# *Hazel Taliaferro*

Interviewed by Ruth Doyle on January 30, 1984 at an unknown location.

Oral history tape number: 12

*This is an interview with Mrs. Hazel Taliaferro, a long-time, life-time resident of Madison. Today is January 30, 1984.*

One of my earliest memories was a ride in a surrey to Middleton to what is now a tavern. It's still standing. My father came home after I had gone to bed. In fact, my mother was in bed. I heard him say "Elsie. Dress the baby quick. I can have a surrey tonight. Let's go someplace." He worked for Frank Brown. He was a chauffeur there. I don't remember getting dressed but I do remember coming awake during the ride.

*Was this in the winter time?*

Yes, it was.

*So it was a sleigh.*

No. It was a wagon. But the path was clear; there was no snow. It was chilly, I know. We were bundled up to our teeth. That was the only ride I ever had behind a horse. I remember it very distinctly.

*How long did it take you to get to Middleton? It must have been hours.*

It probably did, but I slept part of the time, I know.

*Were you the baby?*

I was the baby, yes. And I was the only child then. So we got to this house, which you can see now. It's still there. In fact, here a few years ago some man wrote a book about the customers that inhabited this place. I guess it was sort of a tavern and an eating house. A man by the name of Frank Hoover ran the place. He was a friend of my father's. I remember my father picking me up and carrying me upstairs. There was a beautiful red carpet on the steps. I was just awed by this beautiful velvety-looking carpet. They put me on the bed and covered me up. That's all I remember. I don't remember coming home or anything else. That was one of the earliest memories. I must have been very small.

One night I remember my father carrying me. He looked down at me and he said "Are you Papa's little girl?" I had been asleep. We had been over visiting a place where I was born, which was over on Proudfit Street, right across from the Marshall Dairy now. My father stopped there and adjusted me in his arms and my mother bent over and tied her shoes. It was four or five blocks from Murray Street.

That area was all filled in, from the lake. That was something I feel should not have been done, but it was. My aunts, my father's sisters, and other relatives used to skate all around in that area. There were flags and cattails here and there. I got cuttings from flags when I was five years old.

*When was that? What dates are you talking about?*

I was born in 1906, so this probably was about 1911.

*Tell me a little more about your father. What did he do? Was he a life-time Madison resident?*

No, he was born in the town of Forest, up in Vernon County. He was a product of that migration that came up right after the Civil War.

*Of black people?*

Yes.

*There was a settlement there, was there?*

There was quite an extensive settlement. It's been researched and written about by several different people. It was a very up-and-coming group of people. His uncle had the first electric plant in the area, had the first tractor.

*They were farmers then?*

Yes. They were hardy people. Very, very modern. They had a bathroom with all the trimmings and a hot water plant before we did down here in the Bush.

*Do you know what's happened to that group? Is everybody still there?*

No. There's not a soul left.

*It's like other farming communities, where the young people just didn't stay.*

They came to Madison or Milwaukee or Chicago. They were not too prolific either. Most of them didn't have large families. In my father's family he was one of three. His uncle, who had the farm up there, had four children.

*Yes. So there weren't very many children. What about your mother?*

She was from Germany. She came over when she was a child.

*She was not black?*

No. No. She came from East Germany, as a matter of fact. She came over with her parents and two older brothers when she was just a child. They settled in Rockport, New York. I'm sorry. Lockport, New York, which is right in the northwestern part of the state. Their older boy had gone west and had settled in Wisconsin. He thought Wisconsin was quite the place so the family moved to Wisconsin, the whole family.

*On the say-so of one... one young man persuaded them all to come.*

Yes. My grandmother always regretted it all her life. She hated Wisconsin. When she left New York the trees were blossoming and it was warm. They had had a fruit farm there, in the fruit growing area of New York. [On the trip to Wisconsin] they came through Chicago and saw blood in the gutters from the packing plants and [the weather] was cold and slushy. My father's ancestors came up from Cincinnati in March. That seems to be a time to move. She hated it. My great-grandmother hated Wisconsin.

*Oh, dear. But she stayed the rest of her life here?*

Oh, yes. She did. They did. There wasn't anything else they could do.

