

Interviewer: This is April 12, 1976. I am Ella Pruitt. I am interviewing Mr. Henry Warren Sewing of Douglass State Bank. I am interviewing him at the Douglass State Bank. Mr. Sewing, we're going to begin the interview with your early childhood.

[0:00:30] Would you tell me when and where you were born?

Respondent: I was born in Fremont, Texas. You want the date?

Interviewer: Yes, the date.

Respondent: February 15, 1891.

Interviewer: Tell me as much as you can about your parents, who they were, their names and possibly their occupations. What did they do?

[0:00:58]

Respondent: My parents were Thomas Wesley Sewing and Margaret Sewing. My father did common labor, and my mother was a washwoman.

Interviewer: How many children were in your family?

Respondent: There were six.

Interviewer: According to your book, I see...

[0:01:27]

Respondent: Just a minute. I'm not telling you about those that passed. Let's see. Now, actually, there were eight in all. [counting] That's five in all. No, I mean, not five, that was eight of us. [interruption]

[0:02:03]

Interviewer: Okay, Mr. Sewing, I'm aware that your parents were very active in church. Can you recall the name of the church?

Respondent: Yes, the Progress Baptist Church of Fremont, Texas.

Interviewer: Could you describe the church? Was it a small church?

Respondent: Very small. To begin with, it started as just an ordinary [unintelligible].

[0:02:27] And finally, we built a church, but it was a very small church that would congregate, I'd say, about 100 people.

Interviewer: Your father, was he active in church?

Respondent: Very much so.

Interviewer: In what capacity?

Respondent: He was a deacon. I might say a head deacon. He had a great deal to do with the running of the church.

Interviewer: What about you as a child in the church?

Respondent: Well, I grew up as a Sunday school [teacher]. That's about all that I could say.

[0:02:58]

Interviewer: Were you baptized?

Respondent: Yes I was, at the age of nine.

Interviewer: Did the church at that time – you know, now, the church has different activities for the youth such as the summer school. They may have vacation bible school. During those days, did they have any type of programs such as this?

Respondent: Not at all.

Interviewer: It was just basically what? You just went to church?

Respondent: Yeah, Sunday school and BYPU.

Interviewer: What about during the week now? That's usually on Sunday.

[0:03:28]

Respondent: Prayer meeting on Wednesday night.

Interviewer: Approximately how long did that last for prayer meeting?

Respondent: What do you mean?

Interviewer: How long did the prayer meetings last on Wednesday night?

Respondent: Oh, I guess about an hour to an hour and a half.

Interviewer: Also, looking back at your book, you recall picking cotton.

Respondent: Yes. Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Was this picking cotton to help the family? Why did you pick? What reason?

[0:03:55]

Respondent: Well, it was just an industry. Cotton was a big industry in Texas. And [unintelligible], we went off on these what you called cotton picks. And it

lasted about a couple months. About a couple months to get your money in for Christmas and other things and then they [sat by].

Interviewer: I see. Now, the struggle for an education.

[0:04:26] Why did you consider education at that time to be a struggle? Was it circumstances within the family, maybe as you had to slow down and help more with the family?

Respondent: Well, I'll tell you, my schooling began at the age of nine. And the system provided for only nine grades of work. You graduated at the ninth grade.

[0:04:57] As a matter of fact, the school period was very short, about four to five months in the year. And I went to school until I got to the sixth grade. And I self-taught myself until I went to Boyd Academy in East Texas. When I left public school, I was in the sixth grade. I began at the age of nine, as I said.

[0:05:30] And when I went to Boyd Academy, I entered the ninth grade and graduated from the normal course in three years.

Interviewer: What do you mean by the normal course?

Respondent: You have what is known as a high school graduate, but in those kinds of schools, they wouldn't say you graduated from high school. They said you graduated from the normal course that involved 12 years.

[0:06:00] It's equal to the graduates in the other schools.

Interviewer: From this time, what did you do next after you graduated?

Respondent: I stayed out of school one year trying to find work to do to save money to go to Howard University. And I took an examination. I didn't pass the examination.

[0:06:27] And so I did the next best thing. I went to Tillotson College. I didn't have any money. I went there as a work student.

