

Commons for Justice Project

Goombay Festival

Narrators: Thelma Gibson and Fredericka Brown

Interviewers: Mikeya Brown, Nathalie Guevara, and Aarti Mehta-Kroll

Date: 05/30/2022

[0:00:05] Mikeya Brown: Good morning. This interview is being conducted for the FIU CFJ project. The interviewer is me, Mikeya Brown. I'm a resident of Coconut Grove and also, I work with Hope Through Art, LLC.

[0:00:24] Nathaly Guevara: My name is Nathaly Guevara. I am a recently graduated FIU graduate student.

[0:00:30] Aarti Mehta-Kroll: Aarti Mehta-Kroll, doctoral student in the Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies at Florida International University.

[0:00:39] Mikeya Brown: The narrators with us today is—

[0:00:42] Fredericka Simmons Brown: Fredericka Simmons Brown.

[0:00:46] Thelma Gibson: Thelma Andersen Gibson.

[0:00:48] Mikeya Brown: The interview is taking place at Christ Episcopal Church, in Miami, Florida, on May 30, 2022. To open up, I want to ask you ladies, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Gibson, tell me about your life here in Coconut Grove.

[0:01:10] Thelma Gibson: Well, I think I should start and I'm the oldest, Fredricka. Miss Brown was born—I'm Thelma Anderson Gibson born here in Coconut Grove on December 17, 1926, and I was baptized in this church on March 20, 1927, when I was three months old. I'm a true native delivered by a midwife. And so, my navel spring is right here in Coconut Grove, and I think I have a passion for Coconut Grove, and I don't ever say I'm from Miami; always been from Coconut Grove and I grew up here and all of my young life was spent on Charles Avenue—3382 Charles Avenue—and I stayed there until I was an adult; went away to nursing school, came back and stayed there while I worked [0:02:00] and finally moved when the veterans had some houses built in between eighties—for veterans and my uncle in law had bought one of those houses and he came to me and he said, "Thelma, I've got a house in Richmond Heights. Richmond Heights too far, and I could give it to you if you paid three-hundred dollars down and they only have to pay twenty-nine dollars a month." And in 1950, it's the first time I really left Coconut Grove to live somewhere else other than when I went away to school. And so, it's been a ride for me. I remember when Ms. Brown was born we were so excited because the first twins that we knew about—she and her brother—were born and they lived right down the street from us at that time on Charles Avenue, the mother did and so it's exciting to be doing this interview today with Mrs. Brown as the other person doing this because we are both Coconut Grovers now. I went to Carver Coconut Grove Elementary School for training—training

for colored—you know, this was colored town back in the day and we had colored town or white town, and I was brought up in Coconut Grove color town and went to what was Coconut Grove Elementary for training school for colored—and that was the name of the school at that time. So, all my elementary school years was spent there and then it was finally changed and when I was in high school to George Washington Carver High School but—this Ms. Brown will tell you she went to Booker T. Washington which is a different thing from going to school in Coconut Grove. I finished when I was seventeen and went at St. Agnes School of Nursing in Raleigh, North Carolina, to do my nurse's training and, fortunately, they had [0:04:00]—Uncle Sam it started the United States Cadet Corps, and I was fortunate enough to become a cadet nurse. And a couple of weeks ago, a picture came out of me on the page in the paper. I saw it when I was nineteen years old when I took this picture and this uniform that they had given us, they gave us a beautiful uniform and I came home, only one time, and those three years I spent in Raleigh, and I took that picture, and that picture has circulated all over the place. Vizcaya did a podcast as you're doing and, apparently, someone from that group gave that picture to the Miami Times and when I saw it, I said, “Oh my God, they showed me when I was just eighteen or nineteen years old and in this cadet uniform.” And so, my life has been one of trying to do whatever I could for the community, and I guess you've heard enough about me right now. I guess you probably have questions about other things that I've been involved with, but I let Miss Brown tell her story.