*They weren't free to just go back to Germany.*

[One time] my great-grandfather had business to take care of in Cincinnati, and he walked to Cincinnati from the town of Forest up in Vernon County.

*How long did that take? Do you have any records of that?*

No. I just heard the story time and time again.

*Tell us the story. It would be interesting to have it on tape.*

He just followed trails. This was probably around the 1870s, somewhere in that area. This was

my great-grandfather.

*Who had come to Vernon County from?*

Near Cincinnati. They had moved up here. My grandmother was born down there and I guess three or four of the children were born there. She, incidentally, had a large family, my great-grandmother did. They're all dead now, every one of them. He walked back. He said he sometimes would get a ride in a wagon for a few miles, but most of it was...

*How long did it take? Do you know?*

Actually it took him a little over a month to go one way.

*And a month to come back. But he did come back to Vernon County?*

Oh, yes. His family was there and he had homesteaded up there. Of course, the thing they did was chop trees down. It was just one stand of forest up there.

*And they sold lumber, I suppose.*

Yes. And built a house. They built their houses, too, and their barns. I saw a picture of his family with all the kids lined up in front of the house. I wish I knew where the picture was. It looked very, very primitive.

*How many people were there in this colony, the immigrants from the South?*

No, I don't know.

*But you said it has been researched.*

There's quite a bit of material on it. There's extensive material on it. It's been researched and speeches made at the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences and different places. A man by the name of Phillips, who was a sociology professor, was intrigued a number of years ago when he was doing some census work. He ran across all these Negroes up in Vernon County. What surprised him was the fact that none of them lived in Viroqua, which was the city. He had always been told that Negroes coming from the South who were migrating to the northern countries came to the cities. He started investigating. He had quite a time at first. He wasn't accepted [at first], but finally he was.

The story of his finding these people and interviewing them is beautiful. He got to be very close friends to a number of them. They were very suspicious, because LaCrosse had this Copperhead newspaper that was very violently anti-black and they thought that he might be a representative.

*So they had to be very careful about what they said.*

Yes. But he finally won them over.

*I suppose his writings are in the Historical Library?*

Yes, they are. I have some of them at home myself. He published in different journals.

*Your father then grew up there?*

Yes.

*Then he came to Madison when he was a young man?*

Yes. He was seventeen when he came to Madison.

*Did they go to high school up there? I suppose there wasn't a high school.*

No. He went through about fifth or sixth grade. That's the extent of his schooling. That's why he worked so hard to see that we all got through.

*He met your mother in Madison then?*

Yes. Quite by accident. My mother was working for... do you remember Elsa [unclear]?

*Yes.*

My mother was working for her parents. There were three girls, I think. Mama used to talk about these girls, how pretty they were when they were little girls. One day my father was doing the yard work around and one day he [the father of the three girls] told my mother that he wanted her to meet a very nice young man that he knew. He introduced my mother to Papa. Isn't that something?

*All those things seem to be a matter of chance. Suppose they hadn't been convenient right at that moment. It is interesting to me. I'll speculate on my mother and father's romantic courtship. After you're born and they have a family they don't look very romantic to you at all any more. So they were married at?*

They were married at Rockton, Illinois. It's just over the border. They took a train down there and got married. My father's uncle and his girlfriend went along with them, as witnesses.

*What did your father do when they set up [housekeeping]? Where did they live? What did he do?*

They lived over on Proudfit Street, and that's where I was born. As I say, it's right across from the Marshall Dairy there.

*Right there near the corner.*

Yes, the corner of West Washington. The house that I was born in was probably in what is now the middle of the street, because that was widened. That was made about three times as wide as it was at that time. They lived there for two years and had a wonderful landlord, a Mr. Bartlett, who was a man from Mississippi, a black man. He bought the lot where we were in the Bush, the Greenbush addition. They moved a paint shop, a Mautz Brothers paint shop, from State Street on Labor Day. The movers, the house movers, were all drunk, except my father and his uncle, who helped. They had an awful time getting that house down Murray Street. But they finally got it down.