Interviewer: What type of work was available to you at that time?

Respondent: As a matter of fact, it might seem funny, but most of that work was a student teacher. I was a student teacher at Tillotson College, and when I left Tillotson College and went to Fisk University, I was a student teacher there.

[0:07:03] And when I arrived on the campus of Fisk University, I entered there with \$0.25. That was all the money that I had.

Interviewer: As you were leaving Tillotson, this is where you first met your wife, right?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you tell me about your wife?

Respondent: Well...

Interviewer: How did you meet her? Was she on campus?

[0:07:28]

Respondent: Do you have time?

Interviewer: Yes, I have time.

Respondent: At Boyd Academy, I became acquainted with a nice young girl there, and we started going together. But our courtship didn't last very long. It lasted a couple years, I would say. She thought that I was going with some other girl, which I was not. My sister kind of conspired with that other girl to try to do all the help that she could in breaking up Ethel and myself with the other girl.

[0:08:04] But we got [real] cold toward each other. We maintained friendship, however.

Interviewer: Now, her name was Ethel Black?

Respondent: Ethel Black. We maintained a friendship with each other. And the first year that I went to Tillotson College, that was in 1911. And leaving after the commencement, we left on a train on our way home, and Ina [Wiseman] was one of the students that was on that train.

[0:08:37] At that particular time, she was 16 years of age. And she was the only girl that I sent a postcard to. I didn't have anything else in mind. She seemed to be just a nice chat. And so when she came back the next year, it so happened that she sat at my table.

[0:08:59] I was at a head table. And the other girls – before she came, all of the other girls were my [play] daughters, and I had one baby daughter. And when she came, I said, well, I'll make you a baby daughter, and kids began to tease her about it. So she wrote me a little note and said possibly for you not to call me a baby daughter, because it causes a little confusion.

[0:09:24] And I just smiled and shook my head. Well, at this particular time that I'm speaking, she was 17 years of age. So I was not going with anybody, so when had our suppers and parties, I [unintelligible] and go with her. I continued to go to -- she lived in Austin, Texas, also, where the school was. I continued to go there, and when I'd go back, I'd say, well, I saw Ethel today.

[0:09:57] She said, did you have a nice time? I said, yes. She'd say, I'm glad you did. But that kind of a thing continued for about six months. And she never did assume another relationship other than just the baby daughter. So I began to think about her, and I said, this girl looks all right to me. And I spoke to her

about going with me, you know? And she said, well, I'll think about it. She never did say anything else except I'll think about it. We just started going. So from then on, we just went together and all that.

[0:10:30] And that was for a total of four and a half years. And we never had a hard word pass between us during that entire time of four years. So in 1915, in May of 1915, I graduated from Tillotson College with an AB diploma. And then in the fall of that year, I went to Fisk University.

Interviewer: Now, you had some problems at Fisk, right?

[0:11:03]

Respondent: What kind of problems?

Interviewer: Like monetary problems, as far as having enough money.

Respondent: Oh, I didn't have any money.

Interviewer: Now, tell me how you managed to survive at Fisk with no...

Respondent: Well, I had written the president of Fisk University and I had informed him that while at Tillotson College, I had done some student teaching and also monitor of the reading room and so forth.

[0:11:37] And I wanted them to provide me sufficient work so that I could go to school there. Somehow or another, they let me come on, but I thought I was going to have some money. And as I said, when I got on the campus, I had \$0.25. Well, they gave me – at that time, Fisk University had a high school department too.

[0:12:00] And they gave me classes in arithmetic – no, I take it back, algebra and geometry. And I had two classes in each of those branches of study. And then I kept the telephone office at night. Any call that came in, I took it.

[0:12:28] And I was having a little hard time, and I thought I'd try going to out as a non-boarding student and getting a job in the meantime. But I wasn't able to find it, so I came on back as a boarding student. And this one of the things that I'm about to say I've always been proud of myself because I thought about it.

[0:12:55] They allowed me salary – I guess they called it salary. And so when I graduated – and I'm getting ahead of my story.

Interviewer: That's okay. That's fine.

Respondent: I didn't know just how to get back home. I [was about to stay] two years, but my father was having difficulty in paying for his place, and I thought I better go and help him. So I didn't have any money. I didn't know how in the world I was going to get home.

