

## Mike Summers

DINO ROBINSON: This is Dino Robinson. I'm interviewing Mike Summers. This is tape one of one. Today's date is seven -  
- July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1997, 6:30 pm.

MIKE SUMMERS: My name is Mike Summers. Most people know Mike, but the real full name is William Michael Summers. I was born in Evanston, Illinois, at the Community Hospital, which at one point had been Dr. Penn's House, I believe it is. Not the one that is there now as a Hill Arboretum, but actually a house -- rather large house -- in 1941, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1941.

DR: OK, so I assume you did grow up in Evanston, which is -- did you -- what is your parents' full name and where did they come from?

MS: My parents, one was born here in the city of Evanston. Her name was, at that point, Edna Irene White, later Edna Summers. My father was born in Kentucky and grew up most of his life in the northern states, that would be, like, North Dakota and Minnesota. Later moved to Evanston where he met and married my mother, and as a result of their several years of marriage, there are four children. I have three siblings -- two brothers and one sister -- and my

father is deceased. Died in 1996. And my mother is still very much alive and very active here in town.

DR: Give me a rundown of a brief history of both your mother and father when they -- starting with your father when he first came to Evanston. What was his job (inaudible).

MS: Well, my father came to Evanston in the -- that would have been in the '30s, and he actually grew up here. I mean he lived some of his younger life up in the northern area. I'm not exactly sure of what year he moved here, exactly how old he was, but he clearly based on his telling me of his schooling experiences here in Evanston was a student -- an elementary school student. He went to St. Nicholas Catholic School. My grandmother was doing work there, which helped pay the tuition, and plus she did other work here around town. And his father, my grandfather, who I never knew, I think did other kinds of work for the penal system. I'm not exactly sure of what he did, if he was a guard, or a transport person, or exactly what he was, but nonetheless he did work in the federal penal systems. Like I said, he was dead before I was born in 1941 so we never met. So my father moved here either in the '20s or in the '30s, I'm not exactly sure of when. But when he graduated from the high school he took a job -- after he did a short term in the service -- driving a taxicab in what was then a

fledgling company called Better Cab Company. And he was one of the original partners or members of that group that formed this particular company, which at that point was an all African American company, and they provided transportation services here on the north shore, mostly in Evanston obviously, but here along the north shore. After that timeframe, he went to Chicago and became one of the first -- matter of fact, he was among the first 10 -- bus drivers to drive for a bus company in Chicago then called Chicago Motor Coach Company. They and CTA were about the same size at that point in time. Chicago Motor Coach had the double decker buses, but they also had several bus lines, many of which still come up here to Evanston. They have the 151, which was not -- was then called the 51, etc., etc. But he worked for them for several years, and when CTA bought them out he decided he did not want to go work for CTA, so he started driving a truck, which he had done when he was in the service. And he was an over the road trucker for several years. When he retired as a teamster he then bought a couple of numbers, cab numbers, here in the city of Evanston, and resumed his career as a retiree driving a cab. So he was an owner-operator of -- oh, what did he have? He had three cabs at one point. And then he finally sold off two of the numbers and he just had

the one, and he retired and -- but just because of age. I mean, at some point you just get a little too old to still be out there doing those things. So he retired about 19-- I would say about 1993, '92, '93, in that general vicinity, from the cabs altogether, and lived on his pension, and just kind of enjoyed his [00:05:00] older years. He developed a mild case of diabetes, which gave him some circulation problems. They amputated a couple of his toes. He seemed to be doing all right. And in the midst of recovery he had a stroke. And a few months after that he passed from complications due to the stroke and the diabetes.

DR: Condolences.

MS: Thank you. Now my mother was born in Evanston. She was born -- as a matter of fact, she often likes to say she was born on Jackson Avenue, in the 1900 block on Jackson. She lived on that street until, oh, probably under 10 years of age. And then they moved into the house that's on Hartrey Avenue that was owned by our family until just a few years ago, at 1939 Hartrey Avenue. And when they moved over there, that was sort of like moving into the prairie or into the country. The streets weren't paved, and there weren't very many other houses over in that area period. It was sort of like moving into the middle of no man's

land. But my grandfather thought that was the best opportunity for him to acquire land, to build a home, and to take care of his children, which was -- I think it was seven. I have to kind of count back to be exactly sure, so pardon me as I just kind of count off their names. Let's see. There was Jacqueline, Marian, Edna, Richard, Robert, and one who died, that would be Rudolph, and I don't think I said Jacqueline, so that would be seven children, all of whom grew up in the house at 1939 Hartrey. Mom and my father moved to Chicago when I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade -- they and my two brothers and sister -- and I stayed here in Evanston and continued to stay at that same house, that 1939 Hartrey address, with my grandfather. She and my father lived in Chicago for approximately three and a half years at which point she moved back to Evanston and worked -- picked up the old job that she'd had. She had worked at food service at the high school, Evanston High School. She was also -- she was the manager of the cafeteria. The dietician planned and then she would execute through the staff the various meals. So she managed the cafeteria at Evanston High School, of which there were three of them, I believe. After several years of doing that, she went to work for Department of Children and Family Services, where she became a -- not a case worker, but a resource person,

where she had the job of placing people that may have had difficulty with their families. And I skipped something that was extremely important and that's prior to that, actually shortly after she took the job at the high school, she was offered a job at Evanston School District 65 as the first parent coordinator for the Head Start program. So she was very responsible and key in recruiting several people to bring their children into something that was new. The Head Start program, many of the young women whom she recruited at that point were women who were single mothers, you know, running single parent households -- many of them were not, but nonetheless that was her real debut, I suppose, into public life. I might also add that prior to that she had been a lifetime member of the PTA, which goes back to my days of being a student where she was active and she later became -- and still is, and then, of course, because she's still very much alive -- a lifetime member of PTA. So to put it in the perspective, she worked Head Start. She then, after several years of that, went to Department of Children and Family Services as a resource person, where she stayed until she retired. In the interim, she also was an alderman. She was a three-term alderman in the city of Evanston, and after a brief hiatus -- she took roughly a three-year timeframe off -- she then

