

academic subjects to go along with the number of hours required in music for the degree. The number of the semester hours for the Bachelor were eighty semester hours of music, forty-two hours of academic subjects and for the Master we had thirty-two semester hours of music.

MRS. GREENE: You said you got a Master's degree in Musical Training too.

MR. DAVIS: Right.

MRS. GREENE: You were pursuing these courses and at the same time carrying on your work at the Post Office. Did it affect your work?

MR. DAVIS: No. With the accumulated time that I had I had enough time to carry me over. Vacation time was fifteen days. Later we had more. Still later we had twenty-six days, and these days were exclusive of Saturday, Sunday and holidays. The way we had it figured out I would have enough time to spend the six weeks.

MRS. GREENE: You taught private music lessons before you began your association with the Greenville Public School System.

MR. DAVIS: I did. That started in the early forties. I taught all the boys who would come to the house for lessons. The very fact that I would let them come to the house seemed to be motivation enough. I remember Billy Powell coming in a snow storm for lessons.

MRS. GREENE: Is he a dentist?

MR. DAVIS: He's a dentist on the west coast, I think it's Oakland, California.

MRS. GREENE: Name a few of your other band members who still live here in Greenville.

MR. DAVIS: Well, I have to think of William Jackson, R. D. Davis ---

MRS. GREENE: Now, let's see, this William Jackson is the same one connected with Radio Station WBAD?

MR. DAVIS: Right, WBAD. Doctor C. B. Davis, Jr., who lives out on Colorado Street ---

MRS. GREENE: The young dentist was in your band?

MR. DAVIS: That's right. Arthurlia , she was in the band too and quite advanced as a tap dancer. Margaret Andrews, teaching at Weddington Elementary School.

MRS. GREENE: Did she take flute?

MR. DAVIS: She played clarinet all time. At the time she was with the band we couldn't afford to buy one.

MRS. GREENE: It is an expensive ---

MR. DAVIS: It's not expensive, but there were other instruments we needed more. Melvin Catholic, a Protestant Minister, he was one of the drummers at that time, Robert Davis who works for the Greenville Lock Manufacturing Company. Oh, Mr. Roy Huddleston, he's the band director at Greenville High; Miss Herticine Jones, choral director at the Greenville High, Mr. Charles Strange, band director at the Bass Junior High, Mr. John Parker, who is connected with some newspaper company on

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

the south side, I don't know his name. I just happened to see him the other day; E. T. Davis, another son, he's connected with the City and then Jack Davis too, he's connected with the Lucy Webb Elementary School.

MRS. GREENE: Did you know Mr. Al Jennings at the Greenville Hotel?

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Al Jennings, yes. We played for a number of banquets, most times for dances in the Gold Room in the upper part of the Hotel Greenville and we played quite a bit in the Blue Room, that was on the southwest portion of the building on the first floor.

MRS. GREENE: I suppose you have many pleasant reminiscences about those days at the Greenville Hotel, and you hate to see it in such a state as it is now.

MR. DAVIS: Yes. Well, in addition to the hotel we played in a number of choice night spots. I remember the Casino. This was a place they would use for the white patrons. The Casino was an exclusive night club. Mr. William Rode owned it.

MRS. GREENE: William Rode, R-o-d-e?

MR. DAVIS: Yes. They called him R-o-d-i-e, but William Rode was his name.

MRS. GREENE: R-h-o-d-e?

MR. DAVIS: No, R-o-d-e.

MRS. GREENE: Oh.

MR. DAVIS: He would have such bands as Louis Armstrong

and some of the white bands - Larry Clinton and two or three others. I don't remember the exact name now. Every time he would engage one of those bands for a night stand, he would call my band in to play about three weeks nightly. Then, of course, we played at the Silver Slipper, that was on the old Warfield Landing road that led to the ferry, and we played at the Midland.

MRS. GREENE: What place was that?

MR. DAVIS: Midland.

MRS. GREENE: M-i-d-l-a-n-d? Where was that?

MR. DAVIS: On Highway 82 now that goes, that travels south to the Lake Village Bridge.

MRS. GREENE: But, they are no more now?

MR. DAVIS: No more.

MRS. GREENE: When you worked with the band at Coleman High School did you train the majorettes in addition to training the musicians?

