Interview with Benjamin Edward Adams

July 20, 1994
Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
Orangeburg (S.C.)

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Interview with
Benjamin Edward Adams

Orangeburg, South Carolina
July 20, 1994

Interviewed by
Charles H. Houston, Jr.

Unedited Transcript by
Victoria Haas of TapeScripts+
Adams: Okay. My name is Benjamin. Benjamin E. Adams. I was born 1933, July the 19th, 1933 in the town of Edgefield, in the rural section of Edgefield. And ...

Houston: What county is that?
Adams: Edgefield, Edgefield County.

Houston: Edgefield County?
Adams: Yeah.

Houston: Okay. In the town of Edgefield in Edgefield County.
Adams: Edgefield County. M-hm. Now my granddaddy was a minister and I ... he was sold as a slave in Virginia at the age of nine, he and his mother. And, of course, he never saw his mother any more after then. And I think the Adams bought him and brought him to South Carolina. Now, he was the first born of his mother. So she might have had some children thereafter since she being a young woman, but we don't know who they are or whether she had any more children. And he came from Texas -- I remember that. He did come from Texas to Virginia at the age of nine, and sold in Virginia.

Houston: He was sold in Virginia to someone who brought him to South Carolina?
Adams: Yeah.

Houston: Okay. But his mother had been brought ... he and his mother had been brought from Texas to Virginia?
Adams: That's correct.

Houston: Okay.
Adams: That's correct. And so like I say, we don't know whether she had any more children thereafter or whatever because he lost sight of his mother. So the Adams raised him. And so he married and he had four sons. And he didn't have any daughters. That's about the extent that I know about ... about my granddaddy. Now being raised partly in Edgefield, up until about the age of nine, my daddy sharecropped. And, of course, I went to school. Had a one room school. And that school had seven classes with one teacher. And I remember the teacher would come around to me maybe once every day and give me assignment and she would check my assignment the next day, having had to teach seven classes.

Houston: The teacher taught seven classes?

Adams: Yeah. In that one room.

Houston: Okay. Right.

Adams: Wait a minute. Let me back up, back up. No. She only ... She had four, first through the fourth grade. I'm sorry. Not seven. And we, all the boys, had to go out and cut wood and sticks for the heat during the winter months. And we didn't have no outside toilet so we had to go in the woods. And you had to take a different direction or sometimes you didn't have no direction to go. But our parents, sometimes they would bring wood to the school. And we didn't have to cut it all the time but we had to go out into the woods and cut wood to keep ... keep the heat going. We didn't have no ... no ... athletics, anything like baseball or basketball or whatever. And so we ... we would entertain ourselves by sometimes playing dog and rabbit. And one would be the rabbit and then the rest of them would be dog running behind. We'd run all through the woods, you know. But I stayed in the first grade because I really didn't learn anything about two years. And then after my parents realized that, you know, we really wasn't
learning anything, we had to walk five miles to Edgefield, the city school. And so then I went to Edgefield city school and then I stayed in the first grade there for about two years. No. Yeah. One year. So I stayed in first grade approximately three years. And once I got a good foundation, then thereafter I made my grade every year thereafter.

Houston: Yeah, but you stayed in the city school?

Adams: Yeah. Well, we stayed at city school for ... oh, approximately two years. And my daddy sharecropped there. He was a sharecropper on a plantation. And so he had worked for this plantation on for twenty-three years. But when his health got bad and we ... it was only three young boys. I had ... I had seven older sisters and brothers but they had left. And so my ... out of the three boys, I think ... myself being the young one, I was about nine years old -- and that was in about '41, 1941, and my next brother was ten and the next brother was about thirteen. So we really wasn't able to do a whole lot of heavy farming. And my daddy's health got bad so ...

Mr. John Kemp, who was the plantation owner, came and, I remember, told my daddy we had to move because he was no longer able to farm and he had somebody like a family, about ten kids, he needed the house. Well, my daddy's health being bad, he couldn't work any more. He had high blood and diabetic. So we tried to go to ... move to the city. And my mother, she did domestic work. But she didn't make enough money to pay the rent. So we were just about to be homeless 'cause you had to either be able to farm or you had to ... well, it wasn't much work could do for a black man or either a black woman unless they did domestic work. And so then, we finally ... my daddy met a gentleman. His name was Broadwater. His family wanted him to come north. And he had forty acres of land and wanted to sell it for $700. And so, so we ... my daddy finally got a bank to buy that land with a three bedroom house. And that's ... it's in
Edgefield County, a little town called Trenton. We moved to that in '42.

**Houston:** You moved from ...

**Adams:** From Edgefield.

**Houston:** Okay. So it was in South Carolina?

**Adams:** Yeah, yeah. It's all in the same county. But Trenton is about six miles from Edgefield but it's in Edgefield County.

**Houston:** And this man wanted to sell land to your daddy?

**Adams:** Not ... Mr. Broadwater, who was black, wanted to sell his land to my daddy 'cause he wanted to go north with his grandchildren. I mean with his children.

**Houston:** Oh, Mr. Broadwater wanted to move north.

**Adams:** Yeah, yeah.

**Houston:** So ... so, he wanted your dad to buy his farm.

**Adams:** Buy his farm. And, of course, ...

**Houston:** And it was how big? 700 acres?

**Adams:** Forty acres.

**Houston:** Forty acres. Okay.

**Adams:** Yeah. Let me back up now. They wanted ... He wanted twelve hundred dollars. I'm sorry. $1,200 for forty acres. And so ...

**Houston:** Was that a good price?

**Adams:** Yeah, oh yeah. And so the bank looked at it and they knew my dad wasn't working. But they knew the property, where it was, what they were asking for it. Well, we ... we stayed there in Trenton approximately six years. And Mr. Broadwater, being old and he had
grown ... the property had grown all up so ... so it was the only piece of black property in between two white families. And so, my daddy improved it and we fixed up the house and everything. And the first year, my daddy three bales of cotton. So six hundred some dollars, and plus seed money which my daddy never did realize that when he was sharecropping. The plantation owner didn't give you the seed money. And so we made that kind of money and we paid ... it paid ... I think my dad paid about three hundred dollars on the mortgage and bought a mule for about two hundred dollars. And my daddy never had made that kind of money. But we did ... we did good and got prosperous. And we were able to buy a halfway decent car and so, we began to show prosperity. And the white lady that lived on the left of us had a pond. And she also ran a service station. And when we would go off to church ... And back then, we'd go to church like in the morning and come back maybe six o'clock in the afternoon. We stayed all day at church service, you know. My dad was ... and my mother was religious and involved in church. And when we come back, we would find that we'd had a mule with something, with her leg broke. And then, we'd find a cow with a leg broke. And we just didn't know what happened. And then, the white people would ride by and shoot at our house. And we set back off the road quite a distance. And we had been tin topped ______. They really wasn't trying to do harm but they'd shoot at the top. And so, later on, Miss Samuels -- that's the lady's name that had the pond and lived next door to us -- she wanted to sell us ... Wanted her sister to buy the property. And my daddy said, "Well, no, I ... you know, we don't want to move. We like ... you know, like our home and everything." And she said, "Well, I think you just ought to sell my sister that property. She ... I want my sister to live close to me." Daddy said, "Well, I understand that but I won't sell my property." And so, later on, she would come back maybe the next week or so and tell ... "I
think you ought to sell my sister that property." And daddy'd tell her again, "No, I ... you know, we don't want to sell our property." And she would tell him, "Well, I think, you know, that you might wish you had sold my sister that property." And so we kept finding things happen to our ... our cattle when we'd go to church and all. And so then, she really got mad. And so then, she began to show some resentment and all. And our mailbox would be torn down every ... every night by some means. Somebody would vandalize our mailbox. And back in then, you didn't have no lawyers _____ and you didn't want white people really to get mad with you because you had nobody to go to. So then, my daddy and my mother decided well maybe we better sell this property because we ain't going to have no peace here. And later, we find a hundred and forty acres down about twelve miles in Edgefield County. And there had been some cabin ... there was a cabin that used to be a private school ______, high school and junior college. So my daddy bought a hundred and forty acres there. And thereafter, we ... I grew up in Edgefield County on the border of Aiken County. Really, Edgefield County split our property. And so therefore I attended high school. Just about the extent ...

Houston: So was this a good arrangement for you? I mean, it sounds like ... it sounds like although you were ... you were forced to move in a sense, it sounds like it turned out to be a good move for the family. Was it a good move for the family?

Adams: It was a good move. Because we was the only black property owner within about a six mile radius and we were in the middle of a white community.

Houston: And when you moved down to this hundred and forty acre ...

Adams: Yeah, when we moved to 140 acres, that was in a predominant black area that had black owners, property owners. And there was a pattern. So then, you know, we lived ... we
lived happily thereafter. And then, later on, times was tough back in then. We ... We'd go to school. Before then, we moved to Bettis. My parents wanted us to get a good education. And so she wouldn't let us go to the school there in Trenton. And so we drove twenty-two miles to Bettis Academy before we moved to Bettis. So we had three stations that we would buy gas from.

Houston: This was before you moved, when you were living

Adams: Yeah, yeah, before we moved.

Houston: When you were living up on the forty acre farm.

Adams: Forty acres.

Houston: You drove twenty-two miles to school?!

Adams: M-hm. Twenty-two miles. Because you see, I lived in a farming area and black male -- when you got maybe about sixteen years of age, the plantation owner would expect the boys to start to farm. So they didn't get much education. And so since we owned our own property, you know, we ... nobody really controlled us. But we had problems trying to buy gas to go to school because we had to get it on credit and whatever. So we had about three or four places that we would buy gas so that people wouldn't know that we really was riding that much gas out every day. And we'd gas up at those three or four places and went to school.

Houston: So the move was ... so the reason you drove twenty-two miles was because there was no white school around? I mean, there was no black school around for you. Since you were the only black family for a six mile radius, there wasn't a good school for you to go to. Is that it?

Adams: Yeah. It was a school but the black male, when he got about sixteen years of age, you know, they ... we had to go farm. You know, the male. So ... in order for us to get, continue
the education without ... well, we could have went to school there. But we ... we would have got ...
... We got a better education by going to Bettis Academy, twenty-two miles away.

**Houston:** And what town was Basil Academy in?

**Adams:** A little town ... well, a community but it's in ... it's address is in Trenton. It was in a rural section of Edgefield County.

