Transcript of tape dictated by Harold G. Moss:

It's sort of over in the night on February the 4th, 1993, and I'm responding to your letter to me that you faxed this morning, and this seems to be a pretty good way of going through your questions. Because if I spent a lot of time typing all this stuff up and spell check and, you know, trying to get it just right ... This may inhibit me and may somehow, the effort may make you feel, "Well, if he put it down, I should use it." But with this recording I can just kind of talk and answer your questions and you pick what you think fits with where you want to go with the story and again I'm just absolutely flattered. I couldn't ask for a better person to be involved in the project with me, and I have to admit I'm starting to get really carried away with the project.

So let me kind of go down through your questions as you start with "Tell me all you can remember about your family history, grandparent, great grandparents, etc." [Laughs]

Well, my great grand-father is as far back as I can go. And his name was Bud Moss. Bud Moss had two sons, John and Herbert. John Harris Moss and Herbert [Moss] and two daughters, Norma Lee [Moss] and --Good Lord, the woman's been dead so long, in fact, with the passing of my Aunt Norma Lee last month, and that would be in January of 1993, the four children of my grandfather are all dead and there was a dual kind of family of which I'm not really clear, but there was a Harris side. My father's name, John Harris Moss, and the story is that Bud Moss had a dual family, somewhere down near Henderson, Tyler and Gilmer, Texas at the same time. I guess that was fairly common in the 1800s.

My father turned 80 years old and that was -- well we'll forget the date, but when he turned 80 he was in Dallas, Texas, and my sisters and I flew down to Dallas, Texas to be with him on his 80th birthday and they had a family reunion. The Harris side of the family were there, and I got to meet people that I never imagined to have known. It was like a whole side of the family.

My grandmother, Isabel Moss, looked just like my father. My

father, well -- that's great people. That's a book by itself. But these are ... You know this is really very, very hard, because I am talking to you about visions and they are moving so fast in my mind. I'm looking at people and I can't even give you the names of them. I go from one to the other to the other. My grandmother, Isabel Moss, was a great lady, just a great lady. My last memories of her, almost, were of a nursing home in Detroit with my father sitting beside her and a photograph of that event and I was there. I'm not sure I took the picture, but I have it. Nice lady.

And, "You were born in Texas." Yes, I was born in Texas, "around 1930", you are kind. It was '29, and I lived in Texas with the family until my father, who was a barber, an insurance salesman, a real estate salesman [and a] Baptist Sunday school teacher. [He] wore a stingy brimmed hat with really little spectacles [laughs] But if you looked at the early pictures of John Harris Moss, he was a young black man about being somebody, and he left Tyler, Texas after having built a little house. And, you know, the little shotgun houses down there. It's not a house like you see in the North. We think of a house with a basement and storm windows and awnings and all that. In the South you have houses built on a course of about six bricks high, and the foundation, I mean that <u>is</u> the foundation. And then you start building, and you can get on your knees and look right up under a house all the way through, right through the house. Most of the times the chickens lived up under there, snakes lived up under there. Anything that wanted to live up under there lived up under your house. It was not like we do in the north where you've got a concrete foundation. And there are some pictures I have of that little, long house. You walk in the front door and you look right through the back. It's a shotgun. That's what they call them. [Because you could shoot a bullet in the front door and out the back.]

He left his little shotgun house, wife and three kids and he and a fellow, body and fender man... well, the guy was a body

and fender man, Pop wasn't at the time... headed for Detroit in a Model A Ford pick-up truck with everything they had, and my mother and we stayed behind. He got to Detroit and the only jobs available in Detroit in the factories -- and that was why they went was these big factory jobs -- was as a janitor, and my father would not take the job. When he sent for my mother and us, we moved to a house on Lumpkin Street in the garage of a Mr. & Mrs. Clark. You know it wasn't a bad garage. It was a garage that had been kind of converted into an apartment. He still didn't have work, but he went out every day like he had a job, and he just could not have left an insurance company business as an agent, as a pressman, you know in a tailor shop and a barber and come to Detroit to be a janitor. He just couldn't deal with that. Ultimately he went to work for Sam's Body and Fender Shop, and that's where he learned to beat fenders to death and spray paint and do all that which ultimately gave him a fairly decent retirement as an independent businessman.

And I'm going to get back to your questions in a minute. "Tell me a little about growing up in Texas." I didn't know nothing about growing up in Texas. No, we didn't live anywhere between Detroit and Texas.

And about my mother and father. That is a great question. My mother never worked. She -- well, you know, that is such a misnomer, my mother worked her butt off raising us kids. That was her job, and she did it extremely well. I just absolutely cherish my mother, and my father. They fit, if you can excuse the expression, the old fashion traditional values. The father went out and did whatever he could to make a living for the family. The mother stayed home and did whatever she could to make it work ... and this was depression time. Bread pudding is not an accident. It's a creation of women who know that, if you have a meager meal of greens and salt pork and you want to try to find some kind of little dessert, you got to find a way to do it. And they made bread pudding and rice pudding and tapioca pudding. They did everything. Kool-aid was not an invention of the rich,

but of those who were poor and they found ways to make life a little better. So I look back at that time with a great deal of fondness.

There was a thing we did with curtains. Everybody had a rack of some kind and you would wash your curtains, window curtains and then you would go out in the back yard and you would stretch those curtains on little bitty hooks, little nails and they were not much more than a half-inch apart. But when you stretched them while the curtain was wet and it dried, they were just like stiff as I don't know what. And you'd hang them back up in your house and tie them back, and they referred to them as Priscilla curtains. In my house my mother's curtains were just beautiful and I remember that as a kid probably 8, 9 or 10 years old. You know I'm never going to finish this. I'm on page one and you've got me in the nostalgia and you'll probably never hear this damn tape.

Good morning, Alison. This is February 6 about 7 o'clock a.m. and I'm going to start again. The last question was growing up in Detroit and I hadn't talked about that at all.

I suppose if I look back on growing up in Detroit I still would have to say that it was pretty much an ideal major city experience, because the large cities at that time had really distinct locations and elements. The bad part of town was clearly defined. You could almost look at it like the way the ethnic communities were broken up. In the Greek portion of the city and Polish sections all the windows that announced the stores were written in Greek or written in Polish or written in Italian, and the language of the people in the 30s and 40s, folks spoke their native language. I mean you'd get on a street car and if it was predominately going through a Polish community you better know how to say, "Dzien dobry, pani" which means "Good morning" [madam] or to at least speak some portion of the language to get along. And I guess that the same thing was true in the black community.

You had parts of John R. down near Woodward areas referred to as "black bottom", you know if you wanted to get cut up and shot at that could occur for you. But in my neighborhood, up around Davidson and Dequinder and George Washington High School or elementary school rather was purely residential, working black families. To be sure, segregated. The entire area was black, but one of the things that a large community like that did for you where 60 to 70% of the people went to church every Sunday, 70% of the folks or better had jobs. I'm including the elderly and folks too young. So you didn't have a major unemployment situation, especially in the early forties when the war came. I was in junior high school during a good share of the war and then into high school, so unemployment was just not heard of. Neighborhoods were nice places, plenty of kids to play with, a lot of good friends, great memories. So growing up in Detroit was just great.

