

Interviewee: Franklin, Michael

Interviewer: Brian Clark

Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

Today is April 14, 2008. My name is Brian Clark. I am interviewing Michael A. Franklin whose current address is 2301 Massachusetts Avenue, Northwest in Roanoke. He grew up in the neighborhood of Southwest and West End. This is for the Roanoke Public Library's Neighborhood Oral History Initiative.

BC: Mr. Franklin, you were just telling me you are 55 years old, lived in Roanoke all your life except for – Where'd you go to school.

MF: That's correct. I went to school here in the city of Roanoke. I started at Loudon Elementary School which no longer exists on Loudon Avenue in Northwest Roanoke City. Its Loudon Park right now. Our other elementary school was – in the 3rd grade, I went 2 years to Loudon, and in the 3rd grade, I went to Lincoln Terrace which was a new school at the time. I went there for 1 year. That was the first year the Hurt Park Elementary School was built. There were too many students and not enough class space, that's why I bussed to Lincoln Terrace and in the 4th grade and 5th grade, I came back to Hurt Park for 2 years and then I went to Harrison Elementary School for 1 year in the 6th grade and that was my segregated education. The schools were segregated during that time. That was the first 6 years of my public school education.

BC: That was up until '54. Is that correct?

MF: '64 or '65.

BC: So you were in segregated schooling until '64 or '65?

MF: And in 19..., in the 7th grade, we went to integrated schools, Robert E. Lee Junior High School. That's where the Poff Federal building is right now and to give you some kind of indication and there were no school buses. We walked to school from this area, this neighborhood here down to Lee Junior.

BC: That's probably about a mile and a half?

MF: A mile and a half, give or take.

BC: Wow. Did you attend high school?

MF: Yes, I attended high school at Jefferson Senior down – Its the Jefferson Center now. And when I was in the 9th grade at Robert E. Lee Junior High School, I was fortunate enough to play basketball for the Junior Varsity and Varsity team in 1968/69.

BC: What position did you play?

MF: I played center.

BC: Did ya?

MF: Yes.

BC: I was trying to guess. I get those questions too. You're rather tall.

MF: It was an experience going from a segregated school to an integrated school and the challenges of the day, you know. It was a balance. Just to understand about the transition and the change and just dealing with it and by being a part of a successful basketball program helped us really achieve. I guess my mother really played a major role in shaping my life plus my siblings. I guess I'll speak for my siblings 'cause a lot of them were not as popular as I was as far as playing basketball. I gained a lot of notoriety and it opened a lot of doors for different opportunities. And being successful and humble with it.

BC: With that basketball team, when you played, was that an integrated team?

MF: In the 6th grade, the Salvation Army had the first integrated basketball, satellite basketball team here in the Roanoke Valley. We had 5 black players and 5 white players and we played at the Salvation Army on Salem Avenue and that was the first team, to my knowledge, that had actual teams here in the City of Roanoke and we played the games at Woodrow Wilson. This was, golly, 196-, I was 12 at the

time, 12/13 at the time.

BC: And you were on that team?

MF: Yeah, I was on that team.

BC: What was that experience like? Was that your first experience with segregation, I mean, desegregation?

MF: Integration – The Salvation Army opened up the – It was called the Boy's Club and boys and girls went and they opened the doors up to the kids in the community and we just went in and started playing and participating and I guess the rest is history. You notice it, but once you take a part, once you are being a part of it, you just accept and move forward right on with it.

BC: What was the most, maybe, noticeable, or the most prominent memory that stands out in your mind that first day going into school and it was integrated?

MF: Oh God. (Laughing) I guess to look back, I can't really remember the first day but I guess what you remember are occasions and situations where you are apart and then people notice the change – if you are the only black person, people notice you being the only black person. Or if you're the only white person with the blacks, then people notice and then it kinda stood out and then kinda embraced it. We're all part of the team. It was fun, a lot of fun. It was a challenge as you look back at it. A lot of fond memories.

BC: Like what? Any that stand out right now?

MF: Oh God. (Both Laughing)

BC: Just a couple. (Laughing)

MF: I guess the – going places like being with Halifax with the Confederate flags and dealing with Confederate flag issues of the time. And guys wanted to go in the stands and take the flag. It would be like the whole stands would be all white students and there was a Confederate flag in the middle of 'em and a couple of guys on the team wanted to go up in the stands and take the flag. (Both laughing) We said, “Naw, man, we gotta play a game. We can't take no flag”. (Both Laughing) - and keeping people under control and sticking with the mission at hand versus being distracted. There were a lot of distractions and sticking to the task and achieving your goals. Those are fond memories as I look back at it. To look past distractions and reap the benefits of, hey, the prize is not there, the prize is here. And its keeping your eye on the prize and being successful and kinda like laughing all the way to the bank in the process. You know, if you say, and then we'd think, easy money. (Laughing) As I look back, the only jewelry that I wear is jewelry that's been given to me for playing basketball and I got it at every level. From high school to college to playing international basketball. I've been fortunate to be one person's trash and another person's treasure. And I say that right there. In 1971, when I graduated from high school, I was the best basketball player in the state of Virginia.

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BC: No kidding.

MF: And one of the best basketball players in the country. And to not be good enough for certain schools until 2 years later and my mother said, “If you weren't good enough in '71 you're not good enough in '73. So the University of Cincinnati gave you an opportunity to get an education and we are a family of our word. Just because you have a basketball ability, you want to transfer it back to Blacksburg – Naw, you're staying in Cincinnati 'cause they gave you a chance to get an education. Then that's where you're going to stay and you have no say-so in the matter.” (Interviewer laughing) And that's pretty much how it went.

BC: I was going to ask how'd you feel about that.