I remember the house so distinctly as it was. It had iron steps in the front, you know, like all stores did have at that time, and iron posts out in front. And it had a big light in the hallway where it was green on top and white inside. But that wasn't connected for a number of years. We used kerosene lamps.

*Oh. You didn't have electricity?*

No. But there had been... the shop had electricity.

*Moving houses was much more common in those days, wasn't it, than it is now?*

Yes. It was very common. You could see it any time, going down the street, a bunch of horses.

*Was it a comfortable home? Is that where your parents lived?*

That's where we lived. It was a big place.

*Was there a store on the first floor?*

There was a store on the first floor and we lived upstairs. The downstairs was more or less empty. I remember my mother and dad spending hours with chisels and different things, scraping paint off the floor.

*Oh, to refinish?*

It had been spilled. No, this was paint that was spilled. It had no bath, no water, no electricity, no furnace. We had a great big hard-coal heater and Papa put a round thing in the ceiling up over the heater so the heat would go up.

*A hole in the ceiling that took the heat up.*

Yes. All of us kids would dress around that hole. Papa didn't know how to do any of those things, but he learned. We had electric lights put in, where the man came in and put three lights in what we called the front room and the dining room and the kitchen.

*You mean one light in each room?*

Yes, one light. Hung by a green twisted, you know, those electric cords.

*That must have been a thrill for the family when those lights went on.*

Oh! Was that wonderful! Oh, dear. Well, anyway, Papa watched him and helped him and then he wired up the rest of the house afterwards. Then we had water put in and Papa proceeded to put a bathroom in. Just slowly fixed the house up. It became quite a nice comfortable home and there was a lot of room there. We finally moved downstairs and he put partitions up. Talley used to be so amazed at what he could do. He would say "Well, we ought to have a room for every kid." So he'd just get busy and put a partition up.

*So every child had some privacy.*

Yes.

*That was a marvelous notion of his and not very common in those days.*

No. Well, he had lived so crowded when he was a child. His mother and father separated and his mother went back to the farm near Hillsboro, up in the town of Forest. All of the kids, his cousins and uncles – he had uncles that were younger than he was – and an aunt, all slept in one bed up there which, I guess, was a little bit longer than this.

*Like a litter of puppies.*

Yes. It was a log cabin, and he used to tell about waking up and there would be snow on his bed from the cracks in the logs.

*So it's understandable that he was interested in his comforts and in improving the living for his children.*

He was very much a family man.

*What was his business? How did he earn a living?*

He was a carpenter and he learned it himself. He used to make hiding places for liquor distributors down in our neighborhood.

*In basements?*

Sometimes they were in basements, sometimes in coal bins, and sometimes other places.

*That's one thing you hear about the Greenbush area at that time is that there was a thriving liquor business.*

Yes. There were quite a few of them, you know. But they were all friends and we got along beautifully with them. They were so good to us. He did a lot of carpenter work around. We found out in later years that he had done carpenter work for our daughter's husband's mother's family, over on Jenifer Street. He put in a stairway.

*That's interesting. They were Madison people, too?*

Yes. They were born here. They were Swiss people. [My father] worked very, very hard. He worked very hard up until his death. His death was more or less an accident. He was putting some threads in pipes, trying to get his father situated in a restaurant he was going to run. He had gone over to the Wisconsin Foundry, where he had worked for a number of years, and borrowed some tools. In the process, one of his ulcers broke through in his stomach. We, of course, didn't know what had happened. We got him to the hospital and they didn't know what had happened. They took him to Bradley, which was a place for people that were a little bit off, the psychiatric ward. Dr. Lorenz, was that his name?

*Yes. He was a psychiatrist.*

We had called Dr. Lorenz one night, just looking in the telephone book, when he had been ill, and so after that he always came and took care of him. He walked in the room that morning and he said "Jesus Christ, Oscar. Have you gone nuts too?"

*They took him to the psychiatric ward?*

Yes.

*Because that's where the doctor was, I suppose.*

Yes.

*Was he having terrible hemorrhage? Was that it?*

Yes, he was. We got him in the hospital that afternoon and he died the next night.

