

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: 106 minutes
Date:	February 27, 2006	Interview: 3 of 5

Counter Index Topic of Discussion

[CD 1 of 2, Third Interview 02/27/06]

0:00:00	Introductions
0:01:00	Exposure to dentistry as a child, Dr. James Chiles, D.D.S (1930s)
0:04:27	Dental Practice, Jackson Ward: Popularity of gold crowns (mid-1900s)
0:07:46	Dental Practice, Jackson Ward: Dentures (mid-1900s)
0:11:07	Dental Education: Personal memories of Dr. Chiles
0:14:23	Dental Education: Howard University
0:18:49	Dental Education: State Boards at MCV
0:20:19	Virginia African America Dental Pioneers
0:24:13	Dental Practice, Richmond: Dr. Tyler Haynes, orthodontist (mid-1900s)
0:35:47	Richmond African American Dental Specialists
0:37:44	Dental Practice, Jackson Ward: Popularity of gold crowns (mid-1900s)
0:41:54	Dental Practice: Setting dental fees (story)

0:43:30	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Scope of practice
0:48:52	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Dental hygienists and office staff
0:57:38	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Carmen Foster's childhood memories
0:61:46	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Details of running an office
0:64:47	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Community service
0:66:30	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Rapport with patients
1:11:32	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: House call, Virginia Florence
1:15:59	End of first CD

[CD 2 of 2, Third Interview 02/27/06]

0:00:05	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: House call, Virginia Florence (continued)
0:02:41	Dental practice, Dr. Foster: "Ministry in Dentistry"
0:08:38	Professional African American Dental Organizations
0:14:50	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: The Professional Budget Plan
0:23:45	Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Opening practice in Jackson Ward
0:30:06	End of second CD

[End of Third Interview]

Interview 3, Track 1

Track Time: 1:33

0:00:00 Introductions

Kathryn Colwell Hill: Good afternoon. Today is February 27, 2006. This is the third interview with Dr. Francis M. Foster, Sr. We are at James Branch Cabell Library again, his daughter Carmen Foster is here in the room and will ask some questions. I am Kathryn Colwell Hill and I am the interviewer.

Today, Dr. Foster—as we have just been discussing—we are going to focus on some questions that were provided by Jodi Koste, who is Head of Special Collections at the Virginia Commonwealth University Medical College Library, Tompkin-McCaw. She has extensive knowledge—it would appear—of what goes on in the dental field. I really appreciate Jodi's questions.

0:01:00 Exposure to dentistry as a child, Dr. James Chiles, D.D.S (1930s)

The first questions deal with early dental education. Jodi was aware, as I was [from your first interview], that you were influenced by Dr. James Chiles. Can you describe his dental practice? I know that he influenced you as a person, [for example in exposing you to] parliamentary procedure and things like that, but if you could talk about what his practice was like, from your observation.

(Recording was paused briefly as Dr. Foster organizes prepared notes regarding early Richmond dentists. These notes, "Dental Career Observations," are included in this file.)

Interview 3, Track 2,

Track time: 1:13:49

0:00:00 There we go. Okay, Dr. Chiles [is our first subject].

Go right ahead, Dr. Foster.

Francis Merrill Foster, Sr.: My first encounter with Dr. Chiles came when I was a child in elementary school. He was the school dentist. His office was at 301 W. Clay Street above the A&P grocery store. He later moved across the street to Brook Avenue and Clay's southeast corner, above the Virgil May Drug Store.

Before I had become a patient in this new office, I was allowed one day to sit in his waiting room at the front window and check off the number of persons who went in the store [A & P] as a purchaser. I would count the people. He cooperated with the local NAACP in their boycott efforts to get the A & P to hire colored clerks. I felt quite important being allowed to make the four ones on the paper and then the little diagonal to indicate the five. This made it easy for a final tally. I was available that day because my buddies and I played and hung out at the drug store's corner. For some reason, they picked me out to go upstairs and do it. This was probably my first baptism into the community service arena. He later started the Little Colonial early morning baseball club.

Dr. Chiles was a graduate of the Tufts Dental School, in Boston, and had served as a Pullman porter, which gave him a special knowledge of the charm and profitability of quality service. He was a member of the Peter B. Ramsey Dental Society of Petersburg and Richmond, which was a close-knit group of community service oriented professionals swimming against the tide of discrimination, segregation, and denial of civil rights. His office was well staffed and the limited number of black dentists kept everybody busy. The use of gold shell crowns for ornamentation, as well as for fixed bridgework, helped create profitability for all dental professionals. Most of his denture cases were done by Madison Jones, dental technician and a member of the staff of Dr. Leon A. Reid, Sr., D.D.S. His son, Ferguson Reid, M.D., became the first Virginia black delegate since Reconstruction. His other son, Leon A. Reid, Jr., was my childhood classmate at high school, college, and Howard Dental School.

Having worked with the schools, Dr. Chiles placed a strong emphasis on prevention; working mostly with low income people, domestic servants, and poorly paid factory workers.

His fees were fair, though modest at a time when people wanted it “Out. Take it out! Take it out!” Many grass roots persons, black and white, thought that gold in their mouths meant prestige. The speed with which a talented dentist could fashion a gold crown from a sheet of gold plate metal would amaze you. Amalgam restorations were cheaper than cast gold and became the fillings of choice, with white silicate for those who could afford only the least.

Dr. Chiles did have an x-ray. Helping patients hold them cost him a finger from radiation necrosis, which did not affect his operative skills. It made me more alert to the dangers as I practiced later. As a matter of fact, when I started in my office, I arranged to find out where I could get some eighth-inch thick lead. I placed them in my operatory, where the x-ray machine was going to be, up to six foot. We lead lined those walls. That gave me, the patients, and anybody else who entered a sense of protection.

0:04:25 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Concern regarding use of gold crowns (mid-1900s)

Many grass roots, as I told you, people thought that gold was the thing. People would come to me and say, “My daughter is going to become sixteen and I want to give her a gold crown for her birthday. But, I have never put a shell crown on a patient’s tooth in my whole years of practice. Well, I would do it on a denture. One of the other reasons why I didn’t do it was that I knew there was always a better way. Once you start compromising for the sake of profitability, you find your soul slipping away from you. The reason why we didn’t do it was because—. Most of the old dentists would just disk two sides of a tooth, see if the crown would fit up on it, cut off enough to get it to fit up there, and then cement it in. What it would leave would be a little margin, not much of a margin but it would be enough to make it an inverted garbage can. As a result, persons would eventually end up with periodontal disease. The only person you would probably feel safe putting it in their mouth would be a person who was meticulously careful. And, a person who was meticulously careful would prefer that you not use something that cheap, but something that might cost a little bit more.

The use of the shell crowns was an interesting point of contention with a lot of people in the profession. I never made much comment about it one way or another. I just felt comfortable not doing it.

0:06:27 Dental Practice, Jackson Ward: Dentures (mid-1900s)

Most of the denture cases were done by Madison Jones, the dental technician, as I told you. Incidentally, Madison Jones lived—was born in—the Maggie Walker house, he and his brother. His father was an interesting Richmond person. He had one brother who became a pharmacist. He did most of the dentures, artificial dentures, at that time, until I got out of school. At that time, all of the dentures were made of vulcanite rubber.

KCH: Vulcanite rubber?

FMF: Yes. The teeth were porcelain teeth. Now vulcanite rubber was rubber that was placed in the space where you put the material that was going to cover the gums. When processed, it gets very hard. You would vulcanize it for twelve hours and let it bench cool for six. Then it would be as hard as Bakelite. The denture teeth had—. On the back teeth, there were holes inside and to the side, which served as a lock for the rubber once it was processed. But, always the six front teeth had two tiny gold pins that held them onto the position. It was a joy when we were able to start using plastic teeth because you could cut them back and put them right where the others were. A lot of times when you had a close bite—even the smallest teeth—they would sort of stick out a little bit. Even though you were doing the best that you could.

KCH: Did many people during that time, during the 1930s and 40s, need to have dentures, complete sets of dentures? Was their personal dental hygiene, their practices, not up to snuff?

