

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: 123 minutes
Date:	March 10, 2006	Interview: 4 of 5

Counter Index Topic of Discussion

[CD 1 of 2, Fourth Interview 03/10/06]

0:00:00	Introductions
0:00:05	Private Dental Practice: Establishing practice in Jackson Ward, Richmond
0:01:59	Peter B. Ramsey Dental Society
0:05:16	Richmond Dental Society: Committee work
0:11:38	Richmond Dental Society: Membership
0:17:01	Early Black Dental Associations
0:23:18	Christopher Foster, his father: Teaching by example
0:27:29	Ellen Glasgow's Family: Memories
0:31:30	Early Black Dental Associations: Impacting change
0:37:29	Virginia Commonwealth University, College of Dentistry
0:40:00	Virginia Board of Dentistry
0:47:47	Private Dental Practice: Retirement

0:49:00 VCU College of Dentistry: Faculty position
0:51:40 VCU College of Dentistry: Examples of rewarding and satisfying work
0:60:30 Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays' Influence: Poem "God's Minute"
0:70:10 Dental Profession: Significant medical and social changes
0:75:32 End of first CD

[CD 2 of 2, Fourth Interview 03/10/06]

0:00:08 Private Dental Practice: Professional support of dental students
0:08:58 Dental Profession: Community service
0:13:46 Recognition of Black Richmonders' Community Service: James Kilpatrick
0:23:00 Dental Profession: Concern for patient beyond dental needs
0:31:03 Formation of personal attitude toward life
0:35:26 End of second CD

[End of Fourth Interview]

[CD 1 of 2]

Introductions

Interview 4, Track 1

Track Time: 1:16:07

(Due to mechanical difficulties, the introductions were not recorded)

Kathryn Colwell Hill: Today is March 10, 2006. This is the fourth interview with Dr. Francis M. Foster, Sr. We are at James Branch Cabell Library. I am Kathryn Colwell Hill and I am the interviewer.

0:00:05 Private Dental Practice: Establishing practice in Jackson Ward, Richmond

(Recorded interview begins)

Francis M. Foster: ...he [Dr. Daniel Williams] turned over all of his crown and root canal patients to me. His rationale, too, was probably that I was new and had access to the better techniques. It was a big boost to me psychologically, as well as financially. I was particularly fortunate in having an abundant number of patients because I attribute it mostly to the dispersal of the special individual Foster influences of my sister and brother. All of their friends, naturally, came to me out of a sense of loyalty. My brother Kermit, who had just gotten out of the service, was working at the Veterans' Administration. My brother Skip was teaching at Virginia Union and was the head of Richmond Teachers Association Federal Credit Union. My brother Richard was a former Maggie Walker teacher who had become an officer of the Virginia Mutual Life Insurance Company. And, my brother Wendell was very active in the National Alliance of Postal Employees. My older brother Chris had passed. Although he had passed, he had been assistant principal at Armstrong for years and he became principal of Benjamin Graves Junior High School, which was the old Armstrong when they built the new one. Of course, Benjamin Graves was an uncle of mine. So most of the traffic that I got were people who felt close to the family.

0:01:59 Peter B. Ramsey Dental Society

As the years went by, we began to appreciate the location. It was close to the bank and close to downtown, Miller and Rhodes and so forth. At that particular time, it was in walking distance of my home. It was actually just about six and a half blocks away. The interesting times that would occur would be when we had our monthly Peter B. Ramsey Dental Society meeting. This was a group of practitioners from Petersburg and [Richmond]. Peter B. Ramsey, PBR, we said it stood for Petersburg and Richmond. Peter B. Ramsey, Sr. was for the first practitioner, black, in Richmond who was licensed. The meetings gave us an opportunity for some growth as far as continuing education was concerned, but very, very limited. I think we have spoken before of one of the initial times that we spoke with Dean Lyons.

KCH: No. This is new information.

FMF: As time went by, a number of practitioners got together and decided that we would go and talk to the dean of the Dental School to see about taking some continuing education courses, since they were being offered and since we were taxpayers. We had this session with Dean Lyons. In the course of the session, he was saying that there was a limit to what he could do because of some of the constraints, legally, which would be placed upon him. Immediately Dr. J. Conway Wilson—who had practiced in the West End—made some comment about “that damn Byrd Machine.” Dr. Lyons very discretely said, “After all, we are all professionals and we are all gentlemen here.” (Chuckles) Dr. Wilson quieted down. He said, “I can appreciate your position because when I first had gotten my license, because of my background—.” Being Jewish, they didn’t allow him in the Richmond Dental Society for a while. He said that he would arrange some courses for them and that they would be held at St. Phillip’s Hospital, which was a black hospital. But the group as a whole got together and decided that they didn’t want to accept a segregated situation.

KCH: What year would this have been?

FMF: This would have been about; I guess about ’55 or ’56.

0:05:16 Richmond Dental Society: Committee work

It was soon after; I had an opportunity to be asked by the Richmond Dental Society to be on the committee that would be making a study on fluoridation. They wanted to have some minority opinion. I was the token black that they asked help serve on that particular committee. It did expose me to a number of persons, because we were able to give them some points of view that they had never thought about.

Later, one thing led to another and one of the early experiences that I had was being asked to serve with a group to go and talk to the person in charge of—the Insurance Commissioner. The Virginia Dental Service Corporation wanted to get its dental insurance plan underway and so we all went down there. As fate would have it, the person in charge was named Paul Orphanydis. I think he was Greek. After he called me, he asked, “Do you know the Commissioner?” I said, “No, I don’t.” He said, “We would like for you to meet us at the insurance commissioner’s office. Would eight o’clock be too early?” I said, “No, I’ll be there.” “Because,” he said, “in the thirty minutes before, we want to make sure that we have everything together.”

I went down there that morning at eight o’clock, introduced myself, and we went upstairs and went into the office. The commissioner came over to me, put his hands on my shoulders, shook my hand, and said, “Foster, it is so good to see you.” I had never seen him a day before in my life. I sat down and Orphanydis walked over. He came over, gave me a hug and said, “Man, we’ve got it made.” I said, “Paul, I’ve never seen that guy before, not a day in my life.” He said, “You’re just trying to give me some bull rap?” I said, “No, I’ve never seen him before.”

Anyway, the meeting went on well and everything that we wanted was accomplished. As I got ready to leave, he came over and said, “Tell Mr. Bradshaw that I asked about him.” Booker Bradshaw was the president of the Virginia Mutual Life Insurance Company. He thought I was my brother Richard; we looked so much alike that he just presumed that I was he.

KCH: Oh, all along he thought that you were your brother.

FMF: Uh hugh. It is interesting because—I found out years later—when Dick went to Michigan on a state scholarship and got a masters in mathematics, he took a course in the mathematics, actuarial science. He took this course. On some occasion with state examiners, when someone had been around, he expressed a little more knowledge than usually happens when (laughing) people are in minority company. Then the commissioner decided that the next time he would go down and he met him. They were of a lot of help to each other. Strikingly, some years later, just before he died—he had been a patient for years at the Dental School—I happened to see his chart and I asked the student, “Where is this person sitting?” I saw him and I walked over and we were able to sort-of reunite.

KCH: I don’t think that you have mentioned his name.

