Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project and the
Southern Maryland Folklife Project, St. Mary's College of Maryland

James Alexander Forrest Sr.

Interviewed by Bob Lewis
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For Bob's anthropology class semester project
At Mr. Forrest's home in Leonardtown
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Bob Lewis: This recording is the property of the Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions. Today we are interviewing Dr. James Forrest at his home at [redacted address], in St. Mary's County. The interviewer is Bob Lewis. Today's date is February twenty-fifth, two thousand three.

Tell me about your people and where you were raised. Start by saying, "my name is," and state your full name.

James Alexander Forrest Sr.: My name is James Alexander Forrest. I was born in Southern Maryland about fifteen miles below St. Mary's City and probably ten miles above Point Lookout. I was raised partially by my great grandmother, who was a former slave, who obtained her freedom at Point Lookout during the Civil War - emancipation, before then.

BL: Tell me more about her.

JF: She was an Afro-American, purely Afro-American, no blemish of mixture in her body as we could tell. Her master was a man by the name of Briscoe Smith from the Scotland area. And she tells us many tales of her slavery adventures, shall we say, and she did - she used to relate to us many stories. And I supposed, she like many other people, maybe added a little here and there to make it a little more spicy. And we laugh about that, whether it is true or not, I don't know.

But, she was a very hard working woman, very hard working woman. She married a man by the name of Lewis E. Bennett, who was also a former slave. And his owners were the Lilburns, John Gray Lilburn from St. Inigoes, I think, from that area. Now he didn't--. In fact she didn't tell us much about his emancipation - how he got free, I don't know. But my son, who is deep in genealogy, has done some research and had found out that he [Lewis E. Bennett] worked at Point Lookout during the civil war.

Let's see, what else now do we need to talk about her. Well she was a--. She and he both were the parents of five children - three boys or four boys and a girl. He--. I don't know how it happened. And at that time when she was telling me this, my interest wasn't there. Now if it had been now, I would have probed a little deeper and found out more about her. But anyhow, he was a very, what would you say, entrepreneur. He owned two sailboats. He bought, and I don't know how he bought it, but he bought nine acres of land down at - just below a place they called Taylor's Hill, the road going down to Miller's Wharf. And he farmed that land and he done commercial, what we called commercial sailing, I reckon he carried wood, cordwood, from this area to Baltimore. Well he just carried anything that people wanted to ship up to Baltimore.

And he had, what I can remember as a child, he had a beautiful orchard and he had a horse. I don't remember whether he had any cows or not, I'm not--. She didn't tell me about that. But anyway, these are some of the things that I remember.

Let's see, what else about them. But I always tell people that she kind of laid the groundwork for me. Gave me certain views of life and how it would be a benefit to me if I would follow some of those. Very--. She was very strict, a very religious person, so was he. And just all round good people.

BL: This was your great grandmother, right?

JF: Great grandmother.

BL: You said your great grandmother told stories, is there a story that is fresh in your mind?

(6:05) [1A0450]

JF: Well, she--. (laughs) Yeah, she told us a story that just at the time they were trying to escape from slavery to get to Point Lookout, the story has it that if you got within Point Lookout boundaries where the camp was - they called it "camp", but she always said it was a prison

where the Southern soldiers were brought there as prisoners. And she said if you got--. There was a bridge that used to go across to get into the Point Lookout area. And she has related to us many times that there was a password that you had to use. Now how she got that, I don't know. But anyway, she used to always tell us that when you got to the gate the guard would ask you:

> "Who goes there?"
> And her response would be, "Friend to the guard."
> Then, "Advance friend and show your countersign."

I don't know all about that. But that's what she used to tell us. And of course we got a lot of kick out of that - as children we would mimic her, you know, and say:

> "Who goes there? Friend to the guard. Advance friend and show your countersign."

And we got a lot of kick out of that. And I'm sure some of that was true and some was probably handed down from somebody else.

BL: Sounds like a fascinating person. And then she met your great grandfather after she was free?

JF: Yeah, evidently. Now that she didn't talk much - too much about that. But I'm sure she did.

BL: Can you give me an idea when she was born and when they got married?

JF: Oh, my goodness. We did some calculation because she said that she was a grown woman when, excuse me, the Emancipation [Proclamation] was signed. And we figure she was probably in her twenties, twenty-one, something like that, and we figure that from then, from the time she died, she died in nineteen thirty-four, I think, or something like that. We figure she was in her hundreds. She was close to a hundred years old. Of course my mother was too. My mother was a hundred and one.

BL: Okay. And did your mother and father live with you or?

JF: Well, my mother went away to the city. In those days the work opportunities in this area were very minimal for young people who didn't want to work in the factories. And she went away to the city. She went to Detroit. And I stayed here with my great grandmother. And that's--. She kind of guided me through life for many years.

BL: And your father?

JF: He was a waterman too. He was a--. He followed the water. Most of the area people here in Ridge either followed the water or the factories. There wasn't any real large farms in that area. One or two, but very few. And if you were black, you worked in the factories in the summertime and you followed the water in the wintertime. And that was our--. That was our livelihood. That's the way we made our living.

BL: So as a young child, tell me about your day? What did you have to do around the house?

JF: Oh, well, we had our chores to do. There was no question about that. See we couldn't pull a switch and get light. (chuckles) To light a lamp. And if you wanted water, you either went to the spring or you drew it out of a well. No--. None of this spigot business. Well, and you had your hogs to feed, chickens to feed, wood to get in, wood to cut, water to get in before it got dark, [traffic noise from outside]and just chores that were natural to us. It was just something that everybody did. Everybody did the same thing.

And of course, we went to school when [it] was time to go to school. But that was the general pattern of life in my early childhood days. Then I went to--. We had another gentleman who was a waterman who would come around and get youngsters and old people too to go to the Eastern Shore to pick strawberries. I went over there and worked for awhile picking strawberries on the Eastern Shore.

BL: So what did you eat when you were young? And where did the food come from?

JF: Well, it was a--. Our staple food was--. We raised most of the food; like hogs, chickens, and--. We bought our flour from the store, of course, and had cornbread and we had a garden. And most people in the lower part of the county in the early days raised most of the food. They had fish, chicken, hogs, and beans, of course, molasses. Those were some of the staple foods for the average person in St. Mary's County. Well I won't say the whole St. Mary's County, but the lower part of St. Mary's County. I can only speak for that area. But I'm sure that area was [the] same as other areas in the county.

BL: How did you get along with your great grandparents? Were you always a good child? Were you ever bad?

JF: No, I don't think--. (laughs) I think all children are mischievous. And I don't think it depends on what you mean by "good." We were devilish like any other child. We got into difficulties. But the correction system was much different than it is today. If you got in trouble and got caught, you had a penalty. You paid a penalty. And that penalty was a whipping. Sometimes a pretty good one. And there was always that reminder, if you do it again, you'll get the same thing. So it was--. It was a kind of a stabilizer. But of course today, we look at correction from a different point of view. You say, "Look, you ought to talk to the child and explain to the child this is wrong. Don't do this." and those kinds of action. See in those days that didn't happen. If those elderly people look at you kind of cross-eyed like, you better be careful 'cause something was going to happen and did happen. And everybody worked in the same system. It wasn't--. It wasn't no special area that it worked in. You could go in any household and find some switches sitting in the corner.

And I can remember going to school, and the teacher there was a lady by the name of Cecelia Biscoe, and she called the switches the, "Doctor."

Say, "The doctor might have to give you some medicine, 'cause you're sick."

(laughs) You look at those things now and get a kick out of it, but it was serious--. It was serious consequences.

And I--. One other thing that we respected more, I think, we respected the elderly people. We kind of held them just a little bit above the fray. And I don't know whether that's good or bad. Sometimes I look at it and say, "Well, it's working, but maybe it would have work better if you had used a different method." But I don't know that. But I know it worked for a lot of us. I--. She [great grandmother] didn't have to get me out of jail. (laughs) She--. Jail was sitting in that corner. (laughs)

Yep, you have a lot of memories of those days and they were joyful. They were days that - and I don't know, in that era it seemed I was more peaceful. You just didn't have the tension that there is today. And I can understand that, I can understand that. You take the little grandboy here now - great grandson; he can tell you things about the moon, and sky, (laughs) and stars. Hell, I didn't know there was a moon when I was starting up. But the advancement in technology is so much different now. I think it's probably good. Yep.

[1A1030]

BL: You said that children were mischievous and that you yourself was mischievous. Was there an incident that stands out in your mind that you would like to tell me about? About when you got in trouble?

JF: Well yeah, if you didn't do what you were told to do (chuckles) there was a consequence. I'll give you a little, slight example which today is trivial. When your parents send you to the store, when you had to go to the store to get feed for chickens or maybe get some flour or something from the store, and if you left home at nine o'clock, she expected you to be back by about quarter after nine, ten minutes after nine. And if you stayed too late, let's say you dilly-dallied along the road, there was a consequence to pay. You got a little warming-up from behind. (laughs)

And things like that. It wasn't, it wasn't anything really serious, but it was serious enough for them to say you didn't do what you were supposed to do. I don't remember getting into any too many fights or doing things that would harm somebody. Just things that I did that I wasn't supposed to do. And that was it. Where you would go to the spring and you didn't come back when you were supposed to come back. You'd stop. See how I went to the spring went through my neighbor's yard, and I 'd probably stop there and play with the children for awhile. And that was wrong. You're not supposed to do that. You're supposed to go to the spring and get your water and come back home. And that was the rule. That was--. (chuckles) They made you understand that one way or the other.

BL: Tell me about your brothers and sisters? Did you have brothers and sisters?

JF: No, no brothers; a half-brother, but no close brothers. When I say close, I only had a half-brother. I was the only child. I was the only child.

BL: You said your great grandparents were very religious. Did you start going to church with them very young?

