

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY  
JAMES BRANCH CABELL LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: TWENTIETH CENTURY RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

NARRATOR: DR. FRANCIS M. FOSTER, SR.

INTERVIEWER: KATHRYN COLWELL HILL

Place:	Cabell Room	No. of CDs: 2
	James Branch Cabell Library	No. of tracks: 3
	Virginia Commonwealth University	Length of interview: 125 minutes
Date:	January 20, 2006	Interview: 1 of 5

---

Counter Index   Topic of Discussion

[CD 1 of 2, First Interview 1/20/06]

0:00:18	Introductions
0:04:36	Elementary Education: Monroe School and Elba School
0:11:18	Elementary School: Learning to dial a telephone
0:15:00	Elementary School: New books for Elba students
0:18:34	Elementary School: Physical conditions at Monroe School and Elba School
0:20:08	Elementary School: Area surrounding Elba School
0:24:10	Middle School: Booker T. Washington School
0:27:11	Secondary Education: Armstrong High School
0:32:50	Secondary Education: Armstrong High School – Football program
0:34: 57	Jackson Ward: Leaders during Dr. Foster's youth
0:41:43	Post-secondary Education: Virginia Union
0:44:57	Jackson Ward: Friends Association for Colored Children

0:51:40 Influences of Dr. Chiles, D.D.S.  
0:54:25 Experience at St. Paul's Church on occasion of L. Douglas Wilder's inauguration  
0:59:02 Influences of Dr. Dan Williams, D.D.S.  
1:11:01 Old Dominion Dental Society: Friendships  
1:14:00 U.S. Army, WWII: Enlisting  
1:19:50 U.S. Army, WWII: Philippines – Initial experiences

[CD 2 of 2, First Interview 1/20/06]

0:04:50 U.S. Army, WWII: Philippines – 1315<sup>th</sup> Engineer Construction Battalion  
0:11:50 U.S. Army, WWII: Philippines – Duties as the venereal disease control officer  
0:16:39 U.S. Army, WWII: Guam  
0:21:10 U.S. Army, WWII: Guam – Promotion to Captain  
0:24:44 Post-secondary Education: Virginia Union – Development of self-confidence,  
challenging coursework  
0:32:41 Medical School: Howard University, Dental School – Influential professors  
0:40:10 Medical School: Howard University, Dental School – Deferment issues

[End of First Interview]

The footnotes provide additional information provided by Dr. Foster following the interview.

Dr. Francis M. Foster, Sr.

*Interview 1, track 1*

*Track time: 0:1:17*

[CD 1 of 2]

0:00:18      Introductions

(Dr. Foster's first comments were also a test for mike volume)

Francis M. Foster, Sr.: I am Francis M. Foster, Sr., a dentist in Richmond, Virginia, a product of the near, old Jackson Ward area. I have been classified as a historian. Both Ray Boone and Bob Holsworth are two people that have always described me perfectly as a history buff, because I did not seek this historical material academically. It is something that I have grown up and lived with, in a neighborhood that shares two generations of predecessors, whose graphic presentations of this material have stuck with me down through the years.

Kathryn Colwell Hill: I am going to ask specific questions in a just a moment and right now we will listen to the volume.

*Interview 1, track 2*

*Track time: 1:18:36*

0:0:03      Strategy Session

Today is January 20, 2006 and, as noted previously, this is an interview with Dr. Francis Foster. Also, present in the room is his daughter, Carmen Foster, and I am Kathryn Colwell Hill, the interviewer.

We are going to start going over—. This is sort of a strategy session beginning, talking about the different topics that we might want to cover in these sessions. We want to be sure that what we document—your experiences and knowledge—is what you feel is important to be

documented. Do you want to—? Carmen and I, over the telephone yesterday, mention you boyhood in Jackson Ward. Is that something you would like to talk about in this format?

FMF: I guess we could start off with that.

KCH: What other things, as you—I know you are a very humble individual—but I would think that it occurs to you at times, “I wish somebody would write this down.” What subjects might those be?

FMF: I grew up as the youngest of six boys and the effect of their presence on me, as well as the effect of my parents was profound. I had an oldest sibling sister who was probably the greatest influence on me, even more so than my parents. Living in a house with that many folk, I started off sleeping with my sister Ada, you see. And so down through the years, I learned so many things from her and was constantly apprised of everything that I was doing; not that it was wrong but that it could be improved. She was a great influence on me. Early in life I found out that as a result of all of these siblings ahead of me and my sitting and hearing them do their lessons, whenever I wanted to get some attention I would just say softly, just beneath where someone could probably hear my voice, “Omnes Gallus es divisa un partes tres” or “Four score and seven years ago our forefathers founded on this date a new nation.” All of these things that I heard that somebody had learned some place. By the time I got to school, so much of the stuff was a little less challenging. So, it gave me a good push when I started out in grade school.

0:03:15 Elementary Education: Monroe School and Elba School

I happen to have started out in grade school at what was called Monroe School, at the corner of St. Peter and Leigh Streets. It was home of the Sixth Virginia Volunteers, a black unit for the Spanish-American War that was commanded by my uncle, Captain Benjamin Graves, who was married to my father’s sister Hattie. Years later, they would use it as an elementary school. It was called Armstrong Normal Elementary Department, where teachers would train. Benjamin Graves’ daughter, Elsie Graves Lewis, was the first supervisor.

It was on the schoolyard, my first day, that my nomenclature changed. A young man came up to me and said, "What is your name?" I said, "My name is Francis Foster." He said, "You've got a girl's name," and I instinctively hit him in the jaw. A very close friend of my mother's, Miss Mollie Cephas—whose relative, B. A. Cephas, Jr., was later to become a city councilman in the city—watched and she called my mother. My mother was shocked because she had never heard of me using violence before. I was used to receiving blows but not to aggressively giving them. When I told my father the reason, he said to me, "If anyone ever asks you what your name is, tell them your name is Frank." And so, after that I began to get the name Frankie Foster.

KCH: That works.

FMF: Then I was teased by students who knew that I attended this school because the whole school playground was fenced in with common chicken wire. That is all the city thought of black schools. And so, they would say, "You live in a chicken coop." They would always cause a lot of aggression on my part. Finally in 1928, about '28 or '29, I was transferred to Elba School, which had changed its character from a white school to a black school. I felt so liberated because I no longer had to be teased and told that I went to the chicken coop.

KCH: When you say that people teased you, who were they? Where were they individuals going to school?

FMF: They were going to other schools.

KCH: Okay. Your family's home, where you raised your children; I had the impression that that was in Jackson Ward. Where was your parental home?

FMF: We started out in Oregon Hill near the prison and then they moved to the 1000 block of Fourth Street in Jackson Ward. In 1919, they moved up on Clay Street, which is adjacent to Jackson Ward but was really Clay Ward. So I wasn't really born in Jackson Ward. I was born in Clay Ward. I went to school in Clay Ward because the Benjamin Graves School was at that corner. You see Jackson Ward is defined as starting at St. Peter and Leigh Streets and

going west to Lombardy, to the city limits; from St. Peter and Leigh, going north to Jackson Street, which is one block; east to Fifth Street; and turning inward backing around the medical college. So technically the Bo Jangles statue and Maggie Walker, all of that stuff, is in the Jackson Ward area but it is not in technical Jackson Ward.

KCH: Yes. Yes, because I associate in my mind the Jackson Ward, the geographical area, with land, which was outlined in the National Register Historic District.

FMF: Much later, much later.

KCH: —which is very different from the Jackson Ward that you describe.

FMF: And see, in 1919 when we came up there, as Negroes began coming up, then people started thinking of Jackson Ward as being everything north of Broad Street. You see. — everything north of Broad Street.

And so, I went to Elba School. I started there in the third grade. We had excellent teachers and, of course, all of the teachers were single women. My principal was a woman named Florence Lohman; she was a Phi Beta Kappa.

KCH: She was an African American.

FMF: No.

KCH: Were all the teachers white?

FMF: No. These were all colored teachers, everyone except the principal. I was one of two persons who attended her funeral when she died. The other one was John Clarke. What was his name? We played tennis against his daughter. He was principal at Ginter Park School. John Clark. He said, “How did you know her?” I said, “She was my principal.” I was surprised to know then [that she was a Phi Beta Kappa], because they did have her Phi Beta Kappa pin on her.

At Elba School, I was exposed to a woman who is still living. Her name is Gullnare Hill Williams. She is about ninety-nine and her husband died at one-hundred and one. He had founded the first professional pharmacy for blacks in Richmond. She took special interest in

encouraging children who could draw. She used to let us draw, with colored crayons, on a holiday. It was in her class that we first were exposed to the dial telephone.

0:10:02 Elementary School: Learning to dial a telephone

One day she said, "Someone from the telephone company is here and he is going to spend some time with you. How many of you own telephones?" This was a class of about twenty-eight and about six hands raised. She said, "He's going to teach you how to dial." She said, "Have you noticed that they have taken the old phones out and they have that thing on the front of them?" Everybody shook their heads. He said, "I'm" so-and-so "and I am going to teach you how to dial. Now there is a finger-stop and you put your finger in a number and you bring it to the stop and you let it go. Now suppose someone had the number 1-2-3, let me see how you would dial." Everybody put their finger in 1 and then 2 and then 3. Then he went on and showed us how to dial. After we got through he said, "Now I want you all to go home and teach your parents how to dial the telephone." So I came home and—my brother Kermit had also been taught—and so I said, "You tell them the parts of the telephone and I'll teach them how to dial." So he went on to say, "This is the disk with holes and with numbers on it, and this is the stop," and everything, [earphone and speaker]. Finally, I got my mother and father to come upstairs in the hall, where we answered the phone; I showed them how to dial. My mother immediately went and dialed our number, Randolph 1781 W; I still remember it from 1927. (Laughter) Then my father kept messing up, you know. Kermit would say, "Now this is—," and I would say, "Now this is how you dial." So after he'd messed up two or three times, my mother said, "Well aren't you going to give us a grade? You're a teacher now." So I got a piece of paper, across the top I put on it "Mama, Mrs. Lucy Foster", and I put "excellent." On my father's thing, I put "fair." When he saw his report, he said, "That's no way to treat your father! I was just planning on raising your allowance from a penny to two cents and here you go—." I said, "Daddy, you kept messing up and you always say that we should tell it like it is, no matter who it is!"

