

INTERVIEWEE: James Moss

INTERVIEWER: Melanie May?

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Ma: My name is (Melanie May?) and I'm at William H. Turner Technical High School on March 22, 2002 to interview-- could you spell your name for me please? Could you--?

Moss: Yeah, of course. J-A-M-E-S M period M-O-S-S.

Ma: James M. Moss, right? Okay. I'm here to interview Mr. Moss about his personal history. Could you explain to me when and where you were born please sir?

Mo: I was born in the Bahamas- Nassau, Bahamas.

Ma: Mm-hmm.

Mo: My mother sent me to a little island about 365 miles southeast I think it is of Nassau to my grandmother. What an experience. And while there, I attended school- elementary school. I attended school there on-- in Crooked Island. The first white man I ever seen, I was about nine years old. And it was a shocking experience to me, you know? Here's this person-- I have never seen any person like this person. And the contrast between this person and myself and the people in my community was quite amazing, different. He was standing in the sun, and I could look at him and it looked as though blood was gonna come out of him, that's what it looked like to me, you know, in the sun But, quickly I got adjusted to that because he was a-- what you call it? A person that goes around, a minister that goes around and speak? Um, well, he was someone that was more or less carrying

the gospel-- missionary, that's the word. He was a missionary and he spoke that night, and I really enjoyed what he said. Oh yeah, but that's my experience with a white man. And after leaving Crooked Island, I came back to Nassau with my mother. My mother had sent me up there, you know, and I came back with my mother and it wasn't long- my father who was here in Miami- sent for me. And I came here to Miami. Now, I hope I'm not going too far because you got some questions you wanna ask and I would like to kind of stay within your boundaries, because I can go on and on with this kind of thing., okay?

Ma: Okay, when you moved to Miami, what-- what was your community like. Did you like it, did you dislike it? What things went on everyday?

Mo: Okay, when I first land-- land at Thirty-Sixth Street- at the airport at Thirty-Sixth Street- oh, and saw all of lights and whatsnot-- in Crooked Island mind you, not in Nassau-- (but let's go back through time?) In Crooked Island-- when I was a boy in Crooked Island, there was no lights at all, no lights. The only lights you see at night is lamp lighters, that was it okay? But Crooked Island was a beautiful place and I always wished after I become a man and have my children, I wish they were able to experience that kind of experience that I have enjoyed while I was in Crooked Island, you know, going fishing and doing a whole lot of nature things was such a beautiful thing and I just realized how beautiful it really was when I'd come to this big city, that's how I, you know--anyway, back to in Miami now. When I got to the airport, I saw all the lights and I was more or less happy and felt pretty good, you know, coming to the big lights and whatsnot and my father took me in the car and we were driving, as we driving around we were talking and suddenly I noticed the light is diminishing. (One, one?) lights, you know? And when I got down in Redland, my father said, "You see that light over there?"

I said, "Yes sir." "There where you gonna be living." Almost like what I experienced in Crooked Island. I say just where I came from, Nassau with all the lights and come here to live in a place like Crooked Island. However, it was quite different. And while living in Redland, I-- I worked with the Dade-County Park Department for awhile.

Ma: How old were you?

Mo: Uh, seventeen.

Ma: Seventeen years old? So, um, was there a problem with integration in your community at the time?

Mo: Oh yeah, there was a problem with integration. I first-- I encountered se-- not integration, problem with segregation. I encountered my first problem with segregation in Homestead, Florida. There, I usually take a bus from Homestead to Miami because I wanted to, you know, I always wanted to come to Miami with the lights, I wanted-- on the weekends, I wanted to come to Miami. And I discovered that when I go to the bus stop, right? I get-- first of all to get your ticket, you have to stand on the outside on the porch and wait until the lady who is serving the tickets sees you, then she would come and ask you what you want and then you would say, "Well, I'll need-- I'd like to have a ticket to go to Miami", and then she'd go get the tickets and bring it back to you, okay? Because you were not allowed to go in there to get your ticket. That's the first bad experience that I encountered. Secondly, when I get to the bus, I noticed that you have to-- everybody in line of course, but I noticed that the bus driver would take the tickets from all the white people and I got my tickets right in his eye. And he takes the tickets from all the white folks and when he gets all the white folks into the bus, then he'll take mine; that was my second experience with segregation after coming from the Bahamas.

Ma: And so that's the most important thing that you remember about segregation--?

