

Mary Hebert: Please tell me your full name and when and where you were born.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Sammy L. Gordon, Sr. Well, I'm a senior now. Let's put it that way.

Mary Hebert: You were born in Orangeburg?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, in Hampton County.

Mary Hebert: When's your birthday?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Fourth month, first day of '37.

Mary Hebert: When did your family come to Orangeburg?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh, I moved here, not the family.

Mary Hebert: Okay. What did your parents do for living?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, my father was assistant engineering, and salesman, and part-time farmer. He did several things, so part-time truck driver occasionally, and he was a supervisor, so some jobs.

Mary Hebert: Was he educated? I mean, how much school-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, he was high school and two years of college. He was eligible to teach at that time.

Mary Hebert: Did he ever teach?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, he didn't like it.

Mary Hebert: Did your mother work?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, she was a housewife.

Mary Hebert: Did she have the same amount of education as he did?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, she didn't. I think she was fourth grade education, but you couldn't tell it because she was a great reader of books.

Mary Hebert: Did they stress education?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Certainly, yes. Right, that was the most emphasis, education and property owners.

Mary Hebert: They owned the property also?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, they owned the property. We were great landowners through the history, but-

Mary Hebert: How did that work? Was land passed down from generation to generation, or did you father buy the land?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: They bought what they had, yes. It'd been generation to- but some had stopped gap. They owned land before then, but something occurred during that time, the loss of it, the family did, but he bought his own.

Mary Hebert: Did you know your grandparents?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No. Well, grandmother, yeah, but didn't know the others. One grandmother, the other were deceased before my time.

Mary Hebert: Did she live near you?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, she lived right in the area.

Mary Hebert: Who else lived in your neighborhood? I mean, were there aunts, uncles, cousins?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: When it come to- My father was the only child. My mother had one sister, and she had a brother, but I didn't know him. He was died before my time. My aunt, she lived in Georgia, yes.

Mary Hebert: It just beeped again, hold on. Did you grow up in a rural area, or was it more of a city?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, rural area, yeah, farming country.

Mary Hebert: How far is Hampton County from here?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Approximately, what, 65 miles.

Mary Hebert: North of here?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, south.

Mary Hebert: South?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. My home is actually 65 miles because Hampton County is about 50, but then I lived about 15 mile below Hampton.

Mary Hebert: Did you have to walk to school?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes, from beginning. Yeah, the beginning, we walked about a mile and a half round trip.

Mary Hebert: Did you walk with other children or was it-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we was in like group setting, a group setting.

Mary Hebert: Was there any opposition to you going to school by White members, White community? Do you remember?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, we'd gotten along real well. Now there was folks in the community that had problem, like I said earlier, but we just really didn't- I guess our school, we were just trained to accept our schools. Now I did find some problem, what was happening, because see my father, well, he held a series of jobs. He worked with the White and the Black school. They were separated schools, but we was able to go into the White school and see where they- He was the person that supplied the books, and whatever they needed for the county from the state department, it comes in. He was the person that took them and got all of the equipment kept up, get somebody to come in and inspect them. Now this is one problem I've seen now because I've done this for months. When he was traveling, they would send the old equipment out of the White school down to the Black school.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Now that was one thing that I seen because I had the keys to go in and let the man install them. They would bring in the new- Their textbook were passed down. You would have pages torn out, but I had a good relationship with the White community, both like girls and boys. We all growed up together. Students in my class, we could always share- We studied sometime together. When we had a book that might not have some of the things that we needed, they had some of the things. So we had this great relationship with the community because my family was just not a hardcore segregated unit. We worked with everybody so we was able to get some of the advantage that a lot of people didn't get.

Mary Hebert: Did you get to see what the inside the White schools looked like?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, I sure-

Mary Hebert: [indistinct 00:05:23] different?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Right, it was different.

Mary Hebert: Did they have lab equipment and that kind of stuff?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, they were poor schools, both schools, very poor schools. I'll be frank with you. Now-

Mary Hebert: But they got the books before you did?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, that's what we- The main thing was they got the books, and some of them books was- some of the books- cut it off.