JF: Oh yes indeed, yes indeed. I don't know exactly how old I was when I started going but I've been going to church ever since I can remember. And of course, in that area where I was born, was mostly Catholics. From a religious standpoint, it was much more structured religion than it is today I think. You followed certain rules. I was an altar boy. I served the priest when he was saying mass, I served at the altar as an altar boy. I remember doing that. And we went to church

every Sunday. There was no question about that. You had to go to church on Sunday; something you just had to do. And it was a custom. Wasn't anything out of the ordinary. You know, like, somebody say, "That's a great adventure." It wasn't no adventure. It was just something people done. It was expected of you to do it. And that was it.

BL: Did you ever go away on trips as a child? Can you tell me about traveling?

JF: Oh yeah. I lived in Baltimore for a while. And in the wintertime, sometime, we would go up to my uncle's. And if we had any problems with the children sickness-like, we went to John Hopkins Hospital 'cause my aunt worked at John Hopkins Hospital. And when we went, I bought and sold papers in Baltimore on Monument Street. I had quite an adventurous young life. (chuckles) I lived in Detroit for awhile. Sold papers in Detroit - Detroit Free Press. Yep.

[1A1246]

BL: When was that?

JF: Oh, I was in Detroit in nineteen twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two - somewhere along in there. I remember in Detroit there was two Ford factories in Detroit - Highland Park and River Rouge. And I remember when I was a youngster--. I went to school there for little while. The assembly line was something new back in those days. It was a novelty. They had this long building with glass and you could walk along and see the men working on the assembly line putting these cars together as it went down the assembly line. Very interesting, very interesting. It started here and when it got to the end everything was together and she'd roll out.

And you know I wonder sometime when I talk to the people. You know, as you get older your mind plays funny tricks with you. And you wonder, "Did this really happen? Or am I imagining these things?" I seem to remember the Prince of Wales coming over here and Henry Ford putting a Ford together for him. [traffic noise] Now the history people can check that and see if I am wrong. I don't know. But it seems I remember that. And that was--. We got out of school purposely for that activity. And it was quite interesting. And sometime when I'm sitting here by myself I wonder if that really happened? Or am I just imagining these things from years ago. And things like that you, after you get older, you--. After you get older, it'll happen to you one of these days. (laughs) Your mind start saying, "Look, are you sure you are right now? Or are you just imagining things?" Umm hmm.

Yep, we've done a lot of traveling as a family. I tried to expose the children to a little different way of life. That's about the size of it.

BL: How did your great grandparents--. You said that if a child got really sick, you went up to John Hopkins. But what if they were a little sick. How did they care for them?

JF: Well, we had doctors here. We had a--. But they weren't available like they are today. If you called--. And of course a lot of old remedies that seemed to work. And I suppose that was--. It became a necessity 'cause you couldn't reach a doctor and you had to what they called "improvise." You got a cold, they had certain things that you could mix up, take it, and it would relieve the cold. No question about that. I kid the children now. I think we gave our children some of them, I'm not too sure. But what they called coal oil; they call it--. Call it kerosene now. We used to call it coal oil. You put two or three drops of that with sugar on a teaspoon and take it. Good for a sore throat. And it worked. A lot of little things. Mustard plasters to put on your chest to relieve the congestion in your chest. And my gosh, there were some people who were very good at that - mixing. And you had people who--. I'm trying to find a proper name to call them. But who had the skills of mixing these remedies, that doctors did professionally, they did it because it was handed down to them from generation to generation. That this worked. Try it. It'll work. And that's the way we kind of halfway survived our medical problems. And if you got really bad, then you'd call the doctor. And you call him today, he might come tomorrow or next day. And he'd probably tell you, "Do this for him until I get there." And that was the way we survived. A lot of us survived, you see I'm still here. (laughs) Yep.

[calls Mrs. Forrest] Harriet, didn't we give these children for--?

[During the next couple minutes Harriet Forrest discusses home remedies. This section has been cut out at Mrs. Forrest's request.]

BL: Okay. Could you start with your first formal schooling and go through what your school day was like, what schools you went to, who your teachers were, and just kind of just follow that through?

JF: Well, we went--. I started my school, schooling in a Catholic setting down at St. Peter Claver's. And, of course, in those days they called it the primer. That was the name of the first grade then.

You got you're A, B, Cs; and your time tables, basics. And then we went to all--. All my schooling was in the Catholic setting down at St. Peter. Then when I got into eight grade, then I went--. I think it was eight-- eight or ninth, something like that. I went to Cardinal Gibbons Institute. That was a high school for black children, girls and boys, but it was non-denominational. It wasn't for just Catholics alone, it was any child that wanted to go to school. And I think that they went through the normal four-year, I supposed you call it, curriculum, I reckon.

And nothing spectacular--. Nothing particular--. Just--. We didn't think it was. Because it was the only school in the early thirties--. Well that school was opened in nineteen twenty-four, I think, September nineteen twenty-four. Only high school in the area for black children. There were no other high schools then. And we got--. And we had children from New York, Boston, Chicago, all around. I think it was really an experimental school. It was basically for--. [traffic noise, siren] Like an industrial school for farmers to be taught how to understand the land a little better, raise better crops, be more productive.

We had a gentleman come in from Tuskeegee Alabama by the name of Victor Emmanuel Daniels. He was the principal down there. [more traffic noise] And his system was to educate you in a different way. In other words, talking about crops--. Take raising crops. Instead of planting the same thing in the same field every year, he called it, "rotate your crops." Diversification. And that was his philosophy. And in those days it served a good purpose. 'Cause we had been--. I say we, our parents had been used to raising crops in the same field. Just--. And it wore the crop out--wore the field out. And he said you've got to change that. You've got to change that. And he taught us a different way of life; that was the whole story. 'Cause he had brought a new era of living in St. Mary's County for black people. It was rather interesting as I look back now because we had a set pattern in those days and we followed that--just followed the same thing--. He said, "Look we've got to change." Got to change. And a lot of us changed.

[1A1700]

BL: Can you tell me who some of your teachers were at St. Peter Claver and at Cardinal Gibbons?

JF: Yeah. My--. The teacher that I knew best was named Cecelia Biscoe. And I had another teacher named Lula Harper from up around Charlotte Hall area. And then we went over to--. Went on from that school to another scout school and was taught by the sisters. I remember one of them was named Sister Nunceida. (sp?) And some of the others slip my memory. Then

when I went to Cardinal Gibbons, I remember that some of the teacher's--. One was named--. Most of them was from Louisiana. Duchaux, Marchan, Parnell, Ives--. Those were some of the names of the teachers. It's been so long ago, I can't remember them. And of course the dormitories had--. See it was a boarding school. You stayed right on the campus. They had a dormitory for boys and a dormitory for girls. Structured. Very structured. He was very--. He was a disciplinarian, Daniel was. If you didn't tow the line, you didn't stay there. (laughs) He'd give you a bus ticket, go back where you came from. (laughs) Yeah, you sit and you talk to people and they--. Of course they can't relive the same thing that you were living, but you think about those things and we thought as youngsters, that he has very harsh. But he--. You look at it when you get a little older; he wasn't all that harsh, just something that had to be done. And if you didn't follow it, then you'd get a plane ticket or bus ticket or some kind of ticket (laughs) 'cause you left there. Yep. Yep, yep.

Then of course, I went to work at--. After I come out of school, I went to work at St. Mary's College. I worked there for--. I reckon I worked down there, off and on, for four years-- I reckon I was down there 19--. Let's see. Tercentenary was 1933. I went there then, 1633 when St. Mary's was just, I don't know, discovered or what? But anyhow, 1633 [he means 1933] they had a tercentenary, three hundred years of activities in St. Mary's County. And I worked there off and on, I reckon, for three years under a lady by the name of Adel France. Another disciplinarian. She thought that--. Course it was an all-girls school when I went down there. Boys after--. Later on some boys came down there during the daytime. But it was strictly a female, what they called a female seminary. [traffic noise] And she thought that her method and her girls--nobody in St. Mary's County liked them. [laughs]

Now I reckon it was either. But you recall those things and they were, they were--. [sirens and traffic] They were educational to you; you got a lot of information from that kind of a, what would you call it, livelihood, shall we say. Of course I stayed there. We boarded in. We had one day a month off. And served a good purpose. I made a good living down there. Yep. I say a good living, it was because wages then, dollar a day, was top of the pot.

A lot of people working--. In fact, I worked for fifty cents a day. And a lot of people in this area worked for fifty cents a day. And then--. And when farmers--. They mostly paid a dollar a day. And when somebody came here from the city, think it was a man by the name of J. J. Sullivan--. He hired people and paid them two dollars a day. My gosh, they almost run him out of the county. Too much money. Too much money. A lot of things have happened in my travels [laughs] that looks strange now, but it was a fact. [traffic noise] There was no question about it. When he came through here and offered the farmers--farm hands rather-- two dollars a day.

Those would say, "That man must be crazy. Gosh, two dollars a day." Look at it now and two dollars a day won't buy you a stamp. [laughs] Yep.

BL: You said you went to Detroit and delivered papers. You were still young then? School age?

JF: Oh yeah, yeah. 1920.

BL: Did you go to school there?

JF: Yeah, I wasn't up there very long. Maybe a year, maybe. I can't really recall how long I stayed up there, but it was in the twenties. Because that's when I was telling you about that incident of the Prince of Wales coming over here and they made that--put that Ford together for him. Course Henry Ford in those days, he was a powerful person. Them two factories going, I don't know; he had thousands of men working in them factories.

BL: How were the schools different in Detroit then they are here?