As you refer to my sisters, bless their hearts, we didn't get to know each other as well prior to my leaving Detroit and coming out to Fort Lewis. I came to Fort Lewis in 1950, and that was probably just about three years after high school. Right after high school I went into the dental laboratory apprenticeship program. ... At that time your parents paid for your apprenticeship. It [cost about] $300 down and $15 a month. That wasn't paid to me. You paid people to teach you a trade, and that was paid to the Smith-White Dental Laboratory, Mr. White in particular, Anthony White.

Anyway, my sisters and I had gone to California on vacation, extended vacation, and I had worked in a little laboratory out there, because I had just completed my training and so I was trying to use it and got called up to go in the service. So we hot footed and grabbed a train and came back just as the troop trains were leaving heading for the west coast to be shipped out to Korea.

I had been introduced to Bil Moss, who was a Stringer [her last name] at the time, Willie Bell Stringer and she had

graduated with my sisters from the high school of commerce. And one of the things -- I guess not rivalries -- but problems with youth about that age is the brothers and the sisters girlfriends and the idea of "I'm not bringing none of my girlfriends around the house, because you blah, blah, blah..." [Laughs] And I was really attracted to Bil, and we met after I came back, no we met just prior to going to California, because we didn't leave until after they had graduated and I wrote her a few times. We came back in August and by September I was on a troop train heading for Fort Lewis. So, in that little interim, we got to be pretty close little friends. At that time there was no such thing as you doing much more than going to the movies with a girl if you liked her. So we did a lot of movie going. I'd go by her house and she lived in a section of the community where I'd always have to take a buddy and we'd always have to have a plan on how to get out of there because neighborhood gangs did believe in kicking each other's butts.

And you asked, "Was the situation in Detroit the same as in the South were a black man could work in a factory in a low paying job but not as a skilled laborer?" Again you pose some very interesting questions that I would enjoy going into depth about, because there is a great difference between occupations in the South and occupations in the North. Business opportunities existed in the South that never did migrate to the North. In the South you had a work force that was non-union, but highly skilled black folk. It was absolutely a common thing to have blacks own masonry shops, brick masons, iron worker, carpenters, and they owned their little businesses. And they would go out and market themselves just like Northern sub-contractors, but in the North you worked for somebody else primarily. The business community was not as cohesive. There weren't as many small stores owned by blacks in the North as there were in the South. Even down to medical facilities, hospitals and funeral homes, these would be owned and operated by blacks in the South as opposed to going North to work in the factories. In the North you competed

directly with the Irish, the Italians who had formed their unions and locked you out, so it was a different kind of work force. You were, in effect, in Detroit where automobile was king and a factory job was where it was. In that area you were locked into the low paying jobs.

I don't know -- my father, as I said earlier, wouldn't take a job as a janitor. Ultimately went to work for Sam's Body and Fender and of course his next step as soon as he could, and I remember that, he said he was making $100 a week and that was a fortune, $5,200 a year. I remember as a soldier out at Fort Lewis when I passed $5,200 a year, my reflection was that I was making as much as my father had almost at the peak of his working for others career. And his attitude was "If I'm worth $100 a week to Sam, I'm worth $100 a week to myself." And he opened up his first shop. He had a shop on Dexter Avenue... He had probably five shops that I can recall. His leaving would always have to do with the noise of a body and fender shop. You really didn't have a lot of zoning going on then, and so anybody who had a big garage might rent it to you for a body and fender shop until the neighbors got bent out of shape then he'd have to go find another one. And it seemed, as I recall, that he always had maybe a four car garage shop and it would always be in some kind of off a residential area, but not a commercial building. That's just a thought. I never thought about that before. But he made a living there. I mean he made a first class, damn good living. He had customers he used to brag about that had been with him for 30 years. He did very, very well.

[Reading a question: January 20, 1992 at a labor gathering celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King you said "Labor, organized labor, is where you find the folks with enough heart and enough compassion to say 'I am part of your struggle, you are part of mine.'" How do you reconcile that with the refusal of the United Auto Workers in Detroit to allow black machinists?]

Well, I saw a film the other day with Walter Reuther, who was a person that I got an opportunity to watch give a speech one

day in Detroit. I just happen to have been coming from school and he was up on a soap box out at the Highland Park plant at Ford Motor Company. Listening to him and watching the crowd around him, it wasn't uncommon to have a lot of black people involved. The statement that I made with regard to black machinists, the apprenticeship program, of course, was the elite end of the machinists, and the machinists and tool and die makers are no different than almost -- oh, the people who used to operate cameras in the movie theaters. They had the strictest union in the world. I don't believe a black person ever got into one of those damn unions. It was a closed shop. But black people belonged to the U.A.W.C.I.O. They belonged and were members. The expulsion of women and blacks after the war where they withdrew their blue cards and expelled them from the union was done with the noble intent of making jobs available to the returning G.I.s who had in effect gone over and fought the war and made the world safe for democracy, etc. But there were [also] union members who were black who retained their jobs. Long ago I think they got over the machinist thing. Labor and black people have always been very close, organized labor. So I reconcile it partly by acknowledging that times change and during certain times people did things and accepted things for altogether different reasons.

[Reading question: When did you decide to become a dental technician and why?]

Well, the honest truth of it is it was decided for me. My father wanted me to become a lawyer, and he did it in such a way that I just rejected it. He was buying law books, old, musty law books way, way in advance of my graduating from high school, and I wasn't doing that great academically -- several things -- I'd rather play with them girls. Oh, you're not going to believe that, but it's true. And I didn't have those kind of study habits. I really had that mixture of wanting to do things with my hands, and around my house I was constantly making model airplanes, model houses, model bridges. Anything I could make

with balsa wood and glue, I would make. And I was constantly showing stuff off and I was the neighborhood mechanic and the neighborhood carpenter, constantly from 15, 16 years old remodeling the bathroom, I remember at 2120 Cody that was a big deal, and remodeled the pantry and made it into a breakfast nook. Yeah, that's interesting. Yes, I did that.

So the old man figured that here's something that you can do with your hands, and he took me down to this company. I don't know how he found out about Smith/White Dental Laboratory, but he had talked with Mr. Anthony White and he had set up a school to teach G.I.s and had been approved as a facility that had been V.A. approved to teach G.I.s to make teeth. So I joined his school and work force and, for whatever reasons, he decided that it [teaching G.I.s] wasn't going to work out for him. I don't know whether the government wasn't paying what they promised or they had promised him students and he didn't get as many as he wanted, but ultimately he abandoned the notion of his school and went back to a production laboratory. So some of the guys who had worked with him, including me, stayed to become employees. As of June 1948, I still was not an employee. I was still paying the $15 a month, but I had a job downstairs with a bakery company, a new, modern Warsaw Bakery run by Benny Zukta, a Polish Jew. He was a good person, so I was earning some money while I was still being trained. And I loved the work. I just absolutely fell in love with making teeth, with that whole mechanical notion, with the artistry of making teeth. The ability to mold gold into what you wanted. It was just beautiful.

Okay, you gave me a break there. I'm still at the bottom of page one and I'm going on.

[Reading question: You came to Tacoma by way of Fort Lewis. Tell me how you came to be in the army ...]