KCH: He was just joking.

FMF: He was doing it for a purpose. He said, "I was just joking, I just enjoyed seeing you going through the procedure again. That was all." I said, "Well, I was just joking too."  
(Laughter)

KCH: It is so interesting though, we don't think about how those transitions came in, those new technologies, in the '20s and '30s.

FM See in our home, on the block there were a number of people who would have some reason to use the telephone and they could go to the Jewish grocer on the corner, but they would stop by my house and say, "Mrs. Foster, can I use your phone?" And because we had a porch, they could walk up on the porch and the telephone was right there, with a coat hangar and everything. We had a little stand. Then as time would go by, people began using the phone more, and more, and more, and more, and more. That was probably one of the significant things that occurred at Elba.

0:13:42 Elementary School: New books for Elba students

The only other thing that occurred at Elba was when we left Elba to go to Booker T. [Middle School], which was sort of like a junior high school. We went to Elba in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade; we went to Booker T. in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. One of my 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers died about—. (Addressing Carmen) When did Naomi Lewis die?

Carmen Francine Foster: In the last two years—.

FMF: Yes, the last two years. She was one of the first persons in the Richmond Senior Citizen's Hall of Fame. Her husband is still living. He worked for me for thirty-five years. He was a dental tech.

KCH: Now Booker T. is on Leigh Street.

FMF: Leigh Street, at First and Leigh Street, southwest corner.

KCH: It is painted yellow now.

FMF: Right. So what happened was, right after I got to Booker T., they appointed the first black principal. Her name was Ethel Overby at Elba. Years later, they named a school for



her called Overby-Sheppard. Her co-name person was the first woman mayor of the City of Richmond, Mrs. Eleanor Sheppard.

I never will forget, one day the people from the schoolbook department called and said they would be sending some books to Elba, and to get the old books and put them in a box, which they did. So the driver was sick that day, they had a new driver and he got confused. He took this box of brand new books and instead of taking it out to Fox School, he took it out to Elba School. Then he took the books from Elba School, put them in the car and took them over to Fox School. Now the books at Elba School, five or six years ago, had been sent because they had been used by Fox School. You see. Immediately, when she saw they were brand new books, she ran out in the hall and hollered up there, "All teachers pay attention. Let the meanest and biggest student in your class sit at your seat to keep order and you come down here right away." Everybody ran down and wanted to know what was happening. In the mean time, she had already opened up two card tables, they opened the books, and they had the stamps and they did an assembly line.

KCH: Good for them.

FMF: About five or six minutes later, the telephone rang. The folks at Fox School had called and said, to the book department, "What the heck do you mean by sending these books back. We used these five years ago." When the phone rang she picked it up, [someone said], "This is Mrs. Smith from the Book Department." And she said, "Oh, good morning Mrs. Smith. It is so nice to talk to you. We just got that nice, brand new set of books that you sent. We have been needing them for so long. We just got through putting the Elba stamp in them and are just so pleased and proud. How can I help you today?" The lady said, "Never mind" and hung up.

0:17:03 Elementary School: Physical conditions of Monroe School and Elba School

KCH: Those are the kind of stories that we really need to document because—. We are aware of the second-hand books that went to the black schools and the condition—. One of the

questions that I was going to ask you was if you had been at Elba during that time they were trying to get the renovations; trying to get the restrooms inside—

FMF: Right

KCH: And, I understand—

FMF: That was a little later.

KCH: —that was when Carver came to be.

FMF: I'll tell you what. When I was at Monroe School, the toilets were at the alley, in a brick building. You would have to go all the way down and it would be cold. (Chuckles) They had, what they called, these crapper-seats that when you sat down on them, and do what you had to do, when you got up, automatically the thing would flush the toilet. Then you'd have to walk back up in the cold to your classroom. You didn't have inside hallways. You had to go outside and go up some wooden steps to the second floor. Originally, it was like an armory, you see.

KCH: Yes.

FMF: When we got to Elba School, the situation was the same. You see, there would be a girl's side and then a boy's side.

0:18:44      Elementary School: Area surrounding Elba School

After we left Elba, one thing I remember about Elba was on my way out—. It was roughly eight blocks from my house. We would go through the back gate and up through the alley, eight blocks through the alley, like a short cut. Cut over in front of the Baughman Stationary Company.

KCH: Almonds?

FMF: Baughman, big printers at that time. They had windows that would open outside. Sometime we could stick our head and almost, barely see what was doing. Occasionally we would holler in there and a guy would take a handful of type and throw it at the window. Later on in the day, we would come back and pick-up that type and take it home, put ink on it and make imprints, you see. Years later, Biggs Furniture took that building over.

Across the street from Elba School was the T & E Laundry, which was the largest laundry in the City of Richmond. Right where probably the Siegel Center is now was the old Elba Station, way back, way back when. That is some of the history around that area.

In the next block was the residence of Miss Virginia Randolph, who started a school out in the county, Virginia Randolph Training School. She was an outstanding black educator. To the side of her house, around on Broad Street, was the entrance to the Richmond-Ashland Car Line, where the Richmond Glass shop is now. You'd go up the steps, get on the car, and go on out to Ashland.

KCH: Did you ride on that train?

FMF: Many times. Many times. See, my brother Chris first started teaching [at Hanover Training School], in Ashland. He and a teacher from the school, Miss Bundy,—she lived around the corner—would walk up Broad Street together every morning, get on the car, and go on out to the school. [Years later] I went in to get some glasswork finished and I asked the guy, “Can I watch you do that in the back?” I looked up and saw those beams that were like that wide. (Holds hands two feet apart) I said, “Whoa.” He said, “Ya, I don't know why they would put something in that big.” And so I told him, “This used to be the Richmond-Ashland Car Line.” I told him the history of it. I said, “You know, the cars would go on out across the streets on the trestle until you got to Virginia Union and the U S. Post Office, and then go straight out to Ashland”. I said, “When people started buying automobiles, the line had less traffic and then they finally went bankrupt. They sold the scrap to Japan and they sent it back at Pearl Harbor.”

KCH: Oh, my.

FMF: If they could have waited just two years, it would have been a gold mine. They could have extended that track to Fredericksburg. Since the power was coming from electricity—and people were rationing gasoline, rationing tires—it really would have been something.

KCH: I have wondered if the façade is still under the very plain, metal pieces that are over that. It really is a landmark in the Carver neighborhood.

FMF: It is. Right. Other than that, those were little striking things in terms of landmarks. Of course, up and down Broad Street, you would see a lot of fruit stands and things like that.

0:22:46 Middle School: Booker T. Washington School

After we left and went to Booker T., the most significant thing was coming under the influence of someone named Albert Norrell, Albert V. Norrell.

KCH: How do you spell his last name?

FMF: N-o-r-r-e-l-l. He left the Normal School at about the age of eighteen and he served the city for sixty-five years, the longest person ever on the city payroll.

KCH: You did say sixty-five.

FMF: Sixty-five. Six, five. He was the assistant to the principal. Basically, Negroes were assistants to the principal. One guy, Oscar Morton, was assistant to the principal, Mr. Carelton, at Moore School. Let's take Norrelly—he was called "Commodore," his nickname will come to me—he would walk up to a student and say, "I whipped your mama and I whipped your papa and if you don't behave I'm going to whip you too." (Laughter) He had taught two or three generations. Yes Albert, Albert V. Norrell.

CFF: Did he ever whip you? (Laughter)

FMF: No, I only had one encounter where I was reprimanded by my teacher, Fanny Williams. That's because a boy, Howard Jones, and I got into something and we scuffled. I never will forget there was an expression, "I'll nail you to the cross." That's what he told me, that he was going to nail me to the cross. Then we became the greatest of friends and he became one of the most outstanding engineers in the country. He did the Patriot Microwave System for the Iraq conflict. He later went ahead in engineering and became a member of the few, three or four blacks, in the American Academy of Engineering. He is a native, Howard St. Claire Jones.

KCH: May I interrupt?

FMF: Yes.

KCH: How would you describe yourself as a student?

FMF: As a student, I was good. I wasn't what you would call brilliant because I had a tendency to be a little shy. When you are constantly dominated by five brothers above you—you are sort of kept in your place—but in high school I was selected as the student "Most Likely to Succeed." When I was in Booker T., I was impressed by the Woodwork Department. They had the shop. I liked Shop because I liked to work with tools. But other than that—.

0:26:08            Secondary Education: Armstrong High School

I went to high school in '33. When I went to high school in '33, Thomas Jefferson had been built in '29 to relieve the white congestion. But in order to relieve the black congestion, what they did was they decided to give us what you would call a two-tier system. The freshmen and sophomores would go from twelve to four and the juniors and seniors would go from eight to twelve. It seems as if we were given a half education. We had to move fast. I remember, accidentally, a talk on the radio once said that we got a half-fast education. (Chuckles)

KCH: How many years did that go on?

FMF: Until Maggie Walker opened.

KCH: Really, that was in—

FMF: Thirty-eight. But I am going to tell you what; it was really sort of a blessing because your teachers had no problem with discipline. The parents were behind the children. They were going to make it anyway. Then, it gave the kids an opportunity to do something productively with their free time. Most of the parents were right on top of the kids then.

