

Title: Key West Oral History Interview with J. "Bill" Cassidy

INTERVIEWEE: William J. Cassidy

INTERVIEWER: Albert Key

TRANSCRIBER: Andrea Benitez

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Key: This is Albert (L.?) Key interviewing Mr. Bill Cassidy at Cassidy's Grocery Store here in Key West, Florida at 1128 Packer Street. Mr. Cassidy, how long have you been operating this Cassidy's Grocery Store?

Cassidy: This will be my twentieth year.

K: Can you give me your full name and your date of birth?

C: William Joseph Cassidy. I was born March 17, 1912.

K: Can you give me something of your family background? Tell me, you're a Conch, where your parents came from?

C: My parents were born in Key West. Their parents came from Nassau on my mother's side. Now, my father came here during the Spanish-American War from New Britain, Connecticut and he served in the Spanish-American War in Cuba. Then he came back here. My mother was married to him at the time he was (doing duty?) in the Spanish-American War. Now, as the years went by, we-- papa moved to Chester, Pennsylvania during the First World War. And we went up there, I think, 1918 when I was six years old. Papa died during the flu epidemic and we came back in 1919 to Key West. My mother worked at the cigar factory at the (?) Cigar Factory, which was located where the Hibiscus Motel is today- on the corner of Simonton and United. And there was three of us when papa died: two sisters and I and my mother.

K: What are your sister's names, Bill?

C: Well, those that (?) when papa died and left were Nathalie, Clara, and myself. There were (more of us?) living in Miami. Well, Nathalie got married and left Clara, mother, and I. And things got so bad in '25 that we moved to Tampa where we lived up until '29 when the Depression hit. Boy, they were rough days.

K: You going to school at the time? How old were you, Bill?

C: At that time-- let's see, we moved to Tampa in '25, I was thirteen years of age. We lived in Tampa. And I worked at a dairy in Tampa, also. And my mother worked at the cigar factory (?). In '29, mama lost her job and things got bad so I hitchhiked from Tampa to Miami, stayed there awhile and then I came down here (try and assist?) sister Nathalie, she was (farming?) back then. Things got bad here, I went back to Miami. And in 1933, I bluffed my way aboard a ship this guy was (?). The (*Glad Mary?*) running out of Havana-- rather Miami to Havana and I stayed with (*Glad Mary?*) 'til '36. One is (?) and another is (?). And I quit the (*Glad Mary?*) in '36 and I went to work for (?) and I worked there all during the summer-- part of the winter and the summer of '37 in New York. Then in '37, (?) go back to Key West with intentions of going back to sea again but I didn't. And I went to work for (Adams Dairy?). I worked for (Adams Dairy?) from November of '37 to the last of 1955 when I decided to open up a grocery store. This grocery store, which I am in today. And it's quite an experience since I've been here in this grocery store, to see the politicians come in here. (Oh, we'd have quite a while there?) everybody (would get food?). And everybody-- we had (higher than?) forty-two people here at one time. And the back (road?) brings them there and we'd roast a hog in the back (?). We had grouper chowder, we had conch chowder, we had piaya. And I learned down through the years that the politicians, the only time you see them is during a week or two before elections. And well after that, you don't hear no more. (?) the next time elections come around. Mr. (Gov.?), you don't see him. And those that get elected, (?) election. You need some little favor or something, (and you don't return the favor?) (?). It won't get you right now but sooner or later it's going to (?). And I found out outside of two politicians, (all are out for the latter?). (And those?) before election, during election, after election (for anybody?).

K: So that-- you're in effect saying that this is exactly what you have learned over the years with regards to politicians?

C: I don't know. I guess what I've seen of the politicians, they're not for the better for the community, all they're looking out is for themselves and I got to-- I've gotten disgusted with them. I say I'm not gonna vote, but (I go right and?) vote anyhow. Maybe this guy is better than the one I voted for the last time, he's in it for himself. But it don't turn out that way. After nearly six months in office, they get into the groove (and then they are?) just as bad. They don't work for the better of the community.

K: You don't see anything going on?

C: I don't see it. I don't see it. And it's wrong.

K: And since they don't come around, you can't talk with them, you don't know what they're--

C: They don't want to come around.

K: They're afraid to tell you that they're not coming around. [laughs]

C: Well, I feel that-- I feel that we could have had the-- take the (?) one head. But, to me you could have benefited by it, but they (did what--?). This guy want to be king of the aqueduct, this guy want to be king of the election. Who suffers? The community does. So, you know, you just can't trust a politician anymore. And it's not only that way in-- it starts in the city, it goes to the county, it goes to the state, right on up to Washington. The politicians just don't give a damn about the public no more. They've thrown it down the river? to the unions so they can get the vote from the union and that's what's got the country in the fix it is in today is the politicians and the union. Now, I'm not 100% against the unions, the unions have done a lot of good but the unions have gotten too powerful. They tell the politicians what to do because the politicians went along with them. (?) if you can believe it. The union and the politicians got we in the jam we are today.

K: Um, your married Bill and I know that you have a couple of sons. Can you tell me your wife's name and maiden name and give me the names of sons and daughters?

C: My wife's name- when she married- she was Esther (?). She was born and raised in Key West. I have three sons with-- uh, three children with Esther: William (?)--  
[audio cuts off]

**END OF INTERVIEW**