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An Interview with
Samuel Adams

Conducted by
Calder M. Pickett

Endacott Society
University of Kansas

Q This is March 8, 2000. I'm Calder Pickett. This is going to be an interview with Samuel Adams, one of my long-time colleagues in the School of Journalism, and a friend ever since he came here back in the 1970s. I've conducted other interviews with people in the School of Journalism. I interviewed Dana Leibengood about a year ago, I guess. Actually, most of the interviews that I've done have been with other people in other schools and departments. Sam, I want to start with some kind of basic stuff about you. I'd like you to tell us, first, your date of birth, your place of birth, the names of your parents, what your father did, what his work was, etc., to get us started.

A I was born January 25, 1926, in Waycross, Georgia. I was the third of six children born to Viola and J.N. Adams. J.N.'s real name was Joe Nathan Adams, but there was another Joe who was Joe David, so he was always called J.N. He was the youngest of the four kids that I knew. He had a sister who was just above him and two brothers who lived there. But, there was another brother who was born earlier who lived in the North who I didn't know. J.N. Adams was really the son of parents who were born before the end of slavery. He was a very enterprising and hard working person whose education was in a one-room schoolhouse in Camden County, Georgia. My mother was married to him when she was 16. She had gone as far as she was allowed to go in school in Waycross, Georgia, so the next thing was to get married. She was in a one-parent family.

Q Most of the people that I've talked with, their parents did not have a whole lot of education, and many of them went to one-room schools.

A That's interesting. But, in his case, the one-room schooling was four years. Yet, he was really brilliant. His knowledge was superior to mine in a lot of areas. I always remember that he could crunch numbers without the benefit of computers or calculators.

Q What did he do for a living?

A A variety of jobs. He decided earlier that he would work for himself. He started as a shoe maker, and he taught me to be a shoe cobbler. But, in that time we would fix umbrellas, do loads of things with one's hands. He insisted that each of us work each day, although sometimes I would go in early in the morning before school to put in an hour so that I might be away in the evenings to play football or some other things like that.

Q This was something that he did at home, then?

A No. In the hometown, but my dad started his business jointly with one brother. Then he moved his shop downtown next to City Hall. Part of my early racial memories relate to that because there was a desire for him not to be where he was, and it led to changes in his life, and in his business. The lease was moved from under him from his business next to City Hall. The police station nearby right downtown, he moved a block up next door to a jeweler, whose name I will always remember. But, that jeweler, who himself was leasing, disliked having someone of color with a business next to his. We had to move. He was only able to stay there a month. So, he decided I will own my own building, I will do other different things. He moved his business closer to home into another district, and, then, finally he was able to build his own building. His building was a shoe

repair, a different change. Rather than serving the elite whites from downtown, his business needed to do other things, now. So, he would repair old boots and stuff that came out of surplus from the war. There was a bargain store and all of those things were there. Then, when we were all in school sometime later, my mother set up her business, a dry cleaning business. A mother who was a presser worked for her. So, those buildings were on the same lot.

Q How big a town was Waycross?

A Waycross, now, I guess it's about 50,000, maybe less than that, but somewhere around that. Then, it was about 15,000, I think.

Q I don't know Georgia. I've, of course, driven through. I've been in Atlanta, places like that. Where is Waycross?

A Waycross is the county seat for the Okefenokee swamp.

Q Clear down south, then?

A Oh, yes. We're talking about 70 miles from Jacksonville, Florida, maybe a little less than 70 miles from Jacksonville. It's inland from Brunswick about 50 miles, midway between Brunswick and Valdosta, going east to west. So, it's inland, and it's the Ware County seat for that land of Okefenokee. It's where the cartoon "Pogo" is.

Q Sam, I'll probably be asking you some dumb questions, but they're the kinds of things we want to talk about. I am assuming that this was a highly segregated town.

A It was. That's not a dumb question. Yes, you know the answer. It was very highly segregated. As a matter of fact, even though I lived close to where I could

get, a sewer wasn't allowed. The man who picked up the waste and came through an alley nearby, used a pump early on. Things are very different, now. But, all of it had a lot to do with how my dad performed. He was one of the original organizers 80 years ago of the NACP. He was a founding organizer of Keystone Voters League. There were loads of people there who understood the need for change. They were positive in their approaches to how to bring it about, and the political changes there now are just great.

Q How conscious were you as a little boy of the matter of segregation. I imagine that you went to a school that was all-black children, or did you?

A I went to school with all-black children, but when I was downtown at my dad's business there was Central High School there and there was a playground. I could go to the playground and play. The interactions, you know, between young blacks and whites were not unusual. The South was noted for backyard segregation. As long as people were young and prior to puberty, you might play together, though you might also encounter some horrible things. When the school was overcrowded in my elementary school, fifth grade, I had to walk across town past the white schools into another district for schools. Sometimes, fights would break out just because whites would want you to get off of the sidewalk to let them past, or some other kinds of insults, which young persons like myself resisted, and did not really tolerate well.

Q This is something that, I won't say it's hard to comprehend because I know a lot about it in an historical sense. But, there was nothing like this in my life. This was the difference. This is the difference when it comes to the races. I've never

had an experience, well, the only kind of experience that would suggest something that involved bigotry, is a little story I want to tell you. Nola's mother worked for a Jewish tailor in Ogden, Utah. He was one of the grandest men I've ever know. Well, we were in there. I used to get clothes from him, it was very near the depot, and people would come in and sell their clothes to him. Then, he would sell them to me for a very low price. That's the kind of clothes I wore for a long time after we got married. We didn't have much money, you know. And, he was pressing some pants for me, and a one-armed guy came in, thrusting his way around in there, and he wanted his pants pressed. And, Harry, the tailor, said, "Just a minute after I get these pants pressed for this gentleman." And, he said, "Why, you Goddamn Jew kikes." All of us, we were all Jew kikes to him. Nola's mother, who was used to people like him, reached under the counter. She had a blackjack. Where she got it, I don't know, but she went after him and chased him out of that place. I had the feeling then, I understood briefly what Jewish people would have to go through sometimes. I am really appreciative of these things.

Did you say that you had brothers and sisters?

A Yes. I have three brothers and two sisters. I had three brothers. I lost a brother a year and a half ago in Atlanta.

