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John Williams: I was born in Dallas County, in 1902.

**Herbert Jones:** Where was this? Where is Dallas County?

JW: Out there on (inaudible). That's Texas.

HJ: Dallas County, Texas?

JW: Umm hmm.

HJ: So, did you go to school there?

JW: Yeah, I worked there at that high school.

HJ: And what kind of work was you doin' prior to your coming to Tampa?

JW: Well, most of my work I was contracting—doin' contract. We were out here in them days (inaudible) you know, on account of (inaudible). Then I practically come up in Bridgeport. I mostly worked in Bridgeport in a brass company—steel company—until I got to be twenty-one, then I left and went out to California and I worked in the grape farm, pickin' grapes. But I'm gonna tell you most of my history is not (inaudible). See, I went with Ringling Barnum shows nineteen years.

HJ: What did you do?

JW: Well, I— Where it started with—you know what they call roustabouts? That's puttin' up the tent, drivin' stakes, takin' it down. Then from there on as I got on, I worked from the ticket office to the gate tearin' up tickets. So that's when I— See, I started with Ringling in 1917, 'cept it was Barnum. In 1919 they combined. I was in Houston, Texas

then. That's just right after the war. See, we had to close in Houston because the flu was so bad. So they put me off there. Oh, we had over two hundred people workin'—thousands—you got seventeen hundred people workin'.

HJ: How many black?

JW: Oh, around about four or five hundred. Yeah, he had a lot. They all did—some of 'em was bosses. Some was the canvass bosses, some was—everything. They put me off. I had to stay in the hospital. I had to stay in the hospital till they got a chance to—I only stayed there— See, them times Barnum, they were winterin' in Houston. And Ringling was winterin' in Babylon, Wisconsin. So I stayed in the hospital about a year and a half. I was a sick man. But they kept in touch with me all the time. See, I had—you know, that was the time of that bad flu goin' around. That in 1917, 1918, killin' people. So I was in St. Joseph Hospital.

HJ: In Texas?

JW: Umm hmm. Yeah, that's in Houston. So my people come and got me. So they transferred me there to a hospital in Dallas. Then when Ringling found out—see, they paid all the bills. I didn't pay no bills. They paid everything, they do. Every week of winter I got my money. Then they write and tell me whenever I got better let 'em know, they would send me a ticket. But I couldn't go back to Connecticut. I had to go back to Wisconsin then.

So by the time the season about ready to open, I got better in that St. Joe's hospital. I was in both Saint—both times it was a Catholic hospital. I was at the Catholic hospital in Houston. I was in the Catholic hospital in home, in Dallas. And I've been well all—when I was a younger—I was well treated. But see, I didn't want my people to know that I was sick.

HJ: So when did you move to Tampa?

JW: I come to Tampa in 1933.

HJ: Nineteen thirty three.

JW: But I've come to Tampa before then with the circus—twenty-eight [1928].

HJ: In 1928?

JW: Umm hmm.

HJ: Okay, you— When y'all were doin' the circus, how was it when you came to Tampa? Did you have a special side for the blacks to come in, or a special place for blacks to sit, or how was it arranged?

JW: Oh, it was Jim Crow. See, especially when you get to the South. See we, generally have a red cloth straight down. Colored on that side, white [on the other]. But I tell you what would do happen, though. See, Ringling was—they was funny people. If there was more colored that was comin' in, they'd take that sign down. The crackers, they didn't know it. Somebody pulled that sign, after a while everybody was sittin' in the same place.

You know, I'll tell you one time—I think in twenty-eight [1928]—we showed Miami, and I was workin' with kids. I worked with mixed, white and colored, sometimes twenty-five, thirty, forty, fifty kids. We got there on a Sunday, rainin', so we— You know how the kids are when the circus come to town. Well, they come out there. When I asked all who wanted to come back Monday, and do work, you know— "Why, I can't work when school goin' on; I can't work none of 'em." 'Cause in Miami they didn't allow you to work no kid up if the school term. I had to work big men then; some of 'em helped.