FMF: I’m trying to pull it; it’s going to come to me in a moment, Everette Francis.

The interesting thing was he, that particular day, had told me, “Watch the newspapers.” Sure enough, I saw an article in the paper where some lady who had been taken advantage of by one of the banks. He had, in some way or another, gotten a hold of it and they had given her something like five thousand dollars. She in turn, not expecting it, had turned it over to Grace Covenant Church.

KCH: Very generous woman.

FMF: Then there was a fellow, Gilbert Robertson, who had a stand on the Boulevard, a metallic stand and it had in it a little charcoal burner; that was against the law. But, Howard Carwile, the politician, he somehow or another introduced an ordinance to allow him to keep it. He said, “Any time a man wants to stay off of welfare, we want to encourage it.” When Robertson died, his wife said—after Carwile contacted her—that she was unable to give him a proper burial. It just so happened that he used to say hello to him every morning and he went to the funeral home. When he found this out, he sent a letter to the paper and they did a story on him. They were able to raise fifteen-hundred dollars and they were able to give him a proper

burial. His name was Gilbert Robertson. He was crippled, a big fellow, but he had a lot of initiative and he sold flowers.

KCH: I believe that there is a little marker right on the corner.

FMF: Right. Gilbert Robertson.

0:11:38 Richmond Dental Society: Membership

The Virginia Dental Service Plan was able to get a start and I was elected to its board. I served with them although I was not a member of the Richmond Dental Society.

Some years later, I had gone to New York to a meeting for the American Academy of Oral Roentgenology. I happened to see a fellow who looked at my badge and it just said Francis Foster, Richmond. He said, "How is everything in Indiana?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Aren't you from Richmond, Indiana?" I said, "No, I'm from Richmond, Virginia." He said, "Really, I'm from Richmond." He said, "Golly gee, it's funny that I have to come all the up to New York to meet you. I wish that I had met you earlier because I was helping them to get some people on committees and I could have gotten you an appointment." I said, "No." Anyway, we kept in touch.

Then I came on the board of the Richmond Memorial Hospital Courtesy Staff and you have to do a presentation. So I did a presentation on roentgenology and the son of a former dean, Elmer Bear, was there. After I completed, he said, "That was a very excellent presentation. If you are interested in trying to do something about continuing education, I'd be happy to sponsor your name for the Richmond Dental Society." He said, "C. B. Richardson, our radiologist, said that he had met you."

We got together and I drafted a letter and sent it in. Two weeks later, I got a letter back from them saying, "As a result of a meeting of the Richmond Dental Society, your application for membership has been disapproved." I called and told him that I had the letter. He said, "Just hang on to it. We are going to resubmit your application." Now, as I understand it, at the next

meeting the son of one of the professors, who had just graduated, had sent in his application and because there was a one-blackball [allowed] rule, someone was blackballed.

The next time around, they decided to change their by-laws and make it majority rule. So the next time they had a meeting, we had one of the worst storms we've had in Richmond and the only people that came out were those younger fellows. And so, I was elected to the Richmond Dental Society.

KCH: Which year was this?

FMF: 1963.

KCH: Okay. —because membership in the Richmond Dental Association enabled you to have membership in the national organization.

FMF: Right. Right.

KCH: Do you want to talk a bit about—.

FMF: Yes, membership in the Richmond Dental Society allowed me to be a member of the Virginia State Dental Association and the American Dental Association. It is ironic, the year before last, the Virginia State Dental Association, in its newsletter, designated me as the Virginia Dental Association Hero of the Year. It was a touching and significant item to come along at that particular time.

KCH: Did you ever, did you anticipate being blackballed by the Richmond Dental Association? Was that a difficult decision to write that letter?

FMF: No. I had anticipated that it probably wouldn't—. But, I was real glad to see that there were young fellows who had an interest and were willing to stick their necks out. Particularly somebody like Elmer Bear who was the son of a former dean. He didn't graduate from MCV. I don't know if I had mentioned his name before. He went to Northwestern.

KCH: You had mentioned his name because when you were taking your state boards. It is interesting that he continued to reach out.

FMF: Right, right. His son is the head of Oncological Surgery. He was the class ahead of Carmen at Thomas Jefferson High School.

0:17:01 Early Black Dental Associations

KCH: Could we back track a little bit? We were talking about the Richmond Dental Association and you becoming a member. Prior to that, you had the African American dental associations. Could you tell a little about how those organizations got started and a bit about the activities and goals of those organizations?

FMF: My closest friend in high school and on into college was Leon A. Reid, Jr. His mother's brother was named David Ferguson. He was one of the first blacks to be licensed by a board in Virginia. He was a graduate at the turn of the century from Howard and he came to Richmond and opened his office. He was a great organizer. He organized the Richmond group and got the Petersburg group together. They named it in honor of the first black to practice in the state, to be licensed to practice, and that was Peter B. Ramsey.

One of his contemporary's was J. Mercer Garnet Ramsey, Peter B. Ramsey's son. They had a strong sense of background. Originally, I believe, Dr. Ramsey had gone to Hampton and then to Meharry. Dr. Ferguson had gone to Howard; did his dentistry at Howard. Anyway, they got together and formed a group called the Inter-state Dental Association. They were able to get Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. I think they first called it the Tri-State. Then there were other states that came in and they changed the name to Inter-state.

About that time, they could see for themselves the potential for growing and so they requested from the American Dental Association the privilege of using the old name that they had, which was the National Dental Association. They granted them the privilege and so they called themselves the National Dental Association. There is a book that came two years ago by a distinguished scholar named Clifton Dummett. It is called *The NDA II*, which represents the black man's dental association.

One of the prime figures and really the patriarch was Dr. Ferguson. There is a Dr. James A. Jackson in Charlottesville whose daughter was the first black Virginia hygienist. He became the secretary-treasurer and held that position for a number of years. When he gave it up, he gave it up to his oldest son, Dr. Ellard “Punjab” Jackson.

KCH: Punjab?

FMF: Yes. You know turbaned Punjab in Little Orphan Annie. Well this guy weighed about three-hundred pounds and he was an outstanding football player at Lincoln University. Usually, they don’t run the football. (Laughter)

KCH: They power it.

FMF: Yes, it is the line. Anyway, he picked up a fumble at the Howard-Lincoln game and ran with it—dragging about four fellows—to the goal line. He became sort of a legend. He has a brother who was the president of my dental class, George Jackson. George has a son who is a dentist and he has a son who is entering the University of Missouri Dental School. That will be the fourth generation in one family.

When the American Dental Association began integrating in 1962, the first person in Virginia was a fellow named Harry Montgomery, in Alexandria. He was admitted into the Northern Virginia [chapter] and I was the second with the Richmond Dental Society. As time went on and they were accepting more minorities, it didn’t impede the progress of the local group. They still stuck together and had what I guess you would call a more collegial fellowship type of thing every year at one of about three or four of the key cities. It would be in Roanoke one year, in the Richmond area one year, and in Tidewater one year. They still stuck together. Now as time went by we began to play roles in the political structure of the American Dental Association. Over a period of time, we began to take advantage of the various continuing education programs that were held other places as well as were held here down at the Medical College of Virginia.