MR. DAVIS: Well, I had assistants and inasmuch as they did a nice job, I didn't interfere. However, I have trained some of the majorettes, probably in Simmons High in Glen Allen and Indianola.

MRS. GREENE: You worked at those schools after you retired?

MR. DAVIS: After leaving Coleman High, I went to Sacred Heart, and then went to Simmons High at Hollandale full time there as director, Glen Allen full time director, and because of the integrations of schools we were called together --- that is,

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

O'Eannon High School, Glen Allen High School and the High School at Riverside. These three were combined as junior high school. At the time we had one large band of about 250 pieces. Incidentally, this was one of the better bands and one of the more exclusive instruments that I had ever had at one time. While at Glen Allen I was given more instruments than ever.

MRS. GREENE: After the schools were integrated?

MR. DAVIS: Well, no. Just at that time all of that was in the making I suppose, because at Glen Allen we had about thirty thousand dollars worth of instruments, musical instruments, all brand new from the factory, which was quite a change from what has happened since. Of course, at Coleman High when they started that band, I wasn't able to get a bass horn, or any other instruments from the school. Sousa horns, and the larger instruments. Every time I would ask for them they didn't have the money.

MRS. GREENE: How do you spell that Sousa horn?

MR. DAVIS: S-o-u-s-a. It is a bass horn. It's a bass horn curved around your neck with a brass hook in it.

MRS. GREENE: Well, you have been band director for at least five schools?

MR. DAVIS: Yes.

MRS. GREENE: What puzzles me, Mr. Davis, is that you conducted parades, you played for dances, even before you retired, "Where did you get the energy? What was your source of power?"

MR. DAVIS: I ate my spinach in proper quantities. Well, I attribute most of that to a schedule. I ate just enough. Most of the time I got eight hours sleep every day. I did it, I think, with a little sympathy from some people, cooperation from others and a desire to do what I could for the other person and, consequently, I had some people to do things for me. Namely, the boys in the band would come and load the instruments and have things ready. Some were old enough to get their driver's license and do most of the driving. That would give me a chance to sleep. I can sleep in any place and in any position, you might say, can get a good night's rest on an arm chair. Those were the things I would say that helped me along. Of course, my mother - as long as she lived - was at my rescue at any time I needed her. Also, my wife.

MRS. GREENE: I was just wondering how you paraded by day, how you paraded in the afternoon and carried mail in the day. I wondered how you managed.

MR. DAVIS: I don't know.

MRS. GREENE: Your band was called, Little Wynn... How did you get that name?

MR. DAVIS: Harry Wiley, who was a student at Sacred Heart at the same time I was, painted the sign on the drum and I took it up from there.

MRS. GREENE: I think it would be interesting for future generations if you would tell us about this draft-proof band.

MR. DAVIS: During the World War II we went to Alcorn for an engagement, and when we got back the next day we found out that everybody in the band was drafted except me. I was the only one that wasn't drafted. I just decided I would get a draft-proof group; that is, older players. I got Mr. Ed Gray, Mr. Webster they were probably in their sixties, then ---

MRS. GREENE: About how old were you?

MR. DAVIS: I must have been in my thirties, thirty-eight or something like that, or probably forty. Anyway, I could have been drafted also, and I looked around and saw a couple of Alto saxophone players, Walter Kriger and Frank Maddox. I knew I would have some trouble coordinating their rhythm and their expressions, but with a lot of hard work I could shape them into sounding good. I succeeded and after a number of rehearsals, got them to play tunes that were pleasant to me. One of the big mistakes was that they imbibed too freely.

MRS. GREENE: Spirits?

MR. DAVIS: Yes, spirits. They went to the night spot in Leland ahead of time and about the time we were ---

(turned tape)

MRS. GREENE: You were telling me about your draft-proof group members going to Leland.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, we got there ahead of time. We went in the early evenings and about time we were ready to

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

start playing, a little discussion had taken place, and there was a difference of opinion. This along with the spirits of which they had too much caused them to go to sleep. I had to play for the dance with the drummer and the piano. There were just three of us. When we finished playing at one o'clock that night, one of the players was finally aroused and said, "I'm ready to play."

MRS. GREENE: The dance was over.

MR. DAVIS: The dance was over. On my way home I said, "I think Unble Sam has won out. I can't get a draft-proof man and keep going."