[0:13:28] And then in the midst of this situation, I went to the office to clear my situation up, to see whether I owed anything. And the girl said, no, you don't owe anything, and you have \$43.25 coming. And I said, no, I don't think you're right. She said, yes, you have it.

[0:13:55] And we talked about it, and so I said, well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take this money and go to my dormitory room and see can I figure out how this happened. What I found out, when I went back to Fisk University, after having gone out to get a job and make some money, I came back January 1, and she had me recorded as coming back in February. And I called her attention to that.

[0:14:30] And she said, well, you're wrong. You came back in February, and you ought to be glad that it is like this. I said, well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to leave this \$43.65 here, and I'll go study it again, and if I find that I'm wrong, I'll come for it. Otherwise, I'll leave it. Now, I didn't go back [for it].

[0:14:57] Now, I'm proud of myself at that point in my life.

Interviewer: You should be.

Respondent: I was as poor as they came. I borrowed from a doctor – he's a doctor now, [Danny Cummings], and I saw him. I was at a bankers convention about a couple years ago, and I saw him. I borrowed \$15 from him, \$10 from another fellow, and \$10 from another.

[0:15:31] And that's the way I got money to go back home after graduation. Now, I had decided – I think this ought to be interesting too. I had decided that in going back home, I wouldn't go straight home. I'd go to Dallas, Texas, where I'd meet a friend of mine and stay with him and try to get a job there.

[0:15:55] So I stopped there with the firm intention of staying over there and trying to find some work. But somehow or another I got the feeling that I ought to go straight home. So I caught this train that night, and it went home, went to bed, and before I could get up that morning, I received a telegram from a Professor [Anniston], who was principal of the high school in Austin, Texas telling me to come on down to Austin, they had a job for me.

[0:16:28]

Interviewer: What type of job? Was it a teaching job?

Respondent: Teaching job.

Interviewer: What subjects were you going to teach there? Do you recall?

Respondent: I was going to teach whatever subjects that school had, but I went to an elementary school, and I think I had kids in the sixth grade. And I spent part of the year at the school in what they call South Austin.

[0:17:00] And then they changed from that to a school they called the Gregory Town School.

Interviewer: Let me stop you right here just for a minute. I'd like to make a quote from out your book. "I found out that a negro schoolteacher with the same educational background and qualifications as a white teacher was paid only half the salary."

Respondent: Mm-hm.

[0:17:27]

Interviewer: Why was this like that at the time?

Respondent: Well, because one was colored and one was white. They made no bones about it. That's the way the system worked.

Interviewer: And this was in Texas?

Respondent: Yeah, Austin, Texas. That was the way the system worked. And I understand it worked that way in many places in the south. And I took pedagogy in school. [unintelligible] Of course, [unintelligible] anything else to do except with the schoolroom.

[0:18:01] But there was one point that I never did see in that book. When I went to the [Gregory] School, that's kind of a tough school. And one of the kids was cutting up.

Interviewer: Was it a boy or a girl?

Respondent: Boy. I got after him. He invited me outdoors to a fight. I went to the principal, I told him what the boy had done.

[0:18:32] I said, what shall I do? He said, get him. Go get him. So I had to go get him.

Interviewer: What did the boy think of that? Did he come? Did he just come on? Did he willingly come?

Respondent: Oh, I got hold of him and brought him in.

Interviewer: And brought him on in?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah. And brought him on in. And I didn't get that at school, see?

Interviewer: No.

Respondent: A number of things that I experienced in teaching wasn't in the book at all.

[0:18:56] So I taught there for the rest of that year, and then the following year, I went to Anderson High School, and I taught two things that had no possible relationship. I had a class in Latin and also mathematics. So I taught mathematics and Latin at Anderson High School. I taught there for three years. And I like Austin, Texas very well. I had a friend that was teaching there.

[0:19:30] We had a nice friendship together. But in the meantime, I took a correspondence course.

Interviewer: Can you recall, Mr. Sewing, about how much was – for the college credit thing. You know, [unintelligible]'s up to some places \$42 an hour.

Respondent: Well, we didn't know anything like that. That wasn't part of certain minorities.