*How old a man was he then?*

Forty-seven.

*Isn't that terrible!*

It was awful.

*Such a waste.*

When I think my daughter is going to be fifty this year...

*I remember thinking that my father lived to be a ripe old age, and he died at fifty-four. Now I look back and think what your father and my father and a lot of people could have enjoyed if they had been given a little more time.*

Yes. Ma had six kids.

*So what did Ma do then to take care of the children?*

The house was paid for. I think he paid $200 for the house when he bought it and $200 for the lot.

*Then he had spent money on the improvements he had to make.*

Yes. He never bought anything that he couldn't pay cash for, so we didn't have much. We had roomers. My uncle was living with us, my father's brother, and another man that had been living with us for years, a man from Bermuda that worked for the Hobbins family. And my oldest brother, Stanley – he was next to me – got a job at Oliver Davis. Do you remember him?

*No.*

He had an eating place out near where the Morley Airport used to be. I guess it's where Kohl's is now, that shopping center out there. Stanley got a job working there nights, and he worked there full time during the summer. Then also my next brother went out there and worked. Then he got a job shining shoes up on State Street. They were all going to school and working. So, we made it. Talley still talks about this. He could never get over it. Whatever money we made we put in a kind of sugar bowl. It was quite large, about that big. It was an antique. I wish I had it now. Whatever money we made we put it in that bowl, and whoever needed it would take it.

*Fortunately no stranger needed it and came in and just took it.*

Yes. Talley just couldn't get over that. He still talks about that.

*He's a big-city man, Talley is.*

Well, no. He came from a little tiny town, Kewanee, Illinois. He said in his family that wouldn't have worked at all.

*What did you do? Did you work, too?*

I worked. I worked up at the Dental Clinic on State Street and I worked at University Hospitals. I worked in the diet kitchen. I went to school, of course, all those years. I got my degree in 1934, which was ten years after I started. Even though tuition was only $15.50, I didn't have it. I'd go to school a semester and then work.

*You had to live at home and work all the time, so that you were putting money into the sugar bowl at the same time you were going to school.*

Yes. Yes. It was a blessing that we lived in Madison. That's the most fortunate thing for the family.

*Did they all go to college?*

Yes. We were four blocks from the university.

*But, you know, for many people who lived around you, that four blocks could have been four hundred miles.*

Yes, that's true.

*They had no consciousness of the university at all. Your mother must have been some kind of a remarkable person.*

She was. She was a great gal. A wonderful person. She stayed home. Shortly after Papa died she went to work for a little while at the tobacco factory. That's where all the Italian women worked.

*Rolling cigars.*

I don't know what they did over there. It was over back of Proudfit Street, up near the railway station over there. She worked there just a short time. I guess it was too much for her.

*With such a large family. You were all very young children then, weren't you?*

Yes. I was twenty-two, Stanley was eighteen, Nelson was sixteen, Frank was twelve, Duke was eight, and Sally was five.

*So she had a lot to do and a lot on her mind. But she must have been... both of your parents must have been very intelligent people and hard-working.*

Ma finished high school in New York before she came here, so she had a little bit. She was just eighteen when she came.

*Were there many black children in school when you were there?*

No, no. Practically none. There were maybe three or four in Longfellow School.

*How big was Longfellow School in those days?*

Well, they had three first grades, two kindergartens. I don't remember the third grade or the fourth grade, but we had two fifth grades and, I think, one sixth grade. We stayed there through eighth grade. That was the thing.

*What do you remember about Longfellow School?*

Well, that was where I first learned about discipline.

*You didn't get any discipline at home? Didn't need any, I suppose.*

Well, we really didn't need much.

*You were all too busy, for one thing, to get into trouble.*

Yes, that's right. And I found out about race at school. I had a few very unpleasant experiences when I was in seventh grade. When I was in first grade I think the teacher was prejudiced. I don't think she knew I was colored. There were two boys in the class, in first grade, and if one of the boys misspelled a word she would line them, how they used to do, and she'd hit them over the head with a pointer and broke it.