MRS. GREENE: I understand Roy Huddleston is preparing something for you in the spring.

MR. DAVIS: Yes. I understand he invited people connected with me to his concert. At that time I am supposed to direct one of the numbers for him.

MRS. GREENE: Do you know any of your old friends who have been invited?

MR. DAVIS: Yes, I saw Clarence Rosenthal from Michigan. Marion Garrett is one. We tried to contact Red, but nobody has found him, Otis Red Byrd, and, of course, Tump of Chicago.

MRS. GREENE: That's your brother.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, and a number of others told me they would come.

MRS. GREENE: Burgess Gardner is coming. Does he

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

have a record shop in Chicago?

MR. DAVIS: That's his brother. That's Walter Gardner who has it.

MRS. GREENE: Well, he's quite a musician himself, isn't he?

MR. DAVIS: Yes. He was studying at Michigan State the last time I saw him a year ago. He was working on his Doctorate in Music Education. I haven't seen him since. His older brother, Willie Gardner, Junior, of Baton Rouge, taught him the trumpet with Thurmon Gardner, who is a lawyer. I think he was admitted to the bar this past spring, I was told.

MRS. GREENE: Very recently.

MR. DAVIS: Yes.

MRS. GREENE: That should be a highlight of your career.

MR. DAVIS: Yes. It highlights the effect that some of the players tell me that with my training they had achieved some of the things that they never would have made. Dr. E. G. Mason of Chicago, said if it hadn't been for me, he couldn't have made it in college.

(Above this is 15 minutes playing time
into tape 2, side 4)

MRS. GREENE: Tell me about Pete Collins.

MR. DAVIS: Peter Collins is one of the drummers I had from Sacred Heart school. He said he had decided to go to Tennessee State. Tennessee State gets most of their

players from Memphis due to the activity of their alumni, as such they have quite a field to draw from. They said that anybody coming from other places or even the first year, Freshman year in Tennessee State, would have to take further instructions before they could even audition for the band. Peter Collins directly out of Sacred Heart school was passing in the dormitory one night. One of the players, or would be players, was playing Washington Post. But he wasn't playing it exactly right.

Peter Collins said, "You are not playing that like the music." The player said, "Who are you from Mississippi to tell me what I do?" He gave him the sticks and told him, "You play it."

When Peter Collins proceeded to play, the band director happened to be passing the dormitory, heard the drumming, and came up to compliment the player who he thought was practicing.

"Well, you finally got it." He looked and said, "Oh, that's not him. That's Peter Collins." The band director asked, "You really mean it?" "Yes Sir, I do." He gave Peter about three other pieces to play. When that was over the instructor told Peter, "Well, come and go down to the band room. I'll give you a band uniform." Peter Collins was put in the band at that point. Tennessee State had twenty-five drummers, but they made room for one more.

MRS. GREENE: Tell me, Mr. Davis, was it your need

for extra money to help support your family, or was it the love for music that drove you so?

MR. DAVIS: Well, a desire to help the underprivileged first and, of course, sometimes money was a little tight, but with careful management I didn't depend solely on that. But the desire to help the other person, especially the young black person, and, incidentally, I might interrupt here and say that I did have some white boys who came to my home.

MRS. GREENE: For private instructions.

MR. DAVIS: For instruction and they offered me different prices, top prices, which I didn't accept. I just gave them the few pointers because I had to reserve my time for the different activities that I had, and I would give them what time I had. I would just give them a few pointers, a few lessons. I've even had the top players in the Greenville High band to come to me for instruction, but I told those kids, "You have the top instructors, as such, against what we have at our school system. I think you need to go to your teachers for more instruction."

I had two mothers say to me, "Well, it's still not like you." Whatever she meant by that -- Whether I was better prepared, or could inspire more -- I don't know. I had to draw the line there.

MRS. GREENE: You feel that your dreams of helping others has come true?

MR. DAVIS: Yes, I do. Well, when I look around and

see the fashion in which other people live, I think about Mrs. Lillian Fields, who was in the band and played clarinet ---

MRS. GREENE: Mr. Lillian Fields is a rading specialist at Coleman High.

MR. DAVIS: In Coleman High.

MRS. GREENE: At one time she was director of a chorus at Weston.