Mary Hebert: But they were both very poor?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Poor, yeah. The rural area, it was very poor.

Mary Hebert: Was your family one of the leading Black families in the community?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. Right.

Mary Hebert: [indistinct 00:06:01]?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes, it was.

Mary Hebert: So other people around you were sharecroppers and-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes, sharecroppers, right. Now we had some Black landowners there, too. Yeah, there was some there because some of my cousins, they had land. Property, land.

Mary Hebert: What-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: And then they sharecropped some that they didn't- If you was a good producer, some of the White men would always ask you to take over some of their property and sharecrop some of it because you could provide good yields. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: You mentioned that you studied with White students and-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we studied but not in the classroom, like, say, a friendship deal.

Mary Hebert: Did they live near you?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we all lived right around each other. We socialized together in some instance, too. I guess I could say this openly, but we wasn't the poorest in the area. We always had- most of the White

student didn't have things. They were poor, too. But we always had the advantage because we had things that they didn't have, and that mean a lot of difference. So we just kind of worked together in a lot of areas there. We had a few elite families, some families that they was White. They didn't even allow their people, even family members, to penetrate into that. Yeah, there was a few there, but everybody was just a big farming area.

Mary Hebert: Did you continue to associate with the White families that lived around you throughout the time you were-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Growing up, yeah, sure. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: Was there a point when you didn't associate anymore?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Never, because I can go home now, and we're glad to see each other like old friends. They come up, and they see my name, and they'll stop in and check on me. We kept that relationship.

Mary Hebert: What kind of house did you live in growing up? Was it a large house?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes, about five rooms. Yeah, pretty good size at the time.

Mary Hebert: How was it compared to some of the other houses in your neighborhood? Was it one of the bigger houses?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: One of the big and one of the nicest because my father always worked at good jobs, and he could keep things in pretty well perspective. My mother was a housekeeper, see, well that was her job. It had to be right.

Mary Hebert: Did she have a garden and that kind of thing?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes, we had a garden. We had a garden, what you call a spring garden and a fall garden.

Mary Hebert: Did you have to work in it when you were growing up?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, I sure did because I planted most of it so then I got large in that. Matter of fact, when we got to farming, I would start the farm. I learned from my cousin. I started plying a mule when I was six years old, after school. They would giving me lunch to stop in and teach me how because the old lady was old, and they couldn't handle handle the mule. They wanted to teach me how to do something. I was interested in learning some of the things that I did. When we stopped from, I was already farming, helping the community. My dad decided he'd buy me a mule, and I could farm so he gave me that. He never did do much of it.

Mary Hebert: That was just kind of a little extra income?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Extra income to the family, yeah, because we start raising mules. We had cows, horses. I got 13 years old, I bought a tractor for this farming.

Mary Hebert: So then you used the tractor?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. Yeah, we got rid of the mules and the horse. Just a tractor then would take care of all this work.

Mary Hebert: That was in the '50s?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, this was in the '50s, that's correct.

Mary Hebert: Did you hire anyone to help you on the farm?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, we just was family units.

Mary Hebert: And y'all did cotton and-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we grew cotton. When I got large enough, I grew soybeans, and pone, grain, that nature.

Mary Hebert: Well, how did you learn the shoe repair business?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Okay, this I went to school for. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: Was there someone in the community that taught you how-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, no. Matter of fact, I didn't really were interested in it at that time, I'm afraid, not in shoe repair because when I go to the shop, the shop would be inadequate up here, and I see the little potbelly men with greasy coats on. That didn't interest me, but what I did when I went to school, I went to school quite a bit, and industrial from the North, the South, travel over the area. I found out these- I met different men. Before I got out of high school, I went off to school. My last school was in private school.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: I met quite a few different nationalities of people. We had a lot of Jews in our area so we was able to tie in with those beautiful communities and see some of the things they were doing because most of the White community most was farmers. It wasn't educators or anything of that nature. People comes in, and I remember maybe two or three people might have went to college even in the White communities, but they was always branch out to different areas. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: So your father was better educated than-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah.