*Broke the pointer?*

Yes, broke the pointer. It went in all directions. I saw this same teacher hit him several times. Nobody was bad, but she hit him one day and drew the blood on him.

*Isn't that terrible. Those are things that stick with you as memories, don't they?*

I knew how to read and write before I started school. My mother and dad, I guess, both taught me that. I did very well in school. When I got up into seventh or eighth grade I began to feel my oats. I made a remark in school one day – I forget now what it was about – and one of the teachers said "That's just like your people." I went home and told Ma about it. Pa wanted to come up and blow the school up, but he didn't. But, as they say, I started to learn about the world.

*You were undaunted, though. Apparently your whole family was. You stuck around and made it go.*

Yes, we did.

*Of course, you wound up, you and Talley, with a host of friends and admirers all over town.*

Yes. I think a lot of it is due to being in Madison.

*You think Madison is different from other towns?*

Yes, I think so. Talley often remarks that he's so glad that his ancestors passed through such slavery on the way. He said he would hate to be in Africa.

*You met him, I suppose, at the university?*

Yes. I met him in  class.

*And he stayed in chemistry?*

Yes. Yes, he did.

*What did you major in?*

Zoology. I started in home economics. I used to do a lot of sewing and I thought I was pretty good at it, but I found the approach was a lot different in the university. I then became fascinated with chemistry. That was before I met him. I met him the second semester, I believe. And so I changed my major to zoology. I took quite a bit of chemistry then. I took quantitative analysis.

*That was because of him?*

No, not particularly. I liked it. I took a lot of math, too. I found out that I didn't know what I was doing in algebra and trigonometry in high school, but I found out what I was doing in the university.

*Oh, my goodness. I never found out and I was scared to try at the university.*

I took a lot of math. Joan did, too. Joan still takes courses in math and physics. She says "I can get them free, Mother. Why shouldn't I?" Tom teaches there.

*Well, maybe you should go back to your little list.*

I was going to tell you about the lantern shop slides. I guess that was a forerunner of the movies. My uncle – my father's brother – used to take me some place – I don't know where it was – and we would see slides. I suppose it was like a home slide show. I remember the people clapping and cheering.

*Do you remember what the slide show was about?*

No.

*Would that be in sort of a theater?*

It was. It was in a place where there were seats. I remember sitting on my uncle's lap. I couldn't have been more than four years old at that time.

*I wonder when they started having movies? Do you know?*

I don't know.

*It must have been just after that.*

We had a movie [theater] called "The Pastime" down on the corner of Mound and West

Washington Avenue. Everybody went to that in the neighborhood. It became Pearlman's Dry Goods Store in later years. Then Pearlman moved over to across the street from the University Hospitals, on University Avenue. They were lovely people, the Pearlmans.

Another thing that we took advantage of were the puppet shows. My mother used to talk about *Puppenspiel*, the German. She had talked so much about the *Puppenspiel*. Finally the *Puppenspiel* came to Madison and she was so excited about it. Do you remember where Paley's Junk Yard was, over in the bend on Regent Street? Well, that area from the junk yard to Washington Avenue was vacant. They put up tents there and they would have the puppet shows there.

*Did they stay around a while, the puppet shows? Were these Madison puppets?*

They would change every week. They would be there quite a few times during the summer. That was great stuff! Oh, gee. My mother and father always would go.

*Did they charge you a nickel or something to get in?*

Something. It was a small amount. That was nice.

*Do you remember what kind of stories they had?*

No, I don't.

*Were they the standards? "Little Red Riding Hood?"*

I think that was one of them, yes. And *The Three Little Pigs*. Gee. Oh, my!

I was going to tell you about our plumbing facilities. When I was small my parents always warned me to never, never go out to the toilet, which was on the back end of the lot, without somebody being with me, because I might fall in and might drown. They had a walk, a board walk, like a pier, out to the toilet out here. It was on a little bit higher ground. Flags grew here and there, cattails, one thing and another.

One year my father brought home a great big basket of Easter eggs. A big basket! It was from the people that he worked for. They made them for me. Papa wouldn't let me eat them because he was afraid that the dye would be poisonous and so he just dumped them beside the toilet there. To see all those different colored eggs floating around in the water!