[0:05:07] Fredericka S. Brown: I'm Fredericka Brown, and I have lived in Coconut Grove all of my life. Thelma and I have similar backgrounds. We choose to stay here. I think we're some of the only people that wanted to remain in Coconut Grove all our lives. My family asked me several times, “Why you choose to stay in the Grove. Why don't you move out?” And I told them, “No, it's just like planting a tree. When you plant a tree, you see it grow up and it remains there until the end.” And that's how I feel about Coconut Grove. Thelma and I have a similar background. We both lived on Charles Avenue at that time. It was the most popular street in the Grove. Everything happened on Charles Avenue. Not that I was born [0:06:00] on Charles Avenue—and it was famous—it was just a popular street for us. We were a small community. Everyone was like a big, happy family. Most of us were left alone because our parents had to work and I had two neighbors—I kept my grandchildren all the time—I had two neighbors, but there they were, my great grandparents—Miss Josephine Walker and Miss Ellen Stirrup. When my mother went to work, those two ladies took care of us like we were their grandchildren and all the families in Coconut Grove, growing up as a child, they had an interest in all of us. We couldn't get any trouble, into any trouble, because they knew it before we went home and I say, “Doc, how did they know that already?” And how they communicated it, I don't know, because there were no telephones, no cell phones at that time. So, they just had connections, I guess. And as Thelma said, this part of the Grove—which is known as the End of the Grove—was connected with what we call the White Grove, which is now called Coco Walk, or what have you, or main highway. So, we had an easy way to get to White Grove if we choose to do so. And as Thelma has said before, and I don't want to repeat what she said, it's because we just like have similar backgrounds living in the Grove as children. One thing I can say about the Grove, and I tell my grandchildren, “Please, if you just remain here, you'll find out that it's centrally [0:08:00] located. You can get from point A to point B”; when my friends visit me coming from other

places and I pick them up from the airport, they say, "Gee, you got here fast!" And I say "Well, I don't live too far from the airport its right down the street." They can't believe it. And when I'm going other places, I get there first. They say, "How did you get here so fast?" I live centrally and I got here fast, and I really think that's why most people are trying to move into the Grove because they found out that it is centrally located. Believe me, it is. As Thelma has said, we all attended segregated schools, but it was a learning experience for me, and I tried to pass it on to my grandchildren to know that everyone is human. We're all here for a purpose and a reason, and maybe that was our reason so that we can be connected with each other. I enjoy my days—as you see, I'm still here. They can't move me with the bulldozer. And I love the Grove. I went to Carver, as Thelma has said, and it was the colored school then. Fortunately, my three—my brother and my sister—they were three of us attended Booker T Washington High School. We graduated from that school and at that time Booker T. was the well-known Black school. I love the Grove and I won't give it up. As you know I've been here ninety-something years and my grandchildren are like, "You still want to live here?" Yes. Until I passed away from this earth. And they know that The Grove is my home.

[0:09:59] Mikeya Brown: How has your community evolved [0:10:00] or changed over the years?

[0:10:05] Thelma Gibson: We've had so many changes. I think I need to go back and just let you know that this section was founded by Bahamians who came here and dug out this area, and Charles Avenue used to be named Evangelist Street because that's where the first three churches—colored churches—were founded on that Evangelist Street. First, Macedonia Baptist Church and second St Paul A.M.E. Church, and third was Christ Episcopal Church. And all three of them were in the one block, the 3300 block of Charles Avenue, Evangelist Street at that time. And then it was finally changed to Charles Avenue because the Frow family bought up most of the land around here and Mr. Frow decided that Franklin and Charles and William were named after his sons, and the names of those two streets could never be changed by any municipality. And so, we were in this area founded in 1876, whereas the City of Miami was not founded until 1896, and so always our people know Coconut Grove is very special. And as I said earlier, in 1950 I had the opportunity to live in Richmond Heights but when I got married in 1967, I came back to Coconut Grove. And so, I have been here back as a resident since 1967, and we sat on Franklin Avenue and then never lived anywhere else. I did go away to school when I decided I wanted to get the Bachelor of Science in Nursing. I ended up—I have a story always to tell about something in my life because I wanted to go to the University of Miami and they told me at that time if I found twelve students [0:12:00] and came back they will give us an instructor and he could teach us at another campus because we couldn't go on the University of Miami campus. That was 1955 and so the young man who was a driver's education person who knew a lot of people and he was wanting to go to the University of Miami and I—right now I'm not recalling his name—but he found these students and they gave us an instructor and he taught us in his home for the first semester the English 101, and for the second semester we had another instructor who took us all we went to Booker T. Washington High School, where they

gave him a class room to teach that class. So, I never was able to go to the University of Miami to school, but this young man went, and he was one of the first colored people to get a degree from University of Miami in 1961.

[0:13:02] Mikeya Brown: Well, not to cut you off. Was his name Roy Berry by any chance?