[0:19:59] They got you a seat in the club. Now, I started with \$45 a month in the elementary school, and then the first promotion was to \$50 a month. Well, when I left to high school, that come up to \$75 a month.

[0:20:24] Now, as I said, I took accountancy by correspondence with LaSalle Extension University of Chicago. I don't know why I took that except thinking that maybe I could break into some high degree of work. But I was satisfied was [unintelligible]. I was buying a new home. [unintelligible] buying a home. My wife liked it, and so forth.

[0:20:57] And I walked down the street with a friend. Led to changing all of that. I said to this man, for honest you're going to spend the summer in Austin, Texas. He said no, as a matter of fact, I don't intend to stay here. And he told me some good opportunity he had to get other work that didn't work out but said, I'm not going to stay here. And I said to him, I wouldn't mind leaving Austin, Texas if those kind of situations come up to me.

[0:21:31] He said, they won't come up to you, you have to go after them. And I thought about that, and I thought about that, and I thought about that. I prayed about it and discussed it with my wife and discussed it with my school principal and my other friends. And finally, I made up my mind that I wouldn't stay there. And I tore up the application to teaching another year – the contract, rather, to teach another year.

[0:21:59] And I did that because I felt that the going might get hard for me, and if I had signed a contract, I'd go back. My principal told me, so sign up and go, and if you get a good situation there, stay, and if you don't, just resign. But no, I didn't want any bridges to be left for me to come back over. So I went to Chicago. And I looked for a job all day long.

[0:22:29] But I saw that Chicago wasn't the place for me, and I left that night. I borrowed \$10 from a cousin. I realized that if I stayed there another day, I wouldn't have money to get out of town. So I borrowed \$10 from him, and he suggested that I stop at the YMCA here in Kansas City. Didn't know a single person [unintelligible] here.

[0:22:56]

Interviewer: So this is your first coming to Kansas City?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: All the way from Chicago?

Respondent: Mm-hm. Yeah. And so I came down. I stopped one night at the Y and met some people there from Texas, and I got a room with those people. And I wasn't there a day – about two days I was there – before somebody had stolen all of my clothes. Well, that was a pretty big blow to me.

[0:23:27] And I remember one day, I sat up in the window, and I said to myself, what a fool I've been, tearing up that good contract. And here I am – at that particular time, I was working at the freight house. You know what that is? Out there. [unintelligible] there.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: But I kind of perked up a little bit and said, well, maybe I can get something else.

[0:24:02] And one day, I saw a little ad in the paper that said, stock room, only colored. Well, I got permission from the timekeeper to go attend to some business, and I went there and there were several other people there at the time. And he asked me what I had been doing in the past. I said I was a teacher of Latin and mathematics.

[0:24:32] And he said, well, I'll tell you one thing, there's a world of difference between this job and the job as a teacher of Latin or mathematics. And [unintelligible] yes, I realize what you're saying, but the same fundamental principles that would make a person a good Latin teacher would make them good at doing this job.

[0:24:55] And so he said, well, you can call me, and he said I have a dozen people coming in here, but you can call me. I'll let you know. I left without the job. And the evening came, I had a debate with myself as to whether I should stop by, because I said, somebody in the meantime would be hired, and they'd have no use for me. And the reason why I was debating, if I stopped by, my – you know, you get your pay, and they give you one of these slips, you know?

[0:25:36]

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: And I said, my pass would run out, and it would cost me another nickel to get home. And I kind of halfway thought I couldn't afford to take a loss on that nickel. But I said, well, I'll go now. So I stopped by. Somebody was being interviewed at that time.

[0:25:59]

And when he got through, he said, well, I've decided on another fellow, and says, you can call me in a couple weeks and if [unintelligible] then I'll talk to you again. And they said, come up son. I knew I had the job when he called my name to come up to him. And he said, fellows have been coming in all day here, but you said something to me this morning that stayed with me all day long, and I'm going to give you the job. And he gave me the job.

[0:26:28]

And after I worked there for six weeks, I became very dissatisfied.

Interviewer: Were you dissatisfied with the pay? What was it?