Mary Hebert: So your family had a lot more education than-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. Yeah, because my dad, they looked for him. Someone was ahold of the mayor, he would run the mayor. The superintendent of the county would always come to him because they went to Clemson, some of the White around there, I think Clemson and Carolina, a few areas. They came back and did the- but he was always the guy that they would call in and sit down if they wanted to do something special or bring a highway. He was always part of this, always in the working crowd. He never segregated himself.

Mary Hebert: Could he vote prior to-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Now, that's something I'm not certain about. Yeah, I'm not certain about it. Because when we got into voting now I know it was in- when Isaiah Howard ran, that's when they got into the voting process. I knew about that, but prior to that I'm not certain about.

Mary Hebert: Where did you go to school? What school did you attend?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: I went to Furman Elementary in Furman and Estill Training High School in Estill.

Mary Hebert: Estill Training High School?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah.

Mary Hebert: What was the private school that you went to?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: The private school was Industrial Education. That was one year.

Mary Hebert: Was your family involved in the church in the community?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we were church goers. My whole roots are church.

Mary Hebert: Which church did you go to?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, my family's Baptist, but I'm African-American Episcopal after I got married. I grew up a Baptist. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: Were they involved in the civil rights movement and bringing that change?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes, they played their part. Yes, they were because I played a lot of part. We played a

lot of part involved in it-

Mary Hebert: What kind of-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: - being advisory and going out counseling, because see, being able to go between the both races. We have a great relationship in both communities.

Mary Hebert: So y'all were like biracial a community?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, right. That helped a lot. Yes.

Mary Hebert: Did you belong to any of those committees yourself?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, yes, but-

Mary Hebert: Mostly your father?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, mostly him, but I would belong to some of them. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: What were some of the signs and symbols of segregation in the community that you remember? Do you remember any of them?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, we didn't have- Let's see. Now the few things that I remember were going to the county courthouse, the separate restroom, separate water fountains. I remember seeing a couple of those, but-

Mary Hebert: But you grew up in such a rural area that-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, everybody was just trying to make a living at that time. It wasn't really they thought about themselves as separated because we were just in a area that everybody was reaching out, when the time when I come along, they were trying to do, get some money was the biggest thing.

Mary Hebert: Do you remember ever going to the store and not being waited on because they were White customers there before you and that kind of thing?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, we had a relationship with the stores in town. No, we just got what we want when we come in because we were so and so children or whatever. That was-

Mary Hebert: Did you qualify much on credit, or did you use cash?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, he had both ways. Yeah, both ways.



Mary Hebert: What did y'all do for fun as a child?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh-

Mary Hebert: For fun?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh, we had various activities with ball games and even basketball, baseball, mostly ball games, very entertaining, picnics, social events of that nature.

Mary Hebert: Were those integrated events?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Not really. Some of them, not really integrated mostly.

Mary Hebert: Did you just play with the neighbor children too? Play games like marbles and things like that?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we played marbles. We played all of us, with all the boys, White and Black. We played marbles together. All of us had pocket full of marbles during those times. Whenever we got together, we'd just sit down and start shooting marbles.

Mary Hebert: What was the school year like? Was your school year the same as the school year for White students, or did you start later?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, I was on the same terms. We had nine months during that time, yeah. Now I heard of they talked about differently, but before my time was along the same level.

Mary Hebert: Along the same-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Same level.

Mary Hebert: - calendar?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes, because-

Mary Hebert: You got started at the same time, ended at the same time?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: At the same time, yes, because see we had our Whites and Black, everybody worked in the field. Just a few people that had a little money that was able to send the children of to certain places in the summer.

Mary Hebert: Was there a White sheriff's office in the area?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. Oh yeah, some lived on the White folk place. Yeah, plenty of them.

Mary Hebert: How did those relationships work? Do you remember how the Black sheriff's office and the White sheriff's office interacted with one another?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, they would have different people they worked for, that's one.

Mary Hebert: Were there any major controversies in your neighborhood concerning desegregation?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, because see actually our town was once owned by a Black, and it was the only town in South Carolina is named for a Black man, which was my mother's family.

Mary Hebert: Oh, what was his name?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Furman.

