

Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
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Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
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Interviewee: Mr. Purcell Maurice Conway
Interview Date: September 13, 2011
Location: Meeting room, Hilton Bayfront Hotel, St. Augustine, FL
Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer: John Bishop
Length: 1:16:44
Special Note: Sitting in as observers of the interview were Mrs. June Conway (Mr. Conway's spouse) and Dr. Robert B. Hayling.

Joseph Mosnier: Okay?

John Bishop: We're on. We're rolling.

JM: Oh, okay.

JM: Today is Tuesday, September 13, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I'm with videographer John Bishop. We are in St. Augustine, Florida, at the Bayfront Hilton Hotel to do a set of interviews related to Civil Rights Movement history in St. Augustine with various folks. And we're delighted and very privileged to sit down with Mr. Purcell Conway. Mr. Conway, thank you very much for taking time and being so flexible today. It's been a little bit unusual as we've balanced out our day, but thank you for, for sitting down. Um, any comments, John, for the tape?

JB: Um, no XD.

JM: We are not recording to –

JB: XD.

JM: XD and I think with, to the XD cards and I think with that we can began. Is that right? Okay.

JB: The room tone is the same as the previous one [that is, the interview completed a few minutes earlier in the same room with Ms. Hamilton and Ms. Ulmer].

JM: Okay, the same room tone, that's what it was, yeah, okay. Mr. Conway, let me invite you to, to share some, to, to, to start today to share some reflections on your family and the community, um, here in St. Augustine when you were coming up.

PC: Yes. First of all, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to document this. Uh.

JM: Forgive me. I did forget one thing on the tape and I need to say it. I beg your pardon. This is a Civil Rights History Project interview for, uh, joint sponsors, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress. Forgive me.

PC: Okay. Well, I'll start off by, uh, just, uh, my history of growing up in St. Augustine, particularly Lincolnton. It's a black, uh, self-sufficient community. [Clears throat] I recall, uh, early on, uh, just the, the feel of Lincolnton. It was a heavenly place to grow up. All the adults knew you. I knew most of the kids in Lincolnton. Uh, I was raised after the age of five by my great-great-grandmother, uh, Ms. Julia Robinson [note: he intended his great-grandmother]. She was, uh, Seminole Indian and Spanish mixed. She raised me with the understanding that I would acknowledge adults, be respectful, don't steal, don't lie. That's how I was raised and, uh, my mother and father and my three brothers moved out to, uh, a brand new development, uh, in West Augustine and that's where they resided on Scott Street.

Unidentified speaker: The Rollins subdivision.

PC: The Rollins subdivision, newly developed. Uh, I recall, uh, as a child, uh, getting up in the morning. I could run from sun up to sun down throughout Lincolnville with no problems. There was no concern about, uh, the children because all of the adults in Lincolnville watched out for the children and I spent most – most of my time particularly at the Little Links, which is also housing the Galimore Center today [named for St. Augustine native Willie Galimore, who played professional football with the Chicago Bears]. It was the only black park in St. Augustine. It was the only place blacks could go to for recreation and there was a lot of recreation when I was growing up. You had football teams organized throughout the city. You had, uh, softball games with the adults at night. We had, uh, uh, an instructor there, a Mr. Eddie Lee Vickers, who ran the facility. I was amazed that you'd go in. You had ping-pong. You had pool tables. You had all sorts of activities, even a man was training some of the, uh, kids to, uh, play tennis, archery. I was just amazed you could do all this for nothing. So I would spend most of my time as a youth, uh, there at the Little Links.

The biggest problem growing up as a child is, uh, money. Money was very scarce. Uh, uh, I re, recall often thinking, well, I gotta find a way to put a little change in my pockets for my candy and ice cream, uh, because my great-grandmother just didn't have it all the time. So I would, uh, I'll never forget. I was on Washington Street one day. I saw these white paper boys on their bicycles riding away from the, uh, St. Augustine *Record*. I'm thinking wow. [5:00] Now that, I was not supposed to go in that part of town. That was a white area and it was only a block across from Washington Street, but that was a white area. The blacks, you didn't go there unless you were accompanied by an adult. But, uh, I would stand there daily and watch these white paper boys riding away from the St. Augustine *Record*.

So I worked up the courage one day and I was ten years old, that's, to venture over there and ask for a job. And I went in and I recall speaking to this white gentleman and I'd say, "Well, look, I'd like to be a paper boy. Can I be a paper boy?" So he looked down at me and he said, "Well, how old are you?" I told him I was ten. He said, "Well, uh, okay. I'll give you a try. Come back tomorrow." I left there happy as a lark. I went in and I told my, uh, my great-grandma, I said, "Mama, I got a job as a paper boy." And she was happy. She said, "You did? But I told you not to go over there, but alright since you went there, okay. You got a job, but I want you to sell. You can not go out of Lincolnville to try to sell papers." I said, "Oh, oh, okay, Mama." So she ironed up my shirt. I shined up my bicycle. I went in the next day and, uh, uh, and they gave me a few papers and I went throughout Lincolnville trying to sell them. But, uh, after a period of about two weeks, uh, it didn't work out too well. I'm out in the hot sun, uh, three, four, five hours a day to make ten cent wasn't too, it wasn't too good. I started thinking, "Well, maybe I'm not too good at this. I, I can't make any money. It's not worth standing around making ten cent pretty much most of the day."

Uh, and this one particular day, uh, I'm thinking, "Well, how can I make more money?" And I said, "Well, alright, wait a minute. You've got that fort, that big fort there, uh, in the downtown area" [Castillo de San Marcos, now part of the National Park Service], the white area. So I said, "Alright, let me, I know I'm not supposed to go, but let me give it a shot." So I came over here one day at the fort. I stood in front of the fort and within about an hour, I sold every paper I had. So I had to go back to the *St. Augustine Record* and get more papers and I came back in an hour. I sold all of those. So I went back a third time and got papers and sold those. The people would come out of the fort, look at me, and take pictures: "Oh, what a cute kid." You know, and oh, I was happy. I know the, that first day of working at the fort, I had, I had

never up to that point made a dollar bill. I had about four of five in my pocket. Uh, I couldn't believe it. So this went on for, uh, a few weeks. I'd go in to pick up my papers and, uh, you'd have a line of white paper boys, but I would always be allowed to go right up to the front window and get my papers and, uh, I'd say, "Wow. They, they, I guess that they treat me, the black, the only black kid here. So they're putting me up at the front of the line. I get my papers." Uh, I didn't see the sign "colored" there [laughter] and there weren't, I was the only paper boy at the time, uh, and not even aware of, you know, race or anything else.

