TAPE 1, SIDE 1

BB: Okay, it's the first of July, and this is Bruce Baker. I'm in the offices of the Williamsburg Arts Council in Kingstree, South Carolina, to interview Mr. Abie Wilson, who is the director of the arts council. And the main focus of the interview is going to be about the Southern Negro Youth Congress. But we're hopefully going to cover a bunch of other interesting topics as well. And this interview will probably eventually wind up in the Southern Oral History Program Collection. I don't have a number for the interview yet to put on the tape.

BB: I was wondering if you could just start out by introducing yourself and saying a little about when and where you were born, a little bit about your parents and about growing up. Would you mind if we cut the radio off? And I might get the door as well.

AW: Well, I was born in _____ not far from here near _____ Kingstree in Clarendon County, Manning, South Carolina being the county seat. We lived there for a short while during my lifetime because my father worked for the Atlantic Coast Line. He worked at the railroad station. He was the one who would take the mail from the train and take it to the post office and take the mail from the post office back to the train. And also he would take care of the freight. Everything came by freight then. You didn't have the long distance trucks that you have now delivering freight. It came by rail. And he

would enter the railroad cars and he would distribute them. I mean, would sign them out to people who ordered, or who the packages, or who the freight belonged to. Usually stores. And so we lived in Alcolu during my lifetime a very short while because the Atlantic Coast Line would _____ move them after a while to other cities, or other stations. And we were moved from there to Lane, South Carolina. Lane, of course, is here in Williamsburg County. Lane is, I think Lane is no more than twelve miles from Kingstree. So I began school there in Lane. My mother, although she was a high school, not even a high school graduate, I think she came out of the eighth grade, there were a lot of _____. So she was teaching them. And I was able to get past the first grade. Because I understand they stayed in first grade there for two years. It was almost like kindergarten. I mean, you went there, you had to learn the alphabet, you had to learn your letters, and you actually didn't start school till you were about six years old. But I skipped that first first grade section and went into the second grade instead of the first grade section because I guess they thought that I was capable of handling it. My mother had taught me a lot at home. So that's about it. We stayed there for no more than two years, and then my father came into Kingstree. They moved him into Kingstree. Now Lane is a place that at one time, they don't have it now, it was a cross. You could go by rail from east to west and from north to south. So it was a kind of cross. But many of the, we called them "Yankees," but many of the northerners were hunters. And Baruch and all of the other big men from the North had estates out there in Myrtle Beach and Georgetown, South Carolina, which is on the coast. And they would come from New York, and there they would make that change to go into, to go I guess east, to go to the beach. Or go to that _____ area. I made more money then because many of them

would send the dogs ahead of them. The dogs came by freight. And they were in cages. And I would take the dogs to the plantation. My father drove at that time, so he would take me out to the plantations. And I would go there every day, if I didn't stay on the plantation, I would go there every day and I would feed the dogs, see that they had water. So it made a little money for me. Many of the other fellows, black fellows, who lived in Lane at that time would stay there and grab the bags as they came off the train. And as they came off the train, they would grab the bags and put them on the other train, or put them in cars, or whatever. So they were acting as red caps. And this made a little money for them, too, so we would be happy. I knew when they were coming. My father knew. They would say ahead that they were coming, and of course I'd spread the word, and the other fellows knew that the Yankees were coming and there was money to be made. And so it was a _____ time at that time, really. Because if you got two, three dollars out of it at that time, it was good money, very good money. But anyway, we came to Kingstree after two years living in Lane. And Kingstree is larger. It's the county seat, really. And the schools were better. And my father, although after we got here, he had for another two years a chance to go into Florence, he had a chance to go into Rocky Mount, North Carolina, which I wanted to go. But I had very little say in it. But I wanted to go there because I felt that North Carolina was a better state and I just felt that North Carolina, I just wanted to be in North Carolina. It was north. We all say, if it was north, southerners thought, we just, black southerners anyhow, thought it was better, I guess because they remember going north for freedom when they were enslaved. So north was just a place to go. And it was North Carolina. And "north" got me. I wanted to go. But my father thought the schools here were good, and by this time he had met the teachers and he