Well, I was in the National Guard because it seems that one of the contingencies in my apprenticeship contract said that if I got drafted -- and the draft was alive and well then -- I

wouldn't get my money back and I wouldn't be able to continue the training. I would have to -- in order to protect our agreement -- it was suggested I join the National Guard. So I joined the 1279th combat engineers. It was a great group of guys. My "brother" -- put it in quotes, because he had two sisters and I had two sisters and we were the only boys in the family -- he was the youngest and I was the oldest. I was older than my sisters and he was younger than any of his. I think Curtis had three sisters, yup. Deacon Broder, Curtis Broder.

In the service, you ask about the racism. When I got in the service in 1950, if you recall Harry Truman had declared that service shall be integrated. Well, they were getting there, but we still had separate barracks. We still had separate NCO Clubs. We still had separate mess halls. You know, there was a lot of separation, but there was a lot of integration going on then, too. One of the first things to be integrated was work stations and mess halls. 1279th Combat Engineers got off the train right in the middle of Fort Lewis. They'd just bring you right down Pendleton and debarked us from five days on the train. Lord, I tell you that was a long, long train ride.

From Detroit, and the funny part about it, Alison, is that when they inducted us, they had us hold up our hands out there in the middle of a big park in front of the downtown post office, the main post office. As soon as we raised our hands and said, "I do" that we were now in the military, they immediately put guards around us, marched us back in the building. We couldn't go no where. We were in the army, could not go home. Nobody told us what was going to happen, and we had one telephone and about 400 guys trying to make a call out.

Finally, by word of mouth and by the newspaper people knew the 1279th Combat Engineers, a colored combat engineering outfit had been called to duty, and that we were going to go to Fort Lewis, Washington. We probably had been on the train for three days when we realized we were not going to Washington, D.C. and

not a damn soul knew where Camp Washington was in Washington State.

Well, first we thought they were taking us on the surreptitious, serpentine train ride to confuse the enemy. They had us damn confused. We were headed straight out to Wyoming and we crossed the great plains, Montana, Good Lord. And we hit the mountains. I had never seen a mountain in my life. Detroit is flat as a brick, and I just went crazy. I thought that was the most beautiful thing in the world. Then we came down on the other side to an absolutely brilliant Autumn. The colors were fantastic. This was late September, and -- just gorgeous country. All of a sudden I was struck by how absolutely clean and new everything was. It's not like Detroit, where it's been there for a million years and between the soot and the snow and the coal dust buildings become old. Even the grass is dirty. And here was this absolutely pristine, beautiful place, and I just loved it from the very beginning of getting here. But the military part of it, I was to go into basic training. We were all to undergo basic training. And I got out there and of course with my background they made me a medic. And I just didn't like running around firing blanks and, you know, crawling through the mud. ... I didn't like the macho soldier business. I guess that really is the main thing. That being -- you know you're going to go out here and kill somebody with gusto. That really didn't excite me.

So, in my writing back and forth to Bil and my family, and I'm not sure whether it was Bil or my folks that said, "Hey, why don't you go see if they make teeth out there at Fort Lewis." and I did. I went to dental clinic Number One, and a Colonel Fulton -- in fact they've named one of the dental clinics after him -- I went to see him and told him that I was a dental technician and I'd like to work in a laboratory. They had just shipped all of their technicians out. They couldn't even do repairs or anything at that time, and so he took me over and introduced me to Colonel Christianson and Powell. I believe that

was the two folks. And so I went on up and started work in the laboratory that day. They got in touch with my commanding officer at the 1279th to see if they could get me on loan, and pulled me out of basic training, justified the need for technician. And I quit crawling in the mud and started going to work eight to five in the morning. Loved it!

With regard to that September 11, 1961 comment where they comment both on my skills as a technician but, "at times he has been opinionated in issues that do not involve his work performance..." [Laughs] "But are not in conformity with the esprit de corps of the organization." Obviously, I would argue with anybody at the drop of a hat about race relations. Of course we had two or three dentists there from the South that loved to mess with me, and I loved to mess back with them and we would have to -- You know I was a corporal in the service, and here's a lieutenant or captain. We would have to declare a moratorium, that they weren't an officer and I wasn't an enlisted man and we discussed the issues. Otherwise they could go straight to hell, and I made my views known in that laboratory, but if you came in the laboratory, your ass was mine. I didn't go out into the clinic and preach up and down the halls, but we got into a heated discussion in the laboratory I just let it fly. I was talked to several times about that, but I was also quite outspoken about my rights as an individual. I was a skilled technician. I knew what the hell my job was about. You do your job and, if you want to talk about race relations, that's fine with me, but I'm going to let you know exactly where I stand, and you just have to put up with that.

Just an aside and quickly, one of the officers, he'd come back and he told me that he had always had good relationships with the colored down there in his part of Tennessee or where ever the hell he was from. And every other Saturday or so they'd go out and they would fix lunch and they would, he and Homer or whatever the hell it was... He would always provide for the food and the rifles and the shells and all Homer had to do was just be

there. "I brought the dogs, I did the this. I did the that." And I told him then, I said, "See if you wasn't trying to keep him a God Damn boy, Homer would have to bring his fair share of whatever the hell it was -- whatever you ate, whatever you drank, have to get his own God Damn rifle, etc." And he really took offense at my implying that his generosity -- that Homer had every right to be as generous to him as he had to Homer. And we got into one hell of a fight about that, so at that time a lot of the white officers, especially southern officers, really had a case of "I have a right to this."

The last time that I got into a real, well, close to getting my ass fired, was when John Kennedy was killed. And these same guys that I'd been debating with all that time came running back there into the laboratory and told me, "Your God Damn leader just got his fuckin' head blowed off down in Dallas, Texas." And we turned the radio on to hear that John Kennedy had, in fact, been shot, and they didn't know whether or not he was dead, but the reporter who was close to it said that he didn't know how he could survive, because he had seen his brains on the back of the car, what-have-you. And I grabbed a flask with these laughing sons-of-bitches, and a flask is a bronze, four-part, it has a lid, it has a bottom, a middle. It's about four inches tall and you press dentures in it. The damn thing weighs six or seven pounds, well, maybe not that much. Four or five pounds. And I threw it. And I don't think I threw it at them, but it flew apart and when it hit the wall, it bounced around a bit and I got up and I left. Well, I had gotten a call or two at home that I didn't need to bother to come back. But I stayed off the whole time. I stayed off until Kennedy was buried. I stayed glued to the T.V. It just hurt me to my heart. When I went back, there was no discussion about race relationships anymore.

On joining the NAACP in 1952, I had always had that interest in the NAACP. It was a strong, militant organization. I don't know why I didn't join back in Detroit. They had one of

the very strong organizations there. Maybe it's just a matter of exposure. When I got to Bethlehem Baptist Church, which Bil and I went to, they had a chapter there. I was run by Mrs. [Helen] Stafford. She has received her doctorate degree, Dr. Stafford, now. I went to a couple of meetings, and in my usual fashion challenged the hell out of them because they were pretty much sitting around. Looked to me like they would talk about civil rights for about ten minutes then set up the card table and start playing bridge, which truly pissed me off, and I let 'em know that. And they, in effect said, "Well, if you're such a damn hot shot, why don't you make some changes."