ran for an office called the township office, where she then became the township supervisor, an office that she had for approximately five and a half years. She was elected to the second term and midway through the second term she just decided that I guess she was getting a little tired and decided to step out. Any other reasons beyond that I guess you'd have to discuss with her, but basically she just kind of got a little bit weary. But she has an impeccable reputation in the city of Evanston, did a fine job, and all there were certainly no clouds over her leaving. She left on her own terms. People tried to convince her to stay, but I think she just was a little bit tired at -- that's a lot of years of serving the public, and at that point I think she just wanted to sit home and do something different for a little while. So that gives you the background on my mother.

DR: Wasn't she also president of (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

MS: Oh gosh. I mean, she had so many offices. Mom was active with NAACP. She was president of the NAACP. She was -- I mean, if I start trying to list all the things, I would have a hard time recalling them. Suffice it to say that she had a high public profile. She was very active with [00:10:00] Church Women United. She was active with local

national politics. She was a member of the Black Elected Officials for the state of Illinois, which kept her in close contact with many of the people who still hold office in various statewide positions even to this day. She was a Cub Scout leader. She was a Girl Scout leader. I mean, you name it, I think, and she has been involved in it in some way, shape, or form. Very high profile. She was a trustee at her church, Ebenezer AME Church, a position that she held for several years. She was also a class leader at her church. The list is far longer and greater, I think, than I could sit here and recall. She would probably do a better job of telling you the things that she has done than I ever could do, but she was very, very high profile, very active: politics, children, community, welfare, just you name it. I mean, she was there and she was there not just as a gadfly, but she was there to try to make a difference, to try to be a spokesperson for those people who otherwise might not have had a person speaking out for them, to see to it that the community -- both her community and the areas that she represented and also the greater Evanston community and also the state of Illinois -- would benefit from some sensitivity to the things that needed to be done for not only poor people or people of color, people -- African American, and other groups. And as I mentioned

before, she was a resource person with the Department of Children and Family Services, where she dealt with a wide range of families from those who were impoverished to some who were very wealthy. So her range of experiences and her giving to the community has really just been her life in terms of the things that she has done. And my father, God bless him, God rest his soul, was always there to support her as best he knew how in the activities that she did. He was not necessarily a public kind of a person, but he was there in whatever way he could be to support, whether it was being the chauffeur, or being the shoulder to cry on when things maybe weren't going well, or the listening ear, or -- and sometimes as an advisor, and certainly just as a help mate when she was doing the various things that she had to do in terms of helping her canvas, or helping campaign for her when she ran for elections, and just kind of being there to be a strong voice of support for her. Certainly when people attempted to take her on he was there to watch her back, more or less.

DR: And on you now, let's talk about you. Let's take it step by step. What elementary school did you go to?

MS: OK, I can take you through my schooling, starting from actually prior to that. Evanston now has a childcare center that is up on Asbury and Emerson. It's one of the

large ones in the city. It started actually in the basement of First Church of God, which is now called First Church of God Christian Life Center, and it was there that I started daycare. It was an all black nursery school at that point, which later moved over and is now a citywide daycare. And sort of interesting to note that that's really where my schooling started if we dealt with something that was formal. Obviously I learned to read and those kind of things at home with my family. But from there I went to Foster School, which is now the Family Focus Our Place building, but was called Foster School at that point in time. And it was there that I attended from kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. For junior high, or 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade as we had it at that point, I went to Haven. For my high school, or the freshmen through senior years, or the 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I attended Evanston Township High School. After graduating from Evanston Township High School I went to the University of Illinois in Champaign, Illinois, where I played football for my years down there. And as a matter of fact, one of the real highlights in terms of sports was my last year there we actually won the Big Ten Championship and went on to the Rose Bowl, where we also won out there. So that's kind of a highlight there. At Evanston High School, played on football teams that were

very bad, and I played on some that were very good. Played on one that won the championship, and played on one that came in second, and played on a couple more that were sort of middle of the road. That covers the years of my schooling.

DR: What was your experience like at Foster?

MS: Foster at that point was an all-black school. There may or may not have been one or two white students there, but if so I truly don't remember. I won't say there weren't any, I just don't remember any being there. Foster as a training ground was excellent. We had teachers there -- and I sometimes was teased and still am, I suppose, [00:15:00] even to this day, about the way in which I talk. And that's because we had teachers there who said, "If you're going to be in this world, you're going to have to learn to speak the King's English in the way that it is meant to be spoken." So it was a school where they taught us the basics on how to speak, how to carry ourselves, and of course we came in as prepared as any other group would be prepared when we went to Haven, where for the first time we were then in a totally integrated setting, and the kids from Foster could compete just as well as anyone else academically at that point. And things happened at Haven that weren't always very positive, I hate to say it, but