Mary Hebert: Furman.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: It's in the history book. It's amazing.

Mary Hebert: And that was a relative of your mother?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, a relative.

Mary Hebert: Did she grow up hearing stories about him?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, she told a lot of stories about him. Matter of fact, my mother was a great storyteller. She reads so many books. That's how we learned to do, I guess, a lot of it. I'm a minister too, so my philosophy is based upon some of those books that she read to us. She was a great reader.

Mary Hebert: What kind of books would she read to you?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh, she'd read stories of motivating. She would tell stories, and the story would consist of things of the nature that usually things would be impossible to do. She would get stories out to create an interest in you that you felt that nothing was impossible to be done, and the whole family grew up that way. We just didn't feel like we were handicapped.

Mary Hebert: Is that the most important thing you think she taught you with be honest?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: And be honest, yeah, honest. Honest. Be honest and treat people right. She's a highly church person, very religious.

Mary Hebert: Would she read the Bible to you?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, she'd quote the Bible and read it, too.

Mary Hebert: Did you have to quote [indistinct 00:18:49]?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: In Sunday school, yes. That was one of the main things we had to learn to get in Sunday school, and tell what we read, and do Bible verses, and things of that nature.

Mary Hebert: When did you decide to become a minister?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh, I guess it was in the making early, but I didn't pursue it at that time. I was more interested in business. The business world was my world, but then when it arrived, that time came, I just went on with it, but my thing always was business. We was business oriented when we were young.

Mary Hebert: Was your mother's family that way too? Were they-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: They were mostly religious. Yeah, and my grandfather was a preacher. Religious.

Mary Hebert: Baptist preacher?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah.

Mary Hebert: Were there any gathering places in the town you grew up where people gathered-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, there was. On the weekend they had their social activities together, come together, and-

Mary Hebert: Picnics and things?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Picnics and sometimes we'd do fish fries, or whatever. Then they would do a house or a family get together, a social event. We'd just go over and have a big fish fry. Everybody would go fishing a certain day and come back. We did this with White and Black. Like I say, we never then had really drawn our line between us because my grandmother was able to- kept us in the White world. She came from that side of the family, and that made a difference to us. We didn't have a door closed in our face.

Mary Hebert: So she was related to some of the White families?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, my father was too, so that made a big difference. We knew the family. They knew us, and we knew the family, but they denied it. Because see, actually, before slavery, my family had property, plenty of property.

Mary Hebert: Were they free?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, they was free. They had plenty of property. I'm just beginning to break the surface of doing some research work on that. As I traveled and studied, I found out the years that they had document they'd owned land and property, who the roots were, and all of this nature. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: You're tracing the family tree.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, I'm tracing it back right now. Yeah, it's amazing, beautiful setting because we have different cultures in the family relations.

Mary Hebert: Do you have Native American family?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, right. We'd always share this when we were growing up, and we found this to be true.

Mary Hebert: Could you tell me about the Furman who the town's named after? Do you know anything about him?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: I really only met his- I think I met his daughter when she was an old lady, but I wasn't interested in at that time-

Mary Hebert: Not at that time?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes.

Mary Hebert: So it wasn't founded until after the Civil War, the community?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No. Yeah, I haven't even traced that back to that far, but I'm not certain, but I knew that's what it was named after, him.

Mary Hebert: Did you hear stories growing up about the free Blacks that had been in your family that owned property and-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah.

Mary Hebert: You knew about them?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh yeah, we knew about this. We have documents of this, records of it.

Mary Hebert: Do you have their papers? Do you have any papers from them and that kind of thing?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. Right, because on my mother's side, my grand uncle, he fought end of slavery

in the war. He crossed over and joined the Union soldiers. My mother always shared that because she gotten some funds through this when she was small. I went to look into that. I know they offer different scholarships, and so many things to people, but really I just haven't had time to get to that point yet. But I knew his document where he was recorded he fought there because they got a record. The funds came back to him.

Mary Hebert: So he fought in the-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, right, during the Civil War war.

Mary Hebert: I know in Summertown and in a lot of other areas in the South, Saturday was the big day for everything.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: That was the day.

