

Margaret Bush Wilson
August 25, 2003
Location: Mrs. Wilson's Office
Interviewer: Christine Lamberson

CL: Could you please state and spell your name?

MBW: My name is Margaret, M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T, Bush, B-U-S-H, Wilson, W-I-L-S-O-N.

CL: And where and when were you born?

MBW: Born in St. Louis. January the 3-0, 1919.

CL: Could you describe the neighborhood that you grew up in?

MBW: Yes. I was born and grew up in a neighborhood which has the connotation The Ville.

Short for the name Elleardsville, which was the name of the area, which at one time was all farmland and, I suppose, in the early part of the twentieth century began to develop into a community and a neighborhood. I can't verify this story, but I'll tell it and let you verify it. That all of this land was owned by one person whose name was Elleards. At one time it was a huge farm area and back then farmers had slaves, and the reason I think that there were African Americans who settled there is that originally a settlement was established in some part of that area for the slaves who when they were freed, they just simply became a part of the community. Now don't hold me to this, but that's what I understand. At any rate, my father, who was not a Missourian, but born in Texas bought a home in that area before 1916, while he was a railway mail clerk running from Texas to St. Louis. And it was a very nice residence. My recollection is that it was a three-story home with a lovely ground level living room, dining room, pantry, and kitchen and then the second floor, three or four bedrooms, and then on the third floor, another three or four rooms. So it was not a small development even then and that's where I was born.

4243 West Cote Brilliant and West Cote Brilliant, because apparently this was a double block and the other was just plain 4243, 4243 West meant it was the West part of that double block.

CL: And, did you live there until you went to college in that neighborhood?

MBW: No. We lived there until the mid-twenties when we moved to an even finer house on Enright Avenue and I lived there until- hold on, stop the tape for a [Tape turned off and on again]

CL: Let's see about the second house you moved to.

MBW: Oh yes. Moved from there, it would have to be in, the mid-twenties, 1920s, because we lived in this new house, new home, 4149 Enright during the very terrible tornado in 1927.

CL: Okay and where did you go to high school?

MBW: The Charles Sumner High School.

CL: And what kind of high school experience did you have there?

MBW: A long one. I went to high school for seven, the high school building for six years instead of the usual four and I think that was because in the seventh and eighth in Marshall School where I went to grade school, there must have been an influx of children so they had, didn't have enough room. And so they sent the seventh and eighth graders to use some of the empty rooms in this high school building, so I went to Sumner High School for seventh and eighth grade and then the four years of high school. It seemed like an awful long time. By the time, I was very bored with Sumner by the time I got ready to leave.

CL: Could you talk a little about your family, like what your parents did and did you have any brothers and sisters?

MBW: I have brothers and sisters. I have one older brother and one younger sister. And we grew up together in these two homes. My younger sister is now living in upstate New York and my brother still lives with me in our final home where we are, homestead, where we are now on West Page. And we're all in our eighties. It looks as though we're all going to outlive our parents who also lived to be in their eighties.

CL: Oh wow.

MBW: My father was eighty-two and my mother was eighty-six. My bother is already eighty-six, so he's going up.

CL: He's doing quite well.

MBW: And I'm on my way.

CL: And what did your parents do? Or your father?

MBW: My father was for many years a clerk on the railway mail service, for the railway mail service, U.S. mail. This is during the period when most of the mail in the United States was transported across the country by train and there were clerks and a mail car on the train and they processed the mail while the train was moving and then, you know. He did that for many years. My mother was a teacher. She finished Sumner High School also, early, and then went to the Normal School and then taught in Kindergarten. So.

CL: Alright. And then where did you go college?

MBW: I went to a charming liberal arts college deep in the heart of Alabama called Talladega College T-A-L-L-A-D-E-G-A, Indian name, founded by freed persons, General Wager Swayne who was the General in the reconstruction period over that area and the American Missionary Association, and as a result of this famous story and ship, that I hope you know about called the Amistad. Have you heard of the Amistad?

CL: Mm-Hmm.