Well, there wasn't no school term then. So I think I had around about twenty-five—oh, around fifty—all mixed, white and colored. They all come back like they said. So now I had 'em spread the tent, you know, for the animals. So I get 'em a sticker, so when they come I waited for 'em—I'd be at the number one ticket wagon waitin' on 'em. So they showed up, every one of 'em showed up. They here. All right. So I put the top gear up. Carried the seats, put the seats down. Helped raise the seats up.

HJ: Were the black children and the white children workin' side by side?

JW: Workin' good. I didn't know it gonna be (inaudible). They were workin' together. And after all of 'em got through I said, "Well, gang—" I line 'em all like I been doin' all over the country. You know, give 'em all a ticket. After a while two big motorcycle cops rolled up there. "What you figurin' to do?" I said, "I'm figurin' to give these kids a ticket."

"You can't give no colored no ticket." "What?" See, I never have been down this far in—we'd been showin', but we always showed Mississippi and all around Arkansas. I said, "Well, [what do you] want to do?" "You've got to give 'em money." "Man, I haven't got no money." So I thought he was kiddin'." I said, "What I'm gonna do about this white ones?" Said, "You can give them a ticket."

So you know what? The white ones said like this: After they see this guy means business they said, "No, we won't take the ticket until you give the colored guys their tickets too."

So after a while the chief come up there. He divide 'em. He divide the white over there and the colored over there. He asked the colored boys, "What y'all rather want to have?" I said, "Look here, man, I gots all the (inaudible). Look here, I'm the boss here."

He said, "I'm gonna tell you too. We don't let no niggers and whites work together." So, the white people, they jumped him again. They shoved him away.

So finally, I said, "I'll tell you what you can do. I don't give nary a one of 'em no ticket at all." After a while the manager would be there to reckon and let [them] settle it. So he

kept on arguin' with me and arguin' with me and so I got mad with him. And all the—see, all the actors and all of 'em know me, they know I tried to (inaudible). So finally they come, quieted the cracker down.

So after a while I saw the cars roll up, standin' back there. "You can't touch— You go to—" So all the kids, they went. So out there arguin' and they arguin' and they arguin'.

So finally the manager—the superintendent; John [Ringling] hadn't got there. John was in town somewhere. I didn't know it. Finally somebody got him and he come and he settled it. He said, "I'll tell you what we're gonna do. We gonna give all of 'em fifty cents." So they line 'em all up there, had a big ole bale of hay, and give 'em all fifty cents.

So this two old crackers, they watched me from now on. I went to the candy stand and got me a drink. Come back. Went to the front door, you know, tell the head ticket seller what's happenin', you know. I said, "Oh, they ain't no passes. All of 'em got fifty cents."

So he said, "Okay." So now this guy, he didn't know I was goin' to go and change and put on a uniform to come to the front door, take up the tickets. And I kept a lookin'. Oh, man, there was so many people there that day we could afford to give two shows; sometimes we do. And I kept lookin' and lookin'. White was buyin' the tickets. Colored wasn't buyin' no tickets.

So finally John Ringling come and asked what was wrong. They told John Ringling, "Ain't no nigger goin' to the show."

He said, "What? This is my show. Anywhere a colored can't go, I take it down." He had already gotten mad with that argumentation during that morning.

So they argued. So they agreed. You know, we had three ticket wagons: a white one, a yellow one, and a red one. So they asked him, "What one do you want the colored to buy a ticket?" Well, they think—one of 'em said a red one. One said a white one. One said a yellow one. So all of 'em said like this. So the manager, he said, "Well, we try the white one."

I thought they'd come in—I thought they gonna let 'em in the front. That chief of police and a sergeant got there. Well, that made all the white tickets. They got mad. He said, "What happen?"