Q Tell me a little bit about your home. Did you have books, magazines, newspapers, radio?

A Yes. Home to the radio, like white on rice, when Joe Louis was fighting, or when there was something else of significance, especially as it related to racial progress. Waycross was a very progressive town. My mother was very keen on education.

She was in state PTA's and in all of those kinds of things. When all of us were in school, she ran her own business. My sister was very bright and became a Fulbright Fellow. All of those kinds of things were the kinds of goals that sort of perambulated in the family. As a result, my family stayed in school longer than expected. So, five of us were in college at once.

Q That's wonderful. That's really wonderful. Tell me, did the Depression hit your family much?

A Yes, but who knew about it?

Q That's what I thought. Everybody was poor!

A We were already poor. It was not a sharp change for us. I would say it was Depression because of what was going on. I know about it historically. But, how I knew about then was not to know about it. Of course, it is why there was such a great love for the compassion of the president at the time.

Q That's what I want to ask you about.

A I wouldn't call them compassionate conservatives, just compassionate men. But, he had a wife who was even more compassionate from the points of view of my colleagues and associates down in Georgia.

Q So, you became quite conscious of the fact that Roosevelt was president, and that we had the New Deal?

A Definitely. It affected politics because even though we in the South ran the Republican party, we ran it defensively because we could not be in the Democratic primary, so we were all supporters of the Republican party, the party of Lincoln, until a president came out of Kansas and had followers who sort of

rejected black leadership in the Republican party. Then, came the Democratic troubles, the walkout of the Democratic party and it led to a total shift in the orientation of southern blacks, although they ran the Republican party and put up the Republican candidates, except for president. The national election for president, they were all voting for Roosevelt.

Q Sam, tell me about your grade school. Do you remember the teachers, do you remember them by name or any way that they influenced you?

A Yes, I remember them from grade school. I remember the left-handed Viola Woods because, even though she was thin or whatever, she believed in a little corporal punishment. I can see her picking up one of my classmates by the seat of his pants, a little spanking with the hand. Nothing was ever very violent or serious, but you knew that there was displeasure if you did something wrong. I remember my third grade teacher. I remember loads of those teachers, but I remember many of them because they were family friends, they were part of the community. This was a little town. They followed you, they had some sense of your abilities and would insist upon your achieving whatever their goals were.

Q What did you like in school? What were you good at?

A My trouble was that I was a jack of too many trades. I loved loads of things. I loved the arts, I loved music, I loved writing. I also loved doing things with my hands. And, I did them all. It's partially why I ended up in journalism because my teachers then said, "It's okay for you to go into something that blacks can survive in. You will survive, you will do okay because there's a variety of things that you can do."

- Q I asked my grandson, who is a very good student, what his favorite class was.
Recess. I'm sure that's something that lots of the children say.
- A I think of the great recess we had on the first snow I saw in Waycross. I was in elementary school and they let us out. I think it was on my birthday, January 25. I must have been in second grade or whatever, but they let us out to run and play in it.
- Q Sam, did you ever have to get out when you were a little boy and have a job, work to earn money?
- A Not to earn money. I had to get out and get a job, but the job was in the family. My family was protective, and they would not allow us to work for whites at that time to avoid some of the abuse that some of the neighbor kids would encounter. But, we worked more than anyone else because we were working in the family business. Even though my family said that one shouldn't work on Sunday, we found ourselves making deliveries after midnight. It always bothered me because I said, "Hey, that's Sunday!" But, they didn't want people coming for their clothes on Sunday, so we needed to finish our work. So, we worked all the time.
- Q How about play. Were you able to get out in the countryside around Waycross? Was there a river there or anywhere to go swimming, did you go fishing or anything like that?
- A I never went fishing, I don't like to fish today. My dad loves it. I didn't know that he loved fishing so much until later in life when he's now able to do it. He worked from sunup to sunset all the time. I learned later that he fished.
- Q He was much like my dad. He didn't fish until he retired.

A My dad went so long before he retired. He was in his nineties before he was doing things. He said there was a day off. After we all had left, there was always Wednesday fishing on his day off. He had friends there to take him, crabbing or fishing. Well, he was a seaport town person, so I can understand his love of fishing. As for other members of the family, none of us tuned into fishing.

Q When you got into high school, junior high and high school, did you go into sports?

A Yes, with a bang. But, in order to accommodate sports, I would go to work with my dad in the morning before school so that I would be able to get the time off to practice football or whatever. I was small.

Q Were you any good?

A Oh, I was super good.

Q Were you?

A Yes. I got a lot of ink and partly because even after I got to college, I played college football, too, wanting to do it. I remember a young lady telling me I walked like I was stepping into hot spit. She said something different. But, my gait was not, let's say, as manly as she might have wanted it to be. This kind of challenge to one's masculinity, I think, had some impact on my choosing football. But, I liked athletics, anyway. I played football and was good at that. I was not as good at basketball. My brother was a super baseball player. Left-handed and he could hit and throw. This brother is deceased now. In football, I was so fast I was able to do things with bigger people than most. In college, I suffered little

separation and some physical things because I was playing football with huge people, and I didn't take a back seat for anyone.

Q When did you graduate from high school? 1944?

A Yes, 1944.

Q See, you're the same age as my brother. He was born in 1926, and I know well that he got out in 1944. Did World War II catch you?

A Yes, except that I was not taken into World War II. I went into the services after college during the Korean conflict when many of my colleagues went in and became First Lieutenants. So many of them got killed, and some of them also became the first line of black generals. I was at West Virginia State College, and that ROTC program produced a lot of great soldiers.

Q I was interested. How come you went clear up to West Virginia to school?

A It's interesting how I went to any schools. My parents would support any school that I chose. I was looking for a good school. There were, of course, schools in Atlanta. The girls went to Morris Brown College, a church school. Both girls went to the same place. The boys, the oldest boy went to Tuskegee and then to the Army, and then he came back to Tuskegee. The boy who was next to me, he and I finished college at the same time. He went to Fisk, private and a little more expensive than state schools. I chose West Virginia. We were allowed to go wherever we wanted to go.

Q West Virginia State College.

A Yes.

Q Were your parents able to send you up there? You weren't able to come home weekends or anything like that.