KCH: —, which is a good thing.

FMF: Right. We (Carmen and he) were talking; she had just attended a Community Learning Week breakfast. She had mentioned Rev. Tyler Millner, who helped to carry the original thing on. The original thing was started by Dr. Grace Matthews Pleasants.

CFF: There was a community breakfast earlier today.

FMF: Actually, the person who deserved all the credit for it was a girl named Grace Matthews Pleasants.

KCH: and, why her?

FMF: I am mentioning her because she was a protégée of Edwina Sharp, the English teacher. This English teacher would want you to dot your “i”s and “t”s; and you weren’t going to “axt” any questions, you know. You “ask” questions, you see.

KCH: Good for her.

FMF: She sponsored kids. What they would do is each floor would have sort of a competition to see who was the best speaker. Then the four floors would have a competition to see who was the best speaker in the school. That student would participate at the state oratorical contest. Grace Matthews was one of those outstanding speakers that she developed. She and a guy named John Thomas Mitchell, who is in the V.C.U. Mass Communication Hall of Fame. He used to run the radio station WANT, as “Tiger Tom.” He was Planet editor, John Mitchell’s nephew.

WRNL started a radio station and the *Richmond News Leader* started a Colored Page. The Colored Page was headed by Milton Randolph and the people helping were two students, Tom Mitchell and Grace Pleasants.

KCH: Now at that time, was the Colored Page—you said, “Mr. Randolph?”

FMF: Yes, Milton Randolph.

KCH: —was he black?

FMF: He was black. He was in the postal service, but he also worked as a reporter for the *Journal and Guide*.

KCH: About what year was that, approximately?

FMF: Oh, it must have been between ’33 and ’37, because they started a program and the name of the program was called “Colored Richmond on the Air.” It first featured three girls in a trio, the MacDonald trio. That was the only MacDonald family: Emily, Annabel

MacDonald, and her sister Jean. They sang “sweet music.” It wasn’t jive or jazz. Their father was an Episcopal minister. They were very talented.<sup>1</sup>

She would come on (with great expression) “Co-lore’d Rich-mond is on the air!” Now, one of her classmates was a bus-girl. When she would get off at twelve, she’d run right down to the Woman’s Club, bus those dishes, and work through the evening. This particular day—she was coming in with this tray—this white lady was saying, “I’ll tell you what you should all do, listen to that program when it comes on again, called “Colored Richmond on the Air.” I don’t know who that white lady is, who is the announcer. She’s sure teaching those negroes how to pronounce their words.” And the girl realized that she was talking about Grace and she dropped the whole tray. (Laughter)

0:31:23        Secondary Education: Armstrong High School – Football program

The drive, in 1933, in high school was to reestablish football.<sup>2</sup> We were told that if we brought fifty cents—everybody brought fifty cents—we could start playing football in competition with other schools again. We all brought that fifty cents.

KCH: That must have been difficult for some people.

FMF: Yes. There was a fellow, who was finishing Union, named Maxi Robinson<sup>3</sup>—he was an outstanding football player—they got him to coach the team. They scrounged up some used uniforms from Union and they started. They couldn’t schedule but about eight games and they were undefeated that season. The next year they were still outstanding. Then they developed the team. Robinson became not only an outstanding football but also basketball coach. See, they were still playing basketball then but they had stopped football after World War I.

KCH: Had they stopped football in all of the Richmond public schools or just—

---

<sup>1</sup> The MacDonald Trio sang for Marion Anderson after she received the Spingarn Medal from Eleanor Roosevelt at the Mosque in 1939.

<sup>2</sup> The ringleader, for the drive, was William Johnson, a senior who later started Bob and Bill’s Seafood Enterprises.

<sup>3</sup> Maxi Robinson was the father of Anchor TV Max Robinson and Randall Robinson, an anti-apartheid icon.

FMF: See we only had one black high school.

KCH: Armstrong.

FMF: That was Armstrong.

KCH: Okay. You were not allowed to play against Thomas Jefferson—.

FMF: We didn't have a team; didn't have a coach; didn't have a team.

CFF: They wouldn't do that until the sixties.

KCH: Ok. That is what I was—. But it was another form of “haves and have nots.” I mean that the public schools were funding football programs at Thomas Jefferson and all of those schools.

FMF: Right, but they weren't funding one at Armstrong and neither was they funding a cafeteria, at Armstrong. You see. During the time that I was going there, when you came to school in the afternoon, you had eaten lunch. When you had breakfast in the morning and came, you didn't worry about lunch because you were going home.

0:33: 24          Jackson Ward: Leaders during Dr. Foster's youth

KCH: Um-hm. Exactly. Exactly. It seems as though the Jackson Ward community was quite creative in ways to still accomplish, to experience, some of the things that you should have had funded for you.

FMF: True.

KCH: Where did—. Who were some of the leaders that sparked that enthusiasm, kept it going? You have to have some real strong leaders with—

FMF: I came in on the tail end of the influence of John Mitchell, Jr., who was the editor of *The Richmond Planet*. Fifty years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, John Mitchell, Jr. did successfully bankrupt the segregated streetcar lines in Richmond with a non-confrontational boy-cot. At that same time, there was a young man, a lawyer, in Durban, South Africa—from what I understand—that decided to use that strategy to win back the East Indian freedom, named Mohandas Gandhi. John Mitchell was an outstanding



person. He founded a bank. On one occasion, he spoke to the American Banker's Association in New York, at the request of some white bankers here in town. He got up and made a speech and it kind of enthralled them. They appointed him on the Committee for Small Banks. The rest of the whites were just upset that that could happen. His bank went under but he finally paid off all of his debtors. At that time, Richmond had five black banks. His bank and Maggie Walker's bank came some years later after the first bank for blacks in America. A bank that was called the Bank of the True Reformers.

KCH: The True Reformers did they also offer insurance for the members, or those with accounts.

FMF: Yeah, yeah. It was the largest black business, at that time, operating in America. Also, Benjamin Graves worked for the True Reformers.

KCH: Did your father—. Did you have exposure as far as the business dynamics in the neighborhood, or community service, through your father and mother?

FMF: My mother was a teacher. When she got married, she had to give up her job.

KCH: And her name is—.

FMF: Lucy Ann Jackson Foster.

KCH: This exposure, this imparting information to the children, was that something that was done around the dinner table? What were the conversations like in your family? I know that all of you brothers, and I assume Ada, have been active in volunteer activities, community service, all along.

FMF: Yes. If you started with Ada, she was very active in the church. She could play the piano and so was an assistant pianist. She later became president of the BYPU and was assistant superintendent of the Sunday School.

CFF: BYPU is—.

FMF: Baptist Young People's Union. BYPU used to mean, we used to call it, "button your pants up."

KCH: (Laughter) Is this Ebenezer [Baptist Church]?

FMF: Ebenezer. She was a protégée of the Rev. William Stokes, at that time. She had gone to conventions with him.

KCH: He was a leader in the Baptist church.

FMF: Yes. He was also a professor at Virginia Union School of Religion. He was also very active with the Anti-Saloon League. Many years ago, there was a place on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street called the Richmond Athletic Club and you could get a drink over the bar during Prohibition. He went down with a group to the mayor and said, “This is not right, legal. It is just totally wrong.” The mayor said, “I tell you what. We can close it down but there is a whole lot of crime that is going to go unsolved.” He said, “I don’t understand.” He said, “Well, what happens is when we need some information, we close that bar. When those people get dry, they come to us singing like canaries.” He said, “But I don’t see how these black folks are so important that you have to worry about their crime.” He said, “I’m not talking about black crime, just black crime. I am talking about white crime. Black folks know more about what is going on because they work as domestics in these households and they know all the secrets and everything. They hear conversations. That is where we get our tips, to let us know where to look.” Then the Richmond Athletic Club continued to have an open bar.

The fellow who ran the bar (the manager), Beverly “Tap” Turner, it was his pistol that Maggie Walker’s son borrowed when he had heard about somebody being on the rooftops.

KCH: —and ultimately ended up shooting his father.

FMF: Right. After Armstrong—. Of course, when we graduated, we graduated from what is now the Virginia Commonwealth University building adjacent to the soccer field. That was the old Richmond City Auditorium.

KCH: Yes. Right. You say that is where the graduation ceremonies were held?

FMF: Yes, most of the high school graduation ceremonies. That was—the Mosque had just recently been built but it was strictly Shriner’s activities and everything like that.

0:40:16      Post-secondary Education: Virginia Union

KCH: Following high school graduation, you went to Virginia Union.

FMF: I went to Union in February of 1937.

KCH: Graduated in '42?

FMF: Yes, I spent an extra year. What happened to me was—when I went there in '37—I was lucky because they really did some hazing when you came in as a freshman in September. The first thing they did was, as far as boys were concerned, they cut your hair and they gave you a little beanie cap that you wore. But, luckily for me, when I came on campus, I had had so many brothers at Union before and nobody just thought of wanting to hassle or haze me. I spent most of my time being unseen, at the library and other places. Fortunately, there were two or three families on the campus that we were close to. My brother Skip was close to the Brinkley family; his father taught there. He would always be in and out of their apartment and I would be visiting Dean Drew's son, James Drew, Jr.

KCH: So, the school provided residences, apartments, for some of the faculty.

FMF: Yeah. They used to be in the dormitory, at one end of the dormitory for faculty supervision. Then there was Professor Drew's son, James, who was my age. We were in the Boy Scouts together. We were pretty well known on the campus. The freshman year, I went up there and I think the outstanding thing that happened that February was there were two fellows who were outstanding basketball players who came. Union had had just a fair team but, after they got those two fellows, they started building a basketball dynasty. Both of those fellows are in the Basketball Hall of Fame. One guy was named Wiley Campbell; people called him "Soup." He was a dead eye. He was a little fellow, too. A dead eye and that was when they used two hands for a set shot. Union played basketball at the community recreation center.