Said, "We don't put— You ain't goin' in that front door."

He said, "God damn your soul, you get up in here." So after a while the elephant men, all the roustabouts, they come. They gonna be a riot there. Even the clowns, you know, all of 'em got around there. In them days, you know, there wasn't no man there to fight with no townspeople. No, you got to fight the whole circus. The circus had seventeen hundred [people]. So they didn't say nothin'. So they agreed to let 'em go in the side door. And they'd agree. You see now, where they want 'em to come—they would never get a chance

to come in the menagerie to see the animals.

So Ringling got tired of that. He called up—I don't know now who was the governor he called that time. But, anyhow, he called the governor and he got this thing straightened. And that night, we were gonna give two shows, so he decided to give one and that made all the white people from the north mad. So they got mad and they wanted to run all the— See, now, it wasn't the white people. See, the law in Miami, in them days, they would sort of protectin' the northern people. And the northern people didn't want 'em protectin' like that.

So they find they was wrong so— Well, we don't— We were gonna tear down anyhow. John had done gotten mad. People had all the tickets; he had a loudspeaker, said, "All who got tickets, come to the ticket wagon, your refunds be—we ain't gonna give but one show, that's the afternoon." So they tore the show down. And next year we went back, everybody was treated like white people.

HJ: Okay, so in 1928 in Tampa, did y'all have any kind of problems then when y'all brought the show here in Tampa, in twenty-eight [1928]?

JW: No.

HJ: Black and white?

JW: No, there wasn't no problem at all.

HJ: Okay, Mr. Williams, can you tell me anything about World War I?

JW: No, I was too young then.

HJ: Too young?

JW: Yeah.

HJ: Okay, so when you came to Tampa in 1933, what were the conditions of blacks here? What kind of work were they doin'?

JW: Well, most black in them days—some of 'em worked for Cone Brothers [Construction Company], some workin' for Paul Smith [Construction Company]. Most all of 'em workin' for the dock. That's before; they didn't have no union then.

HJ: Umm hmm.

JW: But after they got the union, they was workin' on the dock. Show you how they do: "Come on, come on, work."

HJ: Right. Did you ever work on the dock?

JW: Oh, yeah, I worked on the dock. I work on the dock when I got hurt.

HJ: So how much money were you makin' when you first started at—an hour?

JW: Well, at that time we were makin' seventy-five cents, I think, in a day—a dollar something at night.

HJ: An hour or a day?

JW: Hour. Then after that union would—you know, went up a whole lot.

HJ: When did the union come in?

JW: It come in around about—I think it was around in thirty-eight [1938]—thirty-six [1936]. They always have somethin'; it wasn't— Well, they went up two dollars, accordin' to what you were doin'. But I think this was the—I'm gonna tell you, I think they were the last port that went up, because they were all colored; there wasn't no white. Yeah, they went up, paid five or six dollars—what you were doing—six, seven dollars an hour. See, I got six dollars an hour. I got seven dollars an hour. I be unloadin' some kind of cement or fertilizer, or somethin' like that

HJ: So how were the working conditions? How were you treated?

JW: Wasn't worth a shit. Well, you gotta get you (inaudible). You know, I would see them jokers. Boat come in, it's suppose to last a day or two days, like it got somethin' on it like can goods or some kind of other freight—man, them cats load that thing in a day and a half. And a lot of those seamen used to get at 'em. Say, "Man I come here to rest. That dog, you already got this stuff unloaded"—sack stuff.

They was runnin'. They were gettin' hurt. Didn't have no safety like they do now. Some of 'em get killed in the hold. Let the dirt down, people leanin' over that stackin' boxes and all that. And when the ships— There wasn't no— This ain't nobody. See, and like you load a ship one side, well, they kept on loadin'—you know how the ship tilt in the water—and they stand right there and let them—they didn't even—so I had— See, I always been by myself. I ain't never had nobody so I can work if I want. I only kept enough for eatin'. Man, when I saw that thing go to reelin' and rockin', I come out. "What you come out for?"