MF: Well, I wanted to transfer back but yet when it was brought to my attention about how things was and how things are and someone gives you a chance to get an education and it don't come cheap and today – I didn't pay anything and to be in an out-of-state University of Cincinnati in 1975, from '71 to '75 would've cost about \$60,000 being an out-of-state student. That same education today would cost about \$140,000 for 4 years and to put a value on that – so anytime today when I have to pay money for

something, I say deduct it from that \$135,000 education that you got on your basketball ability. And to always put a value on the money you didn't pay. You still deduct it and that way, the education didn't come cheap. You're still putting a value on it, the knowledge you have, for a better life. And to try and get kids to understand about the standards of learning, 'cause I have a lot of ability, a lot of stories to share with kids for opportunities and to pick kids who want a better life, you can tell 'em how to get it. Kids who don't want a better life, you tell 'em, "If you want a better life, you can go over here and get it right here. You ain't got to mess this person's life up in the process. You can walk right over there and get – If you want a terrible life, you can go right over there and get it. You ain't got to take 10 people with ya." "What you mean by that?" I say, "What you're doing is you're influencing this person who is easily influenced." And its coaching – They asked me to coach basketball at Patrick Henry High School for one season in 1984/85. It lasted for 16 years. (Interviewer laughing) Two state championships. We were the first team, Coach Dean took 2 teams to Hawaii and I was the assistant coach. But he had – One thing people say is how you handle people. No, you don't handle people, you deal with people. 'Cause you handle animals, Red Auerbach with the Boston Celtics, he put it in perspective. He is one of the coaches that talked about handling people and dealing with people. You handle animals and you deal with people. If I am incarcerated, I'm being handled. If I'm in jail, I'm being handled. But right now, we are dealing with each other and you have a choice in the state of Virginia and I took the state flag, dealing with kids, and we're trying to work on the Standards of Learning. We start with the flag. What do it mean? Nobody really knows. The simple solution I came up with was just stay and write and blue or wrong and red on the ground (??) And you got a choice. We fly this flag over our state and a lot of people that I work with with the Department of Juvenile Justice call me stupid for saying it and trying to put it into practice. This is a challenge that I see 'cause if I sit down with a kid one-on-one and I ask, "How you wanna live? Just think about it. Show me that emblem." I say, "How you want it? Right standing or wrong on the ground. We fly this flag over our state". And everybody looked at it and have no idea what it means. Its just something blue hanging in the air, versus, really, everything dealing with the state have that emblem on it. And so as we teach our kids to really look at it and take it seriously during the educational process, we send a stronger message – When you do wrong, there are consequences associated with it. When you do right, there's reward associated with it. Sometimes, the reward is not as great as you might expect but it takes time. Its the reward. And to just share the ups and downs, the positive and negative experiences. Sometimes the negative experiences, are some of the greatest experiences you'll ever have because, hey, it can't get no worse than this. It can only get better. And I always know what the worst is that could happen to me and move forward than to not know – I'd rather lose first – that first season in the integrated team, we beat the first game and lost all the rest of 'em. (Both laughing)

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BC: Definitely likes to get switched don't it? (??) (Both laughing)

MF: I guess, to look back at it, it was a humbling experience because we thought we were world beaters – I think we scored like 12 points and the team that we played against, they scored like 6 and the other team just beat our brains out. They were so much more – We were like 12 years old and teams have been playing for like 3 or 4 years against first year players. No matter how big you are, if you don't have the skills, you're not going to excel and...

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BC: That's funny. (Both Laughing)

MF: Its heart-warming. I got so many heart-warming experiences with that basketball. And I had an experience once during segregation. It was challenging because it was a guy that I went to Junior High School with that was in another neighborhood and I was like an 8th grader playing on the 9th grade team in one of the counties. And the county had a reputation for being kind of not racially friendly to black people. And so, it was two black guys on the team and we went to this county to play this game and some of the things that were said wasn't really from the people from the county. The one white guy

that was saying all the stuff, I recognized him from my Junior High School and what I did, I was just looking. I just turned and looked at him. Make eye contact. Look him square in the eye. Just look at ya. You just stare people down. And the next thing you know, they were changed. And then after it was over with, I would see him and I would walk up to him face-to-face and I said, "Now, could you repeat that?". And to this day, nobody ever has. To say it one way versus saying it another.

Sometimes, I call it false courage to live and deal with situations – If you put God first in everything you do, its a reward for you to be fearing only of God then you live a better life. I'm a pretty big guy, you know. I ain't never been injured, no broken bones. I played basketball at the University of Cincinnati and to be fortunate enough to – I had football equipment at home but I had never played in an organized football game in my life. (Interviewer laughing) And when I finished playing basketball in 1975, it was 4 pro football teams that wanted me to seriously consider playing football and the Dallas Cowboys was one of them and Gil Grant wrote me, he typed me a letter and hand-wrote me a letter and wanted me to seriously consider playing professional football – (Laughing) – by the way I played basketball. I never really was a big Dallas fan and at the time, I always thought I could play professional basketball. (Phone ringing)

BC: Mr. Franklin, this has, I am really excited to hear this perspective that you've acquired over the years and I'd like to step back a little bit and look at -

MF: (on phone)

BC: I'd like to just take a step back and just kinda go through some of your childhood experiences and what helped create that mentality and philosophy that you have by now.

MF: I think mainly my family – To grow up in a neighborhood where we grew up in, we were poor, I was poor and never really knew or realized I was poor until I look back on it. Yet, we utilize being poor to not be wasteful. I guess by being conscious of (Phone ringing) (Talking on phone)

BC: Are you referring to the neighborhood in Southwest?

MF: Excuse me? Oh yeah, right where Prairie Park is, that's where...

BC: What was the address, do you remember? Or what road it was?

MF: My grandmother lived at 24 12th Street and I lived at 34 12th Street Southwest, right now where Prairie Park, where the basketball court is – They put the basketball court when they designed the park where I used to live at.

BC: Oh, you're kidding. OK.

MF: That's why the court is in that part. That's where I grew up at.

BC: OK

MF: In Prairie Park.

BC: And when were you born?

MF: 1952. I was born on 11th Street. The house was on 11th Street but I was born in Old Burrel Hospital.

BC: OK. And you mentioned your mother. Was it just your mother?

MF: My father died when I was 12 and my mother raised 6 kids, Miss Lorraine Franklin. She put all of us through college except for 1. My older brother did not want to go. After Jefferson, he said he was tired of wrecking his brain. (Both laughing) He always has worked but all my other siblings went to college and graduated.

BC: And your mom's name was?

MF: Lorraine.

BC: What was your dad's name?

MF: Nathaniel C. Franklin

BC: And you're one of six, huh?

MF: I was born right in the middle. I grew taller than everyone else. (Interviewer Laughing)

BC: I bet they loved that.

MF: Oh, yeah. Right down here at Graybar, I don't know if you know where Graybar is. Do you

know where Libby is on the corner?