FMF: Yes. The tendency was also for physicians when they had a patient that they couldn't find a cure for, they would say, "Probably your system is being poisoned by your teeth."

KCH: Oh, dear.

FMF: Of course, if he had a buddy who was a dentist and who liked to specialize in taking out teeth, they had a good income. But it was a situation where, if a person—. It is just like the classic story about a woman who went to see a physician. She had been treated by him for quite some time. Finally, he just said, “You know, I think what you need to do is to get your teeth taken out.” He said, “I’ve tried everything.” So she reached in her mouth, took them out, and put them up, to his amazement. He had never taken the time to look in her throat to see just what was what, since she wasn’t complaining about her mouth.

The denture situation was an interesting situation. Then sometimes people would just decide—after they had a few teeth left—they’d get up the nerve, “to get me a plate,” thinking that their problems would cease. The problems would just begin.

KCH: Dr. Chiles was a dentist in the schools, wasn’t he?

FMF: Yes, in addition to his practice.

KCH: Right. At what age did most children start receiving dental care, during your youth.

FMF: At six years of age, when you first started, if you had any complaint they would send you to the school dentist. Then sometimes the school dentist would come around and do a cursory examination, look in everybody’s mouth, see who had a lot of decay. It would usually be families who had a lot of candy for the kids and had no real cleanliness whatsoever.

KCH: Did you have some other thoughts about Dr. Chiles? I didn’t want to interrupt you, or steer you in another direction. We can move on—.

0:11:02 Dental Education: Personal memories of Dr. Chiles

FMF: He was a very dedicated civic person. Just like, he made his office available for that little thing. Eventually, after they found out how many people went in there, they put up picket signs, but the Negroes didn’t pay it any mind. You see, the A & P would always have the prices to undercut the grocers in town on those specialty items. People would come in to save

those few pennies on those specialty items, even though they were in-bed with the neighbors for not cooperating, you see.

He had a sister who lived down in Kilmarnock, in Lancaster County. Because he would go back and forth—particularly for fishing, he was a great fisherman—he decided to buy him a place down there. Of course, through his brother-in-law, he was able to find out where there was some land available cheap. He built him a place down there.

KCH: His dental practice. It sounds as though he gave quite a bit of his time at a much-reduced cost. Even though he provided dental care to indigent people, he stayed profitable.

FMF: He had a lot of people from down in the country who knew his family. People would always be talking about him. He had a way with people. He had a sort of, I guess you'd call it that special family touch.

0:14:23 Dental education: Howard University

KCH: At the time that you were getting ready to go to dental college—you have stated in the past—Virginia schools were not open to black students and thus MCV was not an option for you at that time.

FMF: No. No schools in the South and very few in the North.

KCH: Could you elaborate on that? You chose to go to Howard. Were there other options that you considered?

FMF: The other option would have been Meharry, which is in Nashville, Tennessee. It was an all black medical and dental school. My best buddy had gone the year before, to Meharry. I was kind of leaning. Then I had a cousin, named Joe Epps, who had gone to Meharry and had made a name for himself. He was the roommate of a fellow named Forrester, which was an outstanding Richmond family. Dr. William Forrester's grandfather was a page in the Senate, very fair. When they trashed the flag, on the day that we succeeded, in 1860, that night he went back and he got that flag.

Did I tell you that story?

KCH: You did, but you did it off-tape. Go right ahead. I think that is one of those stories—.

FMF: He went back that night when no one was around, wrapped it around him, put his coat around him, and brought it home. He put it under his mattress and it stayed—. He slept on it for four years, until the black troops from Massachusetts came in. Then he brought it out and that was the first flag to go back up on the capital.

His brother was, for about fifty-five years, a professor of medicine at Meharry. My cousin Joe left and went to New Orleans and became an outstanding surgeon. He has a son who is a neurosurgeon. My buddy who went there—. (Chuckles) He liked it, but he was away the next year. The next year Leon Reid had gone early—he didn't get his bachelors—he had enough credits in sciences to be admitted. His father was a graduate and so he had a little legacy factor going on. When he would come back and talk about the professors and everything—. Then too, when I thought about going from Meharry back home, there is a difference in catching the RF&P [Richmond Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad] and coming back in two hours. So, I decided that I was going to go to Howard.

Also, my Uncle James had finished in 1902, the School of Pharmacy. His son James had finished in 1937, the School of Pharmacy. I had Mother's brother-in-law, Dr. James Blackwell from Southside, Manchester. He finished in the—, somewhere early in the 1900s. The Blackwell area is named for his father, who was the principal of a school over there. Of course, when they annexed they took that principalship away from him. Those were the Howard factors.

Then as I began to think, I had three or four sets of cousins in Washington. You think the Graves. You think of Stokes, the Plumbers. My favorite uncle and aunt, they were in D. C. And then, I had two girlfriends, who used to come and visit Richmond. That made it really, really easy for me to do.

KCH: How long was the dental program at Howard?

FMF: Four years.

KCH: Four years. At that time, was that comparable to the length of the program at Virginia Commonwealth?

FMF: Yes, they were all a standard length of time.

0:18:49 Early Dental Education: State Boards at MCV

At that particular time—I remember—I came down to take the state board. The school was where the old pharmacy building is, next door. I went directly down—. I went directly to that back door to make sure that there wouldn't be anybody that would start a mess. As soon as I got inside, I heard a guy walk by and somebody say, "Hey, Bear. Come here and meet" so in so. So the next time he came past me, I said, "Excuse me"—the dean was named Harry Bear—"Are you any kin to Dr. Bear?" meaning Dean Bear. He said, "I am Dr. Bear." He said, "My name is Elmer, what is yours?" I said, "Francis Foster." He said, "Fellows meet Dr. Francis Foster." I said, "I'm not a doctor yet." Before I could get out anything more, he said, "How the hell can you be taking the boards if you aren't a doctor?" I said, "We made arrangements with John Hughes, the Secretary, to allow us to take it in the blind. When they give us our diplomas, they will let us know if we passed." Sure enough, I saw him again, when we went down to Fort Sam. They shipped him to Yokohama and they shipped me to the Philippines. Then he came back, went to Michigan for his maxillofacial surgery and rose to be one of the foremost maxillofacial surgeons in the country. His son is now the head of the oncological surgery and medicine department at MCV. He was at TJ a year ahead of you [Carmen].

0:20:19 Virginia African American Dental Pioneers

KCH: You mentioned maxillofacial surgery, which leads right into the next question that Jodi had for us. She asks who were some of the Virginia African American dental pioneers in orthodontics, endodontics, periodontics, oral surgery. Who are some of the names that—?

FMF: There are two or three names that I have written down, briefly.

You see, when the average Negro went to professional school he had it psychologically made. He didn't have time for additional training. He was usually ready to try to make some money and get socially prestigious. Then you would find some of them who weren't satisfied, they were going to try to be —. They were rare, but they were usually people who fought for it to occur and they usually went on up.

In orthodontia, we had a very close friend in James Chiles, from Richmond.

KCH: James Chiles?

FMF: Yes. —and Emmett Julian Scott. James Chiles went to Tufts, but Emmett Scott was fortunate. He was a good baseball player at Virginia Union and a good student. He entered the Harvard dental class at just about the same time, the year before he [Chiles] went to Tufts. He finished number two in a class of thirty-three. He left there and took a job at the clinic at Forsythe. Forsythe is an outstanding clinic in Boston, graduate clinic. Then he was brought back, in the prosthetics department. He was the second black to teach at the Harvard Dental School. Then he came to Howard and became head of the orthodontics department. He became the first black certified in orthodontics.

KCH: I'm not quite keeping track of the time frame here. He would have been at Howard when you were a student.

FMF: Yes, he was there. He was the head of the orthodontics department, about that same time. See, he was from Richmond originally, but he didn't come back. They sort of kept him up there in D.C. His father and my father worked in the post office as clerks, together.

KCH: Here in Richmond.