In the winter time my aunts and relatives used to all go skating all through that area there. All that area was retrieved from the lake.

*Was the Neighborhood House part of your life?*

Yes. That came about for us during the war, World War I. They gave classes in knitting and making garments. It was primarily, I think, for the Italian immigrants.

*They taught them to speak English, too.*

Yes. And I got in on it. Let's see, I was in seventh or eighth grade at that time. We used to knit little squares. And there were classes in cooking and classes in nutrition. I remember that Miss Sexton, who was a nurse and sort of volunteered down in that area, attempted to teach nutrition to the Italian immigrants. One of the things that she was trying to teach them was to give the children milk. A lot of the people were giving the children coffee.

*And wine, I suppose.*

Yes. Coffee and wine. That was one of the big things that she succeeded in doing. Speaking of

the Italian people, there was one family lived a couple of doors from us. They were always bringing us food. They were very generous people.

*They always cooked three times as much as they could possibly eat.*

Oh, yes. Ample. They had a round table, an oak table, in the kitchen, a big table, and the kids would be in the yard, "Come, come, come." They always had celery. They seemed to never be without celery.

*Isn't that interesting.*

Yes. And always spaghetti. There were different kinds of macaroni. They'd have a big platter, like that, full of spaghetti. They may have different things on it and they may not, and they had their own bread. That was a story in itself. They made bread right there in the neighborhood. There was a home bakery there. They would break off a hunk of the bread. They always had wine on the table. They would offer us kids, you know, "Come, come. Sit down." They would take their forks and each person would go into this platter. Nobody had a plate.

*They could demolish the platter-full in no time flat.*

Yes. It seemed to be a standard diet: the celery and the wine and the bread, no butter, just the dry bread, and the macaroni. In later years, maybe in the 1950s, some of those women were wonderful cooks and their children grew up not liking Italian food. They wanted pork chops or something like that, hamburgers. They continued to cook their stuff. The kids wouldn't eat it and we were the lucky recipients. Mrs. Polari used to bring us over. She said that he says "I want hamburger, I want hot dog."

*A lot of parents have gone through that with their children.*

Yes. One of the ladies there in the neighborhood really became a gourmet cook. She cooked with fennel and different things.

*What about the hospitals? Were they part of your life, too? Did Madison General exist in your youth?*

Oh, yes. It was there. It's no relation to the building that's there now. Oh, gee. Every once in a while they have a picture of it, with a little porch on one side. I spent a couple of weeks there when I was fifteen. I had blood poisoning in my finger and had to have my arm tied on the bed.

*We don't see that any more, do we?*

No.

*I remember when we were kids, looking for the black line, and it was so scary.*

Yes. My father had been doctoring it himself. He had put bread and milk, which was the thing to do.

*It was supposed to draw the poison out.*

Yes. And Dr. Kolusi, not Kolusi. That was before Kolusi. It was Dr. Cooksey. He said "Oscar, that's the worst thing you could have done." They took me to the hospital for almost two weeks.

[Another time] we were going up to the town of Forest to visit Papa's relatives. My mother went down to Pearlman's to buy me some shoes. They were size five. My father said "My God, Elsie. Where is that girl's feet going to? Size five!"

*When you took a trip like that did you have a car?*

Yes. It was a half-block long. It was an old Buick. I think the engine was as long as this table.

*How could they drive them! How could they turn those steering wheels?*

I don't know how they did it. And shift them! Oh, gee!

*I always wonder about that. For many years I drove a car like that. We all did, until relatively recently, when we began to get automatic transmissions.*

... As I say, Talley put me right to bed, upstairs. Talley likes to tell about how he would fry an egg for me. He'd lie down on the kitchen floor while it cooked.

*Because his back was troubling him?*

Yes.

*What a bunch of people!*

Oh, it was awful. Then my sister would come in and help clean up a little bit.

*What about your brothers and sisters? Where are they now?*

One brother is dead now. He was in California. He had a brain tumor. But my relatives are in and out.