And I think it was during that time that I started with the youth group, and I organized a group of young people, NAACP, and we started our work. And that was interesting, because part of what we tried to do was sensitize good people, good white folks. You go to churches where the good white folks are, and we would, in fact, I'd get us an invitation to go a church. They would either set aside a part of the Sunday worship, which we preferred, or right after worship in one of the rooms off to the side we would carry on a discussion. I remember First Methodist down here on K street, K and about south 4th or 5th. They couldn't wait until service was over to get in the room. They just packed that room, and that was probably as vigorous a discussion as the youth had [up to that point]. And by that time, the folks who were with me, Bob Lassley, who was a young man about to enter college. [Pauses] Oh, God, one of these days I have to look back and find some minutes and get some of those kids' names. They're all grandparents now. We really had, not lively discussions, they were really throw-downs in church, but good. And then we would get a call from another minister to go out, say out to Fern Hill Baptist Church. We went out there, and, God, we got hooked up on the East Side for a long time. We would go from church to church. And, as you recall, and definitely know, the most segregated hour in the country is 11:00 o'clock Sunday morning.

And there was a fellow who used to follow us around, and I have looked for his little booklet and I have tried to think of his name and I cannot. And he'd always try to get in his point of view, and at that time it was totally rejected. This was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and we were fairly comfortable with "colored" and were just beginning to emerge, to refer to colored people as "Negroes" not "colored" anymore. And he had moved into the 21st century. He wanted everybody to refer to us as you did Italian-Americans and Irish-Americans. He wanted us to be known as Afro-Americans and we didn't want no parts of Africa at that time. Talk about brain washed.

Well, as the chair of the Employment Committee, that's when I really began to ... Well, both the Employment Committee and Public Accommodations. The state of Washington had the Public Accommodations law, the Washington State Board against discrimination and that series of anti-discrimination laws, of which public accommodations was one of them. At the time the Winthrop Hotel was going on full bore and full blast and blacks couldn't get a room. You couldn't get a room in the hotel. You couldn't rent the ballroom of the hotel. Meeting rooms et cetera were off limits. The carpenters local had down on Fawcett their brand new hall, but you couldn't rent it. We decided in a meeting that one of the things we were going to test first was the public accommodations law, and that meant all the bars, taverns, hotels, etc. We were going to go in and try to be served. We were able perhaps as a result of the one test case that we did, and that was with the Alibi Tavern, which was the first case that was brought that went to a tribunal. And that was the process the state had set up. It was the State Board Against Discrimination. I think I've got that in the Prior

Learning Experience.[67] Maybe if you want to go through that in any more depth we can do that rather than me redescribing it here.

Okay, you asked, "After the cease and desist order, did blacks frequent the tavern?" Not necessarily, this was that little tavern down on Tacoma Avenue right across from what is now I think Salvation Army Headquarters, but it used to be the library. It wasn't a popular little tavern. It was just that it was fairly well in the heart of the black community and the guy, Ferguson, had been very blatant about it. Blacks that he knew were allowed to stand at the far end of the bar. And what Fox and I did was simply walked, carrying on a usual conversation, sat right down at the bar and looked at the bar tender and waited for service, and he told us we were drunk and we told him we hadn't had a beer all day, were hot and tired from working and just wanted to get a beer. And he said, "As far as I'm concerned, you're drunk." Fox got upset and went up to tell him to smell his breath. He hadn't had a beer and he just wanted a beer, and I'm trying to say, "Fox, look it ain't worth all of this crap," and the guy had reached back and got himself a little billy that he had behind the bar. And I said, "All the guy wants you to do is smell his breath. We haven't had a beer ..." So we raised enough hell to establish the case that he was refusing service to us.

But what happened after that cease and desist order and the publicity that we got because we had only Channel 5 at that time, but they came down and they filmed the major portions of the proceedings. And it became a part of the news for a couple of nights. And having received that order, we proceeded then to the Top of the Ocean, busted that one and had our first affair there. We proceeded to the Winthrop Hotel, had an affair there.

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[67] A written compilation of life experiences prepared for college credits at City University. Privately held by Harold G. Moss.

The NAACP was putting on stuff as fast as you possibly could, and black people were responding because they would go. You know, they had never been to the Winthrop Hotel ... for a dance. We had a couple of little formal affairs there in which ... The cotillions still went on long after we had opened that facility, and opened by going in and being the NAACP [and] having a function there. And then it seemed that after that you didn't have any further problems.

I guess the Top of the Ocean, Carpenter's Hall and there was another one that was up on the hill, almost where Stanley and Seafort's is I believe. Well, the freeway took it out anyway. I forget the name of that thing. But those were four major steps that we did in public accommodations.

We followed the same thing in the patterns of employment. And, of course, [laughingly] one of those employment operations was when Dick [Sonntag] and I met. [Laughs] I got the damn job, unfortunately. Well, really I look back, and it was truly one of the most fortunate things that I had done.

Oh, you asked whether I had the dental laboratory when I got the job at Valu Mart. No, I didn't have the dental laboratory then.

Oh, and "the struggle between black and white being the struggle between justice and injustice" [referring to a question]. It does express my feelings, and it was the feelings that came across so clearly in Dr. Kings pronouncements and his speeches. To clearly define what it was that we were in a struggle against. At that time it was important, it's important to me right today that you do not alienate other people in your effort to assert for yourself your right.

There are those who are never going to see, never to be willing to give up an advantage. But I pretty much discount those and reach for those people who can understand that everyone has a right to self-expression, the basic human rights. I get very, very upset when people start talking about special rights for special people. The struggle is between justice and

injustice. As long as you can hold on to that single thought you can almost make any situation, if you overlay that as the matrix, you'll discover what the right position is. It becomes easier to argue your point.

[Reading a question] "Tell me about the house on South 64th and Cushman or Ainsworth."

[Laughing] You really want to know, huh? Okay. This home was owned by a minister... We had purchased the land [for another home] and couldn't get it built. I think around 1953. We'd saved $1,800 or so and actually had the land. It was bought for us by Abner Jones. People wouldn't sell the property to Bil and me. He [the property owner] had just flat told me, no, he wouldn't sell it to me. So we had Abner Jones, who was really a fair skinned black man. For black people, you know your people, but white folks could accept him. He was just a dark, mediterranean looking guy. He went and bought the property and got a kick out of doing that. The proviso was that we would hold the property for at least six months so that he wouldn't get in any trouble and lose his job and stuff like that, because this guy was bound to go tell them.

When we did transfer the property and I called the gentleman down, [who had owned the property] Mr. Miller. I invited him to our house, told him that we were black. We were living at 1509 South I Street in a little basement apartment, in fact, the first apartment that we had. I had built a model of the house that we wanted to build there. The house was designed by Lionel Gordon, a black architect, who had designed Jack Tanner's house, and Ricky Branch. The house that Bill Muse lives in next door to them up on 1022 and 1024 ... Essentially I had the plan, the design. We had the land. I had built the model of the house so that Bil could see what the house would actually look like when it was built.

Once we called Mr. Miller, he came down. He said, "Look, I'll give you your money back." We said we didn't want our money back. He said, "But you can't build your house up there. I got

too many lots that are still unsold, and if you build your house up there I'll never be able to sell them. So if you find another lot anywhere, please, I will spend more to buy that lot for you, but I can't let you build up there."

We kind of got our backs arched. I told him that I would look. I would see if we could find anything else, but we had looked so long before we had found that, I doubted it. Bil got highly incensed with me, boy, that I'd even made that statement. Ultimately we said, "No, we're going to proceed to buy the [land]." The guy [Miller] said, "Well, if you try to build, I'll do everything I can to stop you."