Uh, so I came in one day and, uh, one of the white men there said, "Well, you know something? You sell more papers in three days than this whole group in a week." He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I, I just go out and I ask the people to buy the papers." And this one particular day, uh, before that, I used to see some of the white paper boys on their bikes trying to follow me, but I'd, you know, circle around, circle around, and lose them and, uh, but this one particular day, I said, "I don't care if they do follow me." So I did. I had two white paper boys to follow me up to the fort and, uh, they took positions to my left and right. And now as the people came out of the fort, they would come out and look. They'd look at me. They would look at the two white kids and uh, they started buying papers from either one of the white guys. Uh, being a ten year-old, I thought, "What is going on?" I'm trying to figure, well, I'm looking at my shirt. Is my shirt dirty? I'm looking at my pants. Are, are my pants dirty? I, I couldn't figure out what was going on, but they would come out of the fort, [snaps fingers], they'd take a look, and they'd buy from either one of the white kids. And I'm saying, "Well, they're not any handsomer than me. You had one guy with blonde hair and blue eyes. So what?" I said, "Well, well, I was a pretty sharp-looking kid.

But I, I, uh, I'll never forget. I, I sat on the curb there across from the fort. I'm trying to figure out what is, what is going on. I can't understand what was going on. So it happened, uh, for a few days until the point I said, "Well, look, okay. I see that people are not going to buy papers from me. I don't know why." Uh, so I had to find another [10:00] location. I did find other locations. They weren't as, uh, good as the fort, but, uh, uh, like I said, the life of a paper boy is only a year or two. So I, uh, after, after twelve, I looked for other work. Uh, I worked throughout St. Augustine, uh, in many locations, uh, and the only thing you'd get pretty much at that time was washing dishes, washing pots, or, oh, cleaning up floors. But I managed to eke out a little, uh, living out of it. I kept money in my pocket.

Uh, I'm in high school now, uh, and I'm really disenchanted with the high school. I would, uh, challenge my teachers about the books being four or five years old, written in. I would always be told, "Well, just, aw, just stop making a fuss." Uh, fortunately for me, uh, my uncle, Edward Norton, who moved to New York with his family, uh, left a small library of books and at that time, I loved to read. I'll never forget his medical books, uh, and I had a little more advanced education than most of the kids in my high school. I would even challenge some of the teachers with some of the things they would say about history behind some of the books my uncle left. Uh, so I was considered somewhat of a, a troublemaker or a rabble-rouser or a, I always felt I was a smart student, but, uh, there was no change.

Then I started seeing, uh, the way my mother particularly would be treated when she'd come, like I said, uptown or downtown to buy clothes or to, uh, to buy goods. It was always "Julia this, Julia that," and she would respond, "Ms. so and so and Ms. that." It started annoying me. I said, "Well, well, why isn't she being called 'Ms.?' Why does she always have to call someone 'Ms.' or 'Mr.' and they call her by her first name?" I started getting annoyed, uh, with

that. I, I didn't say anything to her, but I was annoyed and they started a program in my high school called the DCT where you would get credits for, uh, working outside of school and I, I, I thought it was a joke. I thought the program was a joke. Are they going to give me credits for working? That's all I've been doing since I was ten. So I said, "Well, let me join this program," which I did and, uh, the teacher approaches me one day and says, "Well, um, well, uh, we have to find you a job." I said, "I have a job." "Oh, alright. Well, get your employer to, to fill out this form so that you can get credit for it."

And I was working out at, uh, on Anastasia Island, Island with my father at a grocery store there and I took the form to the owner. I said, "Would you mind filling this out so I could get credit in high school for working here?" He said no, he don't want to get involved. I said, "Well, why not? I've been working for you for the last couple of years. What do you mean you don't want?" "Well, no, I'm not going to sign it." Now at the time, I'm in about the eighth or ninth grade and I was doing this guy's accounting. You know, he would, he showed me how to go into his, the back, and order whatever goods he needed and I was doing that, plus stocking groceries and he was only paying me, uh, I think forty dollars for working, uh, pretty much a fifty-day week, I mean a fifty-hour week. And he refused to sign. I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. I quit and I'll get another job." And he said, "Oh, wait a minute, wait a minute now." And I was a good worker. That's one thing. Any job I worked, I did it well and I knew that and, uh, he said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. Let me think this over." I said, "Well, there is nothing to think over. I'm just asking you to fill the form out. It's nothing out of your pocket."

So he caved in and filled the form out. And I started getting credits upon credits upon credits because I always worked. I had to work. I was staying with my great-grandmother. Uh, I didn't know poverty, but I know we didn't have much and, uh, I tried to help out as much as I

could. But I was still upset about the treatment, uh, not only of myself, my parents. Uh, my father also was working at the same grocery. He wasn't making that much. Uh, my mother, uh, the most she could find was tourist work or some menial job. So I always growing up wanted to do something about that. I didn't know what to do or how to do it.

Uh, [15:00] so I would go to, I started going to Florida Memorial College. Like I said, it was the only pool, uh, in town for blacks. A couple of my fen – friends at high school drowned in a sinkhole behind Murray High School. I used to jump off the pier with the little bridge coming, uh, from West Augustine, uh, into, uh, uh, Lincolnville, just a little crossover. I recall jumping off that pier with four or five of my friends. One did drown in there, but there was no place for kids to swim, black kids in particular. So, uh, at least the college, Florida Memorial, opened up their pool in the summer to a lot of the black kids. Now that's when I got involved with, uh, listening to some of the, uh, the young, uh, male college students talking about demonstrating, talking about civil rights and talking about doing something about it. It intrigued me, alright.

JM: What year were you born?

PC: I was born in 1948.

JM: Okay, just, alright.

PC: Now.

JM: So you were twelve in 1960 and –

PC: Yeah, well, in '60, actually I really started getting involved when I was about fourteen, fifteen.

JM: Yeah, yeah. So '62, '63.

PC: Mmm hmm.

JM: Yeah.

PC: And like I said, it intrigued me. I said okay and what I do recall is the training that it gave some of the kids that came there and one was, yes, you know, uh, uh, they embraced non-violence as a tactic. Uh, so did I, but I think the ear at the time and my ear at the time was leaning more toward the, some of the more, uh, I wouldn't say radical, but the more direct speakers like, uh, Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X. Alright, I'd hear of this Dr. King. Uh, I, uh, found him to be, uh, very informed and passionate, but the, the understanding derived from the college kids, non-violent, non-violent demonstration is the way to go. So that's what we decided and I decided with them to embrace. Now when the demonstrations started here, yes, I remember the kids going up to sit at the counters and, and what have you. So I told my mother, "I'm going to start demonstrating." She said, "Well, I don't think it's a good thing." I said, "Well, Mom, we've got to do something." Uh, I recall at the time, uh, that it was a little hard, a little struggle to get the adults more involved in the demonstrations. Uh, I felt that they were like in a trance. I, I, I, I, it was just hard for me to go into the white neighborhood and see the way a lot of the blacks were being treated. I said, "Well, why doesn't somebody do something or say something?" So I just said to myself, "Maybe they're in a trance of something. Maybe they're so used to, uh, this particular way of being treated, uh, it's, it's at the point it doesn't bother them." Uh, and I used to try to talk to my mother about it, but again, she just, "Aw, just let it go, just let it go."

JM: Of course, she had so much more to lose.

PC: I don't think there was much to lose. I mean, there wasn't, there wasn't, uh, anything here. I mean, the way blacks survived in Lincolnville at the time, if it wasn't for the black businesses along Washington Street, most of the blacks had menial jobs that weren't paying

anything. It was more slave labor than labor. I mean, just to think about how my family eked a living amazes me to this day. And like I said, the only thing that was then available was tourist, court work, or taking care of some white family's kid. You know, that, that was pretty much most of what blacks, uh, particularly non-professionals had to, uh, to deal with. Now my mother was working for, uh, uh, this white lady out on Anastasia Island.