0:23:18 Christopher Foster, his father: Teaching by example

We [his family] have enjoyed our tenure there, because it brings back a lot of memories. It brings back a lot of things that were instilled in us by my father particularly, (Chuckles) who had had some exposure to what you would call genteel people and who had developed a sense of control. I've never ever seen him really angry. I've seen him in some interesting situations but he always maintained that [self-control]. I say that it is something that he picked up from his father, who picked it up from the people who brought him up. My grandfather Jack Foster was the half-brother of Christopher Tompkins, for whom the medical library is named. That family was a distinguished sort of family and exposure to that type of background, there is something that rubs off. When in your associations that you build, you build them staying as far away from trashy people, it does a lot to sort of, I guess you would say, purify and instill character. I was laughing when you said "Mellon" as my middle name.

KCH: (Laughing) yes.

FMF: It is interesting. My "Merrill" came from an administrator in the school system where my mother taught as a teacher. She thought so much of him that they decided to name me for Mr. Merrill. Now what happened is that he must have made a particular impression on her.

KCH: Mr. Merrill on your mother.

FMF: —for she and my father did agree. Then during those times, things were tough. A lot of times, relationships between blacks and whites were tenuous at most.

Another interesting thing, when I was on the Center for the Book, when we later had our fifth annual awards, I was on the committee to plan for the program. We had gotten everybody straight except for the Lifetime Achievement Award. They got together and they decided that they would give that to Miss Ellen Glasgow. They said, "Now who will do this presentation?" One young lady said, "Dr. Foster, you handled David Baldacci so well when we opened the Library, would you do the—?" I said, "Well, if you insist, I won't resist." So they said, "That wraps everything up. We really got quite a bit accomplished." Then, the guy said, "I declare this

meeting adjourned.” I said, “Well ironically, I’d like for you to know that I was named for Ellen Glasgow’s father.” They got quite a charge, quite a charge out of that.

0:27:29 Ellen Glasgow’s Family: Memories

KCH: This is deviating a little bit. Did your father talk a lot about the Glasgows? Did you visit in their home, at all, when you were a child? I forget which year Ellen Glasgow died.

FMF: She died in the late forties. She had been a Pulitzer Prize winner in ’48 for *In This Our Life*, which was a movie. I do remember on one occasion, passing by he [Christopher Foster] stopped in front of the house and was talking to somebody. Then I remember later, one day we passed the Jefferson Hotel and—I think it was someone who lived next door to the hotel, the widow of Joseph Reid Anderson—they were tied up. I remember the lady saying, “They want to buy our house. I told them if they don’t stop messing with me, I’m going to buy that hotel and turn them out.”

Also, I remember one day passing up the street, he was talking to somebody, and they were saying—. I think that it was the black fellow who was the coachman and he was talking about how—. It must have been when Joseph Anderson’s son shot himself. My father said, “You know, it takes a whole lot of nerve to take a pistol and do something like that.” He said, “Oh no! He didn’t use a pistol. He used a shotgun. They always did things big.”

KCH: Oh no! The Anderson’s did it big, even in death.

FMF: But I have been in touch, over a period of time, with James Anderson’s sons. James Anderson was her housekeeper. His son used to be an accomplished photographer and worked with the photo department at the medical school. In 1937, his younger brother, named Bully, and my brother, Kermit, were helping my cousin, James Jackson—who was trying to organize the black workers—pass out some leaflets across from Maggie Walker High School, at Union Leaf Tobacco Company. Someone called the police and when the police came, they ran. They caught Bully Anderson and they took him down to Juvenile Court. When the word got back to Miss Ellen that the police had James’ boy, she had to call and get the carriage, and they went

on down to the court. They say that when she walked in the court, Judge J. Hoge Ricks saw her and—knowing that she was hard of hearing—said “Hi there, Miss Ellen. So nice to see you. What you doing here?” She said, “James’ boy is here.” He said, “James’ boy?” She said, “Oh there he is. Come here boy.” He came over to her and she walked him out of the courtroom. He [the judge] said, “Anytime Miss Ellen, anytime.” (Laughter) It was just one of those things.

Then, I was talking to Randy Johnson—he lives next to the park where the bears were memorialized.

KCH: Oh, yes. [Maymont].

FMF: I stopped there just for relief, but I got busy talking. His father was the intake officer at the Juvenile Court at that particular time—his nickname was “Kid Johnny” and he was an outstanding minister---and she [Ellen Glasgow] was held in such high esteem. She was what you would call a real early women’s libber, home educated.

0:31:30 Early Black Dental Associations: Impacting change

. You see you find people who are supposed to be reaching down. The first thing they want to do is be seen and heard first. They don’t want to focus on what’s the greatest need. A lot of time discretion, moving slowly, and making sure that all the steps that you need—. Because, a lot of times you get a whole lot of information and everybody know what to do, but before you know it, there are people who can’t focus and they impede your progress. If you can move slowly, and firmly, and stay out of the limelight—.

KCH: Is that part of your methodology as the Old Dominion Dental Society? When you’d get together, were you trying quietly to focus on some goals, which then opened some doors for you?

FMF: Yes, yes. Then to, frequently we would use people from the school, who would come in a give a lecture. They would get a stipend and everything. It was profitable to them in a fashion. The funny thing about the Society’s policies was that there were so many dentists in Richmond that they didn’t want you advertising or promoting yourself.

KCH: Not any dentist should advertise. Black only?

FMF: Black only. But that was the way it was. What happened was that because I was not a member of the dental society, I would invariably get people who would ask me to come speak in the school. Now I didn't need the children's practice, but it gave us an opportunity to teach prevention. It was kind of a tricky situation because you end up doing it for somebody, and then somebody else is going to ask you. Since two of my three brothers were in the teaching profession—you see what I mean—I would try to be as discrete as I could. Still they called on you and, when you could, you would do it. But the moment we became part of the Richmond Dental Society, their regulations were that you had to get on the list and anybody who called would have to call the Dental Society and not call the dentist direct.

KCH: Are they trying to spread around the opportunities?

FMF: Yes, yes. You see for some folks it would give them a good opportunity for exposure but for me, I really didn't need the exposure. I already had plenty on my plate.

KCH: And you were doing it for—

FMF: —for the education part of it.

(KCH: Pausing as she reviews questions from Jodie Koste.)

KCH: You have answered a number of Jodie's questions.

We have talked a little bit about continuing education when MCV opened up [to African Americans], but prior to that where did you get your continuing education?

FMF: Usually from our state and national meetings. We attended the state and national meetings. Then what meetings were being held in nearby places, like in Washington there was the Robert T. Freeman Dental Society; named from the first black to graduate from Harvard. The second year was a fellow named George Grant, who ended up being the first black to teach at Harvard. He was the one who invented the golf tee.

Maryland had a group that would use some persons from the University of Maryland. They would have, from time to time, meetings. North Carolina, we would occasionally go down

there—particularly on Armistice Day, November 11, which was a holiday—we would go there. I used to drive down with them, one or two of the fellows. We were picking up stuff like that.

KCH: Did most of the dentists in Richmond belong to the Society?

FMF: Yes, everyone did. It was a great social event, to get together.

(Pause) I was trying to think—.