A No, the boys didn't get their money that often. We had to work. I went to West Virginia. A Georgian was president, John W. Davis was president, who would always say that he grew up in Milledgeville, Georgia, and he escaped all the institutions there. Milledgeville was the state penitentiary, also the Reidsville State Penitentiary is there. There was the insane asylum, etc. But, John W. Davis took a liking to me, and I survived well at West Virginia State. The tuition wasn't always there, but I was able to work in his house and do other things.

Q Was that a black school?

A Yes. It's no longer black. As soon as the 1954 decision came about, West Virginia State was taken over by white students. It suddenly changed from 100 percent black to 80-20 as whites streamed into the school. But, they streamed in from the city, they didn't move on campus, and that was the difference. But, it was an example of the 1954 decision. I wrote about it and visited there. The 1954 decision, you see, gave liberty to whites in that general vicinity.

Q Now, where is it?

A It's near Charleston, West Virginia. Whites had the school at Marshall and Huntington, which was away from the capitol. Marshall was not the good school that West Virginia State was.

Q Did you live in a dorm?

A Yes.

Q You went for four straight years?

A Yes.

Q Graduate in 1948?

A Yes.

Q Is that when you went into journalism?

A I started journalism, but they didn't have a real program there. There was a Harvard-trained drama professor who also had some journalism, he taught journalism classes and we ran the newspapers under him. I was running the newspapers and boasting of the football players they had their little popularity during the football season and basketball season. I had things of interest to do year-round because I would shift into journalism and was editor of the newspaper and yearbook, and that sort of thing.

Q You said earlier that the armed forces finally got you. Was that after then?

A After that. In 1948, I graduated. The Korean War was to start soon afterwards. When I graduated in 1948, I went to Detroit, having sung in the choir and visited Detroit, I ran into family that liked me. It sort of helped to attract me to Detroit. I went there, found a cousin to stay with, and I worked nights. I got a job in the factory, and went to work at 11:20 p.m. and I got off at 7:20. Thanks to the cousin I got this job, and I was able to get the night shift. At eight in the morning, I would go to school at Wayne State.

Q Wayne State, that's in Detroit.

A That was in Detroit. It was Wayne University then because it was a municipal university, and the state took it over later. I graduated from Wayne about the time they were pulling me into the Korean War.

Q Yes. You got two different bachelor's degrees. You got one at West Virginia and then you got a second one at Wayne State. Then Korea came.

A I went to Wisconsin, Camp McCoy, for training. I eventually became a chemical biological specialist there.

Q My Lord!

A Well, that's the Army way and the Army training. I joined a National Guard unit and was about to be shipped to Korea. Because I worked in the USO with a lady from Washington State, I'll never forget her, Miss Lewis, she was the girlfriend of the Colonel. She liked fishing. Before I finished basic, I accompanied her to LaCrosse, there's the river there, and she would fish. I was just there for more or less the company. But, as they were about to ship me overseas, she knew about it and sort of, I think, intervened with the colonel. I was of great use in the USO. I'd paid their signs, I did all kinds of things of use to them. Gosh, I didn't go. I stayed with that National Guard unit, which was the type of unit they protected one another. They had youngsters from Boston when all of the officers were there. They kept me long enough to when they were sent overseas, they were sent to Germany. And, in that way, I missed Vietnam, something to feel guilty about because had I stayed in the ROTC, I would not have missed Vietnam. My friends who were in the ROTC were called quickly to go to Korea, they were officers, first and second lieutenants, and so many were mowed down, as a result.

Q Nothing to feel guilty about. When did you meet Elenora?

A I met Elenora after I returned from the services, that was 1953.

Q Where was that you met her? What was her background?

- A She was working for the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. She had been parentless from the age of two. Her mother died in childbirth with her younger sister, and the dad died shortly after. But, the family always kept together. Pretty large family, but the sisters kept them together. She had started, she went to Los Angeles City College, and with a relative she came back and did her college work at Spellman. But, she was then working for the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, a black insurance company, when I left. I returned to Atlanta to begin a journalism career, and she was there. She sent someone out to check on me.
- Q Now, you worked on the *Atlanta World*. How did that come about?
- A I kept going to school, and they were trying to push me away from the University of Minnesota.
- Q Now, wait. You went to the University of Minnesota before you went back down to Atlanta?
- A Yes.
- Q Okay, let's get you to Minnesota for a minute. When and why did you go up there?
- A I came out of the Army in 1952, and I wanted to continue my education. The state of Georgia would still not allow blacks in my field, at that time. Charlene Hunter-Gault had not broken through there. She and Hampton Holmes were really the first two admitted. I tried and was not allowed to enter there. I learned that Georgia would pay the transportation to another college outside of the state so long as that college was not west of the Mississippi. So, I explored and tried to find the best college I could find as far away from Georgia so long as Georgia

would pay. So, the University of Minnesota was a fine university and was right on the Mississippi. Part of the campus was west of the Mississippi, and part of it was not. I entered there for a graduate degree in journalism, and continued to stay there for as long as I could say to Georgia that I was not taking a degree that Georgia didn't offer. Rather than request the degree at the time that I could, I continued to simply study until I was sort of pushed out by Ed Emery and some others who wanted to find jobs for me. They were looking all over to find job because I wanted to report and write.

Q But, you got your master's there.

A When I say "push out," I don't mean to suspend me or push me away. I had already qualified for the degree before I left. I was continuing the study.

Q Was there a master's thesis?

A There were three, collateral. I had done all of that, and other colleagues were there, friends of mine. They were really working towards the doctorate, and the question was, "Hey, are you going to do this or not? Why are you just continuing here?" But, to declare for a degree at that time would have made me ineligible for the little support one gets from Georgia. They paid the difference in tuition plus transportation. I have forgotten whether it was once a year or whether....

Q You were there a few years before I was. But, we know the same people. Emery's my guy.

A George Hage.

Q George Hage, a wonderful man.