Respondent: \$15 a week. That's pretty good then. And so I got the job, and I worked there, and I went to see him and told him that I liked the job all right, but I had a wife and a child and I couldn't get along well on \$15.

[0:26:57]

He said, well, I'll think about it.

Interviewer: Now, your family, were they here in Kansas City?

Respondent: No, not in Austin. I sent her and the child home to wait until I could send for them, in Cameron, Texas. So anyhow, he said, I'll think about it. Now, as far as the clerks were concerned, I was the only black clerk. The others were white. And [unintelligible] came, and I got ready. He called, come up son.

[0:27:28]

He said, I've done what I could for you, increased my pay by \$3 from \$15 to \$18. He said, but don't say anything to the other fellows about it, because they'll get jealous. And I thanked him for it, and I worked there. Finally, I got disgusted and I said, I'm going to get me another job. I talked to the superintendent for the schools here. I talked to the principal of the high school.

Interviewer: Who was the superintendent at that time?

[0:27:56]

Respondent: Mr. – oh, a heavysset fellow. Fellow just before Professor [unintelligible].

Interviewer: Pearson?

Respondent: Yeah, Pearson. Pearson was the one I talked with. And finally, I went to Western University and taught there. And I got a job there [unintelligible]. And I stayed there for three years, and I resigned there to take up life insurance salesmanship.

[0:28:33] And after working there, first as a part timer, as a full timer out of there for a year. Not quite a year, however. I was sent to the school of agency supervision at Atlanta, Georgia, and that was in 1923, I believe.

[0:29:04] The fall of 1923. And then that following December, I made manager of the Kansas City agency. And I stayed there until the company went broke. [interruption – silence]

[0:30:25] ...about 1917. And I believe it was '17. I'm pretty sure it was, because I was drafted in 1918. 1917. And several of my friends left to attend the army school. A good friend of mine [unintelligible] of Austin, Texas and [unintelligible] who subsequently became principal of Anniston High School.

[0:30:57] And there was William [unintelligible] all of those fellows at length. But I didn't go. I didn't apply, because number one, there had been a riot of soldiers in Kansas City – not Kansas City, in Houston, Texas. And as a matter of fact, they prosecuted those fellows and killed a number of them.

[0:31:29] And I felt that it was so wrong for them to be protecting the life of a colored woman and all of them got killed that way. That was in Houston, Texas at that time. And I was just bitter against going into the army, and I didn't go. But I was drafted September 1, 1918. I was drafted and went to Des Moines, Iowa, and I stayed there three months.

[0:32:07] And I never carried a gun on my shoulder during the entire time that I was there. And my wife was confined in the office of the officers. And I'll never forget that day, November 18, when I was discharged and went back home. [unintelligible] wraps up that part.

[0:32:31]

Interviewer: Now, after getting settled in Kansas, you started on the insurance road, right?

Respondent: After getting settled.

Interviewer: After getting settled. What kind of insurance was it?

Respondent: Life insurance.

Interviewer: Do you recall what company?

Respondent: The Standard Life Insurance Company.

Interviewer: Tell me about that. What was it like as an insurance?

[0:32:57]

Respondent: Well, you know, there have been so many incidents in my life that figured in me going into various organizations, and I told you about that. They just opened up. I had a friend from Austin, Texas who was working up here in the laundry. He had charge of the laundry at Western University. And one Sunday evening, he came over to visit with me [unintelligible].

[0:33:31]

And in the meantime, he said, well, I took out a \$1,000 policy with the Metropolitan Life Insurance the other day. I said, why did you do it? I said, we have a company, the Standard Life Insurance Company. I wasn't connected with the Standard Life, but I believed in that business. And I said, why didn't you do that? You have a daughter going to [unintelligible], and she's taking commercial work. You think she's going to be able to get a job at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company?

[0:33:57]

And I talked to him. He said, well, I – [nothing was wrong], and I just went in and did it. I stepped to my phone, called up the Standard Life man and told him that I'd like him to come to the school the next day, I had a prospect. And I introduced him to this prospect. In the first place, in the Houston schools, there is no mathematics. I had my class divided up into four parts. I had a monitor for each one of those sections so I could leave and they'd carry on with the grade.

[0:34:29]

So anyhow, I [unintelligible] to see several places, and...