FMF: Um hum. He was named Emmett Scott because he was born in Tuskegee. Then they came right directly to Richmond. There was a secretary of Booker T. Washington named Emmett Scott. He was an outstanding newsman and administrator and was alive during Booker T. Washington's success. They weren't kin. He just happened to be named Emmett Scott, Emmett Scott the notable.

The next person, probably, who I would bring to mind would be in—. Years later in orthodontics, we did have a young fellow who was the first one to finish in orthodontics at MCV named Dr. Ralph Anderson.

KCH: Okay. Ralph Anderson.

Carmen Francine Foster: Ralph is probably in his late sixties.

FMF: Yes.

CFF: So that's a big gap.

KCH: So he was one of the first to enter the MCV Dental College.

CFF: Indirectly, at the graduate level. Then there was another Virginian named Nathaniel West, who later went to the University of Minnesota and finished in [nineteen] seventy-five in endodontics. He came directly to MCV and was added to its faculty. Some years later, he left and went to Howard, where he is now. He is about ready to retire.

KCH: What I am picking up from you is that there were not specialists, black specialists here in Richmond. Where did people go when they needed further—. Where did African American people go when they needed further dental work?

FMF: Usually they were referred to the white dental community.

KCH: —and that community would see them.

FMF: If they could afford to pay.

CFF: Can I give a little story?

FMF: Right.

0:24:13 Dental Practice, Richmond: Dr. W. Tyler Haynes, orthodontist (mid-1900s)

CFF: When I was eight or nine, I had an overbite and needed braces. I remember Daddy took me to see this man named Dr. W. Tyler Haynes. I think I went to him for four years. I had my braces done by him—in fact I may still have the wire, somewhere, that I just kept—but I do remember the fact that there was something different about him. You know, naturally, he was

white. I was just beginning to realize the racial differences then because I was eight or nine years old. He always seemed to be very cordial, because I was his [Dr. Foster's] daughter.

I do remember one time when one of the wires in my braces had slipped and I needed for him to adjust it. Normally when I would see Dr. Haynes, it would be very early in the morning. [This time] the only time I could see him was later on in the afternoon. When I would see him in the morning, I remember there was another little, young, Negro girl—I'll say it like that—that would be there too. If I saw her face, I would remember it. I remember she would have—. She would always be holding a twenty-dollar bill in her hand, which was a lot of money. Her mother would give her the money to pay for her braces. I'm guessing that Dr. Haynes saw me as a professional courtesy—.

FMF: Um hum.

CFF: —because I don't remember ever having to do the same. Seeing other little African American children, the few that would be there in the morning would be no big deal. But when I came to visit him in the afternoon, I do remember just sitting where I would normally sit and everyone else was white, in there. (Aside to Dr. Foster) I don't know if you remember this. I know that I was asked to come inside where one of his workers were, so that I wouldn't be out in that hallway. For me, that wasn't anything that I would think about as being uncomfortable or insulting because I spent a lot of time with my father's workers. For me to be next to them to do my homework, in that position, really made it feel just as cozy as if I was with the ladies who worked for him. I didn't really think about it until I got much older. Then I realized that they had asked me to sit in another space because they wanted, they evidently had sorted it out so that he saw his colored patients at one time of day and then white patients at other times of the day. The irony is that, when I worked at the University of Richmond, our faculty meetings were all in a room that was named for W. Tyler Haynes. As you know the—

FMF: The Tyler Haynes Conference Room.

CFF: —the Student Commons is named after Tyler Haynes. And so, it is amazing, our lives tend to go in circles. It all comes back and people would look at me so strange when I would tell them that Tyler Haynes is responsible for my smile, but he really was. In lots of ways, there were so many symbols of him at UR that I felt comfortable at UR because I knew who these people were. I knew Dr. Haynes and he was very kind to me, very kind to me.

KCH: I almost sense, from what you are telling me, that the white community was unaware of the fact that he treated the African American community.

FMF: Probably, more or less. As far as I know, I think he was the only one.

KCH: Really. Oh, my.

FMF: When I reflect back—. I was thinking if I might have taken a turn at trying to do a preceptorship under him. I never asked. He might have arranged, you know. He was a real gentleman, real gentleman.

CFF: Oddly enough—clearly, we know that the orthodontic dentists make money—he owned an apartment complex that was, like, a block from our home! He did. It is right at Byrd Park. Naturally, he doesn't own it now but probably the sale from that was very helpful to the University of Richmond. (Laughs) That is where his money comes from, real estate and things like that. I always thought that was interesting.

FMF: I'll tell you what I do remember. I remember a case I had where a kid came in with teeth sticking out like that (indicates a forty-five degree angle). I talked to his mother and I said, "It will cost you a little bit but it will really be worth your while; when you think of a lot of the things that you will spend money on, clothes and everything." I said, "But you can do a lot for his image." She went over and he worked his case and everything, started him with the braces.

Well, something happened. I think it was about the time when the Eisenhower recession came. Her husband was working construction and the money just wasn't coming in. She said, "We can never continue." I said, "Talk to him and see what he says." She apparently went over

there with the child. He went and got his models, where he had started and then where he was. He was telling them that he could make some arrangements, probably to see him a little less frequently. He was trying to cooperate.

Anyway, she must have come directly from his office to my office. She waited out there a while. He must have seen her early in the morning, because I know at lunchtime I talked with her. She sat down and said, "You know, you sent me over there but I ain't no fool. He showed me some things and said—they were all sticking out—said that they were Willy's. They weren't Willy's. I just, I just don't—. Sometimes you think that you are doing right, but I just don't trust white-folk." As fate would have it, it just so happened that I had just started taking color slides of all my patients. When I opened his chart, I said, "Yeah, did his mouth looked all—. They all stuck out, didn't they, just like right here." She said, "Yes, just like that. That's the way it looked." I said, "That's your son." She said, "Dr. Foster, I shouldn't have talked to him the way that I did." Don't you know what she did? She must have turned around, gone back over there, and apologized to him.

KCH: Good for her, but how unfortunate that she had that initial feeling.

FMF: But you know what? If you could have seen the case, you'd never—. Changes were taking place so slowly. She sees him every day and all of a sudden, you saw that thing of his mouth. She just couldn't believe it.

KCH: It is good to know about the cooperation and that there was someone in Richmond who was willing to break the conventions of the time and treat—.

CFF: Dr. Haynes' office was not that far from Daddy's office. Dr. Haynes' office was in the Medical Arts Building, which would be in the—

FMF: two-hundred block.

CFF: The two-hundred block of Second Street, right across the corner from the City Library. Daddy's office was in the four-hundred block of First Street. So, it was quite easy to

walk from his office to the other. The line of demarcation between black and white was Broad Street.

KCH: Each [office] roughly two blocks on either side.

CFF: —of Broad Street. Exactly. I think that when he was describing how quickly the woman could come over to his office, it was very quick. I remember when I would go to Dr. Haynes' office, some times that Daddy would try to take me back or at other times, I would catch a cab. The cab would always be a Manhattan Cab to go to see Dr. Haynes, either back or forth. The Manhattan Cab was the black cab company. I mean, we really would not call for a Yellow Cab; we'd always call for a Manhattan Cab. I remember that as just part of that era and time.

0:35:47 Richmond African American Dental Specialists

KCH: Do you want to talk about anyone in other areas? We've talked about orthodontics, primarily. It is okay. There is plenty of material to cover and we do want to focus on your personal career.

FMF: In 1984, Barry Griffin, a VCU periodontics dental grad did his grad work at Temple and he came and taught here at the dental school.

Then we had Lt. Col. James Wilbanks—a Meharry graduate and a retired military oral surgeon at Fort Lee—who devised an intra-oral method of repositioning protrusive lower jaws. Most of his success came from an internal magnifying surface on his patented retractor, which received requests from thirty-three foreign countries for reprints. He did a preceptorship under General Shira, who later became head of the Dental Corps. But, he had designed this little thing that you hold the tissues back with and designed it and had it smoothly curved enough that it would magnify the surface. What would happen is, ordinarily, you would go in and you'd make an opening here and you'd make an opening there. (Dr. Foster indicates long, vertical incisions in front of each ear.) Then you would shorten the jaw and put wires back there. He had a method by which you would go in, into the mouth, shorten the jaw, and put the wires in. Then when it healed, you had no keloid formation. See, the more you have pigmentation, the more keloid will

form. Scars would sometimes become unsightly. He made an interesting, interesting breakthrough.