MBW: Well the group in New England who befriended the human beings on that ship who were trying to get free stayed together after they won their freedom and founded something called the American Missionary Association, and took as their charge getting support to the freed people in the South. And one of the things that they supported was to send teachers and to found schools so that we could be educated. And I went to one of those schools.

CL: Alright. And then how did you decide to go to law school?

MBW: Quite by accident. I had no idea I was going to be a lawyer, in fact I had no idea what I was going to be period.

CL: Many people don't.

MBW: Came home from college with a degree in economics and a minor in mathematics, no education courses, so I couldn't teach. And quite by accident a friend who was then in law school, and I realize now she was recruiting, came by my house one sunny afternoon while I was sitting on the porch and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Nothing." "What are you going to be doing?" "I don't know." "Well why don't you go to law school, everybody can use a little law." And I said, "Law School?" You know, never had occurred to me. So she said, "Yes, law school." She said, "I'll make an appointment and you go talk to the dean and see if you can't work out a way for you to go to law school." So that's, you know, I did it on a lark really. And actually I kind of indicated what I wanted in the way of support to do this and he said, "Very well I'll arrange that." And I decided I was going to law school. So it was pure accident.

CL: Very good. And then, when did you finish law school and pass the bar?

MBW: 1943.

CL: And what kind of law did you specialize in?

MBW: Well it was almost a natural. My father was in the real estate business, so I went into real estate law. He was my first client, gave me a lot of rent cases.

CL: Always handy.

MBW: And you know, over the years I handled most of his legal work.

CL: And where did you go work right after law school? What was your first-

MBW: Well, my first, my first, it was kind of an apprentice, right immediately after law school I went to clerk and be a kind of clerk secretary for a lawyer here in St. Louis named David Grant, who was a very able lawyer and I'm sure if he had not been African American he would have been one of, a mayor of St. Louis back in those days. He was just that dynamic. So that's where I started at. Meanwhile I took a civil service exam for lawyers, came out in the top three, and was hired to be a lawyer for the government, whose United States Department of Agriculture in their Rural Electrification Administration. This was the period when the government as a matter of public policy had decided to light up the farms, and so I was among that cadre of lawyers who counseled the farmers and helped them create cooperatives and start the process of bringing electricity to the farms of the country.

CL: That's pretty exciting.

MBW: Very fascinating period in our history.

CL: And how long did you work for them, the government?

MBW: At least two and a half to three years. During this time I got married, and my husband came back from the war and I went to Chicago, because he had not -- we were classmates

in law school -- but they yanked him out of class in I guess his junior year to go to war. So I, technically I was his senior partner, but I never mentioned that. I was a lawyer before he was. And I went to Chicago while he finished law school in Chicago at Chicago Kent College of Law and during that time I worked with the Legal Aid Society, volunteer. I mean I went down and said you know, "I'd be glad to work if you'll pay for my lunch and, you know, bus travel." So every morning I got up and worked. I had my first taste of practicing law in Chicago. Very interesting, they offered me a job full time.

CL: Legal Aid did?

MBW: After that year and I turned them down.

CL: You didn't want to do that one?

MBW: It was too cold. I could not deal with Chicago. It was just so cold in Chicago. I said, I told my husband, I said, "I'm going back to St. Louis." He said, "I'll go with you."

CL: That's good.

MBW And so we came back to St. Louis. It was too, it was just too cold for me.

CL: And so then what did you do when you came back to St. Louis?

MBW: Hmmm?

CL: Where did you work when you came back here?

MBW: Well then we started a law firm.

CL: Did you start this law firm?

MBW: Wilson, Wilson and Wilson.

CL: Oh, and when was that approximately?

MBW: Let's see. If I got married in '44 and we went to Chicago in '45, about '46, '47.

CL: And so did you face much discrimination in the field of law? Did you feel-?

MBW: Not that I know of. I think I was, back in those days, a woman who was a lawyer, was almost, you know, somebody you didn't see and then to have a woman of color who was a lawyer was just, you know, just unheard of. And so I must say that I have not experienced this discrimination that so many women have encountered since then and maybe it was because I was such an anomaly. I mean I'd walk into a courtroom, I think everybody was astonished and by the time they got over being astonished, I had taken care of whatever business I wanted to take and I'm gone.