JF: They were segre--. They were *not* segregated. That's strange, but it's a fact. I went to school with white children in Detroit. Now people don't recall that, but it's a fact. Whites and blacks all went to the same school. And I am sure you're historians could verify that. Yep. In fact, we lived in a neighborhood--. We had a white family on this side; we lived on the other side. Course they were mostly--in the early--in the twenties--there were mostly foreign--we called them foreigners that came over here to work in the factories: Italians, Irish. Of course the Jews had the stores and things like that. In the factories, though, it was mostly black and white worked side by side. Of course when you came further south, it gradually changed a little bit. But up there, Detroit, it--. Now I don't recall the segregation issue getting so, what would you say, prominent in Detroit. In later years I am sure it did, but I don't recall too much problems. Course maybe I wasn't cognizant of that fact. But I know I went to school with white children.

BL: How did you fell about that--? Going there and being with white children and then coming home again?

JF: You know, strange as it may seem, and this is from my perspective, you never really--. It was a custom. And you never really put a lot of emphasis on that until later life. It--. I don't know, I can't find a word that would fit what I want to say. But it was kind of accepted, expected, or whatever. And that's the way it was. And of course, later on you start looking at this thing. There's something wrong here. (chuckles) You know, why should you be any different than

anybody else? But you didn't look at those difference when you were young. I played with the white children; didn't have no problem. Course like any other, blacks too, sometime you'd say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing and you'd have a little scuffle. But it wasn't--. Let's see. It was a different issue. You just thought that, "you're white and I'm black." That's it.

Of course, after you get older and start looking at things different, you attacked them! I know we had a white family that lived right next to us and we played together all the time. Have a little scuffle and go back home (laughs) and all the next day come back and play again. And that's the way it was. But we knew it--. After we got a little older, we knew it was something wrong with the system. And of course as you get older you look at it differently; study it and say this ought to be changed. Something has got to be wrong. But when you're growing up, you don't--. You don't think about those things in the same way you do when you get older.

[1A2100]

BL: Did you have a favorite teacher, favorite subject, or a particular teacher or subject that you didn't like?

JF: I don't really remember a teacher that I didn't like. I really don't. And I'm sure some people did. I never had a problem with teachers. They probably had a problem with me. (laughs) I didn't have no problem with them. I liked history pretty good. I wasn't particularly good at any subject. (chuckles) But I--you know, I got by, I got by. I got grades enough to pass. And I supposed that was all I was concerned about then. And of course, the man I told you about a while ago, Daniels, he kind of wanted us to look at some of the finer things in life, like the arts and science. He told us about Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and all those philosophers. He wanted you to broaden your scope of knowledge. He said, "That's the way you do it." And then we studied quite a bit about Negro history; men who had made a mark in life, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Phyllis Wheatley, and, my gosh, a whole host of others that I recall very well. And years ago when I was kind of more apt to think quicker, I had a lot of interest in black history. And he gave us that--. He opened that little window; said, "There is people in your race that has made progress in life. You ought to know about them." Like the man at Howard University and he said, "you need to know about these people and know their history." W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington--. Yep.

BL: You mention Howard University, sounds like another part of your education; talk more about that?

JF: No, I--. My only knowledge of Howard University was that we knew it was a high form of learning. And Daniels told us that. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University. He wanted you to know these people. I wasn't involved in Howard no way. But he just wanted you to know that these people had made certain strides in life; they are not the buffoons that a lot of people thought you were. And he impressed you with that.

> He said, "you can do anything you want to do, if you put your mind to it." And said, "I can prove that to you by this man, black as tar as they said but he's well informed, he's educated; and he knows certain things--he studied philosophy, studied the arts. And it doesn't make him any better; just broadens his knowledge to the world."

It was so important. And I don't know, I think maybe sometime we--some of us have lost that *desire* to be informed of certain activities that we made progress in. See we've done a lot of things that've not been recorded--a lot of inventions. And I think we need to know that and that gives you a pride in your race. "Look, there's a man just like you, same color same features and everything, and look what he's done; he's made progress in life. Instead of being a nobody, he becomes somebody. And it just makes you feel better. I don't know whether everybody feels that way or not. Can't talk for other people. But I know a lot of us do. And that's probably why they got that display down at the library, to let people know that there are people that contributed something. And through their contribution, they should be respected. And that's the way I see it. I don't know whether I am boring you or not, but that's the way I see it.

[END OF SIDE A; TAPE 1 OF 2]
[START OF SIDE B; TAPE 1 OF 2]

[1B0000]

BL: You talked about getting done with your formal schooling and then working down at St. Mary's College for three years?

JF: Three or--. Probably what?-- three or four years.

BL: Let's pick up there. What did you do after that?

JF: Well, I went with the telephone company. Now of course in the summertime, after I left St. Mary's College, I went to work at a boy's camp at Point Lookout- Oh not at Point Lookout- Piney Point. Called the meat yards-- camp. Summertime, I worked there for a little while. In the summertime, I went to, when schools were closed, I did a lot of waiting, waiting on tables, things of that nature. Then I went with the telephone company. But that was--. I went to the telephone company in probably in--. This was contracting now. See I went to work for the telephone company on two different occasions. The first time I went with the telephone company, was on a contract basis, working for a contractor whose name was Harry Jones. He contracted work from the telephone company and we would do the work. All black. Had a white foreman, but all the men, the workers, the linemen, were black. We built lines in St. Mary's County. Opened wires. I worked there with him for, oh-- I don't know-- until the contract ran out-- I don't know,. It was three or four years, maybe. Maybe less. And that contract ran out, and then I went to work in Indian Head naval powder factory in LaPlata. Not LaPlata-- Indian Head. And I worked there for--. Oh I reckon I worked there for two or three years. I'm not sure. These years come up on you so fast. Then I went to work for the C & P Telephone Company, what we used to call "Mother Bell." [traffic noise in background] Got a job working with them and I was the foreman of that crew. Only black line crew in St. Mary's County, Charles County, Prince George's, Anne Arundel. We worked from Point Lookout to in Charles, Calvert, a little bit of Anne Arundel, building lines. And then I worked with them for thirty-- thirty-- about thirty-four years. Quite an interesting story on that too. That's a whole different block. (laughs) Whole different story all together. It was quite an experience.

[1B0254]

Of course, things were segregated then. You couldn't eat in restaurants and things in areas that we worked. We had to eat in the kitchen or bring your own lunch. Segregation was in its highest form--. And I don't know about the highest form, but people recognized it more and they were attacking it as unconstitutional, it was wrong, foolish, but it existed. So you had to deal with it. We've been to places where you want to get a sandwich--.

> They say, "Yeah, I'll give it to you, you will get it out the window. You can't come in here."

And you started to wonder, you know, "Why is that necessary?" Evidently it was and I supposed the laws were on the books that this is the way it should be. But if you really stop and conscientiously think about this situation, it was so foolish. Expensive and foolish. But it existed. And you kind of learned to deal with it. Try to change it if you can. Resist some of the

things that happened to you. And say, "Look, I'm going to try to do something about this if I can."

And that's the same-- same principle in the school system. When they were getting ready to desegregate the school system, I was on the school board. I wasn't on the school board then-- no. But I was in the school arena and we were looking at things and say, "Look something ought to be done." And we had some people who felt the same way we did.

> And said, "We ought to look at this thing not from an antagonistic way but from a sensible standpoint." Say, "Look why don't you look at this thing a little bit different? Look at it from my standpoint. Why should we be getting second-hand books when we are a taxpayer?"

And those kind of issues came up. And we talked about them. And my experience--. Now I can only go by my experience. I can't--. An experience of the people that were with me or working with me. There was a lady by the name of Lettie Marshall Dent. You probably heard of her. And I really believe she was a conscientious person. And, of course, she like any other person that has a job, she has to conform to certain guidelines; now you just got to be careful that you go too far - you're out of line. But I think she was conscientious. We had many meetings and most of them were closed because we weren't out to be rabble-rousers. We were out to attack the situation openly, fairly, and try to make the other fellow understand that what we were asking for is just justice. That's all. That's all we were asking for.

And it worked out. We had meetings and talked about how it was best to integrate schools. Which grade it's best to start integrating first. Which would cause the less interruption. And all those things were discussed openly and honestly. Not with a club over your head and say, "Look if you don't do it, I'm going to knock you over the head." And I think it worked out--. I think it worked out pretty good. Of course it didn't suit everybody. But I think it achieved a purpose, I think.

[1B0555]

I don't regret anything that I ever done. (laughs) And I'm sure a lot of people didn't agree with everything that I said. But ah--. I don't think there's too many people dislike me. (laughs) I don't reckon. Hope not, at least, anyhow.

And I remember something else that happened and I'm very proud of it. Charlotte Hall for an example; I was on the committee when the Charlotte Hall project came up. Charlotte Hall

would have been sold to public developers had it not been for this committee saying, "Look, it's wrong. You oughtn't do it. You ought to look at it; check it out. And when you make your final decision, make sure it's the right one." And today you've got a veteran's home up there instead of a high-rise development. See people--. That's in the past. People never thought about that. But it's a fact. Actually happened and if you don't believe it, you can look in your books and find out (laughs) that that did happen. A lot of things.

I was on the hospital board. And I worked on that with people who thought that certain changes ought to be made. But we got a--. You know, sometimes you run into a brick wall and if you can't go through it, you've got to around it. (chuckle) And you achieve a purpose that is more productive than if you take a hammer and try to knock that wall down. You see if I can't go through but I can go around I can get the same purpose. I don't know. Some of those kind of things we--. And I say *we* with the full purpose in mind that there was a lot of *we's* in my experience in St. Mary's County. A lot of *we's*. And when people say, "Well look he done this." He didn't do it all. Had a lot people thought what he was doing was maybe right and that's why we found him. I served on the school board for ten years-- five years as president. And I don't know, I think we got some things accomplished.

BL: Can you tell me more about--, you said you were involved with the schools before you were on the school board. How were you involved and what put the spotlight on you?