Evanston when I was growing up was a very racist city. It had set neighborhoods where black families lives, neighborhoods where Polish families lived, neighborhoods where the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants lived, and it was just a very segregated city. There's no other -- it was red line, there were certain jobs you couldn't get. Banking, if you chose to save at a bank you could, but the difficulty in getting a loan was astronomical no matter how much money you might have had in the bank. So that experience carried over to Haven in that it was one of the first times in my life that I really and truly encountered genuine racism in its rawest form, both from the student population -- although not nearly as much from the student population as from the teaching and administrative staff, who made no bones about the fact that they favored highly the kids -- the white kids from north Evanston, which is where Haven was, and that while they would teach us, that many of them had utter disdain for us up to and including calling us sometimes some pretty ugly names. Not necessarily racial names, they wouldn't do that, but really sort of some ugly names. There was inequity in terms of the way that they treated students in terms of grading. As a classical example, and I always kind of smile at this, I did a project when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, a science project,

and what it was doesn't really matter, but it was pretty extensive. It took a long time to do it. It was like a half-year or semester project that all of us had to do a project of some type. And when I completed it and turned it in, and of course we had to display all of our projects, I noticed that the highest grade in our class was mine, which was a B. And that struck me as odd, because I looked at some of the other projects and I didn't see anything that looked any better. Well, I took that same project to the high school the following year, because we had to take science at that level, and it was one of the highest graded when I got to the high school. I got an A on that same pro-- nothing about it changed except I took Haven's name off of the project. Which was another indicator to me that not only were we treated badly in terms of how we might have been talked to or treated, but we also didn't get a very fair shake academically.

DR: When you continue on to Evanston Township High School was there a further separation or (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

MS: Well, Evanston High School --

DR: -- (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) type of attitude? Or was it a little bit different or --

MS: Oh no, Evanston High School had its situations too. We were a very small part of the Evanston population then. I don't know what we would have been, maybe 5%, 10% at the max of the total school population when I attended -- when I say "we" that'd be people who are African Americans, blacks, Negroes. But, yeah, there was a separation -- see, that's where you got separated in ways you didn't always know. I was on what they call a college preparatory track. Many of my friends got put in very basic programs, which meant they took basic English, they took basic math, they took basic language. When I went in, I took -- well, they had a program then called combined studies, but had I not taken that I would've taken a regular English class, I would've taken a regular social studies class, and I started off with the geometry, the algebra, trigonometry kind of a track, where -- as I said before -- many of my friends were put in basic science or basic math. So to that extent were we separated? Yes. The problem was subtly, because we weren't always aware. In terms of sports, yeah, we had a lot of incidents that would occur. At that point in the 11 or 12 homerooms that they had at Evanston High School each homeroom would elect a homecoming queen. There was during my time there not a black homecoming queen that was elected. They were always white.

On game day the prior to homecoming, they used to always have a rally at the high school, and for that rally every African American that would have been in the starting lineup was automatically just -- it got to be kind of a joke among us -- demoted to the second team so that when it was time to announce the homecoming queens, they made sure that each one of those white girls was escorted down the ramp -- [00:20:00] because they were always escorted by one of the football players -- by a white athlete. And my junior year in high school all of us banded -- when I say "us" all of the black guys, or African Americans, or Negroes -- banded together, and met at a guy's house, and just said, no, we're not going to go. And one of the coaches -- and matter of fact he was the only black person working in the high school, and I respect him greatly because of what he had to go through and also just because of who he is. He's Dr. Charles Thomas, now a retired school superintendent, at that point he was a social studies teacher, graduate of University of Wisconsin, and also one of the associate coaches. And because he was born and raised in Evanston he kind of knew the community. Wind drifted to him, and he came over and basically talked to us, and basically just said, "Hey, this isn't the right way to go about it, guys." You know, "We'll find another way

to approach this." Now I understand that he had to say it that way, and I'm sure he truly believed that that wasn't the right way. I happen to believe we got their attention and it was the last year that anything like that happened, where we would get demoted for that one particular game so that the whites could walk with the white homecoming queens. And I think it raised some consciousness. My last year at Evanston High School they took all of the African American students, we came in, started the day, they took every one of us and said go down to -- well, there's a theater and a place called the little theater, at that point they'd built a bigger auditorium, but the little theater, oh, I don't remember how many students it would hold, but not very many, maybe a couple hundred at the most. But all of us could fit in. That is from freshmen all the way through seniors. Every one of us that attended could fit in that small theater. And at that point the high school had probably close to 4,000 students. And they told us that we needed to stop being troublemakers. Now, to understand the foolishness of this is to go back to understand that there were a few guys who had begun dating white girls. Matter of fact, most of the girls they were dating were probably Jewish, but still they were dating white girls. And there weren't that matter, but there were

a few. And the white boys at Evanston High School took offense at that. So since we lived sort of in an enclosed community, some of the white boys took to riding through our community and trying to harass black guys, and certainly those who were dating white girls. Well, you know, while Martin Luther King may have been nonviolent, if you came in to harass us we certainly were not going to take that. We would do whatever we needed to do. I mean, no gang thing, nobody had guns and knives, that kind of thing, but you weren't going to come in our community in your car hollering racial epithets out of windows or trying to track down one or two guys and give them -- that just wasn't going to be allowed. Well, as a result of that, that meeting that was held in the little theater to tell us to stop causing trouble was fascinating to me, because we didn't go in anybody's neighborhood and cause any problems. As a matter of fact, if you were riding around with a white girl in certain communities, you might've gotten stopped by the police and perhaps even arrested. So therefore it was almost comedic. But I think the point I make in all of this is, yeah, there was racism at Evanston High School. Yes, there could be -- there was some academic separation, but it wasn't so flagrant that we couldn't get through, that we couldn't compete academically, that we couldn't

compete athletically, that we couldn't have some opportunity to do the things that needed to be done to get through and to be able to go on to college or wherever else people chose to go at that point in time.