BC: Mm mm. Yeah, 12th and Salem.

MF: Graybar is right across the street from Libby. And right down behind Graybar is where I'm talking about. We used to play football in the back of Graybar because they had a lot more room in the back of the building and – We called it Graybar Stadium. (Laughing)

BC: That was the neighborhood?

MF: That's what the name of the building was.

BC: What were you playing with...?

MF: Just neighborhood kids.

BC: OK. Were there a lot of kids out back then?

MF: Oh yeah, the whole neighborhood. I mean, it was like different streets and all the kids get together and each person played a position.

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BC: What was your house like?

MF: It was small. My 3 brothers, we all three guys were in the same room. My sister stayed with my grandmother. So we had pretty much the upstairs and then like 3 beds in a room and all the guys in the same room. Your parents had their room. The living room was downstairs. It was compact but you had a chance to grow and really appreciate – In order to appreciate I guess the lives we have today, we had to go through the hard times of yesterday to appreciate the opportunities. Mainly, the opportunities were very limited as far as plentiful on one hand but as you look at the big picture, limited as far as getting - things that we throw away today, yesterday we used to where there wasn't nothing left. You used it because that's the way it was and the way - If you wanted something, you looked at it from a different perspective versus throwing it in the trashcan, "Naw, we can get some use out of that."

BC: Can you give me a couple of examples of this?

MF: Well, a pair of shoes with holes in 'em. You know, like, you'd put some cardboard in it or you put something in it until your parents could get some, could make it around to it or they might get an older shoe and take it and cut it and work with it and then put it inside the shoe to where you got next to your feet. Instead of putting in cardboard, you might have gotten a piece of leather which served better, I mean, and then the shoe wearing out versus put your feet on the ground, where some people are walking around barefooted. We had one pair of shoes in the neighborhood – You really didn't notice it because people walking around barefoot all the time in the summertime. Some of 'em probably didn't have shoes. We were always fortunate enough to have shoes. Always fortunate enough to have clothes. I can never recall going hungry. It was always food.

BC: Even with 6 of you.

MF: There were 6 of us. There was always food and my sister was telling me yesterday how mom would get a 50 pound bag of potatoes, 25 pounds of flour and so many pounds of sugar and the different ingredients and made food from scratch. Used to make bread. There was a bakery at 5th Street, the Kroger Bakery and Merita Bakery and my mom's bread – people would come through the neighborhood, "Miss Franklin, I want some of that bread", just 'cause she cooked it all the time, I guess she got good at it and I know, this was back, I'm talking back in the '50s and '60s. So I asked her to make some bread in the '80s and '90s and she tried to make some, must've forgot the recipe. (Both laughing) But times change when you really look back at the food, how the food was prepared, how much healthier – I mean as far as being sick, if you has asthma, you gotta go out there and take something this time of year right here with your nose running and allergies and it was stay in the house or put up with it or deal with it. Get a rag or something and blow his nose with it and keep on going. And see the kids being adventurous, we used to always just want to go out. We'd go out and play in the river.

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BC: How far did you roam in that? You said you lived here locally at 12th Street but how far were you

able to roam?

MF: On bicycles, we went to North Campup (??) in Salem out to Carvins Cove.

BC: That's a long way.

MF: That's a long way on bicycles. I can recall going to Carvins Cove on a bicycle, up Williamson Road, up there at Brookside there, up on a bicycle going all the way up to Hollins, up Reservoir Road going to the Cove. Got a flat tire and rode it right back on a flat tire 'cause there was a thumb tack in my tire and I said I just got to ride it 'cause I'm not going to walk. (Laughing) It was just so many experiences. I guess being adventurous and I guess not getting seriously injured, not getting seriously - being safe, always thinking safety enough to where - there was always a level of safety in everything - I guess by being - parents working for the railroad played an important part on safety, sports safety, just thinking safety first. And getting people around you to think the same way. How safe is it? As a basketball official now, if players get rough, stop it. 'Cause if the play got too rough versus stopping - cause and call an inadvertent whistle and then give the ball to somebody and then warn the players about, "Hey, the play is getting too rough". That way, you maintain a level of safety and control versus "Let 'em play", Naw, the kids are learning - I apply the same home training that I got to how I deal with people's kids - Like you and I right now, how we're dealing with each other. There's a level of respect and appreciation versus whatever.

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BC: You mentioned that safety aspect probably came from your folks working for the railroad. Were they both working for the railroad most of their lives?

MF: My father retired - My grandfather retired from the railroad. My uncle retired from the railroad and my father retired from the railroad and...

BC: Wow. Did your mom work for the railroad?

MF: My mom worked as a lady that cleans up houses and then she got on as a nurse's assistant at the Veterans Hospital in Salem and she retired from there after I think 29 years. They call her "Momma Franklin". (Interviewer Laughing) She worked with all the patients who really respected her opinion and they called her Momma Franklin. She is a good lady.

BC: I bet.

MF: She had a reputation that supersedes mine. (Both laughing)

BC: Well you mentioned the food too in relation to your mom. Did you guys have a garden or anything?

MF: We had a garden. We had several gardens, I guess right over here on Norfolk Southern's property. Right now the tracks have expanded to where the garden used to be. We had a garden on the right-of-way and we went up there one summer and planted food. We came back the next summer and they had cut everything away. (Laughing) It was just part of the land for putting the new tracks in and expand it wider. It was progress. That's just the way it was. We were just using the dirt.

BC: Did you have a garden after that anywhere?

MF: Oh yeah, my mother had one. She always had a garden around the house and even today, I still grow tomatoes.

BC: I was going to ask if you had to help out with that.

MF: Oh yeah. Even right now I enjoy just gardening and some of the vocational classes I'm learning in school like sheet metal, wood-working - some of the objects, furniture I made in high school, I still have myself.

BC: Wow. Good quality stuff.

MF: Knowing what type wood that was good wood and valuable and then just making it right, having to put a project together to make a grade. You know, just pick something you like and then just make it, pass the time and learn something in the process.

BC: You mentioned that you were going to colleges. What did you end up majoring in.

MF: Urban Affairs and Child Psychology.

BC: So coming out of building furniture to Urban Affairs and Child Psychology. How did that transition occur?

MF: Its just something I felt, well, I've always thought about John Kennedy's words. You know what those words are don't ya?

