

CARTON 9:25

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

Dellums, Marva - Interview
transcripts and notes

2002

2017/193

Marva 7/1/07

JB & James have ~~some~~ ~~great~~
Grandfather, Benjamin Fortson

FORTSON - DELLUMS CONNECTION

Notes from interviews with Marva Dellums 6/26/07 6/27

At the beginning of C.L.'s Oral History he mentions that his grandfather on his father's side was a man named Fortson. Marva says C.L. told her that his father, William Henry, was the son of a white banker in Corsicana named Fortson, and that Kitty, William's mother, was a 15 year old girl said to be part (?) Navajo (listed in the census as mulatto). The nature of the relationship between Kitty and Fortson is not known, but they certainly did not marry. Instead Kitty "married" (?) John Dellums, a black man, who gave William Henry his last name. The nature of John Dellums' relationship with the Fortson family is not known, nor whether he was slave or free, but family tradition claims William was born into slavery. The "marriage" of Kitty to no doubt solved an embarrassing problem for the Fortsons.

Upon research (see sources below) I located a John B. Fortson whose name (and his sons' names) turns up as notable in newspaper accounts and a local history of Navarro County. He was born on January 10, 1844, (in Chatfield, Rice? "Short History of Navarro county, p. 4-5) and died July 20, 1909. Given family accounts that say William was born shortly before June 19, 1865 ("Juneteenth"), if J.B. Fortson was his father then Fortson would have been about 21 when he impregnated Kitty. William knew Fortson was his biological father and had some contact with him. Marva said C.L. remembered he and his father picking fruit (peaches?) on the Fortson property. C.L. said the Fortson once told William that of his three sons, William was his favorite but C.L. also remembered that his father hated Fortson for how he treated abandoning? his mother, and refused to accept favors from Fortson. (example? Property?) J.B. Fortson married Laura a slave, had 7 children by her

NOTE: Marva says that when Ron was in Congress someone named Fortson once called his office and spoke with a staffer, asking if Ron was related to the Fortsons (CHECK? With Marva and Ron). Ron at first dismissed the call but later remembered the significance of the name Fortson. But the info on the caller had by then been lost (?) lost.

From: Texas Rustler June 14, 1912, Rice, Navarro County
http://www.rootsweb.com/~txnavarr/newspaper_articles/rice_rustler/articles_page_1.htm

rebuild to William's home
after it burned down
on the south side
of the road

“Mr. and Mrs. E. S. McGRR [McGee] of Corsicana attended the funeral of the little son of Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Fortson here Monday. (Mr. McGee was an uncle of the baby)”

From: Texas Rustler June 14, 1912, Rice, Navarro County

“J. B. FORTSON who has been seriously ill for more than a week is reported better. (Note: His son was the little McGee Fortson mentioned above who had died of dehydration and was buried the previous Monday. McGee had been sick about a week according to another entry in this edition.)”

James Elington Christian

Corsicana Daily Sun, April 3, 1923

The remains were interred in **Oakwood** at 3:30 p.m. today. The active pallbearers were A. D. Wilson, J. O. Burke, J. A. Jackson, W. W. Carter, R. L. Killingsworth, W. E. Stevenson, and D. U. Langston of Powell and Will Bartlett of Rice. The honorary pall bearers were B. B. Munsey, J. R. Collins, J. Halbert, I. N. Cerf, J. B. Fortson, Tom Stockton of Kerens; Z. T. Hanks, Zeb Burke, Doc Hull, H. J. Breithaupt, G. R. Thornton, F. P. Mayfields, E. J. Gibson, Merritt Drane, D. D. Hanks, E. P. Breithaupt, Sherman Miles, John Bradley, I. J. Kyser, John Fortson, Percy Williams, Frank Harvard, Fred White, Judge Lee Jester, C. C. Walton, Rod Kenner, W. N. Kenner, E. L. Dupuy, E. Raphael, P. N. Stockton of Kerens, J. G. Walker, Kerens, T. G. Towns, J. R. Richie, Jim, Jno. and Pope Estes of Roane, T. W. Stevenson, P. B. Baltzegar, Noel Reynolds of Ennis, Sterling Hornbeck, J. E. Butler, W. W.

Farmer, Chap Albritton, Jim Pollan, Lip Polland, Joe Bradley, Claude Hervey, Mit Sowell, Frank King, Dr. Hugh Sloan, Dr. Jim Carter, Morgan Holloway, Nathan Garrett, Lawrence Treadwell, Judge landing, Billie Vernon, Luther Westbrooks. Hugh Logan, J. H. Burke of Clifton, Will Findley, Burnice King, Sidney Marks, Henry Barnett, Dr. B. F. Houston, Dr. McCall of Ennis and E. D. Holmes.

LINKS:

J.B. Forston photo, and more (click on "back" and "contents" buttons)

http://www.hillraifordbullard.com/WP01/WP01_156.HTML#a

Scales Fortson home in Corsicana

http://www.rootsweb.com/~txnavarr/homes/scales_fortson_home.htm

"Short History of Navarro County & Corsicana"

http://www.rootsweb.com/~txnavarr/county_history/short_history.htm

Texas Water Development Board (See list of names at end of document)

http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/RWPG/3rd%20Round%20Applications_SOW%20ion%20C/Application-RegionC-Fall2006_FINAL2a.pdf

News report on a funeral attended by Fortson brothers in 1923

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~txnavarr/obituaries/pg000007.htm>

LETTER OF AGREEMENT

This agreement is made as of August 18, 2012 between author Robert L. Allen and Marva Dellums, daughter of C.L. Dellums. Whereas Robert Allen wishes to publish a book about the life and work of C.L. Dellums making use of an oral history interview done by the Regional Oral History Office in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, it is hereby agreed that:

1. Marva Dellums grants to Robert Allen the right to quote in part or in full from the Dellums oral history.
2. Marva Dellums grants Robert Allen the right to publish such quotes as part of a book he is writing which will be produced and distributed by a commercial publisher.
3. In consideration of the granting of the above rights, Robert Allen agrees, to pay Marva Dellums 25% of 100% of any royalties and licensing income he receives as a result of publishing any book containing quotes from the interview.

The term of this agreement shall commence with the date above and be co-extensive with the term of the copyright of the author's proposed book on C.L. Dellums.

In witness whereof the parties have signed this agreement below.

Robert L. Allen
Robert L. Allen

Marva Dellums
Marva Dellums

Morva 11/11/03

John Dellums not

Henry Dellums father
(Cecilia's father)

but step-father

had older sister
Laura

was more on Indian
has more info on
Also Emma's family

6/23/03

Marva Dellums phone call

William Henry Dellums, ^{was} C.L.'s birth father
his stepfather ~~step father~~ ^{was} Dellums
his biological ~~father~~ ^{son}
Marva has C.L. Dellums birth certificate

C.L. was proud of his American Indian
ancestry. When someone asked about
his ancestry. He replied that "one
thing I can say is That I am
an American." C. J. 38

his birth date for Indian Grandmother
name "Kitty"
in family

\$ 141.00

find CL mother's
last name?
his birth name?

Maureen Anne
Emma Anthony?

47
3
2

First interview

Marva Dellums, 6/16/02

I: Interviewer; R: Respondent

I: Today is Father's Day.

R: Father's Day. Yes.

I: Father's Day.

R: June 16th.

I: June 16th. That's appropriate.

R: Yeah.

I: June 16th, 2002, and I'm meeting with Marva Dellums [spells], to discuss her father, C. L. Dellums. And can you just say a word or two? I just want to check the volume.

R: OK. I'm honored about having this book written about my father. I'd love to do it myself, but journalism is not my fine point. It's just putting the words where they're interesting is a little difficult. I can write the words. I'm good at writing letters. But books to keep the reader interested, you know, that takes talent. So I give you a lot of credit for that.

I: [Laughs] Thank you very much.

R: Oh, yes. A lot of credit for that.

I: Well, with that wonderful comment, let's - [gap]. OK, well, as I say, what I wanted to do, to begin with, ask you a little bit about your father's and your mother's background. That is, where were

they born and what were their families? Where did they come from?
How did they come to the Bay Area?

R: Yes. Well, my father, of course, was born in Corsicana, a [inaudible] town of Texas. His father, William Henry Dellums, had a variety of jobs--insurance salesman, barber. You know, of course, the barber shops way back then have a little medical involvement. So he had quite a few different types of jobs that, you know, kept the family going. His wife, Emma - of course, she stayed home and took care of the children. My father, Sid, that at last count she could remember she had maybe 14 children.

I: Fourteen!

R: But a lot of them didn't make it to adulthood. Some of them died at birth. She had a couple of multiple sibs that didn't survive. So the only ones that really got to somewhat of an adulthood was my father, his younger brother, ^{Verney}~~Bernie~~, and their two older brothers, Burnette and Jim.

I: Oh, right. And Ron's father's which one?

R: Verney.

I: Verney. His younger brother.

R: The youngest. Verney was youngest. Burnette and Jim, I don't remember them very well. I vaguely remember Burnette. Jim passed away when I was younger.

I: Burnette. And that's spelled with "B"?

R: [Spells]

I: Oh, Burnette. Yes, OK. And ²⁴~~Vernie~~ is Vernon?

R: No, Verney. His name is [spells].

I: Ah, OK.

R: So I remember Burnette vaguely when my father's mother passed away, because he brought her from Texas to stay with him. And until she passed away. She was 86 years old. And that was in 1949.

I: 1949, yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: Somewhere in his correspondence he makes mention of bringing her here. I remember seeing that.

R: Yes, he brought her here, and he brought my mother's mother from Texas. My mother was born in Gonzalez, Texas and was raised in San Antonio. And . . .

I: But this is Walter.

R: This is Walter, yes.

I: And her maiden name was?

R: Allen.

I: Oh, Allen! Oh, OK.

R: [Laughs]

I: With an "e" - A-l-l-e-n?

R: A-l-l-e-n. And she was an only child.

I: OK. And where did you say she was born? She's in . . .

R: She was born in Gonzalez, Texas, but she . . .

I: Gonzalez, Texas. Where is - what part of Texas?

R: That's near the border.

I: Oh, OK.

R: Yes, somewhere near the border there. And then she was raised in San Antonio. She came - I'm not sure when she came out to California. It was - had to be in the early '20s. And she worked as a - in southern California. And she worked as a housekeeper, maid, cook down in the canyons down in southern California, and then moved up to the Bay Area doing the same type of work. And, of course, my father came from Corsicana in the early '20s.

I: Right.

R: And he got a - his first job that he mentioned to me was on a ship, Merchant Marine, you know, ship.

I: When he left - after he left . . .

R: After he came to the Bay Area.

I: Right. Could I just interrupt and ask you? How would you describe the racial and national background of both parents?

R: Oh, my goodness! Of course, African Americans today are multiracial. I don't agree with that biracial type of, you know, [inaudible] that most people use because the average African American in this country is a mixture of many cultures. We're not a race of people, as per se. We're a - we are our own melting pots. It's difficult to know. I know my father's father was American Indian and Caucasian. And my grandmother, you know, African American, Indian, and there was Irish mixed in there.

I: This is your father's . . .

R: My father's side, yes. And then my mother's side, her father was Mexican American. And then they had also American Indian there and African American. So Heinz 57. The walking melting pot of the world culture.

I: Yeah. Her father was Mexican American, but his last name was Allen?

R: He used the word - he used the name Allen. I guess for jobs sake. He called himself Joseph Allen. And his actual name was Garcia.

I: Garcia. Oh, OK.

R: But they used the name Allen, because that was his middle name.

I: All right.

R: Yeah.

I: And they named her, your mother . . .

R: My grandmother never . . .

I: Walter.

R: Yeah, Walter Lee.

I: Walter Lee Allen.

R: Yes. Yes. And she had - I think she married - she was married twice before she met my father. And it was cute, the way she met my father. I guess her and her husband were walking down the street.

I: Where was this?

R: This was in the Bay Area in Oakland.

I: In Oakland.

R: And she had come to the Bay Area. And they walked past a barber shop, and they saw this man sitting in the barber chair, and my mother walked up to the window and made a face at him, and they've been together ever since.

I: [Laughs] She walked up to the window and made a face at him.

R: At him. And he came out of the barber shop. Yeah, they . .

I: Now, what possessed her to do that? Has she ever talked about that?

R: No, ~~my mother had a~~ was very spontaneous. She'd do things, you know, just silly little things like that. No, she just said he was a very good looking man, and she - I guess that's her way of flirting at him. I don't - she'd just say, "I made a face at him, and he came out of the barber shop, and that was it." Yeah, they married in 1928.

