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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
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Mary Alice Dorsett: I was born in Dade City, Florida, reared in Dade City and Tarpon Springs. I finished high school in Lakeland. I attended Paine College in Augusta, Georgia and Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls in Washington, DC, which the great giant Ms. Nannie Helen Burroughs founded. And she was a personal friend of mine, a personal teacher of mine; and of course, it was through Reverend [A. Leon] Lowry that I got to her school. In fact, Reverend Lowry used to be my pastor when I was attending college. So I feel very humble to have had that privilege.

Now, what do you want to know about?

Otis Anthony: Hold it, you just mentioned something. What was your area of study when you were in school?

MD: Christian social service work. Ms. Burroughs had me to take everything that her school offered, because she was fitting me for foreign mission work. And of course, she said—to send me to Africa or to any foreign field, that I would have to know everything, because I would be going into an undeveloped territory. So, I was taught how to make furniture, how to make chairs out of barrels, how to take nothing and make something out of it. I was taught health, beauty culture, business—you name it, Ms. Burroughs made me take it.

OA: That is beautiful, that's—I constantly say that that is what's missing with us. I couldn't even dream of having an opportunity to go [to] Africa when I graduated from school, or even dream of having a chance to study in all those business areas. And it was an all Black school. Was it a land grant college?

MD: No, it was private, very exclusive, very exclusive. One of the years that I was there, Ms. Burroughs had more teachers than she had students. So it was a very exclusive school. So when I came out of school—in fact, it's all a mystery to me, amazing to me, of

when I think about how it all came about.

This was why, when Reverend Lowry first came to Tabernacle [Baptist Church] in Augusta one Sunday morning—he was unmarried, a very young man—and one Sunday morning he got up and he said that the church should do more than pray and sing. That's the smaller part of it; the larger part is service. God wants service. He want you to minister. And he said that the church should take some eligible young woman or man, and fit them for foreign mission work. And the Tabernacle is a large church, and he said, "And this Sunday morning, I recommend this young lady—" he didn't even know my name, he hadn't been there that long. Of course, while I was there I was living off campus with the chairman of the deacon board, he and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Scott. But anyway, so he said—he told Mrs. Chin, who was general president of the missionary society, to form a committee and to interview me, this committee, and see if I had the qualities and the abilities to be trained to perform mission work. And if I had, the only person he knew in the world who could do the job would be Nannie Helen Burroughs. And so that's how I got to Ms. Burroughs' school.

OA: So, when did you get back to Tampa?

MD: I came into Tampa, July 19, 1950, my first time living in Tampa. It was coincidental, you know, when I was here quite some time before Beulah [Baptist Church] called Reverend Lowry, and it was just a coincidence.

OA: Yeah, I was just going to ask you that. That is exactly a coincidence.

MD: It was a coincidence, I feel often, I tell this. And one day [I was] talking, speaking, at a Woman's Day program at Beulah, and I mentioned this thing and it was so fantastic, because I'm real radical and after a while people are going to think I'm ready for (inaudible). But I can tell this, a lot of people still respect Rev. Lowry, so he can verify that that part of me is not crazy. He can do this—and then to have him here, to come to Tampa.

OA: Because I remember reading something about him being in Augusta, Georgia. That's where he really got into his first civil rights experience, and that type of thing, from what I understand. And then he came to Tampa. Man, that's amazing, to have two who push hard for the people, to come to the same place.

MD: When I heard somebody say that Reverend Lowry was gonna come to Beulah to preach, I said, "It couldn't be the Reverend Lowry I know," and behold it was. God works in mysterious ways. And of course, the reason—well I don't know, things have worked themselves out. Oh, and what I'm doing in Tampa, Reverend Martin, G. T. Martin, called him Dr. Martin, who was then director of the Baptist Fellowship Center there on Green [Street] and North Blvd. Well anyway, he and his wife had me come here to help him set up summer vacation Bible school. So that's what I'm doing in Tampa.

OA: Ms. Dorsett, when you were here, did you have any other interest outside of setting

up Bible schools?

MD: You mean after I got here? At the beginning—ah, well let me say this. When I came—well, I am always interested in people, and even though this was my chief purpose, I did a lot of going and joining civic organizations, and being on programs, and things of that nature.

OA: I had already heard that from Ms. Collins. Yes, she's at St. Paul [African Methodist Episcopal Church].

MD: Oh, perhaps Jeanette Collins.

OA: I think so. So what were the conditions like in Tampa for Blacks, when you got out of school, and you was teaching Bible school at that time?

MD: Well, the conditions are similar to now.

OA: That's an interesting statement.

MD: Yeah, perhaps a little of something, it's got a little worse instead of getting a little better. Because things are subtle now; we still have the same problems, but they are settled now. If you are going to kill a snake, you can hit him better when you see his head sticking up than you can locate him in some big grass. So now the snake is in the grass and he is difficult to kill. At that time, the shingles was hung out, his head was up. So, that's the reason I say, well it's just about the same, though it's worse now.

OA: Okay, Jim Crow was all over Tampa Bay at this time. Can you recall instances where you were confronted with such? Any problem that you had with this?

MD: No, no, not necessarily. This was something that I was born into—I'm from Dade City, you know—cause from what I can understand it is the same way everywhere. And [now] that I have been and reading, and listening to other people talk, I have come to the conclusion that it is the same way all over. When I say all over, I mean all over the world. But nothing in particular that I had problems with, other than—because see, at the same it was something that I was born into. And I am aware of the problems and I have been one of these type people, and still is. You never see me go out of my way to force myself on anybody. See, perhaps if I had been doing that, I would have met opposition. But I never [did], because I am the type who that feel that God has done a pretty good job with me, as he has done with others, too. So, I have, if you don't want me with you, I didn't want to be with you before you decided you didn't want to be with me.

So, therefore I've never come in contact with a racial something, and as I often say my [being] Black has served as an advantage to me. Well, most people feel that it is been a disadvantage. It has put color in my life, it has put adventure in my life, it has put challenge in my life, and it has made my life very colorful to me. So with this attitude, the problems that other people—and I know after coming here, and going around on

various programs and what have you, there were a group of—there were some people, some of our leaders, supposed to be at that time, they came to me and told me that I had impressed them that I could help force some doors open. So they wanted me to—this is when they weren't hiring Blacks in the department stores and things of that nature. That has opened up for us, thanks to Mr. James Hammond and so many more, with supermarket deals and what have you.

OA: I would like for you to explain some of those and some of the people who were involved, if you can, as much as you know about it.

MD: Well, there was Mr. James Hammond; there was Mr. Artrillo Fernandez, who has passed, you know; there was—and he was the first, I understand, I think first Black here to earn his Ph.D. degree; he had gotten it and on his way back he was killed.

OA: This is Mr. Fernandez?

MD: Uh huh, Artrillo Fernandez, who was principal at Henderson Elementary School; there was Fordom Jones, who worked very closely with them; Mr. Fordham, William Fordham; Mr. Rodriguez had his bit in too.

OA: This is Francisco Rodriguez?