DR: I know part of (inaudible) Township is swimming.  
(inaudible)

MS: The swimming pool was completed when I think I was a junior. Prior to that, no, they did not have swimming that I knew of, and when I was growing up there were two YMCAs here in Evanston. One was on Emerson Street, which was predominantly -- it was all black. And there was one on Grove Street, called the Grove Street YMCA -- so it was the Emerson Street Y and the Grove Street Y. The Grove Street Y was totally white. They did not allow blacks to join. They did not allow blacks to stay in the rooms that they had, as most YMCAs would have, like, a couple rooms that they would rent out. You could go in the building if you went for a special event, like they would have a big fundraising pancake day, or certain kind of talent shows they would do. If you bought a ticket you could go in, but you could not join. And they even had the audacity -- they had a restaurant in the YMCA called the Plantation Room. Now, I don't have to tell you what plantation stood for, OK, or the kind of pictures that they had on the wall. So

that was where the swimming pool was. So, no, we didn't go there to take swimming. [00:25:00] And that also limited - - that meant African Americans an opportunity to be on the swimming team, because since there was no pool at the school you couldn't very well go and go to the Evanston YMCA and join the swim team, and they'd practice there, and of course you couldn't practice separately at the Emerson Street Y, so in effect there were no African Americans on the swim team during those first couple of years.

(inaudible) the pool, the Olympic-size pool and the learners pool was completed when I was a junior, so at that point that was a part of the curriculum, and, yes, I did have to as a senior, I think it was, take swimming.

DR: When you went on to college, let's say the first year after college, did any views that you knew or did you become aware of a lot more opinions to inform growing up in other state, had more freedom to think about in college?

MS: I think I probably had the same kind of blinders that a lot of people have on. You know, sometimes I look at old films of the segregated south and I say, "Boy, how did people put up with that?" But then I look at Evanston and I say, "How did we put up with living in basements, and attics, and other places?" I mean, Evanston was not that expensive to live in at that point in time, and we had huge apartments

that were down in South Evanston with maybe one or two rather elderly couples living in these large apartments. They were living at very nominal rates at that point in time. And we couldn't get in. But yet we were probably paying the same amount of rent to live in somebody's basement, somebody's attic, or even in some cases somebody's front porch. I mean, it was really a hodgepodge of -- a lot of which was illegal housing, to tell you the truth. In these days and times you couldn't deal with that. So my time at the University of Illinois I think was probably spent somewhat with blinders on, because it was just sort of the way things were, and I guess it's because those were the way things were, it didn't occur to me how wrong some of it was. Some of the things that were wrong, yes, caught my eye, and, yeah, some of them angered me. As a matter of fact, a few years after I graduated from the University of Illinois I've a picture here of a march that had left from the front of one of the churches and carrying the banner "make us an all-American city," which was talking about marching for open housing. I was one of the people carrying the banner along with an old friend of mine, who's now dead, Owen Thomas, and Roosevelt Alexander, who became a very prominent attorney here in town. As a matter of fact, I'll show you the picture. It's in the den

area out there. So, yeah, we had some awareness that some things weren't right. The banking, we didn't know the term red lining, we just knew it was something wrong with the banking arrangement. It was something wrong with the fact we weren't working in the department stores, of which Evanston had several, because there weren't the big shopping centers as we know them now. So Evanston was a shopping hub. So we had a Marshall Field's. We had a [Lipman's?], a Baskin's, a Ward's, a Sears, a big department store then called Rothschild's, and another one called Lord's, bookstores called Chandlers, (inaudible), so we do have several large stores. And except for (inaudible) we really didn't move very much in any of those stores, or if we did we were stockers, or porters, or cleanup kind of people, delivery guys, we weren't on the sales floors. We weren't getting the higher profile, higher paying jobs. We were sort of at the low end. So we worked at Woolworths and the lunch counters, Kresges, [Meisners?], those places. But in terms of the more upscale stores, we didn't have jobs in those stores. So, yeah, I had some awareness, but I think the biggest jolt came to me when I graduated from the University of Illinois and I got married. Well, actually I was married as a senior in high school -- in college, I'm sorry. To a young

lady that was also a University of Illinois graduate and she was born in the south, lived most of her life -- that's not really true either. Actually she lived most of her life to that point in the south. She moved to the Chicago area when she was, like, a freshman in high school. So that would've been, what, like, eight years -- four years of high school, four years of college. But I remember bragging to her how great the city was that I was born in, and after we came up here we looked around for an apartment. I found several that I liked. Most of them were in south Evanston, which is now in that same area it's mostly -- well, it's mixed. I think you have a little bit of everything there now, but at that point I really wasn't paying attention. I just looked at the signs, found an apartment, and went to a local realtor, who is very much in business still to this day, and after going into the building with my wife, and being basically ignored for a long time as we were sitting sort of in, like, a little waiting room area, finally a man came out from a side office, a back office -- not a receptionist, a number of other people were sitting up front, but clearly probably a manager of some kind. Very pristine sort of a man. And he walked up, and sort of drew in his breath, and sort of stood very straight in his very pristine manner, [00:30:00]

and asked if there was something that he could do for us, or what we wanted, or didn't -- it was nothing along the line of may I help you, let's put it like that. It was kind of brusque, but acceptable based on the manner. I just kind of figured that's just sort of the way he was, a very pristine kind of a person. And when we told him that we had found an apartment in one of the buildings that his firm managed, and that we wanted to put in an application, he stepped back -- he actually jumped back, not so much stepped. He actually jumped back like a step, almost as if I had thrown something on the ground that had blown up and had suddenly startled him. He jumped back, he drew in his breath, and he said, "Why no. We don't rent to coloreds." Now if that had happened maybe a day later I would've dealt with it in a totally different way. But because I had been bragging to my wife, who was from the south, how wonderful Evanston was, and how they had had to put up with the segregated housing, and colored-only drinking fountains, and whatever, but when I moved to my great, integrated city that when he stepped back and said that I felt as if every eye in the room was looking at me. The room was almost silent at that point. You have to recognize it was a pretty good size real estate office with several desk people working at them. It was like silence, all of them