I: 1928. All right. So that's really right about the time he got involved with the Brotherhood too.

R: Yeah. Yeah.

I: Yeah, so she was right there at the beginning.

R: Well, I don't know. Part of it - they were together from 1924 until 1928, and they got married in 1928.

I: Yeah, OK.

R: That was a no-no back then, but . . .

met in
1924

I: [Laughs] Well, they were ahead of their time.

R: Oh, yes, they were ahead of their times.

I: In many ways.

R: Yeah. And she worked as a - she still worked as a maid. He was, you know, a Pullman porter until they got fired for union activity here, so . . .

I: Right. Now, when he left in his - in that oral history [inaudible] mentioned something about the draft, and this . . .

R: Yes.

I: . . . because when he left Texas, that was what? Just after . . .

R: It was 1923, '24, somewhere around in there. He - the draft - he mentioned that . . .

I: Did he ever tell that story to you?

R: Yeah, he did mention to me that, you know, they had to sign up. But in those days black men were not allowed to fly planes.

I: To fly planes.

R: So he enlisted in the Air Corps. And, of course, they did not accept him. But he did his duty by signing up. So he was refused. [Laughs] He was very smart. Yeah, they weren't going to take him in the Air Corps, but he did sign up for military, yeah. Yeah. And - so that was the end of that. So . . .

I: So he got - your father went to high school in Corsicana.

R: In Corsicana, Texas, yes.

I: He completed high school?

R: He completed high school.

I: What as the high school?

R: Oh gosh, I don't know. I have a picture of his - graduation picture up there, but I don't remember the name of the high school. But he did teach for about a year.

I: In . . .

R: At high school.

I: At that high school?

R: At the high school there.

I: So what was it? A black school, an interracial school?

R: Yes. No, it was . . .

I: It was a black school.

R: It was a black school. He also was - he, his brother, his two brothers, were debaters, and won quite a few awards for their debating team. And their teacher and coach was their mother.

I: You said that before.

R: She was very, very intelligent, a very intelligent woman. Not educated, but intelligent.

I: So this is Emma.

R: This is Emma. Oh, yes, she was . . .

I: Was their speech, their debating coach and speech coach.

R: Mm hmm. And very - oh, just - you know, that's where he got his background in speaking.

I: In speaking. How did she acquire that?

Emma
to
coach

R: A natural talent. You'd have to say natural talent. Very talented woman. She - the vague - I have vague memories of her because being so young . . .

I: Yes, right.

R: I have - she was there a few years, and I remember her reading to me.

I: She would read to you.

R: She would read to me. And she would put so much - I would always have her read the story of David and Goliath because she put so much personality into it and really made it interesting. So I could - looking back on that, I could see where that talent was passed down to her sons.

Emma's
speaking
style

I: Yes. Yes. Were there ever any stories about her liking to do speaking, for example, or maybe theater or maybe the church? Anything that might have inspired that [inaudible] . . .

R: She was involved in the church. I don't know how much. I know I went to church with her a few times as a youngster. She went to the CME, the First CME church in Oakland.

I: Yes, there used to be Colored Methodist Episcopal when I was coming up in the church. Then it became Christian Methodist Episcopal . . .

R: Right. It was Colored Methodist, I recall, when we met, and I went with her. And she - [inaudible] few times. I didn't go all the time. But she liked to take me with her, so I'd go to church with

her. My dad would drop us off, and we'd go to church, and then he'd pick us up, because my mother was Catholic.

Walter
Catholic

I: Oh, yes. [inaudible] But your father was obviously raised CME.

R: He didn't really go to church. You know, he wasn't a church goer. He was a believer but not a church goer.

Walter
Catholic

I: OK.

R: Yeah. Because, of course, he was a Mason. And had a belief in God, so . . .

I: Oh, tell me about that. When did he become a Mason?

R: Oh, well, he got involved in Lodges in Texas with his father, the Knights of Pythius.

I: Knights of Pythius?

R: Mm hmm.

I: How's that?

R: P-y-t-h-i-u-s.

I: OK.

R: And so he got interested in Masonry because my grandfather was a Mason. That was a Prince Hall Mason.

I: Prince Hall.

R: And so he got involved in Masonry in Texas and continued in the Bay Area. And he became - he went up to become a Shriner, and so he was in the - what do they call that? The Menelik Temple.

I: Oh Menelik, after the Egyptian pharaoh, mm hmm.

R: And that would be Sampson's son by the Queen of Sheba.

I: Yeah.

R: So [coughs], so he was involved in Masonry. He was also involved in Elks.

I: The Elks.

R: Lodge, mm hmm. And he got - I mean it's interesting, how he balanced his time. You know, he would go to the meetings. He'd come home. He'd tell my mother, "I'll be home at such and such a time." He'd be right there.

I: He was right there, mm hmm.

R: Yeah. Friday nights, he and his best friend, I called them Uncle Jewel, Jewel Brown. He was a porter. Would go to the Friday night fights at the Oakland Auditorium. So it - he balanced so much. It's incredible.

I: From an early age too.

R: Just balanced, yes.

I: That name was Jewel Brown?

R: J-e-w-e-l.

I: Jewel Brown.

R: Jewel Brown.

I: OK. So long before he became involved, well before he came to Oakland, he was active in fraternal organizations--the Masons, the Elks. What else?

R: Mm hmm. And politically he would make suggestions. Wouldn't say exactly what it was, but they would go to political meetings, he and his father, would go to these meetings. But he

never said exactly what it was, but it would be for candidates, certain candidates running for certain offices. And from - I guess from the beginning he was - he had his morals and his principles. He worked as a waiter in a hotel in Corsicana. I don't know what the name of the hotel was, but there was a politician who was at the hotel. And they asked my father to wait his table. And my father refused. So he was fired. But he said, "I will not serve that man." And why, I don't know. He never gave me the reason why. But he stuck to his principles.

I: Yes. Well, I wonder what the political involvement was then, because in Texas there had been - the Populist movement had been strong at the turn of the century, or before it collapsed. So there was a kind of progressive wing within the - well, they were outside of the Democrats for a while. And then the Republicans might have actually had a progressive wing.

R: They might have - I . . .

I: Because the Democrats were, of course, in the South, were basically the party of the Klan.

R: Yeah, he never mentioned exactly what it was about. There was a fight that broke out. But [laughing] I don't know why or whatever. He said he was involved in that. My grandfather told him, you know, get under the table or something because, you know, he didn't want my father to get hurt.

I: Yes.

R: And, of course, Dad was right in the middle of it. You know, that's just - that [inaudible] was just Dad. But he never said who it was . . .

I: He never said who the party was or the candidates.

R: No.

I: But it was some sort of political activity thing, he and his father, that his father introduced him to actually.

R: Right. Yeah, his father was very active, I guess because of the business he was in, being a barber.

I: He was a barber.

R: Yes, he was a barber by trade, yes.

I: The barber is the ear of the community.

R: And, of course, you know, a lot of barber shops - my father told me a lot of barber shops were part mortician, part pharmacist. They just - a little bit of everything. You know, you'd go into a barber and you had a tooth - the barber would pull your tooth. You know, dentistry. All of that was combined. They were just a multitude of talents that a barber would have. And he said one barber shop - I don't know if my grandfather worked there, but my father mentioned that it had the caskets in the back, you know, mortician in the back room.

I: Oh. [Laughing] A mortician in the back, yes.

R: Yeah, in the back room. Barber shop in the front, mortician in the back.

I: For the haircut that went too far [laughs].

R: Yes. But it was just a conglomeration of things.

I: Well, so - OK, so he was - he became organizationally active and politically active in Corsicana. I didn't know that.

R: Yeah.

I: And so he comes to the Bay Area, then, in a way he's - he's the kind of person who would be open to what was going on, particularly some new organizing activity like the Brotherhood. And his first job was on the . . .

R: It was on a ship.

I: A ship.

R: And that didn't agree with him as far as seasickness was concerned. [Laughs] So that didn't last very long. I think he mentioned that he went up from the Bay Area to like Oregon and Washington and would come back. But when he got back, I guess, in the port, someone told him about the porters, and that he could get a job on the railroad. And so that's how he got involved with the railroad. He went and applied for the job as a porter, and he became a porter on the railroad.

I: And that would have been - what year was that? The first job.

R: Probably '24 maybe, '23, '24, some - in that area. Dates I'm not positive of, but it was in that area. Because he was only a porter for a few years.

I: So he was at the very beginning of the Brotherhood. What was it? Dad Moore?

R: Dad Moore.

I: Dad Moore.

R: Mm hmm.

I: Dad Moore was the organizer of that . . .

R: Of the Bay Area. That's right.

I: Yeah.

R: Of the Bay Area. And he got - he heard about it, got . . .

I: C. L. heard about it.

R: Yes. Oh, yes. He heard about it. And I think he - but from what he told me, he heard Randolph speak, and that inspired him. It was over. You know? He got involved. And he would - to help recruit the porters, you know, they had speakeasy's in those days. So - and being a Mason, he would take off his Mason ring and put it in his pocket. You can't wear a Mason ring at a speakeasy. So he would take his ring off and put it in his pocket and go in there to recruit these men, you know, to join the union. So he got very active. Very, very active.

I: Early on, yes. Well, did he ever say much about Dad Moore, what kind of person was Dad?

R: He just said he was a heck of a man. You know, he never really got too much into the personalities of them. He may have - you know, there wasn't much he could really tell me in those - 'cause I didn't know him, you know? But he just said he was - he was - he was a good man. He was a good man. So . . .

I: But [inaudible] a few years Dad Moore became - I guess he had some illness because he basically had to give up the organ- . . .

R: Yeah, he became quite elderly and ill, yeah.

I: [inaudible] organizer by 1928, I think.

R: Mm hmm. And he had become very active. And I think the older that he got and the sicker he got, you know, my father took on more responsibilities.

I: Took on more responsibilities, yes.

R: But, you know, when my father was a porter, he got in a few little scrapes here. He mentioned that, you know, on the trains in the dining car, where people would eat, and the porters, you know, the porters ate. You know, they'd go back and have a meal.

I: Right.

R: And there was a curtain separating . . .

I: A curtain separating.

R: There was a curtain separating them from the rest of the passengers on the train. Well, you can guess who took that curtain down.

I: He did. [Laughs]

R: Yeah, he said, "I ripped that curtain down. And, boy, did I get in trouble for that!" But he didn't say what the repercussions of it were. But it wasn't - they didn't fire him for it.

I: And this was before he was actually involved in the Brotherhood?

R: This was during - I think during the beginning.

no 8.16.02
go
porter

I: In the beginning [inaudible].

R: Yeah.

I: Mm hmm. Early on in his career as a porter, his short career as a porter.

R: Yeah. They just - certain things got under his skin, and he just wouldn't tolerate them. And he didn't worry about the repercussions. He just believed right is right and wrong is wrong. And that was it.

I: That attitude.

R: Yes.

I: Where did that come from in the family?

R: I don't - I think it was a combination.

I: Mother and father?

R: Mother and father, mm hmm.

I: Mm hmm.

R: A very strong woman, his mother was, and so was his father. And he idolized his father.

I: What did he say about his father? What, what . . .

R: He didn't talk to . . .

I: What made him an idol?

R: He didn't talk too much about Grandpa. He - because I never knew my [inaudible]. He just talked about the strength of the man, the stubbornness of the man, the dreams of the man. You know, just - Dad said he had a lot of dreams. They may not have been fulfilled. But, you know, he did his best to do what he wanted

Fortson

to do. But he - he had somewhat of a relationship with his father.
Not much because he was [inaudible]. And his father . . .

I: Your father was . . .

R: My grandfather . . .

I: Was illegitimate.

R: My grandfather was illegitimate, yes. And he had a
somewhat relationship with his natural father. His name was
Fortson.

I: Fortson.

R: Fortson.

I: [Spells]?

R: I think it was F-o-r-t-s-o-n, or F-o-r-d-s-o-n. We're not sure
of the spelling. But that's my grandfather - that's our given name. It
would be.

I: Would be.

R: Yeah.

I: This was a white man?

R: Yes. Yes, and he was married and had two other sons. But
very - very loving to my grandfather. But, you know, my
grandfather's stubborn. So, you know, they could - the man, I don't
know, he had property. And he said, "Any time you guys want to
come on the property," you know, pick pecans or - my dad loved
pecans - "pecans or whatever you need, go right ahead." And he
seemed to have - you know, it wouldn't be any problem because he -

he looked at him as his son. But I don't know too much about - like I said, I didn't know my grandfather. I wish I did.