Mo: Oh no-- [both speak at the same time]

Ma: -- or was there anything else?

Mo: -- that's not the most important thing. You know, segregation was here day and night, you understand what I mean? It wasn't here today and kind of go down south tomorrow and you have a chance to do something else. Segregation was here day and night, so you experience that day and night. The only time you didn't experience segregation and it-- which was a segregation thing-- segregated thing is when you were in your community with all your black people in your community and you don't-- there was no segregation there among you but you must still always be in mind, you were segregated because you were in that group of people there, different from other groups, okay? And then I experienced segregation at my job working with Bell Telephone Company. I got the job with Bell Telephone Company and Bell, as you know, at that time it was called Southern Bell Telephone Company, it wasn't called Bell South those days. And this was a company that includes all of the southern states, all of the southern states was in this company and the mother company for all of these southern states and all the other states in the United States was AT&T and it's just breaking up here this I think the Supreme Court had it all broken up here not so long ago. Well, there was no more of this big-time company. And I got a job with Bell. And in working with Bell, I would notice in the bulletin- you know the bulletin- the different changes, the different position and-- that needs someone or the different area that might need someone and so I thought maybe I would like to have-- I would like to kind of improve myself by trying to get a promotion. So, I would get the application and file the application only to find my application-

because my job all you could do at that time-- in those days as a black person was to clean up, you know? I would find my application in the trash can the next morning, you understand? My application that I filed I would find in the trash can because they-- this was the way of them trying to keep you back, hold you down, okay? And you had no recourse-- there was no recourse, you can't, you know-- it's no use to talking to anyone about what has happened. No, because they was of the same kind and so you were (cutted?) more or less (down?) That doesn't say that in this-- all this America there weren't some real, nice, concerned white people. There were a whole lot of concerned white people, nice white people in America, but in this south-- in southern America, there was some devils.

Ma: Do you remember going to Virginia Key Beach? Did you-- [both speak at the same time]

Mo: Oh yes, I remember Virginia Be-- Key Beach. You were not (?) allowed to go into any-- go on any beach--beaches in Dade County, the-- matter a fact, not in Florida. All the beaches were off limit to black people, alright? So, in order to pacify black people, they decided they would open this thing called 'Virginia Beach.' You had to take a boat and go over there, and this was a beach that set aside for black people. So, I could remember that because I, you know, I've been on that beach many times.

Ma: Did you ever attend any football games at the Dixie Stadium in Dorsey Park?

Mo: [laughs] Oh yes. I was a bad boy, too, I remember jumping the wall once. [both laugh] Yes, I attended the football games there, yes.

Ma: What was the best game that you ever visited?

Mo: What was the best game?

Ma: Yes.

Mo: Well I don't know if I can recall which one was the best game. I always was tight with the-- my thing was Booker T.- Booker T. Washington- and on the turkey day, you know, that was my thing. And I always was a more or less-- Booker T. was my team, so it's kind of hard for me say which was the best game.

Ma: Was it really named the 'Dust Bowl'? Was it really nicknamed the 'Dust Bowl'?

Mo: Yes, that's what you used to call it, the Dust Bowl.

Ma: Oh. Did your family ever visit the Hampton House Hotel?

Mo: I have, not the hotel itself. There was a nightclub downstairs in the hotel. Me being a saxophonist- I play saxophone- me being a saxophone--saxophonist, I had played there at the Hampton House, yeah.

Ma: How old were you when Martin Luther King was assassinated?

Mo: I don't know. After you get married and start having children, you forget about keeping up with the age, okay? [May chuckles] The important thing about anything there is to take care of a family- I mean I'm talking about a man, I'm not talking about them other people, I'm talking about a man- the most important thing to any man after he gets married is try to take care of his family and age and all of that become secondary and I can't tell you how old I was when Martin Luther-- me, I can take figures and stare at a piece of paper and figure it out about how old I was at that time but I mean, right off my head I couldn't tell you that, but I could remember the day.

Ma: Did you ever get to meet him in person?

Mo: Uh, see him from a distance, yes; shook his hand, no. You know, everybody wants to meet King, so it was a hard thing for anyone to go to meet him. It's not that he

wouldn't like to meet you, but so many people wanted to meet him, if he just decided that he was gonna just shake everybody's hand, maybe he wouldn't be able to raise his hand up the next morning, you know what I mean? [May chuckles] Okay.