thought we were getting a good education, so we remained here. And this is where he retired here from the railroad station here in Kingstree. And of course this is where I grew up. Now, growing up in Kingstree. What can I say about growing up in Kingstree? I had a happy life. We lived in a somewhat mixed neighborhood. Now that might sound strange for South Carolina, but it was. And many of my friends were white as well as the black kids. And I used to enjoy singing. I always had, always enjoyed singing, and I remember when many of my white friends, girls and boys, we used to go to the movies and maybe see Shirley Temple and all her singing. We'd come out and imitate the songs. You could buy a song sheet then with just the lyrics on it, there wouldn't be any, well, we wouldn't know the music anyway, but just the lyrics, the words. So we had a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun growing up in South Carolina. As I think of it now, schools were not what I suppose they should have been. To me it was just fine then. We knew no better. You know, as far as we knew they were schools. Although we would spend the first day of school, the second day of school, erasing names from the books that we got. And I understand later on that they were secondhanded books, books that were used by the white school and given to the black schools when they got new books, then we got secondhand books. Didn't matter. Many of them were not that much damaged, and we could repair them, erase the names from them. Occasionally we would find one that had a very derogatory statement in it, or a word in it, or a picture in it. But we got rid of those pictures and used the books. It was fun. We didn't know no better. I guess that was about it. So growing up in South Carolina wasn't bad. There was always the Black River that we could fish in, or swim in, or boat in. And that to me was a lot of fun. And since we did not live on a farm, many of my schoolmates were farm children, children

from the farm. Unfortunately, the boys came to school rather late. They didn't get into school until after the holidays, after Christmas because they were, I guess they were made to help their fathers on the farms with the planting. And they left school early, early in the spring, when the father was about to plant his crop. They left school. So many of the boys in my class were older, and they were much larger than myself. But we had fun during school. I guess I was pretty tall for my age, so I competed with them in basketball and a little football and baseball. Because although they were older, I was about their size, not that much from their size, in size. I was pretty tall. We played, had fun. The girls were about my age. I think the girls kind of stayed in school. Evidently the farm girls were not restricted to helping on the farm as the boys were. So there were always a lot of girls, a few boys, so we all had fun. It was fun for us. The girls outnumbered the boys, so we could always get two or three girls to visit us on Sunday afternoon. And that was the time when we really socialized. After we would all go into their homes and talk with them and pick out a girl _____. because there were plenty of them. But anyway, growing up in South Carolina was fun. I, as I got into high school, my fun really began with one teacher we had here. And he just passed about three years ago. It was Charles Evan Murray, C. E. Murray. Everybody knew him. He was the teacher who shed a lot of light on black history and let us know who we were and made us aware of our history more than anyone else did. We certainly didn't learn it from the history textbooks. We were not mentioned too much in that. But he always would bring in pictures of our black leaders and people who had achieved a lot. Our inventors, our writers. He always had around his room these pictures, and he would explain who they are, and we had to know who they are. He would give us a test on it, and we really had to

know who they were and what they'd done. He taught us all the etiquette. My mother, of course, was pretty much up on that, although everything she did was copied. I never shall forget that. She would always say, "Now, you don't see white people doing that." They don't eat like that, and they don't act like that. So I could understand that for her, I think the white culture was her model. And we were brought up on that culture, eating and talking at home. "Don't be so loud. You don't hear white people screaming and yelling." And so it was her model, and I guess it was her way. She did the best she could with her limited knowledge. She was able to stay at home. I must say that about her. It's one thing. My father had a standard [?] job, and he supported the family. And we didn't have to go out to work, you know, in the fields, as many of the youth had to do. Oh, I wanted to do it. I mean, when they'd come around and ask for people to get on the wagons or the trucks to go out in the country to pick cotton and pick beans and do the various things that they paid a little money for, I wanted to go. And at times we got in our mother's hair, so she said, "Look, go." And occasionally my sister and I, my sister, I had a sister who was two years older than I, and she and I always wanted to be with the crowd, make our own money. It didn't pay very much, but my father gave us an allowance, but then you felt like you need your own money. And so we _____, couldn't do it. We picked very little. In fact, when they'd come round to collect people from town to take them in the country to pick their cotton, they didn't want me to go because they realized we were just, we were, you know, weren't going to pick that much. But they couldn't refuse us. And my mother insisted. She'd make a big lunch for us and said, "Oh, they can, they'll go." And all my friends from town would go. I guess they needed to. Financially I guess they made their money that way. So their parents would