I: Yes.

R: I really wish I did.

I: It sounds like he was a very interesting man, yes.

R: Yeah. Yeah. He was. He - my dad didn't talk too much about him, being - you know, the only comment my dad made when his father died - he said it was the most traumatic thing that ever happened to him in his life.

I: The most traumatic thing that ever happened to him?

R: Mm hmm.

I: Yes.

R: So it probably was not too long after his father's death that he left Texas. I believe it wasn't too long after that that he left.

I: I see.

R: Yeah.

I: Did he ever say anything about what, anything that specifically motivated him to leave, either to leave there or to head for or come to California?

R: To - he'd heard a lot of people talk about California and, you know, coming to the Bay Area. I think the Bay Area was kind of like the culmination of Blacks at that time. They were all coming to the Bay Area for jobs, you know, the ships, the trains. And I think this is what they were coming for because the hiring, the jobs and the availability. And this was the call, to come to the Bay Area.

Death of
William
Dellums

Get
Death
Certificate

I: Right.

R: Yeah.

I: Where did he live when he first arrived here? He came to Oakland first?

R: He rented a room - yeah. He came right to Oakland. And he just said, "I found a room." And this is when they told him about the job on the ship. And then, of course, he found out about the railroad job from the people on the docks. But he rented a room. He said it was down in West Oakland. I'm not sure where. But he rented a room. He said some very nice people, you know, rented him a room.

I: And the ship that he was on was basically going up and down the . . .

R: On the coast, yeah.

I: On the coast. What kind of - was it a cargo ship, a passenger ship or . . .

R: I don't - no, it wasn't a passenger ship. It was a cargo ship.

I: Cargo ship.

R: Yeah, cargo ship. And it just - you know, he said his stomach didn't agree with the water, so [chuckles] he said most of the time he was very sick on that boat, so - so he said he was glad to hear about the job on the railroad.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: So how - was his story of how he and Walter met?

R: He didn't say much about it. He'd just smile and get red-cheeked when my mother would tell the story, so . . .

I: [Laughs]

R: You know, he - he said they were verbally volatile, but they - not physically volatile, but verbally volatile with each other. And I think that's what attracted them to one another because neither one of them backed down. And they balanced each other out. My mother's education only went as far as the eighth grade, but she could out-read my father. So they balanced one another out. You know, my mother was real, down to earth, feet on the ground, just home body type. And my father was just the opposite. He was out there in the limelight, speaking and traveling, and my mother never went with him. She used to - after I was born, he told her, "This is where you belong, right here with this, with the baby." But she kinda just sat in the background and kept him going because she realized what he was doing.

Ask
Marva
about
manager
certificates

I: She did.

R: Yes.

I: From early on, do you think?

R: From early on, yes. And she realized what he was doing, what he was trying to do. And she supported that. She never felt - I never saw her depressed or lonely or - she always kept busy because, you know, she got involved with the Eastern Stars.

I: Tell me about that. Eastern Stars?

R: That's the women's auxiliary to the Masons.

[Note: Robert - it's not Stars - it's Star, Eastern Star]

I: OK.

R: But I don't know much about that. I wasn't around then.

I: Yeah.

R: And she didn't talk much about it. You know, you're not supposed to talk about those things.

I: Right.

R: You know. So I wasn't born until 1944. And she was 43, and my father was 44 years old.

I: How long had they been married?

R: They've been married since 1928, and she lost children.

I: She did?

R: Mm hmm. And I was kind of like a "it can't be a tumor because it moves"?

I: [Laughs]

R: So I was a big surprise. Three and a half pounds full term. Wasn't supposed to make it but did. So I think I got the best of both worlds.

I: Yes, I bet you did.

R: Stubborn but tactful, diplomatic, and real. I try to be true to myself. So it's just - I think I got the best of both.

I: Why do you think - you know, it sounds like she had - your mother had political ideas and social ideas and, you know, she had her own mind.

R: She did, but she . . .

Quoted
X

I: When did that - in her background, what might have been the sources for her - her ideas and her . . .

R: Her ideas, she . . .

I: . . . her take on the world?

R: She didn't really talk too much about her beliefs or whatever. She let my father take care of everything. They'd sit at the breakfast table in the morning and discuss things. And she would ask questions, and he would answer them. So it's kind of like an educational type thing. He would learn it. He'd tell her. You know? And it was - she was just fascinated by, by listening to her. And this was every morning. Every morning they'd have their little discussions.

I: This is over breakfast or?

R: Over breakfast.

I: Did they take a lot of papers and magazines, or . . .

R: Yes.

I: Was that part of their [inaudible]?

R: There was - of course, you know, the *Black Worker*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the - oh, gosh, there were so many of them. They had so many papers coming in and out of there that - and I would even read them. I would lay on the floor, and he would read this. You know, and he would . . .

I: [inaudible]

R: Yeah. He would keep me reading and . . .

I: [inaudible]

R: And, you know, "Here, you read this." And, you know, "Here, you read this." And he'd make me read. I didn't want to read, but he made me read. So it was - sometimes I read it and didn't remember because I didn't want to read.

I: Right. Where were you living then? Was it in the same house?

R: 829 Brockhurst Street in Oakland. I was born in that house.

I: Brockhurst. [inaudible] What part of town is it?

R: That's - they consider it West Oakland now. It was North Oakland when I was a young child. Between West Street and Market Street.

I: Oh, I know that, yeah.

R: Between 31st and 32nd.

I: Oh, OK.

R: Right across - it was Hoover Junior High then. Now it's Hoover Elementary School. Right across the street. And, yeah, I was born in that house. And that's where he lived till the day he died.

I: A lot of porters lived in that part of West Oakland?

R: Yes. There was quite a few. Yeah. And, of course, that was the first jobs that they - my father said that they had where they could own property, where they made - of course, after the union got their rights and got everything straightened out, to where they could earn enough money. They were starting to buy homes, and so it was in the Bay Area where they were buying homes. And the

children just - and Dad said a porter would drive down the street, and he was in a nice, crisp uniform, and the kids were just, "Wow!", you know, "Look at him." So it was kind of a prestigious type job.

I: It was a prestigious position. I remember that growing up myself.

R: Yeah.

I: There were two prestigious positions. Well, besides a minister. The porters, [inaudible] those who were with the Brotherhood, and the union. The union was very well thought of, everywhere, certainly where we were. And then the Post Office.

R: Yes.

I: Especially to be a letter carrier. My grandfather was a - as he said, "I was a letter carrier." [Laughs]

R: Oh, yes. That's what they called them, letter carriers.

I: [Inaudible] the term of choice there. But that's what got our family through the Depression. [inaudible] he had a job.

R: Yeah. See, I wasn't around during the Depression, so I don't know too much about that. But, of course, when it came to [inaudible] officials, if they - if the union officials needed to pay their rent, voluntarily the porters would come together and help them to, to pay their rent, because they really weren't getting paid. They really hadn't - not that much of a salary. My mother was working. So they didn't really have a salary because they didn't designate a salary for themselves.

I: Yeah, he makes mention of that in his correspondence, when he talks about - this is years and years later, in the '50s, when he's talking about it, trying to get new organizers for these . . .

END SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B

I: This is a continuation of the interview with Marva Dellums.
This is Side 2. OK?

R: Yes. It's an interesting little story that my father taught me about their marriage. They got in their little ~~Model A Ford~~ and drive down to Martinez. And he said that they had a shotgun wedding. And, of course, I was a young child. I said, "What do you mean, a shotgun wedding?" And he says the two witnesses were sheriffs [both laugh], and I still have their marriage certificate.

I: You do? Oh.

R: Oh, yes. Yes. And it's, you know, pasted on a little piece of cardboard where my mother had their marriage certificate. Yeah, I still have that.

I: She had a piece pasted on her - did she have it framed or . .

R: No, it was just on a piece of cardboard.

I: Just on a piece of cardboard [laughs].

R: So I just left it there, just left it on a piece of cardboard. But, yeah, it was a shotgun wedding. And I have - I think there's a picture of my mother there. There's the Model A Ford.

Also
wedding photo
p. 27

I: This is . . .

R: On to the right. That's her wedding day.

I: Oh, my goodness, really?

R: Yeah. That's her wedding picture.

I: Oh, she's lovely in that. That's the Model A she's . . .

R: That's the Model A. That's the one that my father tried to teach her to drive, and he never succeeded. She never drove an automobile. She said it scared her to death.

I: Well, it didn't stop her from getting around though.

R: Oh, no. She - she got around. Taxi cabs, trolleys, buses, you know, wherever - when she wanted to go somewhere, we'd go. But she never drove.

I: What was the household like? The house that you grew up in? How would you describe that house?

R: Well, very warm. You know? Full of love. I mean it just - when I was born, my father's first cousin - she came out to California, had gotten married, and her husband went into the Navy. So she stayed with my mother. And they were both pregnant. And so my cousin and I are like three months apart. So I had almost like a sister with me until he came back from the Service, and they moved right behind us. She was two years old. So I had a buddy, you know, to grow up with and to play with.

I: What was her name?

R: Jill Robinson. And so she was - she's still like my sister. And Teresa, that's Ron's sister, that's my big sister. You know? She

- she was really something. She'd come and take me here and take me there, and I - she was the only one my mother would let take me anywhere.

I: Is that so?

R: Oh, yes. My mother was very protective. But when Teresa would come over and want to take me somewhere, she'd go, "Yeah." So she trusted me with her. But Jill and I were raised together and just fun. My mother was fun. You know? But, of course, very reserved around my father. But my mother was a lot of fun. She was - she would joke and play and have a good time and, you know, her and I would go on vacations, because my father never took a vacation. Never. The only day he took off was Sunday. Sunday, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

I: And did he go to church on Sunday?

R: No. No, he never went to church. My mother and I would go to church.

I: You would go. What church did you attend?

R: Sacred Heart. I was baptized at the age of seven. I remember that . . .

I: Sacred Heart?

R: Yes. The church on the corner of 40th and - it was Grove at that time, but it's Martin Luther King, Jr. Way now.

I: OK.

R: And I went to Sacred Heart School, from the 4th grade till the 8th grade.

Catholic?
m 29
yes m. 32

I: You had a full Catholic education there [inaudible].

R: Just from the 4th till the 8th grade.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: So how's your father - was that ever an issue . . .

R: No.

I: . . . religion, in the house?

R: No. Whatever I chose to do. Because at the age of seven - see, I'd go to the church - I used to go to church with my grandmother, and then when they brought my mother's mother up from Texas, she was ill, my mother went down, helped her sell the property, and then brought her mother out here, and she passed away from cancer a couple of years later. But my father said, "Go down and get her. Bring her back." He was such a compassionate man. And she stayed with us for - and that was the other lady you saw, Parilee, was her name [inaudible].

I: This is your mom's mother.

R: My mom's mom, mm hmm.

I: OK.

R: And her name was Parilee.

I: Paral?

R: Parilee. [spells] And Caventer was her husband's name. That's my mother's stepfather. So she came and stayed with us. Incredible women in those days. I look back at my grandmothers - I

Walter
mom

mean they ironed my socks. [Both laugh] You know? And my underwear. I - when I was little?

I: Right.

R: And they just - starching and ironing and just everything had to be just perfect. And I look at my generation and the generation after me. I said if it's not wash and dry, forget about it [laughing].

I: Right. Exactly, yes.

R: I mean she ironed - I saw her ironing my socks. And I just - that was love. You know? That was just - that was love, grandmas.

I: Amazing. It was certainly amazing.

R: Amazing. But my dad's mother, she - like I said, she would sit me on my lap and she would - she had a little paring knife, and she'd peel [inaudible]. I couldn't eat apples [inaudible]. She'd peel an orange, and she'd give me a little slice, and then she'd take a slice. And then she'd read to me. So I spent a lot of time sitting on a big rocking chair, you know, the big, broad arms, and her felt - she had purple felt slippers. I remember those.

I: Purple felt slippers, yes.

R: Purple slippers. And . . .

I: Now, this grandmother is . . .

R: That's Emma.

I: This is Emma you're talking about.

R: Yeah.

I: OK.

Sandra
P-9
CL's
mother

R: See, that's the memories I have of her. Because I was only like 3, 4, and 5 at that time, so - and I was around 4 or 5 when she died.

I: Lovely memories to have.

R: Yes. So I remember, you know, just bits and pieces.

I: You went to Sacred Heart School.

R: Mm hmm.

I: What other schools did you go to?