looking down at the desk, all of the white real estate agents and receptionists looking at the desk. And the only person looking directly at me is this man with his hands sort of up to his heart with this shocked look like the audacity of me to come into this place, like what's wrong with you? And I was so embarrassed at that moment that all I could do was just leave. It's one of those few things in life that I really wish could be replayed, because quite frankly I probably would've owned several of that company's buildings by now. It would not have been a violent reaction, it would've been a financial reaction. Since you make the scales uneven, and the only way we could've made it even was financially I would've made you pay. Not that I'm lawsuit happy, because I think that some of the lawsuits that people come up with today are both frivolous and wrong, but I think there are some cases where you hurt a person most by hurting them in the spot that they most respect. And in that case, it would've been in their wallet. It's history now. I'm not bitter about it. And the owner of the real estate -- I never really got to know that person very well, but certainly the children that have taken over the agency from that point forward and I, we've become very, very good friends. And the children that run the agency now have been very generous in terms of causes

in the African American -- and in general, in the community period. They're very philanthropic and, to the extent that they could, I think they have shown their good will and as a result of that I cannot harbor any hard feelings toward them in any way, shape, or form. But, yes, I was made very much aware at that point. And then I looked at all the things about Evanston -- its housing, and its jobs, and everything -- and I moved out of Chicago and I did not move back for approximately 18 years. I wouldn't even come to Evanston too much to visit after that.

DR: What year was that?

MS: That was 1965, because we lived in Champaign for a brief while. We both taught, as a matter of fact, in Champaign before moving back to Evanston. When I say "we both," that would've been my wife and I. So I didn't come right after graduation. I did live in Champaign.

DR: Did you serve in the armed forces at all?

MS: No I didn't. I don't say that with either pride or shame, it just -- when I was a student, that was a deferment. I didn't apply, but it just was automatic. That was the way it was done. Then when I graduated, I was married. That was, again, another deferment. And I taught school in Champaign, which was still another deferment. And then when I moved back to Evanston, shortly after I moved back,

my wife was pregnant, so we had our first child. So that was strike one, strike two, strike three. So I managed to miss Vietnam. But I have to say in all candor that I probably, had I not been married, I probably after graduation would've gone to the service, because I had seriously contemplated it. And at one point had even joined up with a group called the Platoon Leaders for the Marine Corps, which is like an ROTC program. You go to summer camp during the course of the summer months, and then continue to attend school during the school year. At the end of your time of graduation you take your one last cruise and basic training, and then you become a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps at that point. And the reason that I didn't stay with that is -- well, many reasons. I suppose the main one being that something very bizarre happened with [00:35:00] the Marine Corps while I was a student -- not with me, but with another group -- where a sergeant actually marched a group of people out into a swamp in the dead of the night. He came in drunk, decided he was going to get them all up, marched them into the swamp, several of them died. He put them in full battle pack, they drowned, some got bitten by snakes, and all different kind of things happened. Several of them did die as a result of that march, either from drowning or

snake bite. And that kind of soured me on the Marine Corps at that point. So I probably would have gone into a training program had I not been married with either the Air Force or possibly the Army. Wasn't terribly interested in the Navy, plus I don't swim, so that would not have been (laughter) a good move. But either the Air Force or the Army. I probably would've tried to have gotten into one of their schools, OTS schools, Officer Training Schools. And I was a college graduate, and I'm sure I would've been accepted and would've gone the same route, but I didn't want to deal with the Marines. I thought now this was -- that was insanity.

DR: Looking back on your school career, what was your first job or your first part-time job?

MS: Oh goodness. My first jobs, aside from those that were just sort of pickup jobs helping out, well, actually the first job I had was probably when we were in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. There weren't quite so many landscaping services around at that point, so a friend of mine and I actually formed a little company. And we charged hourly rates, and we went around, and we did that. When I was a freshman in high school -- plus I also worked for -- as a delivery person for the *Evanston Review*. That was when they were then delivered to your door. And I used to help my uncle

out from time to time who had a morning paper route, but I won't really count that so much because that wasn't really mine. When I was a freshman in high school, that summer between 8<sup>th</sup> grade and freshmen year in high school, I actually falsified my age. I was a pretty tall kid at that point -- I was about 5' 10" -- a fairly good size kid. I guess probably then I may have weighed about 160, 170 pounds. So that was at least as big as most men. And I falsified my age and got a job actually that summer doing construction. And worked on a construction crew all that summer hauling those 14- and 18-foot forms, and hauling bricks, and pushing mortar, and all that stuff. After that I continued to deliver the paper, but because I played sports I couldn't really do too many other things. And of course we kept up our little landscaping business, so I kept with it through high school and actually several years after I graduated from college calls would still come to the house with people looking to see if we were still in the business, but of course we weren't at that point. But those were my first. Next years I worked out at the North Shore District Mosquito Abatement during the summer months, and on highway road gangs for the state of Illinois, etc., during the course of the summer months. Part-time jobs, like I said. We continued our landscaping business. I

continued to deliver the *Review*, and any other kind of little odd jobs that we might be able to pick up -- or I might be able to pick up along the way. And I continued that until I went to college. When I went to college then every summer I usually would get some kind of a construction job. And you could not work -- if you were on a football -- I hate to use the term scholarship, but that's how people relate to it so I'll call it a scholarship -- it wasn't because I was a scholar, it was because I was a football player -- but you could not work. If you worked at all during the course of the school year, if you made a dollar, that was a dollar that had to come off of your grant and they -- so they discouraged that. And I'm certainly hopeful that in the coming years that college athletes will receive a better shake. Certainly schools make millions on the labor that -- and it is labor. It's not fun and it's a job. And they really treat these youth unfairly. Sometimes I read about kids from some of the schools getting caught up in point shaving, or read about some of them breaking in and stealing, and I find myself thinking if you had your room, board, books, tuition and no money to go out and buy a pizza, or a hamburger, or to go to a movie, yeah, sure you're getting your meals, but you have no money. And I'm not condoning crime by any