make sure that they picked a lot of cotton, made sure that they made some money because they needed it. And tobacco was a big thing here. People would work in the warehouses. People used to, would bring the bags of tobacco in and they had tobacco sold there, graded, tied. And many of the women would take their children into the warehouses during the summer months. And kids knew how to tie tobacco. I never knew. I would love to go in the warehouses just to sit around and hear the auctioneer work with the tobacco and also just to sit around and chat with the kids, my friends. They were all in the warehouse because their parents made them go. I would go. Unfortunately, I couldn't make no money out of that. My money came on Saturday. Everybody, when my father would let us go, everybody came out on Saturday with their shoeshine box. And I shined shoes. Five cents a shine. But with my allowance and that I was able to go to the movies. I was able to buy peanuts to eat in the movie, Cracker Jacks to eat in the movie, maybe buy a soda for the movie. And my father made certain that all of our allowance, we kept money for church, and we had some money, I guess, for school. Many of the schools, or the high school here, had to raise money if they wanted to buy something special for the school. Blinds for the windows, or pictures for the wall. Jumpropes and things like that you would use during recess time. Balls that you used during recess time. So we would, they would bring lunches, the girl would fix the lunches and the boys would buy the lunches on Mondays. The girls' mothers would set a piece of cake, maybe a piece of chicken in there, and the girls would wrap a box, and we would buy the box for maybe fifteen, twenty cents. And this is how we raised the money for the few things that we, the extra things that the school did not supply. And _____. He would put on plays. And I always enjoyed doing that. And I can't

remember a year that I wasn't in one or two of his plays. Although when I was in grammar school, because of my height and my ability to memorize lines, I guess he would let me be in the play with the high school kids. So I got a chance to do a lot of acting. And he was a very good director, and a teacher. I learned much from him. When I went to graduate school, I did my graduate work in speech and drama. I do theater here as an adult. I just kept up with it. So that's where I was in South Carolina. Well, ah,

BB: Let me pause here and go back and ask you to fill in a few details.

AW: Okay, sure.

BB: You're one of these great interview subjects who is just a natural talker. It's so nice. I guess just to fill in a couple of details. What was the date you were born, and what were your parents' names?

AW: Oh, I'm sorry.

BB: And also I wonder did you ever know your grandparents growing up.

AW: Oh, yes.

BB: And maybe a little bit about what you learned from them and learned about their lives.

AW: Oh, yes. I, my maternal grandparents I knew. My paternal grandparents I didn't know. I understand that she died the year I was born. So she got a chance to see me, but I didn't recognize her, my father's mother. And, of course, his father died before I was born, so I didn't know. But my maternal grandparents, I knew very well. And they lived in a small town out of Alcolu in Manning, where I was born, Gale [?], the little town. But I would always visit my grandmother. My grandmother was, oh, she was a lady if there ever was one. And we always were happy to go there because she always made special foods for us, and she was so good at that. Although my mother was a good cook, too, but there was nothing like granny's sugar biscuits and potato pies. And she had a farm, cows and pigs, so we learned a lot about that. And I learned a lot about animals. And I would help here when I went out there stake the cows, take them out to pasture, and put a big stake on them so they don't run away. They had a leash on them, I guess I'll call it a leash, the rope around their heads so they would stay put in a special spot. And when they had eaten up all the grass around that spot, I would move them into another spot. So I helped too. But my grandmother taught me much. I, now I'm a storyteller, and I learned many of those stories from my grandmother. In the evenings when we had nothing else to do, we would sit by the fireplace and my grandmother would tell us all these stories, things that happened when she was a child. Buh Rabbit stories, stories about animals, and it's like the cartoons now. They give the animals human characteristics. And it would be stories we enjoyed. And she always talked about ghost stories, too, which used to get next to me. All of us were afraid to go to bed after hearing her ghost stories. But she, I learned many of the stories I now tell from my

grandmother. My grandmother was a socialite, I guess, because women would gather in our house for quilting. And they would gather in our house for while they would have their church meetings there. When I say church meetings, after church meetings when they would meet, and I guess they were missionaries and things of that kind always met at our house. I didn't mind it because she allowed me to sit around, and I used to love to hear the stories they'd tell and just be a part of what was going on in the community. And I learned from them. And my grandmother of course always made small sugar biscuits and tea and, for them, and I was always the recipient of that, of those goodies. So it was always a pleasure. But, I thought a lot of my grandmother. And she would come to visit us, and we were happy. When my parents would go away during the summer, there were times when we all went away, to New York, and my father had always traveled because he got his fare all free [?] because he worked for the Coast Line, and he could take his family, too. But there were times, I think, they wanted to be by themselves, and they would go get Granny, and she would come, and she'd stay with us. And we loved that because she was, seemed more, I don't know, catering, I guess she catered to us. She'd make us more of those sugar biscuits, and she would, I guess we could get away with a lot of things that our parents would not allow to get around with. But she also would work with us during the summers when we would visit her. She believed in education. She would question us on how much we know. And we would sit on the ground and use a little stick to make and form letters. And she would instead of having a book there, she would write on there a "3" and then put a "1", now subtract this "1" from the "3" and right under that. So she, it was her blackboard, the ground was, and we would erase that. She had a special stretch of dirt back over there. My grandmother