Mary Hebert: The big day off.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. When their families get together. That was one of the main days. People don't work on Saturday, don't work on Saturday, go to church on Sunday, but that Saturday we'd come to town, sit and share. The family didn't see each other for a while. They would just be commingling.

Mary Hebert: Did they do their marketing on Saturday?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Marketing was one of the major time on Saturday. Now ours was Monday because for the majority of the times, because the jobs my father worked, I think he would get paid maybe Friday or Saturday. Monday would he have his check, give my mom his check and we'd go through our shopping.

Mary Hebert: Did she handle the money?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, some. He handled some, but she handled most of the buying for the home, like the foods and stuff of that nature. She selected all that, the housekeeping part.

Mary Hebert: Did she have anyone to come in and help her with the house work and cooking?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, she usually-

Mary Hebert: She handled it herself?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: - herself, and then after we got older, we'd just share it.

Mary Hebert: How many of you were there?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh, about seven. Matter of fact, it was eight but one died, a twin. My brother died, but it was seven of us that grew up together.

Mary Hebert: What kind of chores did you have to do?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Whatever. I was a boy, but I scrubbed.

Mary Hebert: You scrubbed?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: You had to ask. She liked that pretty, pretty clear looking floor. She make this- Well, I learned to make soap too, but we'd make what you call lye soap and make soap out grease. She taught me how to do it, and she would take that- and you could take it on a little scrub brush and make that floor look so pretty. Now she had what you call rugs on the other part, but the porch is the thing that we had to-

Mary Hebert: You scrubbed the porch?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, that was my job every week to scrub.

Mary Hebert: Every week?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Every week scrubbing that. It had to be spotless because she'd come and check it. If you missed a spot, she'd come back, "You missed something."

Mary Hebert: Did neighbors help on another out a lot?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, that's what they did, right.

Mary Hebert: You're a lot younger than most people I've interviewed, but I know people tell me when they were butchering animals, everyone would gather and watch-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah.

Mary Hebert: - and share the meat.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: They would do that.

Mary Hebert: Did they do that when you were growing up?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, they did some, mostly, but now what mostly would happen, they would invite people over at that time. They'd give you a portion, a mess to cook a meal out of say, but they used to cure it, mostly. That's the way we did most of it. Now my family immediate, my grandmother did a lot of that. But we didn't do very much of that because my daddy, Roy, like I said, the way he did it, but the one we raised,

we usually raised it for the market. We had cows for the market. We had hogs for the market, and stuff of that nature.

Mary Hebert: And y'all would sell-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we'd sell them, right, mostly we'd sell.

Mary Hebert: Did you children have to take care of the animals?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, I was a main post. We had pastures. I remember times changing them before going to school in the morning. We'd get them from one pasture to the other, and that was the main job.

Mary Hebert: When you got home from school, did you have to do your studying immediately?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Do the studying unless the cows get out. If there's an emergency, we'd go take care of that, then we studied there before we go to bed.

Mary Hebert: Now when you were a teenager, what was dating like, and that kind of stuff? Did your family have a car?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we had a car. Yeah, my dad had a car. Even back when he was a boy, he had a car.

Mary Hebert: Would you have to borrow his car to go out on a date and that kind of stuff?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, till we got large enough, and made some money, and bought a car.

Mary Hebert: Were there a lot of dances and things like that?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yes, they had dances mostly through the schools. We didn't have much, not like we got auditoriums and things of that nature. Well, in the '50s, the last part of the '50s, we had auditoriums. We could bring large groups in, social events of that nature.

