

Oral Memoirs
of
Charlie Morgan

An Interview Conducted by

Joseph Morris

September 21, 2011

Linda McKnight Batman Oral History Project

Historical Society of Central Florida

Museum of Seminole County History

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Joseph Morris

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The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Museum of Seminole County History, Sanford, Florida.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Charlie Morgan is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on September 21, 2011.

Abstract

Oral history of Charlie Morgan, conducted by Joseph Morris on September 21, 2011. Morgan was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1940, but migrated to Bookertown, an African-American community in Sanford, Florida. In the interview, Morgan discusses life in Bookertown, working in the agriculture and construction industries, segregation and race relations in Sanford, moonshine, civil rights, serving in the military during the Vietnam War, how Bookertown and Sanford have changed over time, and Mary McLeod Bethune.

Charlie Morgan

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Joseph Morris

September 21, 2011

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction and Bookertown

Morris This is an interview with Charlie Morgan. This interview is being conducted on the 21st of September, 2011, at the Museum of Seminole County History. The interviewer is Joseph Morris, representing Linda McKnight Batman Oral History Project for the Historical Society of Central Florida. Would you care to tell us about yourself, Charlie Morgan?

Morgan Well, I was raised in the Lake Monroe area – a little community called Bookertown. It was established in 1926 by three white men and one black preacher. At that time, we couldn't live among white people. We lived on the back side of the farms, in the little shanties. We didn't have doorknobs. We had just a wooden latch to close the door. We were so poor that we didn't have anything to steal. You had a little one room shack, and you took a sheet and made two rooms out of it. You had a wooden stove. You had to chop wood daily to cook our foods with. We had a little oven in the wood stove, and we had lamplight. We had wooden windows to the little shanty. We had to walk maybe a thousand meters to get water to heat up on the stove so we can take a bath. And we had to carry water for to drink, and water in – we had it in a bucket to keep. And we didn't have a refrigerator. We had what they called an icebox, where you get about 25, 50 pounds and put it in there. It'll last about a day and a half, two days, to put our foods on, our perishable foods. So those days we would have to hunt wood. The bottom – the roots of a pine tree, we called it lighter knots. And it's the sap coming out of the bottom of the wood, and it would burn fast. And that's what we'd start the fire with. And had oak wood to keep it going.

0:02:26

Working on farms

Morgan So – and then, our parents would work on the farms, and we thought it was just farms all over the world. It's just all we knew – farms. You know, we'd need us a cabbage, we'd go out in the backyard and get a cabbage. There's a field right out there. Corn. And this one white guy was – he was trying to, you know, live a little bit better. He had him a cantaloupe farm. He got me to work with him, and so I worked with him. And he had to go somewhere while I picked the cantaloupes, and when he got back, I gave him the time I had worked. And he didn't – I knew he didn't have much money before, from the way he told me. He said, "Oh, no. That's too much time. Too much time." I said, "You told me to keep the time." "Too much money. Too much money." And I knew that he was

trying to make it, like a, you know – but I couldn't tell him that, because I wanted to make the little money. We wasn't making that much money. We'd work on the farm, and the kids would get 40 cents an hour, and the ladies would get 50 cents an hour, working on the farm. And the men, if they were driving the tractors and stuff, they'd get 60 cents an hour.

So, I wasn't much of a farm boy. You know, they had okra and cabbage and stuff to cut out. I mean, I could – after they packed the bags, I could throw them on the trucks, something like that. But cutting the okra, you know, I tried to cut it with one hand. That's the way they used to do it. And I was cutting the tops out the okra. [laughs] He told my mom – said, "Send him home. I won't have no more okra if he's cutting all the tops off." [laughs] So those are some of the things that we went through. And there was a gentleman who we rented the house for \$6 month – the standard little shanties. And we'd go up to their house. He had a big, nice house. He had lights in it and all this, and said to myself [?], "They're rich," you know. He had – he was a tall, slim, lean white guy, had a big brim hat, and he was – well, we said, "Mr. Buchanan." We called him "buck-cannon." "Mr. Buchanan, can we get some of those tangerines?" He said, "Yes. Get you a couple and go." [laughs] We said, "Okay, thank you!" [laughs] I'd get a – they gettin' more [inaudible], I got more than a couple. He was looking. He said, "Get along, now! Get along!" [laughs] I guess he didn't want me to get them all at one time.

0:05:24

Segregation in education and sports

Morgan

So those were the days, and then we had – going to school – across the farm was a white school. Well, you know, it was segregation at that time. We had passed the white school walking, and we'd come going over to Bookertown from in the area of the post office. We had walked through there and go through the woods. And they had cows out there, and some time the cows was running, and you had to run through there and through a pass. But they tore down all the woods to build I[nterstate]-4, and so there's no more evidence of that now. So a black man had probably about 21 or 22 acres. The Briar construction [Briar Team] bought that, and tore down all of those woods, and his intent was to build a complex, but it never materialed[sic] yet. But those were the woods we used to go through, and this black guy had a black baseball park there. People would come from Orlando and Daytona, Apopka. You know, all the black players, you know – we'd get out there. It really wasn't that good, but, you know, those guys could throw that ball. Some of those guys were Puckwood[?] guys, you know. You know what Puckwood[?] guys are?

Morris

No, sir.

Morgan

Well, they cut trees down, and had a certain method. They'd load them onto a truck. Those guys had muscles almost big as my head. You'd get some of those guys to pitching – that ball looking like an asteroid [inaudible] coming. [laughs] I didn't never want to be a catcher. And I was a young guy, I was about 16 back in 19 – was I 16 or 17? Somewhere in there.

0:08:03

Farmers in Georgia and Florida

Morris What year were you born, sir?

Morgan 1940.

Morris Okay.