0:37:29 Virginia Commonwealth University, College of Dentistry

During that time, I think we had one female; named Dr. Clarissa Wimbush from Lynchburg. Later, we had a protégée of hers who had finished in something like four years during the fifties, I guess. Fifty years that I have covered. Right now, last year, we graduated eight black dental students with five honor students.

KCH: When you say “we”, you are saying—

FMF: VCU.

KCH: The dental school here at VCU.

FMF: We got a new dean about five years ago and he turned things around quite a bit. He added in the second year program. A black female with a PhD, who had worked with him now and then, she immediately came in took on recruitment and things have picked up.

KCH: I would like to ask you one more question about the dental society and then we can turn to VCU Dental College.

At the time that—this is one of Jodie’s questions actually—“At the time that you were nominated for membership in the Richmond Dental Society, in 1963—” She has mentioned that Dr. Clayton, Walter Clay—

FMF: Claytor, t-o-r.

KCH: —who was a Roanoke dentist and he, evidently, was turned down for membership in the Piedmont Dental Society?

0:40:00 Virginia Board of Dentistry

FMF: No. I'll tell you what happened. That was in 1970. Now, there was a bit of politicking among some persons in Tidewater and Richmond, who wanted to get on the board. There were a number of dentists that did both, were active in the NAACP, who had developed themselves sort of a political agenda. The interesting thing was that Walter Claytor was from Roanoke, Virginia. In 1970, the first Republican to serve as governor of Virginia since slavery ended was elected, Lynwood Holton. He, as his secretary of the state, hired a black fellow named William Robinson, a tall, nice looking fellow and very gifted. So it sort of just fell that when they were thinking about making some appointments, they thought about whom at home. Then Claytor was sought. His father was a physician. His brother was a physician. He had served on the board of the colored hospital out there and he was an ideal pick. He came along and he served for four years.

KCH: On the Virginia Board of Dentistry?

FMF: Dentistry. The Board of Dentistry. Now, I think the next year, I think Mills Godwin, a democrat, came in. I had been serving on the Virginia Museum Board that same year, as Claytor was on the Board of Dentistry. Mills asked me if I would serve as a board member. Then the next year, and I had met John Dalton—.

KCH: And that name I am not familiar with.

FMF: He was the lieutenant governor with Holton. The next term, he asked me to serve on the Board of Dentistry. See I'd met him at museum functions and we, he and his wife, we got to know each other. I think the next year it was Godwin that came back and ran as a Republican—it was a democrat before him—and he asked me if I would serve a second term on the Board of Dentistry.

Then after that, I—. (Pauses, then speaking softly) Let me see how that came about. Yes, a ten year span from '80 to '90 because—. In '90, I left the regional examining board at MCV. They—. I considered consequences and everything. Right after I had resigned from the

board, they took the head of the orthodontics department and elected him to the Board of Dentistry.

They rationalized and said that well, the way they had it—they had numbers and everything—. When you have a chance you do them a favor, but then you go on and forget about it. I was glad to step aside.

KCH: It sounds though between the Board of Dentistry and your Museum Board work that was quite time consuming. Part of the time, those boards overlapped your service on those boards.

FMF: Yes—. Remember now, they were in different years.

KCH: Okay. You finished with the museum before you started with—.

FMF: Yes. I had ten years on the museum and eight years on the Board of Dentistry.

KCH: So the museum [VA Museum of Fine Arts] was actually 1970 to 1980 and then you picked up this other one. What were some of the responsibilities with the Board of Dentistry?

FMF: Its basic mission is to prevent incompetence and fraud in the professional relationships with the public. They served the purpose of licensing persons. They supervise the administration of the examinations. Any complaints that were filed, they would serve as a sort of judge back then. It was pretty interesting. We had a lot of interesting cases to consider. I enjoyed the experience.

What had happened to me was that I had gone down and Dr. John DiBaggio—he was the dean of the dental school—he called me into his office one day and said, “Francis, I would like for you to come down and serve part-time, on the faculty. I said, “Well give me a couple of days to talk it over with my wife.” Then the next day, the governor calls. He said, “I’d like for you to serve on the Board of Dentistry.” I said, “May I call you back tomorrow?” He said, “Yes.” I talked to Dorothy and she said, “One day out of the office is not going to affect us in any way. You go on and serve on the Board of Dentistry.” Little did we know—.

KCH: How involved it would be?

FMF: Yes. What happened was, you see, when we started serving on the Board of Dentistry, I began to have to take a lot of time out and I had to begin to do a lot of travel. See we have examinations in Tennessee and Kentucky, as well as Virginia.

KCH: Oh. It was a district.

FMF: Yes. Out of state, it was Arkansas. But, as time went by, it became very educational and it helped you learn and stay on the ball. I didn't feel any overburden what so ever. If I had then taken a job at school, I would probably have adjusted my schedule, because I could have taken that one day. I wasn't working the same, anyway. It turned out to be a very rewarding and educational experience. I certainly had a chance to meet a lot of fellows and see how things were going at other schools. Then, when I would come back, I would share with my friends at MCV what was going on, what was happening.

0:47:47 Private Dental Practice: Retirement

KCH: Now, let's talk about your service, or your present position, as a professor at MCV. What were the determining factors that led you to close your dental office in Jackson Ward, after forty-one years?

FMF: (Speaking very slowly and contemplatively.) Things had reached the point where the building that I was in wouldn't allow me the ability to expand. I didn't want to go into that expansion without doing a certain amount of planning. Then I had an older brother who had discovered that he had terminal cancer, cancer of the colon, and they gave him two or three years to live. After thinking it over, I said, "Maybe this is a good time to close my office." I closed the office and I spent that first year trying to make a decision as to making this second move. I decided, no.

0:49:00 VCU College of Dentistry: Faculty position

I had this cousin, Alice Stuart down in an apartment, at the Berkshire. I'd go in the Berkshire to see her and, on occasion, I'd see Dean Lyon and he would always say, "When are

you going to come down and give us some volunteer time?” See, my going in there over a period of ten years, sitting on the examining team, they were aware of my presence and my attitude, I guess. Eventually, I decided to maybe go down and talk to the dean. After I’d been there about five or six months, they said, “We’d like to offer you a full-time position.” I said, “Let me talk to my wife.” Dorothy, she was just so happy, she said, “I’d give anything to get you out of this house.” It gave her a little bit more freedom. It was just, everything just, sort of, fell in line.

Of course, as time went on, I contemplated on removal of the benches [benchmarks for admitting students] and they found a little nook for me as sort of a trouble-shooter. As I was helping with other branches in the dental practice department, they ended up sort of locking me into the interview for new students process. I spent thirty minutes—it was sometimes more and sometimes less, but it was about thirty minutes, because I had that time frame and such that it was easy for me to do it.

KCH: —and obviously had some of the skills necessary. It requires some rapport, I would think, with the young students.

FMF: It is interesting now because I see students all of the time who I had interviewed three or four years ago. Then, when I go to meetings, I see someone and they will come up and say, “You interviewed me.” It has been quite interesting.

0:51:40 VCU College of Dentistry: Examples of rewarding and satisfying work

KCH: What has been the most satisfying—this is actually one of Jodie’s questions—“What has been your most rewarding experience at the dental college?” and, secondly, “Where have you made your most valuable contribution?” The first is more personal, what has been most rewarding.