And I'm still trying to eke a living myself and, uh, doing little things. Uh, I, uh, was also cutting grass. My, uh, great-grandmother, uh, helped to get a lawnmower and I cut grass on the side. So this, my mother asked me, "Son, uh, my white friend," I think she was clean, cleaning her house and keeping her kids at the time, "Uh, needs her grass cut. If I drop you off at her, cut, cut her grass, uh, uh, you think you can do it?" I said, "Well, yeah, alright." It was a hot day, extremely hot day. I said, "Okay, Mom, that's your friend." I said, "I normally charge fifteen dollars to cut an average yard, but since it's your friend, I'll, I'll charge her ten." So my mother drove me out with my lawnmower, dropped me at this lady's house, introduced me, and I commenced to cutting her yard. It's very hot. So the lady comes to her driveway and she calls me, "Purcell, would you like a cool drink and a sandwich?" And I said, "Yes, thank you, ma'am."

I thought it was polite of her and, uh, when it was prepared, she came to her garage entrance again and said, "Alright, Purcell, you can come in. Everything's made." So I came to the entrance of the garage and, uh, I'm looking and I said, "Well, where, where, where is the sandwich and the, and the drink?" And she said, "Over there." So when I walked up, she had set it down next to her dog, dog's tray, dog food on this side, my sandwich and water on the other side. So I looked at this woman and I said, "Mmm, boy, okay. What is this mentality? What is with these folk?" So I said, "Look, Miss, can I use your phone?" And she said, "Well, oh,

what's the matter?" I said, "Look, please, may I use your phone?" She said, "Okay." So she allowed me to come in her house and, uh, I called my mother and I explained to my mother what had just happened and I could hear the frustration in her voice.

She said, "Could you please put her on the line?" So I did. I said, "My mother wants to talk to you." She said, "You know something, Ms. so and so and so? I thought you was my friend. I cannot believe that you would treat my child this way. Let, let alone, I can't believe you would treat, treat any child this way." She said, "Look, I tell you what. I'll, uh, be over there to pick him up immediately." She said, "I am very sad at what you just did." And the woman – she, so the woman tried to apologize. She said, "Naw, naw, naw, don't worry." So she did. She came and she picked me up and we got back to our home and she sat and she said, "Well, now I can see what you've been trying to explain to me, just the way people treat you. I can see now." And Doc, that's when she started getting involved.

JB: Um, we have to pause for a second.

JM: Okay. Excuse me one second.

[Recording resumes after pause]

JB: Okay. We're back.

JM: We're back on after a short break and let me just interject quickly. Dr. [Robert] Hayling is with us for the interview as well and we may be rejoined by Mr. Conway's wife, June [Conway, his spouse, who attended the interview], as well as the afternoon progresses. Please.

PC: Okay. So I, uh, I participated in a number of the marches, but my mother insisted, uh, that I promise not to get arrested because there was, there would be no one to, I was living still with my great-great-grandmother and I tried to tend to her needs as best I could. So she wanted to make sure that there was always somewhere, someone there with her and she asked me,

“Please, just don’t get arrested. I don’t mind you demonstrating.” I said, “Okay, Mom. I won’t get arrested.” So I made sure on all the marches that I stayed, uh, near the rear and sometimes that didn’t work because too often, I was chased by the police. They could never catch me, but, uh, no, I, I, I never got arrested and good thing because one particular night, my mother, my father, and my three brothers were all arrested. So I was the only one out of jail. [laughs] It’s a good thing. Like I said, I was there with my great-great-grandmother.

JM: Wow.

PC: But my parents were very active. Uh, my mother was very passionate and my father was very supportive and my brothers too; they were out there. I think at, uh, one point in St. Augustine amongst black households, it was a badge of honor to be arrested for the Movement and that was that passion and I think when the adults saw what was happening with the young, with their children and the teens out there, they got motivated and totally committed.

JM: Yeah. You knew, you were a classmate of Samuel White?

PC: He was one year, uh, below me, yes.

JM: Okay.

PC: I was, his brother, James White was, uh, he and I were in the same homeroom class.

JM: Yeah. How did, um, how did young people your age kind of move through that period of time when peers were incarcerated as they were?

PC: Oh everybody, well, you know, I, I, my own personal feeling is that, you know, we as young adults saw what the system of segregation was. Our parents had lived under it. We were growing up in it. We decided, uh, to the death. We’re not going to live this way. Sorry. I mean, we’re going to push it. As far as fear, I think fear had nothing to do with it. I think when you live under oppression for so long, particularly seeing your parents, uh, live through it and

now you're coming up through it, my thing was, I, at fifteen, I'm going to do this for my future and my children's future. Now if, if it means getting out there to the death, I'm committed and I think that was the attitude of a lot of the young, uh, folk in high school with me.

JM: Yeah.

PC: And people talk about fear. You know, like I said, when you get fed up to the point of being mistreated that fear no longer exists for you, it's just doing something. The anger is just doing something to break free of this, these chains and this oppression, and that's what it was, segregation.

JM: Yeah, yeah. What, what, um, what memories come sharpest to your mind when you think about that long period of, of extended demonstration and protest?

PC: Oh I was jubilant, I was glad. I, I'll show you how naïve I was. I said, "Finally, I've got all these people helping me out." I'm thinking I'm being helped, not realizing [laughs] that a movement has started, uh, uh, out there. Uh, I wasn't too much into the nat – national forefront of the po – political lens of this, but, uh, yeah, I was just, uh, amazed, uh, with Dr. Hayling when I, uh, finally, uh got to know who he was and, uh, Dr. King, Abernathy, Hosea Williams, and all these people started coming around or coming down. I was, uh, I was like a fly on the wall. I mean, uh, they probably never noticed me because I tried to stay in, in the background, but yes, I was, I would sit around and listen, uh, as best I could to what they had to say and what they were talking about. I was just elated just to be out there to help and, uh, yes, I, uh, particularly.

Now, uh, I recall after the Civil Rights Act was passed, we were, we were, we were kind of pressed to get people to go out to, uh, test, uh, the newly enacted law and we did have people coming in, uh, from out of town, uh, a lot. Uh, I, uh, went out myself on, uh, one demonstration, uh, to St. Augustine Beach, uh, and with a group of, uh, uh, four other teens and this white man.

He drove us out, a tall white man, I think his name was Al Lingo, drove us out to the beach, and we were in the surf maybe about, uh, ten, fifteen minutes when you could see this, uh, large crowd of whites coming from, uh, North and South. They were converging on our location and, uh, we weren't too alarmed because they were at a distance, but they kept getting closer and closer. So, uh, Mr. Lingo said, "Well, I, I guess we'd better get back in the car and leave." Uh, there was a young, young, young teenage girl with us, a black girl, and she was running back to the car as fast as she could. Now we were just casually running back. Uh, she got back to the car before us and she locked all the doors and we could not get her to open them. You know, we had enough time to get in the car and drive off. We kept pleading, "Open the door. Open the door." And she was just hysterical, crying. Uh, she was just frightened, just crying, boo, and we kept pleading, "Open the door. Open." She wouldn't open the doors.