**Houston:** Okay. And it's B-a-s-e-l?

**Adams:** No. Bettis, B-e-t-t-i-s.

**Houston:** Oh, B-e-t-t-i-s, Bettis Academy.

**Adams:** Yeah. It's a long history. Reverend ... Reverend Bettis started that school right after slavery.

**Houston:** And did your parents have to pay to send you there?

**Adams:** Yes. They had to pay tuition because it was separate but unequal education back in that time. And so, Bettis had their own buses to go out and pick up the kids and take them to school. Which they bought and purchased themselves. And the maintenance and gas. So they would go out and pick up kids and would bring them to school there because there was only one high school in Edgefield County. And that was about twelve miles away. And so, kids within about a six mile radius of Bettis, Bettis would go out and pick them up and bring them to school. Because they ... back in then, they didn't fund any buses for black kids.

**Houston:** Right. But you were too far away to be picked up by the bus when you were on that forty acre farm?

**Adams:** Yeah, yeah.

**Houston:** You were twenty-two miles away.
Adams: Yeah.

Houston: The bus only went out six miles.

Adams: Yeah, twenty-two. Six miles, yeah.

Houston: Now, after you moved to the 140 acre farm, did you still go to Bettis? Or did you go to a different school?

Adams: No, we went to Bettis.

Houston: You still went to Bettis.

Adams: Yeah, we still went to Bettis. Only we didn't have to drive; we could walk.

Houston: Oh, so you were really close to ...

Adams: Yeah, I was about a mile and a half from Bettis.

Houston: Okay. And this was a black farm owning area.


Houston: So most of the ... There were a lot of black land owners in this ...

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And how big ... 140 acres -- that's a big farm!

Adams: M-hm. We got that ... I think my dad paid ... I think he paid $1,200 for that -- 140 acres. And so we ... we sold the property in Trenton, had 40 acres, I think my daddy sold that for about $1,400. So we had enough to pay cash for the ... for that 140 acres. Yeah.

Houston: And so your dad made out okay.

Adams: Yeah, made out okay.

Houston: Those white folks did him a favor.

Adams: Did him a favor. Yeah, did him a favor. And so, so then, you know, times was
Adams: Savannah River Project was started being built. That's, you know, where they make nuclears and all, the H bomb. Well, blacks lived on the plantation and they were doing ... you know, they were making a little money and all. But they started off paying -- the Savannah River Project started paying off to labor a dollar and fifteen cent an hour. And that was big money because wages back in then, I remember, was fifty cent an hour up unto seventy-five cent. And if you got seventy-five cent, you was making top money. Well, black people began to leave the cotton in the fields and move off the plantations and move down around Aiken. And so the white man had a problem trying to gather his crop because they began to ... to work down on the Savannah River Project. And then my brother began to get a job. And so we was able to prosper. We had our house wired with electricity. We didn't have no electricity. And we began to do real good. And my momma, I remember her, she did domestic work, house work, and so my brother brought a Lincoln. That was in '52. He bought a '49 Lincoln. And that was right up to date for cars. And so, my mother's car -- she had an old '48 Chevrolet, and it broke down. So she had to drive my brother's car to work down in Aiken so she could do domestic work in the white lady's house. And she parked a couple doors from the house where she worked. But it so happened the lady looked out and saw her getting out of the car. And so she said, "Well, I don't think I need you today." She said, "You're driving a car better ... better than what I am and so you don't need to come back." So my mother lost that job as a result of driving a nice car. And she wouldn't let my mother explain that her son's car and whatever. And ... But anyway, the Savannah River Project really was the salvation of black people as well as white. So they began
to get good jobs and paying good and they were able to buy property and buy a decent house and a decent car.

**Houston:** Yeah, there was a question ... When your ... And this is way back. I'm sorry to back up on this.

**Adams:** No problem. No problem.

**Houston:** But, you said that your ... your granddad was separated from his mother in Virginia and sold to somebody in South Carolina. Did he come in then to Edgefield County? I mean, do you know whether ... whether your granddad when he was brought to South Carolina was brought to the same area?

**Adams:** Let me see. Now he was sold in Virginia. And he don't know where his mother went. But he ... he was brought to South Carolina from Virginia.

**Houston:** But do you know where in South Carolina he was brought? You said he was raised by the Adams.

**Adams:** Okay. He was brought to Edgefield.

**Houston:** Edgefield? Okay.

**Adams:** And the Adams family owned him.

**Houston:** Okay. So in other words, your family then stayed in Edgefield.

**Adams:** Yeah.

**Houston:** I mean, your dad was born there and he grew up there. And you were born there and you grew up there. This is where you went to school.

**Adams:** Yeah, yeah.

**Houston:** Okay. And then after your dad had to sell his forty acre farm in Trenton and
move down near Aiken, to move down to the border of Edgefield County

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: to the one hundred and

Adams: forty acres

Houston: forty acre farm. And you continued to go to ... to Bettis Academy. Did your brothers also go to Bettis Academy?

Adams: Yeah. My ... my two brothers. In fact, my whole family went to Bettis off and on. Even when the older sisters and brothers lived in Edgefield, my daddy -- it being a boarding school, they would go to Bettis after they finished high school.

Houston: Okay. Now who ... Okay. So your brothers, you and your brothers ... Oh, Bettis was also a college. I mean, it had ... it had ...

Adams: Yeah. High school. Well, ___ up to ... it was a junior college. Up to junior college.

Houston: Okay. So two years after high school.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And your brothers lived there at Bettis after completing high school. They went there for two years more?


Houston: Well, I'm wondering then, if your dad had high blood pressure and ... and was not able to work fully, who worked the farm?

Adams: Okay. Well, my mother and three ... my other two brothers. You know, even though they would do light farming in the evening and in the morning. And my daddy, he would
help out. But we're kind of a close knit family so my other two brothers which were married, you know, they would pitch in.

**Houston:** Oh, now these are not the ones who were living at home

**Adams:** Yeah. No.

**Houston:** You mean two grown brothers.

**Adams:** Two grown brothers and my sisters would come out and help us with the farming, you know. They lived elsewhere.

**Houston:** How far away did they live?

**Adams:** They lived about five miles.

**Houston:** And this was five miles from the forty acre farm? Or five miles from the

**Adams:** Five miles from the 140 acres of land. And, of course, they helped out with us also on the forty acre land. So that's ... So, they had children, you know, and they would come help gather, harvest the crop and help plant it.

**Houston:** Okay.

**Adams:** So we were able to ... it was kind of a family affair. We were able to make out. And my daddy, you know, he could supervise us even though he wasn't able to work. But he would come out and get us started and set the plow up and the mules and all. And so we ... we were able to make it by being a close knit family. We always would come to each other rescue.

**Houston:** What was it like living in a ... Now, you were a little boy when you lived on that forty acre farm. But you were only there about three years, you said.

**Adams:** Well, probably ... probably five, six years.

**Houston:** Okay, so you moved onto that farm ... how old were you when you moved onto
Adams: I was about nine years old.

Houston: And so you were about fourteen when you moved onto the 140 acre farm?

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: So, what was it like moving from a ... an area, kind of all white land owners where you were the only black land owning family to moving to an area which was predominantly black landowners?

Adams: Yeah. Well, it was ... other than just that one family, white family, that wanted the property, we got along good with all the white people because the fact ... I didn't realize until there was big difference in white and black until I got ... well, my neighbor on the right of us was white. And they had a son one year younger than I and they had a daughter one year older than I. And we played together each day, you know, when we had time. And her name was Anne. And so, I'd eat at the table with them. I mean, they was ... they was good family. And they made no distinguish between black and white as far as the way they treat. But then, when Anne became about thirteen years old, she ... her mother said ... told my mother that, "Now, Ben's going to have to stop playing with Anne and is going to have to start calling her 'Miss Anne'." So my mother told me, "Now Anne's a little lady now and you have to call her 'Miss Anne'." And so I ... you know, being a kid, I said, "I don't ... I'm going to call her Anne. I ain't going to call her no Miss Anne." You know, I played with her every day and, you know, and everything and now I'm going to call her Miss Anne? I said, "I ain't going to call her." My mother said, "Yeah, that's the way it is." And she had sat down and told, you know ... really I
knew ... I knew you had to Mr. and Miss white people but they were people of age, you know.

Houston: Grown.

Adams: Yeah, grown. And I really couldn't understand that. And she had to really sat
down and talk to me about calling her Miss Anne. And so, then's when I realized that there was
a difference in all and respect and, of course, they would call my mother "Annie" and call my
daddy "Uncle". They never would address them as ... my dad's named James Adams and they
never did ____ as James or my mother as Elizabeth. They would always say "Annie" when they
would speak to her. "Hey, Annie" and everything.

Houston: Your mother's name was Elizabeth but they called her ...

Adams: Yeah. The white people. That's the name they give all black women. Annie.

Houston: Annie and Uncle is what they called them.

Adams: Annie and Uncle. Yeah, they wouldn't even speak to you "How you doin'?"

They'd say, "Annie," or "Uncle" and then they'd go on with the conversation, you know.

Houston: Now this was ... And even the white neighbors with whose kids you played called
your parents Annie and Uncle?

Adams: M-hm. Yeah. Called my dad "Uncle Jim" and called my momma "Annie". They
didn't call her Elizabeth. Sometimes they would call ... well, very seldom they'd call her by
name. Annie. And so that was accepted in that time and age. You know.

Houston: Yeah, I mean ... it was almost ... in a way, for racist white people it was almost a
term of affection, wasn't it?

Adams: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. They thought they were giving you high ... high respect.

Yeah, when they called you
Adams -

Houston: When they were calling you Uncle.

Adams: Uncle and Annie.

Houston: It's Annie, not Auntie, right? It's not ... Were they calling Auntie?

Adams: No, Annie. Annie. A-n-n-i-e. Annie. And Uncle. But, I go back ... It always stayed in my mind. I go back now, backing up from before we moved from Edgefield ... and this ... this always stuck in my mind. I was out ... We had worked hard. My mother and father told us, said, "You all work hard and pick cotton" ... that was in October, now. Last week in October. "We'll let you all go to school maybe one week. And then, if we get the cotton picked out by the next two weeks, you all can go to school maybe the latter part of November." And so, my ... we had did that, you know. We went to school ... went to the fields early in the morning and late at night because we wanted to go to school. And Mr. John Kemp came up one morning early that I was ... I had on my new overalls and high topped shoes and man, I was excited. And he came and he said, "Boy, what you got your good clothes on?" And I said, "I'm going to school, Mr. Kemp." And he said, "Going to school?" He said, "Go on out and tell your daddy to come here." My daddy had just started breakfast, eating some corn bread and black molasses and buttermilk and all. He was ... Man, he was just enjoying breakfast. It was early in the morning so ...

Houston: This was where now? On which farm?

Adams: Yeah, I backed up now.

Houston: This was before you were on the forty acre farm.