KCH: Which was located?

FMF: Across from Baker School, right now where the Friends Association is. Do you know where Baker School is?

CFF: Mary Binga Center

FMF: Yes. Mary V. Binga.

KCH: I don't think so. Friends Meeting House in over here on—

CFF: St. John. Baker School is at St. John and Baker [Streets].

0:43:23 Jackson Ward: Friends Association for Colored Children

FMF: You see there used to be a Friends Orphan Asylum at St. Paul and Charity. Then they tore down the orphan asylum and they started to put orphans under social care through placements with adoptions, and that type of thing. Then they built the community recreation center there, named for Mary V. Binga. Binga had some nice recreational programs, because I was a member of the Friends Association and later my father took me; he had just retired. I asked the lady how many children were in the nursery. She said about twenty. I said, "I will be willing to examine them, pro-bono, and furnish dental care to them." Then the next year, she asked me to come on the board. I later became the president.

There was a very outstanding citizen, named Ellsworth Storrs, who helped to keep the Boy Scout movement going in Richmond. But, he was a little autocratic. One day he came to the head of the community recreation center—lady who ran the nursery—Mrs. George Clark, Estelle Clark.

CFF: Oh.

KCH: Estelle Clark ran it. Her name I've heard before.

CFF: She also wrote a column in *The Afro*, a social column.

Anyway, he said that the programs they had for the boys coming in the afternoon; that the nursery was just in the way and they'll just have to do something about that because it was interrupting his program. When Miss Alice Harris brought it to the attention of the board, my father was there. He said, "Mrs. Harris, dry your tears," because she was crying. He said, "Inform Mr. Stores that next year will be the twenty-fifth year of the building of the community recreation center. They are occupying that ground for one dollar a year as a blessing of the

Friends Association for Colored Children. If he is not a nice boy, he will no longer have a place.”

You see, it wasn’t under his jurisdiction.

And I have never seen a group of women who were having a mass orgasm. (Laughter)  
Oh, I’ll tell you, they were just so enthusiastic! Storrs was well meaning but sometimes he could be autocratic. So for them to be able to get him told, it was a true blessing.

CFF: I think it is helpful to know that the Binga Center, what I remember as a child, was like the heart of a lot of social activity. While the current building, where the Friends Association is now, is what he is talking about, I remember Binga Center as almost being like there was a wall that held it up high—that you had to go to—because we used to go on roller skates. It was really central to that area. Where the housing projects are—. We think of them as a distinct and different area because, see, the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, which is now I-95, wasn’t there then; if you can imagine that not being there. That area was all so integral to and very much a part of our community until, maybe, the early seventies. [That] is probably when they tore it down. I remember going there in the sixties for dancing school and for roller skating activities.

FMF: They had the basketball games there. They didn’t have much space for an audience. Those were the most crowded games. You had to get there early, stand in line at 6:30.

CFF: Wouldn’t they also use it for formal dances?

FMF: All the dances, everything that was held, was held there. Everybody would try to outdo everybody else in terms of decorations and stuff like that. It was really a great situation.

After the college basketball games, they would have one of the local bands—usually Johnson’s Happy Pals—would play. The lead singer at that time was a guy named John Kenney. His favorite piece was “Stardust” and “Marie, the Dawn is breaking.” It was very wholesome. One of the guys who kept the crowd in order was a guy named Arthur Ashe, Sr., father of tennis great Arthur Ashe, Jr. See, his dad used to work at Virginia Union and Brookfield Recreation Area.. He was great.

Whenever Virginia Union would play a team like Virginia State, you could just—unless you were there early—you would be out. So actually, they got very entrepreneurial and they had, in 1939, they had the Virginia State-Virginia Union game—

KCH: Was that the first year?

FMF: No. This was the first “big time,” I call it, because what they did is they took the stage of the Mosque, outlined a basketball court on it, and added baskets. When they played, that was the largest crowd ever to see a basketball game, at that time, in the State of Virginia; thirty-five hundred people.

KCH: Really. And standing room only.

FMF: Yeah. It was interesting because right after that they had the dance downstairs. I know whoever was behind the dance, probably the V.U.U. Varsity Club, they made some money. They made some money.

0:50:02            Influence of Dr. Chiles, D.D.S.

KCH: (pause) I had a question that I’ve forgot. Oh. When you began Virginia Union, at that time, did you realize that dentistry was the direction that you wanted to go?

FMF: Just about. What had happened was, when I was in high school, I used to hang out at the corner of Brook Avenue and Clay, at Virgil May’s Drug Store. Over top of Virgil May’s drug store—

KCH: Virgil Mays?

FMF: Virgil May, M-a-y. There were three: he was a pharmacist, he had a brother who was a surgeon, and another one that, I think, was a lawyer. But Dr. Chiles had his dental office upstairs. He came out one day and said to us, “How many of you like to play baseball?” All of us said we did and he said, “All right, I’m going to see if I can get a couple of balls. You meet me down here at 5:30 tomorrow morning.” See this was summertime and we were in our bare feet, unless you were lucky enough to have tennis shoes. So we met at 5:30 in the morning. We jogged out to Virginia Union, and he began to teach us the fundamentals of baseball. Some of the

kids were a little bit weaker. When they would hit the ball, it would go down the line and he would say, “fair ball, fair ball.” Then when the guy was out, he’d say, “No, I was saying ‘foul ball.’ Come back here; you have to try another time.” Then he began to teach us—. Then on Sundays, we would meet at the Little Colonial Baseball Club. He was with a group that was the Colonial Baseball Club and they played about six or eight teams locally.

KCH: Adults?

FMF: Adults. IPEAs and they had a great sectional rivalry. People always attended these games.

KCH: IPA?

FMF: IPEA. Independent Progressive Educational Association, something like that. They would play at Virginia Union, Hovey Field.

He ended up—. When we had meetings in his office, I could smell the oil of cloves. That fascinated me and I would ask about the instruments and things like that. He taught us parliamentary procedure, how to respect each other, and all that sort of thing.

0:52:47      Experience at St. Paul’s Church on occasion of L. Douglas Wilder’s inauguration

He had a great—. He came from a great background. I may have mentioned that earlier. See, his grandfather was the guy who came to Jefferson Davis, in St. Paul’s Church, one Sunday morning, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, back in 1864. He told him that the Federal troops had broken through and they had to evacuate the city. He worked for the Confederate government. He was black, fair skin.

I never will forget that when Doug Wilder was inaugurated, that morning I went down to St. Paul’s to the morning service. I got in line behind the pastor of the Calvary Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C., trying to get some information from him about his father. We walked in and the church was just about to fill. Then Dr. Henry Martin’s wife, who was Doug’s Secretary of State—you know the girl, lived right over there on Byrd Park and had that big house—.

CFF: Oh, Ruby Martin

FMF: Yes, Ruby Martin was like the master usher. She said, "I'm not going to take my seat back there, there is space enough for the two of you." We went and we sat. I introduced him to Garfield Childs' niece. And so, Father West said to me, "Is she any kin to Dr. Chiles?" I said, "No, she spelled her name C-h-i-l-d-s." I said, "Chiles was C-h-i-l-e-s. Did you know that his grandfather walked right up here and taped Davis on the shoulder, you know." When he walked down into the reception, Shelly Rolfe, veteran Richmond Times Dispatch reporter, came over to me and said, "Boy, this is really a historic occasion. Isn't it?" I said, "More than you know, more than you know." (Laughter)

KCH: Yes. Absolutely.

FMF: See, his father's father, James West, was the supervisor at the Southern Aid, where my brother, Wendell, took his first job, with the Southern Aid as an insurance agent. He was supervised by Doug Wilder's father. He was an insurance representative.

KCH: What was his name? Do you know?

FMF: Yes, Robert Wilder.

And so, he, they ended up getting together with Dr. Leon Reid, a local dentist, and Ralph Dorsey, who was a very fair skinned real estate agent, entrepreneur, who was a key patronage dispenser for the Byrd Machine.

KCH: Oh. Oh!

FMF: You see what I mean. Most blacks, they don't like Ralph Dorsey. He was a key man because he looked out for them when they got in trouble, because of his Byrd Machine Connections.

However, they did get together and let Ralph get some absentee ballots. Then they filled them out and sent them in. Well, the white folks picked-up on it and, of course, they discarded the ballots. James Oliver West then filed a suit in Federal District Court. As a result of that suit, blacks were allowed to participate in the democratic primary.



Now forty years later, Dr. Reid's son, William Ferguson Reid, became the first black in the House of Delegates since Reconstruction, and Doug Wilder became the first black in the Senate since Reconstruction.

0:57:15            Influences of Dr. Dan Williams, D.D.S.

KCH: Did Dr. Chiles mentor you? Would you say?

FMF: Yeah. He was sort of a mentor. There was another dentist named Dr. Dan Williams who was my mother's dentist. What happened was—. The reason I got to Dr. Chiles was he was working part-time for the school. So, we went over for a check. Then occasionally, I used to go to Dr. Williams. I was fascinated because he had a crystal set.

KCH: Which?

FMF: It predates the radio.

KCH: That is what I was thinking.

FMF: He would allow me to come in any time I wanted to and listen to his crystal set.

CFF: Can you tell her a little bit more about Dan William's influence on you, because I remember often going to his office with you and how you brought a lot of his stuff back to the house, when he passed. I felt like there was a real connection between you two. Also, when you mention Dan Williams and the crystal set, it reminds me of a hobby that you had with the ham radio. I am wondering if that is connected in some way.