So anyhow, the crowd finally converged around the car. They, we were outside. So Al told us to all get on one side of the car. And, uh, they were taunting. They were threatening. Uh, uh, they went to, uh, one truck and they put out angular weights. Their intent was to bound our hands and feet and take us as far out into the surf as they could and, uh, drop us. And I recall standing there thinking, "Well, Lord, I didn't think I'd go out this way." Now like I said, non-violence was a tactic. My life on the line, you're coming after me. I'm going to make sure that I leave a mark and that was, that was my thing. I was pretty much self-trained in what I thought was a little karate at the time. Uh, so I said, "Alright, well, first guy that comes out me, I got to do what I got to do." But I, uh, I thought about it. I said at one time, well, maybe, uh, uh, uh a run here or there might help us. I said, well, look, I'm in the white neighborhood. I wouldn't know where to run. There's no place to run. I mean, it's all white folk. And at that time, uh, my mindset was that, uh, most of the whites just hate black people. I don't know why, but they just

hate us. So I, I just, I had very little trust [30:00] for, uh, uh, pretty much whites, uh, at that time, short of this man that we were with, and I'm, just well, maybe this is God's will. I said, well, if this is God's will, uh, I have to accept it.

But, uh, uh, one white, uh, kid walked past me and he punched me in the face and cut my lip open. I started to jump back at him. I mean, you've got a large mob there with bats and chains and, uh, the white gentleman, Al Lingo, put his hand across my chest and told me to stand my ground. "Don't fight back. Stand your ground." So as, as hard as that was, I did and then he was hit, I recall, over the head with a pipe. The blood hit me in the face and he collapsed pretty much unconscious next to me and at that time now, you could hear at a distance a police car siren faintly. You could hear it and seconds passed. The, uh, the sound grew loud, louder and louder until at a distance, I could see, uh, coming from the South headed north, this police car, this one lone police car. And as they got closer, the mob dispersed because I think they felt they had killed, uh, this white guy, Al, that they hit. I think they, I, I thought the guy, I felt I thought his head crack open, but, uh, they, they dispersed. Uh, uh, help was called. Uh, he was taken to the hospital and we were taken back to Washington Street.

And, uh, I'll never forget. Hosea Williams was so angered, he said, "Alright. They think they're going scare us away from the beach. We're going to come back stronger." So with that, the, uh, a second demonstration was organized and a large group—uh, this occurred about two weeks later, uh—went back to St. Augustine Beach and I recalled, uh, getting off the bus, a quarter of, uh, helmeted police that we walked down between to the water and I think, I forgot the uh, the pastor's name, uh, uh, that was leading the front of the march. But, uh, whoever was in charge of the troopers at that time, uh, uh, came over to the group. This time I made sure I was going to be in the front. I said, "Well, if I've got to go today, I'm going to jail. I'm, I'm

going to be in the front of this march.” Because I was still upset. I was hit in the face and, uh, and what have you, but, uh, this policeman, state trooper approached, uh, the front of the group and he told us, “Well, uh, a little problem. Uh, before you can get in the water, we have to, uh, clear it of all these hostile whites in the water. So give us a few minutes to clear it, but I assure you, you will go into the ocean today.”

JM: This is a state trooper.

PC: A state trooper. So we stood there on the, the edge of the surf. Alright, uh, they went in just about waist deep, the troopers, to force this angry mob out of the water. I have never to this day seen a melee like it occurred that day. Uh, the whites in the water had two-by-fours, chains, bats, and the fight was on. I mean, it lasted, to, to me about fifteen, twenty minutes, but the Klan and their sympathizers were beaten into submission.

JM: By white troopers?

PC: By white troopers. I could not believe it. Now I’m really confused now.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

PC: Because I’m saying, “Wow, I can’t understand these white men beating up the other white men. That’s, that’s a new one for me.” I, you know, I, I was really shocked, but it was, a, a melee. They were knocking, uh, some of the Klansmen and their sympathizers out and then dragging them up to the, the shoreline and dropping them and going back in for more. When I say they were beaten into submission, believe me. I stood there and watched it. I could not believe it and when it was over, this man in charge of these state troopers came back up to our group and he said, “Well, look, okay. I think it’s safe for you to go in now. I, I can’t guarantee the quality of the water, but it is safe for you to go in now.”

JM: He actually made that joke?

PC: He did. He said it.

JM: [Laughs]

PC: I can't get it. And rightfully so. Now when I went to the edge, I looked at the water. I mean, it was bloody. I mean, the blood was that thick in the water. Now a few of the demonstrators did go around and go into the surf for a few minutes, but it was so bloody, I refused to go into it. I said, "No, this water's too bloody." And I mean bloody. And, uh, I stood there thinking and I said, "Well, wow, I'm, I'm still kind of confused now. I mean, these white men fighting other white men for, uh, my, uh, civil rights." I'm, I'm trying to figure out, well, I'm, the first time I've seen this. I'm, I'm confused as a fifteen-year-old. I, I couldn't, I couldn't put that together, and it took awhile. But I do recall going on demonstrations, uh, marches or sit-ins or now to test the law after that. When these state troopers told the Klansmen or their sympathizers to move, believe me, after that beating on the beach that day, they moved. That's one thing I do recall.

JM: How, how did you ultimately explain it? Why did that happen?

RH: Orders from the governor.

PC: Oh, you know, the troopers coming down?

JM: Yeah.

PC: Yeah.

JM: And taking that action.

PC: Uh, I, I, I guess it was. I think they were ordered down here from the, uh, the governor.

JM: Yeah. The governor just decided we're just going to not keep having this happen.

PC: Right.

JM: Yeah, finally.

RH: The Justice Department was on, on the governor.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

PC: Mmm.

JM: Dr. Hayling is, is mentioning also the Justice Department. I mean, there were these wider forces coming down to stop the earlier pattern of violence.

PC: Mmm hmm.

JM: That was always visited on black people.

PC: Mmm hmm.

JM: Yeah.

RH: [uncertain brief comment from Dr. Hayling]

[Recording resumes after pause]

JM: Okay. Mr. Conway, I think, I don't mean to cut you off. There may be more to say on that, but I also, I would, I would be very appreciative if, if, if you could sort of double back and contextualize that moment by talking for a minute or two about the previous pattern of local law enforcement engagement, uh, with the Klan and in, in the context of these demonstrations.

PC: Well, it, it, my vantage point, I, I, all I could, all, what I realized was that the police were not sympathetic to the demonstrators, just the opposite. And again, uh, uh, having been involved with a couple of, uh, situations involving the police, no, I, I, I, my biggest fear was if I was ever arrested, I'd probably be beaten by the local police, but fortunately, I, I was never arrested.