Morgan Yeah. I was born in Albany, Georgia. My mother brought me down here when I was one year old, you know. That's when they – most the people would come and they'd tell the other people, 'cause they wasn't getting that much money in Georgia. So the white farmers down here were recruiting some of the peoples out there, but not telling the white farmers in Georgia. And what they would do – get their big truck, and they'd be communicating, and they'd come in two or three o'clock in the morning and load up these black people. And the thing was, they said, they'd steal one of the white man[sic] pigs. [laughs] And when they'd get by the white man's house, said seemed like the old truck put to cranking more than ever, and said they'd hold the pigs off, until he – so he wouldn't make any noise, and they hit the road. The next morning, white man get up, he don't have no more help. [laughs] They're on their way to Florida. They were making more money.

Morris Farmers stealing other farmers' workers?

Morgan Help. Yeah. [laughs]

Morris Oh, man.

Morgan And some of the older guys said, "Well, we can't go back to Georgia. We stole that white man's pig." [laughs] He said, "Now, that many years – the man probably dead now." [laughs]

So they'd get down here, you know – and in Lake Monroe, that's where a lot of celery, cabbage, and everything, done out there. Sanford was called "Celery City," because of all the celery. Seventy percent of the celery was grown out there in the Lake Monroe area, and they had the, you know, black workers from Bookertown, Goldsboro, Midway, and Oviedo. They would get big trucks and haul them in, and they'd do the work. And they had pride in their work, you know. When they were planting the celery plants – cabbage plants, anything like that, you know – they would brag about how many thousand they set. You know, that was a big thing. And now, if the white farmer would have a tractor, and they drove that tractor, oh, man, it was like they were riding in a Cadillac. They loved it. They'd go down to the end of the row. I don't know how they did that. You know, I never was – I never did learn how to drive a tractor. And those guys would get to the end of the row of a field and they would spin that thing around on one wheel and be ready to go down. I just looked at it. It was amazing to me. I never knew how to drive a tractor. [laughs]

0:11:11

Picking oranges

Morgan And then, uh, you know, in the '60s, there was a lot of orange picking. Around in this area, there was a lot of oranges. And I tried to pick some oranges, but those thorns was hitting me so hard, and I tried to put it out of my mind, but by the time 11 o'clock, I couldn't put it out of my mind no longer. Those thorns, they didn't just tear your shirt all up. You know, it'd be this fight trying to pick those oranges.

Morris You're talking about 11 A.M., sir?

Morgan Yeah, 11 A.M. I mean, I'm just trying to pick those oranges. Trying to, you know, get a lot of boxes, you know. Just going, man, but those thorns was hitting me from everywhere. I couldn't take it no more. I had to rest a little bit. Suck me a few oranges.

Morris Did they pay you by the day when you were doing oranges, sir? Or did they pay you by the box? Because you said you were trying to...

Morgan Pay you by the box.

Morris I see. You were trying to...

Morgan Yeah, you were trying to, you know, get a lot of boxes.

Morris Gotcha, sir.

Morgan And so, I got by my dad one day, and he went out early. He was gonna really make him some money. We had to finish up a grove, and he was there about six o'clock that morning. And he had him a bunch of boxes, a few of them when we got there about nine o'clock. And I said, "I'm gonna get him to work today." So I got beside him and then went to working, and when we got through with that grove, he didn't have but one box more than me. He looked – well, he loved the competition. He didn't want nobody to beat him, especially me, not his son. So, next we went to another grove. So, I said, "I'm gonna have me some fun today." I put my ladder in the orange time we'd got there, and he throwed[sic] his up there too, and I ran up that ladder – I mean, just literally run up it with my orange sack. And just – I mean, I was just throwing them on through them orange limbs and leaves, with this flying. And he was going at it too. So I got a half a sack, and I went down and dumped them into my little bin. And he looked around. He thought I had a whole sack. He said, "Lord, Jesus!" [laughs] "Lord, Jesus!" There he was. He was picking and picking and I went, I ran up the ladder again, and come down with a half a sack again, enough to – oh, he was really – he was really fighting then. He thought I was really beating him. He said, "Lord, Jesus!" He was picking real fast, and he caught a cramp in his right hand. And he took his left hand, and tried to, you know, unfold it, and the left hand caught a cramp. [laughs] Both of them. Both his hands was all cramped up, and he couldn't pick. He said, "Well, I'm not gonna kill myself," and he went down. He

had to be careful about holding the rungs of the ladder. And he got 90 cent down there without coming down with a half a sack again. *[laughs]* He went up that ladder with the cramps. *[laughs]* Oh, man. He beat me by one box. He beat me. He was not gonna be denied. He wasn't gonna let his son beat him.

Morris How old were you at the time, sir?

Morgan I was probably in my twenties, at that time.

Morris How long did you pick oranges for?

0:15:08 Working in construction

Morgan Just between construction jobs. I worked construction jobs. I started them when I was in high school, because I wanted to make more money. I worked for a guy called B. Edwards[?]. He was on Third Street in Sanford, and he had a stucco crew. And we was doing a lot of stucco out in Sunniland. And I was learning how – starting, you know – some of the guys would teach me how to help those guys they called “plasters.” They would be stuccoing the inside of the house and the outside. And you had to mix the mud with the concrete with a hoe. You didn't have a mixer then.

Morris Oh, okay.

Morgan Oh man, my back would be so tired, but I had to survive. It was just me and my mom, then.

0:16:12 Parents and sister

Morris Your father had passed away, sir?

Morgan No. They just weren't together. Just me and my mom. My sister – she couldn't take it any longer. She got married and left. She said she wasn't working on those farms. *[laughs]* So she went to Jacksonville. She met her husband there, and he was one of these guys – I mean, he was thrifty. I mean, he didn't mind a little chasin'. He'd sell those numbers, what they called “bolita” I don't know whether you ever heard about that.

Morris No, sir.