FMF: (Long pause) I have been frequently called on by people in the school for information that relates to MCV itself because my background goes deep into the school.

KCH: Do you mean historical information?

FMF: Yes. See, being tied up with the Tompkins family and then also there was the Anderson family, there is the—. (Chuckles) I was at the Science Museum on Friday. I went in to get something to eat as I was leaving and saw a fellow, Dr. Claiborne, Herbert Claiborne, Jr.—he was on the board of the museum at just about the same time as I was—and we sat down to chat. Unbeknownst to him, we have some family ties. Not too long ago, we were talking and he was saying to make contact with his sister, who is probably a little older than me. When I have a chance—I'll probably have a chance next week—I'm going to go into it with her. I do remember that before Alice Jackson died, she had said that his father, Herbert Claiborne, when he was married, his sort of like a gift to the family was one of the persons who was out of my family. My mother's mother had been owned by him, and so we are interested in getting more of the information on that line. (Chuckles) One day, I mentioned something to Carmen about it and she said, "You know Hobie Claiborne? He reminds me of Uncle Dick." My brother Dick, you know; and there are features, that sort of thing. Funny, but they pop right out, pop right up.

The opportunity to work cooperatively and reach out to people and to students has been something that I try to do. I try to recognize and bring to them the sense of, I guess you would call it, being drawn together, sort of magnetism. So many people don't realize that so many of these students, and particularly those students that we call foreign—if they're foreign, then we're foreign—. In terms of human relations, I think that that is where a number of people have said, "You have a penchant for reaching out and making people feel at home."

KCH: You had said in an article in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, back in 1992—you probably might recognize that—

FMF: Uh hum

KCH: —this is in reference to MCV Dental School, "The more that I am involved, the easier it is for me to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of students at a time when it might be natural to become a retiree." You are talking about the depth of the student that that is part of what you wanted to foster.

FMF: right

KCH: —not just the techniques.

FMF: —and get them free to communicate. If you get some bright students, they'll always want to talk to you. They know that they have a special position, "I'm an honor student" and so forth. But what you want to do, you want to reach that student who might not be doing well, who needs someone to champion them. Let them know that if they just keep on pushing that they have somebody here that will keep the door open for you. Like yesterday, we had this guy that just messed up and looked at me real funny. (Talking very softly) I said, "Boy you—." Do you want to know what I was talking about?

KCH: Excuse me; do I want to know what?

FMF: What I was talking about?

KCH: Yes

FMF: I said, "Because you've made a mistake, you are going to have an opportunity to learn more today that you would have learned if you had done that right." Do you see what I mean?

KCH: Yes, yes

FMF: And so, we went on from there. He did well. He said, "I'm glad that I messed that thing up." (Chuckles) Because I not only gave him the what-was-what, I gave him the reason why.

What actually happened was that I wanted him to make a model of the upper teeth. We poured it out with quick-setting plaster and for models, you need long-setting, special plaster; it is hard. Because we were pushed by time, I went to take it off too soon and it separated. He felt that it was something that he had done, but I said, "No, no." So we waited a little while and I put a little super-glue on it and pushed it back together real tight. And then we went around it and the little holes in the side, we punched in. After about five minutes, we teased it. I told him that the reason why we use cold water with quick-setting plaster is to slow the set. See, because it would

be too fast to get down to all of the places it needed to be. Then, after he had seen the rationale for what I was talking about,—I had put the stuff in a paper cup, the plaster, put cold water in the cup, and just used a tongue blade, which we had already used—my theme for the day was save. See I had a little clock drawn and I had a dental side. I said, “By using this paper cup, when we get through we will discard it.” I said, “When you check out your bowl and your spatula, it is work for you to check-it-out, to walk up there; it is work for the people down in the counter to do the paperwork and give it to you.” I said, “Who are the people who deserve more respect than anybody else?” He said, “The people up in that supply room. They are overworked.” I said, “You also will help to keep them from being overworked.” And, I said, “You saved time.” I said, “Time is a resource and, likewise, you saved money.”

0:60:30 Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays’ Influence: Poem “God’s Minute”

Did I mention to you Dr. Mays’ poem.

KCH: I don’t recall so please—.

FMF: I just said—. I pointed to the clock and I said, “When I was a freshman in 1937, Dr. Mays came and spoke at Virginia Union on a religious emphasis Friday. When he finished, he finished with a poem called, “God’s Minute.” He started off, “I’ve only just a minute, only sixty seconds in it, forced upon me, can’t refuse it, didn’t seek it, didn’t choose it. But it is up to me to use it, give account if I abuse it, I will suffer if I loose it, just a tiny, little minute.” (Shouting) “But eternity is in it!” When he said that, we nearly jumped out of our seats.

KCH: I bet.

FMF: But it stuck with me. I immediately went to the library and said, “I’d like to get a copy of Dr. Mays’ poem.” She said, “What is the name of it?” I said, “I think it is ‘Got a Minute’.” They said, “Oh, we don’t have that.” I said, “Can you check the state library?” They checked and said, “The only thing at the state library is probably—.” They were trying to use the first line. Well, seven years later when I was at Howard, he became Dean of Chapel. The first sermon that he preached—I got up at six thirty in the morning to be sure that I would be there

because they always have a line in the chapel, so limited are the seats— He did and he finished up with it. I went over to the library and asked for a copy of Dr. Mays' poem. They said, "It's not Dr. Mays' poem. That is an anonymous poem that Dr. Mays has made famous. He uses it so often in his sermons." They gave me a copy of it and I learned it.

I saw Dr. Mays about 1980. I was attending a Board of Dentistry meeting at the John Marshall Hotel and there was a meeting of the Southern Association of College Presidents. He was there and I spotted him from his picture. So I walked down the hall to look in, he looked in my direction and smiled, and I smiled and walked over to him. I could see him extend his hand and he grabbed my hand and said, "It is so good to see you." I smiled and I said, "Dr. Mays, you've never laid eyes on me before in your life." He probably assumed that I was a former student. I said, "My brother-in-law, Miles Fisher, says that you are one of America's most astute scholars." He said, "Brother-in-law? Miles Fisher is your brother-in-law?" He said, "You are Aida Fisher's brother?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Oh my Lord, I warmed my feet under her breakfast table so many times. The next time I'm in Durham, I'll tell her that I—." I said, "She is living in Richmond now." So I gave him the number and she said that they talked for three hours. Before we left, I said, "We are real proud of the fact that you got your start here, at Virginia Union, he was a freshman. He had been a Pullman porter, had saved his money. He was mature and he had developed a capacity for courtesy and speaking. He was immediately on the debating team. Some of the professors, who saw him—who had gone to Bates—encouraged him to go to Bates. He became Bates' most illustrious graduate.

KCH: Say that again, Bates?

FMF: Yes, Bates College.

KCH: Oh, Bates College in Lewiston, Maine.

FMF: Yes. He has about sixty honorary degrees from international universities all over the world.

KCH: I did not catch his first name.

FMF: Benjamin Elijah Mays. Before I left him, I said that we were so proud.