*In Madison?*

Yes. Stanley and Dimetria, you know them, don't you? They have a boy that was at the house then and he still is. Dimetria jumped on to him and said the reason that I got sick was because the house was so dirty. It wasn't that dirty, but she is very meticulous. She said "If you would get around and clean this house she won't get sick." Well, they helped. I have another brother that was ill. They didn't help, but they came in every day, they said, to see how I was.

*But you can't remember their coming?*

No.

*Isn't that terrible! Talley must have been scared out of his wits.*

He was. My brother-in-law, John... Sally says when I was in bed he was crying. Sally says "Will you shut up? There's no need of telling her that."

*But it all worked out.*

Yes.

*Now, tell me a little more about your brothers and sisters. They all went to the university, too?*

Yes.

*That must have made you a very unusual family, weren't you?*

Nelson didn't get his degree. He worked under Professor Herriot in ancient Spanish languages. He did a lot of research for him. Then he got a hernia, in May.

*Just before graduation?*

Just before graduation. He didn't do his final exams. He spent that period in the infirmary and he never went back to finish.

*Does he live in Madison now?*

He lives near Sauk City. He was in Texas for years and then California. He always did research for airplane companies on insulation and stuff like that. He was an engineer.

*By desire and brains.*

Yes. He never had any training in engineering at all.

*Isn't that wonderful!*

He was always very good at it.

*And your sister, Sally, is in town?*

Yes. She lives out on South Highlands Road. Do you know where Elizabeth Link lived? She lives right close by there. And the Bollingers. Do you know them? John Bollinger. They had a little party the night before last and the whole neighborhood was up at my sister's. The Bollingers are a very nice family. He's been given several awards for his teaching and one thing and another in the engineering department.

*Oh, yes. I remember that name.*

Their kids were there, and Mrs. Bollinger. John was one of these self-made men. He came over when he was seventeen and nearly starved to death. What do they call them? A stowaway on a ship. Unable to speak a word of English.

*Remarkable people, aren't they?*

He's from Holland. He became president of his optical company. He's quite an unusual person.

*How many black people were there in Madison when you were growing up?*

Very few.

*Most of them living right down there in that neighborhood?*

No. There were two groups, maybe really three groups. There were a few down in the Bush. I think there were fewer of them there than the other two places. There was another group on East Dayton Street, where the old colored church was, the Methodist church down there. Then there were some out in South Madison, on Baird and Fisher. But that was it. They were also dispersed in the city. That sounds a little bit unusual. People were living all over practically in Madison. There were people on Henry Street. There was a family on State Street, State and, I think, Henry. And there was another family over on Henry Street, back of where the Superette is, the grocery store there. And there was a family that lived on North Hamilton, just a couple of blocks from the Square.

*Did they all go to the same church?*

[They went to] the Methodist church back in those days, the people that did go to church. It was over on the east side.

*I suppose a lot of people didn't go. It was so far away for most in Madison.*

Yes. Then when I was in high school the Baptists started organizing. They built a church up on Johnson Street, between Frances and Lake, I believe it was, on Johnson. Right on the campus practically. That had quite a large membership. I used to go now and then to the Methodist

church. My father used to go now and then. My mother was brought up Lutheran and they kind of lost their religious ties. We grew up more or less without any church.

*Actually you sound like quite a sophisticated, modern family.*

I don't know whether it was sophisticated or not. Now we belong to the Unitarian Society. We have quite a few blacks, in both First Church and the Prairie Society, quite a few now.

*There are some remarkable groups of people moving in to town now, aren't there?*

Well, Bernard Manns, Pat Watkins. I don't know whether you know any of these people.

*I know the Manns.*

This girl that was presented a week or so ago, Lorraine Bejoyer. I don't know just how to pronounce her name. She belongs to Prairie. There are quite a few black women in the choir at First Church. We were there last Sunday. We go to Prairie most of the time. It's more free-wheeling.

*Where is Prairie?*

It's out off Seminole Highway in the Verona Road area.