[1B0720]

JF: Well, well, you see, in our involvement in those early days was a matter of money. See, books and things that the school needed, we'd go down and raise money for it. Put the money there so it would be available. (laughs) I laugh at this. The children now laugh at us. My wife and some other people in the community put on a show to raise money--. Now I don't know what the money was for but some purpose for the school. I remember the first playground equipment at Banneker was bought by public-- not public funds, private funds. I was working for the telephone company and the piece of equipment came in at a place up there called Forest Hall. Train came that far. I got permission from my boss man to put that equipment on the telephone company truck and bring it down and deliver it at the school. That's how it got there. And those little things seem little now, but it was a big thing then for black children to have a piece of equipment that wasn't homemade. And those little things like that I say I look back at them now and it don't look like much but in those days it was. It was very important.

BL: Tell me more about how you got appointed to the school board and some of the things that you feel were important that you remember.

JF: Well. Maybe I got appointed to the school board 'cause I opened my mouth. (laughs) Maybe that's one of the reasons. 'Cause I just figured well look, you know, I see something that wasn't exactly kosher, I'd say something about it.

And I suppose somebody say, "Well he's got such a big mouth-- running his mouth all the time, maybe we ought to give him a job." (laughs)

So, I reckon that's how I got on there. And I was appointed by Governor Mandel, I think. And King, who was a-- who was a superintendent after Lettie Marshall Dent, Robert King--. I don't know, maybe I said something that he thought was right.

And he said, "well, put his name in the pot, see if they'll elect him."

And that's what happened. I don't know all the particulars but I know that it was there. I don't have any magic, you know, wand waving say look, "Put him on there." I don't know. Just happened.

Same way with that diploma I got down at the college-- down at St. Mary's City.

Somebody said, "Maybe we ought to give it to him. I reckon he deserves it."

And that's what happened.

BL: So give me a time period when you were on the school board and what was the school system like at that time that you were trying to change?

[1B0905]

JF: Well, it was really the beginning of integration. It was-- I don't know if it was the exact beginning but it was during the time when integration attitudes were changing. And other than that, that's about-- you know. There's no particular incident where there was global news. It was just a phase in of integration. And I happened to be there. And, evidently, when things came up, I voiced my opinion and people thought it was right.

The people on the board thought, "May be. Well, let's look at this thing seriously and maybe it will work."

And that's what happened. I don't--. You know I would like to be a great historian and pretend to you that I had gone into these activities and made certain strides and I've done certain things to change these things. It didn't happen. Didn't happen. Didn't happen to me. I don't know--. (laughs) I don't know about other people, but it didn't happen to me. I didn't have no great awakening. I was just *there*. And, evidently, what I was doing and what I was saying must have had some merits because I got re-elected again. So that's all I can say. You know, I wish I could say to you, Mr. Lewis, this is what I've done, I've moved this mountain and I've done all this stuff. Didn't happen. It really didn't happen. It just seemed like an even flow of things.

BL: So during this time, especially down here in St. Mary's County - the southernmost county of the state, I think it must have been a very difficult time for the kids in the schools, especially in the middle and the high schools. Can you tell me how you felt about what the kids were going through?

JF: It, it--. You know I had kids. My youngest son was among some of the first to go to an integrated school over at Chopticon. And I--. You know I have to be honest with you; I don't see any great commotion. He went over there and he played football. And that was it. And that's the only way I can explain it. I wish I could pick out some particular incident and say, "Well look. We had to march in force and do this and do that." I can't remember it. Didn't happen to me.

> And maybe somebody will say, "Well you was scared to get involved," or, "he didn't get involved in these big pushes that were going on."

Maybe I didn't, I don't know. But it just didn't happen. It just didn't happen. That's all.

> And you might interview someone else and say, "It didn't happen that way with me. It happened different with me."

Well that's fine. I have no problem with that. But it didn't happen with me. It actually didn't happen with me.

[1B1094]

I remember, for example, when we were trying to be recognized or eat in places where we couldn't eat before. Remember the man I worked for, and we were talking about going in there and having a meal. So I went to him.

> And asked somebody, "Would you go in?"
>
> I said, "Yeah, I'll go talk to him. I work for him, I ought to be able to talk to him."

So I went and talked to him.

> I said, "We were just wondering if you would *allow* black people to come in here and eat?"
>
> And he said, "Well, I don't know, I'll have to think about it." [traffic noise]

So we sat there and talked a little while.

> And he said, "I'm going to be frank with you, Jim--." He said, "I don't have no problem with that." He said, "But I owe the bank mortgage on my place. And if I allow black to come in and eat, which I have no problem personally, but these others people who resents it, is my livelihood. And I have to be careful how I (laughs) antagonize them." Said, "Because if they don't come in here and eat, I can't pay my mortgage."

Which was common sense. It made sense to me.

> I said, "I understand you. But it's not right." I said, "Somebody has to, you know, kind of say, look can't we figure this out somehow or other and make it work?"

And that's what happened. Bailey-- the man's name was Bailey who run the restaurant right where the pet shop is now. And I don't know, it just worked out. After a while, teachers started going in and eating. And it just worked. And now maybe somebody else that I don't know about maybe put some fire in him or did something different. But that was my role in it.

BL: Do you remember any other occasions when you took that very big first step and like maybe you didn't want to go sit in the balcony at the movie theater or were there any other incidents like that that you can remember?

[1B1218] (65:40)

JF: No I don't think I got involved in the theater business. But I know there was a balcony where black people sat. But now the funny thing about that is this, people don't know, they had a movies over where Dukes-- where the restaurant is--that French restaurant. Movies was upstairs; all on the same floor. Everybody went in the same--. Didn't go in the same door. We had to go around and go up the [back] steps. But we all ended up in the same room. Course we had chairs across the back where black people sat across the back and white people sat in front. But we were all in the same building all on the same floor. (laughs) Yep, yep. Strange things.

And, of course, that was the system. That was a system that was, for a hundred years, had been accepted. And now all of a sudden you say, "Look, there's something wrong here." And conscience, anxious people started looking at this thing.

And they say, "Look this-- this ain't right."

It's just the same way- I ain't going into that cause it's out of my field.

Just like the army. My son there [that] just came through that door a while ago. He served in Vietnam. He went somewhere-- he dressed in his uniform and everything and went somewhere in Florida and had a car a man asked him.

And said "Nigger, where did you steal that car?"

Here's a man *fighting*, *dying for his country* and that *animosity was there*. And I'm ninety-two and I haven't been able to figure that out yet. Why that is? But that's the way it is. That's the way it is.

BL: Can you tell me something about the hospital, you mentioned being on the hospital board, how did African Americans--?

[1B1224] (67:00)

JF: It was segregated too. Hospital's segregated too - the same thing. I don't know of anyplace in my travels in this area that wasn't segregated. When I say segregated, it was separate. In the hospital, I work in the hospital as an orderly. I had rights because I was working. I could go anywhere I wanted to go. But they had two rooms, one for black, one for white, one for the women and one for the men.

And you went up the back steps. Didn't make no difference whether it was rain or snow, shine or what, you didn't go in that front door. You went up those back steps to get into the hospital. And that is the way it was. That's the way it was. And I do know what rule they used to operate that operation but that's the way it was. That's the way it was.

I worked under a doctor, a young man named Dr. Welsh. Operator-- he was a-- he operated on people. I worked right in the operating room with him. Didn't have no special skills other than do what he told me to do. Hold people on the board when they were giving them ether. Well you know you get a little restless when--. See in those days you had a little, look like a sifter, and they put it over your nose and they dropped this chloroform or ether, whatever it was and as you inhaled it you know, you went into, into a slumber. And of course a little before you went into that slumber, you got a little restless - you wanted to kind of stand - you wanted to get out of there. And I used to help hold them on the table. I've seen him operate on people. And, I've had a lot of experiences. And it worked out pretty good for me.

BL: Take me from the time period from being an orderly at the hospital to being on the hospital board?

[1B1437]

JF: Well, I say again that, you know, if I could pinpoint and answer your question directly, I really would try. But these things just evolved. Somebody--. Maybe they wanted a black on there.

> Said, "well, let's try him. See how he works." And I'm sure they said, "He's not much of a rabble-rouser and he also will speak his mind sometimes if you prick him too hard." So they say, "Let's try him. See what happens."

And somebody put my name in the pot. And they call me and ask me would I serve and I said, "Yeah, I'll take a shot at it." And I served on there for seven years. So I'm just saying these things to you, Mr. Lewis, because I'm trying to be honest. I wish I could do something to give more *glory* (laughs) to this interview. But I can't do it. I just don't have the ability or I don't

have the knowledge to make it more *glorifiable*. I'm just giving you the facts as they appeared to me as I last saw them. And that's it.

BL: When did you serve on the hospital board? [traffic noise] Was that after segregation?

JF: Let me think. So many things happened. It was during that--. The segregation was still going on. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I got the date upstairs but I can't think of it right off-hand. But I know I was on there seven years. And the only reason why I didn't serve my full ten, I missed too many meetings-- I just-- I just got tired of meetings. (laughs) I didn't go to so many.

> They say, "Look if you miss--," I don't know was it three or four meetings, "then your disqualified."

And then after that, and then I served on the-- on the-- well they don't call it the financial committee--. But I served again on the hospital board recently within the last five or six years. And it's just somebody said, "Well look, try Jim Forrest. He'll probably work alright in that." It's just somebody point me out.

BL: Were you the first African American on the state school board and the local hospital board.

JF: Oh no, oh no. Oh no my goodness. There were-- there were, let me see, five--. There were four other blacks on it before me. Yeah, let me see if I can name them: Robert Barnes, Leo Smith. Oh not Leo Smith - Leo Young. Raymond Hewlett - one or two more. They didn't last. They didn't stay long; I don't know why they didn't stay, but they didn't stay. I probably stayed longer than the rest of them. But I wasn't the first one.