KCH: Your mentioning that just highlights for me—. It is an area that never occurs to me that when an African American's skin scars there is that keloid formation.

FMF: Kel, meaning sort-of rounded like, o-i-d. I remember when I was in high school somehow or another kids found out that if you'd take a match and you rub it enough, it would cause something like a little keloid formation. They would take it and try to put an initial on the arm. Of course, it would stay.

KCH: Yes, forever.

FMF: (Laughing) I remember Mama used to say, "If I ever catch you playing with matches, in any way."

0:37:44 Dental Practice, Jackson Ward: Popularity of Gold Crowns (mid-1900s)

KCH: Can you think of anything else—that kind of introduced another topic—is there anything else that was unique about dental practice for an African American community, that you needed to take into account?

FMF: Well, the emphasis on gold crowns was something that—. Right now, there is a company that puts out gold crowns for artificial teeth. Some of them have stars, some of them have, many different types of ornamentation.

KCH: You see them on sports stars quite frequently.

CFF: In the hip-hop community, they call it the grill. Your teeth are like a grill, a car grill.

KCH: But it had its beginnings back in the thirties, twenties and thirties.

CFF: Um hum

KCH: When you said that, I thought, "Well that is a recent phenomenon, from my observation."

CFF: Dr. Leon Reid, Sr. was particularly gifted in fashioning gold crowns. He would cut the gold out and take a pair of pliers and twist it a certain way. They had a way that they would put a tiny little piece of solder there. They would know how to just, maybe count “one-two-three-four” and by that time, the solder had flown right into that space. Then they would turn it over and do the other side like that. Then they would crimp and they could fashion a crown. It was profitable, when you could use the crown.

KCH: Did you ever feel that—? You commented that you did not take that route for profitability. Were there dentists that might have been part of that practice because they were trying to offset some of the dental work that they did that they were not able to charge for? In other words, it is just like often we have those people that pay the full way and then there are others that can only pay part. You feel that you want to serve that individual but you have to make ends meet.

FMF: One thing, whenever you deal with anything that relates to cosmetics or esthetics, you can charge more or less what you want because a patient is being led not by economics but by vanity, and emotionally. They will do anything. So many beautiful girls were messed up by having gold crowns put on teeth. Later, if they were, maybe, around New York and a guy wanted to use her as a photographer’s model, they couldn’t use her because of that tooth. Even when they’d take it off, it would be hard. The only way that they could possibly do it would be to do an expensive porcelain jacket crown, on the tooth. You could hardly tell. It was just one of those things.

0:41:54 Dental Practice: Setting dental fees (story)

Well, you remind me of a story of my mentor in prosthetics at Howard, Dr. Adolphos Walton. Coming along, he always realized that you cannot look at a person and tell how well off they are. This woman came into his office; she looked like she was very poor. She said, “Doctor, you don’t remember me, but three years ago you took out my last teeth and told me to come and get some plates. Then my cousin was real sick in South Carolina. We went down for two weeks

and stayed two years. All of those folks have died and I've come back now. You said that you wanted me to wait until my gums got hard and I know they are hard enough now. I've come to see how much you are going to charge me to get some new teeth."

He looked at her and said "This poor woman." At that time dentures were fifty and fifty for the lower. He said, "Oh, why darling, for you that will just be fifty dollars." She reached in her bosom, took out this roll big enough to choke a cow, and opened it. Taken back, finally he said, "—for, for the upper and seventy-five for the lower." (Laughter)

0:43:30 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Scope of practice

KCH: Fun story! Well, are you ready to focus on your practice in Jackson Ward? One of Jodi's questions was—.

FMF: I had [prepared notes]. I saw patients at about thirty to forty-five minute intervals, related to their specific treatment plan. Work-ins would, in another chair be moved when we had an interval of time to try to move things along, to expedite our time situation. I worked Monday to Friday with Wednesday evenings for staff meeting and treatment planning. I would see from six to twelve patients on some days.

I would do exodontias, silver amalgam and gold foil restorations, gold inlays, full and partial dentures, porcelain jacket crowns, and tooth colored front fillings. Most frequently I treated patients for the relief of pain, sometimes involving extraction and sometimes not. We emphasized the value of saving teeth and ended up doing considerable pro-bono root canal endodontics work. I was fortunate to have an excellent dental technician, which made it possible for me to be moderate in my fee schedule, as far as dentures were concerned. If I could not see a patient, I would refer them to five or six dentists, who were nearby in Jackson Ward, or to the dental school.

I was fortunate from the start in securing a vibrant, outgoing, young lady who had been Miss Armstrong [High School]. She caught on quickly and was a great assistant and office manager. When I came along, there was only one minority hygienist in the state. Her name was

Dr. Francis M. Foster, Sr.

Mrs. Love Johnson. She was the daughter of Dr. J. A. Jackson, who was the secretary of the National Dental Association for years.

I enjoyed cleaning teeth as it gave me a chance to indoctrinate a captive audience, to go home and repeat my preventative lesson to their other beloveds. Sometimes a member of a large family came in and I asked them a question about previous treatment. If they answered it, and remembered the reason why, we would give them an envelope with a dollar bill in it or maybe not charge for the day's service. They would go home and say, "He gave me a dollar because I—." They would listen.

I had no problem with staff. One family supplied me with six female sisters and a niece, who served me for over thirty-five years.

KCH: —and which family is that?

FMF: The Scott family. I received my dental supplies, first, from Harris Dental Company in the old Medical Arts Building on Second Street—that is where Dr. Haynes' office was, upstairs—and also, Powers and Anderson at Allen Avenue and Broad Street and, later, the mail order houses and Schein, which was a big dental company for years. But also, they moved, Harris Dental Company was taken over by Patterson, which is one of the large dental companies. They were out, over near where Circuit City was. We had good rapport with the dental supply company people because so often, we would go out there and pick-up stuff. But, it had reached the point now that they wouldn't stock a whole lot of stuff and you'd call in an order. We would do a whole lot of planning ahead. It kept us pretty well situated.

KCH: Do I understand you then that you did not experience discrimination in obtaining supplies that you needed or the latest equipment.

FMF: No, the thing that I had to watch was somebody coming in and wanting to twist your arm in order to sell something. We had a cordial relationship. One thing I learned. I remember one day Dr. Chiles had gone down to Harris Dental Company. The guy behind the desk said, (loudly) "Hey boy, how you doing?" He said, "Fine," and he told him what his order

was. He said, “You know, I told them I’m going to get that white man straight. Let him know that I ain’t no boy.” So sure enough, the next time he had an order to take down there—he’d already gotten everything in line, he’s an elderly—one of the oldest white dentists in the city came in and the guy said, “Hey boy, how you doing today? What’s your order?” After he waited on him and the man left, he said, “I want to apologize to you.” He said, “For what?” He said, “You know, I notice that you call everybody ‘boy’, don’t you?” He said, “Yeah, boy.” (Laughter) He said, “Well, I just wanted you to know that that’s alright with me. It’s alright with me.” That is one of those things that kind-of stuck with me. It also made me sort of take a position that whenever you are getting ready to try and focus on something, you’ve got to be sure that you are making the right move. You don’t know what the person’s intent really is. There are a lot of people that will be ever so polite to you and they want to stick a knife in your back soon as they get a chance. There might be some other people that you think might hate you, but if a crisis come up they’d be the first ones to jump up there and plead your cause.

0:48: 52 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Dental hygienists and office staff

CFF: May I add a couple of things to what you said?

FMF: Uh hugh.

CFF: One is. You talked about the first person that worked for you. Was that Berthel?

FMF: No.

CFF: Who was that?