- A George was one of my classmates, especially in the international stuff. A person who eventually became head of the journalism program at the University of Wisconsin, Bud Nelson.
- Q He's another one of my friends.
- A Well, all of those were my classmates who saw me hustling and struggling. We had these international things, and I was not at the start integrated mainstreamed. I was more isolated as a student at the start. I had this class that we had to do about 10 books on something, and these guys said, "You're trying to read all of them?" Yes, I was really struggling. Each was reading X number of books and abstracting, and sharing with one another. I got mixed up in that with them, and things became much easier for me as I worked my way through.
- Q Those guys are all gone.
- A All were marvelous people. The other guy was a Texan who went to Florida.
- Q Warren Agee?
- A I know Warren Agee, too. I'm talking about a shorter professor who became head or started the journalism program at the University of South Florida. I can't think of his name now. That's what these senior moments do to me.
- Q I have them too, believe me. I have them frequently. Well, that was a wonderful place to be, the University of Minnesota.
- A Marvelous.
- Q Awfully cold, though.
- A Oh, I will never forget the cold.

Q I remember parking in a parking lot down by the river, and then climbing up the steps. I got up to the top and there came that wind. We lived in St. Paul, we lived on what they called the Farm Campus. I would take the bus. Nola was working at the university hospital and we had our two children at the babysitter at Thatcher Hall.

A Well, 1952 was awfully cold. I had a car. I hit the horn, it had a metal ring, and it just cracked off. That's how cold it was.

Q Beautiful up there, though.

A It was.

Q Did they help you get the job on the *Atlanta World* or did you do that yourself?

A I did that myself. They were unsuccessful in trying to get me a job, though Emery and others were checking down with the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. They thought if anyone would do something, they had me visit the *Minneapolis Tribune*, but they already had their ounce of black, a very prominent journalist, Carl Rowan. So, I found after graduation as soon as I drove down to Georgia that newspaper, a black daily, and it had had people like Lerone Bennett and Bob Johnson.

Q How long were you on that paper?

A Two years.

Q What are some of the things that you did? You were reporting?

A You remember Brown vs. Board of Education. But, there were other suits before that. There were the suits to desegregate the parks. Holmes' father, Holmes along with Charlene Hunter desegregated the University of Georgia later, his

father helped desegregate parks. The public money was going for golf courses, etc., but blacks were not allowed to play on them. Then, in 1954 there was Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education, which was a key thing. A lot of action was going on in a lot of places. I didn't think of Topeka early on as the key place.

Q I wouldn't have thought so, either.

A In a place like Clinton, Tennessee.....

Q Yeah. That was a bad one.

A Look, kids were in town being transported all the way from Clinton into Nashville in order to go to school. And, it was such a reminder of my own childhood schooling. I had to go a long way. It wasn't the busing them, they should have bused us. Because of my grade school, I had to go all the way to a far place because the school was crowded, Northside Elementary School. And, Clinton, you see, did not have a high school in their case, so they had to bus them to Nashville to attend Pearl High. I guess the selection of cases that were most desirable led to Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education.

Q Well, there were some important people involved in that. You mentioned the name a while back of John W. Davis. Well, John W. Davis was the Democratic candidate back in 1924, and he was the head of the prosecution, I think, in that case. You know Paul Wilson here in town? Do you know Paul who was in the law school?

A No, I don't.

- Q He was, also, involved in that. How about Atlanta? What was happening there?
- I was always told that people like Ralph McGill helped to keep Atlanta from being quite as a hot bed as some other places. Is that so?
- A You're talking about Rastus McGill, the hated white from that territory. He was a southerner himself, I think he came from Tennessee.
- Q He should have been in the lot.
- A Yes. He was very progressive by white standards. Black standards he hadn't really reached there, but he was a good man. I knew him personally. I had, in later years when another development occurred, the Watts riot, I was the lone black pulled into a special conference with McGill, and Norman Isaacs from the *Courier Journal*, and a lot of prominent editors at the Arden House in Columbia. That's a fast forward. You're interested in the stories that I covered back when McGill was there. I covered the murder of Dr. Brewer who was NACP head and a medical doctor in Columbus, Georgia. They killed them. There were many stories like that. I went on scene to cover that. There are many stories like that that were published in the *Atlanta Daily World*. I covered police, politics and everything in Atlanta. The courts, and in covering the courts I would cover cases, the predecessor cases, to those that Hunter-Gault and Holmes got into. See, they were not the first cases. The NACP's lawyer, a female attorney who became the first black federal judge, was there. Constance Baker Motley was trying some of the cases down there, and a Wichita person, Donald Hollowell, got involved in some of those cases, whose name was on the tip of my tongue yesterday because he ought to be in the Black Hall of Fame in Wichita, Holloway was the name, and

he was there with a firm and they did a lot of marvelous things. So, covering the courts was a very prominent part of my activity. But, in covering them the key thing was that a crime black against white quickly became a capital offense, especially if rape were suggested, or if someone robbed and it was a forceful robbery. That was capital and it could mean the electric chair.

Q You know what this is? City News Bureau in Chicago, if we phoned in a story that they regarded as being trivial about blacks or Mexicans, cheap, they didn't want it. They don't want anything like that unless it involved some really famous. There was some big black leader on the South Side, multimillionaire who had been involved in some rackets. When he was kidnapped, boy was that a big story. They wanted that.

A Sure.

Q How were you treated by the white reporters down there?

A Gosh, very well, even by white officers. The chief liked me so much, and it helped me a lot. I was sued for a million dollars down there for some coverage, and his liking me was very helpful because whatever I was sued for was something that the police, I was reporting from police information and they had identified a red-haired white woman as the cause of some house bombings in the black neighborhood. They were trying to control the spread of the black community. In addition to putting barriers where they had highway removals and those kinds of things at the borders, there were the attacks on certain homes. I said that the police were investigating a red-haired white woman for this, and this

they were doing. But, she sued, saying her neighbors knew it was she, whatever, so it made it difficult for me and my employer at that time.

Q Now, did you go from there to St. Petersburg?

A No, I went from there to what I consider to be the sister paper to the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*. I went to the *Des Moines Register*.

Q Oh, yeah.

A It wasn't really a sister paper. There was a brother.

Q It was a good newspaper.

A It was a tremendous newspaper.

Q How did you happen to make that jump?

