

Interview with Marjory Stoneman Douglas

Date: June 16, 1983

FIU Number: SPC 95A

Interviewer: I

Marjory Stoneman Douglas: MSD

[57:36]

I: We have some made of Tubular aluminum. Not quite that style.

MSD: No. It's a different, slightly different style but they still have them?

I: Yes. Now replaced every single with the plastic?

MSD: Yes. The webbing. This I've had these done. I think they've just been done a second time after many years. The last quite a long time. I have another one being fixed now. But nothing, time of course gets them. But really they stand being out of doors all the time extremely well. He's modulating beautifully this morning.

I: ...being taken out to the Everglades to see the flocks of birds and being told that there were plume hunters waiting in the...

MSD: Yes, well I could tell that story.

I: I think that would be helpful.

MSD: Because it was when we were taking the people out from all over the country to show them the Everglades, and we were in the houseboat up the... Well, it was up Shark River, I think, over there. And we, I can tell that story.

I: Okay, that's good. Whose houseboat was it?

MSD: What?

I: Whose houseboat was it?

MSD: Why it was a big, commercial; we rented it.

I: I see.

MSD: It was a big commercial houseboat that slept, oh, we must have had 15 people. 15 or 20 people.

I: That large?

MSD: Oh yes, it was a great big one. It was one of those that people hired or leased. That was their business of the houseboat people to rent the houseboat.

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I: Was that common a thing in those days, to rent houseboats?

MSD: Well, this particular one... I don't know if there were any more, it was a great big one, it would go around the Everglades and go alongside the Cape Sable and around up into the Everglades and around the ten thousand islands and so on. I don't know... there were small ones; it was the biggest one I ever knew of. But it would take groups of people, you see. It was very interesting on that account. It was a big upstairs; it was two stories, and there were plenty of staterooms and kitchens and all that.

I: So was there a crew aboard?

MSD: Oh yes, of course.

I: Because now when you go out to the Everglades to rent a houseboat, you crew, you cook...

MSD: I guess you do. Can you take it down at the park?

I: Yes. Flamingo

MSD: You take it, and you run it yourself.

I: Yes, and they provide linen, cutlery...

MSD: Oh yes. A kitchen and all that. You have to provide the food, probably.

I: You provide the food, and you do all the work.

Yes

I: And I think you can take it for two or three days...

MSD: You can take it for as long as you like. How much does it cost, I wonder?

I: Well, lets see... I don't know.

(Cameraman or man off camera) You know, we're rolling?

I: We are? No, nobody told me.

MSD: Oh no, sorry, we were just gassing. No, we weren't speaking to any great point. So you'll have to cut that out and begin over again.

I: We'll just go from here. Well, lets go back and I want to ask you about the trip out to the Everglades in the houseboat when you saw the birds and...

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MSD: Oh yes.

I: ...and you were told that there were...