Uh, I had a situation wherein again, uh, being involved at tutorial school on Washington Street, uh, the young lady, uh, had a class of, uh, youth, I think the oldest probably being, uh, six

or seven. She decided to take a small group, uh, to the movie theater here downtown. Uh, I didn't think it was wise. It's like I said, this was after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and I cautioned her. I said, "Well, look, I don't think it's a good idea." "Oh we'll be okay." She was by herself with the kids. I said, "Well..." But anyhow, I decided to hang around in front of, uh, the church at the edge of Washington Street there, uh, for a couple hours until they safely returned from the movie. Uh, within twenty minutes, uh, I could hear kids screaming. So I walked again over to the, uh, one block over where the St. Augustine *Record* is located, uh, uh, considered to be the white area at the time. If you made it back to Washington Street, you were safe. That was a black area. And I could see the kids running towards me screaming hysterically and, uh, this young, uh, white female who was, uh, uh, who had taken them to the movies, she's got one kid in her hand and she's trying to run. And I see this, uh, white male, uh, on a bicycle with a knife chasing them. Now I intervened and stopped him.

Uh, unfortunately, I was surrounded by two, uh, hulking, uh, policemen, uh, and I felt, well, they're probably going to beat me up. So, um, but I, I, then they had a police dog. I said, "Alright. I guess they got me." I, but I could see a crowd on Washington Street gathered, looking over, and a couple of friends of mine came up to the policemen and said, "Well, what are you doing? What are you doing?" And they told them, "You little niggers get away from here." "No, that's our friend. What are you doing?" They didn't understand. They're like, "Didn't we tell you to get away from here?" So one of the young men pushed the policeman and took off running. So the policeman was so upset at that, they started chasing my two friends and left me there.

But before one the cops left, he told his dog, "If he moves, [40:00] kill him." So the dog sat and started growling. I said, "Oh wow." You know, a German Shepherd. And the policeman

could not catch my two friends. So I could see them headed back toward me and I'm looking at the dog. He's growling. I'm looking at the policeman approaching me. The dog's growling. I said, "Well, look. I have to make a decision." So I said, "Well, what I'm going to do because I'm facing the dog and Washington Street is at my back," I said, "I'm going to sl, turn slowly and run as hard as I can back to Washington Street," which is only a good block to run before the policeman got at me. And, uh, so I slowly turned. The dog is growling the whole time. And I took off as fast as I could, as hard as I could run, back to Washington Street. When I got there, the people, uh, they, they were waiting. They were clapping. So I turned around and looked. The dog didn't even move. [laughs] He was still sitting. [laughs] So now I'm taunting the police: "Yeah. Come over here now. Come get me. Come get me."

So, uh, anyhow, some of the folks said, "Well, look, you'd better go ahead and go home," which I did. Now I, uh, I, I, I hid out for awhile, two days actually in one of the, uh, uh, church yards and people from the community would come by and give me water and sandwiches.

JM: You hid out in the churchyard because you thought the police were going to find you?

PC: Yes.

JM: Yeah, and take you in.

PC: Yeah.

JM: Yeah. You hid out in a churchyard?

PC: Yeah, two days.

JM: And people –

PC: Two days, two nights.

JM: Slipped you food and water.

PC: They would bring me water and, and sandwiches.

JM: Yeah.

PC: They said, "Don't worry about anything. Your parents, we told your parents.

Everything is safe. We'll take care of you."

JM: What had happened inside the movie theater to drive the, the –

PC: I never found out –

JM: Yeah.

PC: Uh, what, but I, I, like I said, I, uh, we're only talking months after the, uh, passage.

So a lot of people were, uh, felt everything was okay and no need now to continue to, uh, uh, demonstrate or, uh, or to test the law.

JM: Yeah. You, you mentioned that it was a white student, young adult, I guess.

PC: Yeah.

JM: Doing this tutoring of young black children.

PC: Mmm.

JM: And she had taken them into this movie theater.

PC: Yes.

JM: Obviously there were some whites in different, from northern colleges, other contexts, came down and had different roles in some limited way. Um, did you, did, did that involvement of whites, you mentioned, you mentioned Mr. Lingo earlier in the beach incident, how'd you, how'd you take the measure of these white folks who would get involved?

PC: Well, believe it or not, those college kids, white, and it was, uh, uh, a pretty good group, those white college kids changed my perspective of whites. I thought all whites hated me and other blacks just because we were black, but they changed my perspective. You had one, uh,

particular, uh, college, uh, uh, student, Gail Blattenberger, and I recently contacted her, uh, about two months ago, uh, and through emails, but she was like a mother hen to me. She was only a few years older, but, uh, surprisingly, uh, is a story. They, you had a group of kids from certain states in the North. I know she was from Princeton, New Jersey, at the time.

You had some other kids from, uh, Massachusetts, all over. So what they did when their, uh, tutorial session was over here in St. Augustine, they invited a group of, uh, uh, black kids who participated in the program back to their homes and, uh, my mother didn't want me to go. She said, "Well, look, no. He's too young. I'm sorry. I, I, I can't let him go." But I, I pleaded with my mother: "Mom, please. I'd like to go." It, it was a two-week trip. She wouldn't. She said, "Well, no. I'm, I'm, I'm worried about you. I, I, uh, uh, I, I, I, I don't know too much about the North and I don't want you to go up there by yourself with the, these kids."

And they were young students themselves. But anyhow, surprisingly, uh, they made up picket signs and picketed in front of my house to try to get my mother to relent and let me go for that two-week trip, trip with them. And everybody was laughing. They said, "What are these kids out there picketing the Conways?" [laughs] But, uh, my mother would come home every day and she would laugh. She thought it was very funny. So finally she, she relented and allowed me to, to go on that two-week trip, but I stayed with, uh, Gail Blattenberger and her parents and what a trip it was. It was a very good trip and, uh, that, that just changed my, my whole perspective on white folk because [45:00] I, I, the only white folk I knew was the ones here in St. Augustine pretty much. And again, like I said, the, uh, not that they were nasty. It's just the way the treatment, like you were subhuman or something, I mean, uh, no respect. You know, uh, and that's, that's what I had, but I with, uh, those college kids coming down, you had an entirely different perspective.

JM: Take, take me through sixty, late '64 or '65, '66, and how you found your way through that period, your perspective on St. Augustine as it's reacting to the Civil Rights Act's passage, to the Voting Rights Act the next year, to –

PC: After some, it took awhile for, uh, I mean, we may be talking a year or two to kind of, uh, uh, get into the, uh, the mindset of the business community here, the white business community, that yes, alright. This is the law and you have to adhere to it. Now I never had a problem. Now I came to the same movie theater myself, uh, uh, I'll never forget, to watch, uh, one of the James Bond movies with no problem. Uh, restaurants, no, I, my, my money, my pocket wasn't that tight to start hitting the restaurants, but, uh, you know, I didn't have a problem. I felt, uh, uh, more at ease now coming to the downtown white area than I had in years prior.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Um, as you move through that early, those, those close months, the close year or two after the heaviest of the, the, the, all these moments charged with so much potential violence, actual violence, did you, how'd you deal with all that in, in it's, sort of, the way it carried forward with you? Was that something that you were able to step forward and away from without too much difficulty? Did you feel it in you? Did you –

PC: Uh, uh, not much. See I, I was, I didn't think what I, I, or most of my friends or fellow demonstrators were doing was of any significance. I just felt like hey, this is something that had to be done. So I didn't place that much importance on it, but I knew, I was just happy that we accomplished, uh, some things. I wasn't even aware when I was demonstrating, uh, uh, too much about a Civil Rights Act or a Voting Rights Act, but, uh, I was, I was just happy that these things had occurred. Uh, now what helped me, now I wound up going to, uh, uh, a junior

college in Daytona Beach where I met my wife, who was going to Bethune-Cookman [College]. It was a trade school.