CL: Right.

MBW: I do recall one, one time when I walked into the courtroom and they called my case and I stepped up and the judge says, "Where's Wilson?" I said, "Here she is your honor." "Oh, oh." But for the most part I've had a good experience with the law. I've not, I have not encountered much in the way of ugliness and the few times I've dealt with it very forthrightly. I can remember in a municipal court, that's the lowest level of court you can have, I walked into the courtroom and a Caucasian lawyer looked up and saw me and realized that I was the pl- he said, "Well what do we have here?" In just that tone of voice. And I looked at him and said, "And what do we have here? An insecure lawyer who feels threatened by a competent female lawyer." And the audience just, the court wasn't in session, the audience just roared. But he left me alone after that.

CL: As well he should. So then were there any other prominent female or prominent African American female lawyers that you remember at that time?

MBW: Well, I was among the first in St. Louis. I don't know if I've been prominent but I was among ... Dorothy Freeman, the woman who recruited me was the first woman of color to be admitted to the Bar. She was admitted to the Missouri Bar, the year before I was

and she graduated the year before I did. And interestingly enough she looked very Caucasian, but you know and, but she also was a polio victim, which meant that she had braces. This is why I was so astonished when she came to my house that afternoon because I have two flights of stairs coming up to my front porch and here was Dorothy climbing these steps with her braces and you know she had this uneven gait because she had to -- so we were among the first. And there was another woman classmate of mine, whose name I can't recall at the moment, and she stayed here for a number of years and then went on out east somewhere. And then, of course, the flood began with women. Edith Sampson of Chicago, was a distinguished woman who I admired, was among the early pioneers among women of color who were the Bar. Sadie Alexander in Philadelphia. But in the Midwest, as I recall, there were very few women of color, members of the Bar when I came along.

CL: Okay. And then in addition to your work in the law, you also worked prominently as a civil rights advocate, correct? How did you get involved with this?

MBW: Let me tell you. I, my mother and father were very active in the NAACP from almost the time I can remember when it was not only, not only not fashionable, sometimes a little dangerous. Not, not in St. Louis, but in the deep Southern states people who were members of the NAACP had to have their mail sent blindly, nothing on the letterhead or outside. But my parents were very courageous and as I think back I realize that they set this example that I've sort of grown up with. My mother was very active in the local branch of the NAACP and my father supported her fully. I remember that back in the twenties when we still lived in that first house on Cote Brilliant, my mother was a delegate, official delegate to the convention, national convention of the NAACP in

Indianapolis. And so my mother and another woman and two gentlemen all went to the convention as delegates in my father's car. And I realize now that was rather *avant garde* because, you know, was not a, nothing was said, my mother was one of these impeccable wonderful people and nobody raised any eyebrows, but here there were these two women, none of them married to each other, but they're all going to this convention and drove my father's car. We then had a big seven-passenger Marmon car, you've never even heard of this car now, but that back in those days it was something called a Marmon, because we were kind of well off in that period of time. And she continued active all of her life and so did he, so that I had this wonderful example. But it wasn't until after I had been practicing a number of years and had had my only child, who was then I guess about three, which would make it in the early fifties, that I decided that it was time for me to go and volunteer some of my time. And I went down to the NAACP office and I can remember that Ernest Calloway who was an active union person was then the president. And I said to him, "I've come to volunteer. What can I do to help?" And I can always remember he said, he said, "Well we always need jobs." And I said, "Fine, we'll see what we can do about jobs." And I belonged to this charming bridge club, it's now over fifty years old, we're still meeting.

CL: Wow.