Say, "Man, that thing—you can't get 'em too loaded. They sink." "Well, it's all right. We'll prop it." You can prop all you want to.

Before I got to home four men's legs broke, black all of 'em. That cargo—the boxes had done shifted. See, Georgie Boy, he was the president. You know him, don't you?

HJ: Georgie?

JW: Yeah, Georgie Boy. You heard 'em talk about that Georgie. You know, Perry Harvey.

HJ: Umm hmm.

JW: We called him Georgie Boy. His name is Perry Harvey. But he's got a home down there. You may know his son [Perry Harvey, Junior]. His son is still runnin' the union. Perry. The union. Yeah, that's bad. When I started on that dock, many poor people got broke up and got killed. 'Cept me.

We was over there on Seddon Island unloadin' some salt. We'd been diggin' that salt about a week. And I went and got my lunch. I come down and I was sittin' on it. Me and another boy—the guy was sittin' there—we'd been workin' over there a week on that old hard salt. So I looked up and said, "Look here, Fred, I see some (inaudible)." See, they didn't have bulldozers and everything to scoop it. "You know, it's time for that salt to break from that wall."

He said, "You think so?" Well, we were wearin' it down; that salt was overhead. He said, "You think so? You've been pretty lucky. I better listen to you this time."

I said, "I'm goin' up there and check it out."

He said, "I think I'll trail you."

And that evenin', that two ton of salt fell on about eight—I didn't know none of 'em. One got all broke up. They find out where the other one was. The other three, they dug 'em out. You know what I said, I was eatin'—I was sittin' there on the pile eatin' somethin' that day. I looked up there and said, "Man, I'm (inaudible). All this jolts and rockin' from this ship." And we'd been there a week and that salt ain't busted yet.

"Well, you think any day?"

I said, "Well, I don't know. When I get through eatin', I'm goin' and check out."

So I go up on the deck and went to the header and told him I'm goin' to check out. He sent me to the stevedore. He said, "What's wrong, John?"

I said, "I got a bad stomach and that's all I know." So I come on up and come on across the bridge, me and him, caught the bus, come on down Central [Avenue].

HJ: Can you tell me anything about the streetcars?

JW: Yeah, they was runnin' then. They was runnin'.

HJ: And how were you all treated on that?



JW: Well, I ain't— You know, there was a sort of mixture. But every time I heard about it they have a little—somebody havin' trouble out to Belmont Heights or some between the (inaudible) but not because—I was on it, I didn't know it. I'm gonna tell you the facts, all over the world I ain't never—I always kept out of that trouble. You know that gang (inaudible). You know this. If I was— See, I'm goin' over seventy-four years old. If it was all the world I'd have been all over the United States I'd been dead. Always lucky. Kept out—

Used to be a time down on Central in "Mugger Alley," there used to be somethin' like a red light district. Well, I crossed there with Charlie Moon—you know he owned the gamblin' joint right down—down further, that was Little Savoy. Down before that when we get there, that was another place, Lee Davis and all that—well, there used to be some white men that used to come up there behind "Mugger Alley" back in there, somewhere colored.

So the crew got up. I was just come out of Moon's. He said, "John." "What?"  
"We gonna lay some on them cracker's asses tonight. Oh, you scared?"

I said, "I ain't said no, I said who? What? Look here, man, you've got that wrong man. You've been where I've been. New York, Chicago, Alabama, Mississippi, they've been doin' (inaudible). But you didn't ask. No, you (inaudible)."

So he start over there. I said, "Man, look at here. You don't know who (inaudible) and you'll get yourself in—all will be pointed."