BL: And how about the hospital board?

JF: Let me see. Was I the only one on the hos-- the first one on the hospital board? I believe I was; I am not too sure of that. Have to check a little deeper into that; but I think I was one-- at least one of the first if I wasn't the first. Umm hmm.

BL: So in your time on the hospital board, did you bring up issues about the segregated aspects?

JF: Yeah, we talked about it. And it was in the construction phase then too. They were doing a lot building. Yep. And it was a gradual phase in. All these things, just--. They didn't come--. Now I don't recall in this area--. Now maybe in Lexington Park they did things a little bit different. But I don't remember any marches in this particular area to bring the attention of these difficulties to the forefront. I don't remember any marches. Might have a little house session, you say, "Look we ought to--." I think the N - double-A - C - P probably got involved in some areas that [traffic noise] needed a little bit more attention, that I wasn't involved in. I am a member of the N - double-A - C - P. So, so many things happened outside of my scope of vision. And that's worked out pretty good. [more traffic noise]

BL: Maybe you can tell me a little bit about meeting Mrs. Forrest and courting her? How you met her?

[1B1678]

JF: Oh my, That was-- that was-- now that was an adventure. (laughs) Best thing that ever happened to me in my life. (laughs) We've been--. We've been good friends, sweethearts, husband, wife, mother to my children, sixty-seven years. And I met her I think--. Of course Leonardtown in my early courting days was a Mecca of black socializing. Her mother owned and operated a hotel in Leonardtown. And when any events happened in Leonardtown like March Court or any event that was happening at the Courthouse, black people usually stayed or had their meals at my mother-in-law's hotel. And, of course, like a young fellow you're looking around, you know, see what's happening. And one of her friends introduced me to her. And, of course, from that introduction, we--. Our chemistry must have started working pretty good 'cause I took a liking to her and I hoped she'd take a liking to me too. And eventually she did. And I think we--. We courted I reckon about three years maybe. I was working down in St. Mary's City too when this courtship started. And then, of course, we decided that--. One or the other of us decided that we ought to get married. And said, "Yeah, that's a pretty good idea I think." So I made a proposal and she accepted. Here we are.

But she's a wonderful woman. She has brought me through many rough spots. And I don't usually talk about this too much but we both have the right chemistry working. Harriet's very outspoken. If you cross her path, she'll tell what she's got on her mind. I think about it a little while before I tell you. (laughs) And it works good. Works good 'cause she sometimes speaks things that after I've thought about them I'd have said, "I would have said that before you did." But it didn't happen. But she's--. Just like this house, she was up this morning cleaning and wiping and dusting and all.

"You got company coming today."

And I said, "Now Harriet, that's alright."

But that's not her way. That's not her way. She's--. And of course you can look around here and tell she's--. I tease her sometimes and call her "Miss F." (laughs) But she's a good woman. And her family knows that and they respect it too. And I can't really say too much about her because she's been such a good woman for this family. See I don't know whether she has ever told you or not but we've got five children, four boys and a girl. And none of them are in jail and I hope none of them are on dope. So she's been a good leader, She's been a good leader. She's--. I just can't help from thinking about it and saying things that I feel about her; she's been good for me.

BL: Going back to courting, tell me about what sort of events or dates you went on to try to win over her heart? What did you do?

[1B1885]

JF: (laughs) I--. Let's ask her. (calls to her) Harriet! Come here a minute. (laughs) We have a very hard question we want you to answer.

[During the next twenty minutes Harriet Forrest discusses her courtship with James Forrest; her relationship with her family; education opportunities for African Americans; and her contribution to the education of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. This section has been cut out at Mrs. Forrest's request.]

[1B2295]

BL: I have a bunch of questions here that would kind of fall into the realm where Mrs. Forrest would end up back in here and I want to focus on you today.

JF: Umm hmm.

BL: Let's see, you talked about family and--. Were there other community activities that you were in? In know you mentioned N, double-A, C, P. Were there other clubs or social groups that you participated in?

JF: Let me see what else. What else did we do? That was probably it. N, double-A, C, P and these different organizations. Oh I don't know whether you can call them organizations or not, committees were set up to study certain issues in the county like Charlotte Hall, the hospital, school. And that was--. That was about it that I can remember. Course there was so much stuff going on. We were involved in the school system just about the better part of our life. Or living in this area. That's about it.

BL: How do you feel about life in general? Talk about the general changes throughout your lifetime, what it was like then to now? Is it better now?

JF: Oh yes it's better. But--. You know that's a question that is kind of hard to define. Because like in another--.

[says to his great granddaughter] Okay now you have to keep quiet.

It's like when you're talking about comparing something, if you want to get a real reaction to that, you have to have something to compare it with. See growing up, everybody was poor. You know, how do you react to that. Everybody is poor and what affects me affects you because we're all in the same boat together. And as you grow older and things change as you become more aware of conditions that surround you, for example having electricity. You never had it before; but we've got it now. And somebody will say, "How . . .

[END OF SIDE B; TAPE 1 OF 1]
[START OF SIDE A; TAPE 2 OF 2]

BL: Okay. You were telling me about how times were different.

JF: How things have changed. And things become affordable because your lifestyle changes. For an example, when you go from thirty dollars month to thirty-six dollars a week, everything changes. I can afford more. I can do more. Have more. My whole life changes. That doesn't necessarily become better. But it changes. I don't know whether I was any better off when I was

living in Ridge getting water out of a spring than I'm living up here in Leonardtown with a faucet and turn it on. I don't know whether I'm better off. I know I can afford it now. In those days I couldn't. Now that's it. I have not--. Physically I haven't changed any. I'm still the same James Forrest in nineteen twenty-one that I am in nineteen--two hundred and--two thousand three. Physically I the same thing, the same person. I think a little bit further in matters. But I haven't changed any. You know I look at--. I look at some things and I would've really liked to have studied philosophy. I'm very interested in philosophy.

[2A0150] (94:00)

You know, sometime we as human beings get carried away. "I'm this. I'm that. I'm the other." But, how do they get this air that we breathe. Who gives it to them? You don't own it. I don't own it. President Bush don't own it. It's here. But yet we get so involved in, "this is *mine*." This land, we-- eh-- I didn't make no - I didn't make one once of that dirt out there. But I am using it. And I get--. Sometime I get carried away and people say, "Well you better shut up." (chuckles) But I'm just giving you the facts of life. We get involved in our self-worthiness. And, and we forget that we are just a speck on this earth. Just a speck. But yet, "I *own* this, I *own*-" - you don't own nothing! It's here. And you use it. But you don't own nothing. And I better hush cause I get kind of (laughs) carried away sometimes. But that's the way I see things. And maybe I see that because I'm getting older. That might have something to do with it. But I do think sometimes I sit here by myself and think just how insignificant we are. Just a speck of mortal on this earth yet we get so high powered that, "my God, I can," and just like that you're--. You're gone. (whispers) Gone.

(whispers) And now I'm philosophizing; but that's the way I feel. Somebody get this tape with that on there think I must have been crazy. (laughs)

BL: Okay. You were talking about how times have changed. You talked about the economic impact and whether or not your lifestyle changed. Do you think it has changed in other ways for the good or for the bad? I know earlier you mentioned that you respected your elders; do you think that has changed?

JF: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Oh yeah. We had change. And I--. You know I don't have a barometer but I do think sometimes, and I don't think I've pondered on it, some of the philosophy of the older people who had seen better times and worse times than I had. Like I used to have--. I had an uncle that used to live up the road here a little ways. Very down to earth man. He was very--. What would you say? We--. Our term is he was very old-time-ish. And he used to come by

here sometimes with a hoe on his shoulder. Had a hoe on his shoulder going down to work in people's garden. And he said to me,

"You know one thing, boy, machinery is going to be the ruination of man."

I said, "What in the world is that old man talking about?"

But if you look at that real seriously and *look deep*, there may be something to it. There may be something to it. But we don't know that. We--. We're just surmising those things. But I think about those things. Now I'm going into a realm that I don't know nothing about. But there's certain--. There's certain philosophy that these old people had that *made sense*. Not to us because we are so, what would you call it, commercialized or whatever it is - whatever this new age is - computerized. Press a button and you've got a message in Florida. One time it took five months to get a message there. But I don't know. Just sitting here talking to you these things come to my mind.

[2A0445]

BL: Do you think children are different today?

JF: Children are different.

BL: Do you think they are? And tell me how?

JF: Basically, children are no different. Basically, but because of the information that's available to them makes them seem different. Had I been exposed to the same things that children are being exposed to now, I'd have been just like them children--just like these children. There wouldn't be no different. That's the only difference. Basically, I said basically. All human beings are the same. It's the exposure that they get that makes them change. That's my opinion.

BL: So looking back from your perspective, tell me about--. You traveled to other places. Tell me about living in the county. You think that was a good place for you? Do you think there were other opportunities that you missed out on?

[2A0545]

JF: I've done a lot of traveling. St. Mary's County has been good for us. Very good. Very good for us and very good to us. I have no solid evidence to prove what I'm going to say. But in my opinion, we've been very fortunate in so many ways. This family, and I'm sure other families would say the same thing too, have had great comfort in St. Mary's County. I've had some good experiences. I've had some good jobs. And I've got a fair wages or I received fair wages which made it possible for me to do certain things for my family. It's like my wife was saying about education. We at one time had three children in college at one time. Some of them got grants, some of them worked, and we provided the rest for them. Which was good, which was good. And out of that experience we could see the results. Like that young fellow (his son George Gaither Forrest) that come here a while ago, now he's the district deputy (Deputy County Administrator) of St. Mary's County. And I think that was made available to him because he had the opportunity to get an education. And I think we were the kind of undercurrent to make that happen. And there're other people that have done the same thing. Now we--. I'm not taking credit away from anybody; I'm just giving you our experience. And we've had some - one or two rough spots along the way. But, fortunately, we all came. And now we kind of sitting here talking to you in an interview, "What happened?" We don't know exactly how it happened but we know it happened. (traffic noise) We did good. St. Mary's County--. I'll tell anybody, I've been to, I reckon, half of the United States, I've been to Germany, been to Rome. None of those places that I--. I didn't stay too long. But was compatible to St. Mary's County. She's been a wonderful place for us. I don't care what nobody says. (laughs)

[2A0736]

BL: Tell me how you feel about the growth in the county? The direction the county is heading? The dependence, for instance, on the defense economy? Tell me how you feel about that.