FMF: Well, Dan Williams lived on the corner; no, they were the second house from the corner, of St. Paul and Charity. He lived next door to Mrs. Ruth Dean Poindexter, whose father was a member of city council. She was one of the few persons, other than Franklin Roosevelt, to recover from infantile paralysis and she wore a leg brace. The close proximity to the playground, it was right there.

Now Mrs. Dean had a number of sisters and brothers and they had children. Most of them were out-of-town but when time for college came, they would come and go to Virginia Union. They would stay at her house. You see.

KCH: Um-hm.

FMF: She mentored a whole lot of kids. One of my closest friends, a guy named Charles Thompson, lived there. During the four years that I was there, I was in and out of his place; much more than he was in and out of mine, because it was convenient and close. Dr. Williams was always someone gentle and nice to talk to. So what happened was, Ruth Dean, his aunt, they wanted to expand the playground and they made an offer to purchase those houses. So immediately, Mrs. Williams, Dan's mother—he never married—decided that there was a nice house on Clay Street. She made arrangements to move. And so, she was talking with Ruth, and she said, "There is a nice place next door to me. Do you want me to see what I can do?" Sure enough, they moved about the same time. Now Mrs. Williams, his mother, had some very striking ties with some folks who ran the brokerage houses downtown.

CFF: When you say "striking ties," you mean?

FMF: Because Dan's father—he was the professor of pedagogy—was high up in the administration. He was aware of and acutely involved in the stock market. Way back then, you know, nobody owned any stock. They were comfortable. What happened was, when they finally moved and got everything together, then there was that same little dynamic duo that was on the corner of St. Paul and Charity; right there, diagonal from the Richmond Public Library, Rosa Browser Branch. So, down through the years, we became closer and also when I finished dental school and came back, there were two or three people there, Dr. Williams and Dr. Ramsey and Dr. Chiles, that, two or three of my buddies, would let each one use their offices to get patients for dental exam boards. They would do a lot of things together.

Then, since I had moved my offices right around the corner from Dan Williams, he began to stop doing extensive dental work. He would all send all of his crown-bridge and stuff around to me. As a result, we would always be back and forth.

When he died, he left all of his books and stuff, old cameras and everything—. Fortunately, there was a picture of his father there. His cousin, who received the bulk of his

estate—just recently I ran into her grandson, as he ate breakfast and he told me who he was—they called me and said, “Aunty Newell Tyler has died and she said there was a journal.” I’m trying to think of where it is. But, that there was “something left and to be sure that you would get it.” I think what it was, that she said probably, a picture or poetry; that he must have gotten later on. Anyway, when I went by there to look, and I saw all the stuff that was there, the books and everything, I just told them that I was going to come back and to not move anything, not touch any thing. To the best of my judgment, in that short time, I went through every book that I could think would have some value. Also, the portrait of his father, we took to the office. The rest we made available to Virginia State as an anonymous donation. They were ever so grateful. There was one book; I’ve got to double check on because it was signed to him by John Mercer Langston, the first black Virginian to serve in Congress. Somehow or other before I did anything with it, I took it by Oliver Hill’s offices, left it, and said, “Look this over for two or three days.” He was just on a cloud. We all realized just how gifted this man was. He was a master of elocution. He was the first black municipal officer in the City of Oberlin. He finished Oberlin.

KCH: The Oberlin you are talking about, Oberlin in Ohio?

FMF: In Ohio, yes. He had a fantastic background.

CFF: Tell us more about Dan Williams and how he mentored you. Is there anything else you recall?

FMF: Well, I would be back and forth, in and out, of his office. Then, he was secretary of the Old Dominion Dental Society and because of that; I was always up under him in everything. He was always a convenient companion. When you would decide that you wanted to walk around the corner, you would go over there. He would—. He always took that nap during lunchtime, even when he was seeing patients. His mother would say, “The doctor is resting now but he will be with you at one o’clock.”

KCH: It sounds as though he had a personality that he would take the time for you. I mean, there are people that certainly have the knowledge, but they don’t—

FMF: He was well read. He took the New York Times and, of course, he had the Wall Street Journal. He was right on top of things. But, he was still single (chuckles) and after awhile, the ladies didn't, sort of, pursue him. He had a great, quiet personality. There was a certain genteelness about him that was very striking.

KCH: Where would he have gotten his dental training?

FMF: Dr. Dan Williams went to Howard University, also. He had a neighbor next door named Carroll Grant, Sr., who was a character. He wanted to get into dental school to stay out of the army. He arranged to sort of—you know—get in there. Of course, he got there and the first week he was there, they took impressions. They would put some plaster in this little tray and they would grease it up and put it in. After it would set, you would go underneath it with a knife and make three deep lines. Then you could break off the sides. Well, the boy that was working with him had to go to the restroom or something and he didn't come back. When he did come back, it was pretty hard. When they finally got it out of his mouth, they said that the next day Carroll Grant, Sr. went home and said he didn't want to be a dentist. (Laughter) Ironically, his son later went to Meharry in Nashville, Tennessee and became a dentist. He was on dialysis the whole four years he was in dental school. He was on dialysis while he was practicing, until he died. But, he did become an accomplished pilot.

CFF: Carroll Grant, Jr.'s father wound up as a motivating force behind the Black History Museum. Right?

FMF: One of them.

CFF: One of them.

1:09:06 Friends within the Old Dominion Dental Society

I think that the stories about Dan Williams and Dr. Chiles, later Peter Ramsey—although you didn't talk about him as much—are for me important because they talked about the Old Dominion Dental Society. I remember that that group, the Richmond group, had what they called the Peter B. Ramsey Dental Society.

FMF: Of Richmond and Petersburg.

CFF: Right. So, it was the black dental group, because they were all segregated. The thing that I remember as a child, warmly and wonderfully, is how we would all get together and spend weekends at Dr. Chiles' waterfront place. How it would be part dental meeting and part social gathering and part family gathering. We have [super] eight movies from the 1950s, those times where we were on the water just being together, as dental families.

FMF: And more formally, we would meet at Capahosic, VA.

KCH: Camp—?

CFF: Capahosic, an Indian name.

FMF: At the Robert Morton Center. Robert Morton was an assistant to Booker T. Washington and he had the students there build him a great big mansion at Capahosic, on the York River. It was used for years as a convention center.

CFF: Well, as a conference center.

FMF: Conference center.

CFF: Now then, Dr. Chiles' place was nearby.

FMF: He was at—what do they call it—near Kilmarnock. The river was the Corotoman River.

CFF: That would be an opportunity for us to be; for us to go for long family weekends in the summer and stuff like that. —stay at Dr. Chiles' place, which was special.

FMF: I remember that we had put the playpen out. We were sitting around talking and—for some reason he liked to smoke—he was smoking. He said, "Wait a minute. Be Quiet and look." We looked and there was this little lady in the pen trying to get up. He said, "I do believe she is going to stand up." Carmen kept tugging and finally she pulled up and smiled. Everybody clapped. (Laughter)

KCH: Yes, I bet!

FMF: (addressing Carmen) There she is! That is when you first stood up. You stood up in Lancaster County.

KCH: Did I understand you correctly? When you came back to Richmond from Howard University—just having graduated from dental college—did you start a solo practice?

1:12:14 U.S. Army, WWII: Enlisting

FMF: No. Here's what happened. Three days before graduation, three of my colleagues and I went down to have lunch at a place called The Club Benghazi.

KCH: In Washington?

FMF: Washington, on U Street. That was a famous street; right up from the black theaters. This particular day there had been some bad news in the newspaper. While we were there laughing, a guy walked in and said, "Well I'll be damned. You all are the first people I've seen with a smile on their faces today." I said, "Well, the reason we all are smiling is because we are finishing dental school Saturday." He said, "Is that right? Congratulations." He said, "How do you all stand with the Army?" I said, "I went down to the Surgeon General's office this morning." When I walked in, I walked over to this desk and I saw this girl and thought she looked familiar. I said that I'd like to speak to the procurement officer. She said, "Wait a minute. Aren't you Foster?" I said, "Yes. You're not Myrtle?" I hadn't seen her since she was a little girl. She said, "I'm Myrtle. I'm secretary to the procurement officer. He'll be right here." So he came on over.

CFF: Was that Myrtle Graves?

FMF: Graves.

CFF: Okay. That is a cousin of ours.

FMF: Benjamin Graves' granddaughter.

I said, "We are concerned as to our situation." He said, "We aren't going to be taking any more dental officers." So anyway—

KCH: The war was winding down, except in the Pacific.

FMF: They were beginning to get some dental persons coming. See, we were officers at the time and we were coming.

He said, "Why don't you all have a round of drinks on me." My father always said, "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts." But, whenever anybody is going to give you free drinks, you are going to say thank you. We sat down and made ourselves comfortable. What we didn't know was he was a reporter.

KCH: A reporter!

FMF: Uh-huh.

KCH: For procurement—

FMF: For the Associated Negro Press.

KCH: Okay. I had you back at the procurement office. You are back with your friends, with the smiles.

FMF: Yes. We are sitting there and he said, "Where are you from?" I said, "Richmond." And he said, "Where are you from Bill Logan?" He said, "Petersburg." And so, we talked. We just talked and we were getting all friendly. Finally, he got up and said, "It has been a pleasure meeting you. I hope you all have a great practice." He left.

Two days later, in all of the black newspapers' headlines "War Department Refuses to take Negro Dentists: Dr. Francis Foster," and so-n-so and so-n-so. The next day I got a telegraph, from my draft board, telling me to report to Fort Sam Houston, Texas for six weeks of training. That is what happened.

Now ironically, I had just taken, the week before, I had taken my state board exams. The building on the corner—the old pharmacy building—that was where all of the dental stuff was. I went—. I made sure that I went in the back door. I heard a guy say, "Hey Bear" and so-n-so and so-n-so. The dean was named Harry Bear. When this guy passed by again, I said, "Excuse me." I meant to say, "Are you any kin to Dean Bear?" I said, "Are you kin to Dr. Bear?" He said, "I am Dr. Bear." He had just finished Northwestern and was taking the boards. You see, they

didn't want him there because generally the environment would be favorable. He said, "What is your name?" I said, "Francis Foster." He said, "Hey, meet Dr. Foster." I said, "I'm not a doctor, yet." Before I could get the "yet" out, he said, "How the hell can you take the board if you're not a doctor?" I said, "My dean has made arrangements with the board to let us take it in the blind. When they present our diplomas, they will let us know if we passed." Sure enough, everybody passed.

I met him again at Fort Sam. They had sent him to Yokohama. They sent me to the Philippines. He came back and did his stuff in maxillofacial surgery at Michigan. His son, Harry Bear, was at TJ with Carmen. He is head of the Oncology Surgery Department down at MCV now.

That was the situation about my finishing. When I came back from overseas, I started a practice.

KCH: By then, you really did have a lot of practice under your belt, practical—

FMF: I had quite a bit of experience.

1:18:01 U.S. Army, WWII: Philippines – Initial experiences

FMF: Now when I went to the Philippines, it was two and a half weeks before they gave me an assignment. I was stationed at the Replacement Depot. Next to the Replacement Depot was the U.S.O. Staging Center. So then all the entertainers would come there and rehearse and everything. I would get up in the morning, go have breakfast with them, and hang around. I'd meet a lot of persons.

CFF: Who were some of the people you met?

1:18:36 End of first CD

*Interview 1, Track 3,*

*Track time: 0:45:01*

0:00:00 [Resume interview]



KCH: This is the second tape of Dr. Foster's first interview; the other CD is full.

We were talking about your time in the Philippines.

CFF: I was asking him about who were some of the people that he met while he was at breakfast, the USO, the entertainers—.

FMF: The first thing that caught my attention was a very attractive young African American lady. She was a singer. I finally ambled over near her and I said, "Hello." She said, "Hi." She looked at my insignia and saw that I was a dentist. She said, "Did you know Pete Wells?" I said, "Yes." She said, "He just left here a couple of weeks ago." He finished Howard a couple of classes ahead of me. I said, "Yeah, I knew Pete very well." She said, "You must have gone to Howard." I said, "Yes. Where are you from?" She said, "From Chicago." I said, "That is a great town." But, she said, "I am living in LA now." She said, "Do you know any folks in Chicago?" I said, "Yes. I've got an uncle whose brother used to be in the Illinois state legislature. He also was the assistant Commonwealth's attorney, for Cook County. His name was George Blackwell." She said (loudly), "Uncle George!"

KCH: (Laughing) Uncle George.

FMF: I said, "You knew—?" She said, "Sure. Everyone knows George Blackwell. He had the nicest collection of records." I began to realize, that he died single but he still had that contact with those ladies.

CFF: Who was this woman?

FMF: Lupe Cartero was her name.

KCH: Lupe?

CFF: Cartero, like Guadalajara.

FMF: Lupe Cartero. I believe that she had some Spanish influence. But, the interesting thing was that George was to my graduation. (Chuckles) His niece, Grace Blackwell Perkins, finished in my class. President Ellison saw him in the audience and said, "We have a distinguished representative from Illinois here, the Honorable George Blackwell." He said, "Oh,

it is so good to be back here at Lincoln.” He had finished Lincoln University. Then Grace said, “You’re at Union!” He said, “I’m sorry. I made a mistake.” But, he was quite an interesting character. His father was the Blackwell for whom the Blackwell area is named and the Blackwell School. J. H. Blackwell was the principal when they had the Underwood Convention and they were trying to turn things back. He was principal at Maury. When they brought Southside in, Manchester, into Richmond, they didn’t renew his contract. He helped form what became the Virginia Teachers’ Association.

CFF: J. H. Blackwell is whom Blackwell was named for?

FMF: Yes. James Blackwell, Sr.

CFF: James.

FMF: Yes. J. H. Blackwell, Jr. was a physician.

CFF: Okay, because my mother, Lucy, had a sister named Charlotte. Charlotte married into the Blackwell family and that gave our family the tie to Blackwell.

FMF: It is interesting. We had two members of our—different sides—of our family who became the grand master for the Prince Hall Colored Masons, in the State of Virginia. One was Benjamin Graves. The other one was J. H. Blackwell, Jr.

KCH: Okay.

FMF: So they had a lot of leadership; a lot of leadership ability.

CFF: Let’s go back to—. It is interesting how that all loops from Richmond to Howard to the Philippines back to Richmond— (Laughter)

KCH: Yes.

0:04:57 U.S. Army, WWII: Philippines – 1315<sup>th</sup> Engineer Construction Battalion

CFF: Tell us a little bit about the Philippines.

FMF: When I got there, as I told you, it was about two or three weeks before they gave me an assignment. Of course, I enjoyed it, listening to the entertainers in the evening, making the contacts, and everything. So finally, I got my orders and they assigned me to the 1315<sup>th</sup> Engineer

Construction Battalion, Medical Detachment. I get in this vehicle and I go over to this unit. When I get there, I went to the office and there was a guy who was the adjutant. His name was C.W.O. Lewis Mitchell, a chief warrant officer. He smiled when he first saw me. He took me on over to the warrant office and there were some officers there. There was a blonde hair fellow that I thought was white. He introduced us around. He was the highest-ranking one there. He was a captain. The others were mostly second lieutenants, and had been for some time. Anyway, the guy who was fair-haired, we were saying something. He said, (pause)—I was presuming that he was white, but he was African American—he said something like, “You’re one crazy nigger.” I looked at him and I thought, “Oh my God. I know that guy’s gonna—.” He came over to me, he said, “How are you doing? Where did you finish?” “ Howard University.” He said, “I was at Howard and I did CMTC, before I came here.” His name was John Archibald Leroy Wallace. His father had been a bishop of the AME Zion Church and he had become a very smart and a very accomplished speaker; worked in chemistry. We became quite close, along with this boy, Big Mitch. Mitchell was a very big fellow. Who had gotten in the service way back there, in the mid-thirties, and had worked his way up to become a warrant officer. He knew the Army rules and regulations backward and forward.

KCH: Did you find that even overseas in the Philippines that socially the army was pretty segregated?

FMF: Oh yes, yes. You see that’s the reason why they were trying to find a place for me where I wouldn’t have to treat whites. Now also, stationed right around that group, were several Philippine scout units and they came to us for treatment. Just as soon as we got there, they delivered a “chest-sixty.” Now that was—

KCH: Chess sixty?

FMF: Chest-sixty. It had a full, metal chair. It had a little thing that you put together, it had a wheel, and it ran to a thing that had a drill. You would pump it with your feet. (Tapping his right foot up and down on the floor)

KCH: Oh dear!

FMF: There is still one down there now. They had just stopped using those the year that I came to Howard. Because, then they had a small electric motor that turned. I called Engineer Service and said, "I'm Lieutenant Foster, D.D.S.; dental surgeon serving Engineering Battalion, 1315<sup>th</sup> and I don't have any personnel with training to help me as an assistant. They said, "Well, okay." I said, "I need sort of a fixed, as closed to a fixed installation as I can get; maybe in a tent or something." They said, "We'll send an engineer out there to help you." He said, "I'm going to see if I can't find a Philippine dentist that we can hire to be your assistant. They found me a fellow named Gionfredo Liongson. We used to call him Freddy. Anyway, he came to the outfit. I shook hands with him and I took him over to my tent. I had brought some books with me. He immediately and voraciously wanted to get into those books. I was blessed because he was enthusiastic and interested. Of course, he could make more money working for the Army than he could on his own. Then too, there were some things that I could learn from him and I was fully aware of that too. I never will forget something happened one day. I was trying to think of how it went because it is sort of vague to me—it will come back to me—anyway was right there with me chair-side.

They brought me water and stuff that I could use. The first thing that we did was to survey the outfit. We had so much turn over that it was kind of hard to do. Anyway, we started to survey the outfit.

KCH: Surveying to determine the medical, the dental needs.

FMF: No trying to determine the soldiers, the groups, that needed emergency stuff and then who needed secondary stuff. Anyway, we ended up getting started and between that and the Filipino Scouts, I had plenty to do.

0:11:48 U.S. Army, WWII: Philippines – Duties as the venereal disease control officer

What happened was, the third day that I was there, I get this memo that says, “In addition to his duties as battalion dental surgeon, Lieutenant Francis Foster is hereby designated as the venereal disease control officer for the 1315<sup>th</sup> Engineering Battalion. Signed Lt. Watrous.

KCH: What ve-nease?

FMF: Venereal disease.

CFF: Venereal disease.

FMF: Now,

KCH: (Laughing) No wonder I wasn’t picking up on that. Okay, you were the officer.

FMF: Anyway, I immediately got together with the chaplain. We decided to establish a program of information and that type of thing. What we would do is—. I was getting ready to get settled down, as far as the tropical clothing and everything. One of the guys said—. I said, “I’m going to go down and get me one or two more uniforms. He said, “Don’t do that. Man, you are going to have to pay for them. What you do is go and—. Let me give you this guy’s name and you can buy a bolt of chino. He will measure you and will fit your uniforms to really fit.” Then too, I was weighing about one-hundred and fifty pounds then, kind of skinny.

KCH: Yes.