Uh, now I took up, uh, brick masonry. Alright. We had a black instructor. The class pretty much was predominately black. It was for the first, uh, it was a two-year course, for the first year and a half. Uh, we were scheduled to go in and take our final exam with the, I think, I guess some city agency in Daytona Beach. Now in the, the year and a half we were there, the black students, uh, the last six months you had these two white students to come into the course and within a few months, they were allowed to go take the test to become a mason, a mason. And my teacher was outraged. He said, "Wait a minute. What do you, what do you – ?" He's telling the school administration, "What do you mean that the only people, these guys are not even trained? They've only been there a few months. I've got these young black men I've trained for the last year and a half and you mean to tell me you're not going to allow them to go and take the test, their finals, so they can get their permits and what have you?"

The school administrator refused. My instructor, through protesting, was fired. We were called to the, uh, administrator's office and offered a settlement because we had a year and a half under this course that if we wanted our, uh, certificates, two-year certificate, that we'd have to spend the last six months in a carpentry class. And, uh, believe it or not, the two white guys, even though they only had three months of training, they, they were given their, uh, certificates to work, uh, in construction. Uh, we all refused. So I never received, though I did a year and a half at Daytona Beach Community College, uh, in their [50:00], uh, uh, program, uh, I never received anything for it. We weren't even reimbursed.

So that was the end of that, but fortunately, uh, uh, uh, I married and my wife is from New York. We moved back with her parents in New York and, uh, uh, I got employment there.

But racism, uh, uh, I found was not just a southern issue. It was worse in the North. At least in the South, it was overt. In the North, it's a pat on the back and a smile on the face, and they'll stab you as often as they can. I worked the post, I worked in the post office my first five years. Uh, again here I am doing accounting for a supervisor who couldn't even do it, but he's being paid, uh, more money just to be over the blacks. [coughs] Excuse me.

Fortunately, uh, the Civil Rights Act was, uh, important in its passage because it did open the, the flood gates, I would put it that way, for black opportunities, particularly in the North because most of the people I went in with, uh, in the post office at the time were pretty much because of the Civil Rights Act. Uh, but like I said, I, I always looked for advancement and opportunities. There was very little in the post office. You know, I, I tried to, uh, uh, petition for, uh, to take exams to no avail. But after five years, I, uh, passed the police department's test and went into that.

JM: Were you in New York City?

PC: Yes.

JM: Yeah.

PC: Uh, now there, the racism was just as rampant and I would say more intimidating, uh, because, uh, uh, it's more of a, a rank and file, uh, organization. As you know, police, yeah, you've got your sergeant, lieutenant, captain, and on up, but some of the hierarchy, uh, that I worked under felt like I was still some type of nigger that they could talk to any way they wanted to. Uh, again, like I said, that's what my training, my involvement in civil rights here in, uh, St. Augustine prepared me for that. Uh, just like I didn't allow the disrespect, uh, regardless of who you were, uh, when I was a teen, I didn't allow it working in the police department. So my, my attitude was if you curse me out, no matter what your rank, I would then likewise, in turn, uh,

Speak as you speak to me. You know, I respect your rank as long as you respect me as a human being and I did run into some, a lot of, with that attitude, you had, uh, oh boy, some of the worst of the worst after you.

But another thing that was fortunate with me, most of the guys, uh, particularly blacks that I, uh, entered the police department with, came out of the Civil Rights Movement surprisingly. And, uh, we were cohesive and they were as demanding for respect as I was, some more so. So that made it a lot easier. I was, I was proud to see, uh, a lot of the, the folk and the females, the black females were the ones, I mean, they did not take any shit, so to speak, if I can put it that way, from their superiors because I think that getting these jobs, uh, I could see that the, the racism involved was to try to still keep you as low as possible and, uh, and it didn't work because, uh, a group, I got together with a group that sued the police department and the city of New York for discriminating on the promotional exams and we were successful. I again had to sue, the same, similar suit for my lieutenant's exam and we were successful. And those lawsuits, uh, were used, the criteria was used around the nation and they're still being used to this day. So yes, the Civil Rights, uh, Movement in St. Augustine, uh, prepared me well.

JM: Yeah. Um, did the, uh, did the department change gradually in your service there over time? Did you think it changed because of this ongoing pattern of challenge and activism by –

PC: Oh definitely.

JM: Yeah.

PC: I think the change came about not so much, uh, willingly.

JM: Yeah.

PC: Uh, the first lawsuit, uh, uh, I guess the New York City Police Department, when it came to, uh, the sergeant's test, produced [55:00] and this is what changed the complexion of the job, it produced over three hundred minority candidates. Now they called us 'quota' sergeants at the time or the, the theory was that we couldn't perform. We were given a break and it was just the, uh, just the, the contrary. I left my position as a lieutenant with honors. I, I trained, uh, most of the people that worked under me, particularly white candidates, trained them well. To this day I'm respected. And my whole focus to them was you treat, you see a woman out there, black, white, green, or blue, you treat her like your mother. You know, you don't, I don't expect you to bring this, uh, uh, white mentality into a black neighborhood on how to treat people and if I ever see or hear of any of the guys I train treating someone harshly, you're going to have to deal with me. Don't worry about someone looking you up or, or the department doing an investigation because I'll be the first to drop a dime on you. I'll be the first to put you on a foot [patrol]. So and, and honestly, honestly, I never, I trained hundreds, I never had a serious complaint of any white male or female office under my supervision, never in my career.

JM: Did you come back to St. Augustine in those years?

PC: Yes, I'd come every year.

JM: Yeah.

PC: Uh, my, my parents were still here, my brothers, my family was still here. So I'd bring my kids down, uh, every summer just to give me and the wife a break. Uh, and they loved it. I mean, uh, and surprisingly, uh, I know I already talked about the YMCA. When they would come down, uh, uh, my mother would put them in the swimming program at the YMCA.

JM: Let's take a break for just one second.

PC: Okay.

[Recording resumes after pause]

JB: We're back.

JM: Okay. We're back after a short break. Um, I just, we were just asking, I was asking about your, your return visits to St. Augustine over the years, family here, and you brought your kids down and all. Um, how did your opinion of the city and race relations in the city evolve over time? Can you sort of track that for me?

PC: Well, not living here in St. Augustine, uh, it's, I can't give an opinion, but what I, I'm, I'm really disheartened at the non-improvement of black life here in St. Augustine. I would come back to see abandoned houses, uh, uh, drug-ravaged areas, uh, uh, particularly black seniors not receiving, uh, assistance, uh, to keep their properties up. I started seeing what I had witnessed, uh, in certain areas of New York at one time due to red-lining.

JM: Yeah.