MSD: Oh yeah, I remember, I can tell that. Yeah. That was the time, as I told you, when the committee for the establishment of Everglades park brought down people from all over the country including heads of National Park Service and other people. And we, the committee rented this big cruising houseboat called "The Everglades." It was a two-story houseboat with lots of staterooms and kitchens and all that, so we lived aboard. And we got on... let me see, I think we went aboard, in down the Keys, and went right across from the Keys to the, in the houseboat, and anchored off the Middle Cape, and went up a canal to Gator Lake in small boats. And I remember there was the first time I'd seen roseate spoonbill in Florida. We went up a lake a way, we went up a canal and across some flats, and I remember, in the open marshy flats, back of the middle Cape, I think, were covered with thousands and thousands and thousands of little wading birds. Plovers and little heron, and birds like that. We would go along in these small boats, and they would rise in clouds ahead of us, and come back to earth behind us, so we moved in a moving cloud of birds alongside. I'd never seen so many. I don't think you could ever see so many there again along those flats. We went down to Gator Lake in another canal, and that was a small lake that had a hurricane not too long before, so it was surrounded on one side by mangroves that had been killed and were silvery colored. The lake was blue, and on the other side were these banks of silvery white mangos, mangroves, I mean, and they were completely covered by roseate spoonbill. They were nesting there. The roseate spoonbill were reflected in the water; you never saw anything lovelier; it was a startlingly beautiful thing. Then we went along in the cruising houseboat along to Shark River, and went up and anchored in an open place, an open sound, and went up the river farther in small boats, again, just rowboats. And we went up just before sunset, when the birds were coming in from where they'd been feeding on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, and they went over our heads in flocks and flocks and flocks, to where they were nesting. And they kept going over in the sunset, and in the twilight and the full moon rose, and we'd planned to be there at the rising of the full moon. So we could see them bursting into the sunset and against the rising moon which rose enormously right over the Gulf of Mexico. And the birds kept going over our heads in flock and flocks and flocks until it was full dark, and we were so excited we were all standing up in these little rowboats, there must have been three or four. Mostly the men and just Ruth Bryan Owen and I the only women, and we were standing up in the boat until it was full dark. The last we could see was the birds coming over the moon, and just at the end, Dr. Bumpus, president of Tufts College in Massachusetts, was in the last boat and at the last minute Dr. Bumpus fell overboard! (laughter) So that was the climax of that. Fortunately, we were, the women, were in the forward boat. They had to rescue him and take off his clothes, get him some dry clothes, people contributed what they could. Poor Dr. Bumpus, he was so excited by the birds he was exalted, people would say "Oh! More birds! More birds!" And that's when he fell overboard, so that was very funny. But then, we had been waiting in the houseboat, I think now, let me see, I have to remember whether it was before that or after that... Oh yes, and then we went back to the houseboat, and that was the night that Dr. Bumpus has been dried off and we'd all been sitting in the big open cabin upstairs; like a big room. And Dr. Gilbert Pearson, who was along, who is the president of the federation of Audubon societies, one of the funniest men in the world, the man who had done

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so much to have the bird plumage protection laws put on, both in New York state against the milliner's business and in the federal government. So we were up there, and Dr. Pearson was telling stories, and I remember laughing so hard, and I was sitting on the floor with a man named Arnold Cammer, who was the assistant of the national park service, and he and I we were in tears, and it was he and I we were sitting on the floor and we cried, we laughed so hard we cried and we just laid down on the floor and cried, cause it was so funny. But it was during that time, that a man on a boat came along and told somebody below who came and told Dr. Pearson and some of the others who came down and saw him, that a bunch of poachers were waiting over in the next stream and it was in the mangroves and there were streams here and there over in the next... they were camped out over in the mangroves just a little way down, waiting for us to get out of the way, cause they were going to go and shoot up that rookery of birds that we'd just been seeing. So several of the people, Dr. Grovner and Dr. Pearson, got into the boat and went over to talk to them, and the men, the poachers, were perfectly affable and they had them come and sit around the fire and they talked. But I don't know why Arno didn't make any protest against the shooting; I don't know why they didn't. I don't know what they expected to gain by just talking in general to the people, but at any rate, they came back and the poachers were still there and we went in the houseboat and went up farther up the coast and, indeed, they went up and shot up the entire rookery. So many of those birds were killed that we had seen, and the young, they killed the young for the nuptial plumes, they killed the older birds, I mean, for the nuptial plumes, and the nestlings that had just been hatched died in the hot sun, with the crows and the predators coming and eating them. So, we saw the destruction of that rookery; thousands of birds were killed. Why our people didn't protest against that, I don't know, I suppose they thought the men would say, "Well, we're not going to hear them." They would have denied it, I suppose. But it was completely illegal but it was very difficult to prevent them because the state of Florida was not exerting itself very much to prevent them, and before then when we tried to and had poachers arrested, with the dead birds, and we had somebody that would turn a witness, would become a witness, to the shooting, we would take that to the court in Key West and the judge would blandly release them, and say, "Well, we don't know that they were poaching," and they'd let them off. We couldn't get justice done in Monroe county. And that's the thing, among the other things, that I've held against Monroe county, was the complete disregard of that sort of thing. Because they'd had so many years, and people, the poachers, lived in Key West, and they lived up and down the ten thousand islands and nobody bothered them. So it was an eye-opener as to what was happening. That is why you don't see so many birds as you are used to, partly because of the poaching and partly because of the pesticides and herbicides and the lack of water proper in the seasons when they are nesting, and too much water when they are nesting let out by the water management district from the second and third conservation basins, they let out at the wrong time masses of water that would go up and cover up all the feeding grounds for all the nesting birds, so they couldn't find any food for the young nestlings and nestling would die. In the natural state there might have been times when there would naturally be too much high water, but that would not kill off as many birds as the poachers and the presence of mankind and in the cities and the encroaching areas. They would have never killed off the birds; the birds lived through normal up and down conditions. That is why you don't see so many today, and I've seen thousands and thousands of birds going overhead. Forty thousand in one sunset period, going from their rookeries, perhaps, or going from the Everglades to a place like Duck Rock, which is below the town of Everglades. Going out there to spend the night

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where there were no predators that could get at them. Where there were no, you know, the kind of predators that would get after the birds, the, I suppose...

I: Raccoons?

MSD: ...animals and the snakes and all that. But anyway, they'd be safer. But forty thousand birds on one mangrove island at once is like a great big bouquet of birds.

I: Marvelous. (Break in tape)

MSD: ...I'll try to stop talking when we hear a plane in the future.

I: I'm going to ask you a question that might be, that's okay because...

MSD: They're not taking, I see.

I: ...that might be difficult for you to answer, but I'd like you to try and tell me, how did your interest in the natural environment develop? Is it something you had right from the earliest, earliest days? Do you remember or is it something that...

MSD: Oh, I think so. Am I talking now?

I: Yes.

MSD: I think I was always interested. You see, I was brought up in Massachusetts in a very different country, in a very different climate, very different weather and all that. But all New England people are interested in weather, and we're all mostly interested in backgrounds because the weather is always so changeable. Its one of our most important sources of conversation in New England. So I think I had a very natural interest in that. I was very much interested in Geography; I had a marvelous course in Geography in my college, which was Wellesley outside of Boston. We had a marvelous professor of geology and geography in those days. The first women to graduate from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Mrs. Fisher, and she was one of the countries' great oil geologists. One of the only women then that was a geologist and she was a very important oil geologist. Well she did a course in geography that was terrific. It led me to ecology and geography and a certain amount of geology, not too complicated, but a certain amount, and archeology and anthropology and all that. A more or less introductory course, but I think it was one of the more important courses that I've ever had, and I've been using it, you might say, ever since. Because that (garbled) I can remember being interested in geography in grade school when you had a great big geography book, and you can hide behind it to read something else. (laughs) So I liked geography books from the very first atlases. I've loved maps and all that; it seemed to be a natural thing. And then with this course in geography with the backgrounds in it and so on, as I say, it was an introductory course only, but at least it gave you the background and some of the vocabulary. So when I came to Florida, here was a new and completely unique country, and I very excited by it from the beginning. I think it was all a natural development.

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I: Do you remember spending a great deal of time out of doors when you were a child?

MSD: Well, not in the very cold weather, my dear! (laughs) I was no great athlete. In the winter, in college, before we, snowshoeing or skiing was fashionable. We snowshoed a lot; I snowshoed a lot in the snow, and I was brought up in small sailing boats and canoes and all that. So I was very much interested in water, and lakes as well as the oceans and the rivers, and I learned to swim very early, but of course developed swimming down here. That was once one of the great attractions for me here was the swimming in Miami Beach when it was still just subtle really, it was just filled and there were hardly any houses on it. We'd go over from Miami either on the old Collins Bridge, the old wooden bridge, or you'd go over in a little bit of a steamboat to the beach and cross over the beach on a boardwalk to the wonderful swimming beach, in the South Beach, which has always been one of the best beaches anywhere around; there aren't any under-tows. And then eventually, the beach up where the Roney Plaza is now, the Fisher, the Fisher pavilion, well it was called a pavilion, I'd forgotten its name. Well, anyway, you could walk up and down the beaches in bathing suits and a gang of us would go over, perhaps early in the morning before dawn, and go swimming and have a fire on the beach and cook breakfast. Or we would do it in the evening and run up and down the beaches and swim and all that. So the open air, you see, so once that open beach business all summer long was simply wonderful. You didn't mind the hot weather because you were in and out of the salt waters so much, and then later down here we have this lovely little Tahiti beach that George Merrick had built when he built Coral Gables, and that, you see, was near the house, so you'd swim. Oh, we'd go swimming, groups of us, three-four times a week down there. And all Sunday mornings with parties and picnics and all that. So the swimming and the beaches were all a very important part of our lives, a very pleasant part, that so many people now don't know anything about at all, which is so silly. That was a great thing, the swimming.

I: How old were you at that time when you were...

MSD: Well, I came down when I was 25 in 1915. I came down to get a divorce. And my father was here, the editor of a paper here, so I got a job on the paper in a totally new country, and so here I was and it was all very exciting and interesting. Those days, it wasn't a quickie; you had to be here two years to get a divorce, and it was all right with me. I kept on staying here after I got it. Then after three years I went overseas with the war, towards the end of the war, and I was over about nineteen months in France with the American Red Cross headquarters in Paris, in the publicity department, so I was sent all over France and Italy and the Balkans with a cameraman of my own writing stories, writing AP stories, that the Red Cross sent back to Paris and of course we'd file with the AP. We had to file five stories a day on the AP and so on. So I did newspaper work over a good deal of Europe, not all of it, but a good deal of it. I loved every bit of it; I loved living in Paris and I loved Paris and France. I had French enough to get around on and all that, and I used it a great deal, of course. So that was a great experience. So when that work was practically done, my father came back to be his assistant editor, so when I came back that time in 1920, then I didn't do anymore reporting on the Herald, I was assistant to my father writing editorials and I had a column of my own that I could write anything I wanted to; book reviews and descriptive comments and all that kind of junk. So that was for the next three years.

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That of course, you use material of the country and all that. I learned about Florida politics from my father who was a great student of them. He was a student of constitutional history, he had been a lawyer. So I learned an awful lot from him about the country and the politics and all that, so my stepmother was a lady from an old Florida family from Tallahassee, and I learned about old Florida from her, so I was more situated to learn a great deal about old Florida from her, more than just the Everglades, but of course that was part of it.

I: Well, lets back up for a minute.

MSD: (laughs) I gave you quite a lot all at once! Well you hadn't asked me anything about that before, so I thought I might as well cover the backgrounds.

I: Well, I definitely want to bring that up again.

MSD: Yes.

I: ...'cause that was a very interesting period in your life.

MSD: Oh, yes it was. There weren't, as I've said, 5000 people in the city of Miami. I've seen the whole thing grow, enormously of course, and I've seen the whole thing keep on growing.

I: When you, when you were describing your outdoor interests before and how active you were when you came down swimming and so on, had you been interested in animals and...

MSD: Oh, always.

I: Always?

MSD: Yes, always.

I: Well, tell me something...

MSD: Well, not very much. Kittens and cats and all that sort of thing, and birds and all that. I've always loved small mammals, even mice. As a child, I liked mice. I don't think I had any live mice, they were mostly dead ones. I was sorry about that. But, um...

I: How did that happen?

MSD: Well, because you had a trap for mice, you know, and my grandmother had a live trap. She didn't want to kill them, she'd take them in a big mason jar and take them, send me to release them several blocks away on the railroad tracks. (laughs) I guess she'd hoped they'd be run over and she wouldn't be responsible for killing them, because she didn't want to kill them herself. So we had live mice, you know, in a mason jar with paper on the top so they could breathe, and I always thought they were a lot of fun. I would have liked to have kept them, but grandmother wouldn't stand for that, but I could always have kittens.

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I: And you did have cats?

MSD: Oh heavens yes, I've always had cats. Everyone in New England likes cats. You see, they came over on the first ships with the first settlers. A cat is very important on a ship, it keeps down the rats. So all New England people, I would make that as one of those stupid generalities that are not necessary true, but all New England people like cats. There are certain, there are all kinds of different cats in New England. The main cat is a lovely kind of cat and so on and all that. We had squirrels and other people had rabbits; we never had rabbits, but I never liked rabbits as much as cats, they're not so comfortable. You can't make the kinds of pets out of them that you can with a cat. They're not so cozy.

I: Well, you were telling us about...

MSD: Well, I wasn't so awfully athletic, actually. I was mostly well, canoeing and sailing a boat and things like that, and swimming and dancing. Swimming and dancing were my two things, otherwise I couldn't possibly play tennis and I was no kind of a golfer and anything like that. I was no good at that sort of thing. It was just mostly boat and canoes and stuff.

I: Was hiking a popular pastime?

MSD: Well, at one point in my life, I think the summer of my junior year in college; I got a job as counselor for a small girl's camp in Maine. Well, in college we just walked miles and miles and miles. We didn't call it hiking in those days; you just went for long walks. You walked for fifteen miles at a time, sometimes even in the very cold weather. Go somewhere for a picnic; we did a lot of hiking and that sort of thing without... we didn't backpack or anything, we just took long walks. Then when I was counselor of a kid's camp in Maine, and I, going up from the boat from Boston with the girls and the people that run the camp on Long Lake and Maine, I suddenly realized at that time, I couldn't swim. I'd been in and out of the water all the time, but somehow I never really learned to swim, and I suddenly realized I was responsible for these kids swimming and I'd been in canoes and all that without really being... I doubt very much that I could have drown, really, I'd been in and out of the water so many times, but I was not, technically, a swimmer. Fortunately, I had read a newspaper account only a few days before, it must have stuck in my mind. It said in a perfectly simple way to learn swim or to teach swimming is to do a dead man's float, you know, learn to float flat out with your face in the water, pick up your face and swim, that's all. So by George, when I first got up to the camp, I took myself around the corner of the pier and did a little dead man's float and found myself swimming, you know, any kind of a dog paddle. You know, I had all the kids in camp swimming in twenty minutes; nothing to that. And then we all learned to swim together, as it were, we learned different strokes and I knew about that in general, and, you know, a dog paddle and a breast stroke and an Australian crawl and all that, so we were all swimming in no time. And I knew about canoeing, anyway, and I taught them about canoeing and all that and that time we didn't do anything with sailing boats, just canoes. And we did a lot of hiking that summer. We went hiking and spent, we went hiking up Mt. Monadnock, spent the night sleeping at the top of the mountain, things like that. Just a small girl's camp, so it was a small group, so it was great

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fun. So that was my really first professional interest, and I never did it again, really, but... Down here this wasn't hiking country in those days, it was swimming, of course, and a great deal of dancing in the open air. Saturday night dances at the Roney Plaza and you'd end up going swimming and going for breakfast somewhere. So every Saturday night, dances were marvelous in the moonlight with a good band and so on, so that was really, swimming and dancing were my chief exercises. Swimming, dancing and canoeing, you might say.

I: That sounds marvelous.

MSD: Well, it was, it was...

I: You went all night?

MSD: It would go on as long as you could stand it, as long as you wanted to. Nobody could stop you. If you wanted to go in swimming then put some clothes on and go and have breakfast in the early morning, you could. Or you could quit at any time you wanted to. There was no regular rule about it. I very rarely stayed up till dawn, because I'd get sleepy. But even after I bought this house, we, a lot of us, would be doing that swimming and dancing business from here, from Coconut Grove.

I: And who were the people that you would associate with?

MSD: Well, all kinds of friends of those days. The people that had the Gulliver School, that started the Gulliver school, were kind of like a center, and there were a lot of us that played around in groups together. A great many of them now, so many of them now are dead.

I: Were they people who lived here year round?

MSD: Oh yes, people who lived here all year round who, a very close friend of mine, Marion Manly, a woman architect, who was a great architect. Built a great many things around here, and the Gullivers, oh, all kinds of people, and as I say, mostly dead now. Ms. Manly is still alive, I'm glad to say.

I: Oh, is that right?

MSD: Yes. She's not so old as I am, but I guess she's ninety by now. She retired long since.

I: Did you all live in this, in the Coconut Grove area?

MSD: Well, yes. When I came, I built the house in twenty-six, came down here, most of my friends had... I liked Coconut Grove, really, better than Miami. It was a separate town when I built my house in '26, but it got taken into Miami in '28. But that was probably a good thing, because we couldn't have kept on with our own, we had to have our own police force and our own judge and our own fire department. The taxes would have really been much greater than they are being the city. But I liked the people down here better, they were not only... there were

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a few very old families, which I really didn't know so much as the other people that had come down and had, many of them, very well to do, who had houses and estates from Douglas Road and the main highway running down to the Bay. Many of those people came down only in the winter, but many people I knew would take care of their houses in the summertime, or we knew them anyway. The Fairchilds were, of course, a great center, because David Fairchild brought down so very many people who knew him in other places. People like the great Tom Barber, Dr. Barber of Harvard who is head of the department of comparative Zoology and head of the Peabody museum who was head of the Atchison Gardens in Cuba* and came down, oh, very often and all kinds of interesting people coming and going, settling here and so on. Very interesting, we had a lot of retired college professors. Dr. DeGarmo, who'd been head of Swarthmore, and he came early so there were four generations of DeGarmos all living in Coconut Grove and they've always been friends. The children, whom I knew early on, are all grown up and some of them are grandparents and still my friends. The DeGarmos and all kinds of other people. So all along the highway there were these large estates with people who either lived here all year round or came down in the winter. The Mathesons and Arthur Curtis James and all people had interesting people visiting them, and we all rather had a very strong sense of community. So you would be invited to dinner, you know, at one place or another, and I remember being invited to the Arthur Curtis James', of course they were perfectly delightful. Mrs. James was a great beauty and Arthur Curtis James was a partner of Rockefeller and all. They were awfully nice people, and we all knew them, even people like me who had just a modest little house and didn't amount to so much. But I remember being invited to dinner, then to my horror being expected to play Bridge afterwards. Well, I've never been good at cards. My family, my mother's people were all very good card players; they played these extraordinary things called duplicate wists and played Bridge. I was threatened with dire punishment if I ever tried to play because I was the kind, I'd always trump my partners' ace and when they'd got through with the game they'd say, "why didn't you play your queen?" and how did they know I had a queen? You know, that kind of thing, I was very suspicious, so anyway, it was to my horror at the Arthur Curtis James,' I was expected to play Bridge in the evening. And they played, as a rule, for mild stakes, but anyway they were very kind. They put me at a table and the people tacitly agreed not to play for stakes for my account. (laughs) They were sure that I'd love lose, probably couldn't have done it, and I'd manage to be dummy. I remember playing partners for a delightful man who was Mr. James' doctor who would come down, a delightful man, I've forgotten his name, and I could always manage to be dummy. And when I was dummy, he could win. (laughs) I remember, Mrs. Charles Deering who was great friend, she was a perfectly enchanting woman, so outspoken and so amusing, who lived down at old Cutler. I knew her very well; I used to go down to lunch and dinner with her there. That was always great fun. And Mrs. Deering would always say to me, "You know, you'll never be a great social success if you don't play Bridge," and I said "Dear Mrs. Deering, I don't want to be a social success if I have to play Bridge." I consider it one the least interesting ways to spend an evening that I can think of. I can remember spending evenings with people who were left over from the Bridge tables or there weren't enough tables to go around and I couldn't play, so other people they had a wonderful time talking to people while the other people are playing Bridge. I remember Johnson McCormick, who was her, let me see, Johnson McCormick, his wife was one of the Deering girls, Mrs. McCormick, naturally, a perfectly delightful person to talk to, you know. Telling all about Vizcaya and all kinds of things, plenty of things to talk about. I'd rather

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spend the evening talking. I consider conversation one of the great social arts. (laughs) Much better than Bridge, which is a destroyer of conversation. But that was always good fun with Mrs. Deering, she was a great gal. She was full of humor and bumptiousness and sharpness. She was older and lots and lots of fun; I was very fond of her. I knew her better; of course, I didn't know James Deering at all. He was beyond my kin, well I think I may have, but he died very early so I wouldn't have known him. I knew Mrs. Charles Deering when I was living here and I knew Mrs. McCormick and Mrs. Danielson, perfectly delightful, who were her daughters, you see. They were the heirs of Vizcaya, because James didn't have any heirs, he wasn't married, he had nieces, and so I knew them. And of course, the Danielsons are here now, and so on. It's kind of old family stuff, the Mathesons... there are fourth generation Mathesons around, I believe know that one of the Mrs. Mathesons said, "You know, there are thirteen Mrs. Mathensons, what with grandchildren grown up and married and all that. So it's always been a very interesting community, much more... Miami has not been a single community simply because as a large, even as a small city, its growing up with any number of different kinds of people. It was founded by people from the Old South, and then overrun by Damn Yankees like me from the North so that, they complain about us not being a community, well we couldn't be. The people had such different backgrounds, my goodness. When I first came back to Miami from the First World War, the Klu Klux Klan was in Miami and doing dreadful things, and you couldn't be sympathetic with the kind of people that were in favor, you couldn't have a community with the kind of people who had the Klu Klux Klan. I remember my family, my father and my stepmother and I guess some friends, I'd forgotten who, were driving back from the beach one evening, my father was driving, and we came up to 5th street, up to where my father lived in Spring Garden up the river, and we came along the street and here was the Klu Klux Klan preparing to march in their masks and sheets and a man on horseback, a masked man on horseback rode up in front of my father and said, "this street is closed," and my father said "Get out of my way!" and drove right straight ahead, through them and scattering them and everything; they couldn't stop him. We were all yelling and screaming in defiance we were so mad. But that was overt, you see, it was an overt thing. After a while, there is always that kind of reaction among some people, and that's what happens. And there were some very bad Klu Klux Klan things: a negro was lynched in Homestead, and a white, crippled minister from the Bahamas, who was the minister to a black Episcopal church in Miami, was tarred and feathered and let out on Flagler Street, and of course he nearly died. When he was rescued, he was ill for years, and neither of the papers, and I regret to state, including my father's paper, even mentioned it. That's the kind of reason why Miami is not a community. How could you be a community with people like that? I liked Coconut Grove. It was a community of people who had backgrounds other than that, and I'm quite sure there was no Klu Klux Klan in Coconut Grove. In fact, we had bi-racial committees and the wonderful work that Elizabeth Virrick has always done. I was on her original committee; well it was originally Coconut Grove Committee for Slum Clearance, which was trying to improve the conditions in the part of town that was then called Colored Town. And we found that there were little houses, but they didn't have running water in them, and they had privies in the backyard and wells, and the white people's laundry was being done in the backyards of those houses, with water that was being polluted from these backyard privies. Elizabeth found this out and she formed the Committee for Coconut Grove, the Committee for Slum Clearance, and it took us two years to get a referendum, which would make the city of Miami pass an ordinance that said that every house in the city had to have

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running water and inside toilets. An inside toilet; at least one. They had never even had an ordinance to that effect. White people would built houses for the negroes to rent that had no toilets or running water in them, and you could imagine the conditions. So...

I: What year was that?

MSD: Well, it would be a little hard for me to say. It was after the First World War, and I can't remember, Elizabeth Virrick and her husband owned an apartment house backing up to the black area, and that's how she knew about it. And I can't remember exactly when that was, because I can't remember whether it was before '26 when I built this house. I'd rather think it was before '26. I think it may have been in the '20s. You'd have to ask her to remember about that. She's kept the work up, you see, all this time. Well, I had said to her, when she said we're going to have to get into this business of getting water mains. There were no water mains in the black area, and we had to have the water mains made. Well first, we had to get this referendum ordering, making the law that there must be running water and a toilet in every house everywhere, not just in the black areas, but everywhere in town. And I said to her, well Elizabeth, when you get that one we get that, because I was going to help her with that however I could. I said, you're going to have to set up a fund, by which the black people could borrow money to have the water mains have water come into the houses and built bathtubs. I may have been down here because I knew about that, because I had a lovely black woman working for me who had a little grandson, and I knew they didn't have any running water, so then again, I don't know if it was before '26 or not. And I said well, they, you've got to have a fund from which they could borrow. And said, "well you'd better come on the committee and do things about that" and I said, "I'd be glad to." So, in the two years in which we got the referendum, by that time, we set up a fund with the help of some banks and some private people backing them, so that the people that didn't have running water in the houses and inside toilets and sinks could borrow, and did. And you know, in the years after that, we loaned them this money without charging them interest, and every cent was paid back. Every cent. It took several years for some people to do it, but before we were through, neither the Coconut Grove bank, which helped us a great deal, or the private people would go on their notes ever lost a cent on that. It was wonderful. The people were so glad to get running water, so glad not to have these nasty dirt, backyard privies, you know, and all that, and polluted wells; glad to have running water. We never lost a cent, every cent was paid back.

I: I sense a feeling of outrage...

MSD: Oh, complete outrage. I'm furious at all that kind of thing. My people, my father's people, were a long line of English and American Quakers, and they were also abolitionists. My father's family were some of the leading people in the abolitionist movement before the Civil War. And my great-great aunt Katie, let me see now, great-great aunt; my grandmother's, well it would be her aunt or her sister, but anyway, my great-great aunt Katie was married to a man named Levi Coffin. The Coffins were all Quakers who came from Nantucket, and my people were both North Carolina and Virginia, along that line. They went west before the civil war, the Quakers did, to Ohio and Illinois and Indiana because they didn't want to bring up their children any longer in slave-owning states. And my aunt Katie and uncle Levi Coffin were the people

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who saved the life of Eliza crossing the ice. You see, nowadays people don't seem to believe that those stories were true, and you know, Harriet Beecher Stowe, she made up a lot of that; she didn't at all. She lived in Columbus, and she knew all the stories of slaves escaping across the river into those free states, and my Aunt Katie and Uncle Levi were very prominent in the Underground Railroad, so Eliza crossing the ice was a true woman; her name was Harris. Her husband had escaped and gotten into Canada, and she was threatened with being sold down South, so she ran across the ice and men were chasing her on horseback, and she got on the ice with the baby, and the man on the Ohio side, yes I guess it would be, saw her coming, and she got, of course the men on horseback were completely baffled by the river and the ice, and the man helped her ashore and took her immediately to my Aunt Katie and my Uncle Levi's house, where they had across the line in Indiana, where they had one room, I don't know if it was underground or not, but it was a nice, comfortable, clean warm room where they could put up escaped slaves. And so, Aunt Katie, the baby was sick, naturally, you could imagine, with all that. She had Eliza there for a couple of weeks, and took care of her and the baby, until another two or three more escaped slaves were brought up from down river by William Beard, who was a friend of Uncle Levi and Aunt Katie. William Beard was the father of you know, William and James Beard were the historians, well it was his father who was a great Quaker abolitionist and in the Underground Railroad. So, when William Beard brought some people up to the coffins, they put them up for overnight, and the next night, Uncle Levi would hitch up the men would be disguised with women's clothes and veils, and he would take them up to the next stage in the Underground Railroad, and they finally got up to Canada, to Chatham in Canada, where they were safe. And later, William Beard and Great Uncle Levi went up to Chatham themselves to see how the people were getting along. So these two tall Quaker men in their funny clothes and their funny hats walked down the streets in Chatham, and the doors opened and all the people recognized them. And there as Eliza Harris, who'd found her husband, and the baby was a little boy, and they had a great jollification, you know. It was wonderful; there they all were safe after that, and Uncle Levi, you see the English Quakers and the American Quakers were very much in touch with each other, and the English Quakers not only refused the weavers, but refused the cotton that was sent over to England from the South. They refused to use the cotton that had been done by slave labor. So, Uncle Levi was sent through the Southern states to buy up what they call "free cotton," that is, cotton that was raised on plantations of free people. Maybe for a little plantation there was not more than one bale of cotton, but Uncle Levi would buy that, and he set up a free labor cotton gin in Louisville, Kentucky, and when it was ginned, it was sent up the river on a labor, free labor, steamboat to Columbus or Cincinnati or whatever was on the river there, where it was sent to England as free labor cotton that had never been touched by the hands of a slave, and the weavers in England had free labor cotton in England and could produce free labor cotton for the English trade. It was more expensive, but it was free. You see, people don't remember how much of that kind of work was done before the war, and how much Harriet Beecher Stowe new about all that. She got that story of Eliza crossing the ice from my Aunt Katie, you know, so I know it's true. I read somewhere not long ago that said that Harriet Beecher Stowe didn't know anything about it, she spent her summers in Maine, she didn't know anything about it; she did to! She went up and down the river and got all these stories, every one of them, true as true. The book wasn't written very well, and probably the death of Uncle Tom was exaggerated and dramatic, or dramatized, but in my mind, the basic facts were true. And that's what people don't realize now. So that's in the background of me hating the Klu Klux

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Klan, and the lack of running water in the black houses of Coconut Grove, that's all part of the same thing. It's all part of this over discrimination, you see, that we've had. Here I've lived all my life, well, it isn't the old South that I've lived in, but I'm a Damn Yankee at heart, you see, still. (laughs) And Elizabeth Virrick has gone on to do wonderful work with the black committee, which is now called "Coconut Grove Cares"

*Note: This is in Cuba, Kansas.