MR. DAVIS: That's right. She is one of the first who told me that with what I had taught her she was able to make it through Mississippi Valley State College. Of course, Roy Huddleston, you see what he's doing. He's the power behind the trumpet, some energy draws him --

MRS. GREENE: He's a dynamo.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, and Herticine Jones has been the top choir director since she started, from the time she started on through.

MRS. GREENE: She's has superior rating for at least twenty-five years.

MR. DAVIS: And the wonderful thing is that Herticine plays to my satisfaction -- better than the composer himsel, of the band that recorded it -- the Erskine Hawkins "After Hours."

MRS. GREENE: Well, I trust you will enjoy your big affair that Roy is planning for you in the spring.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, I'm kind of boosted up about it.

MRS. GREENE: This concludes the tape of Mr. Winchester Davis. Mr. Davis is a life time member of the National Retired Teachers Association.

(End of Interviews January 1/3-1977)
(Transcribed by Vivian Broom)

INTERVIEW: January 8, 1977.

MRS. GREENE: You had several sons, Mr. Davis. Were any of them in service?

MR. DAVIS: Yes. In the Korean War. The oldest one was in that one.

MRS. GREENE: That was Win, wasn't it?

MR. DAVIS: Winchester Davis, Jr. We had a time with him trying to get the draft board let him finish four years of college at Tougaloo. In his sophomore year they sent him notice to be ready to report at the induction center. I went back to the draft board and talked with Mrs. Alice Whitehead, who seemed to be over that part of it, and her instructions to me were to register Win, Junior in the summer school session, that was between the sophomore and junior year. We did that, and when he finished the junior year they still wanted to induct him into the army. I went back to the draft board. The same lady, Mrs. Whitehead, told me to register him in summer school. Well, I did register him into the summer school at Tougaloo. Consequently, then he didn't have but one subject to take in his senior year. What disturbed me most would be that he would have so much time on hand, and I didn't like that. One of my friends, S. S. Jackson, who lived in Canton, saw Win, Jr. at Tougaloo college and went back to his people in Canton, who were trying to get a band organized. He recommended Win, Jr. for the job and so, just about time school started in September Win, Jr. did go over to Canton and talked with the

principal. They gave him a job of organizing the band, getting it started, and they also paid him \$70.00 a month which not only gave me some relief in tuition, but most of all it kept him busy. I didn't want him there with so much leisure. When he got his bachelor degree at Tougaloo I think the commencement exercises was May 31st, on June 1st he was headed for the army.

MRS. GREENE: That was the Korean war?

MR. DAVIS: That was the Korean war, and while he was in the Korean army, while he was in this army he was on patrol duty one night and was shot by a sniper.

MRS. GREENE: Which boy was that?

MR. DAVIS: That was the older boy, my oldest son - Winchester Davis, Jr. He had to be hospitalized and put in the hospital. Mr. Jones from Piney Woods read his name on the list and asked why he hadn't been down to try out for the band, the army band. Mr. Jones was a Warrant Officer and in charge of the Third Army band. He said, do you know Winchester Davis of Greenville? and he told him, "That's my father." Mr. Jones said, "Well, you don't need any audition, just come on in and we will sign you into the band." Win, Jr. didn't go to the band because, if he would leave the hospital while on the disabled list, they would send him back to the states. So that's why he didn't go into that army band of Mr. Jones.

I also have another son, Mayo, my third son. He's in the army. He's been around the world, and at the time

Randolph was killed, Mayo was about thirty miles from him. Randolph - that was the Vietnam war - and Henry, one of my boys, was in the navy and he was about twenty miles, so they were all right together in Vietnam at the same time. I've thought about it quite often when the army had issued a statement that they wouldn't have three sons in Vietnam on the battlefield at the same time. When we were ready for Randolph's funeral, I had to contact Senator Stennis who, in turn, contacted Westmoreland, I suppose, or whoever was in charge, to let Mayo and Henry come home for the funeral, but their immediate overseers told them that they couldn't get off. As soon as Senator Stennis took over, they had them here before Randolph's body.

MRS. GREENE: Did the boys ever see each other when they were in Vietnam?

MR. DAVIS: No. They never saw each other, even though they were twenty or thirty miles apart. Randolph had served his time and was supposed to come back to the states for reassignment on the first or second of November. I understand from some other soldiers that were in the same company, that the states army went out and was penned down ... that they had been penned down for close on to a week and Randolph, however, came out. I think that on the third of November, 1966.