BC: Uh uh.

MF: "Ask not what the country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" or your community. I feel that I can best serve my community by reaching back and doing what I done and look at it and say, "Hey, man, you did your best" - It was great, feeling good about it. Just moving on

BC: That's excellent.

MF: That's pretty much – people helped me – even right now, 55 years old, from kindergarten, and Jerusalem Baptist Church and the first year of school, I had to wait out of school a whole year 'cause my birthday coming in November so I had to wait until I was 7 to start the 1st grade so that first year, they put in kindergarten and some of the same guys I went to kindergarten with I still know today. We went all the way through school together. (Interviewer laughing)

BC: If I say "Roanoke, Southwest", the neighborhood you grew up in, what are the couple of images or thoughts that first come to mind? Anything in particular?

MF: People.

BC: How so?

MF: The people made the, just made it. Each character - as I do – each person had their own individual character and the characters were just, some you can't describe. Its something that its difficult to describe on one hand but on another hand, living it, you think about people and if you lived it – we'd say like, "Do you remember this person or that person?" and they say, "Yeah, I remember that person." and you describe 'em and they be talking about different characteristics about the person versus the person in the room who has no idea who you're talking about. They can't imagine and you try to paint a picture for the person and – some people were alcoholics and we never knew alcoholics. It was people that were homosexuals, like, everybody just dealt with 'em, they were just who they were – And this person this way and you gave 'em names and whatever, every kind of character in the neighborhood that exist today where people just dealt with 'em different and say. "That's the way they are". Everybody pretty much just did their thing and left people alone unless people sometimes overstep boundaries. But for the most part, everybody left each alone and did their thing. It was kinda confined on one hand because you couldn't go to movie theaters. At one time, you couldn't go and the next time you could go to any one you want to. It just seemed like overnight, like a Burger King on Melrose Avenue. There was a Kenny's across the street. You couldn't go buy a hamburger and then - one day you couldn't buy a hamburger and the next day, they were glad to have your business. (Laughing) It just seemed like during the transition overnight and – kids embracing other kids as we grew closer together. Some of the same people that I've met, black and white, I still have today as friends. And to me, its fun. Its a very enjoyable – Its a humbling experience to me, very humbling because I could've very easily been incarcerated if not for people saying the right thing, "If you do this" or "If you do that". "If you do the wrong thing you're going to jail. If you do the right thing, you're going to college". Sometimes, you'd be right on the verge of doing the wrong thing (both laughing). And you think just for a second, you say, "Hey, this is gonna lead me here. This is gonna lead me there." In making that choice and bail him out versus staying and even today, I say, "Oh man, I've got too many people depending on me". And realizing who put food on the table and where the food come from on the table and not realize it. And some of the kids whose parents gave 'em everything as a kid growing up. I look at 'em today and the old saying comes into play, "Give me a fish and I'll feed you for a day, Teach me to fish, I'll feed you for a lifetime". And I feel like I've been taught to fish for a lifetime and I try to teach people around me, people that I want to associate with to feed yourself for a lifetime instead of just reaching out for your next meal, not knowing where its coming from. And to me, that's something that has been instilled in me just by having the best of both worlds. I had the best

of the segregated world and I'm living the best of the integrated world. (Laughing)

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BC: Its an amazing perspective.

MF: I live a good life. I'm a NASCAR fan. I learned about NASCAR growing up. Did you ever hear of Wardell Scott? (??) Not really knowing who he was – I remember Fireball Roberts – He got killed at Daytona. I don't know if you know anything about that. This guy – I mean what happened, the guy wrecked and that always burned my interest in that sport.

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BC: What other types of interests did you have, like, as you were growing up with your family? - 'cause it seems like you have the sports and NASCAR but were there other things that you were interested in when you were growing up?

MF: Oh yeah, everything we ever wanted, our parents made a way for us to get it. Each kid – If you wanted – I don't know how they done it. (Both laughing) IF it was within reason, no dream was impossible but to set realistic goals, each kid set realistic goals and to have realistic goals and to have a support base to help you achieve the goals versus – Education – My family always put a strong emphasis on education. Constantly educate yourself and you don't need no big degree hanging on the wall. Educate yourself and use your education to make the world better. I guess my parents – Its been instilled in my siblings and myself to have an opportunity to change the world for the better is an opportunity that a lot of people don't have. An opportunity that a lot of people do have but don't realize it. And to have that opportunity and realize it, its a power. Its a power that shouldn't be taken for granted. And a lot of times, people take my power, I have that power, but I won't show that power and they'll take that power I have for granted and when that power is applied, I tell them how and why I applied that power the way I applied it just to see how abusive they were gonna be, thinkin' that they had more power. If I'm in total control and I know I'm in total control, I'm gonna give you all the rope you need. If you want to hang yourself then that's just the way – to me that's the way success operates and I think that's something that I reach back, I look back on my family have instilled in me to be a quality person. The quality of the character and just every situation was always a learning situation whether it was fun. I'll tell you another little example. My father, my brothers and I were kids, right, and I got rewarded for being wrong. My father told my two brothers and I – We was in a car – Some white kids were playing a game, they were playing games and my father was visiting this white gentleman, I have no idea who the gentleman was, or even who the kids was. But it was Orange Avenue in Northwest, that's when the whole Northwest area was all white, an all white neighborhood. And this was like in the '60s. I'd say '64/'65, it might've been '63 and we had the windows rolled down. The kids came to the car and tried us to get us out the car to play with 'em. We wouldn't get out of the car. We stayed in the car. We said, “Naw, we can't get out the car”. They wanted to know why. We said, “No, we can't get out the car”. My dad told us not to get out of the car. So they went and played some more and came back again, begged us to get out the car and play. We wouldn't get out of the car. So the third time they came back, I got out the car and started playing with 'em. They played a game with some colors. They had some crayons. They played a game with some crayons. We sat on the porch and played. I must've played with 'em for a minute. I went back to my other brothers and they still wouldn't get out of the car. (Interviewer laughing) And so I played with 'em, just having a good time playing the game and so my father came back and he chastised my brothers for not getting out of the car and playing. He originally told us, “Don't get out the car”. And so by getting out of the car and playing, I heard him telling my mother that I got out of the car. I wasn't in the room but he told her that Bobby and Ned (??) wouldn't get out the car. He was mad with them for not getting out of the car but happy with me. See on one hand, I was kinda rewarded for doing wrong. That was an example of a situation of many situations that occurred – just sit and think about 'em – and by taking that step, I have gone places and been places in my life. “I can't believe you done that”. I say, “Well, I did.”