Adams: Yeah, before we moved on the forty acre farm. And I say that ... what I'm saying now just stuck in my mind.
Adams: And so, I said, "Yes sir." So I went in the house and I told my daddy and I said "Mr. Kemp is out there. He wants to speak with you." So he said, "Oh, Lord. Eating my breakfast." So, he got up from the table and went to the door. Mr. Kemp would never ... He never would come in the house and never would ... always come there and blow his horn. So my daddy come back in the house, head kind of down. He said, "Well, you all going to have to pull your clothes off." Said ... "Mr. Kemp said he doesn't want you all back in school until you get my cotton together. And so, my daddy couldn't get mad, you know. And I said ... He said, "I just ... you know, you all going to have to ..." I said, "Why should I ... we have ... can't go to school? You all told us to go to school." He said, "Yeah, but Mr. Kemp says you can't go to school." So we had to pull off our clothes and ... _____, we all getting ready. So we had to pull off our clothes and had to pick Mr. Kemp's cotton until we got it all gathered out. And so, ... but that stuck in my mind that my daddy couldn't be a man!

Houston: Right.

Adams: And I said, "Something was wrong about that. Something's wrong about that."

And later on, when I got older, I said I never would be in a position that if I tell my kids that they could do something that I could back it up and I wouldn't have to tuck my head, you know. And I just knew something was wrong. That really was ... instilled me into going to college. So, ... that my kids wouldn't have to be submissive to a white man's decision.

Houston: So ... so ... so, you recognized that education would somehow make you independent of the white man?

Adams: Yeah.
Adams: And your parents recognized that.

Adams: Oh yeah. Yeah, they recognized education would be a key to black man's salvation. And they worked hard to keep us in school. And that's why they ... caused to send us to a private school. But, ... but that really bothered me that my daddy ... the look on my daddy and momma's face and when they had to tell us, "Well, you know, that's the way it is. We're going to have to try to work and get the cotton picked." M-hm.

Houston: And this was

Adams: That was in 19 ... maybe about ... oh, maybe '40.

Houston: So this was maybe when you were still in the first grade.

Adams: Yeah, first grade. First grade, yeah. And of course, that ... We ... If you had any problem that you had to go to your white man to solve your problem. For example, some teenage ... white teenagers -- now, back in Edgefield again before we moved onto the forty acres -- they would come by and pick at our house. You know, throw rocks on the house and also shot at the house -- tintop. They were just havin' fun, you know. They ... And we knew who they was. And so you didn't dare try to shoot back. And we knew they wasn't trying to do us any harm. They were just havin' fun shootin' at the top of the house. So my daddy would go to Mr. Kemp that morning and tell him that Mr. Smith's boys were throwing rocks and shooting at our house. And so Mr. Kemp said, "All right. I'll go there and talk with them, talk with the parents."

And sure enough, they would stop. And ... and about another six months or something, they'd want to have some more fun and they'd come back and throw on top of the house and ... we lived close to the road ... and also shoot at the top of the house sometimes. So we had to get up and put tar on the tin to keep it from leaking in the house, you know. They wasn't ... they wasn't
angry with us. They were just havin' fun with a bunch of niggers, ____ might so to speak.

**Houston:** Shooting holes in your roof?

**Adams:** M-hm. And throwing on and they knew that you didn't dare to fight back.

Because you didn't argue with a white man. If he ... if he was wrong, you didn't tell him, "Well, I don't think you ... well, I don't think like that." And he was ... they would often times say, "You mean to tell me that you're arguing with me? Or you speak when I say, you know." And I remember, before my daddy moved to the forty acre land, he had some different with what the white man owed ... See, they never let you see how much you owe them. They just say, "You owe X among of dollars from last year and then carry on." And my daddy said, "Well, I didn't think I owed that much!" And he said, "You ... Uncle Jim, you speak when I say." And Daddy said, "No, I didn't really mean like that." You had to back track, you know. You had to say what you really didn't mean. And so that's the way it was back in then. And any time you had a problem, you wanted some shoes ... you had to ask the white man to call ____ Ruben ... what that is, that's a Jew store. ____ Anyway, it was ... it was a Jew store where we get our clothes and the white man would tell the ____,"Now don't let him have but one pair of shoes." And we had to wear that shoe to school and church. And so somebody'd die in your family, you had to get ... call the white man, plantation owner, and tell him. They'd tell you what funeral home to ... to use because there was a black funeral home ... was two black funeral homes. One was owned by the white man but a black man ran the farm. And they would say, "Okay, you call Pierce Blalock." And so black people used Pierce Blalock, most of them because, you know, you had to borrow money to bury them or whatever. If not, you had to do what the white man said. And so, so Pierce Blalock buried most of all the black. And everything you did, you just about had to
ask the white man and get his permission. If you worked on a job, and you wanted to switch jobs, you first would have to get your permission from your owner to go on another job, or even if you wanted to move on another plantation, you had to get permission from your plantation owner. Because he said that you couldn't move, the other plantation owner wouldn't hire you. Or even wouldn't let you move. And so I remember well my brother, he was my older brother now. Not the one that two ... older than I. Not the one that was home. He was ... well, he was home but he was about eighteen. And so he wanted to go to Charleston. And had a brother-in-law who lived in Charleston, near Charleston, and he worked at a saw mill. Worked at the saw mill. So my brother wanted to go to Charleston and saw mill with him. Meantime, before then, he was working with ___. And so the ___ owner had a truck and he would come by and want my brother to go to work with him, which he did. But finally, my mother told him to go down to Charleston and work. And so, that Monday morning, the ____ works man came by to pick him up. And so my mother said, "Well, he's not here. " She said, "He won't be working with you no more." He said, "Well I tell you what. He said, "You better have that boy ready in the morning when I come by to pick him up." He said, "Nobody quit unlessen I said they could quit." So my mother didn't say nothing; went on back in the house. So he came by the next morning. He blew his horn to pick my brother up. And my mother went to the door. He said, "I told you to have that boy ready." She said, "Now, well, he's gone to Charleston. He's working." He said, "But I told you to have that boy here. The boy just can't quick me." And so he got out of the truck. My mother said, "Why, you just be ... [End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

Brunson: ... man came back the second day and one brother and my mother told him he
wasn't home. And he said, "Well, I'm comin' in the house and see." So my dad ... my mother said, "Well, you just wait right there 'til I come back." And she went in the house and got a shotgun. And so, she came back with the shotgun in her hand and the man saw it. And he ran back to his truck and he left that day. And I never seen a truck spin like that but he did. My momma really would have shot him because she was that type of person. I mean, she told him, she said, "My son ... and I told him he could go and you ain't goin' to come back and worry me no more." And he so left. He left running. So that's the way it was back in there that you ... you didn't queer the white man unless he gave permission. And if you got in trouble, you had to go to the white man or your kids got in trouble and if you was a good nigger and if you got in trouble with another black person, they'd say, "Well, this is a good nigger. I need him. Turn him loose." And all. And that nigger wasn't no good. He always got in trouble. It wasn't no trial or whatever. Or if it was a trial, most of the time, if you was a good worker and good nigger, so to speak, that nothin' really happened. And so that's the way it was.

Houston: This was in a black on black situation.

Adams: Black on black, yeah. But with white people, you usually had to leave town if you got in trouble. You had to leave town fast or somebody had to hide you out. And so,

Houston: Did that ever happen? I mean, in the communities where you lived, the three different places you lived in?

Adams: Oh, well, yes. Down at Bettis, we didn't have that problem because we dealt with mostly black people. And we had, you know, to buy groceries and all from white people. But around Edgefield and around the forty acres, that's the way it was. If you got in trouble with the Highway Patrol in speeding, if you could outrun him and get on your plantation, he had to turn
around and go back or he had to go to the plantation owner and say, "I want you to turn your ... your nigger ... and he got on your property. I want to know if I can go arrest him." And he'd tell him, "No. I don't want to see you on my property. I don't want to catch you on my property." So he would have to wait 'til he could get back on the street, you know, to arrest him or whatever. But he ... you didn't go on any plantation talking about arresting somebody unless you checked with the owner, regardless of what he did. And so, that's the way it was back in there.

And, of course, that was ...

Houston: Do you know of situations where ... where blacks got in trouble with whites and had to ... had to flee or had to leave town or be hidden out?

Adams: Yeah. For example, I had a first cousin who was ... and he was ... oh, he was ... he was maybe in his early teens and there was a white girl that they loved each other. And they saw them together one time and so, they had shipped him out of town at night because they were going ... they were going to lynch him. And the girl told them, she said that, "You know, I love him." And there wasn't no sex involved. It was just being seen with this black boy. And then there were other people that happened. Back in that time, I had a first cousin. Now he didn't have to leave. But it showed that any time a white person, especially a white woman, driving a car, if she hit you ... you was wrong. And I had a first cousin that just finished college and bought him a car. Because he taught in a rural section. And this white woman hit him and knocked him over in the ditch and totaled his car. And the policeman came and asked him, said, "Why you hit this lady, white lady?" He said, "Man, you see the car?! My car's tore up. She done knocked me over in the ditch and you ask me why'd I hit that white lady?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "You're going to pay for it." So, he was hard trying to get a lawyer. So he
finally got a white lawyer and the lawyer told him, said, "Now, listen." He said, "I don't believe I can win your case." He said, "Now, the lady was wrong but if I win the case, you and I both have to leave town fast." He said, "Now the best thing for you to do is to walk to school." And I don't know ... He had just maybe six miles to walk to school. "And save enough money to fix this white lady's car or leave town." He said, "You know, it's just the way it is." So he known what the man's saying, the lawyer was saying was true. And so he saved enough money to fix that white lady's car. And then later on, he was able to get him another car. That's the way it was. Anything ... if you had an accident with a white person, you was wrong. And you couldn't get no lawyer, even a white lawyer, to represent you against a white person. So, then I know some cases wherein ... I had another cousin that was going with a black lady. And she was also entertaining a white man too. And so a mysterious bunch of people came here. I don't know whether they were ... and took him out and beat him up and killed him, really. They left him on the railroad. So we had several cases like that.

_Houston:_ You mean they killed him?

_Adams:_ Yeah. M-hm. Cause he was going with this black woman.

_Houston:_ You mean the train ... they beat him to death and the train ran over him?

_Adams:_ No, no, no. The just beat him to death. And, of course, that's more than one incident happened like that. I remember when the Klan ... if you did something to a white man or an argument, the word would get out that a black person had a big argument with a white man. So the Klan's going to run, parade tonight. And sure enough, man, sun down, boy, black people went in. And, of course, the Klan would come by. And they had their ... Any black that they saw, they would attack them. And so, so that's why when I see this flag, I get nervous because
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the Klan used to have that flag. 'Cause that flag ... and I ... you know, they would go by the
house. It'd be a long ___ of them, you know. And later on, you'd hear about some black they
killed, or hung, or whatever. And so, you really didn't have no ... no law for you on your side.
And ... but that's the way it was back in there.