So many of the soldiers had been wounded and left on the battle field, Randolph had been in and completed his duties and the commanding officer of that platoon asked for volunteers

to bring the wounded men in, and Randolph went in and was bringing the wounded soldiers on his shoulders. He brought back two or three and was given the option of not going back. On one of the occasions, according to the records, he had a flesh wound that just grazed his arm. His officer tried to get him to stay in but he didn't. He went back for more of his buddies and when he went back that's when he got the bad shots, when he went back the second time.

MRS. GREENE: Was it in his head?

MR. DAVIS: I don't know. They gave an account of it and everything they said that small artillery was what they used... that was what he was a victim of.

MRS. GREENE: How many of his friends came over from over there?

MR. DAVIS: Actually, the army sent three persons in, a sergeant, who does that type of thing, and two other persons were at the funeral home. They have things so organized that you don't know whether they came all the way or just they'd just assigned a man stationed in Greenwood. Some lieutenant came in and offered whatever assistance we thought we needed and they gave us full military rites. The day that we were notified of Randolph's death in early November, Father Benoit ---

MRS. GREENE: B-e-n-o-i-t.

MR. DAVIS: Yes. The priest at Sacred Heart at that time came to Leland with some of the army personnel. I was making a parade, the homecoming parade for Leland High School,

and the patrolman announced over the loud speaker, "We want the parade halted just where it is and I'm looking for a Davis." I had no idea that they were talking about me so we all stood at attention, in our line. The march stopped, and the patrolman came up and said, "Do you know a Davis around?" I said, "Yes, I've got one in the band here. I thought he was looking for a student." "No, I'm looking for a band director." I said, "Well, I guess I'm the only one here." "You are the one we want."

I had to turn the parade over to my assistant. That day I had two ladies in the band. Strong was assistant band director and T. B. Sanders sent the two ladies home with me.

MRS. GREENE: The priest came over with the police?

MR. DAVIS: With the police to notify me and to offer whatever assistance he could.

MRS. GREENE: You had another son in the service.

MR. DAVIS: Yes, R. D. was in the air force, went to Newfoundland and he spent his four years and came home. Robert went to Alaska and spent about four years. He's out and Henry spent about four years in the navy. He's out at the present time.

MRS. GREENE: Is there anything that you have done in the community, Mr. Davis, that you feel justly proud of, anything besides your contribution to music and teaching -- anything, civic-wise?

MR. DAVIS: Civic-wise, that would refer to the naming and initiating the first black policeman in modern times

in the City of Greenville.

MRS. GREENE: Who was he?

MR. DAVIS: He was Willie Carson. I first made contact with him in giving him lessons along with Emmett Brock on -- well, I gave Carson lessons on the guitar and Brock on the bass fiddle.

MRS. GREENE: That's E-m-m-e-t-t- B-r-o-o-k.

MR. DAVIS: Right. When I was approached at City Hall one day while on some business, a Councilman came in and asked me what my opinion of the colored policemen and I told him I didn't know anything about a colored policeman. What do you have reference to?

He said, "Reverend J. F. Redmond and James Carter, have been down asking the Council to put on sole colored policemen and we just want to get your opinion. I said, if you want one man's opinion --- I don't know anything about it --- but the time is right. If you want to do good, you have to do good at once. By saying that, this is the reason I would say that you need to put the colored policemen on now. About two or three days later he came back. This time Councilman L. T. Garrett was with Councilman Rhodes T. Wasson.

When Mr. Garrett saw me, he said, "There he is." I said, "What is it?" He said, "I want you to tell Councilman Wasson what you told me the other day."

I said, "Well, I stand pat on what I told you the other day, and I think that the time to do good is right now.

I'll go a bit further, we need to put the right man on - not just anybody will do - you get the right man and put him on and pay him the salary that you pay the other white officers. Then I think that you are doing the thing that is right. He said that they had a hush on the thing.

MRS. GREENE: A what?