[0:13:06] Thelma Gibson: He was from the Liberty City area.

[0:13:08] Mikeya Brown: Yes.

[0:13:10] Thelma Gibson: It'll come to me.

[0:13:12] Mikeya Brown: Because I've met one and his name is Roy Berry.

[0:13:15] Thelma Gibson: All right. I said that name wouldn't come to me. Right? Oh, but I remember very well that he was the one who got the students together for us. And so, it's amazing that you were—

[0:13:25] Mikeya Brown: He played sports, correct?

[0:13:27] Thelma Gibson: Oh yes.

[0:13:28] Mikeya Brown: Yes. That's who it is. Roy Berry, yes.

[0:13:31] Thelma Gibson: Okay, yes. This is what happened. And then when I got out of nursing school I had specialized training operating room technique, and I wrote to Jackson Hospital. This is 1947, young people. And I wrote to Jackson and said I had graduated—I was coming home in August and I wanted a job in the operating room, and they hired me, they sent me the letter saying that I was being accepted. I got here [0:14:00] in August of 1947, I went to Jackson and said, "I'm Thelma Anderson and I'm a graduate nurse and I'm coming here to work in the operating room." They took one look at me and said, "Oh, nurse Anderson, you can't work in the operating room, but if you work on the colored floors and get some more experience, maybe one day you'll be able to work in the operating room." Well, I decided I wasn't going to do that. I wasn't about to do that. I told Gail, who was my classmate and roommate all throughout Nursing School, she said, "Old gal, come on up to West Palm Beach, you could work in the hospital up here in the operating room." So, I take my little can up to get on the bus and go, getting ready to go on a train. And those days the bus, I went up to West Palm Beach and I went to this Saint Mary's Hospital and, again, like Jackson, they said, "Oh, no, I'm sorry. We don't have any coloreds working in the operating room." So at least you were honest about it. Thank you so much. I came back home, and momma said, "Girl, you got to work. You either go to Jackson or Christian." Look, Christian was a small hospital, and I didn't want to be in no small hospital. I wanted to be in the big hospital. So, I went to work in Jackson in 1947 and really, I enjoyed it. I really had a ball. I really, you know, I don't know where I got it from. God knows, I

don't know where it came from, but I was one of these was going to be Miss Anderson because I say when I was in nursing school, when I turned eighteen, they called us "miss" and they told me we had to call all of our patients Mr. and Mrs, and so that's what I was going to do here. So, all the colored nurses who were there, decided "girl, you're gonna get fired because you a nurse. Why don't you want to be called nurse?" I said, "they don't call the white nurses a 'nurse'. They call them Miss and Mrs. [0:16:00] Why should they call us 'nurse' when they call the white nurses Miss and Mrs.?" So, when the young men—and I had three young men who used to come from Booker T. Washington High School—and they come and I say, "Look, we're gonna, we're gonna respect our patients. Everybody's going to be Mr. and Mrs. and I'm Mrs. Anderson, I'm not a nurse Anderson." So, they had a good time and one of them became a doctor—McKinney, McKinney, McKinney. Dr. Johnson and McKinney—There were three, three of them. But I'm not remembering all of their names, but they said, "Oh, we like to be here when you're here because you make us do things right." And they were coming from Booker T. Washington High School, high school students working to earn money after school. And they really enjoyed it. And I enjoyed the time I was there, and I left in 1949 and you have to know Jackson used to be the city hospital, it was a city hospital until 1949 and in 1949 the county took over. I left it and went to work a year in E.J.L.'s clinic, which was a clinic downtown Miami, and I stayed there a year and then the next year I said "I'll go to Washington. I'm going up North." I really thought I was going up North, going to Washington. You, young people may not realize this, Washington is not up North. Washington is still in the South. I get to Washington. I couldn't work in the operating room in Washington, so I stayed up there one year and worked in the emergency room and I came back and went back to Jackson in 1951 and stayed until 1955. And it wasn't until I was ready to leave there that the laws changed, and they were able to call colored nurses, Miss and Mrs. and I'd never forget the director of nursing, who said to me, "Well you got your wish before you're leaving us." [0:18:00] I say, "Well I didn't do it, the government did it, it took the government to change this culture and so this is how it happened." So, I never worked in the operating room and since that time, you know, I left and in '55 I went to the Health Department, and I worked in the Health Department and that is when I went to University of Miami—I couldn't go there for anything except to wait out somewhere—so I decided had some land down there in Goulds. So, and I went to Teach College at Columbia University just to get the Bachelors of Science in Nursing. And I went to New York in 1959 and then I came back. I worked while I was up there with teenage drug addicts a little hospital in the Bronx called Riverside, where the courts sent all the addicts for treatment. And that was a nice experience. And while I was going to school up there, I was working. They needed a registered nurse at night, so I was able to work at night and still get my classes during the day. So, when I came back home in 1963 and went back to the Health Department, and then I got married in 1967 and I left the Health Department and went to work at Mount Sinai Hospital and was the supervisor of the outpatient clinic at Mount Sinai; then I quit work in 1980 and since that time I've just been involved with the community. My husband died in 1982 and I started the Gibson Memorial Fund, and the rest is history and the rest history. I think I've said enough. Mrs. Brown may want to add her experience to this.