Mary Hebert: What kind of impact did the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the beginning of civil rights movement have?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh, that had a great deal, yeah. What happened, people that was frightened, they got courage. They'd start doing things that they never did before because, like I said, what meant our family were so much different, we never felt threatened. It just never felt that way. I tell my son now, I said, "I don't know. I never know the difference between the Black man or White man or different." I said, "The only thing I felt like a boy, and I felt like a man," because I remember one time I got turned away. It was in the '60s. I was shocked. I went to this little store, and they had a barbecue thing there, and I walked in. I'm used to

going in fine, but we grew up, and we was just accepted because we were so and so children. That's the way we were.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: I went there in this little store, and this other man told me, and I went to the counter. I ordered what I wanted. I saw the price list. He said, "I'm sorry, you got to come around to the back door." I said, "Wait a minute, I don't eat out of the back door." He said, "No?" I said, "You don't eat like that." So I turned around. Everybody looked up at me. I went, "I'm not eating." I got up, and I looked at the back door. Sure enough, he had all the Blacks back behind there. I walked out and walked down the street.

Mary Hebert: You didn't patronize his food-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, I didn't patronize. I went back, and I told the guys who sent me there, "Don't ever send me to a place like that again." They got the message, and I never did eat there.

Mary Hebert: So you never really felt like a second class citizen?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: I really didn't. I'll be frank with you. I never, and I teach my children, never feel- I never did, never. I couldn't-

Mary Hebert: Did you get that from your parents?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. Yeah, they were fighters. They didn't care. They had respect for both races. If they said something, that was it. Yeah, that's true.

Mary Hebert: Well, you mentioned some people felt threatened. Were there things happening where you grew up that would've made feel-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, what they felt, like intimidated. When I said-

Mary Hebert: That's what I-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: If you're living on some people land, and they would say, "Well, you have to work. They want this done," and you had to do it because else you move.

Mary Hebert: [indistinct 00:29:48].

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Right, but now we always had our own land. Nobody tell us when to move. They would come and beg us, "Well, we running and we having problems. If you get catch up, would you come out and help us?" "Yeah, we get catch up, we'll come and give you a hand." That's the way we was always asked, not told.

Mary Hebert: So you'd go out and help them with their crops?



Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, I have done it when I took my tractor and catch up my land. If I finish up, they'll go hire me and the tractor. Yeah, pay for both of us. We made extra money like that. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: Did your family belong to the NAACP?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: At that time, I'm not certain about it. After I got older, but at that time I'm not sure.

Mary Hebert: When did you join?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, it was in the '60s. Yeah, in the '60s. We always supported it for the church unit, but I don't know how many- As a matter of fact, my mother's cousin started at in Hampton County after coming to the military, brought the branch there.

Mary Hebert: See mother's cousin started-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: The NAACP, yeah, he was the one that brought it there then.

Mary Hebert: You said that was after World War II?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, right. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: What kind of activities did they take part in?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: In the NAACP? In the voting rights. They was always concerned about the voting and encouraging folks that were living on other people places, trying to get them to go to school, get some training, and elevate themselves up, and stuff of that nature.

Mary Hebert: You said it was active in the church, the NAACP?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, the church supported, right, when they needed funds, legal funds. The church would take up so much money and give the help out.

Mary Hebert: Were the meetings held in the church?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Not at our church. They had other churches around that would have meetings, yeah, but our particular church didn't have.

Mary Hebert: So there weren't any school desegregations or those kinds of things down in Hampton County?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: I was gone after- Not while I was there because I think I was gone before that

occurred. But I don't think there was any suit because whatever they were told to do, they just went on and did what they did.

Mary Hebert: Followed the orders.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Right. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: Where did you go to when you left?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: When I left I went north, spent a little time, not much, just traveled over the world. Well, in the States, you understand.

Mary Hebert: Do you remember segregated travel growing up? Do you remember-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, that was shocking to me when I read about it. I'll be frank with you, because what happened, we didn't use the buses. We didn't use the train. My daddy did, but see, well, you couldn't tell what color he was when he got on it so he went differently. But we always had a car. Where we'd go, he would take up anywhere. We didn't know about that till when I started reading it coming out in the papers that this problem was going on. Then after I got away and started talking to so many different people that were traveling, they told me all about it, but firsthand we never did ride the bus.

Mary Hebert: What about when you were traveling in the car? I mean, did y'all have problems, if y'all went on a long trip, finding a place to stay for the night?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, we never stayed unless there were some relatives or something like that over. Yeah, we always had- We'd go in a certain line.

Mary Hebert: Would y'all bring food the along with you in the car?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, right. My mother was always good about that. She packed up picnic baskets and had everything we needed.