Houston: So when ... I mean, it was about this time that ... that the black people started ...
that some black folks started, particularly in the cities, they started fighting back. I mean, they ...
they weren't fighting the same kind of fight that people in the countryside were fighting. I mean,
you know, people with sheets and violence and stuff like that maybe. But I'm thinking now
about the forties and the fighting back against, you know, unequal teachers' pay and that kind of
thing. The white primary. Now, you were in school in the late forties in Bettis, in Bettis.

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: And Bettis was in a ... was in a town where there were lots of blacks.

Adams: Well, not so much of a town as more a black community. But the main ____ was
in the town of Trenton, but it was about six miles away from Trenton in the rural section.

Houston: I see. What was that community like? I mean, you said it was a black
community. I mean, did you have black stores and business people? Or were they just mainly
farmers?

Adams: Mainly farmers. And they did more like garden work wherein they sold produce,
would take them to Augusta, Georgia. Augusta being like fifteen miles away. So that's how
they made a living because they lived on ... in a sandy area where the white people didn't want
because it ... it wasn't rich soil. And so that's why blacks were able to buy the property and all
and all. But they could grow enough farming and enough to take care of the family and they ...
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enough for gardening. They would sell produce and they would take it to Augusta, Georgia.
And that's how they made the money. And, of course, some of them bootlegged too and all. In
fact, one family -- the Ku Klux Klan, the last time they ran in Edgefield was ... was a white man
lived in the community. And a black family. And they had a partnership with a liquor still.

Houston: Oh they punished him ... punished the black man for a liquor still?
Adams: No, they didn't ... they didn't punish him. But here's what happened. The white
man and the black had some controversy as to ... about some whiskey or something. And so they
were dissatisfied with the black family as to well, they got more liquor or more money and it
wasn't split up equal. Some way. I don't remember the cause. But it was some difference. And
so, they realized that the white people was mad. And like it happened today, that night, the
Klansmen did come to his house. And so, they were ... they were ready. The family ... the black
family, his wife and his mother-in-law and himself, you know, they armed themselves that night.
And so, they knew the white man ______ good so they knocked on the door. And they said, to
the black family, say, "We're the policemen. Open up." And so his mother-in-law had a gun and
he had a gun and his wife, and they told them, say, "Well, come on in." They knew ... they knew
who it was. "Come on in." And he wore a black hat -- the white guy. And so they shot a hat
off. And he ... it was him in the door. And he fell back. And then, the mother-in-law, she began
to shoot. And his wife began to shoot. So they shot a couple of them. And they ran back and
got in the car and left. And ... and so we found out later on from the white man that run the store.
And you know, he used to treat you real ... real nice when you'd go in his store. You wouldn't
think he'd be involved. And he backed his car in ... in his garage. But he had a ... he had a black
man that worked on his farm. And they said the door ... his back window was shot out. So come
to find out, he was there that night.

**Houston:** He was one of the Klansmen.

**Adams:** One of the Klan. So then, the black community knew that they were coming back. So the next night, maybe about twenty-five other blacks lined up in the ... in the woods, you know, hid. So they were going to come back. And sure enough, the Klan came back to really get them this time. And so, when they began ... the black people started shooting first in the house. And then the other blacks began to shoot and all. So they was surrounded by blacks shooting them. And so they had turned around and run. Some of them had to leave their cars and had to get the sheriff go back and get the car for them. The white people had to get the sheriff to go back to the car. Well, they don't know whether they really killed any of them but there was a black church there in that community ... white church in that community. And they saw some light there by night and a fresh grave. So they believed that they killed one of them, they buried him that night because there was a fresh grave. And people that live around there don't remember

**Houston:** there being a funeral.

**Adams:** a funeral. But it's amazing how several prominent white people in that area's car was shot up with bullets. And then, the sheriff had to come and get the car. So they knew ... they knew the car. In a community like that, you know everybody's car -- black or white. And so that last time the Klan really did something to a black in Edgefield County. But the sheriff told them, you know, say, "I'm not going to support you." Said, "They really should have killed you." The sheriff told them that. And so black ... being in a black community, they always pull together. And the same way, the school buses. White people would stop that school busing.
Now mind, now, it was owned by Bettis and make the driver get out. And they would come all in the bus and raising sand. And the black community got together on that. And so, there was an intersection where they would stop our school buses. So black parents armed themselves and sat at the intersection. So that put a stop to that. White people harassing our buses and all. Which were black owned. See, they didn't provide any buses for white kids ... black kids back in then. And we walked to school. And they would throw out a chewing gum, apples at us and call us all kind of names. And I barely go ... didn't get run over twice. See, I was in ... at our middle school, we got out earlier than my brother. And we lived five miles. So I would walk to school ... walk back from school. I would go to school with my older brothers and other older kids. But I would walk back from school myself. And one ... one evening, I heard the bus coming. ____ it's that school bus. So I was walking on the edge. And my mind say, "Look around". And the bus was aiming right at me. So I got in the ditch. You know, a little ditch maybe about three feet. And that bus came right on the edge of that ditch. And I had to jump up on the back. And it happened the next day. The same bus tried to run over me. And so, then I saw ... so I could go ... so I wouldn't ride ... walk down the road that way. I could go through the woods. So I started going through the woods on the way home. And I only had to walk a short distance on the ... on the main road. But, so that really ... really shook me up, you know, walking and getting run over. And so, they would call you all kind of names. And of course, I'm ... the part for me was that ... that you interview people ... how kids would do on those school buses. But, that's the way it was back in then. The way it was. People used to pray for a better day and all. It was hard for you to see a better day coming. It was just hard. Because everything you had to ask the white man for or you had to ... to be submissive. And you couldn't go to school after you got to a
certain age, being a black male. And so, there wasn't no jobs unless labor and working on the farm. And so, what kind of better day you could see. I mean, everything was ... you had to look to the white man, even if you had an education. And very few people had an education. You could count them on one hand -- the school teacher and all. But, you had to preach or teach.

You know. You had to preach or teach. You had no other choice. And so, ... but I always helped my old people _____ and church and all and all pray for a better day. A better day for ...

Being young, I couldn't see a better day. And I don't see how they ... they had a vision. They believed that a better day was coming. And that's why our parents believed that something was going to happen. And they instilled that we needed an education was the key. And that's why, you know, they got together ... well, back in then, they had to support their own schools. So that's what we've got to do now, you know. I'm getting off the subject a little bit. But we've got to go back where we provide our own schools. We didn't look to the white man for our own schools. We've got to do for ourselves. And that's what the old people did back in then. And they send their kids on cotton picking money. I don't know how they did it but they did it. And so, we took care of each other. If somebody's in stress ... I remember my parents would make us go and give a day's work to our neighbor if he got sick. If a neighbor got sick and wasn't able to farm, you had to give him a day's work and somebody else would give him a day's work. But the children or the parents would go and give him a day's work until he could get ... until the family could get able to go back and take care of their own farm. Somebody was ...

Houston: Oh you mean, they'd go over and work on the farm for a day?

Adams: Yeah. That ... that's when we moved in the black area. We supported each other.

And so nobody went ... suffered because everybody would help ... help out. And they ... if they
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got burned out, they would help build the house back for free labor. And also, if they had
donating material, they would ... they would get together and raise money at church and give
people money to rebuild their home or sickness. They was spending ... the ladies would get
together and one ... like my mother would sit the night. And some other lady would sit another
night with the lady that was sick. And so we supported each other and took care of each other.
And that's what we're going to have to start doing now. Support each other. I guess I'm skipping
all around.

Houston: No, no, no. You're not. This is ... this is very interesting. When you ... when you
were in the area down near Bettis, on the 140 acre farm and blacks were ... were supportive of
each other as a community coming to the defense of people who were being attacked by the
Klan, coming to the aid of people who had been stricken with illness or been burned out ... I
know that you weren't totally independent. That there were probably some instances in which
blacks were still dependent on whites. I mean, maybe the stores were white owned. Were the
stores white owned?

Adams: Yeah. Yeah. The store was white owned. Now black people had no big grocery
store but a little ... sell a little ... sell groceries. But you really had to deal with the white man.
And, of course, being in a black area ... because the white store owner, they knew the bulk of the
business was coming from white ... black people. And so they was ... you know, they'd treat you
good as far as you go in the store and everything. So we had to do that.

Houston: The other thing I'm really interested in is ... is what you describe as your parents'
faith that things were going to get better. Now this was ... even though it was hard to see how
they were going to get better. It may have been particularly hard for you because you hadn't seen
how things had been twenty years before or maybe twenty-five years before. Your parents had seen that. But, do you remember any expressions of that faith? I mean, do you remember any of the things they might have said about things getting better? I know you said that they said you had to get education. But ... and I assume the time you're talking about when your parents were saying education is important, get as much education as you can, and giving you the sense that they knew things were going to get better, this was on the late forties, early fifties? Or was it ...

Adams: It was in the early forties and the late fifties.  
Houston: Okay. Early forties to ... late forties or early forties?  
Adams: Well, early forties and ... up until the late fifties. Because times hadn't ... in the fifties, times hadn't gotten much better. Because we just began to get buses. I remember we began to get buses for black people ... was in '52. And so, they said to the blacks that now we have buses and come pick them up. And so, black people were scared to go get the buses. And one man was the principal of a rural school, principal of an elementary school. His name was McCain. I think his name was Jeffro ... Jeffro McCain was the principal of an elementary school. So he went and got two buses. And so he told the other black trustees over at Bettis that now we can get buses. Go pick up our kids. And we no longer have to furnish buses. The state will provide for them. And black people were scared to go pick them up. And so, after he got his buses, then blacks had enough nerve to go. And Bettis also, to ask for buses for our kids. And I rode the bus maybe one year before I graduated from high school. And I felt right. Well, I felt good because every time I got to school before, I had to carry me a damp cloth to wipe my shoes off, the dirt and all. And my sister ... you know. And now, I get off ... get on the bus fresh and get off the bus fresh and everything. And if it rained, they'd come to my door. And it
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looked like ... you know, I just felt like something ... it was too good for me. You know, all of a sudden ... I mean, come to my door! You know. Pick me up and everything. Where they were doing it all the time for the black kids ... white kids. But I was so happy man. I'd go to school just like I left out of the house. And come back. But, ... but the black people were scared to go get buses in there. They were scared to go get them. But you always had some brave black. And this Jeffro McCain -- he went and got them buses. It was something.

Houston: I'm just making a note here.

Adams: You know, Bettis is closer ... You don't know the history of Bettis. Of course, that's in the book. You can read about Bettis Academy. And Reverend Bettis, Bettis opened that school. See, the white people ... he was half white and you really couldn't tell whether he was white or black. And so, back in then, they were always if you had a light complexion or whatever, they would ... the white people would put you in charge or whatever. And so, Reverend Bettis, being half white, the white people sent him off to school so he could teach white kids and all.

Houston: Black kids, you mean.

Adams: No.

Houston: White kids?

Adams: Yeah. They was going to let him teach white kids, you know, because ... But still, after he got his education, he came back and opened organized twenty-two churches. And those twenty-two churches supported Bettis Academy. And the name that I associated ... my parents association is ... It's in the history book. And the parents, so, as a result of him being educated and organized Bettis Academy, we was ... that's how Bettis Academy. And those
twenty-two churches and make donations to Bettis Academy in support, and plus tuition and whatever. But that ... is one of the best organizations that put together as well as white. It was well organized.

Houston: So was Bettis there when you were there?

Adams: Yeah. No, no, no. He had gone, yeah. That was right after ... He was right after reconstruction, right after slavery. He was ... He opened the house, Bettis ... I don't remember the year.

Houston: Right. Now, the leadership in the community where you were -- the black leadership was where? Was it ... was it ... Was the school the center of community life? Or was it something else, like the church?

Adams: More center of the community, because all the activities blacks would have there at Bettis. They had rallies. They had ... tried to work out some strategy, they would have it at Bettis. And, you know, a lot of it went on in the black churches. But, Bettis was more community, center of community. And blacks supported. And all the celebrations like the Fourth of July, because there were no facilities for blacks to go to and so you couldn't go to the parks and the beaches. And so, black people would gather at Bettis Academy and there'd be sometimes 10,000 people there for the Fourth of July. And they would have celebration. They would have something like carnival and they would have about four or five different black -- I guess you would call drummers. And they had people who would perform. They would do special, special ... special stunts like soldiers. What do you call those?

Houston: Drill teams?

Adams: Yeah. And they ... they would do all kind of stunts and all ... come from Africa.
You know. Different type of ... different type of ... well, different types of ... it don't come to me right now. I know it. I've had a stroke.

**Houston:** You mean like dances and stuff?

**Adams:** Yeah. Yeah. Dances and also, different stunts and all. They had the guns and all and ... because we'd never seen that. Because, you know, back in the forties, you know, you didn't see it. So blacks carried on their African heritage. You know, they would do that.

**Houston:** Even ... This was back in the forties and the fifties.

**Adams:** Yeah.

**Houston:** And people ... and ... and at these carnivals and fairs at Bettis, they would have ... African-Americans would put on dances that were from Africa?

**Adams:** No, the people wasn't from Africa.

**Houston:** No, no. I know the people weren't from Africa. But they would ...

**Adams:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Houston:** But they would reproduce African dances.

**Adams:** Yeah, yeah, they would do that.

**Houston:** In costume? Did they wear costumes or did they just ...

**Adams:** No, they'd just have on normal ... normal clothes, you know.

**Houston:** But they would be doing African dances?

**Adams:** Yeah. African dances and ... and they had weapons. Kind of why they used sticks and that for weapons. But they used sticks and all and it was a beauty to see. And that's one hazard that ... that we lost that. And, of course, when you see Florida A and M, it kind of brings it back to the kind of thing they did at Bettis. And so, people ... blacks were real proud
because Fourth of July specials, they would have their own black policemen and, of course, you always had to have some white around -- policemen -- because they were deputized. My daddy was the Chief of Policemen for that ... for that day, two days. And so he would deputize black people. But if there was some bad crime committed, then you had to turn them over to the white policemen and they would take them to the county jail, wherever. Well, very few incidents they had. You know, people get drunk and sometime they get in a little sprawl, a little fight. But it wasn't nothing, no major shooting, cutting and all. ____ people stopping and all. Most of it was were drunk. People get drunk.

Houston: Now what year did you graduate from high school?

Adams: 1953.

Houston: Okay. And what did you do after you ... Now did you ... I guess you continued to work part time on the farm?

Adams: Oh yeah.

Houston: But you ... you went to school full time until you graduated, I mean.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And you graduated in '53 from the junior college? Or did you graduate from ... Adams: From the high school.

Houston: Okay. Now, when did you ... And then what did you do, after you graduated from high school in '53?

Adams: I came here to Benedict College here in Columbia.

Houston: Okay. So you didn't go to Bettis, to the junior college?

Adams: No. Because the junior college went out of existence in '50, you know, because ...
for more than one reason. Like black colleges closed down all across the nation. So for one reason or another ...

**Houston:** And so you came here to Benedict.

**Adams:** M-hm.

**Houston:** And where did you ... where did you live? Did you live on campus?

**Adams:** No. I lived in the city with a relative, a cousin. And he lived about ... maybe ten blocks from the school and we would walk to school each day.

**Houston:** And you went to school full time?

**Adams:** Yeah. I worked in the afternoon and the days that I wasn't in class doing garden work and yard work and catch ___ odds and ends because I had to make money to go to college. Because my parents ... well, my daddy's health was bad and my mother did domestic work. And so, so I really had to finance myself mostly. And, of course, the church, it would make me a little donation, you know. And, so I ... I learned a lot about gardening work by working for ... I had four white ladies and they taught me all about gardening work and the yard. And so I ... In fact, I ended up subbing for Sears Roebuck landscaping. You know, on new houses, putting the shrubbery in, because I learned how to do it, you know. And so, I put myself through college like that, working after school and the days that I was off.

**Houston:** As a substitute worker for Sears, for Sears gardening.

**Adams:** Yeah. I would sub several jobs. Sears would have a contract and I would pick up the plants and

**Houston:** subcontract.

**Adams:** subcontract. And, you know, do all that laying out, putting the shrubberies
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around. These were mostly new houses and sometimes older houses.

Houston: And did you stay at Benedict for four years?
Adams: Yeah. Four years.

Houston: So you graduated in '57?
Adams: Well, no. I would have but I had an interruption for service. I went in the service in '54 and I stayed in the service 'til '56. And so, when I came back, the GI Bill carried me all the way through the other two years, the other three years.

Houston: Why did you go in the service? And did you go into the service to get the benefit of the GI Bill?
Adams: No. But I'm glad that they called me. You know, back in then, there was ... you know, they would call you in. And, of course, I was glad because ...

Houston: So you were drafted?
Adams: Yeah, I was drafted. And that was in September. And so school ... school was just starting and I had registered. But I hadn't started. And I didn't see where I was going to have enough money really to make it through school. And tuition wasn't but three hundred dollars per quarter. We was on a quarter basis. And at that time, trying to raise three hundred dollars ... No, no. I think it was a hundred and fifty dollars. I think it was a hundred and fifty dollars. No, about three hundred dollars for the whole year I could go to school. Whatever, it was hard for me trying to raise that kind of money, you know, just doing labor work and all. But ... So they called me in service and I was ... I was happy. I went in and did my two years and came back out on the GI Bill and I finished. So I finished in '59. I have a degree in biology and ... and a minor in physical education.
Adams: Where did you go in the service?

Adams: I was ... did my training at Ft. Jackson. And after the ... then I went to mechanic's school eight weeks. And then they shipped me off overseas to France. And that's where I spent my other two years, over in France. Not two years, about eighteen months. Yeah. In France. So I was able to come back and finish my education.

Houston: You finished in '59.

Adams: '59, yeah.

Houston: So, how did ... from a kind of social point of view, from a point of view of race relations, what was it like going from a rural area down near Bettis coming to ... to ... coming here to go to school at Benedict? What did that seem like? A big difference? Or not much difference?

Adams: Wasn't much difference. Other than that you could get more ... more work, you know, like gardening work and _____. There wasn't a whole lot for blacks to do. But there was ... being coming from Bettis, from a predominant black area, we didn't have a stress and the problems that we was dealing with when we was living in Trenton with the forty acres and ... and problems of living there in Edgefield, problems moving on the forty acres. And we were more independent. We didn't have to go to the white man for special favors. We were able to buy what we wanted because the Savannah River Project came in in the early fifties. So we ... my brother ... I worked down there too. I think that's part of health because later on, after I finished college, I went down there and I worked in the nuclear plant. I worked in that reactor for about a year. And I was exposed to a lot of radiation. And the doctors say that could be part of why my condition is very similar to leukemia. But, it wasn't much big difference because you could ...
you had a little more freedom here in Columbia. And my uncle was ... my cousin where we 
stayed was a minister so he was more ... he was independent. So it wasn't a whole lot of big 
change other than just coming from a rural area to ... into a city. Yeah. And see, Benedict being 
a Baptist school and they instilled in us the same thing that Bettis instilled in us. And so, ... in 
fact, we organized an NAACP youth chapter. And ... but we had to change our ... our advisor, 
campus advisor to not name it NAACP. It was just named it, like something like the Youth 
Council or something. But, it was the NAACP. And if you had been an NAACP member and 
you graduated from college, you wouldn't get hired. And the same way in Orangeburg, back in 
then, they fired about four or five teachers because they put on their application that they were a 
member of the NAACP and the school district fired them. So, that's why we changed the name 
of the NAACP, as the Youth Council for Change. And so, then, when the student graduated 
from Benedict, they would not have to put down on their application that they were a member of 
the NAACP.

Houston: So you were one of the students who founded a Youth Council at Benedict?

Were you there when that happened?

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: So you were one of the founding members of the ... 

Adams: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Houston: Do you remember, you know, why the Council ... why the chapter was formed?

Why the Youth Council chapter was formed? And some of the things that it did while you were 
there?

Adams: Well, the ... '54, there were people looking for ... say a position on the school
desegregation coming through. And we knew that the NAACP needed money to ... to fight the cause. And so, you know, by having a college chapter although it wasn't named, in the name NAACP, we would support the NAACP. And that was one of the reasons it was organized. And then, we organized for task groups to march on the University of South Carolina.

Houston: On State College?

Adams: Yeah. Yeah. University of South Carolina. University of South Carolina

Houston: It was here.

Adams: Yeah, here in Columbia. And ... [End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Adams: ... all time. But anyway, ...

Houston: It's not apparent.

Adams: Okay.

Houston: So you said there were really two reasons you organized the Youth Council. You were explaining the second one. The first one was to ...

Adams: Now I didn't organize it.

Houston: Well, but ...

Adams: But I was one of the ...

Houston: you were one of the people who was there when it was organized.

Adams: Yeah, yeah.

