

INTERVIEWEE: Athalie Range

INTERVIEWER: Vanessa (Lamestri?)

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TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

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Unknown: Stop shuffling (?) because every time you move, you hear [knock]. You're on.

(Lamestri?): Hi, my name is Vanessa (Lamestri?) and I am at Turner Technical Arts High School in the Information Center and I'm interviewing-- can you please say your name and spell it?

Range: Yes, my name is Athalie. That's spelled A-T-H-A-L-I-E, the last name R-A-N-G-E.

L: Miss Range?

R: That is correct.

L: Okay, I'm going to interview you on the Civil Rights today.

R: Sure.

L: My first question is when were you born?

R: I was born on the seventh day of November in the year of nineteen hundred fifteen.

L: And where were you born?

R: In Key West, Florida.

L: Can you describe what it was like to live in Key West, Florida?

R: Well, as a very young child, Key West was a very enjoyable place. We had lovely beaches. You see, Key West is a small peninsula surrounded by water on either side and [clears throat] everybody lived very near the beach because Key West was small place and we had churches, we had schools, we had movie theaters, everything that one would want. And as a very small child, all I can remember about Key West was very pleasant memories because we left there when I was quite young.

L: Okay. What was your family like?

R: We had-- I had five sisters and brothers, mother and father. My mother was a house wife; she did not work out in service. My father worked at several jobs, he was not an educated man, but he was able to make a living. He worked in a cigar factory, he worked in an ice plant, [school bell rings] and he worked building the oldest hotel that now stands in Key West, Florida- first name was the Casa Marina Hotel.

L: Okay. What is your nationality?

R: I am an American of Bahamian parentage. My mother and father were born in Key West, my grandparents and those preceding them were all born in Nassau, Bahamas.

L: Okay, being that the time you were raised and the time that your parents were raised in Key West, Florida, that was at time when segregation occurred, how was it like growing up, I mean, were you confused, how were you feeling?

R: Uh, that-- that was-- that is not quite an accurate statement. Segregation had no meaning, almost no place in the dictionary in those days. It was not until the latter years after we came to Miami, it was almost in the '40s or '50s that segregation and discrimination were really, really became problems.

L: When did you move to Miami, Florida?

R: Moved to Miami in 1923 and of course then, it was just an accepted fact: black people lived in one area, white people lived in another area and there were no uprisings like we have now. There were no uprisings because I think everybody understood and so what I'm really trying to say, I'm not saying that things were equal, but I am saying that things were accepted. Whites stayed on their side, and we stayed on our side and got along fine.

L: Did your family, like, were they-- did they have any, not prejudice but were they-- I mean how did they feel towards this act?

R: Well, I think it's important to realize- even though I didn't realize it then- that one of the reasons my father decided to leave Key West because the Ku Klux Klan organization became visible, not really active but they became visible in Key West and I remember very clearly on an evening that we were sitting out on the front porch after supper and we were very small children, that something had happened between a black person and a white American, I believe, it might have been Cuban because there were many Cubans in the area at the time, and as a result, a man was killed. Now, my memory doesn't serve me that far back but I do know that these are the facts and shortly after that, even though no uprising came out of this, shortly after that, the Ku Klux Klan began marching through the streets at night and my father said he never wanted us to have to see such a procession of evil-doers, so we moved from Key West to Miami.

L: With your father wanting you not to see such an evil thing go on, have you ever encountered a Klansperson?

R: Not the distance I am from you.

L: Right.

R: I saw them, I've read of their activities all over the country, but I had no reason to be in immediate contact because I was still quite a young child.

L: Living in Miami and going to high school in Miami, how was it like to know that you were not able to drink from certain things that whites were able to drink from, or you were not able to live equally as whites were able to?

R: That came on in my late-teens. In the schools, we knew that we were not being given the complete opportunities that whites were given because we had to use books that had been refused from the white schools that were worn out, that was when schools were furnishing books, I don't know whether they do that anymore or not, but our buildings were not up to par. I remember as a very young woman when my children began going to the Liberty City Elementary School, that school was located on Northwest Sixtieth Street and Seventeenth Avenue and it was just a large group of portables that had been rejected- - you know what portables are?