R: I went to Durant Elementary School. That was down there on West Street, way down there. From kindergarten till the 3rd grade. And then I transferred. I guess my mother and my father both agreed that I wasn't academically challenged, so that's why he did agree for me to go to Catholic school, because their curriculum was a lot stricter and a lot more progressive than the public schools.

I: Progressive in what sense?

R: You know, that they took you - if you were able to do it, they gave it to you.

I: Ah. OK.

R: For instance, I was taking algebra in the 4th grade.

I: Wow [laughs], that's progress [inaudible] . . .

R: If you - you know, I mean it wasn't high school algebra, but it was kind of the introduction to it, or your geometry, introduction to your geometry. And if you weren't challenged by that class, they'd put you in a class where you were challenged, where your public schools, you just kinda went from one area to the next, and I

was apparently bored. So that's why they put me into Catholic school. But after I graduated Catholic school, I didn't want to go back to Catholic school. I was . . .

I: Why?

R: I guess I was a rebel in my own way because during catechism I generally would say something that really made the nuns angry, and that was why.

I: Why. That was - that was you were saying in catechism?

R: Yes. Why? How come? Explain to me why. And that came from my father. If you don't know, ask. And if they can't answer, go find the answers. So I was a little rebel in catechism.

I: [Laughs

R: I really infuriated . . .

I: Yes, I'll bet.

R: Because they couldn't give me answers. And I eventually left the Catholic church because they never did give me the answer.

It - I guess rebel. That was from my dad.

I: Rebel.

R: Oh, yeah. It was from my dad.

I: When did you first become aware of him as a person outside of the house? That is, [inaudible] you became aware [inaudible] of having work, of having a life outside of the house and your dawning awareness of what that work was?

R: You know, it was interesting because I knew he was going away doing things, but I didn't really miss the time that most fathers

have with their children because when he was there, it was quality. And I guess between the ages of about - it must have been 13. And he told me, said, "OK, you're going to come to a N Double A CP convention at the Oakland Auditorium," and I was going to usher, you know, show people to their seats and hand them the programs and whatever. Thurgood Marshall was there. Oh, incredible men got up on that podium. Let's see. Roy Wilkins. I'm trying to remember those men up there. I - they kinda got overshadowed when my father stepped up to speak, and I was dumbfounded. You know? That's my father up there!

I: That's the first time you heard him, huh?

R: That's the first time I heard him speak, and I was absolutely dumbfounded. It was - it was incredible. I was inspired. Just - and then - I never said anything to him. I kinda sat there - it's like relishing something sweet in your mouth, and you just sit there and you just kinda ponder over it. And, wow! He's more than just Dad, you know? And it's - it's almost like I'm not supposed to put people on a pedestal, but I'm just about to put him there. It was in- - it was an incredible feeling. You know? Where I kinda - when we got in the car to go home, I just stared at him [laughs].

I: [Laughs]

R: You know? What - you know, what is this all about? And then I started getting involved in reading and getting involved in what he was really doing. And, of course, my mother then started talking to me more, and we'd sit down and talk about it. You know,

your father this, and your father that. Because I mean Randolph and Mr. Webster and even Ralph Bunche, I think, once, Roy Wilkins--all these men would come over when Randolph was in town. And he'd stay at the old California Hotel down on San Pablo. But he'd come over for dinner. Because he wanted - oh, he loved my mother's cooking.

I: He did?

R: Oh, yes.

I: What was his favorite?

R: Lemon pie.

I: Lemon pie [laughs].

R: So he would come over, and they'd all sit in the living room, and I'd wander in. And my mother tried to get me out, and Randolph, in that deep, eloquent tone, [imitates his laugh] he'd laugh and "Leave her alone, she's fine." And I'm crawling all over these men, you know. And I thought - I've looked back on that. I say, "Oh, my God, what was I doing?" You know, it just - to me they were just guys, you know, men in the living room, and I'm falling all over them, and pulling at their faces and who knows what else, so - but it's incredible. And then I started listening, because they taped a lot of things. I started listening to tapes and reading more of what was going on and, and what was happening, and really becoming aware of his involvement with the N Double A CP and with the Brotherhood. And then, of course, when the Fair Employment Practice Commission got started. And, you know, newspaper articles

Randolph
Loved

Randolph

and all this kind of stuff. I was, I was overwhelmed. It took me a while to get that kinda straight in my brain as this is my father.

I: Yes.

R: But he separated that when he was at home. He was just Dad. You know? Helped me with my homework until I got into geometry. He couldn't go there. He said, "You're on your own."

I: [Laughs]

R: I got too high up in the math. He said, "You're on your own." So we got past fractions and percentages. He never went past that, so he said, "You're on your own." And my mother said, "When you get to adding and subtracting, after that you're on your own." So - it varied, but I mean as far as my English, my writing, and he was very meticulous about my handwriting. Just made me practice how to hold a pen and how to write my name. He was a very meticulous man. On how he looked, how he spoke. But he wasn't a snob, and he wasn't proud.

I: But he was very self-conscious about it, conscious about it, I guess.

R: He was - he was - it was part of his nature.

I: Yeah.

R: It wasn't something that he acquired or because of pride or because of, you know, wanting people to look up to him. It was just part of his nature.

I: Mm hmm.

R: I mean he mowed the lawn in his suit pants.

I: [Laughs] OK.

R: I mean that, that kinda makes a child go, "Huh? What is going on here?" And, you know, my mother had this idea - she wanted me to be a debutante. And my father said, "No." And she goes, "Why not? I want to present her to society." My father said, "No. We're not that type of people. Plus, you're not going to get me in a monkey suit."

I: [Laughs

R: That's two things he wouldn't wear--overalls and a tuxedo.

I: And a tuxedo. Mm mm mm. Yes.

X R: But I mean he mowed - can you - [inaudible] the fact that he mowed the lawn in his suit pants, with his sleeves rolled up and his vest on, and a little push mower.

I: Was his father like that? Was his father also . . .

R: Yes. He said his father was.

I: . . . a dresser and meticulous and . . .

R: Just a very meticulous man. I - that's him here on the left.

That's my - here.

I: Oh, yes.

R: Very, very meticulous.

I: Where's this here?

R: This is at an insurance office.

I: In Corsicana?

R: In Corsicana. And you can tell about how old this picture is by looking at the light bulb.

I: Oh, yes. Right.

R: That had to be in the early 1900's possibly.

I: So this is where . . .

R: This is one of his businesses.

I: . . . your grandfather worked or . . .

R: One of his businesses, yeah.

I: A black insurance company, mm hmm.

R: No, this was a - no, it was a combination because this is a Caucasian man here. And . . .

I: He looks a little tan there.

R: Yeah. He's - yeah. He said - Dad said he was a Caucasian man. [inaudible] African, you know, a black man. And, of course, my grandfather.

I: Right.

R: He [coughs] - but it was just a combination of - and, of course, it was advantageous for the insurance company to have black representatives. It was a white insurance company, and they wanted more people, then they had agents who were, who were black. So - of course, my father used "Negro." He didn't like the word "black." He said, "No one's black or white. We're all colored." [Both laugh] He preferred the word "Negro." He never change it. He never did. He said because all men are colored. He didn't like that word, but he preferred the word "Negro," because to him that meant a person of multicultural backgrounds.

I: Yes, mm hmm.

R: You see? Instead of saying, you know, black Americans or African Americans, he said, "We're multicultural." So - and he said - and it takes a very special group of people to develop a race from nowhere. You know, we base our roots in Africa, but how so many people from so many cultural backgrounds can find that basic root and band together and become a race of people, that's - not too many people look at that. They don't really look at that. And look - I mean some of them may have more of the African blood. Some may have just a minute amount. But they're that race of people. That - and binds them together. And I think it's a very beautiful thing. I don't know, a lot of people don't, but I do.

I: Yes.

R: How they can just - it knitted that fabric.

I: Right, right.

R: Yeah.

I: Well, it certainly is incredible. Now, he was part of that. That's part of the heritage . . .

R: Yes.

I: [inaudible]

R: Yeah. And he was very proud of his Native American background because he said many people would say, "Oh, my people came over on the Mayflower." And my father would say, "And my ancestors met them."

I: [Laughs]

Multiracial
heritage Indian
blood

R: So he said - he enjoyed making that statement. And, you know . . .

I: Do you know specifically what tribe or nation?

R: Yes, the Cherokee nation.

I: Cherokee.

R: Mm hmm. And he doesn't remember her name, her Indian name. She had an Indian name, but he doesn't remember. They called her Grandma Kitty. And that's all he can remember.

I: Grandma Kitty.

R: Kitty.

I: And who is she?

R: That was my grandfather's mother. And she was Native American.

I: Oh, OK.

R: Yeah. And he said he couldn't remember, you know, her Indian name, but she - she had one. But he was so young, he said, "I can't remember. We just called her Grandma Kitty." Yeah, she was Native American.

I: So as you became aware then, he would take you to meetings.

R: Mm hmm.

I: This early NAACP convention being one of the first.

R: Right.

I: Did he take you to Bro- - do you ever remember going to Brotherhood meetings or Brotherhood - they were always having social events, and there was the ladies' auxiliary was doing things.

R: I never was involved too much with - he would take me periodically to what they called the bull sessions. Now, the bull sessions were - as my mother called them too - was Randolph, Webster, and a lot of the other Brotherhood vice presidents would - if Randolph came to California, the California Hotel, they'd have rump sessions, bull sessions over there, and he'd take me with him. So I'm sitting in this group of incredible men. You know? Just bouncing around from one to the other, because I wanted to go. And he'd take me with him. And I was very well behaved. I didn't get into trouble. I just bounced around all over these guys. And they did their meeting, and we went home. At dinner time it was time to go home. So I would go to those type of meetings. I did get somewhat involved with the youth group with the NAACP. I didn't get as involved as he wanted me to, but, you know, I did go to some meetings, and, you know, listening - we went to quite a few of the meetings with him, the conventions. We'd go to the conventions. And then my mother and I would go.

I: Oh, that's - so you got to travel, 'cause those were often back . . .

R: No, only in the Bay Area.

I: Oh, only in the Bay Area. Oh, oh. So you didn't get to travel.

R: No, no. He never would let us travel with him because he didn't want anything happening to all of us.

I: Yes, right, you said that once, yeah.

R: He would travel, you know, [inaudible].

I: So he was concerned about his safety and the safety of the family especially.

R: Yes. So he said, "If anything happens, I don't want the whole family being taken out."

I: Was there ever any threats made against him that you know of?

R: He said there were. He said threats against my mother. My mother had letters sent to her, and he didn't know about them until 25, 30 years later. She kept them in a safety deposit box and never showed them to him.

I: Oh, my!

R: And finally she showed it to him, and he says, "I had no idea you were going through this." But she - she told me how could he take care of his business, you know, fighting for human rights and doing things that he could do if he knows that we're in jeopardy. How could he concentrate on what he's doing? So she kept it away from him.

I: That is amazing . . .

R: Yeah, she was amazing.

I: . . . that she just kept that to herself.

Threats

R: Yeah. She kept it to herself. But she didn't destroy the letters. She kept them. Put them in a safety deposit box. She was smart.

I: [Laughs

R: So, you know, in case they ever could, you know, trace them, find out who they were. Oh, yeah. That's why, you know, I understood after I got older and really understood what was really going on why she was so protective of me, why she wouldn't let me go with certain people, why I couldn't spend the night at my friends' houses. I didn't realize that until I got older, exactly what was going on, that I was actually being protected.

I: Yes. Yes, you were.

R: And so many people didn't know he had a daughter until I showed up at that convention.

I: At the NAACP convention.

R: Right. Mm hmm. And . . .

I: And how old were you then?

R: About 13.

I: 13?

R: Yeah. Because my mother - they were making donations, you know:? Pledges.

I: Right.

R: 25 dollar pledges, you know, or 50, 100 dollar pledges.

I: And you were the usher.

R: And my mother signals me from over there. She had on this beautiful black hat, I'll never forget that, and she signals me. And I'm looking at my mother, like what does she want? And she goes [gestures]. So I'm waving my hand, you know, and so I pledged 25 dollars. That's what she told me. And my father gave me this look . . .

I: She gave you a little hand signal there, with the two^{ten} and the five.

R: My father gave me this look like you wouldn't believe [laughs].