Houston: And the first reason was to help raise money for the NAACP legal campaign

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: Against segregated education. And the other reason, you said, was to ... was to
protest and to demonstrate at USC.

Adams: Yeah, USC.

Houston: And what was ... what were you protesting at ... When was this exactly that we're talking about? This was after ...

Adams: Yeah. Yeah, that was after ... that was in ...

Houston: When you got back from the

Adams: from the Army. The organization was started before I went in the Army. It was formed in ... in '54. I went in the Army in '54. Yeah, it must have been after I came back. Yeah.

Houston: It was formed after you came back? Or that you protested at USC?

Adams: We protest USC after I came back. That was in 1957.

Houston: Okay.

Adams: Okay. And we marched on USC the first, I think, about five or six went down to _ and tried to enroll. That's what happened all over the South. They ran us off the campus, where they ran my co-worker ... not co-worker, my classmates and students. They ran us off.

And I think about three times we tried to enroll at the University and they ran us off. In the meantime, you know, the University, throughout Reconstruction, they said the blacks never attended the University but about eight people had graduated from the University prior to Reconstruction. And Lincoln Jenkins, Lincoln Jenkins, Sr. was one of the persons ... and I'm not sure whether Miss ____ had graduated from the University or not.

Houston: From USC?

Adams: Yeah. I'm not positive but there were about eight persons that had graduated throughout Reconstruction from USC.
Adams: During Reconstruction?

Adams: Yeah, yeah. But they ... they were saying that no black ever went to USC and they wasn't going to let no black in. But, after graduating from Benedict, you know, I did my intern teaching back at Edgefield High School. And I enjoyed teaching. But I mainly wanted to work in a lab, technician. That's the best work I enjoyed. And so conditions like it was then, you know, black person -- you only teach or preach. And I found out the kids were so bad when I first started out, you could take them to the gym and put them on gloves, you know. And the best man wins and it's all over. We had some ... a couple of ___ and I was in good physical condition. I'd take one by the gym and ... but then they said a law passed that you couldn't hit kids, you know. You know, later on. I said, "Well, I better get out of this." So, so I went down to Savannah River Plant and applied for it. That's when I had time, when I was working in the reactor. I worked there about two years. Then, the Fire Department began to seek out for black firemen. And so they came on Benedict campus, about two years before I graduated. And they wanted college people. And so I think about four from Benedict had graduated prior to me and they joined the Fire Department. But, then in later years, I was hired.

Houston: What year were you hired?

Adams: I was hired in 1963. Okay.

Houston: You had already graduated.

Adams: I was already graduated. And I worked down at Savannah River Project. But I got laid off because reduction in force twice during that time. And so I didn't try to go back the third time. And I had put an application with the Fire Department because anything you got like then, that was ... that was good for a black man. You know, because the only thing a black person get
was labor. And so, I had a problem trying to get a lab because they'd tell me either I had too much education or ... or they didn't have no openings. But they wasn't hiring any blacks in labs back in that time, to do no kind of lab work. So, ...

Houston: Did you consider the military?

Adams: I'd put two years in. I didn't want to ...

Houston: You weren't ... You didn't think about it after that.

Adams: No. I didn't want ... I enjoyed the tour of duty but I didn't ... not enough to go back into the service.

Houston: So you never thought about ... you never thought about the military as a place you'd like, that you might be able to do biology?

Adams: Oh. No, no. You know. That's something I never did think about, trying to get in civil service out at Ft. Jackson. I never did try that. But even so then, unless you were already in the Army, and got in lab work, it just ... it just wasn't hiring blacks across the nation in that kind of work. And so, ... but, the thing about it that they were looking for college kids and ... but they were hiring white farmers with third and fourth grade education. And so you had to be a college man to be able to compete with the white man with a third, fourth education. And so they hired about eight black firemen and they trained them, you know, to be fire fighters and how to take over the station. And they said, they told the first eight that they would be able to man their own station and all. And the white personnel that was out there at that time would ... would be replenished. Well, it took about eight years before they ... before they hired blacks and then when they did hire blacks, I mean, when they did promote a black, that any time an opening came up prior to then, they would replace it with another white person. Every time that that
white person would get promoted, they'd replace him with another white person. So, they had four stations and we couldn't go to the other stations if there was an opening, whatever. So we were confined to Harney Street Station. And so, we couldn't get promoted, like I say, until eight years. And then they still hired blacks as the engineer. That was the first step in promotion, then fireman, is the engineer. And so all along time before blacks were promoted to engineer, it was just the engineer position and everybody got paid the same. Well, when they promoted a black to engineer, then they put in that you'd be a junior engineer so you wouldn't have the same power or even the same category that a white engineer would have. You'd be a junior engineer. So they ... they put that in as a junior engineer. But still, every time promotion came up, in order for the fire station that blacks ... I mean, blacks couldn't go there and get that position. And so, unless a black would ... would quit, or die, you didn't get promoted. And so, I was instrumental in getting the Fire Department integrated. And so, we told ... we told the Chief that, you know, this discrimination and all. And he denied it. But ... so we told him, we said, "Well, you know, within thirty days, if people at the city don't see fit to integrate the Fire Department, so we can go elsewhere and get promoted or ... or we're going to bring a suit." So they said they wasn't going to do it. So about the twenty-eighth day that ... no the twenty-seventh day after that, they did ... took a younger fireman and sent him various place in ... across the city. As a result, then blacks began to get promoted and move on up. But a lot of discrimination did go on over at the Fire Department, as elsewhere. I mean, the city don't ... the Fire Department no different.

**Houston:** And when ... when did the Fire Department then break down under the threat of ... of ... you threatened to protest if they didn't open things up.

**Adams:** Yeah, we threatened to bring a lawsuit against them.
Houston: And when was this?

Adams: That was in, must be ...

Houston: You joined in '63?

Adams: Yeah, '63. That must have been '70. Maybe '69. '69.

Houston: Six years.

Adams: Yeah. After about six years. And so they did send blacks to different areas. Then blacks began to get promoted as it came open, not so ... not so good but they did. Well, the black ones that did get promoted, had something like ten years of service. And a white person had something like five years, six years of service. And, going back to being at this black fire station and our supervisor had a third grade education, the captain and all had a third grade education. So they would ask us to do the paper work. You know, we'd go on a call, we had to write up the report how much damage and what we did and how much fire hose we used, how much water we used and all. And so, there was a ... we had to send that in to headquarters. And so, we did all that work. And they began to praise the Chief that was on ... in charge of black stations for the good work, paper work done, and profession done, and we were just fresh out of college, even though the ones that was there prior to us. And so they got promoted because of the good work that we did. You know, the spelling was right and everything. Of course, we knew we had to prove something. Of course, we did what we know. And so we did all the leg work and

Houston: he got the glory.

Adams: He got glory. And they got promoted wherein we still were in a stand still position. Yeah.
Adams: The injustice was very prominent. This has been very fascinating. I think I mentioned I've got to be at Mrs. ...

Adams: Oh, Mrs. Thompson?

Houston: Yeah. Not 'til two o'clock. But I've still got this paper work to ... So, if I can, I'd like to ... I'd like to go through this paper work with you.

Adams: Yeah, I'm going to let you fill out because I don't have my glasses. Then I'll sign.

Houston: Yeah, that's what I ... that's how I always do it.

Adams: Okay. Fine.

Houston: I'm just asking ... So I'm just ... Some of the stuff, I may know but I'm just going to ask you because I don't always remember. Do you have a middle name? It's Benjamin Adams.


Houston: Okay.

Adams: Everybody calls me Ben though. So.

Houston: Okay. Your street address here?

Adams: 724

Houston: 724

Adams: Martha, M-a-r-t-h-a, Martha Street. The zip 29203.

Houston: And your date of birth is July

Adams: the nineteenth

Houston: 7-19 ... so you ... Happy birthday!

Adams: Yeah, yesterday.
Houston: You just had a birthday.

Adams: Yeah. I'm sixty-one.

Houston: Did you have a party?

Adams: No. I just ... My wife fixed me a good steak dinner and it don't take much to make me happy. I'm a home person.

Houston: Well, happy birthday. I just realized that. And you were born in Edgefield County.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And your principal occupation is retired fireman?

Adams: No. Court officer.

Houston: Is what? Co-author?

Adams: No, court officer.

Houston: Court officer, sorry.

Adams: Cause I didn't break that gap.

Houston: And before that you were ... you were a fireman?

Adams: No. I was a real estate.

Houston: Real estate?

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: And so you were a real estate agent or a real estate broker?

Adams: Agent.

Houston: Okay. I've got three slots here. I'm determined to put down fireman.

Adams: Well, yeah. I didn't tell you I left the Fire Department after they did integrate.
That was mostly what I was interested in because I wanted to get into another line of work.

**Houston:** Okay.

**Adams:** And in the seventies, real estate began to open up to blacks cause we had a problem trying to ... they made the tests hard but, you know, we handled it.

**Houston:** Okay. Let's see. This paper work goes on and on. Now, what's your home number, telephone number here?

**Adams:** 754

**Houston:** 803

**Adams:** Yeah.

**Houston:** 754

**Adams:** 754-0726.

**Houston:** Okay. And how do you normally sign your name? Is it Benjamin E. Adams?

**Adams:** Benjamin E.

**Houston:** Okay.

**Adams:** But just normally I'm called Ben.

**Houston:** Well, this question is "please indicate precisely how the interviewee would like his or her name to appear in written materials." So would you like yourself referred to in written materials as Ben Adams or Benjamin E. Adams?

**Adams:** Benjamin E.

**Houston:** Okay. Now you were born in the county, not in the city, right?

**Adams:** Yeah.
Houston: Okay. And you are currently married.

Adams: Yes.

Houston: And what's your wife's name? First, middle and last name and maiden name.

Adams: Okay.

Houston: No, no. Excuse me. First, middle and last name.


Houston: Does she have a middle name?

Adams: Yeah. You want her maiden name?

Houston: Well,

Adams: Adell

Houston: it says "middle name" so I don't need her maiden name at this point.

Adams: Okay. P.

Houston: P?

Adams: T, T. T like in Tom.

Houston: Okay. And, of course, Adams.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And what's her date of birth?

Adams: Seven month and the twenty-ninth day of '41.

Houston: July 29, 1941?

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: So she's got it coming up.

Adams: Yeah.
Adams -

Houston: 1941.

Adams: '41.

Houston: You guys have birthdays only ten days apart. And where was she born?

Adams: Well, in Lexon County. No, no, no. I'm sorry. She was born in Columbia.

Houston: In the city of Columbia?

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: And what county is this?


Houston: Right. And what's her occupation?


Houston: And your mother's first, middle and last name and her maiden name?


Houston: Brown is her maiden name?