Without going through a long litany about how I could not get anybody to provide us with a construction mortgage at that time, couldn't find anybody who would build a house for us at that time, we said, "To Hell with it. We'll find ourselves a house. We'll buy a house and we will then save and eventually we'll build our house. We're not going to give up on that lot."

Well, this [attempting to buy the house on South 64th] was part of that process. When we ran into this house on 64th. Bil and I were part of the move out process. The idea of being confined to a given area did not appeal to what we were going through with the NAACP and ourselves. We really believed in an integrated society. Which means that somebody is going to have to step off the edge and do the integrating. We looked at houses where we wanted to live. I wanted a house that had a shop. She wanted a house that was close to shopping and especially close to buses. She didn't drive. We had basic criteria.

We ran into this beautiful, little Cape Cod house. It had a detached garage. [They] had expanded the shop in the back. It was totally fenced around. At that time, we didn't have any kids. I do believe [Bil] was pregnant, but I have to go back and look at that again.

We talked with this minister. He was game to sell the house, and he said very clearly, "But I've got neighbors that I care about and I love. So, I'm going to let them know that I'm

going to sell the house to you." Consequently later we got a phone call that said, "Well, I can't sell the house to you." We went back to see him and told him we really wanted the house. We didn't want our down payment back. It was a couple of hundred dollars just to hold house. We wanted to buy the house. We would talk to the neighbors. We would go around and we would talk to the neighbors.

We got on the phone. He got a list of the folks he wanted us to talk to and we called and set up an appointment for one Saturday. We went to the first house, the first appointment, and it was not a Cape Cod it was one of the older houses and a little bit taller than the rest. You went up the stairs, and when you got up the single flight of stairs to the porch, you could kind of overlook the neighborhood. We looked in and rang the bell and you could see this woman standing there looking at us. She was back at the archway of her living room looking at us and she wouldn't come to the damn door. We rang and we knocked, looking in the window. It wasn't like you couldn't see her. [It was like] she knew you could see her and didn't give a damn. So we turned and said, "Well, we're supposed to be at the next house in about twenty minutes", but we would go over there anyway. We walked across the street to the house next door to the one we were going to buy.

Boy, you could hear that back door slamming. These people let us in and then neighbors from all over came to that house. They were just flooding in and here's Bil and I sitting on their couch facing everybody as they're standing and crowding around in the damn room and telling us that they didn't want no colored people in their neighborhood. I don't believe the word "nigger" was ever used. It was just so blatant, husbands and wives and that "if you move in our neighborhood, our property values will go straight to Hell." and some woman said she worked at a bank and she knew how that worked. She was talking about the red-lining. "Why don't you want to live down there with your own people?" Blah, blah, blah. "No, I don't care what you do." Bil

worked at Fort Lewis in the signal department as a trainer and I'm a dental technician. Reasonable jobs. We had presented ourselves as wanting to improve that property and enjoy it, and "We just don't want you here."

When we left there, I swear to God, Bil cried half the night and I promised God and several other minorities I'd never go through that kind of crap again. I've found, even over the years, the impact of that still stings. This is probably, I guess because of trying to record it for you and make it make sense, it's probably the first time I've recalled that without being extremely angry about the processes that black people go through trying to do the right thing and being a part of the society. How insensitive people can be and devastating they can be to your hopes your dreams as you try to advance yourself.

The 64th and Cushman house - I'll never forget it, but it also got us into the fight for open housing. We fought from, I think the first bill that was taken up was during my presidency of the NAACP in 1958. We took the open housing ordinance to the council. It was introduced by Mrs. Clara Goering, Dr. Goering's wife. It was debated and debated and debated and finally just flat defeated by the council. They just didn't have the votes for it.

It took us another five years. In '63 we brought it back before the council, and really pushed like hell and finally found enough votes to get it passed. But to our [pauses, searching for the right word] awakening, I guess is the only way you could put it, they had very carefully crafted the language of that open housing ordinance. It could not have any amendments or changes. We found out later that was because they had delayed it a week to make sure they could print the petitions. They had printed up enough petitions so that the day the ordinance was passed, they could get enough signatures to get it on the ballot for the following Spring elections.

They got those petitions out. Mrs. Price, who was a real estate agent and a member of the council, really was vociferous

about her position on opening the "Pandora's box" of letting black folks sue white folks for not selling their houses to them.

When the election came, we were over at Lucille Hurst's house with Jack Warnick and Lillian [Warnick, his wife] and whole bunch of folks. When the votes came in, they just nailed us three to one. It made you feel really like shit. If you hadn't felt like that before, now you know you had it.

The next time we brought it up was during Slim Rasmussen's [term as mayor]. Frank Russell[68] was president of the NAACP. We had gone back and worked it out with Slim that if ... This is where it ties in with the fire and the way the police and fire department was screwing me around, because at that time we had put in the ordinance that the police department would be responsible for investigating claims of discrimination. The reason for doing that was that if the police investigated and found evidence of discrimination we could go directly into the courts without going through some human relations commission sub-committee.

Of course that didn't fly. We ended up with agreeing to have a committee. Of all people to sit on the committee, George Cvitanich, [Tony] Zatkovich[69] and somebody else, [maybe] Moe Finnigan.[70] You know damn well nothing was going to happen as long as it had to go through them. The name of the game was to get it on the books, to strip respectability for discrimination of people based on color off of selling houses. I don't think a case was ever brought to them, but we did gain our objective.

The key to that not going again for a petition drive was that there was an emergency clause placed on it which required six votes and Slim [Rasmussen] got us the six votes. He stayed with his word. This meant that a petition couldn't be brought for six months. Within that six months there was no heat and no debate. They [opponents of open housing] couldn't sustain the

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[68] Local business man.

[69] Recalled City Councilmen.

[70] Businessman, former City Councilman.

argument and discussion, so there never was a second petition drive although they could have whipped us again, I'm sure.

Now I'm reading [question] "September 19, 1963 you were arrested for Second degree and dismissed in March of 1965." I'm doing everything I can to recall this stuff as clearly as I can, but my dates and times may be a little bit different. Essentially what I have said earlier fits. '63 would have been the time we were really fighting like hell to get it on the books and by '65 it was no longer a threat. So '68 we came back through.

The arrest for arson is a strange situation. I had bought that house, the property, in an effort to go back to law school. We had rented our house out on 1270 Huson Drive to a doctor and his family. It was a case of if you can't increase your income, you reduce your outgo. We had what was considered at that time a big note on the house, $300 and something a month. I could get into this little house for about $100 a month. So we bought it and moved down there. It was a little one-bedroom, beautifully designed house. Lionel Gordon owned it and had designed it. The little thing had hardwood floors. I have never seen a picture of it. Although I know I took a lot of pictures of it, I can't find any. We loved it [the little house].

We decided that law school wasn't working. I'd gone to PLC [Pacific Lutheran College (now University)] for two semesters, night school. We had really taken a look, added it up. We would be going to school for 100 years before I'd get the degree.

Every time we'd go up and look at our house, the people were tearing the damn thing all to hell. We'd get calls from the neighbors about the way they weren't taking care of the property. Bil got really bent out of shape about going back to her house.