0:16:49 Bolita and moonshine

Morgan They just didn't do that in Cuba, and they would – you could hear it – Cuba *[inaudible]*. They knew they was doing that stuff. But it was supposed to be illegal here, but you had the police department, everything, you know. You didn't give them a tip, then they'd carry you to jail. But so, they'd come by, and you'd give them their tip, they'd go head on.

The same as they would with moonshine. They'd make moonshine in the woods out there, Bookertown. And you didn't get the police. The chief, you know, he would come in and get you. And then the Feds come around. They didn't want the Feds to know that they was getting money on nothing. They'd let you know when the Feds comin'. And they would let you have a little bit of moonshine, there, then they'd come in and confiscate with the Feds and, you know, make the Feds think they're doing their jobs. When the Feds leave, they'd bring you up there, they'd take you and your moonshine back out there. *[laughs]* Oh, man, it was a lot of things and all[?].

0:18:07

Race relations in Sanford

Morgan

And we loved it. We'd go to town maybe once or twice a week. And we'd walk to town. It was fun for us. We didn't mind walking it. From Lake Monroe, we'd walk down [State Road] 46 all the way into Sanford. And we walkin' and talkin'.

And there was a movie called the Ace Theatre. It's a vacant lot there on Third [Street] in Sanford Avenue. I don't know have you been by there. But anyway, that vacant lot was where that Ace Theatre was. That was for black people. And the Ritz Theatre was for white people. The white people sat downstairs, but they wouldn't let the black people go upstairs. You know how kids is[sic]. They'd go, you know – white kids would yell something, and black folks would throw some popcorn on them or else our drink. *[laughs]* And then, they had a – one of these – had a black guy that was supposed to be in control of the black kids and so, if he'd catch you doing that, then he'd put you out the movie. So, you know, I guess they was kinda integrating a little bit. *[laughs]*

And then we, you know – if we'd be uptown on Saturday, oh man, we'd come up and see the streets and everything, I mean, oh, it was – we was glad to see uptown, you know. We'd go up and go to the ice cream parlor, and get some ice cream. But if you want a hamburger or something, you have to go to a window with a hole cut in it, and you couldn't go inside there, you know. Only the white people could go inside. And we'd get a hamburger. They just seemed like they was some good-tasting hamburgers. *[laughs]* But that's the way it was.

And the later years, you know – I think it was 1959 or '60, somewhere in there, the black kids said, "We want to integrate this[?]." And they'd go out down to the [Sanford] Civic Center. They didn't like the black people going to Sanford Civic Center there. And so, they went in anyway. They called the police, and they go in and run the black people out of there. And they – one of my friends – he's a professor now in Atlanta – he said, "I will return!" He sounded like General [Douglas] MacArthur. "I will return!" And they did return, and there the police was[sic] too. You know, they didn't – as far as I know, they didn't beat them up or nothin'.

But they tried to keep them out, and they kept protesting 'til they built a little center over in Goldsboro called the Boys & Girls Club. I don't know whether you know where that is or not. But they got that for the black people, but the black

people still wanted to go downtown, too. *[laughs]* They originally wasn't letting the black people go downtown. And you couldn't drink out of a fountain that a white person drank out of. You know, you drank out that fountain, if that fountain said "white only" – oh man. Once on Park Avenue, a black guy – he was gonna drink out that white fountain anyway. He drank that, and it was something like a little service station. They had a drink box with the water on the side. He came out with his rifle and hit that black guy – the little young – probably about 17, 18 – hit him in the mouth with that rifle and knocked a few teeth out, and he said that fountain was contaminated.

Morris Ugh.

Morgan "That's contaminated! You contaminated it – that fountain!" So, same way it was with the outhouse. You couldn't go in there if it had "white only."

Morris You can "contaminate" an outhouse? It's contaminated anyway.

Morgan Yeah, you contaminate that outhouse if a black person go in there. White man wouldn't wanna go back in there no more. He probably scrub it and scrub it. He probably get a black person in there. Scrub it with some bleach.

0:22:49

Personal hygiene

Morgan Well – and then they had what they called "octagon soap." You would – you'd kill a hog and get the grease, and put lye in there, and you would cook this grease. And I don't know what all they put in there, but they had it on a big, round, black pot. And it cooks a long time, maybe putting wood up under there, cooking it. And when it'd get cold, be in big cakes, and you'd cut out chunks for soap. Some of us bathed with this. Oh man, you'd be – with that lye in it, it wasn't too good. *[laughs]*

Morris You've had better soap, sir?

Morgan Oh, yes, I've had far better soap than that. But back then, you just didn't know. And then, you know, we used to bathe in a big tub, you know, tin tub. You didn't have bathrooms. You'd get in this bath, in this thing, put some wood in the stove and heat up some water. And I was a little boy. My sister used to bathe me. And it was cold, man, and I was in that tub and I just kept moving, you know, 'cause it was cold, and she was bathing me, and the warm water's all right, but the house was cold. Didn't have a – you could see the studs in the wall holding the house up. And then they'd get cardboard from the railroad, where that old icehouse used to be. That's where everything was shipped out from. They'd throw the cardboard out, and we'd get it, put it in there for drywall. You know, like they do for drywall. Until the rats eat it up, then we had to get some more.

0:24:51

Potbellied stoves

Morgan

So, then, sometimes we had these potbellied stoves to keep warm with in the wintertime. This root of the pine tree was full of sap, and it was easy to get started – to put the oak wood on there. And we'd put it in there – it was cold. I got up and we'd have about five or six quilts on there trying to stay warm, and I put too much of that fat lighter in there. And man, we had a stove pipe, you know, that comes up and then goes out the wall of the house. And man, that's – the pressure couldn't get out quick enough of that old stove. It was really red. You could see – was glowing, man. And when it got too much for the old stove, it was coming up off the floor, you know. It was, "woof, woof, woof." The feet was actually leaving the floor. And then the stove pipes come off. Oh man, we had to scuffle to try to get some rags and put the stove pipe back on there. The whole house was about to catch a-fire. It would have burned down about two minutes if we hadn't a got it started. And so, we got them put back on there. So, we didn't put that much in there before. That taught us a lesson.