[0:19:51] Fredericka S. Brown: Okay, I think the question was about the changes that have been made in The Grove, and as you know [0:20:00], we were segregated then as Thelma had said,

the colored people lived on this side and the white people lived on that side and behind me, and we really as a child growing up—and I told my children we had our limitations where we can go as colored children—and we couldn't go on their side. They could come over on our side and play with us, but we couldn't go over on their side to play with them. We were really segregated. I said that to say how segregated we were as children and as people. So, in growing up in this little area, we found ways that we could make ourselves comfortable. We had families that cared for us as children and gave us things that we needed—not that we wanted as these young people—that we needed as children. And I was telling my children to see the big change. Now I'm glad I live to see the change because all on my street—I live on Franklin Avenue—I would never see and thought I would never see when the other people which were white, walked down the street free as a bird with their dogs, with their children and everything. And even living in the Grove among us, we were just segregated. But I'm happy that God saved me to see the changes, to see that we are all, regardless of our skin [0:22:00] color, we are all human beings, made and created by God. And this is a big change for me when I see that we had single family homes and I look around, I say, "Wow, another big structure going up." Everything is two family homes, separation by shrubbery. We knew our neighbors. And I said all this to say, we were kind, we spoke to each other, we know each other, we had a feeling for each other. But now I can't. I don't even know my next-door neighbors because they've got a big shrubbery tree here to divide us, I guess, but why live in a neighborhood if you don't want to know your neighbors? And I really have seen a big change, and I mention to my grandchildren every day. I never thought I would live to see what is going on in Coconut Grove on this side—"Colored Town" as it was called—happening now where other people can walk down the street with their dog, their children and I don't think they're being attacked. And as a child, we used to stand on a corner, I tell my grandchildren, because they didn't have no streetlights for us on this side and St James right here and Charles being the main street there, they had a streetlight, so we used to stand on the corner, a group of us, this is how we socialize with each other and the white policemen—because we didn't have any Black skin policemen at that time—and they would tell us, "Niggers go home!" we would say, "Well, we already home." "Well, go in your house!". Not doing anything, just socializing. And thanks to Mr. Robert Dunn he opened up Dew Drop Inn, which was a serving [0:24:00], pharmacy for the community, entertainment for the Black children. And that's where we had to socialize. We were limited, but we made it through the help of God. And Thelma has mentioned many things about how school segregation and what have you. We couldn't go to any of the white schools. We had to go either out of Florida—most of all, my friends went to St. Augustine which Thelma said that she went—and FAMU. Thank God for FAMU. Florida saw that they had a school for children so they open up FAMU for Black children and so they opened up FAMU University and that's where we went and thank God for Mayor McCloud Bethune who saw the necessity for her children, her people, and the children to receive a higher education. And she opened up Bethune-Cookman College and that's where I went. So, it was real segregated, now y'all have such opportunity. You don't need to go out of town; you can stay right here. It's open to you, take advantage of it because I couldn't. So, I have seen a lot of changes.

[0:25:26] Mikeya Brown: And so now we're going to go ahead and allow Nathaly and Aarti to go ahead and ask some questions that they have for you both.

[0:25:39] Nathaly Guevara: All right. I'm going to start off by asking, what are some of the major disasters or crisis events that your community has experienced?

[0:25:48] Fredericka S. Brown: What?

[0:25:50] Nathaly Guevara: Let me repeat again. What are some of the major disasters or crises that your community has experienced?