MD: Francisco. There was Mr. Gregory—Matthew—and before my time, I heard about Mr. Davis, Mr. Edward Davis of the Central Life [Insurance Company], that I have the utmost respect [for], because I understand he lost his job fighting for the equalization of teachers' salaries. And I do feel that every Black teacher should give at least twenty-five cent, just twenty-five cent every payday, for him. And I understand Mr. Ben Griffin was also in this fight. But just to think of somebody, and I imagine the average Black teacher—the young ones doesn't even know about this, because nobody to tell them about this thing. But here is a man who took the lead in the fight, and they got it and he lost, he didn't get a thing. And here everybody else who was afraid to say anything, they getting the results, and he's just—so Central Life is giving him ah—

But I think we should learn to appreciate, and to give credit and honor to whom it's due. And don't forget the bridges that brought us across. And so many more that ah—I'm a see Ms. Hillman, Ms. Hillman; Ms. Hilda Turner—I haven't met her, but the people have told about these people—Ms. Hilda Turner; Ms. Clara Frye, Clara Frye Hospital; and even Dr. Mays, Benjamin Mays, he was here. And [we] can't forget about such a dedicated soul as Mr. Arthur D. Allen, who was over the Urban League. We worked very closely with him. He was a very dedicated man.

OA: Can you recall what year, what year he—

MD: In '56, I know he was here in '56; let's say about '55 [1955], '56 [1956], '57 [1957], and those years. I'm sure he was here because we worked very closely. There's Mr. Allen, Rayford Allen—well, you just have any number of people, and so many more that I am

not thinking of right now, who have done a good job. They had Venda Ray Hewitt, Dr. Hewitt's late wife; Ms. Roach, Margaret Roach, now and so many wonderful people.

OA: So, when they came to you and said they wanted to open some doors, what did they mean by that?

MD: Oh, not these people, but there were some that had passed that I had called. They wanted to use me as, in terms of putting in my words, a guinea pig, you know. To use me to—they told that they felt—this particular fellow said that they were discussing it, and they felt that I had the ability. They was trying to get somebody who could do a job and felt that I had the ability to do this, to go down and apply for one of these positions. Often they say they would get Blacks to go down, but then they wouldn't be qualified when the position would come open. But I had a—so that's what they meant about it, and then I could break the ice and open doors for others to come in. However, I had a different idea and I didn't do it.

Ms. Burroughs taught me if you can't find the kind of job you want, you make it yourself. So on those lines, rather than go and bother those White people with their jobs, I made my own job. And so, not only am I a secretary of taking orders, but I give my own orders. So this is the reasons I didn't take that. And so, as a result, I have been self-employed here in the city of Tampa for about twenty-seven years now.

OA: Okay, Ms. Dorsett. When you decided to go into business, were there any problems, say, in you setting up your business?

MD: Oh yes. Anything that [is] worthwhile comes with the price, it comes with the opposition and this is to be expected. And being born into our situation, I'm aware that the White man has all of the rules and the laws made in his favor. And of course, you don't feel—at least I don't, being so radical—I don't feel bad with him because this is the first long danger of self preservation. And see, that's the reason he fights us so hard, because he knows once we get on top that's what we gonna do, and he's gone be on the bottom. So this is the reason it is important that we learn to do our own thinking, and stop letting him do our thinking for us. See, this is part of our problem, cause whenever he thinks and tells you something, it's going to be to his advantage. And since we say we is as smart as he, we got to show it.

OA: We do say that, too.

MD: Yeah, we say it. But then we take what he says and we call it gospel. I went into my first—well, Ms. Burroughs, too, had taught me, and we had touched on it in some other classes before I got to her school. And when I got there, she put the finishing touches, that I was not going into a profession, I was to going into a business. She said it has made the Black race stagnant. They have misinformed us so much so, until we feel that if we aren't a professional, you aren't nowhere in the Black race. And this makes our race stagnant. Sure we need some professional people, but not as many as we have. That is the reason that we can't give a job, we have none to offer.

If a doctor—we feel that a doctor is our utopia—a doctor, if he have six or seven nurses and assistants, he would be raising sand, he or she would be raising sand. A lawyer, if he had four or five secretaries, he or she would be raising sand. A teacher, if she had two, or he or she had two or three servants at home and a secretary, they would be raising sand. A preacher, if he had, but he's about the best dog, cause he hollers two sermons a week, he hollers two, twice a week and he get all his money and they gonna crucify me.

But anyway, this is what Ms. Burroughs had taught me, whatever I do no professional business. And so I asked her, and when I came here she reminded me, in one of her letters, that I was to go into business, and I asked her what kind of business. And she said just so it's business—and, see, if you are in business, this is the reason in our race we don't have but so, cause we can't give jobs. Because we don't have the training for the job, at least we are not in the job market type thing. We end up—we don't have Tampa Electric or Cohen Brothers. See, if some of our people say they going to be a plumber, or going to be a carpenter or contractor, we kind of turn up our nose at him. But it's because we don't know better. And so, so it is—but anyway I looked after Ms. Burroughs. I just wanted to see what kind of business she had in mind—I always had a mind of my own, but she didn't help me out there. She told me just any kind of business, just so it's business. And so since then I have thanked her and all the other people a thousand times over.

So I looked around, to see what seemed to be the White man keeps getting into, this kind, ah, and I spotted the bonding business. So I got into the bonding business. Opposition? I didn't have any opposition getting into the bonding business. I wrote and got the information. I must have gotten this information from the courthouse or someplace like that, how you go into being a bondsman, because there weren't any Black ones. And having a negative attitude that Whites wouldn't help you, cause I was taught that, more or less, so I'm sure I must have sorted myself through the courthouse there, because I didn't know any bondsman personally.

And I wrote to Tallahassee and got my information, and at that time, you could either take a course from the university, or they would send you some study material and you could study that, you had a choice. Of course, I chose the study material. Mr. Feleto was the one who gave the test. He was—Sam Feleto, he was—I meant John Feleto, he was insurance commissioner at that time. And I went in and I was beaucoup—I was the only black, and there was beaucoup of Whites there taking the test. It was supposed to be a two hour test, and I guess I must have gotten through with it in about twenty five minutes, something like that. And when I went in, Mr. Feleto told me, "If you have any problems with it, let me know," and so I thanked him.

So I sat down, was it was just like writing my name down, and so I got up and he said, "Well, you got to do the whole test." And I told him, yes sir, I had done the whole test, and so I end up get my license. And one day I made a bond, I was down to the City Hall to bond out a man, and there was a new employee back there who was a White man, and he was sergeant there and he told me he was very proud to meet me. And he said that Mr.

Feleto said at that particular time I had scored the highest score that has ever been scored on that test. That was my first of hearing that, but that's he told me. So, and then—and my greatest opposition came from my people, not the White man, it was from the Black man.

I can remember my first bond. I was up in the office there, with some of us sharing an office together—in fact it was Mr. Rodriguez, Mr. Fordham, Mr. Saunders, Mr. Bob Saunders—he was at that time [field] secretary for the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]—and myself; it was four of us sharing an office. But anyway, on my very first bond—I'd been in business about three months, before I made my first bond. And when I got this call I ran all the way—I didn't have a car—I ran all the way from—I was living with Ms. Middleton, whose husband Middleton High School was named for—down on Scott and Spring Street. It was about, like, 10:00 at night, and I ran all the way from there up on Central Avenue to our office, dark, and I found my lights and got my materials and took it, and to county jail I dashed off. Because Mr. Abe, a bondsman, had told me, "Say what you got to do Alice," he say, "you got to be very swift, because if you don't hurry up and get your people out somebody else will," you know.