First chance we got we got the people out of the house and we moved back. They [the neighbors] were right. When I went back to the house after they [the renters] had moved, I got a grass rake and started back in the kitchen/dining room area to clean out the house with a grass rake. They had so much garbage and junk. They were the junkiest, nastiest people in the world.

I then rented the place [the little house] to a painter. The painter, [laughs] Mel, had his wife and his girlfriend living in the place and two kids. The S.O.B. never paid his rent. I really had a tough time with Mel. I tried to put him out, finally got Mel out. The rent hadn't been paid for three months or more.

There was a group of guys out at Fort Lewis who wanted themselves a key club. Playboy clubs were big things and they were going to form their own key club. Well, this place was ideal. It was way back off the road. [Laughs] It had plenty of parking and was just sort of nestled out of the way. A couple of guys who I had brought home who were technicians want to rent it, so I rented it to them. They were okay. They did all right. I didn't know at the time what their intent was, but they had probably sold keys to ten or twelve damn guys, [laughs] and they did God only knows what in the house. When I finally got them put out and decided to go back and clean the place up, I had bought oil for the stove and a bunch of candles -- all the stuff necessary to go back and try to clean the place up and see if I couldn't get it rented again.

I would come from work and go down there [to the little house] to work and find that some son of a bitch had been in there. It was because of all of these keys. Instead of having the locks changed, I decided to nail some boards over the damn thing. I nailed it up, and they would come and tear it off and go on in anyway. So somewhere along the line I'm sure I truly pissed off some of the folks and they set the damn place on fire one day.

Of course, it was an ideal situation -- my house, my stuff. Absolutely no reason for me to set fire to my house, but they held me. They just held that thing [the arson charge] over my head as the past-president of the NAACP, and "he and his wife the chair of this open housing damn thing and we got 'em." They really screwed us. Long story told.

[Reading question] "In 1964 Jack Tanner, then president of NAACP, local urged against voting for the housing ordinance... Bishop Spotswood, national leader came out here and urged voting for..." Jack was absolutely correct. Hindsight is 100%, but Jack didn't always give you the benefit of his wisdom. Jack was never a teacher. You followed Jack, you took his word or you could go straight to hell. He wouldn't tell you nothin'. Jack's position was really straightforward and simple: "I'm not going to vote on rights that are already guaranteed to me under Constitution." Well, the problem with that was in 1948 (law was changed or imposed) there were covenants that ran contiguous with property. There were legal, binding covenants that said "I will not sell my house to a negro or member of any other race of people period." It was legal. Jack said, "I'm not going to vote on my rights. They are guaranteed by the Constitution. The problem was he was the only one who could fight his own battle. The rest of us had to change the law.

We went on with it [the fight for open housing]. We did have to get some people who could come in here and really tell folks in Tacoma what the position was. Now, with Bishop Spotswood, Jack and what they call the young Turks in the NAACP had been trying their best to oust Bishop Spotswood and to oust Roy Wilkins and to take over the national leadership of the NAACP. So he [Bishop Spotswood] was not here out of love for Harold Moss and the rightness of our cause. He was out here because it gave him a double whammy. Jack had been back there in Washington [D.C.] and New York stompin' on the national NAACP's tail, and this was a great opportunity to come out here and stomp the shit out of Jack for a bit. And he [Bishop Spotswood] did it [laughs] with great gusto.

It was disappointing. The vote was disappointing when they really nailed us to the wall, but that was the way it was.

[Reading question] "... my role in the formation of the Tacoma Urban League and the selection of Tom Dixon." That was a great piece of maneuvering. In most communities Urban Leagues

have been tied very strongly with some church group of movement such as Ministerial Alliance, etc. etc. In Tacoma, Reverend Boles was very instrumental in getting the Urban League committee together, along with several other people. I'm trying to think of this guy's name, he used to be a pain in my butt. He was the first chair of the Board of the Urban League. Girl, I'm telling you I'm getting old, old, old. Berney Orell with the Weyerhaeuser Corporation was really the guy who generated the money from the business community.

... He [the guy whose name Harold can't remember], Reverend Boles and several other ministers had decided that they were going to pick one of the young ministers to run the Urban League. Of course, those of us who saw it quite differently saw Tom Dixon as really the guy who could handle the duties of the Urban League. We're talking about an office of two people and a $25,000 a year budget, and that was Tom Dixon and his secretary. A one room office in the Hess Building, which was down on 9th and Tacoma Avenue. That's where the Urban League started.

What we had to do was outmaneuver the black preachers and this guy. We finally got Berny Orell and the Weyerhaeuser, George McPheeters, group, Chamber of Commerce to override them and put Tom Dixon in position. I had my laboratory operational then and Berney Orell and a couple of others came down to my shop and we talked there. My feeling was that we would really make a mistake were we to put a preacher in. We needed somebody who had a strong social work background and Tom had that.

[Reading question, laughing] "You were Father of the Year in 1969" The funniest part about being Father of the Year in 1969 was in 1969 I didn't know where my son was. He had run away from home and I think he was somewhere up in Canada. When I was being presented with the award.

You asked why did I close the dental laboratory. I had reached that stage where in 1969, '68, '69, when I had come back into the laboratory and it was a real empty feeling. I had been out there. We had gotten some 300 people jobs. The Urban

Coalition was operational. The Human Rights Commission was moving. The Urban League was functioning then. It had grown and moved up onto K Street. The NAACP was still very, very active, bringing its suits every time somebody would ... The stuff we used to tolerate [we] would not tolerate anymore and they [victims of discrimination] would bring it to the NAACP.

Of course the Southern Christian leadership was active. We had [witnessed] the great Birmingham boycotts that had been going on. Every day on television the struggle was out there. We were having our own internal struggles here in Tacoma with a totally insensitive city council. I would work all day on civil rights, try to work all night making teeth and making a living. Then half the time, with the council meetings broadcast over KAYE, I'd end up shutting down my shop and going down and getting into the middle of the crowd. I just wanted to get into the fray of things. In 1970 Tom Dixon nominated me for employment in the Labor Education Advancement program, which was a brand new program coming out of the National Urban League and Clyde Hupp had been nominated from labor to work with me. Clyde and I met and the AGC building in January of 1970 and we both accepted our positions. He was the apprenticeship coordinator. Clyde hadn't been that long out of his own apprenticeship and was still very active. He had been out as an apprentice for some time and working as a journeyman, but had been very active in the electrical apprenticeship program. At that time I told Tom Bailey and Booker Kindred of my intent to close the lab, helped them both get other jobs. Tom went with Suburban Dental Laboratory and Booker went with Kingery, Eshelman and somebody out in Lakewood. In fact he's still working there to my knowledge. Olly Moore left and became a patrolman with the King County Sheriff's department and is now Major Olly Moore. I dismantled everything and closed the lab. It was just that simple.

...

Today is February 11 [1993] and I'm going to start again at the break where you ask [reading question] "The late sixties were a period of rising racial tension ..." It is true that Tacoma did avoid a lot of the violence that was erupting around the country. It was during a period of time where everyday in the newspaper there was some evidence of racial tension somewhere. And it wasn't always Chicago or Los Angeles, but around the country.