L: Right.

R: They had been rejected and brought out there and just put there for black children who [school bell rings] their families beginning to move into Liberty City and it was a period of almost twenty-one years before we were able to get a school built for us. At that time, I was president of the Parent-Teacher Association.

L: Besides the president of the Parent-Teacher Association, where you in any other kind of activities?

R: I eventually- after having been a member of the Parent-Teacher Association for some sixteen years- I eventually got into politics, but that was bringing us up to the mid-'60s,

you see a lot happened between that time, but I became the first black person to be elected to the Miami City Commission in 1964 or five.

L: With all the national efforts to bring Civil Rights to African-Americans, how did it make you feel to see that they were trying real hard?

R: Well, certainly because there's an old adage that says, "Taxation without Representation" is not good, and so when blacks began to rise up and said, "We want to be represented as well as taxed", I felt very good about it. That was one of the reasons that I became interested in the political arena here in our city. People all over the country by that time- this was the very early '60s- were stepping up, being elected to office, and of course, I think along those lines, we've made great progress.

L: Just being curious, did you ever come across meeting Martin Luther King?

R: Yes. Yes, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. King. He came here to Miami on several occasions and of course whenever he came, it was quite a privilege to be able to get into the church to hear him speak.

L: How did his speech make you feel? Were you--?

R: Well, it gave hope, it gave a lot of hope because by that time, we were really feeling the painful throws of segregation. Our schools as I said were not up to par, we were being discriminated against in jobs, we could not go to Miami Beach, we had no where to swim, that is why even today, I am chairing a committee that's trying to bring Virginia Key Beach back. You see, people your age would no absolutely nothing about Virginia Key Beach but that was-- there was a time when we had a very lovely beach on Virginia Key and it was given to us because of segregation; we could not mingle with the whites. Consequently, they gave us a Virginia Key Beach over there to swim in, have our

entertainment. And now at this late date, there are groups who are working to take over Virginia Key Beach, but we're working a little harder and in a few years, your going to be able to go to Virginia Key Beach and really enjoy yourself.

L: My English teacher told me about Virginia Key Beach and she told me, you know, it's very nice, beautiful beach.

R: Yes. Yes, that's right.

L: Being that time has changed, do think that segregation has made a difference? Do you think that it had changed over the years, or do you feel that it's really the same way, just-- ?

R: Well, it's not really the same way, but I don't know whether it has had the complete effect that many of us had hoped for. You see now that our neighborhoods have been broken up, we are very willing to pass over the poor neighborhoods and move into other neighborhoods, I don't mean just for living purposes but I mean, you would much rather go to South Beach than you would to the Lyric Theater.

L: Right.

R: Because the Lyric Theater is very limited, so what we're doing, we are still-- we're mingling freely, but the capital of it, the finances and everything else is not doing the total black community any good. That's what I'm trying to get to.

L: It's not-- do you think it'll take a-- you know, some more time for us to be equal?

R: I think it's a long ways off, I really do. I don't think I will live to see the day. I trust that perhaps your children or your grandchildren will. [both speak at the same time]

L: Being that--

R: But as far as finances is concerned which is the top (word?) in this country, it's going to take us a long, long time before we'll be equal on those lines.

L: You say that it will take a long time, but do you think that within this period of time, you think that it'll have to be something big that's gonna happen for us to be equal or you think it'll just-- time will pass by?

R: I am seriously hoping that as time passes that we will grow into what we would consider our rightful places in society. I would hope that it would not be something like the story of the mutiny on the bounty or something where blood has to be shed. I think we've passed those-- hopefully we've passed those days.

L: Right. I know this tape has been short, but is there anything that you would like to share?

R: I think I've probably talked out of words. [both laugh] I think you've asked some very interesting questions.

L: Thank you.

R: And it's my pleasure to be here with you.

L: Well I appreciate and thank you for coming here today to be interviewed and, you know, take care.

R: Alright, thank you very much.

L: Thank you.

R: Alright.

**END OF INTERVIEW**