So, remembering this I dashed to the county jail and when I got there, the man was sitting there, and he said, "Oh, Ms. Dorsett, I tried to call you but you had left your house." He was working for a Black businessman and he told me who he was working for, and he said—and I told him that I had called you, and he said that if I wanted him to put the money up, he would have to use his bondsman. He's a White bondsman, and say I told him I had called this White bondsman two hours before I called you. He still said, "If you want to place the money for your bond, you are gonna have to use him." The White jailer, Mr. Griffin, was in there and he dropped his head and said, "Mary Alice, I feel so sorry for him," this is what the White man said, of the treatment I was getting from the Black man. And so I smiled it off, and I said, "Oh that's life, that's life," and I came out and I boo-hooed when I got [out], but I smiled when I was in there.

So most of my opposition came from my people. That's just one instances, I could just name them. And then of course, after the bonding business, I decided, well, there was more to be done. So with my bonding business I opened up a general employment agency. And when I first applied they had a law that in order to open up an employment agency you've got to work three years with an established employment agency before you could be considered; that was one of the requirements. Well, that was a law that the White man had put on the book to keep Black people out of it. Cause during that time, Blacks were not hired in that capacity anywhere around here. And of course, when I got the letter, they had turned me down. All of this stuff was to be expected and I asked various people about what would they do, and all of them told me they would just drop it, but I just do that to feel people out, to see what they think, cause as I say, I have a mind of my own. But anyway, I appealed the decision and as a result, I opened up employment agency.

Mr. [James] Hargrett, Sr. came to me and wanted to know how did I do it, because he had

tried to open up one, and he was turned down for that same reason. Mrs. Thelma Morrow, an insurance woman, came and wanted to know how did I do it. My ace in the hole—I'm a religious fanatic, really crazy when it comes to God, and the supreme being, that's my ace in the hole, is God. I went to appeal when they had the hearing. This same thing governs apparently. Well, there were a lot of Whites down there. I still was the only Black going down. And they had their lawyers down. And, so, when I went inside the bailiff asked me, didn't I have my lawyer. He said, "In cases like this you need a lawyer." So I just smiled at him, because I knew that if I had told him who my lawyer was they would have haul me—

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins.

OA: And so you opened the agency and what happen after that? You were able to get some people employed or what was the purpose, to get people employed?

MD: Yes, I was able to get people employed, White and Black. So it paid off. Here just three weeks ago Ms. Leavengood called me wanting to know if I still had my employment agency, because the people we sent out, she said for her and her friends, they still have them and they are very good workers. She said that Dr. Brown at the University of South Florida had come and his wife wanted somebody to work for her, and she told her to wait and let her see if I still had my employment agency, to get her somebody. I told her I didn't have it—and, of course, the reason I don't have it, is because of our government done fair practices, and in wrongness of our government, locally, district wide, regional wide, and federally wide and nationally wide, what have you. But anyway, nevertheless, I don't have it, but I told her as a courtesy, I would get somebody for Mrs. Brown and of course we did.

OA: What is the policy say for securing a loan from banks to set up, ah, say, a Black business?

MD: Well, I never—the businesses I got in, I didn't have to borrow any money from the bank.

OA: Was there anything like the Negro Chamber of Commerce at that time?

MD: No. They had tried to start one since I here, but it didn't ever get off the ground. I think—they say Mr. Ben Griffin with it, Mr. Hargrett, Mr. Rodriguez, some of the ones who were with it.

OA: So, collectively as in terms of a group, where did we have money? The church, lodges, fraternal organizations, that type of thing. Did we have any monetary strength?

MD: What you mean now? Well, the same as it is now, as far as I can see, with me not really having that information. I should think—it's just a thought—that most of our money would be in churches; this is where I would think most our money is, is in churches.

OA: I asked that question because I was wondering had there been people here who we haven't heard about, who had really tried things in terms of developing business and kind of got started—sort of the way you got started with your employment agency. And died out, or whatever, because of these practices, and we don't know about it and we should know about it.

MD: None that I know.

OA: Okay, we were just trying to give a biblical history. As an example, are you familiar with the Thrifty Bottling Company?

MD: No, I heard about a co-op and I think Mr. Hargrett—have you talked to Mr. Hargrett?

OA: Yeah, we already have talked with Mr. Hargrett.

MD: That's the only information that I had any collectively, something money wise, collectively.

OA: So it seems that everything you did has some kind of consideration for people and grew out of your love for people. You continue to expand upon it. What happened next in terms of—

MD: Well, I worked very hard at these jobs and during income tax—income tax was [a] divine gift. And so I was doing all these things at once, so if one didn't do anything the other did. However, the employment agency was more or less a courtesy I got into for people because, like, employment agencies want you to give half of your first week's salary on deposit, so much down—well, I always felt that a person who was looking for work didn't have any money. So in most cases, I would just let them go to work, just send them on the job. So it was really as a courtesy.

In 1962, I founded that Faith Mission, there on 7th Avenue. That was to cater to the whole man. We had the mission part of it, the spiritual part, to deal with his mind, his soul, his ah—we had the job part to deal with his learning to get his living by the sweat of his brow, working for an earning, and we had shelter for him to sleep until he could do his own little bit. And then getting into politics, it was another effort to take, to try to help people, that was. That reason so often—I ran so many times and I was defeated, however—defeated according to other people, but to myself I won each time. And the very first time I ran for office, I won even according to their rules, but it was taken.

OA: What year is this?

MD: This was in '65—should have been in '65 [1965]; it was either '65 or '68 [1969]. I've got to get my thoughts together—in '66 [1966], perhaps, '66, '66. Because in that year they had it on the TV and radio, that Dorsett and Brasher in a runoff—John Brasher,

who's now in the legislature. And then, in a little while, they began to say they made a mistake—Jack Rodriguez had—they—the man on the air—10,000 votes. They didn't have time to scramble it up, so they just put a one in front of a nine and gave him 10,000 votes. Then that made he and Brasher in the runoff. And then somebody—people were calling me from all over in the Tampa Bay area congratulating me, and Mrs. Hill of Hills Dinner, the late Mrs. Hill, now called me to congratulate me. And I said, "No, they said on Channel 8 they made a mistake," and so she said, "Well, you better turn from that station and turn to Channel 13. They are still saying that you and Brasher [are] in the runoff." Sure enough. I did. And they were saying—but then in a short while, they began to say that they made mistake.

Fortunately the day that I went, I wasn't going to check it out because I felt that my people wasn't concerned enough. And to my surprise, I was surprised afterward, that some of the say that they called down there to protest it, but I didn't know about it. So, anyway Mr. Byares—that's another one that was here then, James Byares—Mr. Byares and Mr. Gilder—that's right he's one who help worked hard here. And Mr. Gilder came to me and wanted to know about—about two or three days after—and so I was telling him I didn't go down because I felt it was a little useless. Because, you know, when you're running for office out here and you're running to help the people, instead of the people even trying to see what you are trying to do, they seem to throw up a dislike for you, and you here trying to help them and they hating you for it. And then we complain about we don't have this and we don't have that and this White man is doing this to us when we are our own worst enemies.