Interviewer:

And what school was this at that time?

Respondent:

Western University. And so the man that was there, he was one of the field men. He said, you'd make a good salesman. I asked him a number of questions about it, and I said, well, what do you do when you write up everybody? He said, that never happens. And so anyhow, I'd go around working the prospects, and they lined me up as a part time salesman.

[0:34:57]

This was a part time thing. And I started in 1922 as a part time salesman, and I wrote more business than two of the men that were in the office and running the office there. So I was selected as one to attend what is known as the school of agency supervision with the Standard Life Insurance Company.

[0:35:29]

So I finished that and came home, and then the close of that particular year, they made me manager of the office. And I was with the Standard Life Insurance Company until it was taken over by the Southeastern Trust Company.

Interviewer:

Mr. Sewing, you know, I'm not familiar with these terms. When you say they took them over, what, did they buy them out? What happened? I don't understand what happened.

[0:35:57] You said, now, this other company took it over.

Respondent: Well, here's what happened. The president of the Standard Life Insurance Company was [unintelligible] Perry. That was his name. He was from Houston, Texas. And so far as books were concerned, he'd never been beyond the sixth grade, and yet he's one of the most skillful businessmen that we had. And he was very successful in building up the Standard Life Insurance Company. He wasn't satisfied with that.

[0:36:30] Then he organized a bank. That bank is still operating as the Citizen's Trust Company. And it's now the Citizen's Trust Bank, but it's in Atlanta, Georgia. I believe it has a 12-story office building, and they've done good work there. So now, he wasn't satisfied at doing that, but he started what is known as a service company.

[0:36:55] And they sold stock, and they were building drug stores, building subdivisions of land and all that sort of thing, and just overshot themselves. And in getting the money to do all these big things, they gave [unintelligible] on the stock of what is known as – I forget the name of this company. The company was a holding company of the Standard Life Insurance Company.

[0:37:27] And when they gave as security that stock, and when they [weren't able] to meet their obligation, Southeastern Trust Company just took over the insurance company. And after they gutted the company of all of its good assets, then they disposed of that company, what was left, to the National Benefit Life Insurance Company. And the National Benefit Life Insurance Company made a great mistake in trying to take care of that, but they didn't do it, and that caused them to go under.

[0:38:03] And after that, I went with the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, first as an agent then next as a manager of the department.

Interviewer: Okay, now I see here – I'm not sure, but when you were a branch manager of the Kansas City office, that you did some recruiting.

[0:38:31]

Respondent: Well, I was first the regional supervisor of the National Benefit Life Insurance Company before going to that Atlanta Life. And I had supervision of five states: Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas. And I recruited managers for those particular agencies.

[0:38:57] And it was a very difficult situation, because it's hard to find management material in a group of people that had been so slightly exposed to business. But I just said the National Benefit Life Insurance, I was recruiting managers at that time. They weren't able to continue, and so I joined up with the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, first as a salesman and then as a manager.

[0:39:30]

Interviewer: Well, I just have to smile at you having Muskogee, Oklahoma. That's where I'm from.

Respondent: Is that so?

Interviewer: That is where I'm from. [interruption]

[0:39:57] Now, Mr. Sewing, in 1929, you said that the stock market crashed. And about this time – well, in '31 – the National Benefit Life Insurance Company had failed. You talk about a man in your book named James H. Brown.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, now, was he your manager?

[0:40:30]

Respondent: Brown, of course, he's chairman of the board of Douglass State Bank.

Interviewer: Now, right.

Respondent: And I'm chairman of the executive committee of Douglass State Bank. And I just talked with him today. Well, yeah, I met Chairman Brown – it must have been about 1931 when I met Jim Brown.

[0:41:00] Somehow or another, he came by the office of the National Benefit Life Insurance Company, and I met him casually. He was 21 at that particular time. And then I was going up 7th Street, I believe, in Kansas City, Kansas, and he came down. And I shook hands with him again, and I was impressed with the way that he shook hands and he was very intelligent, so I began to make some investigations of him.

[0:41:33] And I started him and [Rossdale Mansfield] in a little schooling, getting them ready for the National Benefit – bringing them into the National Benefit Life Insurance Company. I think that was about '31. And, well, it was not long after that that the National Benefit stopped providing insurance at all, so I had to let Jim go.