PC: And I felt like this is what was happening in St. Augustine. Uh, blacks couldn't get, uh, loans for their properties. Uh, I knew how the system of red-lining worked. It starts with the, the banks not lending money. It starts with the, the care of the neighborhood, uh, coupled with, uh, uh, the raising of taxes, uh, and then the gentrification. And this is what has played out in Lincolnville over the last ten years.

JM: Yeah, yeah. What's your sense of, um, what's your sense of the – you, you mentioned that very, very central point about how your experiences here in the Movement probably substantially were reflected in the way you approached the challenge, the racial challenges structurally in police work and, and, and even prior at the community college and the choices you made about how to respond to the injustice of the, of the firing of your instructor and the easy passage of these two white students into credential. Um, I'm, I'm interested in your,

your sense of other ways in which the experience here has been reflected in your life as you've gone forward, maybe perhaps as a parent, perhaps as a, a per, person who contributes to your community and through professional service in other ways.

PC: Uh, well, this, like I said, my experiences growing up here, I, in a way, I was raised by my great-grandmother. I'm, I'm, uh, I'm not violent, but I'm not passive either. I mean, you, uh, if I'm put in a position where I have to respond physically [1:00:00], I will. Uh, fortunately, I was not put in that position, uh, in the police department, but I, I think, uh, my determination and will is what was a force that, uh, I think protected me pretty much. I think those around me knew that I would respond. So what I learned as a second level manager in the police department is this buddy system, you know, viewed by me as racist. Now I can understand you taking care of your buddy or, uh, your friend, which is not a bad thing, but as a whole, I mean, when you have, uh, let's say whites that are in authority, that make decisions that's crucial to the, the group, if everything is going to be based on a buddy system, I started seeing this and I would challenge that with a lot of my white friends. I'd say, "It's not fair." You know, when you get someone who is qualified to do the job, you, you need to put that person first. I mean, if there's a slot open for a buddy, then you, you.

But you know, I started seeing this mentality of this buddy system, uh, pretty much more in place and I saw that my white colleagues didn't view that as being racist, and I said it is because who is your buddy? It's the guy that you live around. It's the guy that you drink with. You're not drinking with me or you're not drinking with the guys like me. So that's why you find yourself not putting them on the same scale as your buddy. So your buddy is always going to make out and I think this is the whole, uh, my, my own personal, uh, mindset is this the whole

makeup of this whole system we live in now. Everything is a buddy system. It's who you know; it's not what you know. And that's the way I see it now.

JM: Yeah, yeah. You've moved back to Florida.

PC: Yes.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

PC: Yeah. I'm, I'm in Palm Coast now.

JM: Yeah. Did you, did you, would you have guessed that you would have done that when you moved away?

PC: Yes.

JM: You always felt like you might come back?

PC: I knew it. Yeah. I knew we were going to come back.

JM: Yeah.

PC: I think we knew we were going to come back.

JM: Yeah.

PC: I mean, who, who can beat this weather?

JM: [laughs] I see, if, if you were to make a, if you were to imagine making a, a, a, a walk through the neighborhood here and a walk through Lincolnville and imagine pausing at a few places because key memories that you haven't shared previously really came out. What, can you imagine what a few of those stories might be?

PC: My passion now and, this is before the City, is the Little Links, the [uncertain word, at 1:02:50], and also specifically the Galimore Center [named for St. Augustine native Willie Galimore, who played professional football with the Chicago Bears]. That pool has, which I understand was managed by the county for the last few years, has been closed for over two years.

Now I petitioned the city commissioners with some historical facts from fifteen years ago and I hope they listen. See the Little Links was more than just a park. It was actually, it actually was a sanctuary for me and I'm quite sure a lot of people and I think it still is. I, I don't know what the, uh, city's intent is in that area, but I hope it is to, uh, restore it to its glory, uh, and repair and put that pool open for our use. I hope it is that way. I don't know. I'm, uh, all I can do is just continue to, to fight for that, but that's, that's one area I, I had so many, many great days and I'm quite sure you have quite a few young kids at the time, uh, probably my age at the time, that can say that that was the only sanctuary you could go to to get away from all this hatred and bigotry and discrimination. That was it. You went there: fun, fun, fun all day.

JM: Yeah.

PC: So that's one spot.

JM: Yeah.

PC: I think actually in my heart the only spot.

JM: Mmm, interesting, interesting, yeah.

RH: He's not telling you that he is leading an effort to reactivate the, the Galimore Center.

JM: Yeah. Dr., Dr. Hayling has just said that, um, Mr. Conway is, is leading an ongoing effort to try to reactivate that, that whole, um, the center, the Galimore Center, and bring that forward. Um, I, I, I know that there is much, much more we could talk about, um, and you're such a great narrator that you've taken me through a nice arc here. Are there other things you want to come back to touch upon before we finish, other themes, other moments, other thoughts?

PC: Well, I, I think, uh, in a lot of communities, you have, uh, a lot [1:05:00] of black activism, uh, particularly political. St. Augustine now is just at that stage of getting there. I was

asked a question, uh, on a panel once why blacks are not involved, uh, in city affairs and civic affairs and, uh, I'll respond the same way. You cannot keep a race of people out of the political spectrum for decades and expect when you pass an act or civil rights bill or any other bill that all of a sudden, they're supposed to flood the gates, uh, and come back in their civic duty. And I think, uh, again, uh, I was not raised, uh, to be into the political spectrum or to, to be civic-minded, just like I'm quite sure generations, particularly here in Lincolnville, uh, and West Augustine behind me weren't raised. I think if, uh, once, uh, those folk understand, uh, uh, the importance of it, uh, you'll start seeing them returning and being more active with their civic duties. And that's what I, a, a, another thing I've been trying to, uh, explain and push, successfully too. I see that there is a lot more activism than there was, uh, a year or two ago. I see that. I'm, I'm really proud of it.

JM: I really want to thank you. It's been a real honor and a privilege and I, let me thank you again also for the extra flexibility in our day's schedule, but it's been great to be with you. Thank you.

PC: Again, I thank you.

JM: Thank you.

RH: I want him to, before he closes out, to at least give a tribute to his mother and his father.

JM: Ah.

RH: And their involvement in the movement.

JM: Dr., yeah.

RH: [uncertain few words, at 1:06:56] Now he mentioned his great-grandmother.

JM: Yeah, let me do that. Are we still on, John? Okay, yeah. Dr. Hayling has suggested

—

RH: Julia and George Conway.

JM: Yeah. Dr. Hayling, Dr. Hayling has suggested that Mr. Conway call out his, his parents and, and let me have you name them and, and talk a little bit about them before we close. That's, that's lovely. Thank you.

PC: Yeah. My dear loving mother, Julia Conway, and my, uh, dedicated father, George Conway. Uh, like I said, very active, uh, uh, passion, my mother's passion was for her sons and to have us excel as best we could. Uh, you talked about one of us, one of her sons? You really got on her nerve. My father, yes, he, my father was well-known both in the black and white neighborhood. I, I was not aware of how loved he was with the white neighborhood; I wasn't. When, uh, I saw the way he was treated, uh, uh, at certain locations and a recent funeral of a friend of his, uh, before my father passed, the way he was treated by his white friends amazed me.