So, in 1960, I was tired of cutting wood. I told my mom, I said, "Mom, I'm not cutting wood no more." Because the stove – the wood stove – had went bad. After cooking on it so long, where you put the wood in – in the wood stove had been – well, maybe, I don't know what you call it – rotted away, something. And it fell back on some bread we had in the oven. Ashes all over itself. Said, "Throw that away," and then we cooked some bread on top of the stove. And I said, "Mom, I'm not cutting any more wood." I was working a little bit then. I said, "We gonna get a gas stove." She said, "Oh, no! Oh, no! That food won't taste right with no gas stove." [laughs] I said, "Mama, I ain't choppin' no more wood." [laughs] I finally got her to get a gas stove. We got the gas stove.

0:27:42

Television

Morgan

We didn't have a TV. So we finally got a TV in 1953. And we was the last people living in the little quarters. They ran some poles down there, and brought electric down there too. And we got a TV. Oh, man. I felt we had something when we had that TV. That was something. We said, "Oh, yeah. We got a TV now." Yeah. We loved to watch *The Lone Ranger* and Tonto. That's – oh, man. We'd get brooms and, you know, we'd be Lone Ranger, we'd be riding those brooms. [laughs]

But we didn't know how poor we was, and it didn't bother us. We just adapted to the situation. Made the best of it, and kept moving. Not that we didn't try to prepare for a better future, but we didn't have time to worry about how poor we are. Our mind was on the future. And a lot of us did live a little bit better. And I lived a little better. I worked hard. And it wasn't a problem – working hard – because you knew where you wanted to go, what you wanted to do. And that's what stayed on our mind. Not that we wasn't getting that much. But we punished this body. It was the mind that we were thinking about. We didn't worry about maybe our children can do better. This is what we were concerned

about. Then, we were taught, not—I know the people I knew—not to hate nobody[sic].

0:29:46

Civil rights

Morgan

So we in charge of ourselves. Even though we'd been oppressed, we're not gonna worry about the people oppressing us. We gonna do what we know to do, and keep going. Somebody will see our problem. And just like, back in the Northern states, it was more people, you know, integrated than it was in the South.

So, they was having problems, and this white lady named Mary [White] Overton—she got with the black people in the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], 'cause they had a movement called the Niagara Movement with the other blacks, so they can be treated better, you know. Because a lot of black people were being hung lately, in 1909. So, they named after Mary Overton, got it in folk [inaudible] form for the blacks and they called it the NAACP, National Advancement[sic] for the Advancement of Colored People.

And so, all those, that's what started the civil rights advocates came in, Martin Luther King[, Jr.] Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson—a lot of those guys, you know, fighting for freedom in a lot of places. And most people resisted change. And so the white people didn't like—clearly, said, "It's not time to change." And black people coming out there. And the police, they didn't like that either. They'd get the dogs, sic the dogs on you. They'd be biting you. They'd run the fire hose on you, and slide you down the street—that fire hose. [laughs]

And so, you know, sometimes you have to suffer through things to get better. So, if you didn't accept things just the way they are, and don't fight for it, sometimes you gonna—some people gonna die, and some gonna get hurt, but you got to resist being treated bad. And don't think of hating nobody. You think of giving them all the love you can. That's loving them so they can't do you no wrong. [laughs] And so, with that attitude, there was a change in heart and a lot of white people, they were seeing what was wrong. It's a lot of white people didn't like the way blacks was treated. It's a lot of them. But they couldn't do it, because the government had this thing set up. So the people in high echelons could get rich, and they kept all the black and white people fighting while they got all the money. And we knew that, because a lot of white people helped black people back then. But they had to be careful how they did it. They had to do it undercover, because it's some white people didn't like it either. They would come beat them up, because they would call you a n—well, a[sic] "N"-lover. [laughs]

Morris

Gotcha, sir.

0:33:34

Spirituality in the African-American community

Morgan

So these are some of the things that people have to think, and mostly where we come through was the spiritual thing. We believed in Him—God—and we trusted Him, what the Bible say, and stuck with it. And, just like they said—they always tell you—prayer changes things. And it does. I had experiences. Prayer changes things. You don't do evil for evil. Some people, you know—some people don't know that they're doing wrong until they're proven that they're doing wrong. Only thing people was[sic], you know, having a hard time. They was looking out for number one—their family. Said, "The heck with you! My family got to be all right." [laughs] But then some people looked at that better. Said, "Well, I can be better." And they can, too.

0:34:48

Race and socio-economics

Morgan

But then, the way the world is, and the way the governments do it all over the world, they want somebody to be on the little—on the totem pole below them, so they can take care of those that greedy after that money. So somebody have to work, and go through these things. Well, the blacks was the low on the totem pole at that time. They'd bring some Puerto Ricans, and some people from Bahamas, different islands and stuff, and they'd work and they'd get them together some crops. But then when so many minorities start coming in, then the blacks started getting moved up a little bit, and so they had to be the one that worked, just like the Mexicans and the Puerto Ricans now, you know. They mostly be picking our oranges and picking their apples in New York. 'Cause those apple and cherry farmers would have black people a long time ago picking their apples. You go up there and, oh man, well, you making a lot of money up there, more than they was up here. That was big money, you know.

0:36:22

Picking apples and cherries

Morgan

I've picked some apples and cherries, and [inaudible]. We'd be going after 'til I went to a private place. They paid a little bit more. It was hard too—picking them. You had to be careful how you handled those apples. If you squeezed them too hard, you could bruise one of them. So, you learn all of that.