worked with us during the summer with our schoolwork, and she too, she was quite a lady. My grandmother died when I was in high school, no, middle school. I think it was in middle school when she died. Yeah, I was going to middle school. I miss her very much. She was quite a lady. And I learned much about the farm. _____ farm, but I learned much about plants and _____ plants, and her garden. I used to help her in the garden, although, I guess she assumed I was helping, but I, sometimes in a way. But I learned much about gardening. I learned much about animals. I learned, I didn't learn to cook from her, but I certainly watched her cooking. And she would explain what she was doing. And I was always there to get the cake pan. When she made the batter, it was always _____ batter, seems to me. She would leave a little in the pan. I could lick it with my finger, and it was tasty. That's about as much of my grandmother as I can tell. She was a lady.

BB: Now, that farm, did they own that farm?

AW: Ah, my grandfather owned the farm, yes. When I say "farm," it wasn't a very big farm because I understand that he would work as a sharecropper with some other man who owned the big farm. But he did own that little piece of land that he had. I don't remember when he bought it, but he was considered a very industrious man. I mean, he had a surrey when most blacks didn't have it. That is, a surrey, of course, they have two, it was like a limousine. It had two seats in there and the top on it. And my mother would tell the story about their coming to church. He would let the girls sit in the back and he and my grandmother would sit in the front. The boys would sit in the little, there was a

little seat back there, almost like a rumble seat, I guess we'd call it, like our trunk, the trunk of our car. It was always like that. And they would carry oats and stuff for the horses when they would go to church. They would unhitch the horse from the buggy and tie him to a tree and they would give him the oats to eat while they went in church.

BB: What church did they go to?

AW: They went to an African Methodist church. They were African Methodists. They went, my father was Presbyterian. My father's family, as I understand it, were rather, well, I guess for black people they were rich. The reason they were that way was my grandmother, my father's mother, who I didn't quite know, was married to a white, a white gentleman. Was married to a white gentleman. Her first husband died. And she was married actually to a white gentleman. Now you may wonder, was marriage, I don't know if the marriage was, you know, if it was done in a church or wherever the marriage was, but she was actually married to the white gentleman. I understand that she worked in the home, and she took care, the mistress was ill, and she was, she took care of the woman, and she died. And then she took care of the master of the house. And they had two children together, and I guess they decided to marry. And when he died, he left her what he had. And not only that, but that's how my father got the job he had, too, by the way, I want to say that. They didn't give black people those jobs at that time with the railroad company. They didn't have those jobs. But I understand that my father got tired of the farm because the farm that my grandmother inherited from her husband, who was white, my father was running that farm. But my father was not the farming type. He

wanted to get away from the farm. And there was a big mill that he decided he would go and work in, in Alcolu. The _____ mill, I think, was known for that, _____ that mill. But he'd go there to work, and of course, my grandmother didn't like his working there because on the farm I understand he was the youngest of the children, and he didn't, he didn't quite work like the way the others did. You could stay home while they were out working in the fields. And my grandmother catered to him, I guess because of his age, and he was younger. And he was the one child that was born, the two of them were born from the white man. She had a husband prior to that, black, and he died. He was a James. He died, and she had, she had two, three children from that marriage. So my father kind of felt that the farm belonged to him because it was his father's farm. His father was white. It was his farm. So I guess he was lazy. He didn't feel that he had to go to the fields and work. So when he went to the place, and my grandmother didn't like it in the mills. She thought he was working too hard.

BB: When you say "mill," what kind of mill was it?

AW: It was a sawmill where they made lumber from the trees. It was the biggest thing in Alcolu, South Carolina. I think the whole city was made up around that mill. As they tell me. And so she said, "No, you can't work there." And she must have went to the brother of her husband, the white husband, and he went to, and he knew there were jobs available. And he went and said, "Give this nigger a job." And, you know, so they gave my father a job. And he's done that job all his life. That is the job with the railroad company. And I'd like to -- what other questions do you actually have? Well, I was

born, my God, people don't believe my age, but I was born in '21. Yeah, I was born in '21.