*Right out here. Beyond the Beltline. I went by it one day. I was so surprised to see it there.*

We went to the First Society. Max was stewing about his boy came home one day and he said he joined the YMCA and he wanted to know just what kind of religion they were. He said "Some of the kids say they're Christians and some of the kids say they're Jews." He said "What are we?" And so Max, in his newsletter, said "We'll try to answer that."

*A good many of the attendees started out being Jews and Catholics and everything else.*

Yes. Max himself was a Jew. But his mother never followed the Jewish tenets and so he wanted to find out what religion was all about so he started going to the Baptist church, which I think is hilarious.

[Unclear]... degree in zoology in 1934, and I had a baby in 1934, so you know what I did the first couple of years. I was without a job for a long time and Talley was working at Lawrence's Restaurant off State Street. I think he got six dollars a week.

*Was he in graduate school then?*

Yes. He was working and going to school. Of course, six dollars sounds terrible now. At that time it wasn't good, but it wasn't as terrible as it sounds now.

*It sounds just horrible now! You can't even go to a grocery store.*

It's just impossible now. You make more than that an hour. Anyway, I had been working while I was in school. I had been working at the Dental Clinic off and on while I was in school.

*What sort of work were you doing?*

Taking care of the books.

*Management, sort of?*

Well, it was a little bit of everything. I sterilized instruments, got the patients in, put a towel around their necks, got their records out for the doctor. That kind of stuff. I was there some time before they found out I was colored. But I was working out all right so I stayed.

*That's a good way to do it.*

A couple of dentists became friends, personal friends, after that while I was there. They're both dead now. That was even before we were married. After we were married I worked there on and off, when people would be on vacation and things like that. I was still trying to go to school, and I did. I finally got my degree in 1934. I then stayed home and took care of children for, I think, about three years, with my mother, stayed with my mother. She was the babysitter, which she really loved being. Mama considered Joan her child.

*That's one of the dangers of that sort of thing, isn't it? You become a visitor.*

Yes. She was very close to Joan. She used to sit up with her all night lots of time when she'd be studying. I couldn't do it, but Ma would sit up with her for a while, keep her company while she studied.

I got a job at the University Hospitals, in the kitchen, one summer, after Joan was born. The work was too hard. I couldn't take it. This was after I graduated. That was the height of the Depression and we really needed jobs. Talley had a job, a WPA... or they didn't call it that. It was a student name: NYA, something like that. So we made it. I borrowed money from the Industrial Commission for tuition at $15.50 and we made it that way. Then I finally got a job in 1941 at the board of health, in the records department, vital records. I loved that work.

*And you did that all the rest of your career?*

No. I did that until 1962; from 1941 to 1962 I did that. As I say, I really loved it. But an opportunity arose at University Hospitals under Dr. Samp. Do you remember him? I won a job there. I could use my training in zoology. That was the most beautiful job I ever had. It was just wonderful. I stayed there two years. I learned how to do cancer abstracts and all the other things that go with keeping a cancer registry for the hospital. Then a job opened at the Division of Health. They gave me an oral exam, one of those kinds of things, and I got the job and I stayed there until I retired.

*When did you retire?*

I retired in 1971. I've been retired for a long time – twelve years it will be.

*The time flies away, doesn't it? I'll be retired five years this year and it seems so quick.*

I published three books of my findings. This was state wide, the cancer registry was. I'm very proud of one of them. The other two I'm not so proud of. I am proud of the one book I did. I had a wonderful gal that did the typing for me. She did a beautiful job, just beautiful. I couldn't get her for the last one and I had to take what I could get. They were all good, but they were all different.

*That's marvelous to have those, isn't it? They're there and real, and you can see what you accomplished and look at the results of it.*

Dr. Fyzler was wonderful to me, and Dr. Vanduser and Dr. Newport. All of them were very, very good to me.

*So you would say that it's been worth your while to stick it out in Madison and make your life here?*

Oh, yes. Yes. Talley and I both say that we couldn't have done what we did if we had been some place else.

*You would have had to fight too many other things along the way.*

Yes, yes. It's been very wonderful: the people we've met, the friends we've had. You just don't get them other places. Dr. Fyzler notices that now out in California. He says "You have such a group of people in Madison that you won't find any place else."

*No. That's true.*