[0:41:59] And so that was the National Benefit Life Insurance Company. So sometime after that – I think it was 1933 – I went with the National Benefit Life Insurance Company as an agent, a salesman. And I believe it was in the following year that I recruited Jim Brown as – at this particular time, a manager of what is known as the [unintelligible] department.

[0:42:30] And I recruited him at that time, at the same time, made him assistant manager. Now, I was fired from the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, and he took my place. You don't have that in the book, do you?

Interviewer: No.

Respondent: Well, when I went with the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, I was already a salesman. I accepted a job as being in charge of the special [unintelligible] department.

[0:42:59] And they arranged to give me, in addition to the commission that I made, the arranged to give me a salary of \$75 a month. And I told the fellow by the name of [Elder] who was supervisor of this new setup that that was not enough, and you can't make it on that. He said, well, the company was not familiar with the capacities of these people that had come into them, and he felt that they would do better, we'd get more when they saw that we were able to make.

[0:43:34] Well, in the end of the first 15 months – that was a temporary contract we had – this \$75 that they were giving me, they went ahead and counted up all that it had come to and wanted to make me salary from then on about sixty-some dollars. I wrote out my resignation.

[0:44:01] And the supervisor wrote to them, and they made a change. They didn't do what they were supposed to do. And then after that, they increased me. And they made certain changes in the contract sometimes, but I built the organization up to the point where I was making over \$10,000 a year. That was way back then.

[0:44:28] And some of the officers of the – most of the officers in the home office didn't like to see that, because some of them were not making that, you see? And they made some changes in my contract [unintelligible]. I accepted it. And at the end of the next year, I still earned the \$10,000. So they wanted to make a change again. I said, oh, I'll carry you to court.

[0:44:56] And so we fussed on that for quite a while, and they went through with it. And I got a lawyer to contest what they'd done, and finally, we settled for \$13,500. They just gave me that, you see? And I was fired for making too much.

Interviewer: Now, moving along, in May of 1934, you're in Kansas City, and you said you were persuaded to accept a manager's contract for the development of a special ordinary department.

[0:45:43]

Respondent: That's what I'm talking about now.

Interviewer: That's the same one you're talking about, right?

Respondent: Mm-hm.

Interviewer: Okay, now, after that, what did you start doing? You'd gotten fired, right?

Respondent: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: What was your next effort?

[0:45:58] You've still got to take care of that family.

Respondent: Oh yeah, well, that's 1934, wasn't it?

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Oh yeah, I went with – no, I talked about Atlanta Life. Well, that was in '34 when...

[0:46:25] I accepted that in '34, and that went on for 20-some years. And this is 1952 when I received a letter – and my contract was canceled in 1952.

[0:46:59]

Interviewer: Now, I see a picture – this is '46. They're having a banquet at your home. What is the celebration all about? The banquet. What are you celebrating?

Respondent: As a matter of fact, I started in the general insurance business some years back, and I had to get my insurance cases as a broker [unintelligible].

[0:47:36] And Dr. Blunt was the first negro that had been elected to the Kansas legislature, and he spent a term there, and next, we had Bill Towers. And we received, through their help, an agency connection with the Preferred Fire Insurance Company.

[0:48:02] And in celebrating that, we threw a banquet, I believe it was about the 22nd of January, 1946, and invited quite a number of guests there. And that was what that was all about. And there's another thing.

[0:48:27] I had no idea of making any mention of a bank at all, because that hadn't been on my mind. I was thinking about this insurance business and how fortunate we were to get a [unintelligible]. But in making a talk to the group, I said, we need a bank in this town.

[0:48:56] And we need a bank. I don't know why I said it, because it wasn't part of my plan. And then that was all.

Interviewer: I know it was banks at that time, but do you have any idea how many banks were operating?

Respondent: About 11, all over the country. Only 11. We thought it was 12, but found out the Bank of Tuskegee was not operating. So it was only 11, all over the United States. And I'll get to that pretty soon too.