BB: What was your birthday?

AW: It was May 17th. 1921.

BB: Yeah, as I said on the phone, when we had met briefly in '95 and then I saw your name in this college thing in 1946, I thought, "Huh, well that's an unusual name. There couldn't be that many people with that name around, but that must be his father. He must, the person I met must be Abie Wilson, Jr."

RECORDING CUTS OFF HERE, ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH THE SIDE

GOING TO FLIP OVER AND SEE IF IT PICKS UP ON THE OTHER SIDE, ALSO CHECKING NOTES

BB: Okay. Second side of the first tape of the interview with Abie Wilson.

AW: Actually, his name was Abe. A-B-E. And I was Abe, Jr. When I was old enough to go to school, everybody said, my teachers also said, "Abe is a nickname. It's not really a name." So I put the "i" in it and made it "Abie." I put the "i" in it and made it

"Abie," and I became "Abie." My father didn't object to it. The teachers said that wasn't a name. So I put the "Abie" in it. But I'm named after my father. Now where were we?

BB: Well, your grandmother who you know so well, approximately when was she born?

AW: I really don't know. I know she died when I was in, and there is an obituary, too. I guess I just haven't really paid that close attention to, I believe when she died, I believe she died at an age of in the seventies, I believe. Was in the seventies. Maybe not. Because I remember my mother getting the obituary together with her sister, and I believe that age came out to be seventy. Because I had always said I didn't think Granny was that old. I mean it bothered me that, and now at my age now, I realize that age doesn't mean anything. But as I look at myself, and what I'm hearing from many people, I hear it all the time, even my doctors. When I give them my age, they don't believe it. They say, "Oh, come on! Come on, you're not 82!" I say, "What do you mean I'm not 82!" They say, "You're not." And I have to prove it all the time. People just don't believe it, but I am, and I feel good. And everybody seems to think I'm not that age. It must have been inherited. Because my grandmother certainly, when my mother said seventy, or in the late sixties, I couldn't believe it because my grandmother as far as I was concerned was never that old. Because to kids then, seventy was like living a hundred and ten now. We just thought it was . . . My grandfather died rather early, too. He died before my grandmother. So I don't remember him very much at all. I remember him when he was very sick he would come to our house and my mother make him, she used

to make him apple pies, and he liked that. And I remember my mother making apple pie for her father because he was ill, and he was coming to visit us. And I could see the old surrey coming around the corner. And I would say, "Here's Grandpa." And, ah

BB: Now, what where his relations with other white people around? Was it, was it sort of, did he treat him differently because he had married a black woman, at that time, your grandfather?

AW: Oh, I'm thinking of my grandmother, on my mother's side.

BB: Oh, okay, I got them mixed up.

AW: Right, yeah. Yes, that was my grandmother on my mother's side. My grandmother on my father's side I didn't know her, didn't know. These things are told to me. Who his father was, the farm that they had. My father was a mulatto. And when we say mulatto, he was a, at one time black people were very prejudiced. They used to think that if you were very fair and had good hair that you were above the average black person. Although, you know, we know differently now and are teaching that black is beautiful, but my father was of that, and he was a quite, I guess, the women loved him, and he was a gambler. My father was. Because all that land that we had, we don't own it any longer. My mother said that people would come every so often, because they lived on the farm there when they got married, he got married to my mother, they lived there. And they built a house there with their own timber. I understand that they, the man

allowed, the mill was near there, the man allowed, because he allowed them to cut so much timber off the land, he gave them enough timber to build the house that he built. So he built, they built a home there on that property. And my mother said every so often people would come and take away a cow or something that my father lost in a gambling game. And a little piece of property that she would find that they couldn't farm any longer, too much of it, because that part belonged to someone else because he would gamble it off. And his brother, and his sister, from the previous marriage, they were working that farm, and they helped build that farm. Because they worked there. And they made my grandmother give them a portion. That portion is still in their, the hands of their children, but we don't own any of it. And originally it belonged to my father. It was his farm _____, but he hawked it off, he pawned it off in his gambling. And so that's what happened. But when I say my maternal grandmother, this was the grandmother I mentioned earlier, this was her father that I said came to us. I didn't know too much of him other than the fact that he was her father and he was ill. And I really, what I could recall from him, we were quite young. We didn't go out to the farm, to my grandmother and he, that often at that time. They would come and visit us Sundays, or after church or whenever. They lived a distance. I'd say leave early before the sun was down because they'd have a lantern on the surrey because evidently they wouldn't get home till dark. And if they didn't have a lantern and they didn't have kerosene which was costly to burn in the lantern, we should have--I hope you know what I'm talking about--fat light. It was the bottom of a tree that the sap had gone down, and it was easy to light. You know, the match would catch to it easily and it would burn because of the sap that's in it, or the turpentine or whatever was in it kept it. And I remember we used to go out in the woods,