(Interviewer laughing) I've been to the Daytona 500 just 'cause I wanted to do it. To have a chance to

go up in there and sit and know exactly what's going on and for – people ask you questions and you answer questions and, say, you ask me a question, I answer your question and you've asked a question and I've given you my answer and see how much you know about what you asking me. I caught a player in basketball going from offense to defense and that's how that game is played. The quicker you can play offense and defense, the transition, the more successful you are. And the quicker you understand how to get into it, you can apply the same thing to how you live and you gonna always be sharp and on the edge of what's going on. To me, that just what – I chose to live in the Roanoke Valley. The Roanoke Valley really didn't choose me. But I ain't realize the potential 'cause I've lived here all my life, with the exception of going to the University of Cincinnati, playing basketball in Europe and South America and places like that. Roanoke has always been my home.

BC: What has made you stay?

MF: I made a pledge I would never live anywhere – after living in Cincinnati for 4 years, I made one pledge, I would never live nowhere north of Roanoke. That's a pledge I made to myself.

BC: What was the difference?

MF: The weather.

BC: Oh, OK.

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MF: The weather. I had friends and the weather is just so brutal on a person's body and have four seasons. We get all four seasons in the mountains. We get all four seasons. To really appreciate what we have in Roanoke, you have to see the rest of the world and I done been a lot of places in the world outside of the United States. I've been to South America. I done been to Europe, Scandinavia. I done been to the South Pacific all dealing with basketball. Basketball gave me all those opportunities. To take those opportunities to appreciate where you come from and what you have, to me, to be able to maintain it and help shape it to where its always a positive even in a negative situation. Even with law enforcement being what it is to be critical of law enforcement that no doubt exists. I say, "Naw, I got to try to help law enforcement better understand as a citizen, right is right. You got to be able to step back sometimes and hear all the stories to put all the facts into a report versus being a judge. "I'm not going to put this in there", and a person is lying to you and law enforcement gets lied to a lot in the Afro-American community. 'Cause sometimes a woman can be deceitful if she's intelligent. If she can use the law to where the law put other women in danger. I guess I say that because it doesn't really affect you until it happens to you. And see like, I'm a single black man, 55 years old. I retired from the City of Roanoke after 26 years of service in the Juvenile Incarceration Prevention. But if I'm dealing with a crazy lady that say, "He the man, I'm going for him. I don't know what it takes to get him." She can make herself a victim and if she do things the right way then – I could even fall prey to her, always being downtown in the system or I can say, "Hey, use your education. Trust in the spirit and let the chips fall where they may". I understand about the justice system the way I do and being patient the way I do. I was faced with a situation like that and – understanding the jurisdictions like Roanoke, Salem – Some of the stuff people get away with in Roanoke, they don't get away with in Salem or Roanoke County 'cause the law is dealt with different. Sometimes, people don't realize who break the law are a little wrong, what jurisdictions means. And they cross them jurisdictions and get picked up and then its a whole different ball game. Its a whole different case. And to know that and to learn that, my parents always told me about the law. As kids growing up, they told me, "If you get in trouble with the same friends you get in trouble with, don't call me, you call them. Don't even pick up – Don't waste your money or time or other people's time calling me". And knowing that right there, and knowing that, uh uh. Some are a right of passage, uh uh. Naw, that's a curse.

0.46.02.3

BC: Was this philosophy that your parents raised you with, was that common in the neighborhood or was that unusual?

MF: I think it was common with us. I can't speak for – It might've been unusual – for the most part it

was common with most families because if someone saw me doing something wrong 3 or 4 blocks away or streets away, parent would call and they'd something to me and they'd call. They'd say, "Boy, I talked to you mom. You go home right now." (Interviewer laughing) They'd know who I was. They used to call me one of those bad-ass Franklin boys. (Both laughing) I look at the pictures, I'm talking I couldn't been more than 8 or 9 years old. But shirt-tails be out – I just looked at myself – I looked like I was getting ready to get it. We was less than 10 years old just looking for something to get into. People used to have fruit trees and stuff like that. We'd be in the fruit trees, the apple trees – get hungry – cherries in season, apricots in season – whatever was in season. You always went in people's fruit trees. (Both laughing) In the day, there were fruit trees all over the neighborhood. A lot of times, people would say, "Take the fruit but leave the tree". (Both laughing) As you look back it, I think about the "Little Rascals", some of the same stuff, getting like a skate you roll with and then make a scooter out of it, had it where you could turn it. Lean one way and whichever way you lean on it, that's the way it would go. Putting a bicycle together from scrap parts, you know, piecing one together. Walking through the neighborhood finding this or finding that.

0.48.00.3

BC: What'd you guys do in the evening? You know, after school.

MF: During the World Series would come on in the afternoon and we used to always, somebody would take – bring a radio to school and we had shop class in the Fall and they would listen – the World Series came on like 2 o'clock and they used to let us put it on the radio in the shop class. And then at night, once the sun went down, you could pick up a clear channel stations from up and down the East Coast. It was KMOX – I still do that today. I listen to radio stations from different – like Detroit, Cleveland. That's how they listened to me here in Roanoke when I played basketball in Cincinnati.

BC: Your folks here? They could listen to you on the radio?

MF: At night on WCKY.

BC: No kidding.

MF: A clear channel station at 50,000 watt. The games came on at night, the could hear me. People used to always say they could hear the games.

BC: Now did a lot of people gather around for that or was it more individualized per family? Not necessarily for your games but just in general.