A My brother-in-law and sister were pastoring there and on a holiday I went there. I went in and visited with the editor, and he wanted to hire me. He wanted to make sure that I was steered away from reporting. He wanted me to work a desk, so I went there to work a desk. He prepared them well. So, I desegregated news coverage in that town because, eventually, I was chaffing at the bit to go out and report. Little Rock was breaking in 1957, and I wanted to be out. Yet, I'm at a desk saying, "Oh, boy, this down to eight inches," and other things like that. Rewrite. I became very, very upset. I eventually did go out and do police work for them or whatever, but I wanted to get out of there and get into the South where things were going on. So, it was from there in 1958 that I went to St. Petersburg, Florida. In that case, I did not request. My sister was being sought, they were setting up a junior college. She told them about me because my family wanted me back in the South. They hired me without my making an application.

Q Who was the publisher down there then, or the editor.

A At the *St. Petersburg Times*?

Q Yes.

A I didn't go there to work at the *St. Petersburg Times*. I went there to work at the junior college as head of public relations and as communication; I taught English and handled their communications. But, when I began working there, they had a black page. They had somebody there they were firing, and they were trying hard to get me and talked to my boss, the head of the junior college, asking if I could work. And, he, because he thought he would get more ink if I worked, he thought I could do both. They gave me the job to be editor of the black page. I said, "No, I don't want any such thing." They insisted, you can change it if you wish. So, I went and edited the black page and reported generally for the newspaper. In doing it, I discovered that that page was a Godsend. It was there that I started a column called, "Sam's Song," and I argued that a community or a group that's behind would be eternally behind unless they either run faster or run longer, or unless they were smarter. Since blacks are no smarter than whites, no race is smarter than the other, I thought, they could only close that gap, educational and otherwise, by putting in more time because the speed of our race would be impeded by the lack of materials and other things in junior college. So, it caught fire. I organized an after-school, summer and Saturday enrichment program called "CACEP," continuing academic cultural enrichment program. We got national awards for that. The federal government caught wind of it and thought it should be an example for their efforts to set up the VISTA, volunteers in services

to America, the VISTA program, as Lyndon Johnson is now trying to take over what had been on the drawing boards from John Kennedy, the Peace Corps and VISTA. So, as a result, we got the first grant for some training in that school, and then the school board chose to take it over and get money for it. Well, it no longer then became volunteer program. But, a student could not study calculus and some of the other things if he were in the black high school because it was not allowed there. In the afternoon in other programs, whites and blacks from industry could come in and for the first four hours of the day on Saturday mornings, they could teach these interesting things. An academic student could not take typing there because the day was filled with regular academic stuff. But, he could learn to type. We had 5,000 students throughout the county in that program for two hours into the day, and this Saturday thing. So, I got this national award, and I was continually coming to the attention of others elsewhere because about this time I also had done the tour through the South following the Civil Rights bill, I was covering the civil rights demonstrations throughout the South, also. Only black on the campus of the University of Alabama at the time George Wallace stood in the schoolhouse door. But, the key was to travel throughout the South immediately after the Public Accommodations bill was passed.

Q When all the sit-ins were taking place, and things like that.

A Yes. The sit-ins, you see, led to the end of public accommodations in terms of the law. So, once the law said you can do it, then my wife and I took the tour immediately after that bill and traveled the 13 continuous states of the deep South.

To go into hotels and motels that were white. We went also back, we went first to my hometown and stayed at that hotel. Then, we went back to someplace where a year earlier I had been chased away at gunpoint. We went there. I had been chased because my daughter had gone into a white restroom, and the guy was complaining and I decided that I didn't want any gas. He just went and got his gun and chased me. I went back there after the public accommodations bill was passed and asked the question. I need gasoline, but first I want access to your restrooms. "Fine." So, I decided from there, law was a great teacher, although, as we went further we found some pretty awful denials. It was still good because now we were being monitored by the justice department. Everything we did the FBI came back to debrief me after I went through the South. Wherever we were denied, we found FBI agents in their examining and interviewing. The Civil Rights Public Accommodations law had no teeth in it. It does not punish you for any misdeeds there, but no one wants the FBI coming in and asking them questions. Now, you could have a civil suit, sue a company. But, there's nothing else to keep you from being denied.

Q Did you go to the March on Washington, Martin Luther King?

A Oh, yes.

Q "I have a dream" day. You were there?

A Yes. Except, it wasn't "I have a dream" day.

Q I know. It's just my way of using it.

A Well, that's the way everyone identifies it now. But, it's interesting that that came later. That part of the speech did not make the paper the next day.

Q It didn't?

A No. It's interesting how that ranks. It was something. First of all, Martin Luther King was a friend of mine. Yes, I covered him and watched his prominence increase. He was looked at even when he was less involved. It often took others to create the crisis, but when he came in the press gravitated toward him. Some of this would cause some frictions between elements. Once, when the troubles were kind of high, I did a story which said that he was able to maintain an uneasy peace among groups, and that was the key. The expectation, generally, of the white media was that blacks were worthless commodities and that he was the leader, and life wasn't like that. He was a leader.

Q He's now the.....

A He's now the leader. And, he deserves it all. In terms of the actual sacrifice, he paid with his life. Some others paid with a lot more pain early on, but he made the ultimate pay. I think of John Lewis who has had his head beaten and cracked, he's a congressman now and a friend of mine, I often wonder how he operates so well considering what he's had done to him. He was never articulate as Julian Bond who was of his age category. But, all of those guys went through much more abuse, I think, than King, and they're watching it because there's a need to protect King to keep the peace. King began to actually have a great power, and it is a power that is bestowed by media attention on a brilliant man who grew along with that attention to be as great as the hype has made him.

Q Were you able to meet many of the great leaders? Thurgood Marshall, did you ever meet him?

A Yes.

Q You did? Did you know Carl Rowan?

A Yes.

Q What's happened to him? I don't ever see anything that he has written. Has he retired?

A Yes. He has some kind of foundation for excellence in Washington. He's been ill. I haven't seen him in quite a long time.

Q How about, the man , the leader in Mississippi who was shot by this terrible white guy?

A You talking about James Meredith?

Q No, I'm not talking about Meredith. I'm talking about

A You're not talking about Aaron Henry, Dr. Henry. I stayed at his house.

Q No, he was one of the people assassinated in the turmoil of the 1960's.

A He will be here because this research I did followed all of these years. Okay?

Q I've seen movies based on this. Medgar Evers.