JF: Now--. Well, the way I feel really doesn't matter. But --. And to control it is impossible. But personally I would've liked to have seen a little less growth. And I'm being, what would you say, prejudice because I'm looking at it from a selfish point of view. And I used that word selfish because there are other young people who needs the developments that are happening in St. Mary's County. But I suppose I've sort of become complacent because I'm comfortable. And that isn't right.

We can't--. It's like genie in the box. You've read that story? Once you open that box up and let them out you can't put them back in there no more. (traffic noise) But there are all right as long as they are in there. But once they got out. As an old fellow used to say, "It's hell to tell the captain." And you can't control these things. But my concern, not for me but for my great

grandchildren, how much is left of this resource that we are enjoying? That bothers me. But what can you do about it. There's got to be a cutoff point somewhere. Oil's got to run out. Water's got to run out. Land's got to run out. Unless we send them to Mars or Jupiter or somewheres or another. It's just practical good common sense. Where say fifty years ago you had, what, very small population in St. Mary's County, plenty of everything - water, land. Now every now and again, the government say we've got to ration water. Getting low.

Those things kind of--. You look at it and say, "What will happen to my great grandchildren. How will they survive?" And that's--. That's simple--. Well, I won't say simple either 'cause it's not simple. Maybe our technology will be so advanced that we can do something about that. (noise from adjacent room) But I've got my doubts. I've got my doubts. But there'll always be a way. I hope.

BL: How about the defense industry and our dependence on it?

JF: It's important. It has changed the way of life in St. Mary's County. And unless we--. I say, *we*, unless our scientists - people with more knowledge than I have - make some preparation, we're going to be in trouble because we are dependent entirely on the outside structures. We're not independent anymore. See one time when I was coming along it didn't make no difference if it snowed for a month. I had enough flour in the barrel to feed me. But now if it snows a month, you going to be in trouble 'cause you can't get no bread out of the stores. Trucks can't get down here. And all those things. And I suppose they affect older people because they look at life a little bit different. They don't worry about tomorrow; hell, it'll be all right. And we old people say, "Well, how do you see that it's going to be alright?" (traffic noise) Can't be all right if it's not there.

But see we--. Just like electricity, for an example, talking to my daughter the other day about electricity, we don't--. We don't really think sometimes how dependent we are on electricity. But that electricity goes off I don't have no heat - don't have no water. And if I haven't put something in the icebox, I don't have no food. But growing up as a boy didn't have no electricity. Didn't depend on it. We were independent. But that independence in gradually losing its power. And I'm philosophizing again. (laughs)

BL: That's good. Can you tell us, what is the most valuable thing you ever had?

JF: The most valuable thing I ever had - my health. That's the most valuable thing I ever had was my health.

BL: And Mrs. Forrest.

JF: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And the children. I don't leave them out - and the grandchildren.

[2A1055]

BL: All right. I wanted to ask you about awards, recognitions. What can you recall throughout your lifetime - special awards and recognitions that you have received? Appointments? We already talked about a few; we mentioned the state--

JF: You know, I've had--. I've had so many people who felt that I deserved or we deserved awards. I got a box full upstairs. If I could sell them I'd be a millionaire. And evidently, and I say this with humility, somebody that I've contacted or came into contact with must have felt that he deserved it. He did something that affected me so I'm going to do something that will kind of help him along the way. All that's the way I look at it.

All that stuff on that wall, I don't know whether you have seen it or not. But there's pictures, just like now for an example, somebody felt that a school needed to be named after me. (James A. Forrest Technology Center) I don't know why. I could not put my hand on any specific point and say, "That's why I deserve that." I can't do it. Somebody thought so. I'm grateful for it. And I'm certainly appreciative of it. But, Mr. Lewis, if I would try to give you an example as to why that should have been. I can't do it. Just can't do it. That's all.

And when I--. My term on the school board had expired. I'll bet you I got a box full of trophies and plaques from the government and the President and--. Somebody must have--. You know, I know he don't know me *personally*. Somebody might have told him. But I say somebody must have thought, "That fellow must be doing something." Or somebody think he's doing something - fooling somebody. (laughs)

I don't know why it's happening. But it's there. There's proof right there. I didn't--. I didn't--. (laughs) I didn't print none of them. (laughs) And I didn't ask for any of them. But I appreciate; I accept them; now don't misunderstand, I don't want this to say that this fellow's talking at the big gate. Have you ever heard that expression? I'm not talking at the big gate; I'm talking from the heart. I've tried to be as honest as I could. Sometime, you know, you get honesty and truth mixed up. You go overboard.

See a fellow said to me one time, said:

"Don't jump overboard until you know how deep the water is."

And these things just happened to me. Mr. Lewis, I don't--. I don't--. It's just like when you asked me about this interview I said, "Well look, what else can I say."

I used to go around I called it preaching to the schools on black history. And these are schools that're integrated in - black and whites were already in place. And I would tell them. I've got a book upstairs with black history in it. And I used to keep well abreast of it - of what was in there and what was happening. And I'd tell them about these things, what happened, what we as blacks had done; that they were not aware of it. A lot of people are not aware of what accomplishments we've made. And I thought that was important that they knew that or that they had some knowledge of it. And I'd--. People'd call me up and say, "Mr. Forrest, I'd like for you to come and talk to the children today on black history." And I was glad to do it; I was young then; had a powerful voice. Hell, I could holler loud.

[2A1304]

But as you get older you know, these things kind of--. They get old. You've done it so much you say, "Look, what's the use of me doing it. Let another fellow take a shot at it." And that's where life has been for me. I've been very fortunate and I can't say it enough and--. And a lot of people will say, "Well look, God has been good to me." He's been good to a lot of people, not only me. He's been good to a lot of people. And a lot of people get the strength from that.

Ah, I don't know. So much stuff has happened - *good* - for this family. And we kind of stand in awe when it's going to run out. You know, sometime it do.

I had--. I used to go visit at the nursing home; that was one of my, I don't want to say *pet* obligation, but I enjoyed going to the hospital going to the nursing home and talk to people. But then I got so depressed when I left; I stopped going. There's so much misery. And you sometimes see that vacant chair over there and you say, "Look Jim Forrest, that might be your chair. Be careful." And you say, "Well look I'm going to slack off for a little while."

Those are the kind of things that--. I don't know. I feel proud of. That I've had a part of it. And I just like people. I just--. I don't know, I just--. I don't know of a single person that I dislike. I've got a lot of people that I don't agree with. But I've heard people say, "*I hate*" so and so. I

don't hate nobody. I really don't. And I don't know anybody that I've got a grudge against. Oh I feel sometime that maybe I'd like to have a little bit more - years ago not now 'cause I don't need nothing. But you in your life going a long feel, "This fellow got a brand new car. Damn, I'd like to have a brand new car." And I don't think that's being prejudice or being aggravated because he's got it. You just feel that, I'd like to have that too. I don't know. That's my life. (laughs)

[2A1430]

BL: Tell me some more about the box upstairs. What are other awards--?

JF: Oh my goodness. I haven't been in that box for so long. I don't know. People just give me stuff that, awards that I received from different organizations. Well, two or three of them in there. (points to the family room) One of them has got a press release. I don't know why they gave it to me but they gave it to me. Somebody must have thought I wanted it. (traffic noise) And stuff that people just--. When we were married, fifty years old and stuff--. Sell it now and pay my income tax with it. (chuckles) Ain't no good to us now. (laughs) But it's here.

Now that's part of our family right there on that wall. (points to the right-hand wall in the living room) There's my--. See that one up there at the top. That's my great grandmother; that's the woman who raised me. The one far over, the woman dressed in that Indian costume, that's her daughter. And the one next over this way, that's my mother. And that's my father down at the bottom. And they're--. I'm sitting here looking at them talking to them sometimes. They don't answer me but I talk to them (laughs) just the same. And a lot of this stuff around here people must have thought something.

And of course this on this side (points to wall on his left), that's my wife's great grandmother there. That's my wife's sisters and brothers. And of course I don't know who that fellow is standing up there with that (chuckles) short coat on. (The wall hanging he refers to here is a painting of James and Harriet Forrest on their wedding day. The dress jacket that Mr. Forrest wears is short in the sleeves.) But anyway that's some of the stuff that's gathered around us. Yep. Course it's been a good road. A little rough in spots but been good.

BL: So a few years back you were recognized at St. Mary's College with an doctorate of letters, I believe?

JF: Doctorate of humanities.

BL: Doctorate of humanities, excuse me. Tell me a little bit about that. How did you feel? What was it like?

[2A1550] (118:00)

JF: It was a surprise. And, when I first got the notice I put it in the trashcan because I though it was some kind of an advertisement that they wanted. Ah - I don't know, I get so much advertisements. So then she called, what was the lady's name - I forget her name now well anyway, she called some of the children and asked:

"Did I get any mail?"

And they asked me and I said,

"Yeah, I got something from down at the college but I put it in the trashcan."