FMF: I went and I talked to this guy. I said, “Listen, I’ll be primarily wearing these when I’m off duty.” I said, “I’ll keep one dress uniform for strict, formal occasions.” I said, “But can you make the pockets a little bit bigger?” He said, “Sure. How big do you want them?” I told him. So, he made bigger pockets and the rest of it—. Most people did not notice it. The reason why I did that was we had designed these Pro-Kits.

KCH: Pro Kit?

FMF: Yes, Pro-Kit.

CFF: Prophylactic.

KCH: (Laughter) Oh, I was back with the dental and you had gone another direction.

FMF: At any rate—

CFF: It was all part of his dental job. That is what makes it so interesting.

FMF: We had a brown coin envelope. In that coin envelope, we would put a two-by-two gauze sponge that had allowed some soft soap, liquid soap, to dry in it. Later, on some occasion, someone could add water to it and work up a lather. Then there was a little thing about the size of my finger (holds up smallest finger) with a tiny, little tip that could be broken off and could be placed in the penis opening and get some medication. Then the third thing would be two or three rubber prophylactics. That was called a Pro Kit.

I would line my pockets with Pro Kits—of course I had big pockets in my pants—and, as I would go around, I'd see a soldier and I'd say, "Do you have a Pro Kit?" We established a rule that everybody who went on leave, for any reason, when they came back that night, they had to stop at what we called they called the Pro Station. There were personnel there to help lather you and make sure that you took care of yourself.

Unfortunately, we had the highest rate of VD in the 1315<sup>th</sup> Engineering Construction Battalion of any place, probably, in the Far East. One reason was that we had a rapid turnover. So many people would come in and contract this stuff. We also had one or two cases that we were able to diagnose. One was lympho granuloma inquinae. As a result of the disease, the lymph glands would actually begin to fester through and would break out. We were able to get the permission from this guy so that everyone could get in line and see. We'd put a burlap bag over his head so he couldn't be identified. It was just one of those instances where it was—. Also in the Philippines—I guess you would say— (pause).

After a year, we were moved up to Angeles in Pomponga—from just outside of Manila—where there was the largest B-27 base in the world. We were there for a short time and then we got a contract to do a construction job on Guam.

0:16:47 U.S. Army, WWII: Guam

They moved the whole outfit to Guam. When we got to Guam, I had a note on my door saying—from its medical officer—saying we were to meet in the morning at the hospital. I went

to the hospital. Well, when I got there—I knew something was going on— they told me that, ah, that they were in the process of getting some stuff together and I could take the day off and familiarize myself with the island. But, what they were doing is—they realized that I was colored—they weren't going to have me in the hospital. They found a place, a dispensary, there that had been closed down at the Guam Army Port. The next day, when I came in, they told me that I would be assigned to the Guam Army Port.

We left and went on down to the Guam Army Port. There was a guy named Lt. Lawson Barr from South Carolina. He was the medical officer; he was the port surgeon. He was very cooperative. After about two or three weeks, he left and they assigned a guy named Lt. Paul Robinette, who was a surgeon that had been working at the hospital. They assigned him to the port. I walked in that first day and I had gotten a package in the mail from Thalhimers. When I walked in, he said, "I can see right now that, you and I, we are not going to get along." I said, "Is that right?" He said, "My wife Shirley's father is an executive administrator of Miller & Rhodes, in Richmond."<sup>4</sup> See, he was a graduate of MCV. We struck up a very endearing friendship. He was very cooperative, in every way.

(Addressing Carmen) You know that book that the boy wrote.

CFF: What boy?

FMF: The one that I showed you, that guy from Washington who became a millionaire.

CFF: Oh. My dad got this book from a guy that he had mentored over in Guam and the guy wound up going to Howard Dental School.

FMF: No. He didn't.

CFF: He didn't become a dentist.

FMF: No. He became a real estate operator.

CFF: A real estate agent, but didn't you mentor him, while you were in dental school?

---

<sup>4</sup> Thalhimers was Miller & Rhodes biggest competitor.

FMF: Yeah, yeah. He later became head of OBSM. Do you remember? Because he was as close to being a political appointee as he could be, but he was on Civil Service and he felt cozy because he didn't have to worry about doing anybody any political favors because they couldn't touch him.

Anyway, Paul Robinette and I, we got along well. There were no Army facilities around. See Guam was an old naval base. We would go, a lot of times, to the Navy medical meetings and things like that. We were just like two peas-in-a-pod.

CFF: Was Robinett white?

FMF: Uh-hugh.

CFF: And you were black.

FMF: He is in Richmond now.

CFF: Okay.

FMF: His wife died from Alzheimer's and he is failing.

KCH: Did your friendship continue when you came back to Richmond?

FMF: I would hear from him occasionally. About three or four years ago, he came and moved to Richmond.

KCH: Oh, I see.

FMF: Anyway, his wife had Alzheimer's and I would see him on occasion. He was a prince of a gentleman. He was a real jewel.

0:21:03 U.S. Army, WWII: Guam – Promotion to Captain

I'll tell you what happened. I had been assigned to the 1315<sup>th</sup> Engineering Construction Battalion, which is a field outfit. Truman passed an executive order saying that all promotions would be frozen in the military except for persons who had served in field outfits.

KCH: Served in?

FMF: Field outfits. See having served in a field outfit, I was still serving. Guam was considered, my dispensary was considered a field outfit. When my first year was up, he



apparently had put in for my promotion. After two weeks, once or twice he'd said, "Are you sure you are in the right uniform?" I didn't know what he was talking about. One day, he went over to headquarters to find out what had happened to my promotion papers. They were still sitting in the box. They didn't send them up. So he personally got him a jeep and drove all the way up to Mariannas-Bowning (Marbo) headquarters, took those things up. He came back, took two captain's bars and threw them at me, and said, "Boy, you are out of uniform!" (Laughter) The irony of it is that that made me the ranking dental officer in the Marbo command, next to the Chief of Dental Service, who was a major. Because, you see, they weren't promoting within the outfit. But, I decided, I said, "Now don't let this go to your head." I just went on and did my job. Eventually, I did—. This fellow, Louis Mitchell—that I first met, who was a warrant officer—he was the first one that noticed. When he saw me, he smiled because I had my 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Insignia backwards. He started calling me "Cruit" and that name kind-of stuck with me. I was talking to him and he said, "You know what." He said, "Your best bet is to write a letter and I'll help you. You'll send it directly to the Inspector General in Washington, D.C. I'll not send it through channels." I sent it. A private aide sent an order down assigning me to the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Hospital.

KCH: You were the first African American to serve then in that hospital in a professional capacity.

FMF: Yes, right. The commanding officer came over—. No. The guy that was in charge of the hospital happened to come by one day and, apparently, he was going through the files to see if there was any correspondence that had come to me. He said, "I see that you've—. I see that you're from Virginia. Who is your representative?" I said, "I've been away from it too long. I don't know who it is." He was probably figuring that I had pulled some politics. He said, "I see someone down in the Norfolk area signed your letter. I didn't see where you had applied." I said, "No I hadn't made any application." I remember, I just kind-of kept my cards close and I went on up and did my job.

0:24:46      Post-secondary Education: Virginia Union – Development of self-confidence,  
challenging coursework

KCH: The thought that keeps re-occurring to me as you talk about all of your experiences—. You indicated that you were fairly shy as a child and so was it experience or general maturing—. How did you turn into a person that really was quite gregarious; kept living through these experiences? The growth is just so interesting. You made your opportunities and you took advantage of situations when it—

FMF: I ended up going to Virginia Union. It was kind of tough there that first year. You had to get down to business. But I had two older brothers who had just joined the Omega fraternity. I decided to join the Lampodos Club of the fraternity.

CFF: Explain what you mean by fraternity, the name of it and everything.

FMF: The oldest brother had finished. He had joined a fraternity. It was the first black fraternity established in a college. It was called Alpha Phi Alpha. Chris became familiar with it because it was started at Cornell. The second black fraternity that was started was started at Howard and it was called Omega Psi Phi. The great mentor to the fraternity was Dr. Ernest E. Just. He was the first black to receive the Spingarn Medal from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He was an imminent biologist. His treatise on the biology of the cell surface opened as many avenues back then as the stuff from DNA did later. He was at Howard. He was a great researcher, but they had him busy teaching. He left there, went to Germany, and did quite a bit of research. He became well known as an outstanding marine biologist.

My major was biology. My second year, the original professor of biology, Limus Wall, PhD, came back to VU. He was the class ahead of my sister and they both taught at Virginia Union. My dad and I first—.

(Pause: Carmen offers Dr. Foster a drink of water.)

What happened was, it was really in comparative and I was busy learning everything about every thing, just memorizing it all. In comparative anatomy, you study instead of learning what cells are, you compare from this to that as things become more complex. When we had the exam, the only thing that I could really put on the paper was my name, and I wasn't even sure of the date. As I was walking down the hall, I knew that I had failed. The next day—of course, by that time, you knew who had passed and who had flunked—he was just as nice, called to me and bought me a coke. His co-professor was my sister, but that didn't make any difference. As a matter of fact, his wife took the course years earlier and she failed.

KCH: Oh goodness.

FMF: He made an impression upon me. That first year I had become a member of the Dramatic Club. I had had some success and we had won the regional dramatic tournament. I was elected student vice president of the Negro Inter-Collegiate Dramatic Association. But, when I realized that his wife, who had failed, had come back from Michigan with a master's in drama. She came over to me and said, "I am so glad to see you, I've been looking for you. I have big plans for us, the Dramatic Club." I said, "Mrs. Wall, I have resigned from the Dramatic Club. I'm going to concentrate on my schoolwork." She said, "What you need is bronze. A bronze snake.