MBW: And it, I think bridge is just an excuse, we just like to get together and visit, sometimes we play bridge, sometimes we don't. But I went to one of the meetings and I said, "You know, I went down to the NAACP office the other day and talked to Earnest Calloway about what they need and he said, 'You know, we still need jobs.'" And by, at that time, black people did not work in the ten cent stores, they didn't work at the drug stores, they

didn't work anyway, except menial jobs. And I said, "I'm thinking of recommending to the Executive Committee that we start a Job Opportunities Council and we're going to need a little money. So I thought maybe at the next-" The NAACP raised money by having teas back in those days and everybody, every major organization maybe had a table, you paid so much and you know. I said, "Why don't we have a table at the tea, but instead of having punch and cookies, we're going to sell buttons for a dollar a piece and the buttons are going to say 'NAACP Job Opportunities Council.' We'll raise enough money to have some, you know." And we did that and it was a great success. We sold all our buttons. And gave that money to the NAACP and that's how the Job Opportunities Council started and that was my first activity with the NAACP. I was the secretary and Ted McNeal I think was the chairman and I think Ernest Calloway was vice chair- anyhow we were all in this and we began to visit, call up and make appointments and go visit these, Kroger store and ten cent store and ... I can remember we went to one store and the man said, "Well nobody ever asked us." I said, I said, "Well we're now asking. And, and there were one or two who wouldn't even meet with us, but it was the beginning of the momentum, and it worked. We got some jobs, and there were groups before us who, who made a difference too, connected with the Urban League. That's how I got started, and then of course I went onto the executive committee, then onto the board itself. And then one day out of the clear blue sky, some people came to me and said, "We want you to run for president of the NAACP" against Ernest Calloway who was the person that, I said, "Are you serious." I said, "I'm not going to do that." "Well, we think you need to." I said, "I'm not going to do that." And then casually when I saw him the next, I said, "You know I had this funny visit from these people and they want

me to run against you for president.” He said, “Would you run?” I said, “No, I’m not going to run.” He said, “No, if I step aside, would you run?” I said, “Oh.” I said, “Well yeah, but why would you want to do that.” He said, “Because I think it might be good for the organization.” And he stepped aside and I got elected president. First time, I got a lot of first woman of color to do this or that and the other. But that was the first time a woman had been president of the local branch in St. Louis.

CL: And when was this?

MBW: It had to be about '58, somewhere around there, 'because I served four years to '62 and then I became state president. I was state president, and I got elected to the national board. And then I got, kept getting reelected to the national board. Finally I got, appointed, not elected, but appointed to be the permanent chairman of the convention, which is the presiding officer of the convention, which was incredible. I did a good job. You know, people got used to me. And then one day, something untoward occurred. December of 1974, I will never forget it. The Chairman of the Board of the NAACP died suddenly. His name was Bishop Stephen Gill, G-I-L-L, Spottswood S-P-O-T-T-S-W-O-O-D, distinguished clergyman in the AME Zion Church. And the timing was incredible because usually we elect chairman every year, in January. He died in December of that year. The election was to be in December of '75. So, last thing I, on my mind was to be Chairman of the Board of the NAACP, you know who would want that job, I mean, it was a hot potato. So I wasn't even thinking about me being chairman, but some people came to me and said, “We think you ought to be chairman.” It was the year of the woman, which I think was part of it. They were trying to do something to kind of give

the NAACP a lift. And to make a long story short, it worked out and suddenly here I am, chairman of the board. Got elected on January 13, 1975 and served nine terms.

CL: That's pretty long.

MBW: A long time.

CL: Okay, how do you think the NAACP's tactics differed from other organizations such as CORE or ACTION was in St. Louis?

MBW: Well, in the beginning NAACP focused on using the courts, and the Constitution—and their thrust was in the legal arena. Then they began to branch out into direct action of one kind or another, but the direct action was not its focus and CORE was. CORE wanted to do, you know go sit somewhere, bang on a table and that was the main difference back then. I think we realize now that any and all tactics that are available -- if they are legal -- ought to be used. I mean, it's that kind of, you know, for example, here we are now, this is 2003 and we've got a school system here in St. Louis which is in complete disarray. But the disarray is not in my judgment a tragedy, it's that the kids are not getting educated. You know, I bring them in here to be sec-, I mean receptionists, they can't spell, they can't read, they can't write, what is going on? I mean, you can take kids out under a tree and teach them to read, write and spell. So something is wrong. And I don't know that all this drastic stuff that's going on now is going to make a difference or not, but something has to happen so that children are educated. I had one teacher just say to me, "You're expecting too much of us, because we get no support from parents." I said, "Well in that case, let's get some surrogate parents." Now nobody's followed up on that, but I think that's the key. If the parents aren't able or willing then let's find some retired people and some folks who you know have some

time, let them be the surrogates, at least have a support system for the children, because that's what's missing apparently. Well, how'd I get off on that?