A You're talking about Medgar. Guess what. The night before he was killed, I was on the campus of the University of Alabama watching George Wallace stand in the schoolhouse door. Then, he was killed. The question is, gee whiz, why wasn't I in Mississippi? It wouldn't have helped, of course. Okay, what would the story have been, because the story after an ambush killing is done afterwards, anyway, but, it's just the idea that you wake up the next day to that kind of news. George Wallace's standing in the schoolhouse door was equally as important at that time. But, Medgar Evers was the.....

Q Yeah. Medgar Evers, that was the name I was...

A I know that was 1963.

Q Yeah. That was the name I was fumbling for, but not having much luck pulling it out.

A I don't know why I didn't think of what you were after. He was killed by Byron de la Beckurth.

Q I want to ask you, do you think that great changes have come in the South? Every time I see one of the basketball teams from down there, I see all of the blacks, and I think that 35 or 40 years ago they wouldn't have been playing. But, they're just kind of, they're there just for show maybe, I don't know.

A No, they're of use. They're important. But, they're gladiators.

Q There are stars. Michael T. Jordon.

A And, they become great spokespersons for particular kinds of things. But, lets understand. Mahammad Ali became a great spokesperson after being denied an opportunity to fight. He would have never fought again, apparently, had it not been for Leroy Johnson providing a place for him because the whole economy clamed up on him after he did not step forward, and Johnson was able to get him in Atlanta, and he was able to fight again. Now, despite the fact that he didn't read well or whatever, he was very intelligent. What happens? Carter sent him to Africa to encourage Africans not to boycott the Olympics in Russia or whatever. He had such integrity, the thing about Ali, that endears us all to him. When the Africans said, "Hey, we tried to get the U.S. to not to boycott the Olympics when it was in South Africa, and they would not do it. What do you say about that?"

Mahammad Ali made that 360-degree turn. "Really?" He began to question that. It's an example of how difficult it is in the situations. It's difficult to say that we've gotten any place, although, in sports sports leads. When we are looking for athletes to desegregate schools, when they were desegregating schools, the first people who were able to desegregate the schools were athletes. Entertainers always kind of on the cutting edge, and athletics is entertainment. And, we've changed, even here. When we were looking for a replacement at the University of Kansas for a football coach, okay? I remember the insistence on getting someone who had a record of winning in NCAA. What does that mean? It means that you could not have a black because not one black coach was in NCAA. But, that was the requirement.

Q There are a few of them now, though.

A Isn't there. That's a change.

Q I'm a great admirer of the fellow at the University of Oklahoma. I like him. I think we had probably better get back to you and your career. You were how many years in St. Petersburg?

A Nine years. That, of course, includes years away. I took leaves of absence, and the reason I didn't make the 10th year and become fully vested is that my boss decided to put his foot down. When the University of Wisconsin asked me to come back there again, I had been there a few times when they were setting off their anti-poverty institute, etc., as a participant. They asked me to come there to teach, I chose to go at a time when my boss said, "No, you can't go. You can go during the summer." I said, "Then, okay, I'll have to quit because I want to see

what's happening on campus among white students." I don't understand. I see them here, but, hey, something different is going on. To go there in the summer, it would be older people getting renewal of credits, or kids who need to be in school extra. I wanted to go there during a regular year. He said, "You can't go." I said, "Okay, I'm quitting."

Q When were you at the University of Wisconsin? Was that just before you came here?

A A few years before I came here, although, I had been there as a Russell Sage Fellow. My career became so convoluted because I'm at the *St. Petersburg Times* even as I am at the Southern Regional Council. I'm on leave. And, even after coming to the University of Kansas, I'm at the University of Kansas even as I was at the University of the Virgin Islands. That kind of thing makes it difficult to follow. A crazy career. I was at Wisconsin as a visiting professor in, that's when I met Ed Bassett, who wanted me to come and look at the school here. I left Wisconsin to visit Michigan. He caught my lecture and said, "Hey, I'm going to Kansas. Would you join me there?" I came and looked, and I didn't choose to come to Kansas at that time. But, my family was still in South Florida. I took an appointment at the University of South Florida. Swanson, or some name similar to that, was the journalism professor there, but I went into the American Idea Department to become a specialist in urban social problems. I had an appointment in the School of Sociology with a little time given to journalism. I went to South Florida and quickly someone asked me to come to Washington to set up a communications system to get women and minorities in the Democratic

party into the nominating process. Seeing me do that, Ed Bassett said, "You're not going to stay there? You're going to be there, though, more than the year that the college gave you. Let us give you an appointment and immediate release. If you choose then to come to us, you can, but you can make up your mind later."

Q You were with the Democratic National Committee.

A Yes.

Q You were there at the time of Watergate.

A Yes.

Q I remember when you gave a lecture in a class, you gave a little showing of how they were hiding down behind the desks and stuff like that. You've got quite a list of places and the things that you've done and places that you've been. It's really quite remarkable. Did you like that work? Did you think that you'd rather be a teacher?

A Stayed there beyond the time. That election, I was really into that. You're achieving something, you're doing something, you're employing everything you've learned as a journalist. I became a teacher, I think, by accident when I went to Wisconsin. I was still, really, being a journalist and learning, but then I discovered that in the academy you're constantly doing things and learning. So, I like being a teacher, also. Gosh, you're able to have some impact to make changes. I thought journalism was a fine way to make changes, but I found, also, in the latter part of my career that being a professor allowed me to do some things in some places with individual students, etc., that do things. Consequently, two Pulitzer prize winners. Not many people can say that. Not many professors in

my department can say that a student who won the Pulitzer for him, the professor was the only teacher. I got that from teaching in the Virgin Islands where I set up a program there.

Q That was later, wasn't it?

A That was later, and that's why those can be made because ... everyone here, tribute in high school and maybe some first impact on them. But, the whole university, and we had a very fine journalism school here. Everyone would touch those students and can claim them. Even persons who don't have direct contact with them, they also can claim.

Q What did you think of Lawrence when you came here to look at the place? Were you favorably impressed, or did you....

A I was very favorably impressed by the people here who were recruiting me. It caused me to come here for less, although there were efforts to find the money needed. I offered to stay in Washington to be associate head of the Washington Journalism Center; it was an interesting thing to do. A starting faculty person here, they didn't start them high. I chose to come here, and I'd make up my mind later. My wife said she would not come to Kansas, and I just was not ready to commit to Kansas. But, when I came, I rented an apartment with an extra bedroom. When I got home, she decided that she and my son would join me here. That was the start. She didn't like living in the apartment, but a good friend went on sabbatical, and I got a house. That was better for her. And, then, when he came back and I needed to move into something. We had to build a house, and when that was done she was ready to move.