So he told - whoever asked, whoever he was talking to - told them and they sent me another invitation. And I responded to that one - but I just though it was something that you know, some kind of invitation or some kind of advertisement because I didn't really realize the importance of it. And I today, I don't know who put my name in. And, maybe it's just as well that I don't. But, you know, you wonder about them things, or you wonder why you deserve it? Be frank with you, somebody must have thought so. That is quite an honor.

You know the children tease me sometimes they get a lot of kick out of my--. Sometime I get carrying on with them. So, the youngest son say, "Um, we're learned, we got two doctors in the family." See my granddaughter's a doctor too. She's a doctor of phyl, of um, pharmacy. And I say, "Yeah, but she's a real doctor, I'm just a--. (laughs) Yep, yep, there's a-- Mr. Lewis, there's a lot of, lot of good things happen to this family. And you still try to look back in your bag of tricks and try to figure out why it happened. And I'm sure it happened to a lot of other families too. But ah, I just happened to be the one that you're interviewing.

BL: Tell me a little bit more about that day? You got dressed up, the family was there - tell me about that - who was there?

JF: What was that on the?

BL: The day you received the honorary doctorate.

[2A1658]

JF: Oh my goodness. That was - that was a that was two days of it. First, first ah--. Course I think it happened on a--. I'm trying to think whether it was on a Saturday or Sunday.

But anyway, they had a dinner first. And there were a lot of dignitaries were there and, and they were sitting round and a lot of professors were there. I mean, heavy, heavy shooters; PhDs and MDs and all the other Ds mixed up there together. (laughs) I was--. (laughs harder) I was kind of *overshadowed* by all this *knowledge*. And you feel very humble because you said, "Look here Forrest, you--. You come out of Ridge, under a, under a place they called Taylor's Hill, and now you're sitting up here with the doctors and professors and lawyers, and physicians. What are you doing up here?" And you have no answer for it and say, "I don't know." Somebody just said you ought to be there. And here you are.

And, of course, I had my grandchildren, great grandchildren, and children, friends, neighbors, and I don't know, you just feel overwhelmed. You just--. You feel so humble, because you know within your heart you haven't done anymore than anybody else. And, and people just picked you out, out of a bunch, and put you up there on this pedestal and said,

"Look, look at him, look at him."

And you're sitting up there. Do you deserve it? Did you work for it? Why is it there? You don't have no answer for it. You just say, "I've lived my life and come the ebb and flow of the tide and here you are."

[2A1754]

And then you look back in your life and it's like--. I always like to mention this man because he was a--. He was an inspiration to me. This is Daniels; the man that was principal at Cardinal Gibbons Institute. Evidently, he saw something in me that I didn't know was there. Because he picked me out and kind of pushed me along. And there were fifty other boys there they didn't push along. It's *scary* sometimes. Sometime you said--. Makes me tremble sometime when you think about it seriously. *Why did that man pick you out*? Was that, what do they call it, predestination? I don't know. But it happened. See those are the facts. Those are the facts.

That man made it possible for me to have a house over in Hollywood. He built a house. I say *he* - the Institution built a house, brand new house, set me up in the chicken business; I raised chickens over in Hollywood for--. 'Til the depression came and things went bad. And you--. You know I'm sitting here (chuckles) boring you with things that happened to me. And you say to yourself, "Why? Why did it happen to you? What did you do to deserve it?" I don't know. I really don't know. I accept it; I respect it. But why it happened, I don't know. And it kind of--. Kind of makes you feel a little - or more humble when you really think about these things seriously.

BL: Okay this is meant to be very open-ended also. Is there--? Have you done everything you wanted to do in your life? Is there something else you would like to get done or wished you had time for? You mentioned philosophy - studying philosophy?

[2A1875]

JF: You know sometime you wish you had paid more attention to your education than you did. Because as you go through life there are so many areas that you would like to have more knowledge of. Philosophy would have been my goal in life I believe. I--. What's the word called? Prognosticator? I just look at human beings and try to understand them. What makes them tick? And there's another expression that's sometime you try to see around the curve. Hard to do but--. I just--. I like human beings. That's the best way I can put it. I just like people. I like to study them. I like to wonder why they do what they do. Wonder what their interest is? Why is?

For an example, I take about you. I said now, "Why does Mr. Lewis follow the line of work that he is doing - interviewing people? What's behind that? There must be some gratification that he gets from doing that. What is it? What drives him? And, this is not personal, I don't know whether you make a salary or whether you do it because you're inspired by some feeling that you don't know what it is. But you do it. And I'm sure that if you were in the professional world and you were doing this on the basis of dollars and cents it would cost you a lot of money. Or it would cost me a lot of money to have you do it. And I think about those kind of things. It don't amount to a row of beans but I think about it just the same. I don't know whether you follow what I'm saying or not? (noise from kids who run through room)

BL: Okay, I want to ask you if there is some story you would like to tell me that would be a story that you would tell to your great grandchildren? If there is something that you feel comfortable telling me?

JF: Well, you know I used to, I don't do much of it now, but I used to tell these children tales. You know years ago, when we didn't have television, telephones, radios, and all that kind of stuff. We had to make up our own stories. You know there was a man call him Uncle Remus. You ever heard of that? He told about Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox. You ever heard of that?

BL: No, tell me about it.

JF: (laughs through next three lines) I don't know whether you're--. I don't know whether you're--. You're not pulling my leg now, are you?

BL: No. Tell me about it.

[2A2020]

JF: (still laughing) See I used to tell the children that years ago when I was coming along we made up our stories; adults used to talk. That was a way of communication. And I used to tell them tales about Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox and how they made a living - how they lived. And you see I told them a tale one time about the Tar Baby.

> This man had a spring and every time he would go down to the spring, the spring was muddy. You know children play in the spring and make it muddy.

You don't know that but--. See years ago, there was a natural source of water that we called a spring. And I suppose it's the gravity of the earth that pulls water to the surface. They call them springs and I'm sure you know about that. I'm not telling you anything new. But they are gradually fading away now; I think they--. The pressure on the water that we use is taking the pressure away from that force. And we all used to have what they call artesian wells on the seashore where the water just continued to flow all the time. All the time doing for thousands of years I reckon. Anyhow getting back to this tale.

> And this fellow said, "I'm going to--. I'm going to catch whoever has been coming down here muddying my springs up." Said, "I'm going to put the tar baby down there and catch him." So the rabbit was the one that was doing it. So he come down to the spring--. This rabbit came down to the spring this morning and saw the tar baby and said, "It's a good morning." Tar baby didn't say nothing to him. He spoke again and he still didn't say nothing to him. He

said, "I'll make you say something." So he struck him. *POW*. Hand got stuck. Couldn't get it away. Said, "I got another one." Struck him again. Stuck couldn't get it away. Said, "I got a foot." And kicked him. That got stuck; the other one got stuck.

So the next morning when the man came down to his spring he found Brer Rabbit had got stuck to this tar baby. And he said, "Umm hmm." He said, "You the one been messing my spring up." So the rabbit he started to pleading and crying and he said, "Please don't hurt me." He said, "Please don't hurt me. Please don't throw me in the briar bushes. Throw me in the fire but don't throw me in the briar bushes."

So of course the old man done just the opposite. He threw him in the briar bushes. And of course when he threw him in the briar bushes, the rabbit laid down, throwed up both his legs, and said, "That's where I was bred and born." In the briar bushes.

And stuff like that sitting down having fun with them. And we'd have a lot of fun. They'd laugh and I enjoyed telling them. And that was, you know, a way of life.

BL: Okay. We'll come back to your lifestyle. Can you tell me how you and others in the county kept informed? You mentioned that you didn't have television. What source of news did you have?

[2A2163]

JF: Well, you have to think about the period which you're talking about. When I was a child they had a paper called the *Grit*, an old newspaper, I don't know where it came out of New York or Baltimore or somewhere or another. And my aunt who had a fairly good education could read and she would read the news to us. It was just what ever happened New York or wherever it happened and they put it in the *Grit*. She would, you know--. She would--. I need a little drink of water. She would read to us. (drinks) And then on Sundays when people went to church they would talk about the farmers or the pigs or the cows or chickens and just a general country conversation. And that was it.

And then the post office was a meeting place. Mail time, around twelve o'clock, the mail would come you'd go to the post office. Probably wouldn't get anything but you'd go anyhow. And that was kind of a community gathering.

And of course as you say there wasn't no telephone. In fact the average person didn't--. Doctors might have a telephone. Stores. Very few local people had a telephone. Of course there wasn't no wires, two wires going down the road; that's all there was. Then later years they started putting in a little more wires and a little cable and then--. That was in the forties. Then everybody got all the information they needed and more to them. Umm hmm.

BL: As you were a child or a young man, what do you remember as some of the big stories that were going on outside the county?

[2A2248]

JF: Well. There was a lot of talk, as a youngster, of the Titanic. A lot of people talked about that in their conversation. Of course that was nineteen--, nineteen eleven? No wait a minute, got to be nineteen--. When was it? Nineteen--? I don't know. It's been a long time ago; ninety some odd years ago. But it was news to us then because it was just getting to us. It probably was five or six years old. But we was just kind of getting the real information on the Titanic - Umm. There was a lot of stories told about that big ship.

And then as time went on they got into the World War One. People coming home from say nineteen eighteen. See I was seven years old something or other like that. And people was talking about the young men coming back from the army - their experience over in France and mustard gas and things like that. We're youngsters, you know, of course we weren't *allowed* to get in (traffic noise) on all the information. You kind of had to sit back a little bit and let old folks talk. And they'd be talking about it. See you had uncles and nephews and things that was in the service and they'd come back and tell tales. I don't know whether they were tales either. It was information. That was something new too, you know. Taking these boys off the farm--. Taking them in the big cities and stuff was quite an experience. Yep.

BL: And as a young man the depression came along. Was that news or did everything seem about the same?