CL: We were talking about tactics, I believe.

MBW: Right. And, and, now the NAACP is a mixture, we, you know, I'm not active with the association now, but I'm a golden heritage life member. And *The Crisis* magazine is the great organ of the association, which keeps people informed. And it now has a prison program, which started during my administration where we actually had branches inside the prisons. And I can remember that the first time I went to speak at a prison branch was up in Lewisberg, I guess, Pennsylvania where there's a federal prison, and I walked in there, I have never seen so many handsome young black men in my life. I said, "Why are they in this institution?" I mean they were-

Tape 1, Side B

MBW: Well, back to the prison program, the prison branch, I said, one of the great scandals today is that there are so many people in jail. There's something wrong. This is, this is not a humane society when you have two million or more people in jail for various things, and a lot of it is drugs. Well, drugs a form of escape from reality as far as I'm concerned, and I don't see enough focus on this by institutions. We need to get a handle on this before it gets any worse and this is particularly true for African Americans, because so many of our young men are ending up in prison. I mean that's a catastrophe. They need to be out here being productive citizens and having families and being head of those families and doing well, and it's possible. So I think this is the agenda that I'd like to see the NAACP get a handle on, locally and nationally.

CL: Do you think back when they very first started when they weren't using as much direct action tactics, did they work well with the other organizations, like CORE that were a little more direct action or?

MBW: They certainly did in St. Louis. We had a, Marion Oldham and I were very close and Marion Oldham was a CORE person and I was a NAACP person and we were constantly in touch and working together. And I can remember when Marion got involved in the Jefferson Bank thing and ended up in jail. I went down to see her. I said, "Marion." She says, "It's terrible." I said, "Well what?" She said, "Somebody has to do it." She was an activist. I said, "Well I'm not going to jail. I mean, I know my limitations, but I will help get you out." And you know it, I'm sure there were some rivalry between these groups, but the March on Washington -- which we're going to celebrate this week -- is a classic example of how these groups worked together. They could, that whole march was a collaborative effort of NAACP and all the rest of the groups -- and a profoundly moving experience I don't quite think I'll ever forget. I've never been in a crowd where you, the momentum began and if you didn't hold onto the person you were with, you got lost, you couldn't find them. It was moving.

CL: Were there any other organizations in St. Louis that were active besides CORE and NAACP?

MBW: Urban League, and there were churches. Churches in St. Louis played a very significant role back in those days. Every one of them almost without exception had life memberships in the NAACP and quietly got all their members, you know, this kind of thing. It was a healthy and I think rewarding experience and some of our strong leaders back in those days were ministers. I'm a member of All Saints Episcopal Church and our

Rector was elected to the board of education while I was active in the NAACP. So they were, there were lots of forces, YWCA, the YMCA, all these institutions were, somehow, if not working openly together being supportive of each other and it was a good healthy thing.

CL: And then since you had a little bit of a more state and national view, do you think St. Louis was similar to other cities or was it unique in some ways?

MBW: Well, you know St. Louis is an interesting city because, and my mother described it that we're a northern city with a southern exposure. And St. Louis, interestingly enough, has never had a riot. But on the other hand, in terms of race progress and the achievements of African Americans I think we trail a lot of other cities. And, quite frankly, I think that's primarily because there are too many of our citizens who are still fighting the civil war. There's a great deal of subtle, but nonetheless effective exclusion going on here – now – and it needs to stop. I'm very distressed that after all these years. See I thought by 2003, considering what we were doing in the '60s and '70s that by the time, that thirty years from now we'd be way down the road, and we're not there. We are not there. And that's very distressing to me because I am just taken aback. And there are many factors that have resulted, you know, I think the political scene has shifted back and forth. And my own sense is that in the 19--, what was the election when Nixon was elected president?