One was my good friend. I said, "You listen to me, Joe. You'll always be (inaudible). You do something, beat 'em up, kill 'em and you always (inaudible). Man, let them do them what they want. See this—they know what they're doin'. There's eleven colored. Those white men didn't come down here. I assume the (inaudible) brought them down here. Now you think about that. Man, they— Man, I—"

They (inaudible) two of 'em off and an white comin' down there (inaudible). They'd beat up side the head, call (inaudible). See them times you didn't have no word. Them crackers (inaudible) come down on Central with their bare hands, would beat a nigger right and left. They carried around about eight of 'em—or would ever go to jail. The rest of 'em (inaudible) them two, them (inaudible) to death.

HJ: Do you remember anything about the land boom in Tampa?

JW: Boom?

HJ: The land boom?

JW: No, I wouldn't. That was before—I heard about it, but—I hear they had a land boom or some kind of boom. You know, that was before my time.

HJ: Well, how was the housing and the schools and the social life and all this kind of stuff in the thirties [1930s]?

JW: Well, my idea about the houses were bad. Schools were so-so. You know. Look like me, in them days they were— They didn't have much trouble with them schools because I lived right by one of 'em. You know, I been by a lot of them schools. I passed—see, I'm all like this, I'm gonna tell you. See, when I ain't workin', I'm always on the street or on the corner. I'm lookin'. Now, I ain't never— They didn't have no disorder troubles like they got now.

They all black. Had some pretty good teachers. And them teachers didn't light up on 'em none. And I watch 'em day and out. There wasn't no dopin'. If they did, they didn't come there with it. They did and they didn't come back no more. And the mama didn't come up there draggin' no broom handle an' whup the teacher, because the teacher be ready for her when she get near there and the law send her back. Or you have the law there (inaudible).

Well, they was pretty good. And I'm gonna tell you, all the children I know since I've been here growin' up, some of 'em made school teachers. Some now—merchant marine on ships. And, you know, practically all I know now—went to school that I've known (inaudible) kids, they made pretty good. They made some good, you know, projects.

But, no, they ain't like now. Now, these the worst I ever seen. And they're gettin' worse. See, I set on that porch day and night. Yesterday—it was Saturday—I was standin' out there. Three of 'em—four of 'em out there smokin' cigarette. Open their mouth and (inaudible). Right out there. Now, they go to some school. They stay right back there (inaudible). You know, now I look at 'em. They ain't embarrassed. They do that regular. Come out there. Smoke.

But I don't know, I may be wrong. I don't know, I may be gone. After a while we'd be back in our same neighborhood, and you see where they're havin' trouble over that bussin' in California. Well, a lot of colored folks gets bussed anyhow (inaudible) because they don't want 'em. They don't want to raise the children no how. See that's what a lot of 'em—

I don't believe colored folks got good sense when they said he don't want his children to go to white schools. You know, because since I've been seein' 'em goin', a lot of 'em been learning. But look at that school over there. That used to be all black. There wasn't no fence. There wasn't no grass. There was never sand. Automobiles runnin' all over the children. Had to put them— No sooner when they puttin' white they put the fence around it. They change the traffic. One way this way. And the white woman. And they put a playground over here. Put a kindergarten. As long as them poor black was over there all those many years they had to dunk out the drunk—there was a trail right through there. All the drunks go through there.

So I don't know. I ain't got that much, but I got as much sense to know somethin'. It has

helped the colored folks since the segregation. I'm gonna tell you the truth, I ain't never been segregated. See, over seventy-four years I've been in Tampa, I wasn't segregated in Tampa. All of 'em called me (inaudible). When there was segregation in Tampa I was treated as—you know—as a person. Because I always carried— See, like I tell that boy— did I tell you about that night? They don't beat up on white people.

I was pointed out. See, before segregation, I was eatin' downtown. There was a lot of them old cops downtown walk up to me and say, "John."

And I say, "Yep."