But when they brought the people up on old school bus from down here, you couldn't stop eating at the restaurant and eat. You had to go in a—maybe a convenience store or something—back then, and get you a little of some bologna, and moon pies or something, and a soda. And they wouldn't let but so many blacks come into the store. They wouldn't be able to watch you. Said, "They might steal something." And then you didn't have no bathroom to go to. You had to stop by a wooded area and go out there in the woods somewhere. This is rough.

When you get up there, I remember one place. You seen a chicken coop? Those big chicken coops? Where you can stand up and walk in them? Well, they partitioned that off and made rooms for the people to stay in that time that they

was up there. And you would work by what they called the “piece.” You’d get so much a box for certain things, you know, like apples, or cherries, or onions. And they had one guy would be over the rest of them. They called him the “crew leader.” And once they took us up there and the work wasn’t ready, you know, for us to go to work. And so they went around into this Italian restaurant, and got this old hard bread. This stuff that the people didn’t eat and stuff. Gathered it up, and they put it in a[sic] old pot, and one man brought a bunch of bullfrogs over there. And they skinned those bullfrogs up. And, man, I didn’t want no bullfrogs. [laughs] They said, “Come on,” and the man said, “Come on! Come on! Come on, and let’s eat this. Eat some of this.” They called it the son of a – son of a “B.” “Come on, get some of this son of a ‘B!’” And he was just boiling and bubbling in there. Had all some of everything – little steak, little, some all kind of little meats, and it was cooking in there. It was bubbling. Man, I don’t want none of that. That’s, I gotta leave here. [laughs]

0:39:40

Military service and the draft

Morris Well, sir, I know you also mentioned earlier, before the interview, that you worked in the military. What time did you, uh – why did you join the military? When did you do that? Because I know you said you were working these other odd jobs – construction, a lot of agriculture. What prompted the move?

Morgan Well, I didn’t join. I was drafted.

Morris Oh, okay.

Morgan They was drafting people at that time. I had went to Philadelphia[, Pennsylvania] to live with my sister, because I wanted to make more money. And my mother was here, so I had to send her money home to her – to help her. I was making about \$80 a day up there doing that construction there. Oh man, that was big money.

And I was 23 years old. I thought the draft people had forgot about me. I said, “They have forgot about me.” And I was working, and I wanted to get me a trade. I said, “Well, I wanna do automatic transmissions.” I said, “That’ll be a good trade for me.” So I went up in there, they had this sort of thing for free. And they got – when I approached them about it – about the application – he said, “Well, by the time we get you trained, Uncle Sam will be calling you.” And he wasn’t lying, ‘bout two weeks later I got a letter. “Greetings from Uncle Sam!” [laughs]

So I didn’t want to go from up there. I wanted to see my mom before I go, and so I came home. And we went downtown there to the bus station, and they – you know, the guy – was calling the names off and everything, and we got on the bus and went to Jacksonville, you know. They’d check you out. You know, sees[sic] you, in case [inaudible], you know, you’re physically ready. And so by the time they get through with us, the bus had gone that was gonna take us to Fort Jackson[, South Carolina].

So they told us to wait 'til October the 17th. And I was here, I walked down to the Cape with the construction, where they were shooting those rockets off of pad thirty-nine, and the VAB building. I seen all of that. And then October 17th, got ready to catch the bus, and we caught that bus. That bus driver was late, and he was driving. I had dozed off to sleep, and he had waken me when he drove off the road. Was trying to—he was driving. I said, "This man gonna kill us before he get us there." [laughs]

I got—we got—there to Fort Jackson, and we got off with our duffel bags. Well, we didn't have the duffel bags at that time. We just was in civilian clothes. And then those guys had been there for a while—we was getting off the bus—said, "You'll be sorry! You'll be sorry!" Oh, and there was bald head sergeant running upside the bus before it even stopped. I mean, time you'd get to the door, he'd snatch you off. [laughs] Man, it was scaring me, 'cause he had a bald head and everything. And then—"Get off, you 'D'-heads! You will hate me before you leave here!" Oh man, they was really—and so, we went through the reception center, went there, and we went to Fort Benning[, Georgia,] they had our duffel bags there. And time we got there, it was worse then. Those drill sergeants and all, they just run up to that bus. He was looking wild and crazy. The guy was in front of me, he had on his hat, like this one—like that—he had on this hat, you know. And coming in there, the hat was too big for his head. They always give you clothes too big for you.

Morris Yeah.

Morgan And he grabbed that guy, snatched him off the bus, and snatched his hat from him. He snatched him from under his hat, and his hat fell on the ground. That guy had a heart attack. [laughs] I don't know did he die or not. So, I had the chance to get on off. He didn't get a chance to grab me. And them[sic] boys was saying the same thing. "You'll be sorry!" And, you know, we—some of the guys—would be talking and everything, and later that night, we wasn't used to having bed check, you know. Ten o'clock, you gotta be in bed. He'd come in, you'd be in there and have them lights on. They'd come in there, man, and get you out, two or 2:30 in the morning, drilling you. "You gonna hate me before you leave here!" [laughs] And so that was a good experience, you meet guys that you had never met before. And you meet, you get to mingle with the white guys, the Puerto Ricans, all different races of people. Of course, I had had experiences.

In 1953 and 1954 I went to school with white people in New York—in Port Byron, New York—and Lyons, New York. You know, it wasn't a big thing. People was just people, far as I was concerned. I had enjoyed it, you know, because they really treated me nice. Man, we'd go out there every night having a good time, you know, playing and everything—the kids, you know. And they—when I got ready to come home, they didn't want me to come home. I said, "I gotta go with my parents." [laughs]

Morris "You'll be sorry."