FMF: The person who worked for me was Merry Patterson.

CFF: Merry Patterson. You said she was Miss Armstrong. I wanted you to know that she was Miss Armstrong High School.

KCH: That is what I picked-up on and it is important for the recording.

CFF: When did Berthel come in?

FMF: Well. The next year, Doug Wilder’s sister, Beulah Berthel Wilder, came for routine cleaning. She said, “Dr. Foster, what do you have to do to become a dental assistant?” I

said, “You can go to school; you can get a correspondence course; or you can do what they call a preceptorship. That is where you work in somebody’s office and they train you.” She said, “Have you ever considered training anybody, to see if they were serious?” I said, “Why did you ask?” She said, “I’m a cashier and I’ve worked up to the chief cashier at the Fort Dix PX.” She said, “A lot of the people from the dental clinic and they always say, “Girl, you sure know how to handle people. If you had just the least bit of skill, we would hire you in a minute at the clinic.” You know, in short shrift. I said, “Yes, I would consider it. The only thing is if I was to train somebody, and they had no real desire to stay with me, I would require that they at least stayed with me long enough to get somebody to take their place.” About six months later, she said, “I’ve got leave. I’ll be able to come to work in two weeks.” I said, “Okay.” And so, we trained her. Well, she had desire. Do you know what I mean? In other words, she asked questions and she just sopped up everything that we were doing. Then, when I felt that she was really ready, I told her, “We are going to see how you do this week. I’m going to see if we have to make a check mark on anything.” She had everything down pat.

She brought in the next week a very ordinary, country-looking girl. — kind of tall, but just country. Not unattractive. It was during the time when the “sack” came into being. Do you remember the sack?

KCH: Do you mean the Strategic Air Command?

FMF: No, the dress. (Laughter)

KCH: Oh, the sack. (Laughing) Okay, we are going way-different directions!

FMF: You know when someone would walk up to somebody and say, “Are you in style or are you in trouble,” because you couldn’t tell if they were hiding something. (Chuckles)

Anyway, that girl in her sack, when she showed up—she’d taken care of her hair and she was already taking care of her fingernails—she was an excellent typist. She made a complete overhaul. Sometimes dental detail men would come in and if they caught a glimpse of her

walking up that hall, you could see that she had a little something! She was from a family of six girls. To make a long story short, she moved right on in.

CFF: What was her name?

FMF: Jean, Joan's twin sister.

CFF: The reason that I wanted you to mention it was because you said that it was the Williams family, but it was really the Scott family.

FMF: Yes, the Scott family. I'm sorry.

CFF: —because Joan's married name was Williams. So, that was the other person's family name.

FMF: Jo's family. Later, Joan joined Jean as a dental assistant.

CFF: Jo married Williams. When he talked about that, there was a family that supplied a lot—. It was the Scott family, not the Williams family. I just wanted to make sure that you got that, as a correction.

KCH: Okay. This would have been Jean Scott Williams.

CFF: No. Jean Scott and she had a sister named Joan.

FMF: I'm trying to think of whom Jean married.

CFF: Whom did Jean marry?

FMF: Anyway, she was Jean Scott.

CFF: Her sister Joan married a Williams.

FMF: Then there were four other sisters that worked with me. One was a very young and attractive girl, named Sylvia, and unfortunately—.

CFF: Was that Chinky?

FMF: Yes, her nickname was Chink. A guy named J. Earley Wood, who was an insurance agent for Prudential. He came by one day and we were talking. He said, "When are you going to give these folks a raise?" I said, "Soon." He said, "Ask them if instead of a raise they would like to have some income protection insurance, in case they were sick or something

like that.” So we had this little staff meeting and everybody said, “Yes, that they would prefer—.” So, he put it into effect.

Now this was in September. Christmas, Chink was out riding Christmas night, I mean New Year’s Eve night with her friend. His car went out of control and they both were killed. The next morning, Wood called me up and said, “I see where Chink died.” I said, “Yes, that was she.” He said, “Well listen, I want to bring you a check and let you take it to her mother.” Anyway, they brought me a five-figure check and, because it was an accident, it was triple indemnity. Chink had just had a baby, about nine months old.

KCH: So it really helped the family.

FMF: Yes, it did. See all of that money went into a guardianship.

I think that, too, was one thing that kept the family and us so close, because we shared that mutual grief.

CFF: Yes, that was a real tragedy when that happened. I will say that the sisters were always good to us as children, when we would come into the office. We would go over there in the afternoons, after school and things like that. They were exceptionally warm and friendly to us. Interestingly, when Joan’s daughter got married, she asked my son to be in the wedding. There was always a very nice kind of cordialness that I always felt. I will tell people that I was a dental assistant from the age of eight.

KCH: I don’t doubt it. You were interested.

57:38:2 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Carmen Foster’s childhood memories

CFF: Well, I would have to spend my time in Daddy’s office, as a kid. The ladies were always there showing me how to do different things. I always appreciated what they did.

KCH: Okay clarify. When you said you “had to spend time in your father’s office;” almost as if your mother had things going on and so you were to stay in your father’s office—

CFF: I was always up under my daddy, like a little puppy.

KCH: So it was by choice.

CFF: Yes, yes. But do eight year olds have a choice? (Laughter) I think that—after school and whenever he would want to check his mail on Saturdays—I think that up until, well through college I was there. Even when I got married, I remember that I wanted to redo the bathroom. He just gave me the key and my husband and I redecorated the whole bathroom, painted it all, just as a gift to him. When it was time for him to retire, I was in there just taking over all of the records and putting things on the computer. I had a little PC Jr. back then. Whatever needed to be done, that was just part of what you did; at least, maybe, for me as the eldest.

KCH: It must have been nice for you, Dr. Foster, to have your child there and showing such interest.

FMF: Oh, yes.

CFF: But, I was not interested in the practice of dentistry. I could not handle the blood! When it came to doing x-rays, I could do that. In fact, that experience of developing the x-ray negatives—. I became a photographer later. I took classes at VCU and worked as a media specialist later on, in the early part of my career. I always think about being in that dark room as a part of something that I learned. I was used to chemicals and things like that.

One of the things that I really enjoyed was being around during the sixties because that was probably the last days and times of the vibrance of that whole Second Street area. So that being able to see the people in the neighborhood. Two blocks down, I think about Sam Owens' Esso station, where I'd be able to go and just ask him to gas-up Daddy's car, so I could drive it. Knowing that Sam would keep all that, those bills, together and then put them on Daddy's credit card later on. When you'd see them, there was a sense of feeling very connected to that Second Street community. That was nice. There was a wonderful place on Second Street where I'd love to get lunch for everybody in Daddy's office, including Daddy. It was a place called Anderson's Grill. On Fridays—that was their fish day—I liked to go so that I could make sure that he'd buy me lunch while I'd get everybody else lunch.

Even when we were little kids, we would sit back in the office with Robert Morse, who was his dental tech. Mr. Morse would find ways to keep us busy by giving us some hot wax. We would try to be good about being around the Bunsen burner and we would take our little tools and melt the wax. He would give us some teeth that we put in with the wax. As little kids, we'd make our own monster teeth. We'd have stuff to do. Every now and then, Dad would let us piddle around with the plaster to make impressions, of anything. Just being around, in that area, kept us busy.

KCH: It sounds as though it was creative. It was intellectually stimulating. You were learning some safety aspects around the Bunsen burner.

CFF: Then Daddy would always want us to meet certain people. He'd want people to meet the kids. We always have to be on our best behavior when he would take them into the back area, which is where we had a little lunch area, on one side. Mr. Morse's dental lab was back there. That was nice. I enjoyed that.

0:61:46 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Details of running an office

KCH: Now this is at 416—

FMF: At 416 North First.

KCH: —and it was an upstairs—. How many rooms? How many chairs did you have in that dental office?

FMF: Well, at one time I had the front room—

CFF: Well until maybe about the seventies?

FMF: Um hum.