Mary Hebert: So you never had to stop and order from the back window?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, we didn't. They didn't allow us to do that. That was one thing we didn't do. Now, my daddy though, that's one thing, he taught us to never do that.

Mary Hebert: Never to go to the back?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Nah, never. We couldn't do that.

Mary Hebert: Do you think if you'd lived in a city, they'd told you not to ride in the back of the bus?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, I'm almost sure he would have. He would give us a car. We'd drive. He believed in independence. I'll be frank. They believe in independence, take care of yourself. That's what one of the major things.

Mary Hebert: You said he was very light skinned? Could he pass?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, he did pass a lot, we just didn't know the difference. On my grandmother's part, they was always like that. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: Did he ever do that while you were around like-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, I went places that they stopped me at the door. He went.

Mary Hebert: Did he go in?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Sure, but I said, "That's my father in there." They said, "Okay." That's why we didn't have to wait for anything. We were at the doctor's office, when I'd see the- We didn't have to go in the waiting room and wait. When we'd go to the doctor, they were ready for us. They'd take us on in, didn't care who was in there. We would go to the- We had our appointments set up. He'd come home off his job, and he'd pick us up and carry us on the doctor. The nurses there- Well, usually the nurse would be the doctor's wife. They would take us right on through. We'd get our treatment, and we would go.

Mary Hebert: So there was no waiting?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: We didn't wait, no, unless we had an emergency and something like that, but I don't remember emergency because if you do, they'd go to the doctor's house. He would let you in. He would treat you there, or something of that nature.

Mary Hebert: Was there a dentist in town?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Not in my hometown. There was a dentist maybe 10 miles, 12 miles away. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: In-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: I went to the dentist when I had tooth problems, but they had always been-

Mary Hebert: Oh, was it a White dentist?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, White dentist.

Mary Hebert: But you never had the waiting room problem?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, because he would treat us when we'd go in, and we just treated.

Mary Hebert: So you don't remember the segregated waiting rooms with the wall in between?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: I know they were there. Yeah, they were there, sure, but I didn't have to go in and stay in it. We'd go through, but just go invade it, and that was something I guess why- I don't know. I was always trying to figure that, but we never- I think that was my family, father's connection getting us through these areas to keep us from getting to see something I guess they didn't want us to know about or something.

Mary Hebert: So you're saying that his position in society allowed him to shield-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Made a difference, yeah, it made a big difference. I knew that was one of the reason that we didn't have to go through so many things that people did. We were always up front. Anything we did was always on the frontline because when they bring schools' teachers in, he was the person that interviewed them. He helped the principal and superintendent. The superintendent did it first, and if he okays it, then it's to go in there. That's the way he was.

Mary Hebert: So do you think he got a lot of top-rate teachers to come in to the schools?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: At that time, we had some great teachers, some of the best.

Mary Hebert: Do you remember any of them?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we got some. Reverend Thomas Dixon lived down there. He was very good, and his wife, Mrs. Dixon, yeah, beautiful teacher.

Mary Hebert: What kinds of things would they teach you in school? Did you learn African-American history at all?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: No, we didn't have that then. No.

Mary Hebert: Did you learn about Harriet-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Not in the '50s.

Mary Hebert: - Tubman and Underground Railroad?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, right. We studied those stories, and we learned that Mary McLeod Bethune, your rights, but mostly our inventors. We were looking at who did the cotton mill and the machines to learn how to do more industrial operating. That was the biggest thing we was concerned about because people was interested in getting some money. I think that was the most elevating. That and I applied a lot- My only

thing was to make the best farm, the best crop to produce the best yield for that get the most money because the money was something that really- If you had some money, you didn't have to suffer. If you didn't have no money, you suffered.

Mary Hebert: Where would you bring your cotton to the gin and-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: We had gins in the area, maybe 10 miles away, of that nature.