[0:25:57] Fredericka S. Brown: Okay, as you said, hurricanes [0:26:00] was one of the disasters I remember boarding up several times for hurricanes. And fortunately, our houses were well built with the pine wood, so they didn't fall apart or come down. And now everything is changed. We have types of protection for hurricanes, no-impact windows and what have you. I have really been through some hurricanes and thank God we were all safe and still alive. So, that was one of the disasters. The other disaster, as I said, and I tell my grandchildren, was not being free to eat in restaurants or to partake of anything that was in the other section of town. But we survived and we made it.

[0:27:12] Thelma Gibson: Oh, you want me to. Oh, I'm sorry. You know, it's amazing when you talk about hurricanes, because we as children used to enjoy the fact that we had hurricanes because all the fruit would be on the ground, and we would find ourselves going down the street picking up mangoes or lemon limes off the trees. Avocadoes, pears, or whatever was on the ground. And when the winds came, we were all excited because our houses were built off the ground. And they said the wind went under the house rather than through the house. And so even though we boarded up our windows and had everything protected, we were also excited about going around after the hurricane. And but in this area, it's amazing how we never had [0:28:00] the destruction like they had in so many other areas when they had hurricanes, and it was because of the way the houses were built. And it's amazing to think that as colored children, you know, we couldn't really call it what water fountains and colored bathrooms and white bathrooms and white-water fountains and all of that everywhere. And we were at a time after hurricanes and oh, they're bad as we are. They can do anything and go anywhere. And we were used to some of us having to go to the outside privy and all that kind of stuff. It was an exciting time. And we tried to stay up to see the winds. It's, you know, it just amazes me when I think today of how when the hurricanes are coming, I once I go to bed, I don't worry about what's going on outside. But when I was a child, it was so exciting, because I knew afterwards what we were going to be able to go out and find all around the neighborhood in the soil, as someone who lived just down the street from us had the guava tree and the lime tree that was on right on the street and the land or be in the yard. And we had almonds. And, you know, today you have almond trees, and these children don't know what almonds are. We used to be able to open the almonds and go get the nuts out of the middle of them. And it was just an exciting thing for me to be around after hurricane. Today is a little bit different. The hurricane that we had, that was the real bad one, that really tore up the south in the county where so many homes were lost and so many people had their roofs repaired and that sort of thing. So, fortunately, we had at that time a congressperson, _____??, was on the streets getting people

to bring in food and water and things to supply the families [0:30:00] with the things that they needed in the South, and they couldn't get in the stores because the store was all closed at time. So, after hurricanes, two communities got together and had these food drives and everything going on, they helped all the people survive. And the government came through and they were able to rebuild a lot of the homes. Some people sold out of their area completely, but others stayed in the area.

[0:30:30] Aarita Kroll: A question I have for you both is you mentioned a little bit about how the community came together after the hurricane and helped each other and get through the disaster. So now seeing the way things are and how things have changed, what do you see as the threats to your community today?

[0:30:48] Thelma Gibson: Well, you know, it stayed pretty much the same. We still have people who come together, and we keep our people from other areas now who come in and almost every week they bring food and everything to this church to give out. And it's amazing. But we're sitting here on Sunday at the church. You see people bringing in different items all during the Sundays after service and all the churches, Plymouth Church, especially Plymouth, has been very good at helping to supply the area with stuff so that whenever something happens it seems that the community, churches, and the people in all get together and decide. And, you know, it has changed so much because now this is real. Franklin Avenue, we I call it Millionaire's Row. The houses are now selling for a million-five on Charles—on Franklin Avenue. And we were all, you know, bought—built these little houses were valued at three or four-hundred thousand dollars and now they're up to almost a million dollars. So, where we live, it really has changed to a point where there are very few Blacks still living in the area. But also, I have to tell you that we would call it up until the 1970s and in [0:32:00] 1970 the young people decided that we were Black and Black is beautiful again. This Lord was everywhere, and we were so excited about Black is beautiful. And I say when I was coming up, Black was a cross word and my brothers look at me and say, "Oh, you are Black fool," and I say, "Well, yeah, you weird fool." And we call one a Black _____ ??, you know. And so, it was just amazing when for this ten-year period from 1970 to the 1980 we were Black and then in 1980 another group decided we were African Americans and so we went from being colored or Negro to Black and then Afro American. And the Afro American is the thing that sort of stuck all through the years now. But I always say I just like to be a good American. I'm still just an all-American girl born and on to grow. So that's the way I look at it. But I have always been a Black woman or an African American woman or whatever you want to call me, but it just amazes how things do change over time. But communities have been able to stay together and bring in to help one another.