However, and so knowing that, and running for office at that time, at one of the times my boy was just five years old, and I had my boy out in the streets, me and my boy with all these here people in town, my boy was the only person that I could depend on at one time, a five year old boy. And we would take one part of the street putting out cards, and he would take the other part. And when he would get to the bar, then I would have to cross over and go into the bar. And one night about 9:30— [it was] dark, black, hot, this particular campaign time—hot, our clothes stuck to our backs, and Dwayne—we were in the project there off of Lake, the street back—what is it, 32nd or 31st—but anyway he was back on that line, and so Dwayne met me to the end. And he said, "Mother, I gave that man, he finally took the card, he said when I first went up, he told me no, he don't want none of that, ain't nothing to it, no Niggers" and this and that. Say, he [her son] say, "Well, I'm working for you too, sir," and he said, the man said, "Hand it here." He say, "I'm out here working for you, too, sir."

And then, like, one Sunday we were going down Lake and we got to the Rabbit Foot bar. So Dwayne was a little upset because some men were laughing at him and I told him, I said, "They aren't making fun of you. [They're making fun of] the very fact that you are so small and out here campaigning." And one day he was putting literature on people's cars, and the police passed by and wanted to know what was he doing, bothering cars. And he say, "I'm putting literature on for my mother," so he say; "help yourself."

So anyway, later, talking to Mr.—oh, and so when Mr. Gilder and Mr. Byares told me

say you have—because there are still some Blacks that voted. Whenever any of us run, particularly with me, I know that most of my votes came out of predominately White precincts, rather than the Black precincts. But anyway, that day when I went down to check after what they had said to me, because I felt that it would be a useless gesture; here these White peoples are so dogmatic or so prone to have their way and not let me run. I'm gonna say take my rightful place, if they do this in the eyes of thousands and thousands of people, they would give their lives before they would permit it to happen. So this was my reason, if they were this dogmatic about it, to do it in the eyes of thousands and thousands of people.

But anyway, I went on down, and fortunately that day, I met Mr. Brasher going in the doorway, and what he told me—he say he decided he better come down. Because if they made that big a mistake with me, they perhaps made one with him, too. And so it was very fortunate for me that Mr. Brasher came, because when we went in, and I told them why I came to see about the error that was made in the counting of votes, why they didn't even talk to me. They ignored me completely.

OA: You went where now?

MD: To the courthouse, down to the—down near the election place. Supervisor of elections, down there where they count the votes, had the books; and so Mr. Brasher would say something, they would answer. And so, then, Mr. Brasher say he would like to see the books, the tally sheets and stuff like that. So they would show it to Mr. Brasher, but then before he would look, he say, "Here it is, Mary Alice." He would let me look first. This is the way I got a chance to see it, some of the thing they had there.

And then I questioned the lady. I say, "Well, how could this mistake have been made?" And when she told me how the mistake was made, she was insulting everybody's intelligence. She told me that each concern or each organization, each TV station, each radio station, they tally their own votes and she said the votes aren't given as a whole. Each precinct calls theirs into these various places. Well, now you see, if it was as a whole it would have been a better thing to tell me. Because as a whole you could have said nine and somebody thought you said nineteen. But now with each individual precinct calling theirs in, nobody will ever get me to see where every TV station and radio stations gonna make the same mistake of 10,000 votes. But then, anyway, that's what she said.

But later after that, about two or three weeks after that, I called Mr. Raymond Sheldon—not this one, but the one who used to be a state senator—and he also had endorsed me and they had worked for me. So I was asking him about the mistake. So he apparently knew about it. He say, "Oh, Mary Alice," he say, "did that come on TV, Mary Alice? Did that come on TV?" And I said, "Yes, it did." And he said, "Well, this what they want you to do. Fight." He say, "It will be another time." This is what he said. And I kept hearing this talking in the background. He say, "Mary Alice, I can't talk for you for my wife. She's saying that you won the election and for you to go look under the machine," a candidates machine. And he said this [by] time three ago the machines have been cleared. And he said, "But next time I'll work hard." So that was my very first endeavor.

And then there was a client of mine, Mr. Dekal and Mr. Sylvester—during that time it should have been Mr. Sylvester; part of the time I was running it, Mr. Sylvester had it. I believe that was Mr. Dekal. But anyway, another one of my clients was working in Miami, he say some very rich fellow down there—he was his boss, doing construction work—and he see that Mary Alice Dorsett that ran for office. He didn't even know that Mr. Baten knew me. Say he told him that she had won that election the very first time that I ran. That was my experience for the first time.

But anyway, getting back to why I have run for office. I, too, have been taught that politics was something dirty, and you don't take part in it. Clean people don't take part in it. And, see, we are so misinformed, and I, too, say it was that way. But Eller—oh, my Lord, how could I forget Eller Bansfield—have you talked to him? Anybody talked about him?

OA: Seventh Day Adventist.

MD: Seventh Day Adventist man. He has done so much to help Tampa. Eller Bansfield used to come to me at intervals while I still had this wrong impression of politics, and he would tell me, "Mrs. Dorsett, you gotta run for office." And I couldn't see particularly coming from Eller Bansfield, a minister. And through the years he would come and sometimes he would come sit and talk to me for one and two hours about different things. He say, "I'm going to start dropping the word along." I say I don't want any part. So he is really the one who actually sowed the seed in me about politics, about my taking an active part.

OA: What was the philosophy? Did it change your outlook—what was his philosophy of why you should run?

MD: Eller Bansfield told me that things were of such—the thing that was keeping us down was because we had no voice in government, we had nobody to help us, we had nobody to speak for us, we had nobody to enlighten us. And he said, all and with the physical part, all of our material things is controlled by the ballot. And he told me that. And he got around in Tampa. This commission [Bi-Racial Committee] that they have, this integration commission, advisory of the mayor and stuff like that, that was part of his brain child, he and Mr. [Harold] Wolf. And he was with this Progress Village, and [with] so many of the interdenominational ministerials. They had an interracial one. He—

OA: He is a minister, that's the minister. I often wondered who that minister was that went to Mr. Wolf and said we needed—

MD: Uh huh, Eller Bansfield. He was killed last year. So, anyway, he told me—this is his idea, that I was the best qualified of all the people he knew in Tampa. This is what he would always tell me, to run for office. He say I could do a better job than any one person here in Tampa—this is Eller Bansfield's idea. But he yet didn't convince me and he say, "I'm going to start dropping the word along," he say. And in politics you have to let the

people know, way ahead of time and get them some.

This is reason of saying that I was the best qualified of any person in Tampa that he knew. He say, "Now, there are other people with just as much training, just as much knowhow as you, but they aren't as qualified to run and serve the people as you are, because those people go within their circle; they are friendly only with people in their circle." He say, "But you are a person who go around with all circles." So this was his reason for saying that I was the best qualified. The one that is supposed to be the little man, he goes and deals within circle. The one who is supposed to be your middle class and such, they don't bother with this circle. He say that I was the only one that he knew that have the ability, who dealt with people on all levels, cause they're all alike to me. So this was his reason for saying that I was the best qualified.