means, but there's a little of me that understands that frustration when you're around other people who have either money or jobs and you can't even go out and get a job -- I mean, you can't even say, "Well, hey, it's not my season. Can I work at a hamburger joint?" Nothing. So there really needs to be some more equity on that. And certainly when you're recruiting very poor youth, who many times have come up in situations where taking something is not a big deal. They may not have ever taken anything, but [00:40:00] that's just a very wrong kind of a situation. So I could not have a job during the school year. I could only work during the summer months.

DR: When you graduated from college, your first profession was as a teacher?

MS: I taught down in Champaign.

DR: What grade did you teach?

MS: I taught junior high (inaudible) mentally handicapped it was called then, or EMH. Now I guess today the appropriate term is mentally challenged, I think. Sometimes I get -- I mean, I understand sensitivity, but I sometimes am rather amused by the terms. I was listening to somebody yesterday talking about people that were using drugs, and he started to use the term people who are substance abusers. He said, "When I was coming along, they called them drug addicts."

And I like that term. They're drug addicts. (laughter)  
Quit trying to make everything politically acceptable." So  
he said, "I want it to be an ugly term, down and ugly," he  
said. But be that as it may, so mentally challenged I  
guess we would call them today.

DR: And you taught down there for about how many years?

MS: I was down in Champaign for a little over a year and then  
we came back up here.

DR: When you came back up to Evanston, did you continue to  
teach?

MS: No, when I came back up to Evanston at that point my wife  
was pregnant, so we had gotten used to double income, so I  
had to find some more income. At that point the teaching  
salary was -- what was it? Well, between the two of us we  
made \$10,000 a year. I made a little more than she did,  
because I taught EMH. I think I made \$200 more a year than  
she made, and so my salary was, like, \$5,200 and I think  
hers was \$5,000 a year. So, no, I went to work for a local  
food -- well, it's not local actually it's a national food  
chain. Got into a management training program with them,  
which did indeed pay me the salary that actually doubled my  
teaching salary. And stayed with them for five years and I  
have to say it was Jewel Food Stores. They were at that  
point trying to get black managers, and so therefore they

were actively recruiting, and I was real proud of my years with Jewel. We did well and they were a company that really took a lot of time to teach, and I was glad for the experiences that I had there in terms of learning. I left Jewel and decided maybe I would go back to teaching. But after six months of teaching -- because I left Jewel, like, right after the holiday season, I stayed with them until the Christmas rush was over, which I thought was only fair, and I went back to teaching in Chicago Public Schools, and I taught for six months, and seriously contemplated staying with it. But I got recruited by a book publishing company, a textbook publishing company, so I went to work for them. And in many ways that was a good move. The company no longer publishes textbooks, but they are probably the largest publishing company in the world; it's a company called Random House -- Bennett Cerf's old company, Dr. Seuss, and all of those. But Random House -- and Toni Morrison, I think, writes to Random House. Maybe even Maya Angelou, I'd have to check to see who her publisher is, but Random is a good company. I worked for them in their textbook division for five years. And after doing that went to work for a supplier, a food supplier, Keebler Company, and was in management with them for several years prior to going into business for myself. I opened up a

company called Summers Limousine Service, and also during that same timeframe I was an alderman in the city of Evanston. I had been elected alderman. As an alderman I had moved back obviously at that point. So there's a two-term alderman and -- I guess life changes. There had been a little call I suppose that I'd had all my life that I just call little, because I'd refused to listen to it. But, oh, a few years back I realized it was more than just a little call, that that was really where I was destined to be. So I've since gotten into full time ministry, and I am a licensed minister with the Church of God out of Anderson, Indiana. That's not where the church I work is, but a licensed minister out of Church of God in Anderson, Indiana, should be receiving ordination sometime within the next six months to a year. That should be full ordination. The licensing gives me pretty much the same privileges that an ordained minister would have, the difference being that my license -- well, it's all over the state, anywhere in the state of Illinois. Ordination means anywhere in the world, that that's recognized by the Church of God, which is a worldwide Church of God. OK? So that is where I will be, [00:45:00] lord willing, the rest of my life.

DR: Now going back again, as you were growing up, what did you do for fun to pass time or hanging out with friends?

MS: I think that probably was a big thing, just hanging with a few of my friends. You know, that was what we did. I played sports, so you have to remember that occupied a lot of my time. I played sports and I worked. I worked a full-time job during the summer months, always had a part-time job during my high school years, and I liked to read. There weren't so many book clubs around then. Now I'd kind of wished some of the clubs that were -- that are around now had been around then, because had they been around I probably would have been one of those who would've joined, you know, one of the discussion groups that gets together once a month to discuss whatever book that they might have been reading at that point in time. So the bulk of my recreation was hanging with my buddies most of whom were good guys. And I say that very -- you know, it doesn't mean the others were bad guys, because they weren't, but I spent -- many of them were athletes, like myself, through high school. Fairly decent students. Not nerdy by any stretch of the imagination, just guys that were, oh, good guys. We enjoyed each other's company, so we spent a lot of time with each other. We did our share of partying and probably did our share of drinking.

DR: What about the party scene? It was, like, at somebody's house?

