

*Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2011*

Interviewee: Mrs. Barbara H. Vickers
Interview Date: Tuesday, September 13, 2011
Location: Meeting room, Hilton Bayfront Hotel, St. Augustine, FL
Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer: John Bishop
Length: 58:57
Note: Dr. Robert B. Hayling sat in on the interview as an observer.

Joseph Mosnier: Mrs. Vickers, you good? Okay.

John Bishop: We're rolling. We're rolling.

JM: Um, today is Tuesday, the 13th of September, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I'm with videographer John Bishop in St. Augustine, Florida, specifically at the Bayfront Hilton, where we are recording several oral history interviews for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History [and Culture] and the Library of Congress. We also have with us today here in the room where we're recording Dr. Robert Hayling, um, who will also be a series interviewee, and we're especially pleased to have the chance to be with you today, Mrs. Vickers. This is Mrs. Barbara Henry Vickers. Um, and we are here to talk about the history, um, of St. Augustine and, and we will

bring that story all the way up, um, through the current year because, of course, we'll talk about the monument. Um, so let me just say thank you and, and we appreciate your sitting down.

Barbara Vickers: It is a pleasure.

JM: Um, I know, Ms. Vickers, that, um, that you have, uh, you came up in, in St. Augustine. Could you, could you talk just a little bit about, um, your family and your childhood in the city?

BV: Yes, I was, uh, raised in St. Augustine and I went to a parochial school, Catholic school, St. Benedict, which wasn't too far from my home, and I finished that school in the eighth grade and I went to Excelsior High School, which was the only black school, high school for blacks, and, uh, I graduated from Excelsior.

JM: Mmm hmm. And you would have graduated about 194 –

BV: Um, '42 from high school.

JM: '42, yep.

BV: Yes, 1942, and '38, '39 from parochial school.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Um, forgive me one quick interruption. I forgot to mention that we are not recording to the HD cards, correct? Okay, that is correct. Excuse me for that interruption. Um, can you tell me a little bit about your parents and did you have siblings?

BV: Well, my mother and father both did hotel work. In fact, my mother worked at a waitress here at this hotel, uh, way back. It was the Monson Hotel [actually, the Monson Motor Lodge] at that time.

JM: It was the Monson Hotel, that's right.

BV: Yeah. And she used to ride her bike. In fact, most people in St. Augustine rode bikes to work. She'd ride her bike here and my father worked a few doors down. It was the

Bennett Hotel and, uh, he was the maître d', which they called the headwaiter at that particular time. And he worked at that, but he had a little car they called "Rippie" and he drove the car. He was the only one in the family that had the car. The rest of the ladies had to ride their bikes. Even if it was raining, they had to ride their bikes because Daddy would just go his merry way. He didn't pick them up, but, uh, that's how they got back and forth. And at this particular hotel, uh, they served three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And, uh, in the morning I can remember Mother having, uh, the black, I think it was the black uniforms they wore. They had black for morning, I think, and white in the evening and they all had their little aprons and their little piece on top of the head. And, uh, I had my mother working here, my grandmother, and my aunt. All three of them.

JM: Ah, yeah, yeah.

BV: I happened to have found a picture the other day with my aunt on it, but I didn't find my mother, mmm hmm.

JM: Did you have brothers and sisters?

BV: I have, uh, one sister living. I lost my sister that was under me, uh, about a year and a half ago, maybe two years. Um, I was the oldest sister and Gwendolyn [Gwendolyn Duncan, president of the '40th Anniversary to Commemorate the Civil Rights Demonstrations, Inc. (40th ACCORD), a non-profit established 2003 to promote awareness of local movement history] was born. I was nine years old. So I'm nine years older than Gwendolyn, and Charlotte, the baby sister, I'm nineteen years older than that sister. So the two of us, we talk every day and, uh, we have a good relationship.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

BV: Yeah.

JM: Are there, um, are there important parts of, of how you thought about the city related to race and race relations that, um, you'd like to share in the years before we reach the 60s and –?

BV: Well, when I finished school, I couldn't finish fast enough and I couldn't get away from St. Augustine fast enough with the intention of never, never coming back again, only to visit my parents. Um, St. Augustine – [5:00]

JM: Tell me what, tell me what motivated that feeling of –

BV: Uh, St. Augustine was a racist, racist town and I was just tired of you go to the grocery store and if white people came in, then you'd have to get in the back of the line and wait 'til your turn and sometimes it would take quite awhile to get out of the, the store. And several times I'd have to get off the sidewalk because white people would not move and they would kind of spread out. So you would have to get off the sidewalk. And I just thought that if life was better anywhere, I would try to find a better life.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

BV: And, uh, it happened that way, but I ended up coming back, you know, later years after I understood life a little better.