All right. Eller Bansfield finally left with a promotion and they did some kind of reapportionment or something. I wasn't even concerned. I was so busy doing my income tax, cause that's where I get my bread and butter. And God has blessed me with a lot of clients, both Black and White, and so I was just busy working and here comes Mr. James Marshall, Senior. I guess Eller Bansfield had been gone about two or three years, and he came and he had twenty-three names, he said, written on, he had a little tablet, he had twenty-three names written on there.

Of the twenty-three names, he had two women he say—that was Ms. Marian Anderson who, too, have done a job. Have you talked with her? But he had her name on there. He had three women's names. He had her on there, he had Rosalind Tallis' name, who was quite a businesswoman—you know. She's dead, but she's White. She own so much down there on 22nd Street—and my name. And he had other people like Mr. Rodriguez, Mr. Sloan—it was others, was men. And he told me he had gone to two of those men, but they had told him, "Well, they'd think about it." In fact, they had no interest.

And he say, "You are the first of these woman I'm coming to." And he came there, he say—they have reapportionment and got an extra seat there—and he say, "The White man is not thinking now, and we could slip you right into it." And I told him I didn't want to run for office, and I had my work and plus I had opened this mission and my hands was full. And he stood there with tears in his eyes, pleading with me, and I say, "Well, why don't you run?" I mean he could [see] the necessity of it more than I could. So when I mention the mission—this is the thing that got me—when I mention the mission he say, "But Mrs. Dorsett, you are only interested in people who don't have any place to sleep and food. That's all your mission will do, but there are people who have plenty food and plenty of all this other stuff and they still need help. If you are in office you can help everybody." And that was it. He said, "And I'll pay for your qualifying fee." And so I said, "Well, if you are interested." And then I thought about what Reverend Eller Bansfield had been telling me. And he said, "If you are interested, then I will." And so I told him I would, if he was that interested.

So then I—we were to qualify—he thought that I could qualify down to the courthouse. So, sure enough, he told me the deadline would be 12:00 the next day; he had that

information correct. But when I called down there that morning to get the papers and what have you, we found out that, for the state office, we had to qualify in Tallahassee. So it was utterly impossible to go to Tallahassee and get the forms filled out and get them in by 12:00. That was in '65 [1965], so I promised him then, that the very next time they came to run, I would run. So that's how I got involved in politics, into the running of it.

OA: And you ran how many times?

MD: I run at least five times. And I'm still out here trying to encourage other people to run and still working for them. Because this is the only way that we are going to get into the mainstream of things. This is the only way that we are going to become a part of things, this is the only key for it, is the ballot, people put into office. And what people don't—I spoke here the other day, and I mention it all the time, because I feel that my people are not aware of it. And now that God has used Eller Banskfield and Mr. James Marshall, Jr., to open up my eyes, I see all others so clearly.

And then it made me go back to a oration that I did when I was in high school, what Ms. Nannie Helen Burroughs said—and of course at that time, that was my first ever hearing of Nannie Helen Burroughs' name. I asked my teacher who was Ms. Burroughs. And of course she [teacher] said, "She was a Methodist, and you're a Baptist and you don't know who Nannie Helen Burroughs is?" And I told her, "No ma'am, I didn't." So she said if I was a Baptist and didn't know who Nannie Helen Burroughs was then I wasn't supposed to know. So she didn't even tell me. But that was the end of it until I met Reverend Lowry. But in my oration it say that Nannie Helen Burroughs said that is the only way, the ballot box. So then I tied it all in. The ballot box—Nannie Helen Burroughs say that's the only way, the ballot box.

OA: Before you ran, did any Blacks run before?

MD: Yes, but nobody who ever run for the state.

OA: Okay, let's get that straight, what you ran for each time.

MD: I ran for the state legislature, the House of Representatives.

OA: That was in '60—?

MD: Sixty-six [1966], I was gonna run in '65 [1965]—my dates have come back—I was gonna run in that '65 reapportionment thing. That [was when] Mr. Marshall came. But I didn't get a chance to run then. Oh, but, each every two years they run, and I was running—only one man has run more than me and not got elected in Tampa. That's Jim Fair. I was one of the next highest. I ran at least four times for the House and one time my name was just put on there for the election year.

OA: Okay, you run for the House of Representative in District 1?

MD: I ran in District 17, mostly in District 17. See in the House, in the state, you can pick either one of the Houses; the seat you want to run for is not—ah, cause now, like when I ran in the first time, a White businessman came to me and tried to get me not to run in District 70, because of Mr. John Children, who was running for office. See, he was running in the same seat and he had—

OA: (inaudible)

MD: Oh, this White businessman, he say Mr. John Children had started way ahead—way ahead of time and he had gotten all of his literature printed up and what have you. So, this is the reason he was coming to tell me, cause see I hadn't—

Tape 1, side B ends; tape 2, side A begins

MD: But now with my business, as I say, I think this Black help me in that, in general, downtown I think they must feel sorry for me. Because I be struggling so hard and some of them bend over backwards to help me.

OA: Can I get you to another area? During this time you were running for office, were they having a suit against the school system and they were beginning to prepare for desegregation to some extent? I think it was around '67 [1967]?

MD: I don't know anything about that.

OA: Were you every involved when they had a struggle and getting involved with that anything in relation with the school system?

MD: Not in that particular—not in '67, you mean the part where they were going to—

OA: They filed a suit against Hillsborough County School System for segregated practices.

MD: No, I never did get into that. The only thing that I did go around with was when they were with this integration and as far as Middleton, you know, phasing them out.

OA: Could you tell us about that or what that was like, in your opinion, of the community, how we felt and what we did right and what we did wrong?

MD: My thing about that, I was going around filled with my ideas that the ballot is the only way and so—and of course, to the meetings nobody wanted to hear me talk, because they feel that ballot is no good and it's long drawn out, so they don't want to hear. But every time, that's what I would go to the meetings and say. All this other stuff, any other way we take it, I feel is a waste of time, so you don't usually see me there. If I'm there, I'm only there to give support, to let you know that I'm in sympathy and I feel that the cause is right, but the method is all, you never hear me or see me going on a committee to ask them people give us something and ask these people, because they aren't going to do

it. It's a waste of our time, we got to earn this thing, and like we say, well the ballot is no good, they gone to do what they want to, that can't be true.

This is the only time the White man will get out with his pedestal and come and set in our homes and call us Mrs. This and Mr. That. And he becomes James or whatever his name is, and his wife becomes Sally or Sue or Betty or whatever her name is; they don't even do it on Christmas. This is the only time and look like it would make us think that it must be something to it, this is the only time that they will come and buy us some beer or wine or give us some nasty money or in a whole or give us fish and all that, this is the only time. And if there wasn't nothing to it, they wouldn't come by here to do it. And then by the time he gets into office, we just better call him Judge So and So, and Mrs. So and So and then he forgets about it.

So this should let us know that the ballot is the only way, all this other stuff, you see you got to be in a position to take these people out of office, they love this thing and you got to be in a position to take them out if they don't do what you want done. But you see, when we go down there to threaten them, well they know we can't threaten them, that we don't have no power. So that's what your committees and things are all about. That's the reason you don't see me, I'm sure I wasn't in on that. And when they having a problem and I'm there, if I get a chance to say something I always tell them about voting and nobody wants to hear it, nobody wants to hear it, because they think it's off, but this is the only way, the ballot. Because God has ordained two institutions, the church to take care of Man's spiritual needs and the government to take care of Man's physical needs. And so when we don't use this method, then we stay (inaudible) at the end of the totem pole.