In the late sixties you had real turmoil in the south. Everything from freedom rides... The voter registration was <u>the</u> hot topic. You had some change of direction that was taking place. Part of the change of direction didn't just begin with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King or the [Ku Klux] Klan, the traditional, well-organized people. It began through the development of things like the Student Non-violence Coordinating Committee. It started just like that until such time as Stokely Carmichael really got involved. Of course you had the Black Panthers, Seals, who wrote the book <u>Soul on Ice</u>, which is still a good reference book, Huey P. Newton, who was almost like the prime minister of the Black Panthers. These were counter revolutionary groups, which had not aligned themselves with sense of white folks dumping coffee on them and kicking 'em in the gut and throwing dogs at 'em and fire hoses and that sort of thing that was taking place throughout the south. Most of it is so well documented in the series of documentaries called "Eyes on the Prize." It pretty much documents the movement from the beginning to the death of Dr. King. It revolved a lot around his work.

The Stokely Carmichaels the H. Rap Browns had more that just a semblance of an audience. They had strong groups that were almost as vocal about their activities as were the Muslims. The Muslims were religious based. H. Rap Brown and the Student Non-violence was civil rights and economic based.

When Malcolm X split from the Muslims, it was religion and economic based. He really wanted to start a lot more businesses,

a lot more enterprise, [paraphrasing Malcolm X] "turn inward, protect your family, don't let the system beat you down." Out of that came his "By Any Means Necessary" speech. If you listen to that speech in context you could have said that it was spoken by Patrick Henry or one of the great American patriots, when talking about the King of England. [Paraphrasing Patrick Henry or the like] "You're not going tax me and take my property. I will fight you with every means at my disposal." Which is what the American colonists did. Really very simple.

Of course, the fear that was in the white community tried to make this a major issue. The difference between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X at that time was absolutely dramatic. One was saying non-violence and the other was ... Every Muslim took Karate and was pretty damned skilled. They would use live dogs, German Shepards for instance, and show them how to get a rope around their neck and by swinging them in an arch could break their necks and kill 'em. This was done in their gymnasiums and in their halls in Chicago and Detroit as they prepared, not to march, not to get involved. Muslims do not vote. Muslims do not get involved in the political process, but they were prepared to fiercely and staunchly defend the section of their community that they had staked out.

Later in the development of the Muslims, they really started talking about a 51st State or one of the States of the United States, preferably Alabama simply be turned over to Black people and that all black people would then live in that independent state. [It would be] pretty much a sovereign nation, like the sovereignty of the American Indians. They had a technique of embarrassing the group by saying to the group, "Are you for a Black state." There would always be those who would applaud. They would go back with "I didn't hear enough of you say that you wanted a Black state." Then they would ask the question, "Well, I'll tell you what. All those who would not join us in our own Black nation, raise your hand." Well, Hell, only a fool would raise his hand. So they would make the assumption that,

therefor, everybody was for it. But it was divisive and it was splitting Black folk.

I have some records in which Malcolm X would talk about Roy Wilkins, Roy Ennis, (Roy Wilkins was the National President of the NAACP. Roy Ennis was president of a major counter-organization. I can't think of the name of it) the National Urban League which was run by Whitney M. Young, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership with Martin Luther King. Malcolm in his speeches would talk about his invitation to all of these quote "so called Black leaders" then would berate the living daylights out of every last one of them.

In those days there really wasn't any love lost between the two [Martin Luther King and Malcolm X]. It was only after Malcolm had what I consider his third or fourth revelation that he began to find some means of accommodation with Martin Luther King. In fact he and the Nazi party and the [Ku Klux] Klan often would be quoted in the same magazine article as having identical goals, both of them being racist and separatist. So it's interesting to watch how Malcolm X's image has turned around.

If you use the later speeches of his [Malcolm X], just before his death. The guy was really on target. His economic drives and Martin Luther King's civil rights drives I think would have eventually converged. And it might have been quite different for both men.

You talked about some young black men who were angry and frustrated -- [referring to a question about a meeting where young black men had spoken in anger] I remember a part of that with Granville Anderson, but he was not so much a central figure. He might have been quoted because they needed that quote or he was the only one they could get to. But there were people like Harold Botley, who was a member of our Black Panthers who chose not to be Black Panthers but established themselves in the same manner. They called themselves "Harambe." Now "Harambe" in Swahili is a uniting, a camaraderie, a positive coming together. Harmony comes to mind. That's the way they viewed themselves.

So they as a part of the black experience during that time played a role. They did wear the black jackets and the black -- damn near you couldn't see out of 'em -- sunglasses. They did wear the big Afros that the Panther berets I suppose you call 'em, and they did strike terror in the hearts of folk around here.

I was in one of their safe houses in which they had reached the stage where they knew that if you were in neighborhood the police may have cause to come after you and if so you really had to have a well-fortified house. Now, in this house -- I don't recall exactly why I was there. I had become an allowed spokesman. They allowed me to speak on their behalf on a number of occasions, and especially their interest in getting jobs. They joined me down on 23rd Street when the Chamber of Commerce and Weyerhaeuser set up an employment office down there. They were part of that. They helped find the brothers and recruited and got them down for us to work with and get them out on jobs. So I was in this safe house and they had gone out and found absolutely humongous, barn door hinges and reinforced that door with layer upon layer of plywood of any kind and every kind. And that was the door. Then they had a big iron bar propped up against the door so that -- you'd catch Hell trying to batter that door down. Inside of the house they had plywood again all around all the windows with just small peepholes -- rifle holes, really -- around it. And they did have plenty of visible weapons and indicated to me that they had a Hell of a lot more weapons. The used to carry those weapons when they would come down to the old -- the People's Center before it was built there was a People's Center there that was a play field. [It] used to belong to the school board and they would carry their weapons in laundry bags. You know the kind that you go to the store and get a suit. And they'd just hang 'em off their back and have coat hanger on there. And they would carry their weapons in those laundry bags.

So you had an awful lot of armed people around the neighborhood. But you also had, in Harold Botley's leadership, somebody who really wanted to get jobs. Now, he didn't like the

Urban League, but he worked with us. We were entirely too slow. We wasn't knocking enough heads. I could introduce him to people and he wouldn't shake their hands unless they had jobs [to offer]. So that was part of that group.

To dwell a bit more on why we didn't find so much of destroying our own neighborhoods. [It] was because of the formation of the Minority Concerns Task Force which preceded the Black Collective. The Minority Concerns Task Force began to meet every Saturday and as a collective, they have met almost every Saturday for the last twenty years. The membership in the Collective is just "you show up." There is no formal representation of any group, although that's the way it was begun. But it's a forum in which ideas are worked out and directions are taken. And through that we could determine a course of action and identify who the leaders of that or who the spokespersons for that action would be. Then when they went out to speak they spoke with the authority of the Black community. The Ministerial Alliance was doing the same thing. Eventually the Ministerial Alliance and the Black Collective began to do their political analysis together and to issue jointly their preference in elections. So there has always been a collective area in Tacoma. There has always been that kind of leadership that would go out and say, "We need to do these things." in an organized manner. And that really has done much to keep Tacoma from disrupting and erupting into violence.