CFF: You had two chairs that were available. Then you knocked the wall between your office and Dr. Gordon's second floor open, so it was a larger suite. Then you had three, if not four, chairs available. I think that got closed up in the mid-eighties when Dr. Gordon was shutting down things.

FMF: Right

CFF: Typically, you would have two.

FMF: For a short time, I had a lady come and work with me. She was working for the Department of Corrections, in the prison.

CFF: Dr. Dianne Ready was her name.

FMF: She spent about the equivalent of two days a week.

KCH: What were her responsibilities?

FMF: She was supplementing some of the treatment plans that we had done. She was interested in developing more confidence. It wasn't long before she was a big shot. Then, later on, she moved on up in the State Department health system, I think. She was at Southampton, the last I heard.

A little later, in the mid-fifties, we began to—

CFF: Dianne came in the eighties.

FMF: Eighties. Right. But we had started doing a little more selling of dentistry, per say. After a couple years of that, we could see that the few people that we were able to, maybe, satisfy and I just didn't feel comfortable. We sort of relaxed and we went back to what was similar to the other system that we had. We were able to keep my staff happy and keep me happy, too.

Some of the guys really went all out for the business of dentistry. I guess I was into what we call the professional, the community service aspect of it.

0:64:47 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Community service

CFF: I will say that Dad—. In the 1970s, in 1970, Dad was appointed to the Virginia Museum Board. That responsibility took a bit of time, for him to be out of the office. While people may want to do these things, particularly because I think he is the second black to be appointed to the board. You are dealing with folks that have a lot of money. I do remember that he was out to go to all of these meetings, because he wanted to be a good representative of the race as a part of doing that. But it did take time away from his work. I know that he worked later

at night, sometimes, seeing patients. I don't think that people understand the sacrifice that one makes trying to do that public duty. I think that is why eventually Dad, in the seventies—

In 1980, he was asked to be on the School Board. He did that for a couple of years, but, in doing that for the School Board, then some of the work that he had been doing with children, he forwent because he didn't want a conflict of interest. I think that it is important to recognize the financial sacrifice that one has to make in order to do public duty. In a way that is also compounded by the fact that he's not one that has seen dentistry as a lucrative business, but as a community service in that regard.

0:66:30 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Rapport with patients

There are a couple of things that I wanted to point out, that I think were important, about being in the office, when you asking what was it like to be in his office. Number one is that Dad is a magician. That was wonderful for children who were scarred to death to deal with the dentist. Being able to do some little magic tricks—not just with kids but patients who were kids at heart and were nervous—was a way to calm them and so he could establish a rapport with them. I think that that is important, to think about what it is like to be in the chair. One thing that I remember, as a child, is that Daddy would have these rings and little tokens, like Cracker Jack type toys, that he used to give to kids if they were good. I remember, whenever he would order these things, I wanted to try to find the two or three that I liked the best. I could get those out of the pile before he gave them to his patients. We had little rings, little trinkets, and little toys that he'd get from a novelty place; he'd send away. I just thought that that was really a thoughtful token. I wanted to mention that, what it was like for the kids.

Another thing I remember was—the trinkets, the toys, the—. I think my father sees dentistry as a ministry. With all due respect, you might think that you are getting your teeth cleaned but you would also end up hearing stories. Sometimes it would take a little longer. Sometimes he'd be backed up with some of his patients because some of them might have problems or concerns and they would talk to them about that. He would consider that as much a

part of his practice as the actual dental part. Some people got spiritually cared for, while they were also being dentally cared for. That would take some time. Sometimes some people would be waiting an hour, or more, to see him. That was just part of how people were served then. Sometimes we wouldn't get home until eight or nine o'clock at night. Part of that was also because people who might need to see him might book at six or six-thirty, after work. They couldn't leave their job until then. That is something that I remember, not being able to get home until like eight, eight-thirty, or nine. I would bring my—. Sometimes in high school, I would come to the office if he'd say he needed extra help. I would work from like three-thirty, when I'd get out of school, until eight-thirty or nine o'clock. Then I'd just do my homework in between, while he is waiting for that last patient. Sometimes we would even take patients home.

FMF: Um hum.

CFF: If it would be late at night. Or, we may need to see somebody or drop a denture off before we got home. People got; clearly, they got that kind of personalized service with a house call. He'd have his little black bag and everything. We would end up doing that sometimes before we came home.

1:11:32 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: House call, Virginia Florence

FMF: Did I tell you the story of Virginia Procter Florence, who was the first black librarian registered in the country?

KCH: Refresh my memory. Her name is familiar but I don't know that I've heard her story.

CFF: Was she one of your patients?

FMF: Yes. What happened was VUU Coach Tom Harris' wife—a city school art supervisor, Lolly Harris, and Sylvia's mother—said, "I've got a cousin who needs some dental work. She is elderly. She can't walk up the steps." I said—

KCH: Oh.

FMF: Did I tell you that story?

KCH: (nods) I don't think that it is on tape though. I think that these are discussions that we had. Please proceed.

FMF: I said that we usually—unless she is unusually heavy—we usually bring an aluminum chair down. I take one part, somebody [takes the other], and we lift them right up. I said, “But please find out specifically what she needs. Do you know if she has artificial teeth?” She said, “I don't know. I'll ask.” So, she called me back and said, “She has artificial teeth.” I said, “That won't be any problem. I have a medical bag. I'll get some stuff that will be necessary and I'll just take it on over there. Tell her I will be there in the morning at nine o'clock.”

I get up that morning, wash, dress, and get ready to go out. Usually I'd come in, take the paper, and throw it upstairs to my wife, if she wasn't up, but usually she was up. I saw it said, “Barney Clark receives artificial heart.” He was a dentist. He was the first guy to get an artificial heart. I didn't have time to read it and so I went on to Mrs. Florence's. I had known Dr. Florence's wife, but I hadn't seen her in a long time. She had developed chronic arthritis and she was in failing health. Her husband used to be the president of Lincoln University, Missouri, and head of the Virginia Union University Department of Education. He was an outstanding community service person.

I walked in and I said, “Good morning, Mrs. Florence.” She said, “Good morning, Dr. Foster.” She said, “Did you read the morning paper?” I said, “No, I didn't have time to read it but I read about Barney Clark.” She said, “Aren't you dentists something?” (Dr. Foster chuckles) I said, “I guess we are.” She said, “Do you know who was the first person to do an operation on the human heart?” I said, “Most sources give it to Dr. Dan Williams at Provident Hospital in Chicago.” She said, “You are very bright.” I said, “That is very kind of you.” I was smiling and she looked at me kind of funny. She said, “You know, he was my cousin.” I said, “Mrs. Florence, did you know that he was married to a cousin of my grandmother's?” (Laughter) “Who was born right here down in Shockoe Slip and was the daughter of Sir Moses Ezekiel, the internationally famous sculptor.”

CFF: Was this Fanny Middleton?

FMF: No. Alice Johnson.

CFF: Alice Johnson, okay, okay.

FMF: Middleton was her maiden name.

When I said that, she said, "Well this is something." I treated her, got her comfortable, and later saw her again. But then, they moved out to Westport Community, the Westport Center. I had been on the Board of Dentistry and we used to meet about two blocks up. Whenever I'd go to a meeting or anything, I'd always stop by Westport on my way up and then on the way back. In '86, some person did an article on her in the *American Libraries* journal. I took my copy of it, took it by and dropped it off to her. Then she saw, the people saw it.

1:15:59 End of first CD

[CD 2 of 2]

Interview 3, Track 3

Track Time: 0:30:06

0:00:05 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: House call, Virginia Florence (continued)

KCH: We are resuming.

FMF: After I had taken my copy out and left it with her, people began to realize they had a celebrity on their hands. In the meantime, he had said in the article that she was living at Westport Recovery Center and all of a sudden, two or three days later, there became a deluge of candy, baskets of fruit, cards and things, because she had worked a number of places, and particularly Walter Reed [Army Hospital]. They could hardly keep up with everything. I went by there one day and the lady had just gotten the mail. She saw me and thought I was a member of the family, because she had seen me before. She said, "You probably want to handle these." I said, "No, proceed just like you've been doing." They took them on over. Later she passed. Her

husband's nephew came and he had her cremated and had a memorial service at All Souls Church, Presbyterian.