CL: Oh jeez.

MBW: '60, '68 somewhere around there.

CL: Yeah.

MBW: Anyhow, with that election was the turning point, because Hubert Humphrey was running for president and Nixon was his opponent and for reasons that I don't understand,

President Johnson, who was the President didn't seem to throw his weight around until the last minute for Humphrey. I don't know what that was all about, but anyways Humphrey lost by a small margin, but he lost. And all that momentum that had been building up was for all practical purposes derailed. And getting, now it's shifting back and forth and back and forth. Meanwhile we've got a lot of people here who are, not doing well in a country that is undoubtedly the wealthiest in the world. Doesn't make sense. Really doesn't make sense. And I'm not going to get out on the cutting edge anymore, I've had my, I've had my day out there, but I'm looking for strong, stronger leadership. It seems to me a little too timid. Or maybe a better word is not really courageous. We need some courageous leaders who are going to say, "This has to stop." And then find a way to set in motion the strategies and the policies and the, to make it happen. There's no reason why we shouldn't educate every child to the best of their ability. That's the one thing I think we could do. Hmmm?

CL: Yeah.

MBW: We could do and it wouldn't, you know it takes. See I think a lot of these school systems are caught up in, in the economics of running a business rather than focusing on the purpose of schools to educate children, and the rest of it falls into place. I can't, I can't imagine why you can't teach children to read and write, spell and add. It's not, not a mystery. I mean and we have wonderful and have had, I don't know whether some of them surely wonderful educational laboratories around the country that have laid out how you do it. They've actually gone in and experimented in the classroom and discovered how you teach children to add, how you, so it's not a mystery, it's just that it needs to get done and the teachers need to be qualified to do it.

CL: There's not enough teachers--

MBW: And the parents need to be there or surrogate parents need to be found who will be there for them. It's, that's my.

CL: Do you think that's a problem everywhere or do you think it's worse in St. Louis in other places.

MBW: I can't answer that because I don't know, but I suspect there are good systems, but not enough. And the key is that they ought to be everywhere. That's what this country's all about. You know my whole philosophy is that we do not have an aristocracy of birth and class and wealth in this country. We do have an aristocracy though and it's the aristocracy of people who have character and competence and accomplishment. And by that standard anybody can be an American aristocrat, huh?

CL: Should be.

MBW: If they've got character, competence and accomplishment and that's where we ought to focus. We ought to make it clear that the potential is here for everybody.

CL: And when you were working with the NAACP in the '50s, '60s and '70s, did you guys focus on education on very much?

MBW: Did I what?

CL: Did you focus on education and that sort of thing very much or was it mostly just jobs and I know housing was a big issue in St. Louis?

MBW: Well, education was a part of the thrust, because you know the NAACP's Brown vs. Board of Education was the one that finally got this albatross off our necks. Education's always been a focus, jobs, training and public policy. You see, I'm very concerned that we do not have enough people in the right places who understand that this country is

based on the rule of law, but it also has a series of ways in which you set policy that leads to the implementation of things. And if you're not putting the policies in place and then enforcing them then you have this kind of, you know, flipping around with kind of superficial stuff. So it takes a lot of bright people now, of all backgrounds who are willing to give some time to thinking through things and doing what is rational and what will make sense for a lot of people. We did some of that. I mean, one of the things they did while I was chairman was to develop a position paper on the economic well-being of black America and what it would take. And we sent it to every member of congress and to all the members of the cabinet, you know. But we need more of that.

CL: And did you get any response from your paper, from the position paper?

MBW: Oh yeah. Yeah, you know. In fact we had, finally ended up with an audience with then Vice President Bush, and at the end of the conference, somebody, one of his staff, I've forgotten who it was said, "If you had one choice of something we could do what would it be?" I said, "Stop taxing poor people." And do you know that poor people are not taxed anymore?