He said, "I remember that there was a very militant editor at the paper and I can't remember his name." I said, "You are talking about John Mitchell, Jr. He ran for governor in 1921." He said, "Is that right?" You see this was in 1904. Then, fifty years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in Montgomery, he successfully bankrupted the segregated streetcar lines in Richmond. At that time, there was a young lawyer in Durban, South Africa named Mahatma Gandhi, who decided to take that strategy back to England.

I went up in 1995 for the dedication of a building named for him at Bates. Fisher's son was then president of the University of the District of Columbia. We went up together for its dedication. It was an interesting occasion.

KCH: I keep smiling because my youngest daughter went to Bates.

FMF: Is that right?

KCH: Yes, she did.

FMF: They have produced some scholars. There is a man named John Kinney who became an outstanding dermatologist, he came from there. When I—. They had a board of trustees meeting that night and so they invited the people, who had come, to the dinner. I was sitting next to this guy and I said, "I'm Francis Foster and I'm from Richmond, Virginia. I am a dentist." I said, "I had met Dr. Mays." He said, "My name is Clark Griffith." I smiled. He said, "I know what you are going to ask me." I said, "Yes, are you any kin to the Clark Griffith that owns the Washington Senators, Griffith Stadium." "Everybody asks me that, but we're not related." So I told him, "The year before I was getting ready to go to dental school, the year or two before, I came up to visit friends on Sundays. We'd go up on the third floor of the Medical School building and crowd around the window so we could look out over the field and see them playing." It was one of those little interesting things.

As he got up to leave, the fellow sitting next to him said, "How's the cranberry bogs doing?" Then he turned to me and said, "You don't like Ocean Spray."

KCH: (Laughing) You don't like Ocean Spray.

FMF: Well I was real interested in going there, because I was hoping that I could maybe have gotten around to another little town close-by that at one time was where the Washburn brothers—. One of them—. If I were to ask you a question like this Can you name three brothers who were in Congress at the same time?

KCH: I cannot.

FMF: The first name that you would probably think of would be who?

KCH: I'd probably say the Adams family. No?

FMF: Well, let me say this, they were from New England.

KCH: I'm drawing a blank today, sir.

FMF: The state that you are probably thinking, it would be the Kennedys, because of Bobby and—.

KCH: That is true

FMF: But no, they were different. These Washburn brothers were in Congress at the same time. They were big railroad folk and in forested wood. They built these wooden bridges for the trains and everything. They let two of the brothers go out into Illinois and they set up shop there. Then one moved on to Wisconsin. And so, at one time, they all were in Congress at the same time.

KCH: But from different states.

FMF: Different states. I remember seeing that in "Believe it or Not."

0:70:10 Dental Profession: Significant medical and social changes

KCH: (Looking over notes) I am just trying to see if we have answered all of Jodie's questions. (Pause) One, that I know that you will have very good insight on in this question, "Dentistry has changed a great deal since you began your practice in the Army in 1946, what do you think are the most significant medical and social changes in the profession?"

FMF: One significant factor that started out about the time that I started was fluoridation. Down through the years, the great emphasis placed in scientific research in materials, dental materials, has been very striking. We've moved from the porcelain jacket crowns to the metallic reinforced porcelain crowns, which are extremely—almost fracture proof. The strong emphasis on cosmetics. We have tried to make people feel that they must have a nearly perfect set of teeth and that they should go to any expense to do it. And then, as time went by, the early emphasis on implants in dentistry, for full dentures, which eventually led us to implant dentistry for single teeth. Those were the significant changes that have been made.

KCH: Was continuing education your primary method for finding out about new dental materials, for keeping up to breast.

FMF: And then the periodicals, like the Journal of the American Dental Association, the Journal of Prosthetics, the Journal of Oral Surgery. All these various disciplines put out these journals. You could keep abreast as to what was going on in that fashion.

KCH: Did you limit your practice in any way? Just because there are so many changes taking place. I mean, sometime you just cannot stay abreast of everything that is being done in orthodontics and endodontics and periodontics.

FMF: We did very little in orthodontics. Occasionally there were some tooth movements that we would accomplish, maybe a single tooth or something like that, with simple appliance that would maybe take a little more time.

We did some oral surgery. Going after impacted teeth can really be something. As you develop, a little confidence and you begin to get more high-speed drills—. But, I never really had a desire to go into the nitrous oxide type of thing, of the dental practice. I would have liked to have done it if I could have been in a situation where I had more control. I had seen some things that had happened with persons when I was on the Board of Dentistry, indiscretion that got [them] in a whole lot of trouble, both supervised and otherwise. If I didn't—. If I felt that there

was something like that, that needed to be done, I would usually refer the person to someone in whom I had confidence and whom I knew would do a competent job.

I did do quite a bit of endodontics. Sometimes we would go in and remove a pulp, dry it, treat it, and cover it up. Then, tell them that they would need to come back or get somebody else to do something. A whole lot of those folks did come back, occasionally they didn't; some of them got along. It depends upon what was happening in that pulp. See, it is in a confined space and any little changes that will cause swelling, will cause a problem. When we first started out, people were more concerned about how they felt.

0:75:32 End of CD #1

Interview 4, Track 2,

Track time: 0:19:45

0:00:08 Private Dental Practice: Professional support of dental students

KCH: This is the second CD of Dr. Foster's fourth interview on March 10th. He is going to be sharing with us some of their family life, how young dentists were incorporated into their home at times. This is a question posed by his daughter Carmen.

FMF: In 1949, some folks at Howard, knowing that I had returned from overseas, thought that I would be a good person to contact for help in getting State Board patients and so they contacted me. We arranged to get patients and we made our office available for any preliminaries that they had to do. What happened was that word got back and the next year we would get this request from others. There were other dentists who would share but the older dentists, a number of them, didn't have x-ray and because I did it made it convenient, you see. We just literally, every year when state board time would come, we would just set aside that two days before that weekend and make things available so that we could help the students.

Fortunately, for the student, if he had done an inlay and it wasn't up to snuff, he could arrange to bring that patient to my office and take another wax model, cast it, and then have it

ready for the next morning. Most of the time, the students didn't have too much difficulty. It was just the convenience. Having someone to keep giving them a pat on the shoulder and making them feel relaxed, that made all of the difference. Then if we knew where they were staying or if they were hard-up. Particularly, this one particular young man—I'm going to think of his name in a minute—but he was from Elizabeth City and he had a small MG—Dr. Clifton Jones, Jr. At the time, Carmen and Colette, when they saw that car—. Oh, they just—. They had to—. He had not set up, gotten a place to stay. I said, "We have a kids room and could put you up in there for one night." I talked to Carmen and the kids and they said, "Yes, we'll get together. He can take Colette's room. The next day, after he came back, he took them for a ride in the car around the block and all through the general area. Oh, they were just on a cloud. Then, from that time on, they would sort of keep in touch. Every now and then, one of his parents was in town for a meeting of the Virginia Teacher's Association, something like that. We would always arrange to get together, take them to dinner, or something like that. His name was Clifton Jones. He was Clifton Jones, Jr.

We sort of looked out to help these kids. Then we began to get any number of people who—this was before I went on the Board, because after I was on the Board I could have no relationships with them what so ever. We had black and white, one or two Vietnamese.