JM: Yeah.

BV: And things weren't quite as bad.

JM: When did you, when did you move away?

BV: Uh, right after high school.

JM: Yeah.

BV: In, uh, the last of '42.

JM: Yeah.

BV: Mmm hmm, the last of '42.

JM: And you moved to?

BV: I moved to New York and I stayed there about, I imagine about four years and, um, they had, I had an urge of working in the shipyard during the War and, uh, they needed people to weld. So I went there and, um, they send you to school. I learned how to tack weld and I got this job on the ship and, uh, was doing the tack welding and, uh, it was nerve-wracking to me being from the South. They were all white men on the ship, and I guess it was my imagination, but they looked like they were the meanest people in the world when you would get on, and I would come with my little southern drawl, "good morning." And nobody answered. They were all too busy doing what they had to do. So I would sit there because if they could not fit a part, you know, with the blueprints, then I would have nothing to do but just sit and when they could fit a part, then they would call, "Tack," and then I would go and put it together. But eventually, um, I wore them down and eventually, we, I had them all laughing on the ship and they would say "good morning" to me before I could get on the ship because I never stopped saying "good morning," because I just was raised that way and you just say "good morning." It was the human thing to do.

And, um, when I left, I left to go to, uh, Seattle and, uh, I thought I was going to be welding there at Boeing's Aircraft and they were upset that I was leaving and, uh, we had that relationship and, uh, but when I got to Seattle, um, I found out that they weren't using me as a welder. They were using me as a mechanic help and I didn't quite like that as well. I just liked the welding, but, uh, I stayed and accepted that and I worked on the graveyard shifts, the night shift, because I'm a, don't like to get up early in the mornings. So I enjoyed that and, uh, I stayed there for quite awhile.

And one day, um, one night, this girlfriend of mine, uh, Corrine [Brown], who was my friend – and I would have her going from job to job because I didn't like the job, until she got tired and she said, uh, "You leave. I'm not leaving. I like this job." But when she said she would go to the shipyard and she enjoyed it, and then I said, "Let's go to Seattle." And she said, "Why? You get less money going to Seattle and we have a good job here." But I wanted to travel, see what Seattle was all about, and move around. I was nineteen, I think, at that time and, um, she said she'd go, but I got to the train station and no Corrine. And I sat there and I sat there and I was almost in tears and I said, "No, because she's coming. I know she'll be here." And, um, I knew one of the porters there from St. Augustine and he took my bags on early and he said, "It's time to go," and no Corrine.

So I got on the train and when I felt the train moving, then the tears did come, but later on, there was a telegram saying, uh, "Barbara Henry, Barbara Henry." And, uh, she had, she asked me to wait for her in Chicago, that she had missed the train. Uh, I was never so happy in all the days of my life. [10:00] Going out there, didn't know anybody, but I figured the two of us would be together. So anyway, when she got to Chicago, I got off and I took the El [the elevated train, in Chicago], to ride the El to see because I'd never been on the El before, you know, and I wanted to see what that was all about. And I came back and we went on to, to Seattle.

JM: Mmm hmm. When did you come back to St. Augustine?

BV: I came back to St. Augustine after I married Eddie Vickers. He was from St. Augustine and we had been dating off and on and, um, he had no intentions, no desire to do anything because he was just in love with St. Augustine. So I, um, he would go to Jersey every year, and was a, a bellhop. So this, this particular summer, he came over and decided that we would get married. I didn't discuss where we were going to live, but that night after we married

[laughs], he says, "When are we going to St. Augustine?" And of all the names in the world, St. Augustine? I said, "We're not going to St. Augustine." He says, "Oh yes, we are." So the marriage kind of soured a little there because I said, "I'm not going." So he gave me, uh, a week. He said he was leaving. He was coming back to St. Augustine and he gave me a week to come back. So, I, it was a hard decision to make and I had gotten a nice job and everything. And, uh, I came back and after that, uh, things broke out in St. Augustine with the civil rights.

JM: Do you remember what year it was when you came, when it was that you arrived back here approximately?

BV: Mmm, I guess I came back in the late fifties.

JM: Okay.

BV: Yeah, because it was about the sixties when I think Dr. Hayling had everything going.

JM: How did you first become, uh, acquainted with Dr. Hayling?

BV: Well, Dr. Hayling was a neighbor. He stayed across the street and, um, I'd see him coming and coming and I would go to the meetings, you know, the rallies and the meetings and whatnot, and he was asking for people to go to the different places for the sit-ins, the kneel-ins, and all these different things. So, uh, he hadn't said too much, but, uh, that night that Dr. King came, uh, Dr. Hayling told him that he needed people to go to the churches. And I don't know whether it was planned or not, but, uh, Dr. King looked at me in the church, of all people, and he said, "Young lady, will you go?" And I said yes and I thought to myself, "What did I say?"