I: [Laughs]

R: I went up on stage, and all the pledges had to go up on stage, and I was standing there, and he's still giving me this look [laughs], and my mother's like, "I'll pay for it. I'll [inaudible]" So I mean he wasn't griping about it, but he was just kinda surprised. And then when I did get on stage, you know, my father introduces me as his daughter. And they said, "Well, [inaudible] we didn't even know you had a daughter." So he kept me quiet. Oh, that was so funny. That look on his face [laughs].

I: That was wonderful though.

R: Yeah.

I: You make this 25 dollar pledge, and then it gets you up on stage, and then he introduces you to . . .

R: He introduces me.

I: . . . his whole world.

R: Yes. This was my daughter.

I: That's great.

R: [inaudible] incredible. Oh, yeah, but my mother just . . .

I: But that was a better way - that beat the - what's the other name - the cotillion or . . .

R: Oh, yeah.

I: That beat that by far.

R: I didn't want that. I didn't want to be . . .

I: Really! I mean [inaudible] talk about a coming out!

R: Yeah. I think they - the LINKS, I think is the name of the group.

I: Right, mm hmm.

R: And I didn't want to do that. It just - it wasn't in me to do that. And my dad's, "Well, you have to present her." "No, I'm not getting in a monkey suit. No." "Well, you have to." "No." But he was the first man who taught me to waltz.

I: To waltz.

R: When I was a little girl. I stood on his feet. And he taught me to waltz.

I: Yes [laughs]. Oh.

R: And my mother taught me how to do the Charleston. And my dad said she was the best Charleston dancer you've ever seen. And Black Bottom, oh my goodness! [Both laugh] She really does.

I: So they liked music.

R: Yes. I was raised up on big band.

I: Big band music, mm hmm.

R: You know, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, you know, Benny Goodman, all of them [laughing]. I still listen to it. But, see, and my mom and I would dance. She'd show me how to dance.

I: You would?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah?

R: We'd have the Victrola.

I: Victrola, yeah. I remember Victrolas.

R: Yeah, Victrolas. Yeah, they loved music. My dad loved music. We'd be driving down the freeway, and he'd have the music going. And the music would get good to him, and he'd start tapping his feet, but he [inaudible]. And a car would be going like this, and, "Dad." "Oh, oh."

I: The car would get rhythm, huh?

R: Yeah, the car had rhythm. Yeah.

I: So - you say he liked to dance, and he obviously liked to waltz.

R: Yes.

I: Did he mainly stick to the waltz, or was he . . .

R: Yeah. He was mainly a slow dancer.

I: A slow dancer.

R: My mother - I don't now if he ever did the Charleston. He wouldn't admit it.

I: Can't quite see that.

R: No.

I: [Laughs]

R: But he may have.

I: He may have though.

R: He may have, but he never admitted it.

I: He could have broken loose a couple of times.

R: Oh, yes, he could have. But he never admitted it. He just said she was - she was great. She could dance. And so I said, well, he had to dance with her, or someone else had to dance - I never did ask because I didn't want to get into that. You know, that was kind of a private thing. But she did love to dance.

I: Well, maybe we should take a break here.

R: OK.

I: And think about continuing at another time. But this was wonderful. It was wonderful. And I just love that story about . . . now we're back at the NAACP. And when you were called up . . .

R: When I was an usher.

I: Usher, and you were called up . . .

R: My ^Mbrother bought me a brand new special dress. And in those days that cost a lot of money. She got me a nice, beautiful, chiffon dress to wear as an usher.

I: As an usher.

R: So she knew what she was doing.

I: So when you went up on that stage . . .

R: I was looking [inaudible]. Yes.

Special
Dress

I: [Laughs] You were spectacular.

R: I was spectacular, yes. [Laughs]

I: Oh, I love it. That's a wonderful story. That's a wonderful story. Yes. [Laughs]

R: She's a smart lady.

I: Yes, indeed. Well, thank you very much.

R: Oh, you're quite welcome.

I: And we shall continue. End of tape. A little bit more here. You were talking about your [inaudible].

R: Yeah, my mother would say, "I'm not as educated as your father. But I'm just as smart."

I: Mm. Yes, indeed. She proved that many times.

R: Yes, she did.

END TAPE

Marva Dellums, 7/15/02 (2nd interview)

I: Interviewer; R: Respondent

*See birth
Certificate
Marva has*

I: Today is July 15, 2002, interview with Marva Dellums. OK, so we're starting. Why don't you tell me again about the thing about his middle name?

Cotrel
R: Oh, his middle name, Lawrence. He told me that he gave himself that middle name. He was just ~~Warren~~ [inaudible] Dellums. At what age he took that name I don't know. But he told me this when I was, you know, a big girl. Because I asked him about his middle name because he mentioned that he was named after a minister that his mother knew, and I was asking him about where he got his middle name, and that's when he told me that he gave himself that name.

I: So Cotrel (?), that's the name, he was named after a minister.

R: Yes.

I: In Corsicana.

R: In Corsicana.

I: But by the time he came to Oakland, he'd already given himself that, the middle name of Lawrence by then.

R: Correct.

I: So he came with that middle name.

R: Right.

I: OK. Well, the last time we talked, we talked a lot about your childhood, and the experiences and the background of the family

and your childhood here in Oakland. And I wanted to talk, sort of carry that forward and look at your experiences as an adolescent, growing up in the house and with your dad, your mom, and your experiences. How did that change over time, and how did you come to learn more about the Brotherhood? I know you talked at first about - that you became initially aware of things from the meetings, people coming to the house, how you met Mr. Randolph and Mr. Webster, and you were too young really to understand what that was all about. And then one of the highlights was going to that NAACP meeting . . .

R: Correct.

I: . . . when you went up on stage and all, and that must have been a dramatic, powerful moment for you.

R: Oh, it was. It was. It was slightly traumatic but . . .

I: Slightly traumatic, yes.

R: Yes.

I: What things happened, though, as you grew up - how did your relationship with your father develop, and how did that mature?

R: Well, he - I really didn't become too involved in his business. He would come home and discuss some things. I did a lot of reading about certain things. But he kinda still kept it separate from the family. We knew how important his work was. He'd come home and he'd discuss certain things. He'd give me things to read. It's this way, he said, "Well, you can understand more about what's

going out. Read this," you know, some pages or whatever you could read.

I: Newspapers, pamphlets, books.

R: Newspapers, pamphlets, books, uh . . .

I: About the Brotherhood?

R: About the Brotherhood, about the Fair Employment Practice Commission, about NAACP, about - and he'd talk about stuff like why did he talk about other, other people, you know, just like stories. He'd sit down and talk with me. He was a good friend. A very stern man, very strict. But, you know, we'd sit down and just talk and I'd li- - well, I did most of the listening, and so did my mother. We'd just sit there, and we'd listen. You know, ask questions if we needed to have something answered. But we didn't pry too much. We'd let him do most of the talking.

I: But he'd initiate these conversations then?

R: Yes. He'd say, "Oh, you know what happened to day, or last week such and such," or he'd tell stories. Sometimes he'd go way back, you know, Randolph and Webster, or something that happened when Webster first went to New York. That was a funny one.

I: What was that?

R: You know, Webster was from Chicago, and my father said that he hadn't really been in New York. And so he went - they - all three of them were there, and they were in a taxi.

I: This is Webster, Randolph . . .

R: This was Webster, Randolph, and my father. And they were in a taxi. Webster had never been in a taxi in New York. And he said that cab was going in and out of traffic and all that, and he said all of sudden Webster said, "That's it. Stop this cab. I'm getting out." [Laughing] So he said it was just funny, you know, the way he's such a big, strong man, telling him to get out of this cab, because he thought the man was going to kill them, the way they were driving into New York. So he'd tell us little stories like this, you know? You know, about Randolph, and every morning he'd have a cup of hot water with lemon in it. You know? And just little things that he would come around and talk about something that happened at a meeting or so many stories. You know, as they come to mind, I'd probably have to write them down because he told me so many.

I: OK.

R: Just sitting down talking.

I: Right.

R: And, of course, after my mother's - my mother's passing, you know, we became closer friends because I was his outlet then. You know, we'd just sit and talk, and talk for hours, and he'd talk to my children. They'd - they were just fascinated. I mean can you imagine just six little kids just standing there staring at this man telling stories, you know? And they were, "I wish I could do that." You know? To fascinate a child. I couldn't keep six children quiet. But he could. He could sit there and talk to them, and they were just fascinated with him. And just sit there and be quiet, and listen.

I: He was a natural story teller.

to do

Dean of Walter

R: He was. He was. And, oh, could he laugh. He would laugh so hard, the tears would just run down his face. And he'd get tickled about something. And he'd just laugh. He was just a great person.

I: Your mother passed in - what year was that?

R: 1974.

I: And she had been ill?

R: Yes, she had cancer.

I: How was that for the family? How did that affect you and him?

R: It - because, you know, he and my mother had been together 50 years. It was really rough on my father. He continued to work. When my mother came home, he had to go on a trip. So I packed up my children and went and stayed with my mother for - I think it was about ten days - and took care of her until my father came back.

I: Now, this is when she was ill?

R: This was when she was ill. Yes. [inaudible]

I: You said she came home. Was she hospitalized?

R: She was in the hospital. They did as much surgery as they could. But it had spread. So there wasn't much they could do. They gave her two months to live, but I didn't tell her that. I didn't even tell her she had cancer. I told them don't tell her anything. Because I knew my mother. And she guessed that's what it was, and then she asked me, "Well, how long do I have?" And I had to turn away from her to answer her because I couldn't lie to my mother.

She could see it in my face. And I said, "I don't know. They didn't say." So I lied to her. And she actually lived nine months. The doctors don't know how she lived that long, but she did. But, no, she had come home from surgery, and she was very weak. And, you know, difficulty holding food down and just - she just needed someone to be there, you know, in case of emergency or anything. So I stayed there with her. And a first cousin of my father's would come by also and keep an eye on her. But after the ten days, my dad came back, and he would do what he could, but he still would work. She insisted he go work. "There's nothing you can do. Go to work." And then his cousin would come over and cook her meals and fix dinner for my father, and then she'd go back. So - but it got really rough on him. And that's when she said that was it, and she put herself into what they call a rehab center. It's almost what they call a hospice today. Because she said it was too hard on him. He couldn't work and, you know, do what he had to do. And she knew the importance of his work. She said, "He cannot work and take care of me." So she put herself into a rehabilitation center.

I: That's remarkable. She did that.

R: She did it. She called her physician and said, "Find me a really nice place where you can put me," she said, "because," you know, Dad can't handle it. And he didn't - he didn't object to my mother's decision. You know, she was a very stubborn woman. If she was going to do it, she was going to do it. And that's what she did.

I: So how was he affected then? How was the family affected by her passing?

R: I held together, I guess, because of my father, because the day that she died we went to the hospital. She went from the rehab center back to the hospital. And the nurse said she was in a coma. Said, "She can hear you, but that's as far as her reflexes are going." And - did it stop? Are you at the end of your tape?

I: No, no, no. Keep going.

R: Oh, OK.

I: It's fine.

R: The - he walked in the room and walked up, and he looked at me, and he goes, "I can't take it." You know, so he walked to the back of the room. And you could just tell . . .

I: This is at the hospital?

R: This is at the hospital. And you could tell by his face that it was just very difficult for him to bear. And, you know, I walked up to her, and she turned her face and looked at me. The nurse's mouth dropped open. And she didn't speak, but I knew what she wanted, because she always told me, "Make sure you take care of my baby." And her first baby was her husband. So I promised to do that. I told - you know, I just felt that's what she wanted, was trying to tell me. And then we left. She passed about two or three hours after that.

I: Where is she buried?

R: She was cremated. She's at Chapel of the Chimes. That's where my father is.

I: And that's where is too?

R: And that's where my mother is, and my mother's mother is there. So they were cremated, and that's what he wanted, and that's what she wanted. She was very particular about that. She didn't want - she said, "I don't want anybody looking at me in a casket. I'd rather for them to [inaudible]." You know, that's just the way she looked at me. Of course, my father was more practical about it. It's a cheaper way to go. [Laughs] He was more practical. But, you know, that wasn't cheap. It just - you know, he wanted to be put in where my mother was, but there was no way that they could do that. So one's down here, and one's way up there.

I: In one of the wall niche . . .

R: In the niches, yeah.

I: OK.

R: Yeah, so they're in the wall niches, so . . .

I: There were a lot of people, of course, that he knew and knew well and worked very closely with, and I'm just wondering if there are any of them that you have any particular memories of in terms of his relationship with them or any comments you would make about it. And I just wondered - some we've already talked about. Obviously Mr. Randolph, Mr. Webster. I was thinking about people like Walter Gordon.