Morgan

Yeah. "You'll be sorry!" Then we got to AIT [Advanced Individual Training]. And they was training. They was – these people said basic training, but basic training wasn't nothing to AIT. Oh man, we had to do 144 exercise. And you started off running two miles, then we got ready to go to Vietnam, we was running eight miles. And do 144 exercise, run eight miles, come back do 10 pull-ups, then you go to breakfast. After you come from breakfast, you go in there and shine those floors, and buff it. Then you get out for your daily training, a 20-mile road march, and after you do that, you do squad tactics. It's a way to fight.

We was in 2nd or 23rd infantry at that time. We was mechanized. And they had, you know, big deuce and a quarter, stuff like that. So, as the Vietnam War was going on, they had a few advisors in Vietnam. And they was taking some of them. And as the war got worse, they sent the colors from Korea to be exchanged there because the KF couldn't come back to the station until they were winning colors.

So, I was honor guard there for a minute at that time. They do shiny helmets and all, and they exchanged the colors and they got us ready for Vietnam. Became a chopper outfit. Used to fly choppers just about every day, repelling from those choppers on ropes, just like those Navy Seals did. We started that. And they had thousands and thousands of choppers. A lot of them was falling because the blades would spit. They didn't know anything about why those blades were spitting, so they sent us a vehicle mechanic up, and he found out what was going on, and radioed back to the ground and told them that the blades was spitting, but that chopper crashed and he got killed. So, they modified the blades and we did a lot of flying, and we had operation in the Carolinas called Hawk Tower 3. We were 17,000 strong. And Colonel Moore – he was a colonel at that time, who was in charge of the KO [Contracting Officer]. He was a guy – he wouldn't keel to the devil in hell. Oh man, he didn't play. And we was men [inaudible] to Carolina, they had the [Lockheed] C-130 [Hercule]s. That plane would – at ankle-deep it would take off in mud. It's a troop-carrier. It would carry a little over 41 men. The same as that helicopter that looked like a hot dog. It'd carry 41 men.

Morris

I know what you're talking about, sir.

Morgan

Yeah. And we was all over the Carolinas – North and South Carolina. And we had called us – we was training. We'd call in a jet from Jacksonville, and they'd be there in five minutes. Boom. Dropping bags. It sounded like they were bombing down there. And then sometimes the guys would get so aggravated, they'd be wanting to fight war. They'd be angry. Tired, tired of doing this. They'd wanna – "Let's go to it!" And I said, "Oh, I don't wanna go to it." [laughs] And when they got ready to go to Vietnam, it was – we'd get out every morning running eight miles, singing this song: "Watch out, VC [Việt Cộng]. Here we come. Watch out, VC. Here we come." And I always liked to start something. I said, "Goin' home. Too much. Here it come." And it was sergeant, he didn't know who had said it. "Returning home? Who is the damn wise guy?" Nobody would tell on me. [laughs]

Morris If you wanted to keep friends...

Morgan [laughs] And so, it started us off again. "Watch out, VC. Here we come." I said, "Going home, VC. Here I come." "Who is that damn wise guy?" And then no one would tell on me. I said, "I better stop, before somebody have to tell." [laughs]

Morris Wise decision, sir.

Morgan Oh, yeah. And so, I didn't have that, you know. October the 15th was my ETS [Expiration of Time and Services]. And so, I was with a bunch of the guys, they had a month to go longer than me. And those were the guys that was in that big battle, and I was with them when we got ready to go. I felt so bad, because we was[sic] more—we was training better than they was[sic]. But they put up one hell of a fight. I mean, they killed over 2,000 VC. That was an area that you didn't supposed to come out of, and they fought good[sic].

I learned how to fire everything. I fired a 3.5 rocket launcher, a 5DM 60 machine gun. I fired the M16 [rifle]. I was expert on everything I fired, 'cause I wanted to know how to do everything. I didn't know what I'd have to use. Of course, they train you that way anyway, but I wanted to be good. And I had metals with expert levels for sniper. I fired in there. I was a door gunner in the choppers at times, but that's when they'd be trying to get that door gunner. They'd be able to shoot that door gunner. [laughs] I didn't realize that was a dangerous place to be.

Morris Sir, door gunner? Come on, you're sticking your head out there!

Morgan Man, see, you got that M16 machine gun—550 rounds per minute. Man, you—they gonna want to get that man out of there, 'cause he can kill up a lot of people, that door gunner. 'Cause you firing that thing, you don't know what you're gonna hit. When that chopper is, you know, shaking, you just hope you hitting something. Somebody said I was good at it. You don't know what you're gonna hit. And I could be sitting close to, you know, a foot away from you in that chopper. I couldn't hear a word you saying, it made so much noise. And we a-flew a lot of those choppers, man. Sometimes they killed—it was so many—it was 17,000. They could not keep up with us. Sometimes we'd be a day and a half trying to get food. And we had [Type] C-rations sometimes. We had some that were back in 1945. You know, it was vacuum-packed. It was good, man. [laughs]

Morris Well, "good" is not the word I would use.

Morgan So some of the guys—"I can't eat that junk!" I said, "Give it here." [laughs] They called me the "eatin'-est man" in the battalion. Man, I never did get sick out there. And so, if we training, and it's going to raining, you're not gonna stop training. Used to be a saying, "It don't rain on them. It rain in them." [laughs] You keep—after we get soakin' wet, and it still rainin', they said, "Find the driest place and go to sleep." And man, you'd be so tired, I just fell over the puddle of water, went to sleep.

Morris I can imagine, sir. How long did you stay in the service?

Morgan Two years.

0:55:12 **Life after military service**

Morris And then what'd you do afterwards?

Morgan I came out and I started back doing construction work, getting a dollar and a half an hour in Deltona. We were building — Michael Brothers was building those houses. And that was all we could do. And you know, after I left there, I went down to the Cape. There again, working down there, so I was getting three dollars and 90 cents an hour. Oh man, that was big money then. So, we'd ride down, which was all about 70 miles riding one way. But to get three dollars and 70 cent compared to a dollar and a half — oh, we took the trip. *[laughs]* And I stayed in construction, and I joined the union and all them, Labor Local 517. And they was, they had insurance and everything. And by that time, my oldest kid was born. And, uh...