JM: What was it that drew him into contact with the white community?

PC: He [coughs] Excuse me. He delivered groceries, uh, for the grocery, uh, store on Anastasia Island. So he knew everybody. I mean, uh, I was surprised, uh, uh, he, uh, and I and my wife was in one of the local banks taking care of some business and they were giving us a hard time understandably. Uh, and I had to caution the bank manager, uh, because it was a [clears throat] a court order that the bank was supposed to adhere to, which they were trying to get around. So I had to caution him. "So I'm going to go back to the judge and let him know that you're not adhering to this." So anyhow, little did I know, the judge was walking by. So the judge said to him, "George, is everything okay over there?" The bank manager looked, "Oh

that's judge so and so." My father said, my father said, "Oh don't worry about nothing, Judge. We've got it. We, it's under control."

Just the fact that I'm saying my father knew [laughs], he knew everybody just about in St. Augustine, just behind again on Anastasia Island, they knew him like their own father or their son.

JM: Yeah. And he weathered, he weathered the consequence of having been a strong supporter of the movement.

PC: Oh yes. Uh, well, uh, his own story, again, was he was working for the grocery store. Here's a good one too. Sorry I left that out earlier. But, uh, the owner, uh, decided to fire him for participating in the marches. Now the butcher of the store was white. So the butcher [1:10:00] walked up to the owner and said, "Well, I'll tell you what. If he goes, I go. So that means the store goes." [laughs] You know, this guy was a butcher, he was, so, and, and my father was the delivery man. So and –

JM: He was just loyal to your dad because of friendship?

PC: They were that friendly and he let him know, "No, you're not going to treat George like that, not while I'm here, not if you want me here. So you think you can threaten him if he goes on a march?" My father told me, "Yeah, you know, so I guess I'm fired." "Well, George, I can always find somebody to deliver." "Okay." But the butcher told, uh, the owner, "If he goes, I'm going." So it's hard to find a good butcher or a good deliveryman. My father, like I say, that store owner just did not know how much love the community on Anastasia had for my father. I didn't know that.

JM: Yeah. Tell me a little bit more about your mother.

PC: My mother, uh, again, like I said, she was extremely loving, extremely hard-working. It would sadden me to see, uh, some of the menial things that she was forced to do. But fortunately, like I say again, she wound up getting a decent job at Flagler Hospital. Again she was a very smart woman, but again, the system, uh, just used black folk even after, uh, the Civil Rights Act. I mean, they had her doing nurses' duty. She was training nurses on how to tend, uh, uh, newborns and this is something that you learnt from your mother, but she would train nurses on when a child, uh, had a colic or something else, my mother would give them home remedies that worked. So again, she worked, she, when they had, they put her in pediatrics, the pediatrics section, but refused to, uh, to pay her properly, and but they would get the credit for things that she would do. And she was a loving, particularly she loved babies. Newborns, yes, that was her passion. She'd sit there and rock them all night and the nurses would say, "Aw gee, I don't know how you sit there and rock that kid." "Well, I didn't want to hear him crying all night. So I'll sit here when I've got some time and rock him to sleep." But she was again, she was loved.

Uh, on the job, uh, they treated her unfairly. Uh, they fired her before her tenth year. This thing with trying to get some little pension out of these jobs back then was just, it was insulting. You're approaching the ten year. I wonder how much of a little pension you can get, uh, uh, something from a job. They would fire you. They'd find a reason to fire you, black or white. Uh, pensions were the scurry [note: perhaps meaning the thing that one chased endlessly with little success?] of, uh, uh, uh, life here when I was growing up. That's why I left Florida. Uh, in my readings, I knew wow, you get a pensionable job. At least you've got something that you can lean on when you get older. So that's what, uh, attracted me, uh, to the North and

fortunately, uh, I feel I was successful in, uh, landing some pretty decent jobs and, uh, acquiring a decent pension.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Thank you again. It's been a real pleasure. Yeah. Thank you so much.

RH: Don't end yet.

JM: Oh well, okay. [laughs] Dr. Hayling is asking for –

RH: He talked about –

JM: Yeah.

RH: All that he did in his youth.

JM: Yeah.

RH: This year alone, he has joined with a court and with the adult activities to Tallahassee with his wife and all to the clemency board and everything else, back to Tallahassee. And I spoke at the capitol in the rotunda on behalf, on, at the behest of a black caucus, legislative caucus.

JM: Right, right.

RH: I was there, and drove one of the vans or did you?

PC: Yes, mmm hmm.

JM: Yeah.

RH: And everything else like it.

JM: Dr. Hayling just wanted –

RH: He's leaving out –

JM: Ah, I know there's –

RH: Some of his things and what have you, but all of his contributions and attributes and everything else didn't stop with his youth.

JM: Yeah.

RH: He is now sixty.

PC: Sixty two.

RH: Sixty two.

JM: Mmm hmm.

RH: And he has carried forth all of those things that he mentioned in his youth. I think they're almost in his genes.

JM: Yeah. Well, well, the microphones probably couldn't pick that up, but, but Dr. Hayling especially wanted to call out Mr. Conway for a whole pattern of ongoing service, including participation in, in the 40th ACCORD [formally the '40th Anniversary to Commemorate the Civil Rights Demonstrations, Inc. (40th ACCORD),' a non-profit established 2003 to promote awareness of local movement history; placed thirty historical markers known as the ACCORD Freedom Trail Project] effort on the clemency issue over in Tallahassee at the, in the state capitol and, and, um, so obviously it's been, uh, the relationship has been a very mutually important one.

PC: And I'd like to add one thing.

JM: Please.

PC: One, one thing. I am totally, [1:15:00] totally amazed at this organization, the 40th ACCORD. I mean, they, Mrs. Gwendolyn Duncan [president of the 40th ACCORD organization] and her family took this task on by themselves some years ago –

RH: '03 [2003].

PC: '03?

RH: It started with the street naming ceremony.

PC: In '03.

RH: Yes.

PC: And has done so much, I would say has done everything to highlight the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement here in St. Augustine.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

PC: They're focused on this. And I, like I said again, my neighbor again, Mrs., uh, Barbara Vickers, I recall when she took on, uh, her lone task of trying to make a monument for the foot soldiers. So these, these folk by themselves have done these great works and like I said, you see the monuments and you see the, the dedications of the 40th ACCORD. But again, all I can do is praise and thank them. They, they again are the fu – future foot soldiers, uh, oh the Civil Rights Movement and, and making it known to the, the nation and the world.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

PC: I'd like to thank them.

JM: Thank you so much.

PC: Mmm hmm.

JM: Yeah. Thank you.

RH: All of the 501(c)3.

JM: Yeah.

RH: Non-profit organizations.

JM: Yeah. All the 15 –

RH: Nobody was on a paid staff.

JM: Yeah. Dr. Hayling is pointing out that, um, that work has all been done on a, essentially a volunteer basis, a 501(c)3 basis. That's right.

RH: Because we didn't have money.

JM: We're, we're going to stop there. Thank you all.

[Recording ends at 1:16:44.]

END OF INTERVIEW