MF: I can recall when Muhammad Ali knocked out Sonny Liston and everybody said that guy, he had a big mouth and all and he knocked out Sonny Liston to say "I'm the greatest". We used to listen to different station - called Randy, it used to come out of Tennessee and he used to play like all the latest music out of Memphis. You could pick up all the different stations all over, up and down the East Coast at night. Just scan the channels. Baseball was plentiful, different state teams. And radio was entertainment at night. If it came on at night, you could pick it up. The radio was kinda like the big time entertainment because you used your imagination. And what I do even today, I go to baseball games and take the radio with me and listen to the announcer. Any sporting event, if I get a chance – even racing, I'll take MRN and PRN. The MRN do a better job of describing the game, the race to a blind person and you pick up on it. People who watch it for the first time with me they say, "The guys still talking but the TV's gone to a commercial". I'm listening to the radio and they're giving me a more detailed look – I can see what's going on here but with the radio, they're giving me more details as far as describing to a blind person. That right there has, to me, enhanced my entertainment – just be more entertaining – knowing what's going on – then helping kids that I work with better understand – this is why I do it this way 'cause I get double or triple the information. They say, "How you know that? How you know this?" (Both laughing) I got a guy telling me in one ear what just happened. A lot of times, and this is getting ready to happen now, "How'd you know that was getting ready to happen?" "A guy just told me." "Who told you?" I tell you something else I'll never try to do, something that was never done to me as a kid. Every time I was critical or punished, I was given a reason for it. I would never punish – sometimes I felt like I was punished for no reason. People will call, they weren't

sure who done it. They say, "Michael did it." They said, "Did you do it?". I said, "No I didn't do it.". "This was something like you would've done. You're going to get the consequences for it anyway." As a kid growing up, I never did get a whipping. Know what I got? Killings. My parents would kill me and bring me back to life just so they could kill me again and never put a scratch on me. I got some killings as a kid growing up. You know something? As kids growing up, I deserved every one of them. I look back it and I think I'm a better person today by some of those so-called killings. My parents used to tell me, "I brought you in this world and I will take you out.". You know something? They meant it. I remember a couple of times, I heard my father talk about his mamma gave him a whipping one time and he played dead. So you know what I did? I did the same thing. (Both laughing)

0.53.01.8

BC: Did it work?

MF: It worked. If you hear something that somebody done that was successful – It worked for them, it might for me. That's the way its been the whole time, winning State Championships, the players – growing up – that's something that brought our community together in 1969 and 1970, the blacks and the whites together. 'Cause we played – Jefferson had – the majority of the team was African American. But it was white players on the team, everybody's rallying around the team. We won the State Championship by one point.

BC: Wow.

MF: There was one second to go in the game, the other team had two free throws and the score was tied, 59-59. Jefferson, the team I was playing for, won the game without going into overtime by one point. And the guy on the other team missed both free throws. The second free throw hit the front of the rim and bounced straight back to him. My teammate took the shooter and the shooter fouled my teammate and he went down and had a 1 and 1 and sunk the front end of a 1 and 1 and we were ahead 60 to 59. That's the only time in the whole ballgame we was ahead.

BC: That's the one that matters.

MF: That's the one that mattered. Just to be a part of that right there and the year before we lost in the State Championship and after the game, the writer asked me what was I thinking. I said, "We're gonna come back next year and win. By coming back next year and winning the way we won... It made for a fantastic story and people say, "Oh, that didn't happen.". I say I lived it so I know and for that to be one part of, one part of many stories as far as going to PH for one year and then staying there 16 years and help them win their two basketball championships and then talking to the kids through it and then just talking to them about their mindset and having been there before. I think you've heard of Alonzo Morning?

BC: Mm mm.

MF: Well his team with PH, kids from the neighborhood, coaching them and then telling them how to go about playing against them. Its a level of toughness, just neighborhood toughness, Southwest, the West End have always had a level of guys tough and fight, toughness to fight. Somebody say something or look at you wrong, they start fighting. As their reputation changed, as times changed and to be tough, because people would run rush out on you. Them guys from the West End and the guys from Northwest, only a few guys could come to Southwest 'cause Southwest had all the good-looking girls. And the guys from Northwest would always want to come up here and they would chase 'em back across 10th Street bridge. (Laughing)

BC: This is when you were growing up?

MF: This is when I was growing up. I was young but see, you had one high school. All the black students went to one high school so that meant you would have little rivals from Northeast, Northwest and Southwest.

BC: From all over the city?

MF: Yeah, from all over the city. Southwest was like a little small pocket. We might've had just 200 or 300 kids and then you figure Northwest might've had a thousand and then you figure Northeast

might've had another 500. So you figure Addison might've had like 12, 14, 1500 students. That means everybody had their own little groups and all. Looking back and stuff at the pictures. Everybody was real sharp and that's just the way it was. A guy said, "That girl from Southwest, naw, you can't bother her, man. She's from Southwest." (Both laughing) That's just the way it was. But now, like the guys from PH and Cave Springs, they date girls and don't think nothing about it. At one time, "You can't date girls from Cave Springs". As you look back on it, it was always fun. Fun learning and just fun everything.

0.57.44.5

BC: Did you have any businesses or shops in the few blocks around your house when you were growing up, prominent in your memory?

MF: They were called corner stores. Wiggins Store, Libby's Store...

BC: Is this the same as the restaurants that are there now?

MF: No, there's a different owner. The lady's name was Miss Libby. She was like a Syrian (??) but she was as much a part of the neighborhood of Southwest. She helped people. If you didn't have food, you wouldn't go hungry. She would extend credit. There were a lot of people in the neighborhood that would extend credit. People knew who they could turn to. Sometimes people needed somebody, instead of going to a bail/bondsman you went to some of the neighborhood people, neighborhood merchants who had a cash flow or generated a service and they would help people out. I mean, they would work with 'em. Work reasonably with people, when people would come to you for a loan. Instead of going to a commercial bank, there were people in the neighborhood that people to for banking services or legal services. People were educated but people just didn't have resources. Segregation, what it did, I feel, was made more people more centrally, people need to depend more on people for services. Once integration opened up, people went, you could go more places. So the people who would usually individual services, they were no longer needed because the bigger services were more glamorous and more converse (??) and people would say, "This is how I establish my credit and I can get more, achieve more". And, believe me, the change was good on one part but on another part – progress helps one person and hurts somebody else. And that's just the nature of – Look at how the automobile put the horse out of business.