MR. DAVIS: A hush, they were silent. Then they looked like they didn't know what else they wanted to ask me, and I told them then, "Well, I've got to be on my route in a few minutes so I'll have to go on, I came here to transact some business"; so I left them at that. Then about two hours from that they returned to the post office. The Postmistress was Mrs. Johnson. She said that the Chief of Police had called again and wanted to see me around at the Police Station. She said it was all right for me to take off and go on around to the station. When I got around to the station, the Chief of Police came out and said, "You know all the time I thought you were a good man, but now I know you are, the best man in your race or in my race."

I said, "I don't quite get it. What is it? He said, "Well, you made a stand about the colored policemen, and they said that you told them that if they put the right man on and paid him a salary equal to the white officer that was a good thing and we'd be on our way. I want to know who the right person is and I want you to get him for me, to contact the right person."

That is when I thought about Carson. I went back and talked to Carson and told him just what I thought. Carson told me, "Well, boss, you have been right in everything that you told me so anything you say goes with me." I went back to the police station and talked with Chief Hollingsworth, and he, in turn, asked me, "When is the best time?" He made reference to the time they had asked for the policemen to be put on and I told him just what I had said. "Well, I can't get a uniform." I said, "Well, we'll have to work out something." He said, "These uniform houses take too long. We want this to come up without any ballyhoo. This is the way I want it done. I want this brought in, give Carson protection and don't let him be out there on the street alone for the first two or three weeks. He said he would give him an escort but what month is this now?-- This is February 1951. This thing of waiting six months or a year doesn't meet with my approval. What I think is that we get him ready now."

So, Hollingsworth said to me, "Well, you are determined, and this is your opinion so I'm going to do it your way and I'm going to let him use a couple of my old uniforms until we can get some in." I said, "Well that's fine." People are not going to be noticing too much, but he will be presentable." That is the way it was, and we were ready to start in the early part of February 1951.

MRS. GREENE: Carson, what was his first name?

MR. DAVIS: Willie Carson.

MRS. GREENE: Willie Carson was the first black policeman, not only in Greenville but also the state of Mississippi.

MR. DAVIS: No. As for that part I had to act as a counselor and, in other words, I had to counsel and advise Carson. I was supposed to meet at least two or three times a week with him, and I would go to the Police Station to see how things were going. If it looked all right to me, he would go tell Carson what I told them. They were saying that they were giving me full authority to tell to act any way I thought. If they needed a reprimanding to do that, and if he needed counseling to do that.

Then when the second policeman came along mention was made of George Davis and what I thought about it. I thought that was a good step. The third police was supposed to be George Crawford because of his stature and build. He looked like an all-American. George Crawford was teaching school at a salary of \$125.00 a month; they offered him \$250. a month, which was twice what he was getting with the chance of promotion after six months. George Crawford didn't want the work, but to me he looked like a natural.

MRS. GREENE: Is this Willie Carson and George Davis --- are they the two black policemen that straightened out Nelson Street?

MR. DAVIS: They did.

MRS. GREENE: There was so much crime on that street

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

So they got that straightened out. Now, do you have any idea how many black policemen we have on the force now?

MR. DAVIS: I imagine around twenty-seven. I think it would be fair to say that.

MRS. GREENE: Do they use police cars?

MR. DAVIS: Yes, they use patrol cars, they are promoted according to their ability. The things that I had suggested when they put Carson on was to use their Civil Service basis ---

(turned tape
to side 6)

MRS. GREENE: You were saying something about.. you suggested that black men be on Civil Service basis.

MR. DAVIS: Civil Service basis, right, and use that as a format. I notice after that that the main requirement for policemen was they would have to have at least a high school education before they would even consider them --- I thought that was a step in the right direction. Then, if you get an intelligent person you would have less trouble otherwise. It was my thinking we'd have better qualified people. Now, what else do you want? Is there anything else you want to ask about?

MRS. GREENE: Before we conclude, Mr. Davis, I heard you and one of your former students, William Jackson - Bill Jackson as they call him - talking about the times you were at Vandercook college. You were telling him about one of your proudest moments.

MR. DAVIS: When I was at Vandercook after making the entrance examination and meeting all the tests I had the main test to show that I was qualified to come to Vandercook and to take care of myself there with my instruments. The proudest moment was when I was selected in one of the bands, in one of the large bands that had band directors from all over the states. When we set up to play, nobody tuned his instrument, and we were supposed to know the pitch of four-forty. After we had played three or four measures the instructors seemed to be so keen that they would stop and bawl the fellow out that was off pitch and tell him that he is supposed to know his instrument. The very fact that I sat right in and played the entire concert without bothering to tune and drew recognition from the players beside me about how well the instrument sounded.. that was a proud moment.