You talk about the Black Businessmen's Association. And, yes, I co-founded the Black Businessmen's Association along with a fellow by the name of Mel Conerly. Mel Conerly was an absolute salesperson. He was also an experienced [laughs] con man. And, it turns out later, he dealt in controlled substances to a degree that almost ruined the relationship between all of us and Mel Conerly. I haven't seen him in years. I hope he's doing well and that sort of thing. But Mel was an absolutely brilliant individual. He could write programs like nobody. I mean he could sit down and think of methods that we could actually sell

to the model cities program to the Federal program, get some dollars in here to assist Black folk in acquiring jobs and acquiring skills. He's credited with the actual writing of the program that Clyde Hupp and I started. That is the writing for the grant for us to start operating on that Labor Education Advancement program. The commitment was to have 30 young, black males enter into the 17 building construction trades. So, I won't dispute it. We all had a hand in trying to do it, but we throw it [the credit] back to him [Mel Conerly].

The Black Businessmen's Association was a creation that started out of these discussions with people like Frank Russell, [Tom] Dixon, myself. There were two or three other people who were in business: Mr. Green, who owned a small grocery, Mr. Taylor, who owned a barber shop, Elray Scott, who was a funeral director and a number of people that had some businesses. Thelma Price -- I'm not sure that's her name -- she had kind of a drive-in on K Street. And there were Herb Tisdale with a construction company and Al Boddie with a construction company. A real estate company by the name of Robert L. Johnson. These were all members. And what we did was formed an association in which we tried to attract white counterparts to take a look at the difference between our community and other business communities. K Street being our primary business community. We wanted to show them the ...lack of viability [for businesses] in our community was because the dollars never got a chance to recirculate. And part of that was because the Black businessman had a very difficult time in competing with others. Our facilities were not as good. People who had the cash would leave.

Charles Walker, who had the station on 15th and K Street, could always count on people who didn't have any money. He would extend them credit. But once they got money, they would go and buy gas -- which is normal -- where they could get gas the cheapest. The other service stations often could sell gas for a cheaper price than Charles Walker could buy it for. That was the difference between his station and others. It wasn't so much a

black or white situation as it was company owned or privately owned. The company owned stations, Exxon in particular, Humble Oil, Texaco were doing everything they could to run the small independents out of business. So they would put a station close by and just simply price you out.

We got the attention of the white business community, and I think I've gone on in my prior learning experience with a considerable amount of information on raising funds and I served as President [of the Black Businessmen's Association], and part of the loan committee that ultimately loaned out all of the $37,000 and was glad to get rid of it. People were driving us nuts!

The Black Businessmen's Association just sort of -- after we ran out of funds -- just sort of laid down and died. About that time, of course, the auditors come in and you know what an auditor is. They're the kind of soldiers that, after the war is over, they go out in the battlefield and shoot the wounded. And nobody really wanted to be fiduciarily responsible for the money that the banks had raised and given to us. [They] had not had the foresight realize that they needed to stay with us to assist us in making fairly good loans and having a mechanism for demanding payment back. They just gave us the money, got out of the way and watched us hit the ground.

"Now, Mr. Lincoln?" [a series of city-wide fund-raising events] was probably as exciting a time as we have ever had in which we had an opportunity to put before the city as a whole our concerns and to have the advertising community, Graves and Associates -- I can hardly think of all of them. But there were three or four advertising agencies that got behind this program and actually wrote it. Involved in a large way was C. Mark Smith, who later became the fellow from whose hands we received the money from the Department of Commerce. He was the regional director of the Department of Commerce when we wrote the grant to build the Urban League building. He was the son of Ward Smith of Ward Smith Mortgage -- or Savings and Loan, I'm not sure which.

The son of the president of the Pacific National Bank of Washington [now 1st Interstate] was very much involved. I can't think of his name right now, but there is a picture of the three of them, I think, and Gene Lewis in one of the "Now, Mr. Lincoln?" news clippings.

It was all designed to culminate in one night when, all over the city, people would be giving fund-raising dinners or putting on some kind of fund-raising affair that would raise money. Weekly, prior to that, we had all of these visitations. You noted that one at the Tacoma County Club. That, to me, was a very dramatic affair. People were there in, not evening attire, but well-dressed. It was a country club setting. First time to really invite a large number of Blacks to come there. Mark Smith and -- They were all so very proud of what they were doing and it just got to me and I had to mention that these are the kinds of places that traditionally have told us that "You can come in [and] wash dishes. You can come here and serve meals. You can come here and wash the cars and clip the lawns, etc, but you can never be a member." And those are the kind of people who set the moral standards for the less fortunate. And I mean right out of the country club you go immediately into the upper middle class. Well, it filters all the way down to the guy who hasn't got anything but he is still white. So you are telling us from the top that "you're not quite good enough." So I had to blast them with the "bastian of racism." They still raised the money, but they weren't comfortable with it. And I didn't give a damn at the time. And I did tell them that it's going to get ugly and that if we couldn't work these kinds of things out in a reasonable manner that there was no question about it. When it got ugly, I was going to be on the other side. And that means in alignment with black people.

Now we move into the election. Well, in 1969, I really, really, really got carried away. After the "Now, Mr. Lincoln?" campaign and the exposure, really, that came from it, and recognizing that you can pull people together, that people will,

in fact, respond to Black concerns, we got this notion that maybe now was the time for a serious candidate to take up the mantel of trying to get elected to the City Council. We did well. I announced that I was going to run on the absolute first day, 8:00 o'clock, when filing opened, and I was the first one for that particular position -- whether it was Position 3 or just what. By Wednesday, only George Goe -- and this is a damn near derelict, but he was white -- had signed up to oppose me. And just scared the living, compound dog doo-doo out of the downtown establishment. They quickly went out and talked John Jarstad into running, because they felt that if they didn't give the public a white man to vote for they would vote for the only white man in the race, George Goe. I don't know. They [voter] may have done that. John got in, apologetic as Hell, but he was extremely well known from his years as a baseball announcer and high school involvement. People know the guy very well. He didn't have a damn thing to say, couldn't care less. And I just knew that our message really was the message people were listening to. It wasn't until the night of the election when John literally kicked the compound dog-poo out of me that we realized that we were losing the election.

People were so angry and tore up so much. We almost destroyed the Caballeros Club [because] people were so angry. The amazing thing was this was Ruth Fisher's[71] first foray into politics and Barbara Bichsel[72] and Barbara Early. The first time Charlie Bingham and his wife got involved, Barbara Bingham. There were just tons of folks who had never been involved in a campaign before who got involved in mine, and we were all really hurt and distrustful of the system after that.

You did ask a question that I didn't directly answer. [Reading part of question quoting himself] "There is a difference

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[71] Currently a Washington State Representative.

[72] Former City Council Person.

between racism and a white voters lack of trust in a Negro's potential as a leader." And there really is. People, regardless, vote their gut, and they definitely vote their fears. If you are not sure, you go for what you know, or you vote no. Essentially, that's what people have done in the past and I think it's been borne out by my elections since that time. The following election, for instance, I think Cathy Eagan, who was pretty much unopposed, was the only person who drew more votes than I did. Even in elections since that time, with the exception of Tom Stenger, who just outworked me, I have shown very well in the polls. This last election with the yahoo who is a school teacher, whose name shall not be mentioned in anything I do. He sent out a real nasty piece based on the fact that I worked in Olympia and could not make study sessions. So he made it appear that I was seeking a job for which I'd miss 28% of the work schedule. He made the piece look good, fortunately he didn't have enough money to get it spread widely. And it's one of those last minute shots, so that you [a candidate] can't get any rebuttal in the newspaper or no rebuttal on the air. It's too late to develop anything.