Sure enough, I worked hard and started staying up late studying. My mother would come into the room and say, "Francis, I want you to go to bed. You are going to get into bad health if you don't get your rest." What would happen is that I would turn my radio up, you see. With music faint in the background, she could hear it. So what I would do is I'd always leave the radio on and instead of turning it off, I'd turn it up or down. I would put my cap on the doorknob, where the keyhole was, to make sure no keyhole light would be shining through and I'd put a towel at the base where the floor was and just go on [to bed]. Then after a little while, I would get back up and turn the light bulb on, you see, and I'd study. I would go to class and I'd never raised my hand. I wanted the teacher to call on me. Then, after awhile, it became a cat and

mouse game. I learned that he liked the fine print. I'd learn all that stuff. After my first three or four weeks, stuff began to fall into place. Then the Army picked up one or two of our professors; he needed a biology lab assistant and he asked me if I would consider it. I was overwhelmed—my salary was fifty dollars a month—N.Y.A. Funds, National Youth Administration.

KCH: Yes, a great honor for someone who the previous semester had not done well.

FMF: Yes. Then I just went on; went right on through. I knew I was good when I took genetics. I made a ninety-nine and he gave me a B. I said, "How can you do this?" He said, "Well. There really is no such thing as a perfect paper. This course is primarily designed for non-science majors; it is just a course in mathematics with you. You have no reason to have missed that one part." So I went along with it, you know. He was a terrific influence.

0:32:29      Medical School: Howard University, Dental School – Influential professors

I never will forget, my first year at Howard, about Easter, he walked around the campus saying hi to folk. He said, "I'm not feeling well. Could you take my class this evening?" I said, "What is it?" He said, "It is the interaction of genes." I said, "Okay." That evening, around three o'clock, I went in. I said, "Dr. Wall isn't well and he asked me to take this class." I had worked with some of those students before as a lab instructor. I said, "First of all, in order to appreciate this course you've got to understand cell division." I said, "There are two types of cell division: mitosis and meiosis. Mitosis is cell division where a cell reproduces itself. Meiosis is cell division where a cell, instead of reproducing itself, it reproduces an entity with one-half of its chromosomes. It is a combination of cells that are female and male that we get together." I said, "Anybody that doesn't understand that—and so I went through the difference between mitosis and meiosis— will never be able to work the problems in the book." At five minutes to five—he had come from downstairs up into the backroom—he said, "Now I know out on the campus—, but what I am trying to get across to you is that if you can get the basic concepts, it will come easy." He said, "You all answer his questions freely but you won't answer or ask me questions." One girl said, "Dr. Wall, you're so hard." He said, "No, I am here to help you. But, I am not

going to cater to you. I am going to get the best out of you.” It gave me also a psychological boost.

KCH: It is interesting. You had been—what did you say—vice president of the Dramatic Society, which didn’t give you that same type of confidence—

FMF: Right.

KCH: —as hard study.

FMF: I’ll tell you what happened. When I was in my freshman year, taking pathology, that was one of the hardest courses. Anybody who was talking—. He said, “Does anybody in here know what Lou Gehrig died from?” We had in that class about five PhDs, about eight guys with Masters. Because see, when they heard about this Army Specialized Training program, if you—this was physicians and anesthetists—if you could get through it all then you didn’t have to go. So, many of the professors had enrolled. Anyway, not a hand raised and so finally, I stuck my hand up. Everybody turned around and was looking. I said, “Lateral amyotrophic sclerosis.” He said, “That is right.” Man, folks were looking at me and talking. When I came out, everybody asked me, “How did you know that stuff?” Well anyway, what happened was—. I remember the day when *Time* magazine, when they had a picture of Lou Gehrig standing beside his bats saying, “This is the happiest day of my life.” I said, Dr. Wall, they say that he had lateral amyotrophic sclerosis. He said, “Yes. Lateral, to the side. Do you remember when you were playing football and the guys going to tackle you? You threw the ball anyway and you lateral it; you throw it to the side.” He said, “A for without, myo for muscle, sclerosis for hardening.” It just stuck with me. That gave me a tremendous psychological boost and I felt comfortable around them just because of that. Those are probably the two striking things that hit me in dental school.

The next day, the professor comes over to the lab where I am and he says, “You must be a baseball fan.” I say, “No, but I like baseball. I like football better.” I say, “I’ve heard my

coach at Virginia Union speak of your days at Lincoln.” He said, “Is he still coaching.” I said, “Yeah.” He says, “Tell him I said Hi.”

Just about right after that—. You see, when the pope puts his blessings on you, the cardinals come around. After that, whenever I was doing something, some of his lab assistants would come around, they’d say, “See anything? Do you need anything? Do you have a question about anything?” Then things began to take up roots.

It just so happened that the pathology lab overlooked Griffith Stadium. On Sunday’s students would flock in there to watch the Redskins play and Sammy Baugh; that type of thing.

KCH: Oh, fun. Yes.

FMF: DC was quite an experience. The first year that I went, the state paid my tuition.

KCH: This was under the—. The State had [tuition] programs, since they would not allow African American students to go to our state universities and colleges.

FMF: Right.

KCH: Did they dictate at all where you went under that program?

FMF: No. I’ll tell you what happened. I had a cousin named Alice Jackson—her father was a pharmacist—she finished Smith College, after finishing Union, and she wanted to go to Columbia. She wrote to UVA for an application. They wrote her back saying, “Dear Miss Jackson, Because of the statutes and other reasons we cannot send you an application.”

She wrote back, “Dear Sir, I received your letter. I am familiar with the statutes of the State of Virginia; please tell me the other reasons.” Then they wrote her right back saying, “Dear Miss Jackson, We feel that the reason of the statute is sufficient. We do not accept Negroes at the University of Virginia.” They didn’t accept women either. Anyway, in anticipation that she was going to file a suit, they called a session of the General Assembly. Del. Ashton Dovell and Stevens passed a tuition grant bill. After that grant bill was passed—and it came out in the paper—my father read it and he said, “Listen. This is a real opportunity. Try to get organized, and keep one of you in grad school. It will be a sacrifice, but we have to take advantage of it. So

my oldest brother was teaching at Armstrong and he left that summer and went to Michigan. My next brother had just finished VU and he was given his job. The next year he went to Michigan. Two years later my brother Skip went to Boston University and got an MBA.

0:39:55 Medical School: Howard University, Dental School – Deferment issues

Then two years later, my draft number came up, while I was a lab assistant. I went before the draft board and when I walked in they said, “You’ve been drafted. Anything you have to say?” I said, “I would like to see if I can get a deferment. I have my application in to dental school.” He said, “Well that is very nice but your country needs you. You get your business together and be ready in ten days.” I said, “Thank you sir,” and I left.

I walked out in the hall and I heard some footsteps behind me. This fellow says, “Here boy.” (Speaking softly) That word, you hated when white people called you “boy.” I said, “Yes sir.” He said, “Why didn’t you volunteer?” I said that I knew that if I volunteered I wouldn’t get into dental school. I said, “But I’m on my way down there to volunteer now because I am not going to be drafted.” He said, “Well, that would be my advice to you.” I said, “Thank you,” and I went on.

Walked into the recruitment office and they said, “Good morning. How can we help you? Which branch of service are you interested in?” I said, “In the Army.” I said, “I just left the draft board. They would not grant me a deferment; gave me ten days.” They said, “We’ll let you have a few days before that.” On the fifth day, I got a commission as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Medical Administrative Corp, Inactive Reserve, which meant I was in the Army but I didn’t have to go.

KCH: Bless them.

FMF: I went to Howard and the State of Virginia paid for my tuition. (Chuckles) At the end of that first year, I ended up hearing about the Army’s Specialized Training Program and the Navy’s V-12 Program. If you were in medicine, dentistry, or engineering, and were enrolled in a program with the Army, you came in as a PFC.

KCH: Private First Class.

FMF: Yes. So, I resigned my commission and became a PFC.

When I got there, I found that my company officer was a sergeant and he used to be the Ph.D. professor of biology at Lincoln University. Lincoln University is a black university that was all men—Langston Hughes went there, Thurgood Marshall went there—and the guys would sometimes come to class in their pajamas. It was an all men school; you know what I mean.

KCH: Yes.

FMF: So the professors were used to handling rough guys and he had been used to that. Apparently, wherever he had been sent as an enlisted man, he rose real quickly in rank because he could handle men. He had typing skills. He had administrative skills. Probably his commanding officer stayed home all of the time. When he heard about this opportunity—seeing it was a great opportunity for him—he got there. Whether or not they still kept him, but it so happened that in Washington they ended up having to be on “rent and subsistence”.

KCH: What kind of assistance?

FMF: Rent and subsistence. That was they gave you a stipend for rent and they gave you a stipend for food. So, it was a good deal.

KCH: And they also paid your tuition.

FMF: Yeah.

KCH: They made it possible.

FMF: Right. I was blessed. After two and a half years, they cut the program out. You had an option to either go directly into active duty or seek a deferment. Those all sought deferments and we were all given deferments. But, now you knew that they were going to get you anyway.

KCH: Exactly.



FMF: When I finished, I told you about how I had this little lunch and ended up having being sent out. Many guys that didn't go, they picked them up in the Korean War. That was the essence of, just about, what happened.

Of course, I had some decisions to make. When I finished, I got a letter a letter from the professor of crown bridges and prosthodontics offering me an instructorship. I thought about that thing and, since I was already committed for the Army, I saw no reason for me to go back and try to get the Dean to pull some strings. I figured that I had better get this thing—get it over with once-and-for-all and so I went back home.

KCH: This seems that maybe it would be a good place to stop for today.

FMF: Okay.

KCH: We have visited for an hour and forty minutes. Thank you for your stamina.

FMF: Oh, bless you. Bless you.

KCH: I am going to turn the tape off and then I would like to talk just briefly with you about what topics you'd like to cover next time. Thank you.

0:45:01           End of Second CD

*End of Interview #1*