R: I don't really remember . . .

I: Those names [inaudible] . . .

R: I don't remember these - I remember him referring to Walter Gordon and Carlton Goodlett. Most of the people that would

come around - Willie Brown - you know, I never met them personally. I think the main people that would come around to see Father - I don't know if you remember Tarea Hall Pittman.

I: Yes, [inaudible] tell me about her.

R: She would come around . . .

I: [inaudible]

R: Oh, that was . . .

I: . . . and their relationship.

R: Oh, she was so flamboyant and just - you know, you could feel it when she walked in the room. You know, she was very talkative, but just - she was just bubbly. And she was, you know, and her husband was a dentist.

I: This is - this is Tarea Hall Pittman [spells].

R: Oh, she was so [inaudible]. But, you know, most of the time when they would come around, you know, I was off doing my little thing, you know? But just certain things I remember. You know? So most of the time my mother would shuffle me out, you know, go, go, you know? But just - the way she came in - just - incredible lady. That's one thing that stood out.

I: Yes. And they worked very closely together for years.

R: Yes, they did.

I: Primarily in the NAACP.

R: Right. And there's, you know, vague remembrances of other people. But, like I said, I was shuffled out of the room most of the time. You know, a lot of time they talked about things they probably didn't want me to hear, so I was shuffled out [inaudible].

Tarea
Pittman

But a lot of times - I mean a lot of the porters would come to the house late in the evening, or on Sundays. My father's heart and his office was always open. If he wasn't at his literal office, they would come by the house. They would call him, you know, "I need to talk to you about something." "Come on over to the house."

I: Yes.

R: And I remember one gentleman. His name was Mr. Thompson. Was scared of cats. And we had a cat. And he would always walk up to the door, and my dad would open the door, and he'd poke his head in. He goes, "Where's the cat?" And my mother said, "That's OK. Cat's put away." But, you know, and he would - my mother was the perfect hostess. You know, she would serve what's needed to be served, or whatever, and she'd leave the room. But Randolph and Webster used to always love to come by and, when they were in the area, and she'd fix dinner. And they'd sit there and have dinner. And it just - and I mean the generation that my mother was from - see, her and I ate before.

I: Ah.

R: You see?

I: That's a, that's a . . .

R: And the men folks sitting around the table having their . . .

I: [inaudible] thing too.

R: Yeah, having their dinner and then they'd go into the living room with their cigars and their high-balls or whatever they had in there, their drink. And, you know, we stayed out. When I was little, I could sneak in. But when I got older . . .

I: No [laughs].

R: I followed my mother's lead, so . . .

I: I remember you said Mr. Randolph particularly liked your mom's lemon pie.

R: Oh, yes.

I: He loved that, huh?

R: Oh, yes. He came - one little story that was so cute. My dad's first cousin, I call her Auntie, was at the house. She came to live with my mother from Texas. And she was like 17 years old. She came out here to go to school. And my mother had fixed that lemon pie for Mr. Randolph. And she went in there. Mr. Randolph came. And, you know, I mean everyone in the household had some, so she was saving some for Mr. Randolph. And he had that beautiful, deep voice, you know? You know, and, "Where's that lemon pie?" And my mother went in there, and it was gone. My aunt ate it.

*Randolph
Lemon
Pie*

I: Uh oh. Somebody was in trouble [laughs].

R: All he did was laugh. He just, he got tickled. And my auntie said, "I thought I was in such big trouble." She said, "But all he did was just laugh." He said, "I can't blame, it's good, isn't it?" So, yeah, he loved her lemon pie.

I: How's your dad like the lemon pie?

R: Oh, yes, he - he loved it.

I: What was his favorite?

R: His favorite, I think, was the apple pie. But his favorite was her chili.

I: Chili.

R: And she fixed chili. And every Saturday he had chili. He was a man of routine. And every Saturday he'd have chili. And he'd invite Mr. Brown, one of his best friends, Mr. Jewel Brown.

I: Jewel Brown?

R: Jewel Brown.

I: Was he a porter?

R: Yes, he was. And he invited - he would invite Mr. Brown over Saturdays, and they'd have chili. And then watch the sports on TV.

I: Yeah, Chili's a very Texas dish.

R: Yes. Very Texas, yes. So they'd have chili. And I think I was 8 years old when my mother taught me how to make chili. I made chili for my father. And we didn't tell him until after he finished. [Laughs]

I: So what was the verdict?

R: He said it was good. And she goes, "Is the chili all right, Dad?" And he says, "Oh, it's fine." "Well, your daughter made it." And his eyes got, you know? So he was surprised that later on after I got married that I could cook. But with a mother like her I couldn't help but not to cook. Because she was great though, a great cook.

I: You got married. When was that?

R: I was 16. In 1961. I got married. And . . .

I: And so you moved out of the house. When you moved out of the house . . .

Marva
Dellums

R: I moved out of the house when I was 17. I was - we stayed with my mother until February of '62.

I: You and your husband.

R: Yes.

I: Your husband's name was?

R: Joe W. Benton (?).

I: Benton?

R: Benton [spells]. And we moved out February of 1962 to Berkeley. And lived there from February of '62 until July of '63, when - because he worked with General Motors. He did [inaudible] in the office, and moved down to Fremont, because the plant moved down to Fremont in July of '63. So that's - we bought a home.

I: OK. So you've been in Fremont since . . .

R: Since 1963.

I: '63, OK. How did that affect our relationship, then, with your father, particularly [inaudible]? How did it change? It must have changed it somewhat.

R: It changed it somewhat because I think he had to look at me in a different light. I was now a wife and a mother, and, you know, he - he would kinda not say things, but you could say by his look if he disagreed with something. But, other than that, it really didn't change. We were still good friends. You know, we'd still - I'd come and see him once a week. On Sundays. And we'd sit down - and on holidays. Of course, on holidays we'd have to go to his parents and my parents. But he'd still sit down and talk. And he was working on another generation of listeners. And, oh boy, did he

love his grandchildren. [inaudible] all his grandchildren. And my first child, believe it or not, took his first steps at six months. For my father. No one else. No one else! He wouldn't stand up for anybody except my dad. And he was just - they were just [inaudible]. So - but it really didn't change. We still - I'd still talk to him once a day. I'd call him.

I: Oh, you would?

R: Yes. Talked to my parents. Well, they were older, you know, make sure they were all right. And he'd - to save my expense for toll calls, he said, "Well, you call this number, let it ring once, and I'll call you back." And we'd do that, and he'd maybe tell me about something happened and, you know, then he'd hand the phone over to my mother, and, "How's the kids?" "Oh, they're fine." And that was - every - yeah, I called them every, at least - every day.

I: Every day.

R: Every day.

I: You talked about the quality of relationship being one of friendship.

R: Mm hmm.

I: And I think that's clear in what you said about how he related to you and things you talked about. What would you say were the challenges, the hard aspects of being C. L. Dellums' daughter?

R: That I don't know. I didn't really even think about that. Most of the time it didn't cross my mind. Because of his wonderful ability to keep things separate, I still looked at him as my father.

That's dad. You know, Daddy, that's Dad. And when someone would come up to me and say, "Oh, you're C. L. Dellums' daughter," you know, and I was actually embarrassed [laughs]. You know? I would get embarrassed because it was hard to put him in that light, you know, of really who he was. I knew who he was. And I, I, you know, I admired, you know, his gung-ho and how he fought for different things for so many years, and how he wanted to make a better world for myself and my children. And - but I still have the - you know, I didn't put him on a pedestal or anything like that. He was still my dad first and my friend, and the rest is, you know, was OK. But it didn't - I don't know. He had a humility about him. And he was on the - you know, he didn't - you know, someone could give him an award. And if he was - you know - "I don't need that. I'm just doing what I'm supposed to do. I'm doing what I have to do." So in a way I looked at it that way.

I: Who - you mentioned Mr. Jewel Brown, right?

R: Yes.

I: Was that his closest friend outside of the family? Who were you say were his closest friends?

R: I think - well, of course, his brother, Verney.

I: Verney.

R: And Mr. Brown, I think, were the closest - besides, you know, Mr. Randolph, besides Mr. Randolph was his mentor. But his brother and Mr. Brown were his closest confidantes, I guess you could say.

I: And Mr. Brown he saw every week.

R: Yes.

I: And, and . . .

R: Unless Mr. Brown was on the road or something, because he remained a porter till he retired. And if he was in town or they - every week - every Saturday.

I: And Verney. Now, Verney is Ron's father.

R: Yes.

I: And they lived some distance away.

R: They lived in, oh - gosh, I think in the beginning they lived on [inaudible] Street, and then eventually bought a home in the hills up in [inaudible], but it wasn't that far away.

I: There was a kind of social distance because Ron talks about coming over to your father's house and how - the fact that you had a back yard, he talked about, or a front yard, whichever it was, but that was one of the anecdotes in his interview. He says, I [inaudible] and he says, "You know, they had a - they had this nice yard."

[Laughs]

R: Oh, yeah, Ron . . .

I: So there's kind of a difference in the status of the two neighborhoods? Is that right?

R: But, you know, maybe that's the way he looked at it, but that's not the way, you know, my parents were [inaudible] because they started off with, you know, down there too, so . . .

I: Right.

R: But Ron was quiet. He was a quiet one. And even when I used go to - when they lived on Wood Street, I used to go over there.

Ron

And Ron was very quiet. I was with Teresa most of the time, and that was my buddy.

I: Teresa's your friend from . . .

R: My big sister. Yes. No, that was - no, his sister.

I: OK, your cousin.

R: Yeah, my cousin. So she was the only one my mother let take me anywhere. She trusted me with Teresa. But Ron - Ron was a year older than Teresa, and so I was with Teresa most of the time. Ron would come by. You know, "Hi, Ronnie." I called him Ronnie. I have to watch myself because sometimes I still call him that. And so he called - he said - they called me the real princess. I don't know why, but that's - but I wasn't spoiled. You know? But I'd go - and he was off doing his thing, you know, very quiet nature. So it just - like I said, he and I didn't really have a bond like me and his sister did.

I: I see.

R: Yeah.

I: Now, he referred - Ron referred to your uncle as - I mean to your father as Uncle Cott.

R: Right. Uncle Cott.

I: Yeah. And Teresa did as well?

R: Yes.

I: Yeah.

R: Yes, she called him Uncle Cott. And I used to call his father Uncle Bud.

I: Uncle Bud. How did he get - why was he . . .

R: Because my father and his - his brother called each other Bud. You know? It's sort of like a worker brother.

I: Ah. OK. So they referred to each other by the same term?

R: Yes. So I called him Uncle Bud. So that's - that's all I knew him as as a child, Uncle Bud. And that's your uncle. OK, Uncle Bud. That's - you know, because that's what my father called him. So I called him Uncle Bud. And, oh, what a remarkable [inaudible]. So good with children. When he was alive . . .

I: Uncle Bud was.

R: Uncle Bud, yes. He - my youngest daughter, Elizabeth, remembers him because he picked her up and put her in his lap, and he was reading her a book, because she had a book in her hand. So he read it. He was reading her a book. And she said - she was only about three - and she said, "I'll never forget that." He was just a loving man.

I: Had a big impact [inaudible], three years old.

R: Oh, yeah, he did. And just wonderful. And laughed. Oh, he had - he and my father had such - but Verney had such a wonderful laugh. But they'd get tickled, and you could tell they were brothers. The way they laughed at one another. And it was a marvelous relationship. And they loved each other so, so deeply.

I: Yes. What about Ron's mother? And all - the relationship between the women.

R: Yeah.

I: The adult women in the family.

R: Aunt [inaudible]. She . . .

I: Aunt Willa Mae.

Row's mother

R: Willa Mae.

She was such a cute thing. She - you know, everybody said she was cute. You know? And very kind of mysterious and shy in her own way, and very soft spoken. She still is. She sounds like a teenager on the phone. And she's very soft spoken, and she always - Uncle Verney would say something to her - when I was little, I always remember she would say, "Oh, Verney, stop it." You know, he'd be teasing her or something, and she was very soft spoken. And her and my mother got along very well.

I: They did?

R: Yeah. Aunt Willa Mae taught me to sew on a sewing machine, and then she taught me how to use a typewriter, and she just marvels that I remember that. And I said, yeah, because she made sure I put my hands in the right position. Very meticulous. And very intelligent lady. They both were.

I: So both - all - the two families, as families, were close then, I take it.

R: Yes.

I: Were there often occasions when the families would get together, holidays, birthdays or something like that?

