give us more information about our town and so forth. And we would have—

We had the various football games to come into the city, and we'd go and encourage all of the black businessmen and to hang the banners up all kind of things of that sort. And everybody get behind these efforts and push them over. And even if it was a—if we'd have a big orchestra that would come into town. Whatever it was that had to do with helpin' any black business, we would have ideas put forth by which the black people would be able to know that they should go and patronize their black brothers and so forth. That's the main idea behind the Negro Chamber of Commerce.

HJ: Were there any black women in that? You know, not—aside from beauticians?

JH: Yes. There were some women in the Chamber of Commerce. There was—Roslyn Williams was one. Roslyn (inaudible). And she had a five and ten cent store. And—

**Unknown Woman:** Florence.

JH: Florence. And there was some of the undertakers were in it. Pughsley Funeral Home was a part of it. And she was a woman. And Ms. Stone was a partner for the Chamber of Commerce. So, yes, we had—there were—

HJ: Were you instrumental in starting the black bank— Saving—

JH: I was ill at that time. But after the Chamber of Commerce had run its length, we organized the Frontiers of America. And we had weekly meetings. And I was instrumental in working on the membership of the Frontiers to send to Atlanta and have those people who were astute in the business of banking and so forth come in and speak to us and give us information as to what these institutions meant and so forth. And I followed it right down until it was time for us to begin this bank, and I got sick.

I was extremely ill for a whole—I mean, I was—I still haven't gotten straight. But in the meantime, I was confined in the hospital for a month at that time. And so, they had to move on, and so they just moved on. And, of course, they acknowledged that I had a whole lot to do with the original processes of trying to get it started. And I think that that might be some—one of the reasons that my son was able to get in there as he is now. And, of course, as soon as I did get out of the hospital, whatever monies that I was able to gather together, we got our part down there.

HJ: Are you a member of the church?

JH: St. Paul AME [African Methodist Episcopal] Church. I was a member of St. Paul AME Church in Apalachicola and a member of St. Paul AME Church here, a member of



the trustee board.

HJ: Is there anything else?

JH: Now, I wanted to say here though that in my—backin' up a little bit, so far as this is concerned, I was an industrial arts teacher, a mathematics teacher and a basketball coach. And, of course, I coached fellows like Jim Williams. Those type fellows. And we had the first championship team that Tampa had ever produced.

Unknown Woman: State championship.

JH: State championship.

HJ: Basketball or football?

JH: Basketball.

HJ: (inaudible) was on the team.

Unknown Woman: (inaudible)

HJ: On that team? Who was all on that team?

JH: There was Jim Williams. There was Orrie Williams. There was Clarence (inaudible). There was Robert Gardner. There was—

Unknown Woman: Nathaniel.

JH: —Nathaniel Green.

Unknown Woman: George Clements.

JH: And George Clements.

Unknown Woman: John (inaudible).

JH: Who?

Unknown Woman: John (inaudible).

JH: No, he came afterwards. Those were just about our first five.

HJ: (laughs) Where was the championship game?

JH: The championship game was played in Tallahassee. Rodingham College. And we won the state—we won the district tournament over in Lakeland and went to the state—

got an invitation to the state and won the state championship.

HJ: Who did y'all beat?

JH: We won from Tallahassee High. Lincoln High, in Tallahassee.

HJ: Okay, now, this coaching job was that adjacent with, say, your teaching job too?

JH: You weren't paid for coaching at that time.

HJ: Oh, I see.

JH: You coached because you loved it. And that's what that was. Now, I can—I'd just like to tell you some people who you might be able to contact.

HJ: That's what we need. (laughs)

JH: You can contact Allen—what was Allen's name? Out at (inaudible)? The teacher.

Unknown Woman: (inaudible)

JH: Clyde Allen.

Unknown Woman: Yes.

JH: You can contact Clyde Allen—if you contact LaVerne Allen. And you can check with—I imagine that you have Ms. Stone on your list.

HJ: Right.

JH: And Andrew Ferrell.

HJ: Right, I have (inaudible).

JH: And Trixie Blanks. You ought to know Ms. Blanks.

Unknown Woman: (inaudible) She's in the library.

HJ: Oh, yeah.

JH: Ms. Blanks, she knows about some things. The old time grocery businesses and so forth. There was an era before my time that blossomed out big. There were— And Leroy Nelson, he might be able to tell you there were some bottling companies among the blacks here.

HJ: Right. The 50/50 Bottling Company.

JH: Yeah. And there was a dry goods store here among the blacks. And there were several big time gambling tycoons. (inaudible) Charlie Vanderhorst<sup>2</sup>. And there were some deputies—sheriff's deputies. Of course—whatever name you give to them they were deputies; they were black deputies. And I think that you can get some information from Marshall, J.D. Marshall. Do you know Marshall—Mr. Marshall, Senior? J.D. Marshall, Senior?

HJ: I don't.