"Oh, you're—yeah, you ain't like the rest of the colored people; they was wild. Yeah, I been a watchin' you for years. You always—you're somethin' in your head, you're always lookin'—watchin' me." You know, they always tellin' me that. Always wanted to stay out of that bad crew. I wasn't no hand to drink that much, no how. But, see, nobody run over me. See, but I was just— Oh, I think I was right. I'm gonna try white or black.

HJ: Mr. Williams, do you know anything about the army troops comin' through Tampa in the forties [1940s]?

JW: Yeah, they had a riot here during that time.

HJ: Yeah, can you tell me something about that?

JW: Well, let me see where the—the riot start somewhere here. I don't know whether it was Belmont Heights or somewhere. But in them times, I was workin' for Central Life [Insurance Company]. I was at the hotel there, before they tore the old Central Hotel down. Where that started, I— But, anyhow, I know they sent troops from MacDill [Air Force Base]. You know, up and down the street. But they ain't last so long. I don't know how—I don't where—I don't know.

HJ: Were there any blacks in that troop?

JW: Yeah, the first one I'd seen in that troop. They come down Central. I was lookin' out the window.

HJ: That was in 1940?

JW: Yeah. I look out the window, and that's the first thing I see was the guy on that— That's most what was down here, most of 'em. It was quite natural to send them because they was tryin' to quiet—I see one or two sergeant and a few MP [military police], but they was in them jeep. But they ran down and flashed them big lights in them buildings around there. And run that gun round and round. And it wasn't long, I don't know. I went on to bed. Only what I do. Quiet down. I don't know where the trouble—

*Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.*

JW: —about that. Forty [1940], the riot. But I know where some somewhere where they have 'em. And I used to have read about it. I used to have clippin'. I was right there when when the first somebody started it but who it was called—it's been so long. Anything I'm tellin' you, anything that the colored start, it don't go in my brain long. Of course, I know 'em. See, I saw a lot of things initially, myself. But now, anything the white folks started—see, I remember more of that. Anything that the colored started—all at once. I know how it start but you see—you know, who said—whomever come on.

HJ: Right. Well, who started the riot? You don't know what made that happen?

JW: I don't know, it was somethin' about havin'—I don't what happened. I don't know (inaudible) MacDill (inaudible) somewhere in town, somewhere in Tampa. It wasn't in MacDill, I don't think. Yeah, I don't know. Oh, they tell me something about a young—about a soldier or something. They used to have one of them medical centers right there on Cass [Street] and Central. There's somethin' about it—I can't remember right about that soldier and somebody.

HJ: Okay, when black folks got sick in the thirties [1930s] and the forties [1940s] or something like—where did they go to get help? To get medical help?

JW: Where I went, you liked to died. Clara Frye [Hospital].

HJ: Were the facilities good there?

JW: See, when I first got hurt, that's where I went. I fell down stairs. I paralyzed myself—my nerves, it's never been right. So, that's the only place I guess you could go. I went there. You know, when them nerves—you got to—you're hollerin' and hoot for that—they would hurt, you know. So they kept me and had to put a needle to me of some kind to quiet it.

HJ: What year was that?

JW: That was in fifty-three [1953].

HJ: Did you know Miss Clara Frye? Did you ever see her?

JW: Yeah.

HJ: What type woman was she?

JW: Well, I was (inaudible). She seemed like a pretty good woman. But you see, she was only—she had it run by a syndicate. I always had money. I had around about eighteen hundred dollars, so I couldn't live there. I had (inaudible). They had some orderly there, two big niggers, they didn't—they'd throw me around, shoot and put that stuff in me, you know. They didn't have no doctors there, no surgery. So I just lay there and take a aspirin

for pain and all; it seem like there ain't nobody there. But them nerve, she hurts, you know, pain.

So finally, a white lady come there to see about her nurse, or a patient of hers—somebody. So I was over there rollin' an' turnin'. So she come over there. She rung the bell, they come. Said, "Anything you can do for this gentleman? He hurt."

Said, "Nothin' we can do, but he—I don't know what will happen."