(Addressing Carmen) You know the church across from where Elsie used to live.

CFF: All Saints.

FMF: All Souls. But I never could make a contact with him, because I was interested in—. The nurses were very fond of her and they taken all of these letters and put them in a scrapbook, all of the cards and everything. I never heard anything further from the relatives.

CFF: I think that that story is kind of an illustration of how connected he was with his patients in ways that are more than just treating people. That he would do many, many house calls, hospital visits, and—. People would call our home, all the time and on weekends, to let him know that they had a broken denture or needed some help. If they had an abscess tooth, how could they come in. We were all trained to be able to tell them to call in the morning, on Monday morning and let Mrs. Williams, Joan Williams, know, what was going on. But it was as if his dental practice was really about how to serve the community.

0:02:41 Dental practice, Dr. Foster: "Ministry in Dentistry"

KCH: Jodi mentions an article that you wrote, "The Richmond Minority Ministry in Dentistry: 1850 to 1950." I have not read that article. I have not seen it, but I would enjoy reading it.

FMF: I will get you a copy.

KCH: Is that somewhat the theme of that article, how dentistry is more than just a physical fixing of teeth?

FMF: To an extent. What it does is that it starts back with the earliest dentist of record, Peter Hawkins, and then it comes on up to Peter B. Ramsey. He was from Petersburg and he had a son who was from Richmond. There is a Peter B. Ramsey Dental Society of Richmond and Petersburg named in his honor. Then it starts back with David Ferguson, who was Delegate Ferguson Reid's uncle. He was the founder, really, of the National Dental Association. They

were great organizers back then. Then it brings you on up through the years with different dentists and more-or-less where they practiced and that sort of thing.

KCH: The use of the word “ministry” in the title of the article, of course, just caught my attention because that is not usually the way one thinks of a professional practice.

FMF: Right.

KCH: What we have been talking about, illustrates that very clearly.

FMF: Every time I go somewhere, somebody will see me and they’ll say, “Are you a minister?” I say, “I minister to human needs.” (Fingering lapel)

KCH: Dr. Foster is indicating, holding his lapel, where he always wears a cross in the lapel button.

CFF: Sometimes he says that that is not just a cross, but it is also a plus sign for those who may not be of the Christian faith. So that what you are looking at is something that symbolizes how one adds on to or is a sign of something positive, in that way.

I would choose to think that he sees his dental practice as a way of alleviating pain and suffering. If one thinks about a ministry, you are working with people that are dealing with pain and suffering and a way to alleviate that. He looks at dentistry in that same regard. Some people are woefully scarred of dentists because of the pain and suffering that they think they will suffer at his hands. He tries to find ways, to look at ways, to make people feel comfortable with him. Probably he sees dentistry more as a ministry and sees those who came before him in a way that is not just part of the practice, but they were very multi-, inter-disciplinary in how they served their community, as well as their patients.

KCH: That characteristic in you though, that wanting to help your fellow man, is that an outgrowth of your faith, Ebenezer Baptist Church? I know your parents fostered that type of thought pattern.

FMF: The early training, I think, at Ebenezer sort of set the groundwork. You see up until, as far back as I can remember, when I was big enough, and I guess up until I was about five

or six years old, we went. Sometimes I'd happen to have my zipper not closed and someone would say, "Hey, zip your pants up." I'd say— I remember when I used to be a little boy and they'd say "Where you going?" I'd say, "We are going to church. We are going to BYPU." They'd say, "Do you know what that means?" I'd say, "No." They'd say, "Button your pants up." (Laughter)

We went to the BYPU.

CFF: Which is really Baptist—.

FMF: Baptist Young People's Union. My sister, at an early age, because she could play the piano, she became a sort of assistant pianist. Gradually the pianist moved aside, she became pianist, and she became pianist for the Sunday School. We always liked to go to the BYPU because it gave you an opportunity to also, if you wanted to, participate. As soon as they started they would say, "Now we are going to have Bible verses." Everybody would stand up and want to give a Bible verse. Everybody was waiting for the person who was going to stand up and say, "Jesus wept," which was the shortest one. (Laughter) It was just one of those fun situations. Because she was presiding, we felt comfortable. Eventually, when she got to Virginia Union, she met a fellow who was aspiring to the ministry. He was about ten years older than she, but he saw the potential in her. Of course, they married and went into active ministry.

0:08:38 Professional African American Dental Organizations

CFF: I would think that his sense of purposefulness is something that is very connected to his own sense of character. When I think about dentistry as a profession—he alluded to it—several dentists were involved in the profession and were not necessarily looking for higher training. But, you had said earlier that there was a social connection that was a part of that. I don't know what the social milieu is in the Richmond white community for dentists or doctors. But, I do know what the social milieu is in the African American/Black bourgeois community. I do think that when you ask more about the profession. In addition to the connection that is there with people doing their community service and civil rights work, there is a social piece that is

there that I think is important to recognize. There was the Chi Delta Mu fraternity that you all had. There are photographs of men—.

FMF: Medical, dental, and pharmaceuticals

KCH: Okay, that is what I was wondering.

CFF: So there are pictures of some of those men at the Black History Museum where they are together having their Chi Delta Mu meetings at Slaughter's Hotel, which was on Second Street. I guess the black version of the Holiday Inn. And also, what it meant in terms of social functions. Some of the men were also involved in a group called the Guardsmen, which was a social group, which typically had black businessmen, dentists, doctors, lawyers. It is a very prestigious, elite social club. Then also, the Alpha Beta Boule, which is a national group that has many of the same men, in there. I'm just stating that because that is something that you may not hear much about. People will not want to talk about the social strata aspects of being a dentist. But, I do think, it is important for researchers to recognize that it is there and how to acknowledge that. It is also a part of the social network that is very connected to all of this.

KCH: Reinforced some, I was going to say values, but it also enabled you to be a service in a greater way because you were having a dialogue with those that had similar values, professional standing.

CFF: And also very social!

KCH: (Laughing) Okay!

CFF: —often having less to do with issues such as civil rights, even though people may also talk about what's going on. But, just as social as being a member of the Commonwealth Club would be, in their own way, because they had a D-r in front of their name. I think that what that also might mean to their wives, in terms of their social standing, is something for consideration. It all interconnects with understanding social networks and club groups in ways that afford people a sense of prestigious or privilege within the black community that is there. Typically, one who is in the club will not want to talk about their own affiliation with the club

because that is not what you do if you really are a part of it. If you are a wana-be, you will want to know about it or talk about it. There's a book by a guy named Lawrence Otis Graham that talks about it. He has written two books. One is—I'm trying to think of the title of it—but one is about being in the club. He talks about the whole black social system that is there. I just bring that up because he would not bring it up. He also sees the side of dentistry that is a part of ministry and service for him. While he has been in some of those clubs, he has also done his participation and then he has gone beyond that to do what really is in his heart, which is the ministry. He is less into the social aspects of what goes on. But it is clearly—. It is around and I think it is worth—.

KCH: It is important. Those of us who did not experience it have no way of knowing that it existed, unless you highlight—

FMF: Um hum.

CFF: —unless you are in it.

0:14:50 Dental Career, Dr. Foster: The Professional Budget Plan

KCH: Right. I think that probably they are going to want to close the library pretty soon, or this section. I am going to ask you to tell us one more story, which illustrates some of your value system. You had told me about employing a professional budget planner.

CFF: The Professional Budget Plan system.

KCH: I thought it was a wonderful story because it highlighted your conflict about bill collecting.

FMF: Right

KCH: Would you mind talking about that?

FMF: What had happened was that I had gotten some information from two or three of my classmates, who were living in New Jersey and New York. Saying that they had been approached by Professional Budget Plan—a group of, what you would call, experts at practice organization—and how well they were doing since they had come in. Every now and then one of

them would be saying something, would call me back. It just got under my skin a little bit. I said, "Let me find out what's this thing is all about." I contacted them and they told me it was four-figures, way back then. I got together with my staff and I said, "Listen, we are going to bring somebody in and we're going to spend a week. They are going to tell us how we can function a little bit better."