Ma: What do you remember about the early days of integration?

Mo: Early days of what?

Ma: Early days of integration? When--[both speak at same time]

Mo: Yes, I could remember the early days of integration. I could remember when it's-- where it got started in the school with Father Theodore Gibson's son, and I think it was one of the first young person to go to (?) in elementary school to start integration. And that was something indeed because everybody was kind of frightened about that also. In some of the early days about integration, I could remember (?) now at Bell Telephone Company after the Supreme Court passed the law- Brown versus something, I forgot what it is, Brown versus--

Ma: --Board of Education.

Mo: Right! After the Supreme [laughs] Court passed that law, I decided that I would write a letter to the manager of Bell Telephone Company and-- stating that I think it was time for me to get into the mainstream of the company, because I was still- eighteen years now, I've been there then- still doing janitor work. No black people was in any kind of position with Bell Telephone Company at that time. No operators, no engineers, no-- not even truck drivers, okay? So I wrote a letter to the manager and telling the manager that I thought it's about time I get in the mainstream of Bell Telephone Company. So, he wrote me a letter and asked me to come take a test- and this is why I like to emphasize this, I like to make sure that you young people understand it- this is why it is always good to be

prepared, don't waste your time with foolishness, prepare yourself so if anything should come down- the (hopper?) so to speak- you'll be ready to grasp it, okay? Prepare yourself. He wrote me a letter and told me to come take the test. I took the test, I passed the test, okay? So, now after I passed the test, he sent me to a central office. Bell central office are the offices that you connect all the telephones for everybody within that area, like if you're in the Six-Three Area, each one of these numbers-- Six-Three Area, the Eight-Nine Area, the Seven-Five Area, they have a different central office, and what they mean by that, those are the places where all the telephones connected and all (connections are?), okay? So, I was sent to the Six-Three Area- my cousin and I- the two first black, two first black. And when we got down there that morning, all the white people was outside I guess to see who these two first-- two blacks are coming here to work. And I told my cousin I said, "Well, we have quite an audience this morning." So we went in there-- we went in the building, there was no disturbing, no one tried to hurt us or anything. Well, (?) guess wanted to-- it was a strange thing, it was a new thing, it was no black people working in that office. So, we went to work in that office. After eighteen years working for Bell Telephone Company, we were sent there. My payroll went up \$40 a week more than it was for the eighteen years I was there, okay? Plus, this was called an entrance job, so you see how far back they were holding me? This was called an entrance job after eighteen years and with the little \$1, \$2 they promoted me. This was called an entrance job and I was making \$40 more than eighteen years worth of work a week.

Ma: What are your thoughts on the changes that were made in the 1950s and '60s?

Mo: What is my thought on what?

Ma: On the 1950s and '60s- the changes that were made?

Mo: (They made?). I think we have made tremendous changes, we have done very well, some of our people have really held the line pretty good. But, you know, there's always room for more, and we gotta do more. And what is so sad to me, today's-- I see so many of our young men, particularly, wasting their time and finding themselves in prison. This bothers me. I think it would really bother Martin Luther King if he was alive, because King never even dreamed that this kind of thing would happen, you know? He knows that some people would go astray, yes, but it seems this is a massive thing with young black men. Every time you look in the newspaper, somebody's shot, somebody (done did this?) sixteen and seventeen years old, you know? And I think maybe-- I don't know what I can do, but whatever I can do, I'm going to try to do to help young people. I am the president of the Bahamian-American Federation- a non-profit organization- and we trying to do some things with scholarships and whatnot, trying to help young people to improve themselves and I would like for you young people- especially you young girls- let me tell you the power of wom--wom--wom--womanhood. Women can change men, really. Women can change men because for some reason, we men have a soft heart for women and when women talk we kind of bend around and (?) sometimes, but we kind of still moving to the direction that they would like to see us and I would say to you young girls, maybe you all need to talk to some of these young boys and talk to them about character, about future, and things like that, see what you can do. And young men- those of you who have some point in life and who are thinking about doing something, talk to your friends about-- let's try to improve the (?) of ourselves instead of finding ourselves in prisons and all that kind of stuff. It's better to go in the Army. My lord, if you shooting

that man, join-- go to the Army, go in the Navy or something, do something with yourself. Yes, ma'am.

Ma: [chuckles] Okay, I would like to thank you for coming out to be interviewed to [inaudible].

Mo: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW