

Patrick Range II
Oral History Interview
March 19, 2018
Interviewed by Jose Albuquerque

Albuquerque: This is Jose Albuquerque interviewing Patrick Range II. The date is March 19th, 2018. Mr. Range thank you for being here to talk to me about the Virginia Key Beach.

Range: Sure

Albuquerque: Can you tell us a little about how your family got involved with Virginia Key?

Range: Sure. I guess my family's first involvement would have been through my grandparents. My grandmother primarily but then also, in an associated, way my grandfather as well. Certainly, at the time that they became and I guess there's kind of two different levels to it, the reclamation of Virginia Key and then the original history of Virginia Key as a recreation area for blacks primarily during segregation times and so my family's history certainly dates back to those segregation days and going to and participating in some of the recreation that was available know at the Virginia Key Beach back in those segregation times obviously that was the only Beach that blacks could attend or could go to for recreation here in Dade County. They could not go to Miami Beach or North Beach, Haulover Beach or any of those areas for recreation. Even Crandon Park and Beach was not available. Virginia Key was the only recreation area open and available to blacks at that time in all of black Miami. If they desired to take advantage of the beachfront the oceanfront, then that's where they were permitted to recreate at that time and so my family certainly did take advantage on occasion. Sure, it wasn't a regular occurrence but on occasion would take advantage of the opportunity to go there and to enjoy a leisure day or recreation day there at Virginia Beach.

In an associated way, in addition to recreation, both of my grandparents were involved to some degree in the civil rights movement actually this would have even predated the civil rights era as it's known, my grandfather was very instrumental in the desegregation of Crandon Park, which was very near to Virginia Key and was at that time obviously, a whites-only beach and recreation area. He along with Mr. Garth Reeves, took the opportunity at one time to go there even though it was against public rules regulations at that time, public laws, for them to do so and they decided to go for swim and they, fortunately, were not arrested as they anticipated that they might have been but they were able to recreate there and shortly after that, others took advantage of that same opportunity and that area became desegregated and became available to blacks to recreate, as would the other areas around the city and Miami Beach over time.

But again, primarily when my grandmother—she was Mrs. Athalie Range and my grandfather's name was Oscar Range, Oscar L. Range. My grandmother Athalie Range was instrumental in the civil-rights here locally, the civil rights struggle here locally, through helping to desegregate schools where her children attended. Even prior to that she was instrumental in helping to encourage the construction of better schools in black-only areas or schools that were available in segregation times only to blacks. They were certainly very poor at the time that my father and his siblings were growing up inadequate in terms of the facilities themselves and the modernity of

them, of their being modern and equipped as other schools were for whites. My grandmother did not feel that that was appropriate. She felt that not only her children, but that all black children, should have the same right and opportunity to enjoy a well-equipped and properly equipped school and so she thought it necessary to voice those feelings and those opinions to those persons who at the time were in power whether it be at the school board level or City Commission level, County Commission level, etc. She was, as I said, instrumental in seeing to it that better schools were built and also that the schools that were available were better equipped for the black students that would attend and then later she shortly thereafter as some of her younger children were coming along, particularly her youngest child Gary. She was instrumental in desegregating Orchard Villa Elementary School here in the Liberty City area, and so (Uncle Gary) was, if not the first, I believe he was the first of maybe three or four students, black students, to attend Orchard Villa Elementary School. Those beginnings led her to a much more robust civic and community and political life here in Miami.

Later, as time went on, Virginia Key actually fell into disrepair. The beach area fell into disrepair and was not frequented as often by blacks after the desegregation of the beaches. The city of Miami actually closed, or Miami-Dade County at the time, actually closed the beach area and it was no longer available for recreation to anyone and after a while of that area being in disrepair it certainly is currently the only beachfront property in the city of Miami proper. So, you have Miami Beach of course, but that is under the jurisdiction of the city of Miami Beach. The city of Miami the only actual beachfront area that you could go to recreate is Virginia Key and that remains such today. That certainly is was always considered prime property and certainly is, in my opinion, the most beautiful city property anywhere in the city of Miami and as such there was a lot of interest after it had fallen into disrepair over the years particularly around the late 70s and 80s when it was closed and then reopened on a very limited basis for activities. I would come to be able to participate in things like what was called the Splashdown which was a summer concert series that came around this would have been in the late 80s early 90s where children, not just students but young adults, could go and recreate there in the field area the beach itself really was not open although some would take advantage of swimming even though they weren't necessarily permitted to but would be open on a limited basis for concerts and those sorts of things but the area was very much a very beautiful area and in prime property and over time there became quite a bit of interest from developers and others seeking the opportunity to take control of that, of the Virginia Key Beach property. And during that time I guess there was a proposal that eventually came forward from a developer to build a as they would call it 'eco-resort' there on the property which would have essentially privatized the property where it has always been public land during the time that it was open and available to any members of the public and then certainly like I said, in the earlier days, being the only area that blacks could go to recreate. This effort to have it become an eco-resort would have prevented public access and only granted access to those who would have patronized the resort and obviously the resort would have been a higher-end in terms of cost type resort that many of the blacks and others who came to record there over the years would not be able to afford and access.

Some of the citizenries here in Miami thought that really was not appropriate and that that land should be preserved as public land for public access and to also preserve the history of the area, it being the only area that blacks could go and recreate. So, they saw that very much as a historical gem for the black community and there was certainly an effort, as I mentioned, to

preserve it for those historical reasons. Likewise, the area is very unique, the property is very unique in terms of its environmental assets. It has a very unique combination of natural flora and fauna there, as well as not just the vegetation but also animal life. There has historically been a nesting season for sea turtles, as just one example of the type of wildlife and an animal life that are very unique and exist there and perhaps not many other places here in the city of Miami, and so there not only was an effort from a historical perspective to preserve the property but also from an environmental perspective and so you had a number of citizens who were environmentalists and active in the environmental community that also saw a need to preserve the property for those reasons as well.

My grandmother, M. Athalie Range, was sought out, she was not of the original members that were a part of that effort but very early on in that effort which I believe at that time was called just the Friends of Virginia Key as a collective, she was sought out to assist in the preservation of the property and to lend her voice as being a person of influence and of somewhat significant history here in the city of Miami to help to assist that effort to preserve to preserve the property. My grandmother was the first black to serve as a city commissioner here in the city of Miami back in the 60s and she would later go on to become the first black to serve in a state department as head of a state department here in the state of Florida, and she served as the secretary for the Department of Community Affairs at that time under governor Reuben Askew in the 70s and so because of those efforts and those accomplishments, she obviously became very well known here locally and she led many efforts in those positions to add to the civil rights accomplishments of blacks and the community at that time and so she fought for very basic things like regular trash pickup in the community at the time she was a city commissioner and so if you can imagine something as basic and as simple as something like that, became the hallmarks of her serving the community and that's very much what she was, what she saw herself as was a real servant of the community at large and obviously particularly the black community so through those efforts in her early years she became very well-known and she continued to fight for civil rights and for the rights of all people to have the same opportunities as anyone else here in the city of Miami and so through those efforts she gave gained a name for herself, gained quite a bit of notoriety and because of that notoriety and influence she was sought out to assist with this effort in saving and preserving Virginia Key. That's kind of how she became involved with the effort to save Virginia Key. It was through being sought out by members of this initial group, this Friends of Virginia Key group, to lend her voice as a former politician and certainly at that time community activists here in the city of Miami.

Albuquerque: And, are you involved in the trust as well?

Range: Yes, actually. Once the trust was established, which was after the time of the Friends of Virginia Key, they became the Friends of Virginia Key Group collective and were successful in their efforts to gain an audience by the powers that be at that time, the City of Miami commission, the County Miami-Dade County commission. That eventually would lead to the establishment of the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust, and once the trust was established, my grandmother was installed as the chairman of the trust or chairlady of the trust, and she served in that capacity until the time that she passed, which was in 2006. After she passed, I thought it important as her grandson to continue some of her early efforts and some of her last efforts obviously in Virginia Key. I think was the kind of the last big project that she worked on. She

was very proud to be able to participate and assist with the saving and preservation of the area and so I thought it important for my own development as well as for the purposes that were most important to her which was serving the community. To continue her work—there was an opportunity for me to join the trust and take her place on the trust, and so after her passing I did accept that opportunity and I was accepted and installed as a trustee by members of the City Commission at that time which would have been in early 2007.

Albuquerque: Did you have any prior experience in such matters?

Range: Not directly. I had not been involved in the Virginia key effort, but certainly, I had watched her and observed her efforts from the very beginning. I think when at the time at the trust was established I was in high school, I went on to off to college in Georgia in Atlanta, and so I was not here for the entire time, but certainly upon my return back home after school and by beginning to work here locally in the Miami area as an attorney, I was keenly aware of a lot of the things that she was doing a lot of the projects that she was undertaking in what would be the last kind of years of her life.

I've always admired my grandmother. She was very instrumental in raising me. My mother passed away when I was eight years old and very shortly after that time, my grandmother moved in with my father and I in order to help to raise me, to bring me up. That was really a sacrifice for her at that time. As I got older, I recognized that sacrifice and also saw and recognized all of the other sacrifices that she made for the good of this community and so all of those things were important to me and I recognized that I would not have gotten to where I had arrived in terms of being able to go to law school, finish law school, and become a practicing attorney here—if not for her efforts certainly, first in desegregating a lot of the community here before I was even born, but certainly in her instrumental role in raising me and those other efforts in the community which she fought so vigorously for to ensure that opportunities would be available for myself and for people in my generation, children in my generation, and others to come behind us so none of those things were lost on me and all of those are reasons why I thought it important to kind of continue her efforts in Virginia key.

But no, I did not have any prior political involvement. However, after I did finish law school, one of my first jobs was to work for a commissioner in the city of Miami. At that time, it was Commissioner Johnny Winton and so, as a matter of fact, that was my first job as an attorney. It was to work in his office in the city of Miami. That was in the early 2000s when the trust was really beginning to take root, and certainly the property had already been preserved Virginia Key Beach Park had already been preserved and they were working on the restoration of the park to bring it back to what it was and to recreate a lot of the original features that were present at the park and at the trust back in those early days in the mid-40s and 50s, when it was open for recreation to blacks only. In little ways, I sought to influence my commissioner or at least to have him understand the importance of the things that my grandmother was undertaking as the chair lady of the trust and certainly there were items that came before the City Commission while I was working for the commissioner that came to a vote and that sort of thing, so I certainly saw it in my own way to kind of assist her efforts from that standpoint. So that would have been the closest, I would say, that I came to undertaking any of those sorts of efforts before becoming a member of the trust, after she passed.

Albuquerque: Ok, very good. So, let me ask you a few questions about how the—Before Virginia Key became available to blacks for recreational purposes, what sorts of places could African Americans go to enjoy a public space? What kind of public spaces were available?

Range: Well, of course, that was well before my time. I did not live through that era, but it was very difficult. Blacks did not have many areas or opportunities for recreation other than in their own community. And the kind of historical black communities here in Miami were, of course, first Coconut Grove of which kind of predated my family's existence here in Miami but Coconut Grove was kind of the first settlement if you will where blacks came to and blacks were very instrumental here in Miami unbeknownst to many they really helped to build what we know as the city of Miami. As a matter of fact, there are a number of incorporators of the city of Miami who were black, if you look at the city charter, the original city charter, and a number of the names of the incorporators were black persons. Really, the clearing of the swampland here in Miami—because of course when Miami was first settled, it was all swampland. There was nothing no nothing here. You did have Flagler, Flagler's Railroad which was one of the first big projects to come and he built his railroad which eventually went down to Key West and so you had blacks who were essentially Bahamian immigrants that settled here first coming through Key West primarily. My grandmother actually was born in Key West and that was but this was even before her time where blacks came up from Key West and helped to assist with clearing of the swampland, not just for Flagler's railroad, but also for the development of the city itself. Blacks really played a very major role in what we know now is the city of Miami today. But in terms of recreation areas, only in those areas in which blacks lived, could they really recreate.

So in Coconut Grove, and then later in Overtown, Historic Overtown, as well as Liberty City, eventually were the first areas where blacks settled here. There were certainly other names that you will hear—Lemon City and other areas certainly, Seminola and what-have-you but there were recreation spaces or not even recreation spaces but just blacks created their recreational opportunities in their own community. For example, in Historic Overtown, you came to find almost anything that you would need because blacks could not go very easily to downtown Miami to get things that they would need to shop for items that they would need, or to recreate, that sort of thing and so those things were done in the community and so in Overtown you found almost any person of any occupation and also any type of recreational opportunity. It was present right there in the community. You had doctors, you had attorneys—as a matter of fact, my grandmother was a clerk and secretary at Christian Hospital, which was in Overtown. It was the only hospital that blacks could go to for treatment at the time and so you had black doctors that worked there, black nurses, as I mentioned in Overtown you also had attorneys who offered their services but really it spanned the gamut of whatever you could think of from dry cleaners to shoe cobblers to newspapers to nightclubs, as a matter of fact, a lot of the famous black entertainers Sammy Davis Jr. and others would come down and perform on Miami Beach from time to time but they also came to Overtown and performed and so those were the type of recreational opportunities that blacks could take advantage of. They couldn't go to the beach, so the black performers would come to come to Overtown so that blacks could have the opportunity to hear them and to patronize and recreate. So again, very different time then and not much that the blacks could do because of segregation.

Albuquerque: And how did the drive to create a space for recreation where African Americans could come and enjoy themselves materialize? Or rather, how did that [space] come to be Virginia Key? How did Virginia Key become a space for African Americans to enjoy?

Range: Well, I don't know, from the early days how that space was selected let's say—it certainly was not Miami Beach and so was it was not as highly regarded in terms of the property itself and actually it was not the safest space to recreate in terms of the beachfront it lies right there along government cut and the tidal influences rip tides were very strong in that area, and even today. With the park being open at this juncture, swimming is not permitted because of those very strong tidal influences. It was a very dangerous area to recreate at that time. Blacks were always given, at that time, substandard everything and so with it not being an area that the ordinary public would consider for safe swimming and recreation, it was kind of just there and unused and so I don't know who determined—I'm sure the city or county had something to do with determining that this area would be made available for blacks to recreate. And I'm sure blacks at that time we're not in position to certainly could not choose where they would want to go, so if that space was made available for them then it made sense that they would take advantage of the opportunity to recreate there but I also know that it had been established as the area for blacks to recreate. They did take full advantage of it and there were all kinds of activities that went on there from church baptisms to Easter sunrise services to birthday parties, to weddings, to almost any type of event that you could imagine which could be held and was held there at Virginia Key Beach and so it became a source of pride a source of certainly lots of fun and good times and memories for many blacks in the early days.

Albuquerque: So, it seems that it was more than just beach space, it was a community place where you could convene as a community to participate in things together?

Range: Absolutely. It was a chance to kind of get out of the substandard community and be in a place that was different and obviously aesthetically a bit more pleasing in that it was along an oceanfront, a beachfront, and provided that opportunity to dip in the water and that sort of thing where you didn't have that in Coconut Grove or in Overtown or in Liberty City.

Albuquerque: Was it readily available for everybody?

Range: At that time, in the early days, it wasn't. I mean certainly at in the early days you didn't have the Rickenbacker Causeway which you utilized to access it now and you could only access Virginia Key Beach by boat or by ferry in the early days. It puzzles me to this day but you obviously had boats and ships that would be going in that direction and I've heard stories of a lot of families hitching a ride so to speak over and they had I guess different areas maybe along the Miami River that you could depart from and catch a ride to Virginia Key Beach. Certainly, I'm sure it took some took some planning or took some figuring out as to how you'd accomplish getting there because you certainly had to do that by boat or by ferry and as you can imagine not many blacks at that time owned vessels of that sort that would allow you to have transportation that way.

Albuquerque: How long did it go on like that? Like transportation by boat—

Range: Oh, that's probably a bit beyond my knowledge but certainly that history is there. I imagine that it was somewhere around, and I don't know exactly when the Rickenbacker was built, but I imagine that somewhere around the early 60s or so, maybe even a little bit before that. I'd imagine somewhere about that time is where you had the causeway being built or accessed besides boat being constructed, but it was also around that time that the beaches became desegregated as well and blacks had the opportunity to go other places.

Albuquerque: How was the upkeep of the beach done? Who was responsible for that?

Range: You did have beach staff. There were certainly a superintendents quarters there on the property and to my understanding the superintendent actually lived on Virginia Key at that time and so he, I imagine with some small staff, certainly lifeguard and maybe some other small staff available to him but primarily on the superintendent and perhaps members of his family that lived there with him at the time were the ones responsible for the upkeep of the park and of the beach and then I'm sure to a large degree those persons who recreated there did a lot of self-maintenance and that sort of thing to keep the area clean and available for the next persons who would come.

Albuquerque: I see, so people took care of it? The beach-goers would take care of it as well?

Range: Sure. It was a different time then and people valued a clean space and leaving a clean space for others and that sort of thing, and then I'm sure that the superintendent did play a role in helping to ensure that the beach area and the grounds remained in good condition.

Albuquerque: Was it only African Americans? Did it get any types of immigrants from other places? Or was it exclusively black?

Range: I mean at that time no. I mean, the immigrants at that time were of different descent than the immigrants now. I mean, you didn't have many immigrants from let's say Cuba or South America, where many of the immigrants today hailed from. Although now, you get them from all over the world as Miami has just become that sort of international city. At that time, it was a different population that was migrating here, but that area was really a substandard area and if you were not black, then you had the opportunity to go to areas like Miami Beach. If you weren't black, then there wasn't much reason for you to want to go and congregate with blacks in a substandard area. Certainly from pictures and history that I know, there wasn't much in terms of other persons that enjoyed that area at that time or that looked to enjoy that area.

Albuquerque: I see. So I see a little bit of a theme of the substandard resources that were made available to blacks. Can you elaborate a little more, like give some more examples? One of the examples that I wanted to ask you for, and you can give more [details about this] if you wish, was the garbage pickup. Can you give us a little example of how that played out?

Range: As it related to Virginia Key itself, or just a community generally here?

Albuquerque: In general

Range: Well just as in many other places during the civil rights era, , there you had the doctrine of separate but equal which in reality was not factual. There were separate facilities for almost everything for blacks here and everywhere in the South in the southern states certainly, but those facilities were not equal to those of whites. As we spoke about before the schools as one example, you had separate schools for blacks, but they were not equal schools. The facilities were not equal, the educational opportunities within the schools were not equal, and so that played out in all aspects of life and again before my time, but from what I understand from my grandmother and my parents and others that that was certainly the case, blacks just kind of were afforded a separate space but, , certainly by no means was it to the level that you would expect or would hope that it would be, and certainly was not anywhere near equal to that of what, , whites received so a lot of times blacks just had to make do because certainly, they didn't have, for the most part, didn't have the resources and things to have better or even to demand better at that time and so that was very much a process, , civil rights was very much a process here as it was in other places and, , only over time and through concerted effort and sacrifices on the parts of many were some of those sorts of equal opportunities achieved.

Albuquerque: I see. How representative of the situation nationwide were things here in Miami specifically? Basically in terms of civil rights, was it following suit with the other parts of the country were doing, or was there anything, in particular, happening in Miami for better or worse?

Range: Yes. I mean, I think generally the answer to that question is yes. But, as a related to Virginia key, even the desegregation of Crandon Park, one of the white beaches very near to the Key, it kind of predated the civil rights era as we know it in the 60s. Crandon Park was desegregated before the 60s. In the 50s, mid-50s or so, my grandfather and Garth Reeves waded out and decided that they were going to go and take a swim so in certain areas we were a bit, I guess, ahead of the time. As mentioned earlier, in terms of the desegregation of some of the schools, those things took place also around the civil rights era, but you had little efforts here and there that may have predated the civil rights era so –

Albuquerque: Can you speak a little bit more about how your grandfather Oscar, is it correct—?

Range: Yes.

Albuquerque: And Mr. Garth Reeves, is it? How did they desegregate Crandon Park?

Range: I'm probably not the foremost person with the knowledge of the history there but I do know that they, at the time, were aware that Crandon Park was not open to blacks and they didn't think that that was right. They thought, 'why shouldn't we be able to go and to swim and enjoy the facilities there?' I think maybe initially they were, some of the first or the first two, but there were one or two others, I think, that also were instrumental in achieving that effort. So, I don't want it to appear as though it was just them, but not many others maybe there were one or two or three other persons that kind of helped that movement along, but it was just very simple. I mean I think they just got up one morning and decided that they were going to go down there and swim and they were open to, certainly not hoping but open to the fact that anything could happen. They [understood] certainly that they weren't allowed to do that, [and that] they could suffer consequences as a result. But again, it was a matter of feeling that they should not and would not

be excluded any longer and they were certainly willing to take the risk of going down and doing that. I imagine that maybe it had been discussed a bit beforehand, but they very simply decided that they were going to go and take a swim and they did that and I guess fortunately at that time they weren't arrested and I don't think the county was really prepared at that point to respond to that and I think they took advantage of that lack of preparation by the county and then soon after others followed and eventually enough of a stink was made, I think by them to have the county kind of back off of their prior regulations and laws.

Albuquerque: As you look back now, being that you are of a later generation than the people that actually experienced that in—when was the Virginia Key made into a park?

Range: Into a recreation area? I think that's roughly around 1945 if I'm not mistaken.

Albuquerque: Your family, let's say your grandmother, she participated in the space?

Range: Yes, certainly. The family did go out and recreate there. Again probably not very often. That would have been a very special occasion to be able to go out, and again, at that time, you had to find transportation there to Virginia Key. You couldn't just drive there. Not that they would have necessarily had automobiles at that time, but certainly did not have the ability to just transport themselves there, so there had to be some concerted effort to gain transportation and access via boat to Virginia Key Beach, so I think that was the case for most. It was during a special occasion, or a church occasion, or some sort of community event or happening that most persons had the opportunity to go. At that time obviously, blacks were not of great means, of great resources, of great financial stability, and so any cost that it would have taken for them to get out there, and I'm sure there was some cost, was seen as pretty special.

Albuquerque: So, the question that I wanted to ask going with this is what place does Virginia Key hold today after, this history that has passed? What influence has it had in the African-American community?

Range: Certainly, it is very much a historical gem for the African-American community here and very much a part of our civil rights story I think that was the reason that citizens came together and saw the need to preserve it. It was because of the importance of preserving our history or having it be lost. And today, it really is, in my opinion, the most beautiful piece of dirt in the city of Miami. And we have proposals all the time from all sorts of folk who want to come and do different things there and have different things there and we do host quite a number of events and things that are open and available to the public. We get a whole host of persons of different backgrounds and descent that come out and can enjoy the park. And I think that was the vision of those who started the effort, to maintain this as a public space that people could come out and enjoy and learn and understand the history and, as mentioned, a lot of the early efforts in the reclamation of the park and the restoration of the park were to bring back a lot of the original components that were there when blacks went and recreated back in the, in the 40s and 50s. So things that they had like the carousel—they had a carousel, a mini train—all of those things we have brought back to existence at the park so that those persons who had the chance to recreate back in the day could come today and reminisce and do a lot of the same things that they had an opportunity to do back then. So you can imagine with all of those sorts of things, there were no

amusement parks available for blacks where they could go in and ride a carousel, or kids could go and ride a mini-train, and that sort of thing. That was kind of the place to go for blacks and so for it to be as beautiful as it is, it's super important to have it preserved and be available so that all can come and enjoy and like I said, relive that history.

Albuquerque: Yeah, it comes to mind. It was more than just a beachfront property; there were also other things like a carousel, a train—

Range: Yes

Albuquerque: Like for children exclusively, or was it for—?

Range: I mean, others could ride supposedly, but it was really meant for the kids, so the kids kind of took advantage of it more than others obviously, but certainly, I mean adults could ride if they chose, but it was taken advantage of mostly by the kids.

Albuquerque: And were there places to eat?

Range: Yes.

Albuquerque: Like what types of [food] for the adults let's say?

Range: Yes. They certainly did have and obviously the adults enjoyed the environment, generally the beachfront, and obviously, at that time, you kind of brought the things that you wanted to enjoy a lot of the time because you didn't have much in terms of money and or resources to be able to buy things, but they did have vendors there. They did have some kind of historic fair, food items, beverage items that could be enjoyed. Spoken of fondly are the corndogs that were made available by vendors there at the beach, and those were said to be the best corndogs anywhere. They had sodas and vending opportunities for drinks and that sort of thing I would imagine ice cream and that sort of thing, but a lot of families really came equipped with picnic baskets and all of the accouterments, I guess that you would have for a day at the beach. Those things were brought with them, brought from home for enjoyment so to enjoy as much as you could without having to purchase or to buy, where you may not have really had the means to do that at the time.

Albuquerque: I see. So even though it was a place that was supposed to be for everybody, there was still a little bit of restrictions about who could go there in terms of being able to get there, afford the things that are there?

Range: Right. I mean and it really was an area for blacks. So again, you didn't see many other persons going there because again, it wasn't the best beach. It wasn't the best area to go to so you wouldn't necessarily go there if you had the opportunity to go somewhere else where it was better. If you could go to Crandon Park, you'd go to Crandon Park because the facilities were better, the food opportunities were better, the recreation was better. They had carousels and things like that that you could go and enjoy that were in much better shape and much better condition than what was at Virginia Key. So if you had a chance to do better you didn't really—

That area really was taken advantage of by blacks, because that was the only area that they could go to and so they went because that was the only area, not because it was the best area that they could choose from.

Albuquerque: But in terms of being able—so it still required a great effort to get there.

Range: Yeah. Even though that was the only place that they could go, it didn't make it an easy journey. So you asked me if my family enjoyed it. Well yeah, on the occasions that they could, which certainly wasn't every day or wasn't often, they did what they could to get there when they could. If they could get there, then they did and they'd try to enjoy it, but that was again a special occasion or special opportunity where they would have to be able to go.

Albuquerque: Just to bring it to the present, you are a part of the trust as of right now. What are the plans for the future, for Virginia Key?

Range: What we have back when the trust was established—there were several things put in place to kind of guide what would happen there and there were a number of charrettes, public charrettes that were held in the community to give the public the opportunity to have input as to what should happen in that space. The trust used the information put together from those charrettes to come up with a master plan for the Virginia Key Beach park area and that master plan is what has guided the trust from its inception through today and continuing on. There's been minor updating of it but really that document is what has guided the development of Virginia Key Beach Park as we know it.

The restoration of the park has really been completed and now it's a matter of maintaining and replacing those sorts of things that need to make sure the park remains open and continues in good repair and so that's a large function of the trust today. But there is one final piece of the master plan, so to speak, that remains to be completed, and that is the museum. There was always in the plans to have a museum which would be dedicated to the history of Virginia Key Beach and particularly to the history of blacks here in the city of Miami and the earliest settlers, Bahamian settlers and others who came here and were the ones who actually enjoyed and recreated at the park, to preserve and to celebrate that history. So, we're in the process now of getting into the construction of a museum. We're finishing or at least have begun planning for the construction of the museum and we're hopeful that we'll be able to embark on that construction element very shortly.

Albuquerque: Very good. Is the space available for people to use it today, or does it have to be, under particular conditions?

Range: No. The park itself is open seven days a week and every day of the year except for, I believe, Christmas and perhaps New Year's. I think, are the two days. Certainly, I know it's closed on Christmas and there's one other day, one other public holiday that it's closed, but otherwise available to the general public from roughly sunrise to sunset each day.

Albuquerque: Very good, is there anything else you would like to add, that you think would be important for people to know about Virginia Key or about the civil rights movement here in Miami?

Range: Just that there's a very rich history, which I think has been overshadowed because of the international city that Miami has become. We have the best weather in my opinion of anywhere, and I was born and raised here in Miami so this is, the only place that I've known, but I've visited many other places and climates and I've always returned here and I think that if I had my choice that I would continue to remain living here because of the weather and the climate. That, I think, has attracted so many here, and continues to attract many here, but then you have so many other great immigrant stories. Certainly, that of the Cuban migrants, that of the Haitian migrants, and you really had migration from all of the Caribbean countries here or most of the Caribbean countries here, and, more recently South America and Europe.

All of those persons have a story to tell, and so those having come later than the Bahamian immigration story and obviously, blacks immigrating here [as slaves], as well as [Native American] Indians—because let me tell you one thing we didn't touch on, Indians used the Virginia Beach property probably before anyone, including blacks, and they were very instrumental in the building of the community here in the area becoming what it is today. That American Indian story, as well as the black history here has been overshadowed over time and so I think it's important, as we go forward, to celebrate those things and to remember that those persons were very much, more so than anyone else, the reason that Miami is what it is today. As mentioned, looking at just the incorporators of the city of Miami, a number of those were blacks and really some of the first settlers here were Bahamians, were black folk who came and who helped to build, what we know today is the city of Miami. So it's important that we celebrate all of those stories, and not allow them to be overshadowed. That's part of our effort, as the trust, to have this museum that will celebrate those stories as well and keep those things fresh in people's minds as to why they're able to live and enjoy the place that they are in today, in Miami.

Albuquerque: Thank you so much, Mr. Range.

Range: Absolutely.