They came in. I never forget the young lady's name. It was Lauri Everley. The first day she went over some of the basics and then she reviewed treatment plan concepts. We went into purchasing supplies and equipment, things like that. Then, the next day she came in—. She had had access to all of my books and everything and she had talked with one or two persons, asked where is such-n-such street. She had seen that right near my office were a number of outstanding bills. Before I left that night, she said to me—. No, my brother came in on his way to the bank. He saw me at the desk and she was sitting up on the desk. She was sitting comfortably, you know, not like it was a lady who was just sitting up there. Of course, when he saw she was white—. You can imagine. He said, "Good evening, excuse me." I said, "Come in. This is Miss Everley from the Professional Budget Plan." She walked over and shook his hand. He said, "Well I am just on my way to the bank. I'll talk to you later." I said, "Okay." After he left, she said, "What does he do?" I said, "He is the secretary and treasure of the Virginia Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company. He goes by the bank every day and usually stops in here and says hi to the girls. Well, just about time we were ready to leave, she says, "Listen. Do me a favor. Ask your brother if people see him on the street and mistake him for you." He looks just like me.

KCH: Which brother is this?

FMF: My brother Richard, he's ninety. I just called him that night and said, "Dick—." He said, "That was a very attractive young lady." (Laughter) I said, "Yeah, but she was here for business and that is what it is all about. But I can really appreciate her because I can see that she is leading us through uncharted waters." I said, "She asked me to ask you if people—I know people get you mixed up with me—but she wanted to know what is usually the scenario?" He

said, “Usually I walk up to somebody and they say, ‘Hi, Doc’.” I said, “What do you say?” He said, “Usually, when they call me Doc, I know that they know your face but they don’t know us. I usually say, ‘How are you doing?’ They’ll say, ‘I’m fine. I haven’t forgot you.’ I’ll usually say, ‘That’s all right. Have a good day’.” He said two or three things similar to that. When we came in in the morning and I told her, she said, “That’s what I thought. Last night I charted this and there are a number of delinquent accounts around in this area, where he is seen. People see him and they say, ‘Hi, Doc’ and because—. They think everything is all right, but they still owe you money. Whenever he sees anybody and they say, ‘Hi, Doc’ [he should] say, ‘Yes, it is nice to see you. Get in touch with my secretary. She is looking to hear from you.’ If they owe you money, they’ll know that’s what it means. If they don’t owe you any money, they’ll know that they want to get on the ball and be sure to get yourself an appointment.”

I told her what the situation was generally. He was very impressed. The next staff meeting that he had, he went on to tell the story. He said, “You know in life, there is a certain thing that you have to think about and that is quality. Don’t sacrifice anything for quality. Sometimes you think that something is going to cost you too much, but you want to think of if it is worth it.” He said, “Here is this case of a guy who had spent a thousand dollars to get some information and he not only got the information but he was able to recover about fifteen-hundred dollars just because of this person’s know-how. It helped him to prevent something that would be crippling to him later on.” A lot of times, you pay for what you get. I remember not too long ago, I was telling someone about that and I said, “Quantity is what you can count but quality is what you can count on.”

KCH: Yes.

CFF: I wanted to add a little snippet in there about the lady with the Professional Budget Plan. When she left, there are a couple of things that I remember that we did. One thing was Daddy had this gray wallpaper, with these Chinese ladies crossing these little bridges, on the wall. We got rid of that. Then we got kind of a bright wallpaper that had bright, but tasteful

looking, hippie flowers, very sixties wallpaper in there. We took out the chairs that had been in there, I think, had been there since the thirties. We got some chairs that, I think, were green. The room was white and blue and green and yellow. It was very cheerful. I think that helped a lot. Then also, we painted. I don't know if she started this or if you had started this before, but Daddy paneled his own office. We paneled the basement, too. He taught us all how to do paneling—that was in in the fifties and sixties—all that was a part of trying to redecorate the office with the paneling. I mention that because that happened right after we saw her. We had somebody to come in and kind of jazz up the office. In fact, I think she told you to cut the hole in the wall.

FMF: Yes.

CFF: —so that when his patients came in, rather than always going to the door, there was a wall, where we opened it up so there was a window. So people could be greeted.

FMF: Right at the head of the steps, she would greet you and see who you were.

KCH: Oh, sure.

CFF: There were a lot of very savvy little things that helped to jazz up that space, thanks to her.

0:23:45 Dental Practice, Dr. Foster: Opening practice in Jackson Ward

KCH: That makes me think—when you say, the chairs looked as if they were from the thirties—how did you finance your first dental equipment, and your chairs. I mean—I don't mean to be too personal—but that must have been a large expenditure, to go into business for yourself.

FMF: Let me get myself together. (Pauses)

CFF: (Speaking softly) I don't remember hearing that story.

FMF: When I came back from overseas, I didn't need to pay income tax when I was over in Guam. Not that it would have been much tax, but I had been frugal and saved my money. First thing I did, I went to see—. I bumped into Dr. Isaiah Jackson, Sr.—he has a grandson who is an outstanding symphonic conductor—and he said, “Where are you going to practice?” I said,

“Well, I am looking for a place now.” He said, “Why don’t you try upstairs? I see that it is going to be vacant over the Bernard Kenney Furniture Store.” I said, “Dr. Chiles is three blocks away, Dr. Green’s two blocks away, Dr. Williams half-a-block away.” He said, “If you’ve got what it takes, their presence won’t affect you.” I never will forget him for that.

Anyway, I went down to the store, went in, and saw Mrs. Kenney. I said, “I understand that the upstairs is vacant.” She said, “Yes.” I said, “Well, I was thinking about the possibility of looking at it. I might want to rent it.” She said, “Relax.” She said, “Listen, would you excuse me for about five minutes? This is my pastor, the Rev. William Robinson.” He said, “You’re a dentist? I heard her say, because I’ve got a little—.” He had a chip in his tooth and little tomato seeds had gotten in it. I said, “Well listen. I just happen to have brought my student kit along.” Somehow or another, I had an alcohol lamp and something. Anyway, I just flicked it out for him, after I took and sterilized the pick with the lamp. Then the next day, when I came, she showed me upstairs and I told her that I would be down to talk with her. The next day, when I came, she had a big envelope. In it was a note from him saying, “Dear Dr. Foster,” something in Latin, and there was three dollars. We put that money aside and lost it. Then about fifteen years ago, we were going through some stuff and it had slipped behind in one of the bookcases. It is up in my safety deposit box. I can say that I have the first three dollars I earned. I can actually say that.

CFF: How did you pay for your—?

FMF: Now, here’s what happened. There is a guy who worked for the state named Dr. James Brown.

KCH: Please say his last name.

FMF: James Brown—he’s not the ‘I feel good’ James Brown.

KCH: (Laughing) I figured that.

FMF: He had worked for the state and then he had a part-time practice in Southside Richmond. He gave up his state job to go full-time. He told me that if you need equipment check with him. Somehow, I told him that I was going to New York; I had a friend in New York. He

said, “When you go up there, you go by Abe Bass’. It is on such-n-such Street. He’s got some good deals on some used equipment.” He said, “Boy, this stuff costs.” So I went to Abe Bass’ and he showed me around. I saw a used x-ray machine, a reconditioned unit. I think for about eleven-hundred dollars, I had them ship me enough for me to get started, my x-ray, my chair, and a cabinet. That is how I started out. No debt. Now days, these kids are coming out with a hundred-thousand dollars worth of debt. Morally—. Finances, they are going to cut corners. I mean—. You know.

CFF: That is an interesting story. I don’t believe I had heard that one.

KCH: It is a very interesting story.

CFF: It is late.

KCH: Yes, it is. We are going to end for today and talk about when we can get together again, okay.

FMF: Right

KCH: Thank you, Dr. Foster.

0:30:06 End of second CD

End of Interview #3