R: Not very - not very often. No. It was mostly just a visit type thing. You know? If they - on holidays mostly I think they, you know, stayed with one another or, you know, most of the time her family because, of course, when I got old enough to remember it, but I don't remember holidays. You know? It may have just - be

back there somewhere. But I can't recall. It may have been when I was younger. You know, they would come by on the holidays or - and then they may have had something else to do because she - Aunt Willa Mae had her mother with her, and she cared for her mother. And she was with her for quite a while.

I: Yes. Now, your father's mother lived with you for - until she passed.

R: Yes. Until she passed.

I: And that was a relatively short time?

R: I was very young. She passed in 1949, I think it was.

I: I think so.

R: So I think it was maybe a matter of no more than - that I can remember. Probably Ron would remember longer than I would exactly how many years it was because I was a little thing. But I know it was a few years.

I: But you don't really have a memory.

R: Of how long, no.

I: Of her or any impressions . . .

R: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I - I remember - she was the one - well, both my grandmothers used to read from the Bible to me. But, remember, I told you she would read me David. I [inaudible] would have her read me the story of David, because I loved that David and Goliath thing, like a little guy taking down the big guy.

I: Right.

R: And I'd always - she'd be sitting there reading her Bible, and I'd pass the room, and I'd back up and go back in, "Can you

Emma

Emma

read me David?", you know? So she'd read me David. And then she used to have a little - my dad kept for many years, and I don't know what happened to it - it was a little, tiny paring knife that she used to peel apples with. And, you know, because she'd take the peel off and eat the slice. I couldn't eat apples, so she'd get up and get an orange and peel it, and I'd - hand me the slice.

I: Peel it.

R: Yeah, and - with a knife, a little pen knife that she used to cut it with. A big rocking chair with a big - the rungs were big, you know, and little purple felt - I think they were flowered, checked slippers. I always remember that. And, yeah, I remember. I remember her. I spent a lot of time in her room sitting in her lap. Oh, yeah. And that's really the only memories - oh, and the tea cakes.

I: Tea cakes?

R: Her and my mother would bake tea cakes. And we loved them so much - of course, both my grandmother and my mother were big women. And I was on my way. And those tea cakes, we'd eat them. They were so hot, they were burning our tongues. Tea cakes and a cold glass of milk. Oh, we would eat up the - I think we saved our dad a few [laughs]. We ate most of those tea cakes. But the women were in the kitchen making tea cakes. Yep. That I remember.

I: Your mother's parents, were they around? Were they . . .

R: 1953, I believe it was. I think it was - she came to live with us. She had cancer. My mother went down one year to help her

purple wicker
mom

with the selling of her property in Texas, in San Antonio. And then she came back, and the next summer, because I went to day camp. Dad went to work . . .

END SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B

I: OK, Side 2, continuing. [inaudible] camp, what was it?

R: Yeah, it was on Market and Brockhurst. I think it's still there.

I: Brockhurst? So that was just a couple of blocks away then.

R: Yeah, it was right down the street.

I: Right down the street.

R: Right down the street, and it was a Y - the YMCA. And it was a day camp. They had run by Mr. Swisher. I don't know if you - he was very active in the school district. And so he ran it at that time, so I - Dad would drop me off every morning. He'd go to work. And he'd pick me up on his way home. So while she was down there, and the second time she went down she brought my grandmother back with her.

I: OK. So she lived with you for . . .

R: She lived with us ~~maybe - no more than two years~~. She had cancer, so she didn't actually live very [inaudible]. And - ~~so, and I~~ was her only grandchild.

I: Does your father also have a good relationship with her?

R: With Parilee? Oh, yes.

I: Parilee.

stopped
here

Walters
mother

R: Her name was Parilee [spells]. Parilee. And I didn't know my grandfather. My step-grandfather. My mother was raised by her stepfather. So it - I never knew him. He died - he passed away before I was born. Both my grandfathers did. So I never knew my grandfathers, but I knew my grandmothers.

I: Yes.

R: And she was - she was the same way. She was a Bible reader, and I got her on David too. [Both laugh] Oh, yeah. Of course, and, like I said, she - that woman was so meticulous. I don't know if I ever told you. She ironed my socks.

I: [Laughing] Yes, you said that.

R: And it's just that . . .

I: Parilee ironed your socks.

R: Parilee ironed my socks! And she'd sit down and iron. And just iron. And she brought her irons with her from Texas, and those were the big flat irons that you had to heat up on the . . .

I: Oh, I remember those. Those big old cast iron irons.

R: Yeah. We had a burner down there in the wash room at the house, and it was gas. And she'd light that and put her ironers on that, and that's how she ironed. And she's sitting in a chair, and she's ironing. And she ironed everything. Everything that came out of the wash she ironed. And so that kept her busy, I suppose. That's what - she wanted to do it. And my mother used that iron for a door stop for many years. [inaudible] Yeah, she passed away - I was nine years old. So that [inaudible] years old. Yeah. Yeah.

1953. I was nine. Mm hmm.

I: OK. Now, your father became president of the union in 1968.

R: Mm hmm.

I: And then he remained president until - till he retired or . . .

R: No, what happened . . .

I: What happened? [inaudible]

R: The union merged.

I: It merged with the . . .

R: With BRAC (?). Brotherhood of Railway and Airline
[inaudible].

I: Right, OK.

R: And that's when he . . .

I: What year was that then?

R: Oh, gosh [laughs]. That was in the seventies.

I: It must have been late seventies because as late as '76 he was still president. Or '77, so it had to be . . .

R: Yeah. It was '78. [inaudible]

I: About '78, '79?

R: Yeah. He stayed on as consultant for a year. For the transition. And I remember him mentioning that. And he just went [inaudible, laughing].

I: What?

R: Whoopie.

I: Whoopie.

R: But I think it was just a title too. You know? 'Cause he didn't feel like - what good is that, you know? But, anyway, he said,

"Just make sure everything was going to get done that was supposed to be done."

I: Yeah.

R: Anyway, but when the merger happened, that's when he - he retired.

I: He retired. Any sense of how he felt about that merger? Did he ever say anything about it or?

R: The only thing he really felt - I think he felt sad.

I: Sad.

R: Because he had a sense of what was to come. He said that the power of the union is on the decline. And he was really sad about that. Representation of the people. And he said they just don't have that power that they used to have. So I think he was very sad. Yeah. Disappointed.

I: He continued his work with the - he was still with the Fair Employment Practices Commission.

R: Correct.

I: After that point, up until - when was it, the year?

R: '86, I think it was.

I: '86?

R: Yeah.

I: OK. Was he ever chair of the Commission?

R: Yes, he was.

I: He was chair?

R: Yes, he was - I don't remember the year, but he did - yes, he did act as chairman.

Decline
of AFSCME

I: OK. And then he continued working with the NAACP as well.

R: Yes. He wasn't as active with them towards the later . . .

I: [inaudible] the Sixties, yeah.

R: Yeah. After the Sixties he wasn't as active. And - as he had been before, so - he never did mention why, but [inaudible] jump to conclusion. I don't know. But - I don't know. I would notice things, you know, when I'd talk to him when I was a youngster or a young teenager, you know, about if something happened, someone said, "Well, I'm going to contact the NAACP." Whoa, you know? People backed away. They - and I don't see that today.

I: No.

R: You know, you mentioned NAACP back in the '50s and '60s, people backed off.

I: That was because he went after them [laughs].

R: [inaudible]

I: I read that correspondence. He went after them about jobs, about every-, everything. Every act of discrimination he was on the case.

R: He was on it. And - you know, they did - they backed up really quick. It - it's just that, you know, I can be - I can be critical, I guess. I can be as critical as I want to be.

I: You certainly can.

R: But it's an individual opinion. But it just doesn't have the pull and the weight that it had. You know, you look at the founders of the - or I call it the backbone. You know, your Walter Whites sitting there with Roy Wilkins, and your Ralph Bunch's and your

Thurgood Marshalls, and all those people. They didn't put up with anything. You know.

I: Right.

R: And it wasn't a money thing. Money had - business didn't have anything to do with it. It was a matter of civil rights.

I: Yes.

R: So - and I can see now it's more of a business. You know, it just - and it - like my father said - I remember one - we're going to build a statue. As long as there is inhumanity to man, the fight is not over. And just because we have a pork chop in our pocket doesn't mean the fight is over. Discrimination still exists.

I: Yes.

R: And people don't see it. A lot of them are wearing blinders. They just don't see it. But it's there. And, you know, he didn't just fight for the African American. He fought for everyone. Till the day of his death he wouldn't buy grapes.

I: No. Really.

R: Would not buy grapes. You know, he - that Cesar Chavez thing, you know? He backed that up 100 percent. And he would say, "Oh, Safeway's on strike. Did you cross that picket line?" "No, Dad, I did not cross that picket line." And today my children will not cross a picket line.

I: Good.

R: They will not. They, they won't. They turn away. My daughter, my oldest daughter said she went to one store, and they were marching, you know, with the picket signs. She said, "I turned

right around and left." She said, "I didn't want those ashes jumping up and down in that urn." [Both laugh] But that's how much he instilled in them, that they wouldn't cross a picket line. And my dad said, "I never marched on a picket line." And I found that picture of him marching on a picket line. And I showed him. He said, "Oh, I forgot about that one."

I: [Laughs]

R: Yeah, I think it was like Kress or one of those five and dime stores.

I: Five and dime, five and dime's we used to call them.

R: Yeah, I have a picture of that. So I said, yeah, that was - "Aha, I have a picture."

I: How do you think he saw, in those last years, his contributions?

R: He didn't talk about what he had done because, you know, he did what he had to do. He did what he accomplished. He kept complaining of there's so much still to be done, and I don't have the strength to do it. That's what he complained about. He just said, "I just don't have the strength to get out there and fight anymore. Oh, I wish I had the strength to fight." [Laughs] It was just certain things that would happen, and he'd just want to get out there and do it, but he didn't have the strength to do it. And he would get so frustrated. I think that's what - I think he - in a way he'd still be alive today if it wasn't for the fact that he was too weak to do what he wanted to do. I think he just said, "It's time for me to go." I really do. He just

Heart
attack

said, "It's time for me to go." Because he just had such a zeal for life. You know. And that's what motivated him.

I: Yes.

R: And I think his - his - his grandfather was 112, and I think he was planning on beating that record. But, you know, his heart was failing, and he'd had five heart attacks.

I: Five!

R: Five!

I: I didn't know that.

R: And he survived them. Oh, yeah. He had one in Florida when he was with the AFL-CIO.

I: What year was that?

R: That was in - you know, that's when he was vice president, one of the vice presidents, because he was president of his union, and he took Randolph's position with the AFL-CIO. And they had a yearly convention in Florida, in Miami.

I: OK, so this is after '68 then.

R: Yes, this is after '68. This had to be early '70s, I suppose. No, it was after my mother's death, so it had to be [sighs] '75 maybe, '76. Somewhere in there.

I: And that was the first heart attack.

R: And that - no, no, he had had three previously. His first one, according to my mom, was when he was 33.

I: Wow!

R: And then I think it was - this one was - and I called the hospital, you know, "Do you want me to come down?" My aunt

Willa Mae, "Well, I'll go with you." You know, she was Ron's mother. And I called and talked to the nurses, and then I talked to the doctors, and I talked to my father. He says, "Don't you waste your money coming down here." And I said, "But Dad . . ." "Don't do it. I'm OK." [Laughs] I wasn't going to argue with him. So I called my Aunt Willa Mae back. I said, "Dad said no." "What do you mean, no?" "He said no. 'Don't waste the money.' He's coming home. He'll be home in ten days," and, by golly, he was. You know? A friend of his, one of the associates he had, flew back with him, and then he went back to Florida. He was fine. Just that - that constitution of his. And then he had another one after he retired. And they - he was going in to see if they could do bypass surgery on him. So they put the catheter, you know, through the artery in the leg, up through the heart, and he had a heart attack on the table. And, of course, I jump in the car and rush up there, and he was all wired up and wires everywhere, and I - you know, I go in with a good attitude. You know, you suck in your breath, and you trot in. And the only way to really make an impression on my father when he's not feeling good is to make him laugh. And so I walked in and I go, "Dad, if there was a fire in here, you'd have a helluva time getting you outta here," and he started laughing. And the nurse comes running in because his heart monitor was going whacky. And she says, "Are you all right?" Tears running down his face. And he just laughed, and he said, "They didn't ask me whether I wanted to die or not. I'm not going anywhere." So he had this constitution that he could overcome anything. And I think he did.

I: Well, he sure did, in so many instances, yeah.