[0:33:16] Fredericka S. Brown: And to add to what she said during hurricanes, all our neighbors would be concerned about each other, whether we want our windows boarded up or any little thing that they can do to help us survive. And I noticed when the stores were closed, I had one neighbor that went all the way to Fort Lauderdale, but she came back, I mean, she came across and asked me if I needed any ice or anything like that. And I told, "Yes, I needed a bag of ice because the ice was melting," and she bought me two bags. So why I am saying this is because [0:34:00] everyone helped each other.

[0:34:12] Nathaly Guevara: To follow up from that. You said the community helped each other as in the neighbors and everything, what do you think would also help to protect your community from any further threats now?

[0:34:29] Fredericka S. Brown: Further threats?

[0:34:30] Nathaly Guevara: Yes.

[0:34:31] Fredericka S. Brown: Like hurricanes disasters or things like that?

[0:34:32] Nathaly Guevara: Exactly. Yes.

[0:34:35] Fredericka S. Brown: Well, as I have said, I don't know about Thelma, I really don't know my neighbors. That's one big change in the Grove. I would offer help if they would receive it, but we don't even speak to each other. I don't know them. They don't know me. You know, they move in a neighborhood. So, I don't know. Fortunately, we haven't had anything like that. So, we can expand on what would happen. Oh, I don't know because like, we're not helping each other now, you know? I really couldn't say what would be the outcome of what if a disaster should happen, would the neighbors help or would they be selfish? You know, I really couldn't answer that well.

[0:35:27] Thelma Gibson: But we still we still know the Blacks—African Americans in our little block that we live in. But because of what has happened, whites have moved into the area and they're on their own. We have one neighbor who rides a motorcycle and have a car and they just get up and the people in the rooming house across the street and they never speak. So, you never get to know who they are. So, if it wasn't for the Lindseys, who live across the street, Mr. Woods, Mrs. Brown, Gibson and Gibson, Mr. Charles, my grandson [0:36:00]—the six houses right there, and then the one on the corner are the only Black families living there now, everybody else—and then there's another Black family in one of the Simpson houses. But they don't tell, they don't speak, and they don't say anything. They just get in their cars and away they go. Or if they're walking the street, we used to have to say good morning to everybody as we walked the street, everybody in the morning or good afternoon if you're on your way back. But they don't do that today. And there's no neighborliness as far as what we were used to in coming up. But again, things have changed because you have all these gadgets that we never had. I tell people all the time I look at that iPad, I get a lot of stuff on it. I get something from everybody from everywhere, but I don't answer because I don't know how to type, I don't know how to do all that, and I don't want to learn. That's the sad part, I don't want to learn but it's just one of those things; it's exciting to see the way things have changed and what's happening in a community that you like to call your own, you know; I think I own this community because all my life was spent on Charles Avenue. All my grandparents lived on Grand Avenue. So, I got a chance to go over there and spend some time. But basically, it was all right around Charles Avenue.

[0:37:34] Aarita Kroll: So just considering how things are changing, how do you see the possibilities? It seems like neighborliness is something that's now missing in the community. And is there, in your opinion, a way to bring people together as the neighborhood is changing?

[0:37:50] Fredericka S. Brown: Like I said, I am observing. I'm still observing and comparing. And I know that [0:38:00] the neighborhood is not a neighborhood anymore. I don't know what you call it, but we are experiencing segregation and that's what I call it, because we were neighbors, and we were like family, so you mentioned Goombay did brings out the Bahamian culture of those Bahamians that lived here. And I don't know how this one is going to turn out. I keep teasing her about it. It's not the same anymore. You know, everything is moneymaking. You know what I mean about that. And it really was supposed to bring the culture together—the people together. But as Thelma has said, we live in the same area, next door neighbors, we don't even see our neighbors anymore. They get in their cars, like she has said, and I don't want to repeat. And that's how we live. I'm not used to living like that. And I'm sorry. It's really happening in the Grove were we one big family, one big community, loving and helping each other. And you talk about change. I don't even know my neighbors next door. Like I said, they don't speak to you. You said good evening _____??? We grew up. We say "Hi, Miss Molly. Everything all right, Mr. Brown? You need any help?" That has gone forever, and they don't even say hello. I don't. I can't even—if you ask me, "Well, who's your next-door neighbor?" I don't know. You don't know your neighbor? No. Because they don't introduce themselves. They move in, they move out, and that's it. And they don't want to be bothered with us. When I say "us" I'm talking about dark [0:40:00] skinned Americans, I heard Thelma use the word "colored". I was used to the word "colored" and "negro". Now, I tell them—because Thelma and I grew up when the word "Black"—that was a sensitive word to call another person "Black" in my growing up, so I never used that word. I said I'm "colored" or even "Negro". Those are the two words that I use for myself and identifying myself. I don't know if they don't want to be among the color of us or it's convenient for them to buy a home cheaper and they buy it and they don't have neighbors. The family atmosphere, it's gone. That's all I can say.