And I reminded them that we had a way to start on this thing. We ran Mrs. [Sylvia] Griñán; did you talk to her? She ran for the School Board and she came there crying one day to me, because it was I who suggested that she run and it was I who filled out her papers and notarized them, everything for her, took her down to the courthouse. But then one day, one of our leading men, she say, told her he hopes she didn't win. I understand Pat Frank, I had heard it before she told me because Deacon Allen had told me, that Pat Frank came, she had went to the same man, to ask his support for her, say he told her that he was sorry she didn't come before because he had already promised to work for her opponent and so he couldn't go back on that, and she say he mention and told her that he hope Mrs. Griñán didn't win.

OA: What year did Mrs. Griñán ran?

MD: I wouldn't know the year. I think it was about Mrs. Griñán—Mrs. Griñán, like about '68, '67, '68.

OA: If you can recall who was some of the people before Mr. Hammond ran for something?

MD: Uh huh, back to that. Mr. Rodriguez had run for the City Commissioner, Mr. James Hammond had run for the Election Board, and Mr. Harold Jackson had run for the

School Board before my time.

OA: Do you remember Reverend [C.G.] Oates running?

MD: It's been since my time, but he has run twice, since my time. I was the first one to run and the first person to run for the legislature.

OA: Tell me a little about the environment where Blacks would try to get together and support various candidates, whether White or Black. I remember, I recall something like one time, [C. Blythe Senior] Andrews and those got together to support, maybe [Mayor Nick] Nuccio or [Mayor Julian] Lane. Maybe sometimes Club 77 was involved in this, that and the other, to get somebody in office. We had various groups like this working, that was set up to work to get people to support various candidates or not support them and did it amount to any kind of political muscle in terms of what we were doing? Did we have any maturity or were we just turning our own wheels?

MD: We just—at least the county may be turning their wheels, them others be sitting down by me talking about you, but the county may be spinning their wheels so to speak. One time, such a group was supposed to have been organized, I guess had run about twice, once or twice, and so the Blacks got together, the Black fathers supposedly, got together and they said that we can put a Black in office and they were going to put two Black men in office, I'm a see Mr...It came out in the [*Florida*] *Sentinel* [*Bulletin*] that Blythe Andrews was going to run for office, Perry Harvey was gonna run for office, and Bob Gilder and Stewart, the four was going to run for office the next time up. All right, they had this committee and most of the fathers of our race, they were there, Mr. Stewart, Sr., Garland Stewart, he had just completed his house, hadn't been too long completed it.

And one night I got a call about 10:00 at night, and it was Deacon Allen calling me and [he] asked me if I would come out to Mr. Stewart's house. They were having a meeting to run somebody collectively, they were gonna—the whole community was going to get behind these people. So I went out there. It was the very first time I ever saw Mr. [Warren] Dawson. I saw this debonair young man and he was, ah—and he had the gift of gab because I kept asking afterwards, "Who was this fellow who was presiding?" He was presiding, and he had people there like the ministers, Reverend Lowry, Reverend Gordon. And you had men like Mr. Perry Harvey, you had the Andrews, you had—they even had my principal from Dade City, Mr. Meakin and my favorite man, Mr. Goodwin from Dade City. And they had Lee Davis, and so many others, and Mr. Richard Pride, your principal, Ben Griffin.

The problem was—the reason that they called me so late—that everybody backed down. All the men backed out but Mr. Stewart; the other men were present but for some reason or other, they had an excuse for not running that particular time. And so they said, well if they just could just get two, and I understand my name—perhaps Deacon Allen could have brought it up, I don't know—but somebody say, "Well, call Mrs. Dorsett; she'll run," and at the eleventh hour they called me and I saw the problem and said I was glad to do it if it helps the people, I was glad to do it.

Later, Reverend Gordon gave me \$8.00 on my campaign because that was the first he ever given me, and the others he didn't. He told me he felt so bad to call for and hear all of them big old men—all of him and all the other ones, big old husky men sitting up in there and couldn't get but one to run for office. And then they had to call a little old woman at the eleventh hour to come, and he said I got to give you something. So he wrote me a check for \$8.00.

But anyway, this is what happened, so they explained to me. Mr. Dawson with this flowery tongue, they explained to me how they were going to get all the money. Dr. Brookins was the treasurer. They was going to get all the money together, the whole community; everybody was behind us, supporting the two of us and they were going to pull all the strings and we just dance, you know. And all the money that was raised, they were going to divide it between the two of us, Mr. Stewart and myself. And so we started to run and campaign and Mr. Dawson and those told me at one point that for me not to use any of my own thoughts or what have you; they pulled a string at one point—of course don't you think I haven't told anybody. Mr. Dawson was a stranger at that time, but these others had filled him in on me.

And he said that—oh, he gave it to me. I called him to see if I was supposed to try and get a campaign manager and stuff like this. He told me why no, they are going to get everything and he told me that I was going to—he already knew that I always went contrary to everybody else. And he told me that they were going to pick the seat for me and everything, because I didn't have the background that Mr. Stewart had and they were going to give me the easier chair to fill. Because Mr. Stewart had all this flowery background, see. I'm a poor little girl from Dade City, I had none of this stuff and so I said, "Yes sir, Mr. Dawson, yes." And boy he laid, he say, "Now [you] are to do and say—I know you never fall in line, but you are to fall in line and we gonna call the shots and we gonna furnish the money, we gonna get this campaign manager and we are going to do all this stuff," and I said, "Yes sir, Mr. Dawson."

And as it happened, even though they gave Mr. Stewart, Mr. Stewart got the best seat, contrary to what they had told me, he got best—the one seat we like to get into, the seat with the most Whites, because that meant the votes going to have to be cut in so many places and where we Blacks can get in more. Well, seat 69 was like that, and that's the easy seat, and Mr. Man had promised me the easy seat, but Mr. Stewart got it. And of course, to erase the guilt from his mind, he told me, "Mrs. Dorsett, let's flip coins on it." I told him, "Oh, no, I'm just running for the good of the people," and quite naturally I wouldn't know the better seat, because at that time he hadn't run, and that was his first try and you get experience as you go along. So I told him I was aware of that seat, but because at that time, we had about thirteen people in it. And I told him no, he keep it, we don't have to flip coins, cause I know if he flipped the coin, he would have flipped it where it was going to turn on his end anyway—a lot of people can do that kind of stuff, so why flip a coin? I say, "No, you have it."

So I got in seat 70 and it only about two people in that seat and I would have made the

third. And the night—oh, one time they had a meeting at Beulah and Mr. Lee Davis asked about some money that he had given Dr. Brookins to divide—he had given \$25.00. Well, he must have given \$50.00 to Mr. Stewart's house, and that was \$25.00—he gave him another \$50.00. I didn't know anything about it until Mr. Lee Davis asked in that meeting, had he given me my \$25.00. And he hadn't; I hadn't even heard of it, and he never did—he died without giving it to me.