R: Yeah, and it's just - I - he brought me up with that philosophy. Don't let anything hold you down. And then he taught me when I was a little girl, my mother said, to ball up my fist and pound on the table and say, "I know my rights."

I: Mm. He did?

R: That was the first sentence I learned.

I: [Laughs]

R: He said at 18 months old if someone did something to me, I'd pound on the table, "I know my rights." And he had me doing this. You could see - I have a picture - I'll have to show it to you. I'm three - I'm three years old, and I'm holding my fist up [laughs].

I: Oh, my God, I've gotta see that one.

R: It's an attitude I've carried all my life. I didn't let anything hold me down. I didn't let anything get me down. I have never suffered a day of depression in my life. I don't care what happened. It might have slipped in for a quick minute, but then that attitude that my father raised me with, you know, ball up your fist, pull up your bootstraps, and face it.

I: Face it, right.

R: And stand up to it. Yeah.

I: Where does that come from in his family?

R: His father.

I: His father. But his mother was . . .

R: His father - and his mother. His mother was . . .

I: His mother was the one who . . .

also
39
Attitude
Shelley

R: . . . the strong one.

I: . . . taught speaking, the public speaking.

R: Yes. With the debating.

I: She was a teacher?

R: No. No. My dad taught high school for a while, but neither one of them were teachers. She just had that ability. Just natural - natural, God given talent.

I: [inaudible] speaking.

R: And her brother - and his brother. He and . . .

I: And Verney.

R: Burnette. And Burnette, mm hmm. Were the debaters. You know? But - and then she taught my dad's first cousin, I call [inaudible], Gene. Gene Robinson. Taught her brother also, the debating, because they were right there close to each other.

Cousin

I: So it was specifically debating that she taught.

R: Right, speaking ability and . . .

I: How to argue.

R: . . . pronunciation of words and how to put forth your voice. They didn't have microphones in those days.

I: She didn't have training that you know of or . . .

R: No.

I: . . . herself or himself?

R: No.

I: Or any opportunity to express herself?

R: No.

I: That you know of?

R: No. It's just a gift that she had. Like my mother only finished the 8th grade, but she could out-read anybody. And hours [inaudible] she [inaudible] just read, and she could tell you all about the book. Fascinating. You know, you kinda go - it just didn't click, you know? You had to think about that. "Are you sure you read the whole book?" You know? [Both laugh] And she had read the whole book.

I: She read the whole thing.

R: Mm hmm.

I: Now, your dad, by contrast, was a slow reader.

R: Was a slow reader.

I: Right?

R: Mm hmm.

I: But he did read, and we know that. I'm thinking about that list I found . . .

R: [inaudible] of - and a lot of times he'd get books and give them to me to read, and so I could tell him about them. And a lot of times he gave them to my mother, and she'd tell them about them, because he got a new book, he'd give it to my mother.

I: Did he ever express any hope or [inaudible] plan to go to college, that you know of? Somebody mentioned that he at some point may have wanted to go to college, but . . .

R: He probably did. But his - I don't know what emotionally-wise or mental-wise, you know, prevented him from going or what stopped him from going or why he decided not to. I don't - I don't know the details of that.

I: Well, he had his hands pretty full [inaudible] the Brotherhood.

R: And he was self-educated. Most people [inaudible] to go. And that's why he instilled in me read, read, read. Constantly read, he said, because you can educate yourself. You know, it's just - I went to - I think I went to college for three years, but I never got a degree. But I went - I was [inaudible]. And I was - at first I took art because I love art. And I got in trouble quite a bit with my parents because I used to draw in my dad's books.

I: [Laughs]

R: [Laughs]

I: That was not a good idea.

R: I ran out of - not a good idea. And so it - and then I went into the sciences because I wanted to become a nurse, but then I had to go to work, so that left that out. But it's still never too late. I may be the oldest graduating person in college, but I'm still going to go. And I may be 95, but I'm still going. You know, I haven't dropped that dream just because I've gotten older.

I: Oh, great.

R: You know? Same thing he - that's the way he brought us up. He said it's never too late. So they may have to put that diploma on your grave, but it's never too late. [Both laugh] Just keep going.

I: Keep going, right.

R: Yeah.

I: Who were his heroes?

R: Gosh, his father. You know, he, he said to me one time, "The most devastating thing that ever happened to me in my life was when my father died." And then he would never elaborate. You know, it was like it was too painful. So he would just drop it. His father. Of course, Randolph. I think that was about it. He didn't have too many. If he had, he didn't mention. Because he was the one who instigated most of the stuff that happened, you know?

I: That's true. I was going to say, "But what about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X," people like that. But these were all younger.

R: They were younger than he was.

I: Much younger.

R: He mentioned to me about Martin Luther King, and he said, you know, when Rosa Parks was arrested, the Brotherhood are the ones who bailed her out. And he said . . .

I: Yeah. That was Mr. Nixon now [inaudible] played a big role.

R: Right. Right. And he said that someone - I don't remember who - heard this young preacher speak, and was just enthralled with his charisma and his abilities as a speaker, and especially on the March on Washington, Randolph said, "This is the perfect person because I'm getting old. I don't have that ability to put forth what I want to say anymore. I'm getting older." And he said, "This is the man who can do it." So, you know, a lot of people don't believe that the Brotherhood and Randolph are the ones who pushed Martin Luther King up to the [inaudible] of the Civil Rights Movement.

I: Well, I can [inaudible]. You know, there's a wonderful interview in the film on [inaudible]. He says, [inaudible] years of struggle, in which Mr. Nixon talks about - is it Nixon?

R: Yeah.

I: Talks about the struggle in Montgomery, and I've seen this a couple of other places too, but he and the Brotherhood clearly played a really major role there.

R: They did.

I: And getting Martin Luther King in the position to take that leadership.

R: That's right.

I: And then in terms of what they did just to mobilize people.

R: Because that March on Washington was Randolph.

I: Right.

R: You know? And it's almost like, you know, he was pushed into the background a little bit. But that was Randolph. And what a marvelous thing that was.

I: Right.

R: Just marvelous.

I: It must have been so incredible for him too. I mean all these years after initially proposing the march back in '41. And then 22 years later, there it is, and even more enormous than he'd originally thought about.

R: Oh, it was just . . .

I: An enormous gathering. The largest gathering in the nation's history at that point.

R: Right. It was absolutely marvelous. And I - I know . . .

I: Did your dad go to that?

R: No. He was handling some Brotherhood business that had to be handled. So he had no other choice but to take care of some business. So - because I asked him about that: "Why didn't you go?" And he [inaudible]. But I watched it on there, and [inaudible], you know, I talk to my children about it, and sometimes, you know, my children talk to their children, you know? About the wonderful Marian Anderson. Marvelous. Absolutely brilliant. And, you know, how she was kept from performing and, you know, just absolutely wonderful. It just - and I said, "You heard her sing, it gave you goose bumps." I still have records of hers. [inaudible] can't play them anymore. They're 78's [both laugh].

I: That's true.

R: I have to find someone who has a 78 and record it. It's just marvelous. It's marvelous. And then when I heard about - just recently about the Amtrak situation. It just - my heart just dropped. Such a marvelous way to travel.

I: Yes.

R: [inaudible] my mom and I went down to Texas. And, of course, the porters and the dining car waiters [inaudible] spoiled us rotten.

I: Oh, I'll bet.

R: Oh! So it just - but my mother never took advantage of that. "I'm just a passenger." [inaudible] Because I mean they were constantly, you know, coming to the door. "You need anything?"

"You go take care of your business. I'm fine." Just, you know, very humble people, and never took advantage of their position, of their situation. And my mother would just open - she'd do things that would just boggle your mind sometimes. Especially with children in the neighborhood who weren't as fortunate as I was. One Easter I caught her doing - that's why I tell you about it - the lady had two daughters, and they couldn't go to church, or they weren't going to have an Easter because [inaudible] clothes, whatever. My mother went down, bought the outfits, made the Easter baskets, took them up there, hung them on the door knob, knocked on the door and left.

I: Mmm.

R: And to this day they don't know where it came from [inaudible]. So that's just - and [inaudible] the people, the lady next door had seven children. My mother got a box of groceries, had it delivered to her house. Nobody knows where it came from. [inaudible] So it's just - they were marvelous people.

I: Yes, they were.

R: Just marvelous people.

I: I'm going to need to get back to Oakland [inaudible] ask you one more question [inaudible] and that is what would you see, in your view, what would you see as your father's legacy? How would you describe that?

R: I would go to say the ability to make a choice, which we didn't have before. He made that possible. We can choose to be who we want to be or what we want to be. We can go where we

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want to go. We can enter any college we want to enter. He gave - he gave, I think, these generations the ability to choose which path they [inaudible], not which path they are given. So, and I think that's a marvelous way [inaudible] choice. And then I think that's what he gave these generations, the ability to choose. No doors that's locked. They're all open. So we can just choose whatever path we want to go, and that door's open. And I think that's the [inaudible].

I: That's a marvelous thing.

R: Yes, it is.

I: But sometimes you have to bump up against that door.

R: Oh, yeah, but it's not locked like it used to be. We've got keys.

I: You've got to push through.

R: We got a key.

I: Yes.

R: We just have to know how to use it [laughs]. He gave us those keys.

I: Right.

R: So it's just - you know, we're not stopped. I think we stop ourselves. We hold ourselves back a lot of times.

I: Sometimes that's certainly true.

R: Yes. We hold ourselves back. You know, "We can't do that." My dad told me, "Do not have that word in your vocabulary, and I don't want to ever hear you say it, is can't." And my children, even as - "I can't do . . ." They put their hand over their mouth because they knew what their grandfather was going to tell him. "I

Added

don't want to hear it." He says, "There's nothing on this earth you can't do. You can - you might not be the best at it, but you can do it." He says, "Don't ever say the word can't."

I: What a marvelous attitude to have. And to pass on to the . .

R: I'm passing it on to my grandchildren.

I: Yes.

R: Yeah. "I can't do it." I say, "I don't want to hear that. Because you can. You might get mad at it, but you can do it." And it just - it's marvelous. I [inaudible] my oldest grand-daughter, I had more time to spend with her. She didn't get [inaudible] and I taught her what she was able to soak in as - incredible. These little kids can soak in. You know? They're ready for that challenge. And I said, "Don't read those books" [laughs]. "Just give the child what it's ready for." And I mean she was in kindergarten telling the teachers, "That's a trapezoid, and that's a parallelogram." And all this. And the teacher's going, "Where did you get that?" And my daughter said her grandmother did it. So it's just the same way if I was around any of my grandchildren. I give them that challenge. And, by golly, they did it. Incredible little kids. I love it. [Both laugh] I've got - my littlest one is, what?, five months, and he's [inaudible], trying to stand up. And he's only five and a half months old. I said, "Get ready. You can do it. Go." [Both laugh] [inaudible] says, "Mom, don't teach him to crawl. Please." [Both laugh]

I: She wants a little peace [inaudible]. Don't [inaudible].

R: [inaudible] it's too late now. He's on the move. He's on the move. And his first words were "Nana."

I: And that's you.

R: That's what they told me.

I: [Laughs]

R: And she looked at me, she says, "Figures."

I: It figures. [Laughs] Right.

R: It figures. Oh, I'm just crazy about my children, my grandchildren. And that's - I'm, I'm going to hang around long enough to really give them a hard time.

I: [Laughs] Your dad would appreciate that.

R: Oh, yes. It's one thing my dad said. "Well, you didn't get your college degree," because they told him when I was little, "Boy, she's gonna be something else." 'Cause I was a little smart thing, you know, just attitude, that's really what I had. And I think it's the best compliment [inaudible] ever paid me in my whole life. [inaudible] Both my parents told me that. And I have - and everyone tells me I have some marvelous children. They're so respectful, and smart. So that's - that makes me feel good.

I: An enormous blessing.

R: It is. Very, very enormous blessing. That was my - that was what I was supposed to do. You know? Is give our race six more . . .

I: [Laughs] Six more [inaudible] folks.

R: Yeah, six more [inaudible] people that want to . . .

I: With attitude.

R: . . . strive and have got attitude. There you go. There you go.

I: Right.

R: My daughters have the worst ones.

I: As it should be.

R: Yeah, they have the worst attitude. But they get things done.

I: Uh huh. I can believe it.

R: Oh, yeah. They get things done. Yeah. Well, I know you've got to get back.

I: Well, thanks so much. I'm going to - I have to run for now, but we shall continue.

R: OK.

I: But for now I have to end the interview.

END