[0:40:50] Mikeya Brown: So, to end it out with one last question, how do you guys explain the incinerator when you guys were growing up and now that you found out that you guys were basically growing up near and on an incinerator and Coconut Grove, what are your thoughts about that? Did you guys know at that time that you were growing up or around an incinerator? Close to.

[0:41:17] Thelma Gibson: Incinerator?

[0:41:18] Mikeya Brown: Yeah, the Old Smokey.

[0:41:20] Thelma Gibson: Oh, Old Smokey, yeah. Well, we lived down on the end, the incinerator was near Carver High School, and we lived a mile south of where the incinerator was. So, it was exciting for us to walk around the incinerator, go to school walking down Charles Avenue and go behind the incinerator. Oh, it was exciting to see the things going on—we had no idea that there was something wrong and that we could get sick as a result of the incinerator

being there. And it didn't come up all while I was in school. And this was a new thing [0:42:00] to me when I first heard about these blocks because when they tore down the cemetery, my husband brought home all these blocks and we had a block wall. We had a block wall built out those blocks. It came from around the cemetery. So, I had no idea that a disease might come from that. I know it's probably normal about what's going on.

[0:42:27] Fredericka S. Brown: Okay, we had, like Thelma said, we had students that were going to Carver, and we would meet here on the corner of Charles Avenue, a group of us. And that was a short pathway from our side of the street to what Thelma said as a path and, on the incinerator, to go to Carver Elementary and the Senior High School. So, it didn't bother us at that time. Like she said, it was put there. We didn't know any results later that it was dangerous, but it wasn't until they integrated Carver that they decided, "Well, we don't need that incinerator." Their children were going to Carver then and they said, "Well, we need to close it down because I felt."

[0:43:22] Mikeya Brown: I don't mean, to interrupt you, when you say "they", who were "they"?

[0:43:26] Fredericka S. Brown: The other people. I don't want to say white, but the government at that time in Coral Gables and Coral Gables was just beginning to recognize the Blacks on that side. They were never recognized before. When I was growing up, they couldn't say they live in the Gables, they can say it now, but they couldn't take that. And I had friends that lived on that side of the gate—well, then they were living in the Gable, but they couldn't say they did because their skin color wasn't white [0:44:00]. So, as I was saying, only when they integrated Carver Elementary did they decide that it was a health problem for their children to inhale the results of what was burned in the incinerator and decide that it was closed. If that wasn't true, believe me, I think that the incinerator would be out there right now, if it was that for integration of Carver and I'm speaking from not what someone told me, what I know and what I learned. It only closed because other people; when I say, "other people," other than my skin color were going up to Carver.

[0:44:50] Mikeya Brown: Now, I know we say we're going to end it out and I'm just going to close it up. Do you also think that this came about, too, with the park on Douglas Road next to Sweeting Street was discovered to be contaminated, and I believe that back then—

[0:45:11] Fredericka S. Brown: Oh, she's talking about Sweeting Town.

[0:45:12] Mikeya Brown: Yes, but what I'm saying, the park next to Sweeting Town on Douglas Road, where the English Center is, not too long ago, a few years ago, they redevelop the park and they found out that it was contaminated as well. But if I'm correct, that also was where you guys went to swim. That was where they—the Caucasians—gave you, gave the African Americans at that time a place to play and swim in that area. And I'm quite sure it was called something else right?