MRS. GREENE: You said four-forty?

MR. DAVIS: Four-forty.

MRS. GREENE: That's a term used in the musical world?

MR. DAVIS: Yes, that's the number of vibrations it takes to make up that pitch - four-forty. See, the different tones

(tape interruption)

MRS. GREENE: You were explaining what four-forty meant.

MR. DAVIS: Four-forty means the number of vibrations that has to go in to make up the tone A. That's middle A

on your piano. For your C, you take five hundred and twelve vibrations, so you see that different tones are marked definitely by the number of vibrations, and when you refer to four-forty that is the A on the piano to which reference is made. The average instrument, when it comes from the factory, is so built that it is around that tone four-forty. Of course, they make an error sometimes and they will sell you one cheaper.

MRS. GREENE: You were saying something about the music houses?

MR. DAVIS: The music houses will sell you some instruments that are off pitch, but they give it to you straight as it is and will tell you how much it is off. It's that type of instrument, when I was struggling for instruments to use at the different schools, would be that I could buy pretty cheap. It would be fine for beginners. That's one of the methods that can be employed when you don't have much money. If you want to get something you can go around to a factory or the pawn shops a lot of times. Of course, the pawn shop, sometimes they don't know anything much about an instrument and would sell it to you and try to get all the money they could, but when an instrument is off pitch they are supposed to give it to you at a rock-bottom price.

MRS. GREENE: Before we conclude, I would like to ask you to repeat something that I found comical. There is an incident that occurred when you were delivering mail. Without pointing out the locale and without mentioning names ...

just give the incident.

MR. DAVIS: One of the things that John Caldwell told me when I first went to the post office...

MRS. GREENE: Oh, John Caldwell was one of the earlier carriers?

MR. DAVIS: One of the early carriers. He had quite an influence with me, and he and his wife did a lot of things to try to make things easy and give me the right instruction. He said, "Boy, the best thing that you can do is learn to get along with the patrons on your route, and if you do that you will succeed. It is better to have people waiting to see you than you waiting to see them."

I had this experience with two patrons on my route. One husband didn't want his wife to see some bills that he had made, and she, in turn, didn't want him to see the bills that she had made. Without knowing who was at home or whether anybody was there I went in on the porch and the husband approached me first and I saw his wife. Looking at the two of them, I said, "Well, good morning, I just don't have anything for you at this time," and with that they spoke and bowed and smiled. When I turned and went on with mail I had for both of them, I couldn't leave it because one didn't want the other to see it.

After I got about two blocks away from the house, the husband drove up and said, "Well, you know, you are the best postman I ever saw. You are all right with me. I want

to give you a sack of flour. I hope you can use it." I said, "Yes, sir, not only can I use one sack, I can use another sack because my family is just that large." He said, "Well, you are just making a joke out of it, but this is all that I have right now." I said, "I appreciate what you are doing", and he said, "I definitely appreciate what you are doing."

Later on when his wife came she said, "You're just the best postman, and I love you for that." I said, "Well, I'm too glad to do favors if I can."

MRS. GREENE: What were you telling me about being postal collector?

MR. DAVIS: Branch collector.

MRS. GREENE: Branch collector. I would collect for the National Association of Letter Carriers. Then, I had to straighten a few of the fellows out and tell them that they needed some protection for their families. The type of insurance that the organization would offer was very much in line with other insurance companies, except that we didn't have to pay the high premiums for what we were getting for the simple reason that we had no overhead expenses. We didn't have to maintain offices, we didn't have to maintain a regular collector, as such, and for that reason the association passed the benefits on to the membership.

At one point, as I remember, in 1928 none of the officers attended our state conventions so I had told some of

the members in getting the organization together that we would have to show something that would attract the officers. Consequently, I had sold many policies to the regular members, and at the next convention we had in Greenville we had two national officers. From then on we always had some of the national officers present in our state association and any other meeting that we needed them. They told us, "Any time Branch 516 need or wants a national officer present notify Washington, notify the home office and give us time and we will get you somebody there." We have had some of the top national officers present here in Greenville. I remember one program that we had at Coleman High using Miss Jones' choir as a part of the entertainment. A band from Hollandale played and Miss Jones' choir sang.