[0:49:27] So that was the purpose of that. Now, this man Jim Brown that you heard about, I said, Jim, we're going over – and I want you to go to town with me, and I'd like for you to meet a fellow by the name of [Butler Dissman]. At that particular time, the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company has been incorporated. And I was a founder of that company.

[0:49:57] And so all of that is in there. And so we went by to see Butler Dissman, and I made this statement to him. He asked me, how is the Sentinel Loan and Investment Company [coming along]? I said, fine, we just put in an application to increase our stock. And I said, and one of these days, we're going to have a bank in this time. That's the second time that I mentioned it. And he said, now, Sewing, you're coming down my alley.

[0:50:28] That's what you ought to do. And I told him three to five years. He said three to five years is too late. You ought to do it now. And so when we left that office, I said, Jim, I want you to go by the library and get the Tuskegee yearbook, and we'll read up on the banks that operate. And we did that, started that, and went to Topeka. We didn't know who the banking director was there, but we went to his office and finally looked at the bulletin board – not bulletin board, but the names, you know?

[0:51:08] And saw where he was an all that and went there and talked with him [unintelligible] the bank. And we said to him that we know that there's already too many banks in Kansas City, but we also know that a large segment of the population of Kansas City doesn't have adequate banking services, and you know the reason for that as well as we do.

[0:51:36] And we just hit that. Then he said, well, do you know Willie [unintelligible]? I said yes, I was cochairman with him at the Negro College Fund. He said, well, he's a member of this board. He'll have a whole lot to say about it, and I suggest you talk with him. And we talked with him. That's where that started.

Interviewer: Let me ask you this.

[0:51:58] That's the first beginning, how you just first started. I saw also here where you even went to the library, you were gathering information.

Respondent: That was when I sent Jim to do that.

Interviewer: Right.

Respondent: Now you will find in that connection, after we started, that we were having it, I made a trip covering eight banks in the United States of America.

[0:52:27] Have we got to that?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: Okay, I made that trip, getting that vital information, and that trip was more beneficial than anything I'd ever done.

Interviewer: Were you financed by someone else? Did someone help pay your way back, paying for your bus fare or your room? Or you did this on your own?

Respondent: Yes, I've always been a good salesman, you see.

[0:52:54] And we had elected an organizing committee, Sherman Scruggs, who was one you might have heard of, that name. [unintelligible] and some number of us. And I went to them, and I said to them, let's each one of us put up or make a pool of money, and when we do sell stock, we'll give you credit on it, see? And they put up the money for me to make this trip. And the second place that I stopped was at the office of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company to let them know what I'd done.

[0:53:34] And then I got information from all of these eight banks that was very vital. Very vital. And we had planned to have \$125,000 total capital [unintelligible]. We were advised to get \$168,750, so we changed it there. We had a man set up for cashier. He was in his sixties. We were told that he was too old to begin, because he'd have a whole lot of study to do.

[0:54:03] He was a friend of mine.

Interviewer: What was his name?

Respondent: C.S. Matthews. And I contacted him, got him to agree not to be cashier. Well, those were some days that we had. When we first started, we were soliciting stock, a subscription. We solicited 180,000, and we got ready to turn it into money, most of that stock went by the wayside.

[0:54:30]

Interviewer: Would you mind if I read a prayer that you have in your book?

Respondent: Help yourself.

Interviewer: Now, this is during the time that you had found the cashier. This is talking about the cashier.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: It's after you return. This is after you return to Kansas City on July 23, 1946.

[0:54:58] This is when you had a lot of valuable information from those eight banks. And it says, I uttered this prayer. Lord, we find that we need a technically trained man for cashier for our team. Lord, you know him. Where can he be found? We are asking that you will guide our steps to him and provide us with the means and power to attract him to our team. In other words, Lord, you

call him, and we will select whom you call. Please, Lord, let your will be done in this as it is done in Heaven.

[0:55:34] I didn't know that was there.

Interviewer: Yes, it is. It sure is. And then it's another picture, where the company moved from the building to the Masonic building and its first expansion. And they have different people there. And here you are, right?

Respondent: Yeah, that's right.

[0:55:57] Well, we got Ephraim C. Ewing. That's was the young man that we got as cashier.

Interviewer: And this was the Masonic building?

Respondent: Yeah, right there on the corner.