And Mr. Lee Davis got up and he threw a mickey about not giving me my share, and then they got up, a lot of them—Blythe Andrews and a lot of them got up. They didn't think it was right to divide the money with me because I wasn't doing anything. See, while they were going to their parties, I was out on the streets, I was in the bars, I was in the gambling dens, I was up and down the streets to the people, I was out dodging trucks at the sanitation department early in the morning while everybody was asleep from their hangovers. That's where I was.

So as a result though, make a long story short, I had three or four more the times the votes, I got into the run off, than Mr. Stewart had with all of his influence. And they would have meetings, the regular body would have meetings without my knowledge, what they would do, I later found, what they would do, they would call a meeting at 7:00 for the others, Mr. Stewart and the others, they would tell me that the meeting going to start at 9:00, so when I get to the meeting, they will have discussed all the important things, I wouldn't know what was going on.

And so anyway, I still, even though Mr. Dawson had given me all his sales talk, I still went ahead and ordered my application blanks, the night before the deadline—the deadline was going to be the next day. They came and asked me—I'm a say they had us come to this meeting. So at the meeting I wanted to know who was my campaign manager, and nobody wanted be my campaign manager, nobody. Everybody was for Mr. Stewart. Then I remind Mr. Dawson that he said he was going to get somebody; at the eleventh hour they hadn't gotten anybody. And nobody there of the men wanted to work with me, nobody, they all wanted to be with the winner, Mr. Dawson, not Mr. Stewart, yeah, nobody.

And so finally, after we say well we got to have somebody, and so then Mr. Reddick—Harold Reddick—say he would run it on the train; in order to fill out my form, you could put his name down as the manager. And then Mr. Dupree say he won't have time to work at it, but to use his name so I can fill the form—the application out—I could put his name down as treasurer.

But then, the next week or so Lorenzo Brown—remember him? He's quite active, too. He came and said, "Mrs. Dorsett, I'm going to be working for you with everything I got, because I know, cause I been with them, and been a part of it. I've seen and I have been impressed. You have been treated awful in the meetings, and I know how they worked against you," he say before. He was always friendly with me, and he had me bring him some literature the very first time that I ran for office.

And he admitted this time, he say, "I have always been against woman running for office, public office. I'm one of the type who feel that a woman's place is in the kitchen, and I'll have to confess that literature that you brought me when you ran before, I threw it all in the garbage can, because I wasn't—but it has been fantastic, the way they have worked against you, and you have been so humble about it, and you haven't raised your voice." And he say you, Delano got the best seat and the deadline date, sixteen people got in your, about sixteen of the, he say, "That was enough for me. There is something different about you and I'll be working." So that's what he came and told me.

And now, that's the reason I say most of my, most of my problems in political and business world comes usually from my own people more than from the White man. And the time before, there was one who suggested that I would go to the frontiers and get their blessing, and this I went to get their blessing and Professor Arches—I call names because I'm telling the truth and because I have nothing to hide. Professor Arches kept yanking at me and I wondered why, because I'd never come in contact with him. And kept saying, "We aren't going to give you this." I told him I didn't come asking for money, I felt that the money would eventually come. But I wanted to know, since they were men of know-how and experience, I came to see if they felt it was feasible for me to run.

So he kept at it and he kept at it, and what have you, but then later, about what, three or four years hence after, that Reverend Lowry had us come. See, Reverend Lowry had it in his mind to run for the School Board before, and he had a meeting at Beulah and to see if he should. Dr. Gruen was trying to influence him to run, so he wanted to see what we said and he wanted me there because I had run before. And so people like the Duprees, and Dr. Wright, and Mr. Gilder and Mr. Arches and several of them were there to this meeting and everybody was in favor of him running until—

OA: I was trying to find out when was this.

MD: I don't know. Perhaps it was about like '68, no—oh, it was '68, at least if it wasn't '68, it was there about. It was the same time that Ms. Griñán ran for office; why don't you talk to her and get that date? Because after Reverend Lowry didn't run, then I went to her, it was the same year.

But then Mr. Perry Harvey, Senior, was there and he suggested that the time wasn't right and me and him had quite a conference, but then all the other people went on his side, I was the only one sticking up and I told him if we weren't tired of these White people kicking us around and they do kick us around, and they kick us around now, and they are going to always kick us around until we get up and stand up like men and woman. And I told him if he wasn't tired of them kicking us around, then it wasn't time to run. But if he's tired of them kicking us around, then it's time.

But anyway, Reverend Lowry backed out because of what Mr. Harvey said. And meanwhile Professor Arches got up in that meeting and he said that he feels that somebody should run for office who have proven themselves and they have the know-how and the ability. And he says, "That's Mary Alice Dorsett," and he walked down the

aisle and he say, "You would have won the first election, but there was a train made up against you." Now he didn't elaborate, I have never asked him, but he did say that in the presence of all those people, Professor Arches. He got up that day and said it.

OA: Who is he?

MD: Professor Edward Arches; he was principal until he resigned from Young.

OA: Oh, that Arches.

MD: That Arches, well in that meeting, that's what Professor Arches said. He didn't elaborate as to what train or who it was, and I never went to him to ask him who it was or what he meant but he said it in that hour, in that meeting, that there was a train against me.

OA: Okay, I want to ask you one other question. I know I got to go and pick up my wife and I think Fred got to go, I want to continue this. What would you suggest, in this day and time to young people like ourselves, who eventually have to do something more than what we are doing now? In terms of how to move forward, in terms of election politics, I mean, how would one even began to go about it?

MD: Well—at this point, you know, as was saying all before, is the ballot. What you got to do is get organized, to get the whole Tampa, particularly in our area. These people, it's an educational process, because got us all brainwashed. See they handle everything and then tell us it's dirty. And one of my pet things that I'm preaching against now is this minority bit. You've got to first stop being a minority; you got to get out of the minority race.

And see, I never got in that race. It's a space vacant in that race, the one that they had set aside for me, cause I refused to get in it. See, my mind is the thing, that's going to put me that race. I still maintain that I even go—I wear my hair kinky, too, and you see my lips, my skin, and my nose, and I maintain that I'm in the majority race, I'm in the human race. Because, you see, if I get in the minority race, I could never get out because they've got birth control and family planning, so we can't multiply, so I can't get in no hopeless situation like that. Even though the White man say I'm in the minority race and the Black man, but I know better. So that's one thing, to get everybody out of that minority race and then, after you get out of the minority race, then you organize. And I have planned to go back in and I said it would be twenty years.

Oh, we are our worst problem. I have stuff, I started on this thing—see, you got to do a house to house something, and I've been in—that's the reason—like what Mr. Dawson was telling me. And the people feel that I'm offish, but you see, when I can see the problem—see I'm impressed more by God than I am by Man, so it's what God would want me to do, rather than what Man would want me to do. 'Cause you see, Man would lead me wrong. And see if you believe in God, you're peculiar anyway. I love these people who they feel that I'm fighting. I'm not fighting them, I'm trying to help them. But

I can't help them if I get into their little clique or their circle. I would have to do the same wrong things they do to be accepted in. So I've got to stay on the outside, so I can act to the best of everybody's ability.