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: Did she have a middle name?

Adams: No.

Houston: So it was Elezibeth Adams?

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: Did she use Brown, Elezibeth Brown Adams?

Adams: No.

Houston: And what's her birth date? Or birth year, if you don't know the date.

Adams: I don't recall now. I know she died ...
Houston: Yeah, what year did she die?

Adams: Oh, that was in 1974.

Houston: And do you know how old she was?

Adams: Yeah. She was sixty-nine. She was born in January but ...

Houston: So she was born in 1905.

Adams: Yeah, okay.

Houston: And do you know where she was born?

Adams: In Edgefield County.

Houston: Okay. Now, when you were telling me about your grandfather, I assume that was your father's mother that you were talking about ... I mean, your father's father that you were talking about.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: Okay. And your mother's occupation was farmer?

Adams: Domestic. And farmer, yeah.

Houston: And your father's name was James?

Adams: James M. Adams.

Houston: What'd the M stand for? Did he ever use the M?

Adams: Monroe.

Houston: Monroe?

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: So he was named after a President?

Adams: M-hm.
And, do you know what year he was born, or if not, what year he died and we can figure out how old he was?

Okay. He died in 1965, and 'cause he was fifty-nine.

He was fifty-nine. So that means he was born in 1906.

Yeah. Well ...

Right? Yeah, that's right.

Okay.

I mean, if he was fifty-nine ... Well, either it could have been one way or the other.

Yeah, yeah. I think ...

If you subtract 59 from 65, it's 6.

Yeah, that's right.

So he was about a year younger than your mom. They were close to the same age. Now, you see, now, there was eight years distance in their age. My daddy, he was older than my mother.

He was eight years older?

Yeah. Now see, I know my mother died in what? I said '74?

Right.

And he died in '65. 1965.

And your mother was eight years younger than he?

Yeah.

So that means ... if he was fifty-nine in '65, that means he was born in '06. And if
Adams -

your mother was eight years younger than he, that means she was born in 1914.

**Adams:** Yeah, yeah. Fourteen year.

**Houston:** Is that right?

**Adams:** Yeah.

**Houston:** Okay.

**Adams:** I should have that.

**Houston:** Which means that she was about sixty when she died.

**Adams:** Yeah. Yes, I know she ... Yeah, yeah. No. Un-uh. She was older than that. She was sixty-nine.

**Houston:** Well, see, if she was sixty-nine, that puts her age back to, birth date back to 1905.

**Adams:** My daddy was fifty-nine but he was eight years younger than she. I mean older than she.

**Houston:** Right.

**Adams:** But he died in '65. Well, that's ... that's probably close enough though.

**Houston:** Yeah, that's close enough. But you're sure there ...

**Adams:** Cause I can find

**Houston:** was eight years difference between them?

**Adams:** Yeah. I can find ... I can call my sister and remember that. Because I had the obituary here. And I can't even find it. I think one of my sons must have gotten it.

**Houston:** Well, you may just want to straighten it out for yourself because ... because if ... you know, because the numbers don't add up.

**Adams:** Yeah, that's right.
Houston: Because if she died in '74, and she was sixty-nine, then she had to have been born in 1905. But if she was born in 1905 and your dad was born in 1906, they were ... she was a year older than he, rather than eight years younger.

Adams: Yeah. Yeah, I'm going to have to ...

Houston: I'm going to leave her birth date at 1914 which makes her only sixty when she died. See, that's the problem. If she was ... If we have his birth date right, and she was born eight years later, and she died in '74, that means that she could only have been sixty.

Adams: M-hm. Yeah, that's ... than sixty-nine.

Houston: Maybe she was fifty-nine when she died.

Adams: No, no. She was older than that. I know that. But I could get that information to you if you need it.

Houston: I don't think it's critical but, yeah, it'd be nice to have it straightened out. Don't worry about it.

Adams: Yeah. Okay.

Houston: Now your mother was born in Edgefield County.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: I'm sorry. Yeah.

Adams: Yeah, Edgefield County. Both of them. Well, momma and dad wasn't ... yeah. Born in Edgefield County.

Houston: And your dad's principal occupation was farmer.

Adams: Farmer.

Houston: Do you mind if we stop for just a second? I'd like to use your bathroom.
Adams: Yeah, go right ahead.

Houston: I know you have lots ... I think you said you ... This is the next question. It has to do with your brothers and sisters. I think you said you had seven who were older

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: and then there were several who were at home with you.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: For this question, how many were there all together?

Adams: Ten.

Houston: Ten?

Adams: Ten, yeah.

Houston: Okay. Can you give me their names in birth order?

Adams: Yeah. I may not have birth dates but Ethel Mae is the oldest.

Houston: is the oldest, yeah. She's deceased.

Adams: And that's M-a-e.

Houston: And that's M-a-e.


Houston: Adams Martin?

Adams: Is Georgia, G-e-o-r-g-i-a. Georgia Elezibeth Adams Jones ... I mean, not Patton.

Georgia Elezibeth Patton. That's her married name. And the next one would be Sarah, S-a-r-a-h.

Sarah Martin, M-a-r-t-i-n.

Houston: Okay.

Adams: And then James M. Adams, Jr. And

Houston: So the first boy got the big handle.

Adams: Yeah. And John Quincy Adams.

Houston: Another President.

Adams: Yeah. White people named you all the time. Most of the time, we had to ask ... why are we ... when you know your wife's going to have a baby, they'll tell you what to name him.

Houston: Is that what happened?

Adams: Yeah, a lot of white people named after some white family or either Presidents or, you know ... And my name ... I was named after a white doctor ... ____ told my momma. And so, you probably find a lot of blacks got three or four names. They'd have a white name and then they'd want to name them after their own people. So, they put that name in. They kind of dictate to you, you know. You didn't ... They wasn't so experienced about the names, but the white folks names, you know, the plantation owner or somebody.

Houston: So, ...

Adams: Okay.

Houston: ____ John Quincy Adams.

Adams: And Albert.
Adams: Albert?


Houston: So you're the last.

Adams: Yeah, I'm the baby. My mother had twelve kids. Two died at an early age.

Houston: And what about children? Do you have children?

Adams: Me? Yeah. Two boys.

Houston: What are their names, in order of birth?


Houston: Okay. And ...

Adams: Adrian, A-d-r-i-a-n. Adrian.

Houston: Does he have a middle name?

Adams: E.

Houston: Is it also Edward?

Adams: No, Eugene.

Houston: Okay.

Adams: Adams.

Houston: And do you have any grandkids?

Adams: Yeah. I have

Houston: How many?

Adams: Three.

Houston: I don't need their names. But I do ... to the extent that you know them, I'd like the
Adams -

birth and death dates for your siblings, your brothers and sisters, if you know them. I know you
said you didn't have the birth dates but you might know some of them.

Adams: Oh boy!

Houston: Here's an easier question. Where were they born? Were they all born in

Edgefield County?

Adams: They were all born in Edgefield County.

Houston: Okay. All right. That's the ...

Adams: I just don't ... I just ...

Houston: I'll just go down the list and if you can think of the year when they were born, I'll

write it in and if not, I'll skip it.

Adams: I don't ...

Houston: Do you know how far apart they were?

Adams: Two years. All of us are two years apart.

Houston: Even ... even ... there's no gap between the groups?

Adams: No. All of us

Houston: are two years apart.

Adams: Two years apart.

Houston: Now the two who died, were they ... were they after you?

Adams: Well, no. Wait a minute. Five of them dead.

Houston: No, no. But I mean, you said your mother had twelve kids. There were two ...

Adams: Oh, oh, oh. Yeah. They ... one died when she was about three years old.

Houston: Okay. But, but ... I mean, what birth order were they? If everybody was two
years apart, ____

Adams: Oh. I couldn't say specific. But she was between the oldest and the second. She was older than the ... She was in between Ethel Mae and

Houston: and Georgia.

Adams: and Georgia. Yeah.

Houston: And so you had one who died there. And the one that was born between those two who died. And what about the other one?

Adams: The other one was after Georgia.

Houston: Was after Georgia?

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: Okay. So, it's pretty easy to figure it out then because you were born in 1933

Adams: Oh yeah.

Houston: and then Andrew was born in 1931.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And then Albert was born in 1929.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And then John Quincy Adams was born in 1927.

Adams: Okay.

Houston: I mean, you know, this is just approximate.

Adams: Yeah, I ... Yeah.

Houston: Then James was born in 1925. Then Annie was born in 1923. Then Naomi was born in 1921. And Sarah was born in 1919. Let me see if this is going to work out all right
mathematically. This would mean your mother had the children at a very early age.

**Adams:** Yeah, yeah. She...

**Houston:** So, this may not ... this may not work. Cause that means then that the dead ... the deceased was born in 1917, 1915, 1913. Now that's not going to work.

**Adams:** Well, I don't know. I know we're all two years old now but ... but the ones that deceased, I don't know whether ... if two years between them and the rest of them. I know my momma ... I know the one that I knew about ... we're two years old different in age. Now, there might have been one year difference between the deceased that died at an early age.

**Houston:** Right. I'm just going to leave ... I'm just going to leave those years out because it's too

**Adams:** Yeah.

**Houston:** And what about your kids? When were they born? Benjamin Edward Junior?

**Adams:** Benjamin Edward was born in '62.

**Houston:** And he was born in Columbia?

**Adams:** In Columbia.

**Houston:** And what about Adrian?

**Adams:** He was born in Columbia. He was born in January of '63.

**Houston:** Now the places where you lived, basically you lived in Edgefield County and you lived here.

**Adams:** We lived in Edgefield County and Aiken County. You know, after graduating from high school, we moved to Aiken County.

**Houston:** Okay. So you lived in Edgefield County from 1933 to 1953.
Adams: Yeah.

Houston: Then you lived in Aiken County ... but I thought you came here in 1953 for a year.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: You came here but your family may have gone to Aiken County. But you came here in '53.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And you were here a year and then you went to the service and then you came back here.

Adams: Correct. No. I came back to Aiken.

Houston: Okay.

Adams: Yeah. And after I graduated from '59, I went back to Aiken because my family had moved to Aiken County. My mother and all. And so, you know, when I was grown, we lived in Aiken County, after '53. And then I came to college in '53. And then I went back in '59 and stayed there until '60. Then I came back here in '60.

Houston: And you graduated from ... what high school did you graduate from?

Adams: Bettis Academy.

Houston: You did graduate from Bettis?

Adams: M-hm. 1953. And then I came ... In August of '53, in September I came to college here. In '53.

Houston: And you started at Bettis Academy in what year?

Adams: Oh, let's see. I've got to think now. ___ school. It must ... had to be ... had to be
'47, I believe. '47, '48.