One professor took the board and she used my office three years. She was in periodontics but she had to do that restorative work, although she would probably not do a filling for the rest of her life. She was a member of the faculty at Howard.

Then—I never will forget—she called me, said she had a nephew and he was at MCV. They had charged him with shoplifting. He had put something in his pocket and had forgotten about it or something like that, and he was arrested. She asked me did I know the name of someone who could help him. I said, "Let me call a friend of mine." So, I called this man and talked to him. He said, "How can I meet him." I said, "Let me call her and I'll tell you where he is." So we got together and ran over there. Anyway, somehow or another, he got together with

whoever was the prosecutor in the case and they—. I think he must have told him something like, “Remember when you were young and you were a student? You were under the stress of things and sometimes you’d do things momentarily, just not thinking? This guy picked this thing up and somebody on the staff (unintelligible). This guy was a surgical resident at MCV.

KCH: Did they get it dismissed? Were they able to—?

FMF: They dismissed it.

KCH: I can see where using a dental office versus being in an institutional environment would be helpful for a number of the students.

FMF: But listen, the young man, who had just started practicing, was named Lawrence Douglas Wilder.

KCH: Oh, Lawrence Douglas Wilder and he took the case.

FMF: Uh hugh. I’ve sometimes wondered if that girl is still around because that was just when he was getting started. I’d like to know just where that fellow is because he really owes his career to him.

Working at—. I can appreciate that more now that I’ve been working and I know that there are so many foreign students. I know the pressure that they are under. I know that you need to have an advocate when things are hard and tough. (Chuckles) It is just interesting to me when people refer to them as foreigners because basically we all are foreigners.

0:08:58 Dental Profession: Community service

So what else did she [Carmen] say?

KCH: Carmen also mentioned, “There was an interesting network of black dentists throughout Virginia - from those in Petersburg to Charlottesville, Lynchburg and in the Tidewater area. Dr. Foster may want to elaborate on that, since many of them were Howard Dental School grads and stayed connected through the years and also served as community leaders during segregation and integration.”

FMF: What happened was that we had a number of guys from Meharry. What happened was that those who went to Howard, they had a little, sort of little, friendly, rivalry with Meharry. They had a particular emphasis on wanting to do something in their community. I think that is something that was passed on. You hear of somebody doing something like that before and you knew that it was kind of expected of you. Then, because of Walter Claytor being put on the Board of Dentistry when he was, all of the other young guys coming out wanted to.

KCH: Oh, they aspired to it.

FMF: Yes. Then they realized that what you had to do was that you had to pay your dues, do some work in the community. Claytor finished Meharry. There was his brother who finished Meharry. Isaiah Jackson, Sr.'s first son finished Meharry. The second one finished Howard. Isaiah Jackson finished Leonard Medical School at Raleigh. Later, they went out of business, after World War I. There was always that relationship. If you didn't have a NAACP card, you knew, "We don't want to be talking about the race problem."

Now in Virginia, right near to me on Second Street was Dr. Jesse Tinsley, who finished Meharry. For years, he was very active with the Virginia, Old Dominion State Dental Society; see that was black. Dominion State was black. His wife also was a dental technician. He had taught her dental technology. She was the one who was in that classic photograph of the two policemen--with two police dogs--dragging a woman during the civil rights struggle. It was a *Life* magazine centerfold.

KCH: Yes.

FMF: Whenever the state would meet, we always took a lot of pride in recognizing people who were doing things. So often, they were recognizing people who were doing things community-wise. So many of these persons, like we had one fellow, James Holley, who became the mayor of Portsmouth. He got into some trouble, but he came back and became mayor again. I think that he is still the mayor of Chesapeake.

KCH: His last name is—.

FMF: Holley. H-o-l-l-e-y. James Holley.

Of course, Dr. Tinsley was the chairman of the NAACP State Conference for years, during the time that Oliver Hill was doing all of those fabulous cases. (Pauses)

KCH: Would you say that there was a positive peer pressure?

FMF: Yes, yes, yes. Very positive. Most of the guys who were active, up to a certain point—unless there was violence—eight or nine years ago you didn't hear about any of them community-wise. The newspapers will—when they are doing something—will give them some recognition. It makes a difference.

0:13:46 Recognition of Black Richmonders' Community Service: James Kilpatrick

KCH: When did you find that the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and the *Richmond News Leader*, the traditional white newspapers, when did they start acknowledging and supporting the contributions that were being made by the black community, the black dentists, and such as that?

FMF: During the years of massive integration, they had nothing in the paper unless it was something that was negative. There was a fellow by the name of James Jackson Kilpatrick who was an outstanding journalist. I never will forget, in I think it was 1956, he wrote a book called *The Art of Writing*. I went down to Miller and Rhodes and got in the line; he was there signing his book. The lady said, "We are stopping the line here"—she was standing right beside me and I was in front of James' desk—"Mr. Kilpatrick has a three o'clock appointment with his dentist and we regret that he has to go." So finally, I walked up to him and said "Hello." After awhile he said, "What shall I put here?" I said, "Put 'To Francis Foster, a very unique fan'." He said, "I can't write that." I said, "No?" He said, "No." He never writes "very" in front of "unique"; "unique" stands on its own. It is absolute. I said, "You mean that you have never have written?" He said, "No." I said, "Never?" And so he wrote, "To Francis Foster, a unique fan." I thanked him, I went home, and I read it.

Then one day I was going through some stuff—where I keep some clippings—and I flipped this thing over and saw this article, something like seven years later. It was on redundancies in writing. He says, “One must avoid redundancies.” He said, “The pilot is flying the plane and he says over the speaker system, ‘fasten your seat belts until we come to a complete stop,’ anything other than a complete stop would be very unique.”

KCH: Oh! “Very unique” that is the way he wrote it.

FMF: Uh hugh.

KCH: My, my.

FMF: Anyway, I wrote a letter to the editor and said that on one occasion I had been at Miller and Rhodes, and so forth, and that he had said that he never used “very unique” but that I see where he has. Later, they published my letter. It said, “Correspondent of the Day” and also they put his picture right beside it. It said, “Local reader upstages Kilpatrick.”

I appreciated it because I had talked to a guy, Guy Friddell, who is a retired editor from a Norfolk syndicated paper, about it. I had told him that I had contacted his office, but that they had never gotten back to me about it. I don’t know what his situation was, but it was just a good opportunity to get a poke at the paper because he was so much into massive resistance. It made him, put him on the top tier. Of course, after that, he changed his clothes completely. But there is no question about his abilities as a journalist. He is a meticulous writer. It is just one of those things. (Pause)

KCH: Well, shall we call this it for today?

FMF: All right.

KCH: Do you have a couple more thoughts that you would like to share?

FMF: Let me see that list that she had.

KCH: Okay. I will pause this recording.

Interview 4, Track 3,

Track time: 0:15:39

0:23:00 Dental Profession: Concern for patient beyond dental needs

KCH: Dr. Foster has just been reviewing Jodie Koste's questions and we found one that we have not addressed. That is one regarding Dr. Hugo Owens, he was a dentist and Civil Rights activist from Portsmouth, Virginia. He has stated that he found that "he kept abreast of community affairs through talking with his patients." The question is did you have a similar experience here in Richmond, Dr. Foster?