BC: Except in rare cases. (Both laughing)

MF: Its what it is. Like the communication system, like the tapes and the DVDs and then the cassettes and the IPODs, they just keep getting more and more... As a society, changes come. How much better we can service. I say, look forward to tomorrow but still hold onto a little bit of yesterday to appreciate – don't keep looking forward, take a second and look back. I guess its kinda like what the city is doing now because, several people told me I need to kinda share this information because to be fortunate enough to have experienced – very few people can say about Roanoke what I say 'cause Roanoke has been good to me. Roanoke has been great to me as far as... My mother and my father gave me life. Roanoke gave me an opportunity and to have life and opportunity and to have a true trust in God and to kinda walk behind the Lord Jesus Christ and then just – let everything else fall where it may. "Gotta choose somebody, thanks for choosing me". (Both laughing) And be humble and grateful. To be humble and grateful because I always say, "The good Lord could've gave it a whole lot of other people and He gave it to you". (Laughing) That's something that I'll never forget. At night, as I grow older, I guess I'm more appreciative. I feel like I got mine and about 5 other peoples. Opportunities to just – the first time I saw the Eiffel Tower in Paris. You know something? I said, "Let's go over and check it out. How much time we got?" We had a few hours. We checked it out. And to have that opportunity versus some people only see stuff like that in pictures. And to go places – I had some kids from around here and we went down to Daytona, right, with PH basketball. We rode past the Daytona Motor Speedway 5 days in a row and the guys were saying, they were saying things. I listened to 'em. I would play devil's advocate. I said, "There go the speedway over there. Y'all want to check it out?" They'd say, "Naw, that place nothing but rednecks in there and they ain't doing nothing in there but

driving around in circles.” Everyday we rode by there going different places, I listened to 'em and I said, “Whoa, wait a minute.” “Where we going?” The last day we were down there. So I took 'em in there, right, and cars were testing and – its education and everything. Its only gonna cost you a few minutes of your time to see this facility. We've been riding past it everyday and I said educate 'em, knowing. I said, “I'd be doing you all an injustice and a disservice not to take you in to show it to you.”

BC: And you had already been to the race at this point, right?

MF: I had been inside the track. We went inside and got – they were just amazed at how huge the facility was inside. They said, “Aww, we don't want to go in there. We don't want to go in there.” They squawked. We went in and Goody Dash (??) service cars were testing, about 155 miles per hour. They ain't never seen cars going that fast in their life. They came by and they were just in awe, just cars testing. And cars coming around the track as fast as they were coming and we stayed about a half hour. They didn't want to leave when it came time to leave. When it came time to leave, they didn't want to leave. Then we talked about it and then we took them to Bethune-Cookman College and walked around on campus and then I said, “Y'all keep your mouths closed, let me do your talking for you”. The coach wanted to give all 3 guys I had with me a scholarship and one guy that wasn't there. He would give 4 scholarships and the kids say, “Coach, how'd you do that?”. I said, “Just talking to people.” And what the coach said was, “If those guys are good enough to come down here, y'all are good enough to bring 'em down here, we figure they must be pretty good athletes”. And that's what they were considering. They seriously considered giving all 4 kids scholarships just – opportunities going places and seeing things and just being available. I guess that's what integration has done, giving kids more of an opportunity to be available and market yourself and your skills. Not that segregation didn't do it, but it was so limited because - the CIAA, I don't know if you know what that is, the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the ACC. The same players that are playing in the ACC, once played in the CIAA. That was an all black conference. They got the cream of the crop of all the top, like Michael Jordans would've played in the CIAA. All the top notch players – and with Charlie Scott played for North Carolina, he was the first black player to play for North Carolina. He was a big thing. Everybody looking, you know? It was just the way he played and how he dealt with situations and how North Carolina embraced him. What he had to deal with in the ACC and as time slowly changed and evolved for the betterment of everybody. To me, it turned a negative into a positive which is always good. And some people say, “It was like this yesterday”. I say, “Well, what about tomorrow? What about right now? What can we do right now to make tomorrow more respectable and more understanding?” We might see something different. “Don't get mad with me. Put your differences on the table. It might not be such a big difference if you put it on the table.” I ain't saying nothing. How you expect someone to meet you halfway if you're not going to come and meet the person. I say, “I tell you what, I'm holding all the cards. I'm holding all the opportunities. If you refuse to meet me anyway, then, I'll give this opportunity to somebody else that I feel is deserving of it and then if I give an opportunity away, I'll tell you. This opportunity was yours but I'm giving it to somebody else because they're more appreciative.” That's the same way I got opportunities. People gave me opportunities because I was more appreciative along the way and somebody else's trash was my treasure and I reaped the benefits of being able to look at the opportunities and situations and move forward. Its what it is.

1.07.26.1

BC: I'm thinking back at some of those opportunities. You've mentioned so much here, its wonderful. From your experience, integration has played a huge role in your life here in Roanoke. That seems to have been a big change. Were there other change, you know, thinking back to maybe when you were 10 or so to now that you really noticed in the Roanoke area or in Southwest, specifically, that you've noticed?

MF: As far as structures, as far as buildings go, I mean, the neighborhood is more – you don't see as much slum, as much – you might see spotty houses where the landowners not really taking care of.

But, for the most part, the slum, housing is a lot better. When you had the facilities on the back porch or kinda outside pretty much and then time has come and changed when you've got indoor plumbing. We didn't have hot water. You had to heat your hot water on the stove. From the time we moved out of Southwest in like '64 or '65, if you wanted hot water you put it on the stove. Coal or wood – you built a fire inside a stove. It's just the way it was. You banked (??) the stove. You kept the fire going and you had a little hole in the ceiling for heat to go upstairs. The house we lived in had 6 rooms and the house next door had 5 – it was like a duplex. Its amazing just to think about 'em. You had 6 on one side and 6 on another in the duplex. It was the kitchen in the bottom and the next two was 4 units down to the alley. First you would have 6, it was two 6-rooms, then two 5-rooms and then two bitters (??) with 4 on each side. It was 8 units and the last two buildings were 4 rooms. Then the other houses down the street, Boswell, a guy named Boswell was the real estate agent and I think the rent was, where I saw the receipt for the rent, it was like \$34 a month. (Both laughing) To be able to go back through it and look at old receipts. What I was fortunate enough to do was to laminate a lot of the clippings and make copies of 'em just to laminate 'em. The Roanoke Times gave me a whole lot of ink when I was coming along playing basketball. When I say a whole lot of ink, I mean I got a lot of articles, but a lot of 'em I don't have, but a lot of 'em I do and believe me, I got a ton myself. And just to – I guess integration has played a role of opportunity and I guess, to realize opportunities and then the role of being a trailblazer, more or less, to be a first to do things and doing it for the betterment of everybody versus – I hadn't given it a lot of thought until I really thought about being on the first satellite basketball team. And the opportunity given by the Salvation Army and that's why I always support the kettle because of that reason.