MS: Mostly house parties, yeah, there weren't really --

DR: (inaudible)

MS: Oh, no, just parties. You know, music, dance, some people had food, some didn't. We used to sneak and have our little drink every now and then. We weren't supposed to, but we did. And so, you know, every now and then some of us would get a little out the box, but basically no big fight. I mean, there weren't any problems or anything like that, we just enjoyed, I suppose, (inaudible) that youth would have.

FEMALE: How are you?

MS: Ssh. You're on the tape. Yeah, that's OK. OK, so that's what we did. So and we worked. I mean, most were responsible guys. You know, I guess, we worked. But my closest, closest friends, all of them have really done well with their lives. I mean, from being attorneys and PhDs, to guys that run their own businesses, to entrepreneurs, you name it. They've run the gamut, but they're really very successful guys. I'm very proud that we had those associations and we still have even to this day.

DR: What church did you belong to?

MS: Well, I do belong right now to the Church of God. The name of our church, our congregation, is First Church of God Christian Life Center right here in the city of Evanston.

As a matter of fact, we just opened a new church. We were in the old building that I remember I mentioned a long time back that the daycare center actually started there. That was a small church at that point, but has since grown under the pastorate of Pastor Curry into a rather substantial congregation, so we just -- lord blessed us, and we were able to build on the same site, having acquired a little extra land next to the building, a bigger church that now in the sanctuary will seat about 1,200 to 1,300 people. In my youth, I grew up at Ebenezer AME. I was actually baptized -- that's African Methodist Episcopal. I was actually baptized there as a child and grew up there. Left, as I said, I left this area when I graduated from college, and that experience I had with the realtor, and lived in Chicago. During those years I probably ignored church. I would go once in a while with my wife, but basically church just wasn't something that I did. So I came back to Evanston and when I came back in the late '70s I re-upped with Ebenezer and began to be more actively involved in their teaching and I hate to say the word like leadership, somehow that sounds kind of pompous, but let's just say one of the people that volunteered to do whatever needed to be done around the church. And I also taught a men's bible study group every Sunday. And, like I said, it

was from there that I realized that the pull in my life was very strong. As a matter of fact, at that point I was preparing to attend Garrett Theological Seminary. And then some things happened there and I realized that I was probably being drawn someplace else. So that was where I moved and went to First Church.

DR: When you got back in Evanston -- you were settled in Evanston again, you started to get involved in organizations --

MS: When I came back to Evanston, I didn't come to stay. Actually [00:50:00] I came -- the company that I work for was planning to open up a -- it was a national company, but there were three states in the United States where they had not been licensed to do business: Washington, Oregon, and California. And they were on the verge of finally being licensed to do business in those three states, so as a result of that I was planning to be a part of that group that would be transferred out there, because they were going to need to have management people out there to do hiring, and teaching, and training, etc. So we didn't come to stay. I came and there were just a lot of things I suppose about which I was really very angry. I don't know too many African American males in my age group who weren't angry about a lot of things, from inequity of treatment,

you name it. And my mother, who at that point was nearing the end of her third term as an alderman, knew she didn't want to run again and suggested that there was a creative and positive outlet for that anger, and that's get involved locally and try to rectify some of the wrongs here in the community. So at that point I looked at that. And by then I'd also gotten involved with a community organization called ECDC, Evanston Community Development Corporation. I'd gotten involved with them and was on their board. I'd also gotten involved with Family Focus, so I was on their board. I'd begun to pay my life membership to the NAACP. I was also active with a -- well, it's a -- as a graduate group it's a little bit different, but it's a fraternity that I was in as an undergrad, Kappa Alpha Psi. And so I got involved with our graduate chapter or our alumni chapter that's here in Evanston, which did some things along the line of fundraising for scholarships, and just the bonding that a group of men who had a common experience of being in the fraternity from their various universities. So I was very actively involved with them. So that, among other just kind of ad hoc kinds of things that I became a part of, were the things that I was doing. And whenever I saw things that didn't look right I would get involved. If I saw issues of mistreatment of youth, I would get

involved. If I saw issues of what I thought was police brutality I would get involved. Wherever I thought I saw injustice, I tried to get involved. So it was from there that the sort of natural movement into elected politics sort of flowed.

DR: What was your experience as alderman?

MS: It was, as Charles Dickens wrote in his book, the best of times and the worst of times. (laughter)

DR: What year was that?

MS: Oh gosh, I can't even recall. I'd have to think back. In the early '80s. It was eight years in the early '80s, late '70s, early '80s. But it was a -- there were a lot of things that needed to be done, and I really felt that the biggest thing that I needed to do was to work hard to represent our community, to get the services that we were not getting, to get some of the capital improvements that we weren't getting, and to fight for some fairness. One of the things that the city decided to do was to privatize many things, and one of the things they were going to privatize was trash collection and recycling, which had not come into being, but was on the horizon. And that was a very personal fight for me, because the bulk of the sanitation workers were black. And I felt they needed to be protected, and I also felt that we needed to provide as

a city the services that people can't provide for themselves. That would be police, fire, garbage. Those are good basic services that people can't provide for themselves. I didn't want us to become some of the other outlying communities where you're suddenly looking up one day and maybe you're paying a contract carrier as opposed to the city providing the service at all, even though initially the city would've done it. Maybe that was a down line goal for those who were looking at it saying that, oh, if we privatize it we'll save money. And I thought, no, yeah, we may save money, but no we're not going to just take these families who depend on these jobs for support and just kick them to the curb. We have a responsibility. I mean, the city, yes, should provide good government kinds of things, but we should also recognize the fact that we're also an employer, and as such let's show some sensitivity here. That was a real difficult fight the Research Park issued, which unfortunately created a kind of schism in the council that took a small group that was a sort of a minority group, and they just decided they would vote as a block on everything. It didn't matter what it was, they would just vote as a block, and that became just a very negative experience as far as I was concerned. But it was constant fight, and I fought for those things that I felt