Houston: And where was Bettis Academy? What city?

Adams: That's located in a rural section but located in Edgefield County. But it's in the rural section. And the mailing address is, for Bettis Academy, this little town called Trenton but it ... it was about six miles out from Trenton so it's just kind of, I guess, more or less like _____.

Houston: So you graduated from Benedict College in '59?

Adams: '59. And an interruption of two years in the service.

Houston: And did you go to school after the ... did you take a degree after that? You took a B.S. from Benedict.

Adams: Yeah, a B.S.

Houston: In biology.

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: You didn't take a master's degree?

Adams: No.

Houston: Now, your work history -- you were a court officer most recently, right?

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: Did you have a ... I mean, did you have like a title? Or was it ...

Adams: Well, it's called the Bailiff. But it entailed a little bit of everything. Sometimes I had to act as a clerk; sometimes I had to help the solicitor, work closely with the judges and I had to sign ... or serve contempt warrants. So I was a constable also as well as a court officer.

Houston: You were a constable?

Adams: M-hm. State constable. Because I had to go all over the state sometimes if I had
to pick up somebody or serve a court order.

**Houston:** And who did you work for? You worked for the state?

**Adams:** The city. City of Columbia.

**Houston:** City of Columbia?

**Adams:** Yeah. Municipal Court.

**Houston:** So Columbia Municipal Court?

**Adams:** M-hm.

**Houston:** And what years?

**Adams:** That was from '73 until 1986. August of '86.

**Houston:** Okay. And before that you were a real estate agent?

**Adams:** Yeah. Well, I was still part time, even while I was working for the court. But, yeah.

**Houston:** And what ... what company?

**Adams:** Maurice Morgan

**Houston:** Maurice Morgan?

**Adams:** Realty.

**Houston:** Okay. And that's Columbia?

**Adams:** Yeah. 'Cause I still have a license.

**Houston:** You're still with Maurice Morgan?

**Adams:** M-hm.

**Houston:** And what year did you start that?

**Adams:** Oh, around 19 ... it must have been 1985. And I ... That was the most recent.
And I was with another real estate company prior to then.

**Houston:** And what about your career as a fireman? You were a fireman for the City of Columbia.

**Adams:** From '63 'til 1970.

**Houston:** And your employer was the Columbia Fire Department.

**Adams:** Yeah.

**Houston:** We're getting close.

**Adams:** No problem.

**Houston:** Now this next question asks your ... requests that we list your awards, honors, or any offices you've held in organizations. You know, like NAACP or ...  

**Adams:** Okay. Well, let me start back in 1972. I was the President of ... and organized the Republican Precinct.

**Houston:** So you were President and Founder of the Republican Precinct.

**Adams:** Yeah.

**Houston:** Do you mean

**Adams:** I mean for blacks in this area.

**Houston:** Okay.

**Adams:** I organized the first republican precinct.

**Houston:** Did it have a number?

**Adams:** No, just Greenview Precinct. But, I ... Republican Greenview Precinct.

**Houston:** Okay. So it was the first black republican precinct for Greenview.

**Adams:** Well, for the city of Columbia, really. Because we just didn't have any black
Adams -

republican precincts. So I was President of that for four years.

Houston: That was 1976 to 1980?

Adams: Yeah. And so, then I was President of this community ... men's club, called Greenview Men's Club President. I served on ... for two years 'til '84.

Houston: Okay.

Adams: Then in real estate, well, I'm just a member of the Board of Realty and also [End of Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

Adams: ... Board of Realtis.

Houston: Were you a charter member?

Adams: Yes. South Carolina. Board of Realtis of South Carolina.

Houston: You're a charter member of the Board of Realtors of South Carolina.

Adams: Yeah. R-e-a-l-t-i-s.

Houston: Charter member of the Board of R-e-a-l-t-i-s.

Adams: Yeah, Realtis. And that's a black organization -- national. And ... and I helped organize that organization. And that was also in '72.

Houston: And this is statewide or national?

Adams: It's a statewide organization but it's a national organization, but local.

Houston: You organized a local chapter.

Adams: local chapter.

Houston: You said you were a charter member.

Adams: Yeah, the Board of Realtis. And also, I'm a member of the Board of Realtors, R-
e-a-l-t-o-r, Realtors. And of course, that's a ... that's a statewide organization and had white and black.

**Houston:** And what year did you join that?

**Adams:** I joined that in 19 ... it must have been about 1983.

**Houston:** ___

**Adams:** I now ... participate in the Rainbow Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

**Houston:** for the mentally ill?

**Adams:** M-hm. It's a support group.

**Houston:** And what ... what dates?

**Adams:** 19 ... what is ... 1993.

**Houston:** Okay.

**Adams:** ___ that.

**Houston:** I've got room for one more if you want to add one.

**Adams:** Well, NAACP, Columbia Branch.

**Houston:** Are you an officer?

**Adams:** Yeah. I'm ... I'm the legal redress

**Houston:** Chairman?

**Adams:** I chair that committee.

**Houston:** You chair the Legal Redress Committee.

**Adams:** Yeah.

**Houston:** Your current religious denomination?

**Adams:** Baptist.
Adams: And your church affiliation?

Houston: Columbia?


Houston: M-hm.


Houston: Last page.

Adams: No problem. [chuckles]

Houston: My hand's getting tired!

Adams: You know, working in court, I always have to sit in, so it ain't no problem.

Houston: List below any organizations that you belong to. I suppose I'm just going to copy ... unless there're others that you want to mention. I'm going to put down Republican Party, the Green ... I'll just say "see Awards, Honors and ..."

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: Is there any ... No, I better write it down. I'll put down Republican


Houston: Greenview Men's Club. Board of Realtis.


Houston: South Carolina.

Adams: Yeah. R-e-a-l-t-i-s, Realtis. That's a black organization. Nationally known.

Houston: R-e-a-l-t-i-s?

And then the South Carolina Board of Realtors.

M-hm.

And the Rainbow Alliance for the Mentally Ill and the NAACP.

M-hm.

When did you join the NAACP ... how long have you ... you joined in college.

Yeah, down in college.

So you joined in '57, '58.

Yeah, then there was a lapse, you know. After college, I got back involved in 197...

I'm just going to say 1957.

Yeah. That's _____. Because ...

Do you have any favorite sayings? Like expressions, mottos, quotations?

Well, one of my mottoes is that little deeds done are better than great deeds planned.

That's a good motto.

M-hm.

Okay. Anything else? Anything else you'd like to say? Comments you'd like to make?

No. I just believe in doing what I can to make more life comfortable for ... for people. And all of my life, I've been a public servant. Maybe I should say make my life more meaningful but anyway it's okay.

We're both _____. And you say you've been a public servant all your life?
Adams: Pretty much so, yeah. I've got a long history. I can tell a whole lot but that's just about the extent because I did a lot of social work for Aiken County.

Houston: Okay. The last thing I need to do is get your signature on this interview agreement. Adams: Okay.

Houston: It says, "The purpose of the Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American life in the Jim Crowe South Project is to gather and preserve historical documents by means of tape recorded interviews. The tape recordings and transcripts resulting from such interviews become a part of the archives of the Behind the Veil Collection at Duke University. This material will be made available for historical and other academic, research and public dissemination regulated according to the restrictions placed on its use by the interviewee. Duke University is assigned rights, title and interest to the interviews unless otherwise specified. Participation in the Center for Documentary Studies projects is entirely voluntary. We have read the above and we voluntarily have offered the information contained in these oral history research interviews. In view of the scholarly value of this research material, we hereby permit Duke University to retain it without any restrictions. We, the undersigned, have read the above and voluntarily offer Duke University full use of the information contained on tapes and transcripts of these oral history research interviews. In view of the scholarly value this research, we hereby assign rights, title and interest pertaining to it to Duke University." And I'll print your name and my name and then I'll sign it and I'll show you where to sign it.

Adams: Okay.

Houston: Today is the 7-20

Adams: twenty, yeah.
Adams: And there's a place here for the address and I'll fill that in later.

Adams: Okay.

Houston: And, I need you to sign it right where the check mark is.

Adams: Okay.

Houston: Thanks very much.

Adams: M-hm.

Houston: I really appreciate your time and I ... this has been very, very interesting. It's ... been a very fascinating morning for me. So I appreciate it.

Adams: Yeah. You know, one thing though ... and I know you've got to go. But I think it's important to say that Edgefield County and other counties in the state of South Carolina have what they called a special name but the rural area -- you only when to school something like six months because they had planting season. So you had to be out for that. And then you had ... had to cultivating. And you had to be out of school for that. And so, then you had the harvest time. And they got a special name, certain counties, rural counties had that ... about three months you were out of school. And I was special that way. I didn't go to school until we went to ... owned the forty acres.

Houston: On the forty acres?

Adams: Yeah. Because we had to stay out for planting.

Houston: Now, I know that ... that ... that black families on the white man's land could only send their school ... kids to school when the white man let them.

Adams: That's right.

Houston: And the white man didn't care anything about them getting educated. He cared
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about making money.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: And so the children had to work in the field when he said.

Adams: Yeah. So I think that's important that, especially black males didn't ... when they got up to working age, didn't go to school nine months.

Houston: So the real change in your life came when that elderly black man, with that _____, decided he was going to go north with his children.

Adams: Yeah.

Houston: That was the turning point in your life.

Adams: That was the turning point, yeah.

Houston: That was a real ... And it came ... And it couldn't have come at a better time because your dad's health was failing and he'd just been thrown off ... 

Adams: In fact, we'd been thrown out because we couldn't move on anybody else plantation. Because they wanted a family that _____ to work.

Houston: Right.

Adams: And then we couldn't move into the city because my mother did domestic work. She didn't make enough money. And so, we being minors, we wasn't able to work. And so, that old man Broadwater was ... it worked through him, God worked through him. And we was on the move from then on.

Houston: I wonder whatever happened to him. You never ... I guess you never ...


You might have heard of him.

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Houston: Is he related?

Adams: Yeah, yeah.

Houston: Is that right? So you still ... So you still have some contact

Adams: Yeah, with ... with the family, yeah. Tom Broadwater, he's writing a book on black South Carolina too.

Houston: Is he the son of old man Broadwater?

Adams: No, he's ... he's just a relative. I don't know whether he's ... Old man Broadwater is his uncle or what. I'll have to talk with him to find out.

Houston: Okay. And now, I need to ask you for directions so I know how to get out to Miss Thompson's.

Adams: Okay.

Houston: And maybe call her and tell her I'm going to be a little late because it's already one thirty and I need to get some lunch and work out the kinks before I go out there.

Adams: Yeah. Okay. It's ... [End of interview.]