So that's the reason. It's not that I'm, because people call, White people call, and tell me—see I get a lot of information and they call people names to me, and they tell me what people say about people, and they say, "I wouldn't tell you this under ordinary conditions, but we think you are fine and we want you to watch your step, and how to protect yourself." Yeah, this is what they tell me.

But you know, we started a mass registration drive and the people—let me tell you how it started. Dr. Hayes—Mrs. Marshall had taken a leave of absence to work on her doctorate degree and Dr. Hayes was in her place—

Tape 2, side A ends; tape 2, side B begins

MD: —Padgett and myself, so having this voter registration bit, I suggested in my first meeting that this is what we have to do. So we organized and I have some forms that I had years ago, when I used to work for—when Mr. Foreman was heading up campaigns for the White man. I would take this material and put it aside to use for my people, and so that literature, the form that we use to have to go and knock on door to door thing. We literally covered—not those particular chairman, but the other people of the community—we literally covered all of, and this Barbara Mobley—have you heard of Barbara? She's fantastic. She stuck with me, we went down together.

Well, anyway, Barbara we worked with some more, literally covered every house out in Port Tampa and we were into the area of, what Lincoln Garden and what is that, Carver City or Lincoln Garden, covering those houses. Meanwhile, I was trying to find some funds for other people to work—not for me, because I felt it was my duty and I was spending sometimes \$20.00 during that time, \$20.00 and \$25.00, \$21.00, like that, a week with my gas, carrying people to and from. But when I would ask other people about working, even old Charles Arline, he say they felt they should have been compensated for it. So it's for those people, I was looking for money, not for me. Of course, I felt that's what God had given me this change for.

But anyway, they finally got someone in here. By this time, Mrs. Marshall had gotten back to the Urban League and Julian Bonds came in here. Now we had covered all this territory for free, all those who had worked. Of course some of them grumbled and they didn't come back. And when Julian Bonds and this Mr. Lewis came in, and they gave, I think it was, \$17,000 at the offset, and this was all at the Urban League—this is where our group originated from, the Urban League.

And do you know what the Urban League did? They went and got a whole group, instead of the group that's already doing the work and doing it for free and who was dedicated, they got another group all together. There were people like Judge Edgecomb, who got up and said, "I think it's wrong to do this, why not give the money to the group who is

already doing the job?" Mr. Dudey Richardson, oh that's another name, have y'all talked to him? Mr. Dudey Richardson fought it, Mr. Millner fought it—a Black man. But the Urban League went right on, and they would tell falsehoods. They would call me names, and would tell Barbara. Barbara was like my right hand during that time, and so they tried to win Barbara over. And so Barbara said she would go in and she say, "What about Mrs. Dorsett?" They pretend that I had said I didn't want to bother, and I didn't know anything about it.

But this is what happened. And then they put a White young lady over it and it was right after the uprising here, and they were already scared of us. And here they were, even more afraid, and she was even afraid to go into anybody house, to go into the area. But this is who Mrs. Marshall saw fit to head it up. And then would tell her to call me because I had the know how. And of course, I would tell her since she's heading it, whatever she wanted me to do, I would do it. I will still working in the afternoon with them and it just frizzed out and nothing was done. I even turned in all my lists to the Urban League, so that they wouldn't have to go over that same, all that literature I gave to the Urban League.

OA: So you would suggest that we try to get organized and start a mass voter registration drive, and start from there and everything else would fall in place.

MD: A mass registration drive and education for our people. And as I say, as I go around, I try to encourage people about this minority bit, and plus the ballot and in the churches. I tell them that, and politics is only the science of government; it's nothing dirty about that. What makes it dirty is that dirty people handle it and clean people have refused to do their duty, that's the only thing that makes politics dirty. It's negligence on clean peoples' part and I tried to show the—

I was to a holiness church, what, last Sunday—and I don't know their opinion because most of the churches here, you don't say it—but I said it because I feel that God would want me to say it. And as I told them, all these Biblical [people] that we idealize, they would be known as politicians if they were here today. Moses, we talk about Moses. Why, Moses wasn't in the church praying while God told him to go to Pharaoh—that's the government. He would be a politician; he was dealing in government stuff and "Let my people go." We talk about the three Hebrew boys and put them in the fiery place—why, they weren't in the church when they refused to eat the candy, they were in the government.

So this is the type. I feel that our people need to be retrained, so it's going to be a slow process, but it's a worthy process. And we need to be enlightened and it would be done by the ballot and by people going out and sitting down talking to these people, so it can be done. See, my thing was to try to get—and of course, everybody get with it. In fact I went to the NAACP, and I'm always offering my service to help with voter registration drives. I went there to the NAACP and told Ms. Saunders and so she told me that good, Mr. Allen. And I got in touch with Mr. Allen and then he said well they were going to start later on with something like that. Oh, there was another thing—see, I can talk on and on.

OA: Yeah, see we need to [have] a second session and we need to schedule it right now, cause we don't want it to stop; we want to get as much as possible.

MD: I was into this organization on Black affairs. Did anybody tell you about this organization on Black affairs? That was one that was supposed to be organized to take care of the community, the problems of the Black community. Really it came about because at that time, I was very active with the League of Women Voters and they was trying to revise the charter, the Tampa charter, and they had all that stuff practically against the Black man. Going around with them I could hear, and we used to have these sessions to let you know what they think about the Black women. We had a hearing at the County Commission office once and all the Black women were against this charter. But when we all went down to this County Commissioner's, this session, the White woman got up and made the report and they say it was unanimous, it was the consensus. So that means that they don't even count us, so they had a luncheon out in Davis Island at 12:00 and they had some of the representatives. Well, I was the only Black to that luncheon and then they talked about it.

In other words, I came back trying to see what I could do in my little way, since they don't count me anyway, to try to enlighten my people and alert my people. So I came back by the—this place, the Longshoreman's to Mr. Perry Harvey, Senior. We always had a run in, but if I figure he can help, I'd go right back. So I went back there, I went to him and I explained what was happening, and what have you, and this was wrong. And he said, "Well, we'll call a meeting." I called a meeting, so he did, but what I wanted was some money to get some literature to pass out and to alert the people, and so he called this meeting.

And then I'll—this was born later on, this thing on Black organization on Black affairs. The first president, and the only president—we met at the Longshoreman's hall until Perry Harvey, Junior, said we were just wasting up electricity and stuff and so we had—we started meeting to the Sugar Shack. Judge Edgecomb—at the time he wasn't judge; he became judge later on—but soon fizzled out like everything else fizzle out. But then what I did do, of course Mr. Perry Harvey did get the material, did get my material printed up and we did get it out, but before they got around, because they didn't want to put their material out until the day before the election. And with my people not being aware, they needed more time and of course, we had an argument on that in one of the meeting.

I'm always arguing with them, but anyway the way I decided to get some literature to put out. I thought about going to an opponent against the two, because they were against for another reason, but nevertheless they were still against this charter, and I found—coming down, going down, what, Tampa Street, over there by this dome parking lot, there was a little place in there, and they had a big sign out [saying] "Defeat the Charter," and I went in there and told them I was against the charter and if they had some material to give me so gladly loaded me up and he put, and gave me a car top and all kinds of material. And at one meeting at Blake, Mrs. Harmon told me that Pat Frank say that the months that they had put in defeating that, getting that charter, I tore it down in one night.

end of interview