our community needed. Air conditioning for (inaudible), [00:55:00] improvements to the streets, improvement to the sidewalks that the people couldn't pay for. There's a long list of things. And to that end I made sure that I stayed on the committee that dealt with that, called Administration of Public Works, so that I could have my fingers in whatever kind of things. Because Evanston is an entitlement city based on its poverty population, and as such, since the bulk of that was in the community that I represented, I wanted to be real sure that those entitlement dollars went to that community. And if any was left over to go someplace else, fine. Matter of fact, we'd even negotiated for a fire station that was to originally have been built over here on a testing lane property, and had it all in place, and after I left office my predecessor -- or the person who followed me unfortunately got caught up I think in some negative rhetoric more toward me than toward -- than recognition of what would've been good for the community, and went to the Sanitary District and said, "Oh, we don't need a fire station." Well, when she realized the error of her ways it was too late, because MSD didn't necessarily want the city to build anything on that land. They wanted to leave it as open space anyway, so -- but I'm glad to see that now finally several years after

I'm out of office there finally is a station. Now you say what's the significance of a fire station? Significance is there were more fire and more EMS -- that's the emergency medical service calls -- in the west side of Evanston that I represented than there was in any other part of Evanston, and it was the furthest distance and the longest response time from any fire station that was in the city of Evanston. And that was one of the fights and basically we had won. But, like I said, the person that followed me didn't understand the significance and got caught up in some other peoples' rhetoric. But that's life. Life goes on. I mean, I'm not angry about that in any way, shape, or form. But you asked what happened, these are some of the just many things that went on. So my issues were fairness, employment, proper treatment of African Americans in the workplace, making sure that contracts that were let out to do work around the city was done in a way so that minorities had a right -- had the opportunity not only to bid, but also benefit in some way, shape, or form from the dollars that the city was spending. That was a lot of what I did. And it wasn't always easy.

DR: So I've only got two more questions. We'll start with what do you like about what you see being back in Evanston again? What (inaudible) --

MS: What do I like about Evanston? Evanston's a pretty city. It really is. I like the trees. I like the ambiance. I like the fact that the places that I stop to eat and shop, I know the people and they know me. So there's a comfort zone there in being able to deal with what I term friends. I like the sense of safety in Evanston. Having lived in Chicago for 18 years, I always was sure that every door was locked and -- well, Chicago is not a wildly dangerous place, I was always aware I was in a big city where you had to be a little more cautious. Here I've done dumb things like actually leave my wallet on the hood of my car, which is parked in my driveway. I didn't realize it was there, got up in the morning looking for it, and realized I must've left it in the car, went out, and there it was still sitting on the hood of my car with all of the money and credit cards, etc., still in tact. That sense of community. Sometimes that can be a little stifling, people just sort of being right here. You know most -- I don't want to say you know everybody, nobody knows everybody, but you know enough people and enough people know you that that can be good, that can be very friendly. But sometimes there's a sense of a need for a little bit of privacy and that's sometimes kind of hard to attain in a city where so many people know you. But so it has its up sides and it

has its down sides to that extent. I like the fact that the city tries to solve its problems. Still has racism, it still has areas that realtors as recently as, what, six or seven years ago had to pay a fine for steering people away from -- people of color steered to one area, people that were white steered to another. The realtors had to pay a fine based on that. They're sued by the Evanston Human Relations Commission, which is a city agency under the direction of my friend, Owen Thomas. As a matter of fact, at that point -- but they tested and found that they were still doing that. But, as I city, it does try. It has service clubs that have always been active -- when I say service clubs, clubs like the Rotary, clubs like Kiwanis, clubs like the Lions -- that try. And I don't know that you could really ask much more than that of a city is that it tries to solve its problems, that it tries to find a way to have diversity be real as opposed to having it be drive by diversity. And we got a ways to go, but we've come a long way from where we were. And because I remember where we were [01:00:00] and I see where we are, I have a real sense of positive hope. We've got some gang issues that we've -- that we're going to have to deal with, but while I think the greater society is going to have to deal with that, we as a community are going to have to look long and

hard at who raises our children. And if our children are in gangs, then what are we as parents and older adults doing to change that climate where they feel that's the only avenue that they have, that that's the only place they can find love and affection, and that that's going to be their economic system. Somehow we have to find a way to bring that to closure. And I think we will. We have issues with the schools. I wish there were a neighborhood school in west Evanston. I'm terribly sorry to see the busing. But it exists and somehow we're going to have to find a way to challenge all the children to achieve all that they can, as opposed to having something that begins to border on segregated systems and integrated schools. Somehow we've got to find a way to solve that, but as I said before, that's what I like about Evanston, the fact that I think we're in a city where people are sensitive enough and caring enough to want to solve those problems.

DR: I'm going to ask one more question. I kind of know what the answer is: who influenced you in your life?

MS: My greatest influence? Golly. I'd have to say probably my mother. But I would also have to say that, gosh, there's so many people that mentored me. My grandfather was a strong presence in my life. I lived with him all through high school, but we lived in his house when I was growing

up. My father, who I didn't recognize as being a person who had so imprinted me until he passed last year and I began to recognize how very much like him I am, which startled me. I didn't think we were at all alike. My football coaches at the high school, who really cared and were instrumental in my being able to be offered football scholarships to schools literally all over the country. But probably the strongest singular influence I'd have to say would have been my mother.

DR: Well, thank you very much for your time.

MS: It was a pleasure.

DR: And if I have any other questions can I still call on you?

MS: You certainly may.

DR: Great.

END OF AUDIO FILE