She said, "You don't know what's gonna happen?" She come, got her maid out. Of course, she's gonna carry her up to—

So she talked to me a while. So I asked her, "Look here, will you do me a favor, will you call up a lady on Scott [Street]?"

She said, "I'll do that."

So I give her the number, she called. So the lady come. So when she come, I wanted to know where I can get me to Dr. [Edward O.] Archie. He was workin' around there then. He was with the city. He was city (inaudible) wasn't see no ricket. They had a Portu—had a some kind of foreign doctor. Then they had some kind of foreign lady. She did better than any of 'em I was to. So finally I got in touch with Dr. Truth, a brain and nerve doctor. See, them doctors in them times, they didn't want to come to Clara Frye because they didn't have no facilities, didn't have no help, you know, to do this and that, don't have somethin' to do this. Everybody duckin' back in that (inaudible) build mines.

So I got in touch with him. So him and his nurse come. He introduced me to who he is and everything; I told him.

He said, "John, we're in bad shape." So they called two of them big black niggers. Said, "Come here. Will you pick him up? You saw him here. Pick him up."

So they pick me up and turned me over. So he went over my back. He said, "Tomorrow morning, I'll be back. I want you all to put him on the x-ray table." They had 1912 x-ray table. Man, I laid there and laid there and laid there.

So that morning him and his nurse come again. Told me the x-ray wasn't no good. Nothin' was no good. He said, "Mr. Williams, you're serious. Well, I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. I'll be back to see you and make them wash your body and your face and pull that tube out your (inaudible). That tube in there two days too long."

So he come right back. Made 'em pull that tube. He put me one in himself. He made 'em wash me up. I'd been layin' there all nasty and dirty. He said, "Look here, you call—" What her name? I'd like to call her name. She use to be the head nurse.

She come. She caught his bawlin' out. He said, "Look here, there she won't even come. I

come here the other day, that poor man ain't washed. I doubt y'all feed him."

They say, "Well, we ain't got nobody workin' on him, on account of people that had to be bed strict like that to stay. We got so many in here." Miss [Mary] Case, that's what been her name, Case. So finally he went on. He writ 'em all up. He come back the next day. He said, "Mr. Williams." I said, "Yeah?"

He said, "I think we done sprung a leak," or whatever. And he said, "You're in bad shape. I think I done broke the color line. I'm gonna get you out there to Tampa General. You're too nice of a fellow to be layin' up here treated like a dog and his own race won't even treat you."

So he sent an ambulance and got me, came up to Tampa General. I was the only colored out there. So he had a x-ray machine like he wanted. You know I couldn't—them time I couldn't put my hand down like that. He had to put up—they had to tie my hand up like with a band and it broke, so by hangin' down like that. (inaudible) boys come in repair.

So he worked on them nerves, and shoot, he was not the only one. So he got that hand down. So he got me so I could feed myself. See, they had to feed me, I couldn't feed myself. So he found out I had that money. He found out (inaudible) three or four insurance. So I told him, you know, I'd have give a million to get help. Which I might have been—boy, I told her, I said, "Lord, I'd give a million."

So he worked on it until finally his brother—In the hospital, they got used to me. They got used to colored people, and me. They had colored workin' around there. You know. They got used to me where I was. So they got used to me. So they went to treatin' me like I was a human. They rolled me back. Took me to x-ray. Feed me. Washed me. Bathed me, did whatever—you know, shaved me.

So finally I asked him, "What do I owe you?" He said, "You owe me nothin'."

So I had blanks, 'cause this lady I know, she brought me blanks. I asked him about signin' them. He said, "No, if I'd have signed 'em blank it would (inaudible) and Clara Frye want all the money." He said, "Don't sign nothin'. Y'all get better. You can pay it as you want to, put a little on it if you want to. Don't sign nothin' on them."