Q When did you move into here?

A 1975.

Q You've been here that long? Beautiful home you've got here in Alvamar. 1975.

You came in 1973. Bassett was dean, still?

A Bassett was dean.

Q I remember your being interviewed when Elmer Beth was still alive, so you must have been interviewed two or three years before that.

A I was at Wisconsin then.

Q I think Beth died in 1970.

A That's quite likely. I was in Wisconsin 1969-70, and I came in from Wisconsin to be interviewed the first time. Then, through 1972 I was at the Democratic National Committee. It must have been 1969 when I came here to be interviewed.

Q Well, that could easily be the case. I know it was before Elmer died. What was the, one of the terms that we hear a lot of is job description. What were the expectations that they had for Samuel Adams? What were you supposed to be doing here? I think I know, but I think for the record is what I'm talking about.

A Number one, my coming was to help legitimize journalism. I would sort of brown in the place here and teach reporting. I had had experience in investigative reporting and research in urban social problems, and a variety of things which was considered useful. So, they want me to be an investigative reporting teacher and to

Q Emphasize black themes?

A No, that would come automatically, just by my persona and my presence they thought that may happen, but no one ever said, "Hey, we want you to teach black things."

Q Now, I'm going to ask you something that maybe it's a crude kind of question, but were you thought of, or did you think of yourself as a token black?

A Oh, I knew I was a token black, but then all of us who were moving into new areas were tokens. I only considered myself a token in the later years as I was trying to increase the number. It has to start. I think you're only a token if one says that one is enough. And, one was already enough at the *Minneapolis Tribune*, they had Carl Rowan. One was enough at the *Des Moines Register* where I went.

Q Well, that concept of one being enough is a troubling thing. I would think that if you had enough people who were really good, really qualified, why not have a great number, just as in basketball. You go to a basketball game, and now you see, I sometimes look out on the floor and think that there's a token white.

A But, you have to have a start. Token white in basketball, whites dominated basketball before they allowed us in. One of my schoolmates, you see, were the first in the Pittsburgh area. So, there are these starts. Jewish persons dominated basketball in that they were good bright people, then finally blacks were allowed in. Starts with one and then increases. Starts with one coach, the Big Eight got it's first basketball coach when Leonard Hamilton came in at Oklahoma State. But, now, no one remembers Leonard Hamilton any more. He went on to Miami. There are others, and things are continuing to move as assistance in getting jobs.

Even, out of our program, we've got people who have come out of here as assistants and are heading important programs elsewhere. So, yes, I came here, and yes, I considered myself a token. I don't think that everyone on the faculty was happy that I was the only black here.

Q How did we treat you, Sam? Be honest. Now, I know that you and I got along quite well.

A I'll be honest, I won't be nasty. Sometimes, special, and sometimes, with the attitude that I thought I was hot stuff. Sometimes, with a need to indicate to me that I wasn't all that awe, and sometimes, this came from a look at the office that I had elsewhere. So, the attitude was okay, some of my attitude was there because you're a commodity and the outside may have been looking in, and the parts of the country because of their demographics have a need for people like you more than we do. We are, ourselves, a proud community. Why don't you go to those places if, indeed, your attitude is what we think it is. Now, those instances drawn from my treatment early. My one-on-one friendships were always very good with those within my ad friends, especially on the surface. It's only what happened in conversations when I was not around which bothered me. That didn't bother me a lot. You see, I lived a long time being who I am. What really would bother me would come very much later. There was a healthy kind of respect that was accorded me on this faculty. There are always sociological differences. My upbringing makes me who I am, and sometimes things that I can say do or even project may make someone uncomfortable. There were certain people whom I could feel pretty comfortably around socially, and invite me out, like to your

house a lot of times. Early on, I was less involved in other parts of the community like the black community, which I have always considered myself to also have a responsibility for. I am a marginal person. I come in and this is where I work. Marginal persons must have their feet in more than one camp. Whereas, the NAACP to me is a God send, the NAACP is a threatening negative many of my associates, and I think of it as the most tame and non-threatening organization anywhere. But, that isn't the way it's looked at. I even see that in the current political stuff as someone as equating Minister Farrakhan with Duke. Minister Farrakhan has never the ability or authority to be injurious to white persons in America. He doesn't have the following for it unless it's a crime thing in New York or whatever. That isn't happening, there's no record of it. Yes, he said hateful things. Well, yeah.

Q Al Sharpton?

A Sharpton? I don't know what Sharpton has said. I don't know what Sharpton has done except attempted to defend someone, and in one case it turned out to be a bad effort, but at least by the record.

Q Well, he was certainly on target the other day in his statements about the exoneration of those four New York cops. Tell me, did you make friends in other departments?

A Yes. Elenora's friend, Dave Griffin, insists that he's my brother, and I insist he is, too. Our families are very close. We went to church together, we've done a bunch of things together. I've taken his son places.

Q Do you still go to church?

A Yes.

Q I remember you took us to a church once in the east side of town. Now, did you get involved in university committees and things like that?

A Yes, I was on University Council a while. At a time when we were battling to screen out black students coming into journalism, the theory was they can't spell, etc., we were screening out all students who could not spell, but the effort to screen them out was occurring just as we were beginning to recruit blacks. So, we decided that we wanted tests to determine entry. I was on the University Council, so I became chairman of that academic committee and got into some research that sort of were up against some of the interests that were rampant in the journalism school. But, not just in our journalism school, it was there all over the nation.

Q Didn't you head up a special program for minority students in the school?

A A program to recruit minority students, yes. I ran summer programs.

Q That's what I was thinking of.

A I ran summer programs to bring in urban, that's what we called them but they were minority kids, the inner city kids, not traditional ones, who wanted to enter journalism. I started and made first a parallel program to the general summer camps that we had here. My urban journalism workshops were, indeed, workshops. They were not camps. So, we separated them out. The money for them was coming from the Newspaper Fund and area newspapers. I developed those and then began to develop them at other places. I did one each summer at Temple University and one at Duquesne University, and then one at Hampton

University. It helped others get them started. These were just great recruiting tools. Out of it we got some very, very marvelous journalism graduates.