0:56:20 **Wife and children**

Morris When did you get married, sir?

Morgan I got married to Josephine. She was Josephine Morgan at that time. And then we separated, and she got married again. So, I still stayed in touch with my daughter, and me and her are still friends today. And my daughter's grown, she got me some grand[kid]s, and I got some great-grand[kid]s. *[laughs]*

Morris What's your daughter's name, sir?

Morgan Pamela. Name Pamela [Morgan] Brown. It was Pamela Morgan. And then I got another one was born 10 years later.

Morris Another daughter, sir?

Morgan Yeah. The one when I was 10 years married out there working in Lake Mary.

Morris Oh, okay, sir. With a new, a second wife?

Morgan Yes.

Morris And your second wife's name?

Morgan Name Jeanette [Morgan].

Morris Okay, sir.

Morgan And the last daughter was named Belinda — was Belinda Morgan. She's married, and her husband's an insurance adjuster. She — =they are both very aggressive,

and they try to live better. And they all checks[sic] on me. Checks[sic] on old man. You know, gotta make sure he's all right. I said, "Papa ain't what he used to be. Come see about him." [laughs]

0:56:20

Community involvement and civil rights

Morgan

So, I just worked all the time. I said, "I'm happy to punish this body to help my kids, so they won't have to go through what I went through." I want them to be a[sic] good citizen[s]. America is a good place to be. I never been out of the [United] States, but I see it on the movie. All those different places. And I know I wouldn't—even when we was oppressed, we were living better than them people over in those other countries. They didn't hardly have food to eat. We wasn't never hungry. We had clothes and shoes. So, we were better off than most people was in different countries. We didn't complain. We knew what we had to do, and we did it, and we was rewarded for it by being a good citizen. Now I just, I—after I got hurt, in construction scaffolding fell on me. And then I'd already hurt in the military too, playing football. And so I just, I said, "I gotta do something for mankind."

I joined the, I joined the NAACP, and I fight for justice. And then I joined the historical society uptown there. That's where I met Charlie Carlson. And, you know, a lot of the people felt the NAACP was against white people. And it's not that. A lot of white people join the NAACP. And they did this fight for injustice, you know. And you know, you'd be surprised, the companies that are in the NAACP. [Walt] Disney [World], they give money, 10, 20 thousand dollars a year. Florida Power & Light [Company], a lot of these banks. Because it's nothing, you know. You don't treat people wrong. This is what they're fighting for. They see what they're doing, and a lot of people see that just like, you know, you got the Ku Klux Klan and Black Panthers, and all that. They don't go for no wrongdoing, whether it's the Black Panthers or not. They're not gonna do that. They're for justice.

And then I got to be a representative for all Seminole County for helping people in need. Then I worked with the police department. They was having festivals out there in Bookertown. They brought the honor guard out. And I was in the paper just about every week. Oh, man. Everywhere. And I wrote these books, and man, the people got jealous, and said I was out there [inaudible]. They got jealous. They thought I was going to get rich, man. I said, "How can I get rich? I ain't get but \$6 for a book. I had to pay almost \$3 to get it done." [laughs] And you know, they wanna say, "Well, this didn't happen, and this didn't." I said, "Oh, yes, it did. You told me that. I can't do anything unless you tell me, and I wrote it down." Oh, they got jealous, and they got jealous about the festival, about me being in the paper every week.

1:01:56

Charlie Carson

Morgan

Charlie Carlson was helping me, you know, with the—he told me about his [inaudible]. He was doing some books, too. He did a lot of books for the society,

and he did some out here too. And right now Charlie Carlson is big. Well, he been all over the state, everywhere. Barnes & Noble got him. And he got agents, and I haven't been able to see him that much. [laughs] Occasionally. I said, "He's big time now."

Morris Doing what, sir?

Morgan Writing books.

Morris Okay. And what does he write about?

Morgan Some of everything. He wrote about strange Florida. He told me one time, said he like to got ate up by a panther out there in the woods. [laughs] But he didn't mind going all over in the woods. Can't eat you out there. And I was raised out there in the – those woods. He said, "Charlie, there's[sic] snakes out there, man." [laughs] He walked up. But I went on out there. We got some history and everything. So some of the writers from *The Orlando Sentinel* come over to the house. I guess like you and me are doing. And it's a lot of people they interviewed. They went out there, as I told you, to the UCF [University of Central Florida]. And I spoke out there, and I sold about 30 of these books. You know, just giving them away, just getting my history out there. I wasn't making no big time money.

Morris Okay, sir.

1:03:41 Plans for the future

Morgan What I want to do, though, at some point, is get some videos and talk about it, what happened at different areas on the farms where we used to live at, and all that kind of stuff. And I think that would be good for people that like to sit back and look at that on a CD, you know. So, I haven't got to that point yet. So, I'm planning on do it.

Morris I hope for you will, sir.

Morgan Yeah, so...

1:04:15 How Bookertown and Sanford have changed over time

Morris So where do you live now? In, uh...

Morgan Yeah. I live in the same little place out there where we went to school, that historical little old black community. And I got two houses out there. This little place – at the beginning, most of the streets were dirt streets. You couldn't – two cars couldn't hardly pass. And you had little saw palmettos was[sic] out there. You know, you had to walk through little paths to go to another house. And it was snake-infested out there. And people worked hard, and you know, get these grubbin' hoes and dig up those palmettos at the elephant place out there now.