So I had to write about a thousand dollars' worth of blanks. So he worked on (inaudible). He said, "John, I think you can go home. And I'll be to your house and see how your back and nerves. We'll bring you back out here."

You know, when I went back, there was a colored lady and a colored man there, and from time on they was comin' in there. I was there. I told the colored lady, "I was the first one in the hospital."

"You was?"

I said, "Yeah." I sat there and talked to her. I said, "Yeah, I was the first one in here."

She said, "God bless you."

HJ: And what year did you say it was?

JW: Huh?

HJ: What year was that?

JW: Nineteen fifty-three. Yeah, I was. So he got me up so I could walk and scoot around. So he wouldn't want to go in that. There wasn't nothin' wrong with my brain. See, it was all in my shoulder; they still left to me for 'em to go in there and see can they find that nerve that was restin' on that somewhere in there. So I think one of these days, if I don't leave this friendly earth too soon, I think I'll let 'em try.

HJ: So, have you ever been married?

JW: No.

HJ: No children?

JW: See that's what all the doctors and nurses told me. Said, "John you're blessed. You ain't got no wife." (inaudible)

I was on welfare. They told me the same thing. I don't know what the other colored folks. See, I give people credit when it's due. Them people, all white, waited on me. They treat me as I was a white patient. I was on welfare. I had a couple colored on my list. I fired 'em because I didn't like their attitude. See, when they find out in the welfare office that I know right from wrong, that I wasn't no Uncle Tom, they take them color off of me and put white. Because I know them colored wasn't gonna do nothin' but drag them same files from month to month and tell me I can't do this and I can't get that. See, wish they'd—wish half of them were on welfare; they was workin'.

So from that time on I stayed in white until I went to gettin' my state welfare; that's sixty-six dollars. And I stayed with them until I went to gettin' my Social Security. I wasn't with—it was a colored lady from Jacksonville; she was workin' on that. She stayed with me until I got that. Her name Miss White. She was out of Jacksonville and everybody loved her.

So I was gettin' sixty-six dollars. And the welfare, they paid twenty-five dollars a month. Oh, they know I had the money. They say I'm lucky. They know I had the money. I'm on—No, they say I'm lucky. They know I had that kind of money. They ignore that. They said, "John, you need every nickel."

I said, "I'd like to hear you talk." He told that (inaudible) so I (inaudible).

So they—I mean, the city; we was on the city then. The city carried me. They paid me fifty-eight dollars for a lady to cook for me and board, until they found out she was too shady. So they take it away from her, sent me the check and said, "John, you capable of paying your own bills." So I pays it. When they sent my check, I paid her. So they did that until I got on the county. In them days, the county wasn't payin' but sixty-six dollars. And the city was takin' care of my other benefits.

So, I'm gonna tell you I've been blessed. See, I don't— See, there's many people (inaudible) living when I got hurt, and they done all died, some in a home, some (inaudible). And I meet some of the people and I'd tell 'em, "John, you must have been a mighty good fellow in those days. See all the people that used to work with you, they dead; if they don't they in the home and you're still scootin' around." (inaudible) tell you.

See now, I was— No, see, I reasoned it out. See, I was the first. See, I read—when Eisenhower was president, you know—I read in the paper a long time ago then, anybody belonged to Social Security any length of time and got it, got disability or hurt, they could get insurance some way. So that's why I (inaudible). So when I got hurt I thought about that. They hadn't opened up no Social Security office here. They just had opened up one down in Tampa down there on Lykes Brothers. They wasn't no (inaudible). They had just sent 'em in here. And you know how long I was startin' to get that? Two years. I worked. And he had colored girls.

The lady from Jacksonville, she worked with me. She said, "John, I ain't gonna quit you until you get your Social Security." I don't know what— That was an educated woman. She's the boss all over. When anything gettin' wrong in Tampa, she come over from Jacksonville and straighten it out. So that cleared that.

HJ: All right, then. Thank you very much.

*end of interview*