my brother did, and we would get the chips from that to give my grandfather. And he would have matches so that if the lantern, if he didn't have enough for the lantern, he would light that, and they would hold that as a light. And they would hold that as a light to see. And I remember ____ leaving early, or saying that he had to go. We had enjoyed them and didn't want them to leave, but he had to leave early so that he could get home. So they lived quite a distance. Not quite a distance, it was a distance then. The roads were not what they're like, what they're like today. Sometimes I understand that they had to go around areas where there was a broken bridge that weren't in repair, the horses couldn't cross because of that and they always had to go around to the shallow part of the water, of the little stream or whatever that the buggy could come through and the horse could come through if the bridge was out. I went with them one time home and I remember the bridge being out. And this is what, how I remember that my grandfather had to go off the road and where the buggy could come through, you know. He had to find spaces. It wasn't a road. He had almost find spaces that was wide enough for the buggy to come through. And there was one time I remember my grandfather, my father, and my brother took the horse away from the buggy and led him around, and my grandfather and my brother kind of pulled the buggy through. And I was young enough to stay on the buggy, ride through, and the water was pretty deep. It came almost into the buggy. But the _____. But _____ they didn't live that close. So I didn't stay as close when he was alive as I did when my grandmother was _____. When I got a little older and my father had a car, was finally [?] able to buy a car, then he would take us out to my grandmother's. And we would spend some summers out there, the children would. And that's how I mentioned Granny when I mentioned her. Her name was

Lucinda Thomas. My mother was a Thomas. My grandmother was a James, to the black husband, and after he died she got married to the white person, who was a Wilson, Molie [?] Wilson was his name. Moses Wilson. And she took the name. That's why I'm assuming that they were married. ____ people just stayed together, but she took the name, and my father kept the name, he was a Wilson. His brothers, his brother and sister, rather, who was born before him, were James. And their family is James too. I couldn't understand why we came from the same family and I'm a Wilson and they're a James. And my cousins can't understand that. And I had to explain, "Well, look, your grandfather died." I can't say it with pride or with shame. It happened. I don't know if I should say it with pride or with shame. There are times when I was ashamed that this had happened, when conditions were that whites and blacks didn't mix too well, it was a shame to say my father was white. My mother was part Indian and the very dark side of the Indians because she was very dark, with beautiful hair, but she was very dark. And my father was very fair. My mother tells the story that my grandfather told my father if you ever call her black, I'll kill you. You know, he was so fair, but you know how women are. They kind of go for the fairer men, at that time. And it happened that way when I was in college, really. The fairer girls were always the ones who were the elites, or the _____ girls on the campus. But now it's different, so the homecoming queen had to be very fair, and it's just that way even when I was in college. But, yeah, but that's it. Anything else from that stuff?

BB: Yeah, maybe a little bit more about Professor Murray, and you mentioned that he would teach you about black history that wasn't part of the regular curriculum.

AW: No, no.

BB: So, so for, ah, what were the regular history textbooks that you were using? And were, maybe, not really the books, but what sort of stuff did they cover?

AW: Well, we knew the presidents. We knew, well, the Revolutionary War. We knew that, you know, from England. Indians weren't mentioned too much. That part of history came only when we started talking about Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims, you know, had Thanksgiving. And all the ways that, ah, and of course, the slave issue was never stressed that much. I remember saying that slavery, I remember the word "slavery," and I remember them talking about going back, of course, I know what slavery is now, but going back to when I was growing up with that, ah, it wasn't stressed that we came from slavery, that we were slaves. My grandmother would tell me slave stories about the master beating people. My grandmother would tell me those stories, and my mother would relate them because she knew them from her mind [?]. And we kind of felt that the pain of slavery through them. It was not brought out in the book. We knew we came from Africa. They said the slaves came from Africa, I think was the statement that was made, you know. How they came, I don't know, but the slaves came from Africa. And Africa to my mind at that mind was a place where Tarzan was. We saw movies on that. And all the black people were really ugly and silly and crazy and _____ and swinging from trees. And that's about what we knew of Africa, what we knew about Africa. In fact, I learned more from Africa, about Africa, even now, just a few years ago. I learned