MRS. GREENE: What year was this?

MR. DAVIS: It must have been around 1964.

MRS. GREENE: Were the schools integrated then?

MR. DAVIS: No.

MRS. GREENE: Just the black letter carriers?

MR. DAVIS: Oh, the letter carriers side was integrated. They had put aside the segregation side on the unwritten law, but the association itself never did tolerate segregation. They were outspoken on it.

MRS. GREENE: Did the white carriers come to this program you had out at Coleman?

MR. DAVIS: Yes. The whites came out, and we not

only had two of the topnotch national officers but we had the local inspector. We had Mayor Archer, we had Mrs. Johnson and we had the Chief of Police at that time. At any rate before Miss Jones left the building they asked her to come back to do the number over, whatever it was, and they had her to do it still again.

MRS. GREENE: This was Miss Herticine Jones, now director of the Greenville High School choir, and your former student?

MR. DAVIS: Yes, my former student. Correct. She really was a big hit, and they gave her the invitation that if she was ever in Washington, D. C. to come by that office, that they would want other members of the National Association of Letter Carriers to see who she is.

(tape off a few minutes)

MR. DAVIS: Oh, yes, I forgot to mention the trucks that I owned possibly during the war. When the different automobile factories were making material for the war, the Post Office Department was told to rent whatever trucks or vehicles that they could get... automobiles or trucks. It so happened that I had a school bus that I had bought from the county and used for my band. When the superintendent saw the bus, he asked if I would let them use it at the post office until they could get their truck repaired. Well, it so happened that the truck was in such a bad fix that it took them a long, long time to get it repaired. Since I would

only use the bus to take my players in the band off when I wasn't at work, it would be a nice thing. I told them that I would let them use it. After about two months when I thought it would be over the superintendent came back and asked me, "Why don't you bid, make a bid, of what you think you can come out at the prices of things now?"

Well, I had paid cash for the bus so I didn't owe anything on it and I had a 1946 model car that I had bought and I didn't owe anything on it, so I agreed to let them use the bus. Then they asked me about the car, and I said, "Okay." So, whatever I was getting off of the use of the car and bus, would be velvet. I did very well with it until I got the contract.

Then one of the members of Branch 516, one that I had gone out of my way to help, was the first to go tell the superintendent he couldn't drive the truck, that the bus was too awkward. So I had been by the Dodge place; the salesman promised to give me two station wagons. That was what I really had in mind to do away with the bus anyway. He was going to give me a good price, so instead of getting two station wagons he gave me one, and I bought a truck from McIntyre. The Post Office Department used my trucks, used what I had and then they didn't need them any more. I still had the jump on expenses because I didn't owe anything.

MRS. GREENE: Which McIntyre is this you speak of?

MR. DAVIS: That was J. L. McIntyre, the man who

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

operated the Delta Bus Company, which was on North Broadway at that time. So, then, I found the next thing in going back to the Dodge place that they would sell me four trucks and give me the car as a fleet buyer. They would also get another saving if I would go up to Dearborn, Michigan and take my drivers. They would give me a hundred dollars for each truck. It helped. It's all right so far as dealing with the local truck people. I had it made there, but then I went to Mr. Henry Arthur Garrett, a mechanic, and I bought an extra truck that I would leave at his place if anything happened to the trucks, that they needed repair or something, then we'd drive out that extra truck and bring back the next one. That went on fine. I did all right with it.

When I found that the drivers abused the trucks so, pure abuse, and stealing from me, I cut that out. I had one driver who left out in the truck to go to work. He was tearing Uncle Sam up as well as me. When he left the post office, instead of going to work he went by the bank to transact some business. Then he went down another street and wasted some time, and wasted time at another place. I just decided that it was time for me to let the trucking business alone.

I saw one of the drivers, drive the truck up to the curb and just try to spin the wheels over the curb, wouldn't go to the regular bridge. I don't know what his idea was trying to make the truck jump that distance. Owing to that kind of abuses I decided that it just wasn't worth it.

MRS. GREENE: Mr. Davis, you have had many, many experiences during your life.

MR. DAVIS: I sure have. Yes.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by Vivian Broom)