CL: I did not know that.

MBW: They did that. Stopped taxing poor people. I said look, you know, we used to have clients come in our office to have their taxes filled out and we'd get through working and they'd owe the government \$10, \$17, \$22, you know. I said, "Why is the government taking this money from these people? They don't need this kind of money." You know. So now there is, there is on the books that if you make below a certain level you don't pay taxes. That was a very important in my judgment breakthrough on an issue involving

taxation. So I can't be very angry with George Bush, the first, because he did that I'm sure, his staff listened that day.

CL: That's good. We need people to listen. Okay, could you talk a little bit about being involved in the state level of the NAACP and what your main activities there were?

MBW: Oh, well I was state president for four years I guess. Yeah, four years from '58 to '62. And I'm really proud of those years because prior to that we had all of these little branches around the state, but none of them were financially stable and none of them, or at least many of them, were not meeting their, each branch has to send so much money to the national, so national can fund. And we devised while I was chairman this exciting approach to ways in which the branches could support themselves and get on with the program instead of having to spend all their time raising money: have one dinner every year, charge at least \$25 a plate. And the state conference, of which I was then president, we'll pay for all the printing, we'll get you the speaker. We got out all of your publicity, you know, you don't have to do any of that. You just sell those tickets. And we did that all around the state. Sometimes more than one branch would work together. You know that transformed the state of Missouri. In less than two years everyone of these branches was financial with the national.

CL: Wow.

MBW: They had their own bank accounts so they could go on with their. So it was a wonderful contribution and it was just the result of the state organization giving them the kind of support they needed to be effective, which I'm very proud of. And some from around the state now I still see some of the people in leadership roles that started out with our thrust. It's very rewarding.

CL: That's pretty impressive. Did you see differences in the activities around the state, like the conditions of race relations in different areas of Missouri?

MBW: I did. Yeah. And it varied of course, you know we have a section of the state that's very Southern, we call it the boot heel.

CL: Yes, yes.

MBW: And they had real problems down there, but they finally desegregated the schools. See they weren't ready to do that until the NAACP stepped in and I was state president and I had this wonderful chairman of our Legal Redress Committee, I think is what we called it, named Clyde Cahill who was, became a federal judge here finally. And Clyde went down, filed the lawsuits, particularly in Cape Girardeau and all those places and he actually made a difference. They finally opened up the schools. And my husband and I had some clients who came up from Jackson, Mississippi because they wouldn't let them use the swimming pool. And we filed a suit against the city and went down there, the lawyers on the other side said, "We're not going to fight this lawsuit, so we're ready to settle." And they opened up the pool.

CL: That's good.

MBW: So, I've had these kinds of wonderful experiences across the years. You have, you feel like you've done something worthwhile. What I want now is for the momentum to continue. There's no reason why we shouldn't. I think the potential for this country is enormous, you know?

CL: Mm-hmm.

MBW: Because we have all of these, we have all of these different people here and somehow we've managed to get along, you know, more or less, and that ought to be more, not less.

CL: True.

MBW: And, do things together.

CL: There's still a long ways to go.

MBW: Exactly, but, but it's all there. I guess what I would say to your generation, which is to me key -- you have to stop teaching children to hate. I don't know what kind of family you grew up in, but I know that some of these children are taught by their parents that they're superior, they're better than someone, and that's wrong. It needs to stop. My parents didn't teach us to hate, they taught us to overcome. And until we do that, I think we're not going to get a handle on what needs to be done next, because this happens in the privacy of homes. And I think it's still being taught. It has to stop. It's not true. Go back to what I said, if you've got character, you've got competence, you've got accomplishment, these are the only things that make you somebody in this country. It's got nothing to do with where you came from or who your parents were and that's what we need to emphasize. That ought to be a good place to end this don't you think.

CL: Um, yeah, unless there's anything else that you would like to add about your experiences.

MBW: I don't think so. That gives you kind of.

CL: Okay.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]