to respect the country and know what the country is all about. Know the complete history of Africa and the culture that they've maintained and they always have. And we didn't know. We heard, we read about the pyramids, not having an idea who they were made by or, when they were made. We had no connection with Egyptians whatsoever. It was a revelation when we found out it was so connected. And it was so, they maintained such a strong culture, a high culture, what we would classify it today as a very strong and high culture. That we did not know. Mr. Murray would, and he did not take us too much into that. What he would bring us into is what people were doing. Frederick Douglass and these people who stood out during this periods, who wrote during those periods. We would read their writings for that period and kind of glean from them.

BB: What books would you read that material from, do you remember?

AW: Ah, I should know the books I have at home now. I didn't have it then. I'm trying to think. Murray had a very good library. Mr. Murray, rather. _____ had a very good library. We didn't have books on them. He would read from them to us, as a part of history, and then you would talk about it. And when he got pictures of it, you know, he would refer to the pictures so we could get a visual image of what it was like, what he looked like and what he was writing about. The schools were not, the schoolhouses were no better than, to me, some of them, of course, Rosenwald came in and built the schools that we attended. I think most of my schools were Rosenwald schools. Except for Kingstree, here. I guess the high school might have been supported, built by the city, or the town, but for the most part they were Rosenwald schools. I

understand Rosenwald came through and said to, in the rural areas, and said to the blacks if they would raise just half of the money. My grandfather, as I understand it from my mother's side, was the one who was very pushy about that. He would make sure that the farmers gave so much of their produce and he would take it to the market and sell it and bring them back the money, and they would, you know, they would put it in a pool that he, that they would pool their money to make sure they could order the school, a better school for the children. And I understand they dealt with Rosenwald. I don't have any documentation on that other than, you know, what was told to me. But I understand he was very strong in that. That was my mother's father.

BB: So he would, so they would, ah, raise produce and vegetables and stuff that he would take to market.

AW: Yeah, he would gather from all the farms. Many of them didn't own their farms. Many of them worked on farms. But the sharecropping farmers would give them some of the produce. That's how they paid many of them. They didn't get actual cash money. They would give them a certain amount of tobacco, maybe going to sell it. It wasn't very much. Maybe give them a certain amount of cotton and maybe go and, well, it didn't make a bale, my father said. Some of them didn't make a bale, but they'd put, they'd all put this cotton together and make a bale, so they could sell a bale for a sizeable amount of money, not a lot, I guess. But that's how they survived. But even what little monies they had for themselves, my grandfather I understand was very instrumental in trying to collect the little money that they could meet the Rosenwald, you know, I guess, grant, or

not a grant so much so as a, he was saying, if you could create so much money, I'll give you some. That's what the Rosenwald school seemingly came out to be. And so that's how they got it, the Rosenwald school. But when my grandmother describes [?], when Murray would show us the schools, that Frederick Douglass and a few of the others went to, they weren't _____. Some of them probably looked better than school in _____ Alcolu. I didn't go to school in Alcolu, but I have visited Alcolu, and my sister and brothers were showing me the school where they went. And it was almost like the schools that Murray would show us that they had there. But I admire my grandfather although I don't [?] know very much about him, on my mother's side, because when I went to Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina, it was an AME school, his name is there.

BB: What's his first name?

AW: Julius.

BB: Julius.

AW: Julius Thomas. His name was there because he helped to raise money to build the school. When Allen University first started out, he helped to raise money. It was, evidently he was a proud man. Poorly educated, I suppose, didn't have that much education, but who had? My mother went, my mother and her sister went, I guess, the farthest in school, and that was about seventh to eighth grade. That was considered then