And the old school that I went to – the elementary school – is still out there, but it, you know. Nobody's going to that school. They use it for the Civic Center. And they would, you know – the county would bring us – at Christmastime, they would bring us some candy, and some apples, and some oranges, and stuff, you know. And oh, we'd be happy about that stuff, man. But man, we'd do some things that we shouldn't, and teacher would come and get us, and bring us in and tell us to bend over the seat. Said, "We gonna put you on the hot seat. Put your hands in your pockets and pull your pants tight, and bend over." And they'd take some of those long palmettos, you know, with the stickers on them. They'd trim the stickers off. And get that red, man. They said, "If you get up, that's gonna be some more licks added!" [laughs]

And so we didn't have any lunchroom. We just had, you'd bring your little greasy bag. You know, peanut butter and jelly. And had an icebox, but didn't have any ice in it. You put it in there. You had a little bench on the outside. When you get ready to eat at lunchtime, and you go and sit outside and eat. And we just – it was just – we had an old cowbell out there. You rang that thing, "boing, boing, boing," for, you know, recess. You go out there in a few minutes exercise, play a little ball, and then they rang it again, "boing, boing, boing." You go back in. And it's a two-room building. They had a divider. First, second, and third in one room and fourth, fifth, and sixth in the other. So, they had – our principal – he was the teacher, and they another teacher on the other side. That's the way we learned. And then when we would get to the seventh and eighth grade, we'd go to Crooms [High School]. That's where everybody would meet up, from – all the black people from Oviedo, Goldsboro, Midway, Bookertown, Altamonte [Springs], they'd all meet up at Crooms and go to high school. That's the way they did it. And a lot of the kids were very smart, because those teachers didn't play. You was[sic] gonna learn. And you was[sic] gonna learn. They said, "You gotta be twice as smart as the white man." Said, "You got to learn." And that's what motivated, you know. If you get the same job that white man got, said you gotta be twice as smart. And one black girl won *The \$64,000 Question*, and oh, that motivated the black people, 'cause it was on TV.

Morris Oh, yeah?

Morgan Yeah, oh, man, she – black people start studying, man. They was really studying. And a lot of those kids come along and some of them are professors, some of them work at the White House, are mathematicians. I mean, this was a lot of smart people coming out of the area. Where we was. 'Cause they had something to motivate them that looked. They tried – they had a goal. They tried to do better in life.

Morris Right.

Morgan And see, the white people were competition. [laughs] Competition is good. And, you know, they, you know, some of them now seem like they done lost their motivation. Maybe they need to pick someone out to have competition with. [laughs] 'Cause a lot of our black kids is[sic] dropping out of school. Maybe they

don't got[sic] – they say they get things so much, they're not motivated. So I'm trying now to get the [Seminole] County, along with the other guys out there, to redo that school and try to educate some of those kids who said that we can't [inaudible], and try to pull some of those kids out the street and show them there's a better life than drugs, you know.

Morris Right, sir.

Morgan I mean, it's just a lot of white guys be comin' out there too. They be buying the drugs. And white girls, I mean, you know – it used to not be no white people living out there in Bookertown. Man, there be a lot of white people out there in Bookertown. [laughs] They all be[sic] – a lot of them be[sic] on them drugs. And it's a – my cousin was married to a German woman. And it's another black guy, he was married to a white woman. And she was real smart. She, you know – he knowed[sic] how to do automatic transmission. He taught her, and she'd do it. But he passed away. Me and him grew up together. We, you know – a lot of black and white people be out there. Hispanics – they get babies and stuff. [laughs]

Morris Well, sir, we're about to – we have to start wrapping up.

Morgan Yeah.

1:11:15 **Mary McLeod Bethune**

Morris Is there anything else you want to make sure you mentioned before we conclude? Anything – like anything you remember, any circle of events, or any kind of memories from your childhood, or any kind of – something you just forgot about earlier?

Morgan Oh, yeah. I remember our teacher was very influential, lady called Miss Hogan. And her friend, I mean, yeah – well, her friend that taught her in college was Miss Bethune, and she came out to our school one time when I was little, but I didn't think that's somebody, you know. This, you know, you remember Mary McLeod Bethune? They got the [Bethune-Cookman] University over there in Daytona [Beach]?

Morris Okay, sir.

Morgan Yeah. She came to Crooms out there and talked to us one time. And, you know, that's a lot of history. Did you read her history?

Morris No, sir.

Morgan Oh, man. She came there from [South] Carolina. It was a dollar and a half. And they had United Methodist Church. They helped her. And she started a learning place in a little old broke-down shed. She started helping a lot of people, and then you heard some white people started helping her too. And the United

Methodist, some other companies. And they dealt – they had her speak at the – what the name of that college? Oh, Rollins [College]. At first, they didn't want her to speak there, because she was a black woman, but they find out how smart she was, and they let her come back the day she had spoke. [laughs] And she was a president advisor. And see, she scold the president one time, [Franklin D.] Roosevelt. [laughs]

Morris Oh, okay.

Morgan It's a lot of history. It's good to read about her.

Morris Sir, she came to your school and talked to you?

Morgan Yeah. Well, I was a little boy. I can vaguely remember. I was a little fella, but when she came to Crooms, I remember her then. I remember her. But I just figured she was just educated, that's all. I didn't, you know – little country boy, didn't know nothin'. You know, only thing I knew about was cabbage, corn, and celery. [laughs]

1:13:48

Closing remarks

Morris And okra. Not to cut the top.

Morgan [laughs] Yeah, okra. And killing squirrels and rabbits, you know. And turtles. We ate those, ate those turtles, man. We ate so many turtles out there.

Morris Well, it's because they're not gonna get away from you very fast.

Morgan Oh, man, no.

Morris You see a turtle, he's toast.

Morgan Yeah. You know, we had – we could have had and used him [inaudible], with the shells. [laughs]

Morris Well, thank you, sir for coming out today and sharing all this with us.

Morgan Okay. Anytime you need me. I'm glad to come in and be of service.

Morris Appreciate that, sir. Thank you.

End of Interview