JF: No, it was news. It was news. It was news. The depression changed a lot of things. And it had an impact in St. Mary's County. Not as great because--. I don't remember ever being hungry and owning--. I say not me, but my grandmother and grandfather owned their own property - hadn't had to move. See during the depression, if people couldn't make it on the farm they had to move. If you couldn't--. If you couldn't produce on the farm, you had to go somewheres else.

And a lot of movement was going on during the depression. But in this area, or in the area where I was born, it was--. We faired pretty well according to the times. There's a lot of stories told about the depression but it didn't involve us too much.

[END OF SIDE A; TAPE 2 OF 2]
[START OF SIDE B; TAPE 2 OF 2]

BL: Okay. We were talking about newsworthy events. We got into the depression - the thirties--.

JF: Umm hmm.

BL: A time of Jim Crow laws in Maryland. Can you recall hearing news or discussions about the heightened segregation during that time and the Jim Crow laws?

JF: You know that--. I know it was--. There was a law Jim Crow law. But in my experience, I never had much to deal with it. I really didn't. See I was--. In the thirties, just like I said, sixteen-thirties -- nineteen thirty-three was the tricentenary of Father Andrew White coming to St. Mary's City - sixteen thirty-three. I was working down at St. Mary's City. So the depression where it affected a lot of people didn't affect me or didn't affect us because I had a job. But it did affect a lot of people. I've always--. I reckon I could take a piece of paper on a page and write for you the jobs I've had. (chuckles) I've had many jobs.

BL: We are going to do that.

JF: (laughs) I worked at St.--. At Point Lookout Hotel. Have you ever heard of that?

BL: No.

JF: Never heard of Point Lookout Hotel?

BL: No.

[2B0150]

JF: Fascinating place my gosh. You need to get some history on that. Point Lookout Hotel was the largest, and I say this without too much authority, building in the lower part of St. Mary's County. I was where the aristocrats came from Washington Baltimore. Spent their vacation at Point Lookout Hotel. You check with--. I tell you what, what's the lady's name down at St. Mary's College? She is a historian too. Umm. She done a lot of work in the forties on living in St. Mary's County. Dr. Hammond. Have you ever heard of her?

BL: Yes.

JF: Well, I'm sure she's got something on Point Lookout Hotel. I worked down there as a waiter. I was in school but during the summertime I'd go down there and wait tables. It was a very very exclusive place. It didn't, as the expression goes, there wasn't no riff-raffs in there. You had to have them dollar bills. (laughs) Yeah, I worked at Point Lookout Hotel. I worked at, as I said a while ago, at St. Mary's City. I worked for the telephone company. Done a little farming raising tomatoes. When I came to Leonardtown I worked at the Hotel St. Mary's. That was a big place too - three stories. You heard of that? St. Mary's Hotel? I shined shoes in Leonardtown on the streets. Got my shoeshine stand out in the woodshed now. And I just--. I was work oriented. I could find a job. I done a little carpenter work, painting, cooking. Done anything. I've done jobs that are out of existence now I reckon.

BL: Okay. You talked about the post-war era as a young man, actually I asked you about it. I don't think you had a whole lot to say. The heightened Jim Crow laws--. The heightened segregation atmosphere in St. Mary's County at that time. You were just a young man when that started I guess. I'm going to end by asking you if--. Throughout your lifetime and especially think about that time in that era then--. Throughout your lifetime, did you ever feel threatened because you were an African American man?

JF: Threatened in what way? Physically?

BL: Physically, mentally, emotionally, challenged in some way?

[2B0396]

JF: Well when you were--. Once you were denied certain rights. Certainly that's an atmosphere--. Because even when you go into a place and you aren't aware of it, see they don't have a big sign

up saying, "We don't serve you"--. You go in there and I--. This particular incident happened to me when I was working for the telephone company. I don't--. He wasn't a friend of mine but he was a worker with me. And we went in this place to get a sandwich for lunch and we both sat on a stool and the lady came out. He made a--. He ordered. And I ordered. And she said,

"I'm sorry, can't serve you."

Well it was embarrassing to start with. Of course it threatens you. It so demeaning because, you know, I hadn't done anything wrong. I just asked for a sandwich. And he said,

"Well if you can't serve him, you can't serve me either."

And those kind of things they--. They just make you feel so--. I don't know. You feel like--. I can't find a word that would properly express how you feel. You feel humiliated. You feel embarrassed to start with. The first thing happens to you, you're embarrassed first. Then you get aggravated. You say, "Why are I being treated this way?" Then you stop and think about it seriously and say, "Well look. That's the law." And you really can't hold that person that told you that totally responsible because she or he is doing it because she is instructed to do it from her boss man.

See if you look at that approach, it kind of smoothes the waters a little bit. And I'm sure, and I feel I'm sure, that if some of those people would serve me had it not been for their boss saying,

"Look, don't serve that black man."

And you feel--. It's kind of hard to interpret your feelings fully because you do get aggravated and you stop and think, "Well hell, I'll go somewhere else and get a sandwich. I ain't going to let it worry me." And you really have to be careful because it's like a sore. It'll keep festering. After a while, it will turn into Ptomaine poisoning. Have to cut your finger off. Those are the kind of approaches that I've taken in life. It helped me a lot because I've been some kind of aggravated sometime. And then you sit back and say, "Well now look. That's a law and it's a custom. You have to approach it a different way if you want to get any result."

[2B0603]

We've had--. We've had quite a few embarrassing moments. I call them embarrassing, but it was the law. And some time you look at those things not from a standpoint of being aggravated

but just from a human--, from a humanitarian point, saying, "Now look. I ain't done nothing. I didn't rob no bank. I didn't cut any--. Done something to somebody to aggravate them. I'm just being attacked because I'm black! That's the only reason." And it gets frustrating sometimes and of course it's hard for you to be in my shoes but sometime when you look at this thing straight now and say, "Look. I didn't make myself black. I didn't bring myself here. And it's wrong. And I'm tired of it. And I'm doing something about it." It depends on how you're going to do it. And depending on how you're going to do it, is what results you're going to get. That's--. I've always looked at that. I put that out front. What's my result? I could do a lot of things but if it doesn't amount to nothing it ain't worth doing.

I don't know whether you follow my thoughts but that's the truth. You get aggravated and I think that's, maybe, some of the frustration of our young blacks today. They're frustrated and they just can't handle it. They don't know how to handle it. And not being equipped to handle it they do foolish things. Completely foolish. And it doesn't help the situation. It just makes it worse. But they don't understand that because they're young. You've got to have a little age on you. You've got to be mellow a little sometimes to take a step back and analyze the situation and see how I'm going to work it out. See that was one of Martin Luther's successes. He stepped back a minute and thought about it and say,

> "Look, if I kill that fellow, there'll be five more coming to take his place. So I better be careful if I kill him. Better wait a while trying to--. Don't retaliate."

Strong person to do that. When you're putting dogs on me and washing me with a hose and blowing up - killing my children and stuff. It's hard for you to try not to take a gun and go and kill him. But if you stop and think about it. Say, "Look. What are the results going to be?" And, and a lot to think about. [whispers] A lot to think about.

[2B0781]

And a lot of us thought about these things and some of us have been accused of saying, "Awh you're too easy. You ought to have done this ought to have done the other." Maybe we should have? I don't know. But that's water over the dam. (laughs) Water over the dam. We've had a lot of--. We've had a lot of--. And of course, that's what I say about my wife. Now my wife wouldn't have been able to--. She wouldn't have been able to handle some of these things. She would have--. She would've rebelled and became more frustrated in my opinion - which sometimes don't amount to much. (laughs) But we've made a good team. We've come through a lot of--. We've come through a lot of trying times. (helicopter flies overhead)

[2B0836]

I'm going to give you this one story and then I'm going to give you no more. In our church we were forced to sit behind. You see that was frustrating. You look at that thing you say, "Look now here's an institution that's trying to follow Christian philosophy and you've got two sets of people in there - one black and one white. Same--. Same--. Same church, same structure. But yet that one that's black is not given the privilege to sit where he wants to. He's got--. He's relegated to the black - to the back.

And if you analyze that and you say, "Look there's got to be something wrong here. If this is a Christian community, looking at Christian philosophy or Christian teaching, All Men are Created Equal, God-like, or whatever term you want to use, and yet in *your house* where you are the leader--. And you say, 'Look you're black. You can't come up here. You sit in the back.' "

And when you think about that, think deep, you say--. You get upset. You get upset. But if you take a step back and say, "Well look. Let's work on this thing a little bit and see if we can't make some sense out of this thing that doesn't make any sense." And finally, it's worked out. But it wasn't easy. Wasn't easy. And you can take it from me, it wasn't easy. But here I am.

And you look at this thing as how *asinine*. Thirty years ago I couldn't sit in the front of the church. And thirty years later I'm a minister of that same church. I'm giving out sacraments to people in that same church. Analyze that and just look at it and put it up on a wall and look at it. And say, "How foolish it is." So there's some of the changes. And they're good changes. But if you want your children or maybe if you want the world to see how foolish it was then put it up on a screen and just compare them.

See now thirty years ago that same man - ain't no change; his skin's the same color, he's the same weight, looks the same--. They had to sit in the back and now he's up on the altar with the minister of that church giving out Holly Communion or officiating in the activities.

That's all. I'm not going to keep on talking about it. But I do think about it. I don't get frustrated anymore. But I do think about it. And I don't talk to these children too much about it because young people--. They're not seasoned enough to take all these things and they retaliate. Which sometimes isn't the right thing to do. So I--. I kind of (chuckles) put a little frosting on the cake before I give it to them. I don't give them all the stuff that we've gone through so that

they have the privilege of being accepted. Because that's what it is. Being accepted in these different phases of life. So.

BL: Thank you Dr. Forrest.

JF: (laughs)

[END OF SIDE B; TAPE 2 OF 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]