to be pretty well, you know, then they had summer schools, and then I understand they would go to summer school if they wanted to teach. My mother taught for a while. And if they wanted to teach, they would go to summer school. And teachers would come and show them how to teach or whatever they had to do. How to make things, to craft things, to show students, or to, like experiments, I guess they were talking about. So, that's what really happened back then. But back to Murray. Murray was always, that's what he always, he would always was, Murray was brave. And I talked about that just yesterday to one of my friends. Murray would bring a set of dishes to school with silverware and would show the girls and the fellows how to set a table. How to eat, what utensils to use, how to, you know, to not to use both hands on the table, and how you introduced your mother to your friends, how you introduced your girlfriend to a friend. He would reenact this in class. "This is your mother, and this is your friend. Now I want you to introduce your mother." And Murray taught us so much grace and so much of those things. I was always in his oratorical contests. I was always the winner. We would compete between schools. We had the contest between schools. I did James Weldon Johnson's "The Creation." Murray would show me the movements in it. He would pronounce the words correctly for me. You had to get at the stresses, and those things that I cherish so much now, Murray taught me those things. And I remember whenever we would go to a school, they would always say, "Uh-oh, here it comes. They're going to get first place." Whenever I walked in, they'd say, there's that big, they called me big-eye, there's that big-eyed boy, he's going to. I did a few of Paul Laurence Dunbar. He's the one who wrote in dialect and he's the one that did the funny things. I did one or two of his. But Murray always gave me the ones that had, I guess, more of a classical meaning. And I

did Shakespeare as well. I did "The Raven." I remember doing "The Raven." I still remember. I still do it now when I have a concert or something. I still do it. So those were the kinds of things that Murray taught us. He was just, and he would criticize how you would dress. And we had a thing Friday was our day to dress up. You had to wear a shirt and tie. He wouldn't let you in his class unless you had a shirt and tie. He was very kind in that some of the boys who couldn't afford or didn't have any, he would give them. _____ He would tell you. "That shirt is dirty." "But my mother wasn't feeling well." "You're mother need not have to wash your shirt. You should wash your own shirt and iron it." You know, he always, on Mondays we had to be starched and prim, I mean, he insisted on it. Girls had to be very clean. A girl had to be very clean on Monday. The clothes couldn't be wrinkled or rough-dry, as we called it. So girls prepared their clothes very well, many of them would wear the same clothes they had on for church. Because their mothers made certain that their church clothes were very clean or very pressed, you know. My mother certainly did. But I didn't have a problem. Many kids had problems because parents couldn't afford it so much. But I never had a problem. My father always had a steady job. And we could always go to any of the stores here in town, and if we wanted something, and he gave me permission to get it, I could go to any stores, not some of these young men that were in stores now that remember from their father, their father, their father's father, that all they'd have to say is, "Oh, you're Abe's boy?" And, okay, they would let you have it. My mother could go to any of these stores and get what she wanted. And they would write it on a card, and my father would pay it when he got paid. That's one thing of being independent. He worked with the NAACP movement in the sixties, in the late fifties and sixties when it

was very much forbidden by the white citizens here. He worked very strongly with that. And the blacks many of them couldn't work with it because they threatened them that if you worked with them they would have lost their jobs, so people wouldn't hire them. Or they could not get credit in the stores. So they were punished. So many of them could not express themselves like they wanted to or to be a part of it. Many of the, teachers when I, and I remember this, teachers could not teach in the schools if they were a member of the NAACP. They wouldn't let them teach. So many of the teachers supported the NAACP, but undercover. They couldn't outwardly say that they were members of it. My father, they would meet at my father's church.

BB: Which church was that?

AW: At Siloam Baptist Church. And meaning that they would meet, the NAACP people would have this meeting there, and we had a pastor there who was very outspoken about it. And my father and the undertakers here, they were very strong because the undertakers were kind of independent. They buried black folks and whites couldn't do anything about that. So they were very strong about it. Martin Luther King came to Kingstree. Yeah. So what happened was, they burned the church down. And the church was burned down, and they didn't realize why the church was burned down until the man who, the black man, they paid the black man to burn the church down, and the man ran the hardware store, so it was downtown here. And the man came to collect his money, and he refused to give the man all the money that the man promised he was giving him. And the man shot him, the man killed him. So they had a court for the man, for killing

him. And that's how it came out that he paid him to burn that church down. That's how they found out that the church was burnt down. Oh, the church was burnt down, but they just never, whether it was an accident or someone maliciously set it afire, they didn't know that until the trial, when they had him up for killing the white man. Then this all came out in the trial because the man didn't pay him for burning down the church. And Siloam Baptist Church remembers that now because I was president of the NAACP here in this county for, oh, for about thirteen years. I'm not any longer. I decided I needed a rest. And we had meetings at different churches. We never had an office building where the NAACP could meet here in this town. We always met at churches. The churches always allowed us, but Siloam never let us come there because they said, look, they burned our church down. And it's hard to get the