1.11.40.9

BC: That makes sense.

MF: Dropping a dollar in a kettle is a small price to pay for a bright future, ain't it?

BC: You're not kidding.

MF: Drop a dollar in a kettle at Christmas is a small price to pay for a bright future. I wish I could give more than I do. I never walk past a kettle and not put something in it and to still reap the benefits that I guess that a little giving is a whole lot better than not giving.

BC: Yeah, it is.

MF: To just be so fortunate. I think some of the older people that were - that used to sit around talking, just make comments and think about – these were older people when I was a kid. (Interviewer laughing) You ask people questions and people made like home brew and people made little remedies. Everybody had a remedy for something. They'd say, "Give him some of this. Give him some of that. Do this for him." I used to suck my thumb as a kid, right, and they tried everything and this lady came by one day and they said, "That's the lady right there." "Take and rub his thumb here and he'll never suck it again." And she took my thumb and she just took her hands and just rubbed it. She said, "He'll never suck it again". And I sucked my thumb and got real, real sick and started regurgitating and after that, broke me from that habit. (Interviewer laughing) Broke me from it. I must've been about 6 or 7 years old and I can remember the first time I tied my shoes, it seemed like one day I couldn't tie 'em and the next day – I was in kindergarten – I was tying my shoes and my mamma say, potty trained, tying your shoes and putting your underwear on right side. A whole lot of stuff versus as a kid growing up just rushing, just put the clothes on, put your shirts on backward, wrong side - couldn't wait to get out the house. As a kid growing up, especially in the summertime. To be a kid growing up in the Southwest, we were some blessed children to never – for kids around us to get cuts and broken bones and for us to never get seriously cut. I can't recall none of my siblings ever getting any broken bones. You know what I attribute that to? Drinking milk. I mean drinking milk. We always had plenty of milk. That's something that I guess with the dairy being over, the Garst Brothers Dairy. We always had plenty of milk. Even right now, I drink plenty of milk.

1.14.43.7

BC: Its good for ya. (Both laughing) Very good for you.

MF: Yes, indeed.

BC: Mr. Franklin, how do you describe Southwest to people when you're talking to 'em? Just out of curiosity.

MF: My home. I live in Northwest but Southwest is my home.

BC: You still have that affinity too?

MF: Yeah, 'cause its a whole thing about Southwest where people say, "You mess with one person in Southwest, you mess with everybody." (Both laughing)

BC: Was it like that?

MF: That's pretty much how it was.

BC: Is it still like that?

MF: I think it's kinda died off now. But at one time, at one time – I guess by having that reputation. "Leave that guy alone, he's from Southwest." So people would say if you jump on a guy from Southwest and they got wind of it, people in Southwest would get a bunch of people to go looking for whoever jumped on somebody from Southwest. So to describe it, I know those guys from Southwest not like that now. When they built Hurt Park Projects, a lot of people from Northeast moved to Hurt Park and then you had Hurt Park and then you had Southwest. So Hurt Park wasn't really considered Southwest.

BC: That's interesting because they're so close.

MF: They're so close but see they put Hurt Park Project in Southwest when they built the Civic Center and all that stuff in the Northeast. That's how Hurt Park – They took a few people out of Southwest and put 'em in Hurt Park but the majority of people came from Northeast. And so that was like, there were people up here living in poverty and would refuse to move into Hurt Park Projects because of the people that was over there from Northeast and they were so close to people in Southwest. "Uh uh, I'd rather live in poverty than live in Hurt Park". Say I live in Hurt Park versus living in Southwest. That's just how close-knit the people, you talk about close, I mean, you get up there and mess with one person – Its kinda crazy on one hand but on another hand, that's the way it was and see I kinda got in on the tail end of it versus – by me going through integration, I went to the white schools. That's what they call 'em, the "white schools". If I had been at Addison, it would've been more challenges more – the girls weren't as plentiful being a big time athlete versus being around every black lady in the city versus half a handful at Jefferson. It was a whole different thing and it was a lot easier to deal with as I look back at it versus you got girls competing and then doing this or doing that and then just getting caught up in it and staying focused on basketball.

1.17.52.4

BC: You were a little more isolated from the social scene.

MF: Oh yeah.

BC: OK

MF: I wasn't – and see by not driving and not having a car and then walking to Wasena Park. We used to walk to Wasena Park and play basketball. That's the only hard court we had in the neighborhood back in the day. We spent most of the time always playing sports, baseball, whatever sport was in season, we played it. Back at Graybar, that's the only big field, local field, plus they had a great big light on the back of the building that shined out so we could go out there at night. We'd be playing out there at night. I think it would cut off at 11 o'clock at night so we had light. That's what we call Graybar Stadium. (Both laughing)

BC: That was your stadium.

MF: They had a church. They remodeled the church. They took the benches out of the church so we took the benches and set them along the sidelines for people, spectators for our performance.

BC: Did you ever have a crowd? (Both laughing)

MF: That was some fun days I'm here to tell you.

BC: Well, Mr. Franklin, we're approaching the end of our time. I just wanted to thank you very much for your time today.

MF: You're very welcome.

BC: I really enjoyed talking with you and, to give you an opportunity, are there any last closing thoughts that you want to offer that this may've prompted?

MF: All I know is, its a lot that we have covered. I'm sure I'll probably think of just of much -

BC: A dozen more interviews certainly. (Laughing)

MF: Its just the main thing, I don't know how things are going to turn, but I'm in the process of doing some work for like putting my life together in like a movie. They told me to write it up so I'm in the process now putting it together. If its meant to be, its meant to be. If its not meant to be, its not meant to be. And I always say one thing, "God's will is God's deal". I'm just glad to be a part of that plan. Its been good. Like I said earlier, I feel like I've had my opportunities and maybe opportunities that were intended for somebody else but I guess if God gave it to me, they were intended for me. Be humble and grateful. I thank you very much and I'm gonna shake your hand. (Both laughing)

BC: Yes sir.

MF: I hope I've been of some help to you.

BC: I think you have.

MF: OK

BC: I appreciate your time.