JH: Well, at any rate, his name is in the telephone book. (inaudible) And a—

Unknown Woman: (inaudible)

JH: Oh, and I have one other thing (inaudible) that I was about to leave out here. That is that we were—I happen to have been on the board of the development of Progress Village. These are the officers of the board of trustees. We developed Progress Village from nothing into what it actually is. And the board of trustees, among the blacks were: M.H. Mott, Ben Griffin, James Hargrett, Romeo Gibbs, Perry Harvey, Senior, M.R. Silas, Ray Williams, C. Blythe Andrews, and Aurelio Fernandez. (inaudible) that were on this (inaudible) trustees for this project. Now, whether you want— Do you want the other people whose names are on there? Well, anyway, these were the blacks that had to do with the building of—

HJ: How did that development come about?

JH: Now, that's a big deal. There was a need for housing, so far as black people were concerned, in the city of Tampa. And we were searching to reorganize ourselves into a black and white committee. And we started seeking to find some place that would be suitable for us to build a black community. And, of course, every place that you would go there would be so much objection to it until you just had to turn it loose. Nobody wanted anybody to build a black community. They wanted the blacks to stay in their places.

HJ: I understand that.

JH: And, of course, with these people who were really people who were powerful people, people who had made dents in the political system in the area, banking and so forth, in the town—

HJ: Give us the names.

JH: —was Cody Fowler, Robert Thomas, who was the—but anyhow, he's vice-president also of the Citizen's Bank.

HJ: (inaudible)

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<sup>2</sup> Also known as Charlie Moon.

JH: But James Griffin, Junior, he if you're Flagship Bank. Carl E. Smith, Junior, they were the biggest contractors there was in the south. Harold Wolfe, the president and owner of Wolfe Brothers. And Fred C. Williams; he was a banker also. And Tampa (inaudible) Leggitt, a banker, A.J. Grimaldi, a banker. And those are the people. Those are the people who helped with us—that we joined ourselves together and started to Seekin' to find properties that could be used.

And each person was able to have influence on the press and everybody else in Tampa. These people, when they spoke, it meant that the whole town would listen. And they would be able to tell to the *Tribune*, "Don't put this in your paper." And they would tell Blythe, "Don't put this in your paper<sup>3</sup>." They'd tell the [*St. Petersburg*] *Times*, "Don't put this in your paper. But we're goin' out to find some property and when we find some property we're going to work along with the federal government and we're going to get housing started here in Tampa, for blacks."

And we went all around, and the only place that we were able to locate were those sixty acres out at Progress Village. And we found it and—I have here the master plan. The master plan by which we went in order to develop Progress Village. And it had the site for Progress Village, the land purchase agreement, the relocation dates, the project phasing, influence and controlling factors, procedures employed, provisions of the master plan, street drainage, the drainage in its entirety, stream planning, water—where to build water plants—sewerage plants, and the exceptions, land acquisition and then the total explanation of the master plan, the utilities, the cost and financial, the conclusions, the neighborhood shopping centers, the schedules—the shopping center schedule.. neighborhood shopping schedules—and the water treatment plan—the sewage treatment plan—and the section and street plan. All of that had to do with the development of Progress Village.

It was something that took more than a year of constant meetings every week—and sometimes twice a week—for us to be able to get together and to work out this type of program before we got this Progress Village.

HJ: Did you—when I say "you," meaning—did the group of blacks go to these white individuals and ask for their help, or they come to you? How did the whole initial thing for black housing come about?

JH: It was with the Frontiers, as we would have our weekly meetings. We had people like Cody Fowler to come in one week and speak to us. Then we would have somebody like Bob Thomas to come in and speak to us. We had somebody like Harold Wolfe to come in and speak. And Leggitt to come in and speak. And then there was Blythe Andrews, who we talked to. He was the president of our organization at that time. And we talked with him, and then we would ask questions when we'd have those people speak about what can be done in order to better the housing conditions of the blacks in Tampa.

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<sup>3</sup> The *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*.

I think that it was Cody Fowler who initiated the idea of "Let's get together and let's call on so many blacks and let's call on—" And then blacks would get together and they'd say "Let's call on so many various white—" it would go through by contacting people like Robert Thomas and Cody Fowler. And from there, they would be able to tell us who among the white would be of the stature and would have the compassion that would be needed in order to carry out a project like this. Then the blacks, we would— The blacks would be picked out from the people in the town as to who would be good people to be among the blacks, who would have the time and who would be willing to give their service, and so forth, in order to make this come out to be a possibility.

HJ: And Progress Village received its name by it being a form of progress for blacks? Is that how it got the name Progress Village?

JH: We decided on the various names; all of us brought in names as to what we would name this place. And how it happened—somebody had Progress Village on there. And so that's how the name was established.

HJ: About how long did it take for it to be built?

JH: It must have been between three and four years.

HJ: Okay, thank you, Mr. Hargrett.

*end of interview*