Mary Hebert: Did you shop around for the best price when you were selling your cotton?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah. Yeah, my daddy would do that. See, they had a radio where this special news would come on early. I knew they talked about it before I even remember how they would do it because I even hear them talked about how when certain food ration would come in, and they knew about coffee. They would come on the radio, a certain channel they would get from up north, somewhere in that area, would let it know the government has put this to do their thing. They would go out and buy it, and bring it in by the cases, and put it out.

Mary Hebert: Do you have any memories of World War I? World War II, excuse me. I know you were a child.

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, I was a child. Yeah, I remember some of the guys coming home. I had some cousins came home from that.

Mary Hebert: Were they more interested in making things better after they got back? Were they more interested in civil rights, voting rights, and that kind of thing?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, some of them got- mostly they were wanting to get into the job market. That was the first thing, looking for jobs. They were choosy about jobs and getting some additional training to get in the job market.

Mary Hebert: Did they take part in the government assistance programs for the soldiers returning?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, some of them did do that. We had brick mason in family. That's when I looked way back. They could build houses. My daddy could do some- He'd build a house. He could build a house. It was just people would do anything to make things work.

Mary Hebert: People would do anything to-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Right.

Mary Hebert: - get ahead and-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, stay ahead.

Mary Hebert: Do you remember any of the Black athletes, Black baseball players?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, Jackie was one of my- Robinson was our inspiration. We would come home out of the field and listen to the ball games. Jackie was with the Dodgers, with our team at that time. I remember when they integrated those clubs, yeah. When you hear Jackie come to the plate, and yell hard, just all of his teammates. They would pull for each other, and they were a great team. Then I remember in the '50s when Mickey Mantle came with the Yankees because they would always compete in the World Series.

Mary Hebert: So y'all would listen to the radio?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, and we got the television in there. We were the first person had a television in that community.

Mary Hebert: Did people come by to look at it?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Oh, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night was show night. You couldn't get to the living room. It was something.

Mary Hebert: So families would gather in your living room?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, they would come to watch that television. I told my son, I have them laughing sometimes, we were the movie theater of the community. Everybody would come in and out. Friday night was fight night. Wednesday night was fight night. Monday night was fight night. That was the male's night. Most of the men would come, and then most of the females were coming to watch Perry Como and stuff back during those times. The wives and the children would come over, yeah, during the weekend. Sometimes the husband would come with them, but most time the male were fight night.

Mary Hebert: Fight night?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Fight night.

Mary Hebert: Well, who were some of the boxers that you used to watch?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Well, I heard of- I'd never seen Joe's fight, but I read- I was big enough to read. I started reading very early age. I could read- Oh God, I first read- I would read anything. I guess my mother always had us reading stories, and we'd just dig it up.

Mary Hebert: So you read about Joe Louis?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, we read about Joe Louis, Jersey Joe Walcott, and Marciano, all of the old

fighter- the gentleman's fighting. We'd just read and read and dig up this information. It was beautiful to read about these stories. Yeah. Yeah, that was the major thing. Now when television came through, Joe was- time was over.

Mary Hebert: Then Muhammad Ali came along-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, right. He was around my age, maybe a little bit older than I am, but we could relate to him. Well, Jersey Joe Walcott, we read about those guys. We heard them on radio, because my dad had a radio. Radio, before television, folks used to- We had it on the radio for a long time. They would come and sit down and watch the radio, and Joe'd fight.

Mary Hebert: They'd come listen to it?

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: They would. When I was small, we didn't get involved. It was just a round table thing. That one radio, they was enjoying it. There was a lot of- I just thinking about some of those things. Yeah.

Mary Hebert: I bet that drew the community together [indistinct 00:43:27]-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Yeah, they stuck together. They sure did, and that's what I always say. Whenever one person had a toothache, you didn't care what color you were. If you were sick, somebody was coming to you, and they would just make things work. They would.

Mary Hebert: Would White families come along too to watch the television, or was that mostly Black-

Sammy L. Gordon, Sr.: Mostly Black families, yeah. Most of the White families would have a- Well, they would go to- maybe one person would have a television too, but now you has what you call elite families. They always were there, but they even White families didn't go to their house to watch. We talked about it. We used to write and share and talk and say, "Golly," even when integration was coming, their own people, they couldn't go there.