Q Now, tell me. The National Association of Black Journalists, were you an officer in that?

A No. I could not be. I was not a black journalist, I was at the university when that was organized.

Q What was the Wells Award?

A The Wells Award is something that I created with the help of others. It's an award that was sculpted by Elden Teffs who is a friend of mine of Ida B. Wells. She was the black newspaper woman who

Q The *Kansas City Call*?

A No. Ida B. Wells, she died in 1931. She was run out of Memphis for fighting against the lynchings of some grocery store owners there who lynched because of their competition with a white grocer. Anyway, the Wells Award honors persons who do great jobs in bringing in minorities into the news media and moving them up. The first one of these was Al Neuharth. He had done a great job, his firm did, as they were organizing *USA Today*. They decided that it should have a balanced inclusion of women, minorities, and that they should be mainstreamed throughout the paper. There have been 17 or 18 of those. Each year has been a marvelous representation of that.

Q Sam, tell me about some of the recognitions you have received. This one is fairly quite recent, 1996, from the United Minority Media Association, a special award for community service. That minority media award is the Mid-West area based in

Kansas City. The other award, recently, being inducted this week into the Kansas African American Museum in Wichita, along with people like Gordon Parks and some others. I got the lifetime achievement award from the National Association of Black Journalists. I got the National Volunteers Award for creating cultural enrichment program that I developed for 5,000 students in Florida. Some of these awards creep up because you're getting old.

Q I'll tell you, I'm going to include these news stories that I have. If you have additional ones, I'd like you to let me have them. If you need them back, I can copy them or something.

A I'll give you something before you leave. The influential journalists of the century as compiled by NABJ includes me, as well as Ida B. Wells and some other people, Gordon Parks, Carl Rowan. But, they have about 24 people that they include. Some of the feel good things have been coming recently.

Q Now, you retired a year ago.

A Yes, in June.

Q You were a bit over 70 when you did that, weren't you?

A Yes. I retired from the classroom a year earlier. They wanted me to get out and do memoirs, but it was at a point,.....

Q Were you just getting kind of tired and worn out?

A No.

Q You just figured the time had come?

A There was a new dean and he wanted memoirs, don't let it go, don't let it die. As incentive, he offered freedom from the classroom for a year.

Q What's your health? Didn't you have some recent surgery?

A Yes. They zipped my heart open. I didn't know I had ever been ill, but then suddenly discovered the LAD was 98% clogged, that's the big artery on the outside. It alarmed my whole family. My dad had died a month earlier.

Q He must have really been old.

A He was 100 plus 10 months, and I had a responsibility for him. So, I was keeping busy. The reason I had them give me a stress test was because a year earlier in running I felt a little tightness. But, they gave me the surgery. After the surgery I had complications. My brother, who was a surgeon, was here and I got all kinds of special treatment. It's good to have a medic as your advocate any time you're ill.

Q Where are your children?

A I have a daughter in Los Angeles and a son in Los Angeles. I have a son from an earlier marriage in New Jersey. My daughter and son came out of KU for their graduate degree. This son was at Harvard and stayed in the East. He lived in Detroit.

Q Have you and your wife been able to do much traveling? Have you ever been abroad?

A Yes. My wife has, also. But, when she was abroad, I was working and she wasn't with me. Yes, I've been abroad. I've done so much traveling in the U.S. I've touched every state in the U.S. You travel first as journalists, then as a professor here. For four years I was traveling more or less introducing the new

technology with the tech van along with the Gannett group. I was a journalist on that team and we traveled all over the place.

Q Do you do a computer?

A Yes. I'm behind in it. I started on the cutting edge, as you may know.

Q Sam, how do you feel about the university and the School of Journalism these days. Do you have any feelings about them?

A I'm not sure I know where they are going right now. I like the people I know who are there. I, of course, am treated very well. The journalism school had, I think, some problems a few years ago. During that period, I felt useless there, during that period.

Q You came here and you stayed. Are you glad?

A That I stayed?

Q Yes.

A I'm glad for almost everything I've done. Yes.

Q You don't want to go back to Waycross?

A Oh, yes, I'll go back to Waycross. That's where my wife wants to go. So, I'll go back there soon.

Q Really? To live?

A Yes.

Q Really? Are you going to?

A Yes. She'll be closer to her relatives, and she'll be away from something she can't navigate, icy and snowy streets. She has a need for a single level house.

Q She and I were talking about that.

A So, we will go for those reasons. It's going to be very difficult because she now is so involved in the community. Boards, church, senior services, friends.

Q How do you spend your time, now?

A Wrapping up my dad's estate. I'm still curator of the Ida B. Wells award at the journalism school. I'm trying to find the time to do what I promised to do regarding a recording of career experiences.

Q You ought to sit down and write your own story. We're going to have a little of it here in outline form, anyway. It seems to me that you've been in some remarkable situations. Well, Sam, we've been talking for quite a while. I don't want you to be exhausted. I've been looking forward to this. What we'll do, after the tape is listened to and transcribed we'll get you a copy. You'll have an opportunity to look at it. In fact, I'd be happy to look at it with you. Some people get them and hold them for years. The tape and the interview will be placed in the University archives. Another copy of the interview will be placed in the Retirees' library in the Adams Alumni Center. You'll have the opportunity to say whether or not you want people to have access to it. But, you've got such a story here that I hope you will say yes. Sam, I thank you very much for talking with me today.

A Thank you. My condolences. I know you lost a great friend who you introduced me to in your home.

Q Bill Balfour?

A Bill Balfour.

Q I was thinking about that. You were there at a dinner one night when the Balfour's were there. He was a lovely human being.

A Out of your fellowship, there were a lot of understanding persons who you can connect up with very well and very easy. I found that true, too, with some of us.

Lee Young.

Q Yes. There's some good guys. Did you see David Dary when he was here?

A Yes.

Q Dary is copying a lot of old tapes for me. He sent me a bunch. Before I came here, I stopped over at the mailbox place to send him that book about Kansas City that Monroe Dodd and Shirley Casper did. And, Larry Day, I hear from Larry frequently. I know he's someone you like. There's a lot of good ones. Sam, thank you very much.