FMF: I think we had sort of a similar experience but the difference being, probably, a better opportunity here, for either of us, to certain aspects of community affairs. Dr. Owens was a junior in the class behind me. He was a classmate of Dr. Ford T. Johnson whose son, who was arrested for contempt of court, carried his case to the Supreme Court and won it. It eliminated segregation in courts of law throughout the South. Both of them were very active in the NAACP. Dr. Owens, particularly, helped to integrate the golf courses and the libraries in Tidewater. He was very active politically and became the vice-mayor of Chesapeake. We, last month, went to his ninetieth birthday and fortunately, he has a daughter named Paula who tied up with my daughter Carmen when she was an administrator at the University of Richmond. They became very close friends.

The community affairs. My office was one block away from Dr. Tinsley; two blocks away from Club 533, where a lot of the political sessions would go across the table for the Crusade for Voters. My father was the person who gave the Crusade for Voters its name, when it was founded. He had always placed an emphasis on the franchise, the Board of Voter Registration. In 1901, he had founded the Astoria Beneficial Club, which in order to be a member you had to be a registered voter and had paid your poll taxes and everything. We both, I guess in our respective areas, did a lot of talking with patients also encouraging them and making

them aware of their responsibilities and the great opportunities that they have to alleviate themselves of this imposed suffering.

(Long pause) That is about it.

KCH: Okay. Did you find that people would talk freely in your dental office? Was that an environment where they could probably vent some of their feelings and, in conversation with you, get an educated perspective?

FMF: Well you know, a lot of my patients will tell me that down through the years, they'll laugh and say, that I always had a captive audience. They say that what I would do was put a cotton roll in their mouth and then I'd talk for five minutes. (Laughs)

KCH: (Laughing) I've experienced that.

FMF: But yes, we shared with patients. Invariably, Susie Smith would come in, have a seat, and we would know who she was because we had her record in front of us. We knew what month she was born in and we knew that she had children. So, "How are things at Armstrong?" or "How are things at the jail?" or "How are things at home?" There would always be an opener there for you. It made things easier and it did make them feel relaxed. Invariably, I would always manage to say, "Well, I see that you have a birthday coming up next week" or if I had reviewed the chart ahead and it was pretty close, sometimes we'd have a little party when they came in. Those types of things would keep the doors of communication open.

Invariably, they would come up with situations that —. You could tell that they had something on their mind and you could just say to them, "You were in a little special mood today. Is there something that you'd feel more comfortable calling?" I'd say, "Well, please do." The next day they would call and say, "Yes, I'm having a problem with my husband. He has been drinking a lot lately." I'd say, "I'm not a professional counselor and I can't tell you what to do, but have you talked with your pastor or with someone with whom you can share?" Sometimes I'd go to the library and pick-up a little book on such-n-such, or something that might relate to

something. From there, they would feel comfortable. Sometimes they would just drop in, sit down, and, if you were not in a hurry, you'd just listen; not try to resolve everything.

Therapists have so much to do with—. What you do is with every day matters let them vent. You see. So many problems are solved; they take care of themselves by letting it out. If you keep stuff pent up in you, you can't talk and analyze. A lot of times these people that are under stress, they are also in jobs and positions where they can't talk. It is just a relief to be able to get around somebody. I'd say, "What is your favorite—?" "Where do you get frustrated?" They'll tell you!

KCH: (Laughing) Yes, in a hurry.

FMF: Well, [you can] say that again.

But, it is an opportunity to meet and share. Like that song, "Blessed be the tie that binds." When you think about it, something that ties, something that pulls us close together, something that really binds. "Blessed be the tie that binds, Our hearts in Christian love, The fellowship of kindred minds, is like to that above." As long as you can establish a kinship with your fellow man, change your attitudes, the closer we can get.

0:31:03 Formation of personal attitude toward life

KCH: How did you then—? You have such a positive attitude. You are a very optimistic person. It must have saddened you greatly at times, some of the situations that you had to deal with. How did you deal with those things on your own personal level?

FMF: (Pause) I don't know what to tell you. One of my instructors at Virginia Union—I was a freshman in his class—the first words he said were, "There is nothing that is constant in the universe but change." I said, "Change." He said, "That's right." From there on, I listened carefully to what he was saying. He made a profound influence on me. His name was Limus Wall, Ph.D.

KCH: Limus Wall.

FMF: W-a-l-l. Did I tell you his story?

KCH: No, no. I don't recognize the name.

FMF: He was a PhD in parasitology from the University of Michigan. He came to Richmond one day, someone in his family had picked him up and brought him here to somebody's funeral and then they took him back. He lived on this plantation and he was one of the few people there who could read, write, and add. The guy who was in charge would give him a list to take down to the general store. He would go out there, get the cart with a mule, and go on down to the general store. He'd give them the list, they'd put it on the cart, and he'd bring it home.

Well, when he'd come to Richmond, he'd heard about this school called Wayland Academy. That was the high school at Virginia Union. He had a strong desire to come, to go to school. He went back and he must have done a lot of thinking about it. He ended up deciding that he was going to go to Richmond. He could write and so he wrote, "Give this colored boy a ticket to Richmond." and he signed his boss' name. So, he went up there with his mule cart and his list. He left the list in the mule cart and gave this other thing to the lady. She gave him the ticket. On the afternoon train, he came from Raleigh, North Carolina to Richmond. When he got to Richmond, he had the address and he was able to find his way. When he walked in there, well people were just bewildered at what he was doing there. What had he done? They knew that he was going to be in some trouble before long. He was so passionate and, apparently, made such an impression on one of the aunts—I guess she might have seen, at the time that they had brought him here that he had potential, but he was down there in Rockingham, North Carolina. So anyway, they took him up to the school. Of course, when he entered the academy, they could see that he didn't have the background. So one or two students were interested in him and said, "Well, he says he is willing to work." They said, "Well, let's let him stay on campus a couple of days." They started working with him and he began to pick it up. Somehow or another, he worked and they worked with him. They decided to take him on condition. He worked his way,

and of course, he was so capable, that he ended up staying. I think he took trigonometry three times in college, but he had this insatiable desire to learn. So when he finally finished—he finished the year before my sister Ada—he ended up getting a masters from Michigan and then he got a PhD in parasitology there. He was a strong influence on me because he flunked me the first year I was there.

KCH: We did talk about Mr. Wall. I recall that situation, but I didn't realize that that was his background.

FMF: One thing he would always say, "If there is something that you want to do, do it. If you can't satisfy your desire for what you want, you might as well destroy yourself." He said, "Yours is not to reason why, yours is just to do or die." That just made a striking impression on me because I was ready to give up, to focus on the other.

KCH: An important lesson. The earlier that we learn it, the more successful we can be.

FMF: Yes, because when he got his PhD—the news service notifies your local newspaper and sends a print out—his picture appeared in the Rockingham newspaper. People said, "Oh my God, Limus Wall. He got put in jail for something,"—because his picture was in the paper. [The paper said,] "Get's Degree." —"he must have stolen something." (Laughing)

KCH: How inspirational that must have been, when they actually read about him.

FMF: Right.

KCH: I think we will say, "the end" for today.

FMF: All right.

KCH: Thank you.

0:35:26 End of CD #2

End of Interview #4