[0:45:47] Fredericka S. Brown: That was Sweeting Town. It was founded by Black family from the Bahamas and she's talking about that Douglas Road Park. In case you don't know, it was a rock pit. We called it a rock pit in my day [0:46:00]. And they dug from, oh, coral rocks and it left a hole and water was there. Black kids couldn't go to the beach. We couldn't go anywhere. They made that like a little place that they can go to swim, that she's referring to. It was a rock pit, and it was like a city dump place, too. They had old tires and what have you out there. And Black folks live right near there, on that one street, which was called Sweeting Town of the day. I don't know what they call it now, because they tell me there was never no Blacks out there. And I say they need to look up their history and find out who was out there. I tell them that Black folks were out there and that's how that came about. And then they built the school.

[0:46:50] Mikeya Brown: No but I'm saying that's where you guys went to swim.

[0:46:53] Fredericka S. Brown: That's where most of us went to swim because we couldn't go to their beaches and what have you. So, they found little places like Dania Key [ed. note: may be referring to Virginia Key] that was always a nice place to go. You can find a place, but that was one of the main places where some of them went to swim.

[0:47:08] Mikeya Brown: And how do you feel now that that park has been redone over and it's more utilized by Hispanics and other people outside of the community than, you know, the community residents that used to utilize it, Miss Gibson and Mrs. Brown, it now.

[0:47:28] Thelma Gibson: Well, the people who live out there now are different from what lived there. But I wanted to go back to this incinerator because Dr. Patterson's mother lived just one block away from that incinerator. So, she knew more about what was going on down there than we did. But when they tore the incinerator down, they said they found this whatever that is that they found and they had to, you know, clean all the sand out. And they found the same thing out in that park. So, they made a different park over there because that's where [0:48:00] the yellow is so amazing. A white folk came in and bought all of it because Mr. Sweeting and the whole family and all the different families who lived up in it, I think the only Black that's still there now is Mr. Hall, the Halls are there today too, the Halls, and then the guys—Hannah, Mrs. Hannah are still there. So, they are the only two Black people still there. And there were about eight homes out there at the time. They had the—but the park was always with Hispanics all across the street. So that was a different kind of thing. And they cleaned all that up and they clean up the parks up in the village that had contaminate in it, finally cleaned up down there and built fire college. Yeah.

[0:48:48] Mikeya Brown: But never came to any of your homes to clean up?

[0:48:51] Thelma Gibson: Not as far as I know.

[0:48:53] Mikeya Brown: So, it was a clean-up all around you guys—

[0:48:57] Thelma Gibson: (she laughs) Yeah.

[0:48:58] Mikeya Brown: But no one ever came to clean up your property.

[0:49:01] Thelma Gibson: I can't say that they never did because I don't know about them cleaning it up, but I know they built the fire college on that land. The fire college is still there.

[0:49:12] Mikeya Brown: And you guys never was offered any assistance in being checked for anything after they discovered that it was contaminated?

[0:49:23] Thelma Gibson: There's a lawyer that's been working with the minister for a little while, (Gibson and Brown talk at the same time).

[0:49:29] Fredericka S. Brown: Your family.

[0:49:31] Thelma Gibson: Dr. Simpson may know a little bit more about that than we do, but I know there's an attorney who's been working with the Ministerial Alliance, and they have been trying to people to sign forms that they had if they live close to that, to see if any of them had any of these problems as a result of the contaminant that was in there.

[0:49:54] Mikeya Brown: Well, it was a pleasure. I am going to let Nathaly and Aarti close out. [0:50:00]. Again, this is Mikeya Brown, and I thank you ladies very much for coming and interviewing with us today.

[0:50:09] Thelma Gibson: Thank you for having us.

[0:50:10] Aarita Kroll: Miss Gibson, Miss Brown, it was an honor to meet you both and to speak with you. Thank you so much for being here with us, for being here with us and for sharing your stories. It was an honor speaking with you both. It was an honor to speak with you. It was an honor to be here.

[0:50:29] Fredericka S. Brown: Oh, oh, oh!

[0:50:30] Thelma Gibson: Oh!

[0:50:31] Fredericka S. Brown: Thank you for inviting us to be here. And as I said, I do hope that what we have said—Thelma and I—don't dress it up, please, and say "put this word". If I said "this or that," that's our language. So don't dress it up. Write it the way we said it. And maybe some of our children will understand what their ancestors went through.

[0:51:00] Nathaly Guevara: Thank you to both of you for sharing again your experiences and taking the time to obviously educate others about how you have grown up here in the Grove and how it's changed and how you been affected by that.

[0:51:17] Thelma Gibson: Good thank you. Thank you for inviting us.

end of interview