JM: Just by chance, he called you out? Yeah.

BV: So that's what started me going to the kneel-ins and then the, the first kneel-in that I went to, uh, they wouldn't let us in the church. So the two young men, young white fellows, said

we'd have to go back to the office to report to Dr. Hayling, and that was a mistake. He says, "Well, go to another church." I'm thinking it's time to go home. I've done my duty. It's time to go home. And he said, "Well, my dear," that's his words, uh, "You just go to this church and that church." So, that's how I got involved and I didn't miss the meetings or anything. I was at all of the meetings and what was going on.

And, um, he, um, we were, we called ourselves the Scott Street Eleven. We was, it was on Scott Street and it's eleven houses on Scott Street. Every home had a particular job. It was, if it wasn't the sit-in, it was the kneel-in, the sleep-in, swim-in. They all had their particular job. So Julia Conway across the street from me, Purcell Conway's mother, she decided that, um, we were going to be a group and we had to protect Dr. Hayling. I don't know how we were going to protect him, but she, the west side boys came and they were in the trees and all around Dr. Hayling's house to protect him because I don't know. I don't think he had any nerves because he was out there in the street and knew the people were behind him. And I would just be so nervous. I'd say, "Well, why don't he get in that house and be quiet until the next day?" But he was always active.

So those boys were there and, uh, we formed this little network [15:00] that when the Klan came through our street, we would call each other and let each other know, and most of the time, we would, they'd say, "You'd better get down because they're shooting low." And a lot of times, we would cook from the refrigerator, open the refrigerator door and, uh, it, uh, it was just real scary and Dr. Hayling would be out there and I would be peeping and they would be peeping to make sure that he get in the house okay.

But, um, he was nervy because I remember one night, my aunt was sick and my, my car wouldn't start and I called his office and asked him if I could get a ride home and he says, "Well,

it'll be late, my dear." So it was late. I guess it was maybe like three o'clock in the morning, he called and he came to pick me up. And do you know? He did not go home. He went downtown in a red Volkswagen with the top going back. There I am sitting up there riding with him downtown, no cars on the street, though, and I said, "Dr. Hayling, where are you going?" And he says, "I have to make my night deposit, my dear."

JM: [Laughs]

BV: I told myself, "Night deposit. You may not be here the next morning." And I said, well, from that day to this, I have not had another ride with Dr. Hayling. That was enough for me that night. But, uh, but, he, um, he just would do what he had to do. And the night that they, um, shot, we had, we would collect, uh, food and the different ones. Like if I fixed something tonight, maybe two of us would fix something and make a meal for the boys that were protecting him and this particular night, I understand most of them went to sleep and they into Dr. Hayling's home and, I, I know you've heard that story about they killed –

JM: No, please, please.

BV: Oh, okay.

JM: Tell me how you remember that.

BV: Well, when I came home, um, there was an officer in the middle of Scott Street and he said, "You can't go in. There's been a shooting." So I said, "Well, I live on Scott Street." So he said, "Okay, well, go on in." So Julia came across the street and she said, he was a huge cop, and she says, "I gave fatso a chair so he could sit down because it looked like he was tired."

[Laughter]

BV: And I said, "Well, I wouldn't have given him anything because he probably was one of the ones that's been shooting through here."

JM: Yeah.

BV: But, um, anyway, they shot, um, Dr.'s dog, Madonna, and, uh, the boxer, and he was crazy about that dog because at night when he would come home, he would walk Madonna, out there walking Madonna. But, um, after that, he, he had friends and I guess he thought to ask us would they keep his children and until he could take them down to Tallahassee.

JM: Mmm.

BV: But, um, people, I don't know, I don't know whether they were afraid or what, but the next door neighbor, she said, "Bring the girls over and I'll keep them." And his wife was pregnant. She was pregnant from the third child and she had just gotten off the sofa where the bullets went through the sofa and, uh, then they refused to. I mean, we were all in danger. So you might as well just take the child. I mean, you weren't safe. Nobody was safe. And, uh, he did get the kids and I guess he took them to Tallahassee because you never know what he was going to do and, uh, one day I remember, he said that they were going to Tallahassee to talk to the governor and, uh, I said, "But why are you asking me to go? I don't need to, you know, go, whatever." He said, "Yeah, we need the different, uh, people from different churches." And I was Catholic. So we went and, um, that was another scary ride because, um, I was looking back. I just knew cars would be trailing us and was going to shoot because we had those incidents going to Butler's Beach, you know. They would run you off the road and just to intimidate you. And, uh, we went and we talked to the governor there and whatnot and, uh, it didn't do much then until, you know, later on when Dr. Hayling went to talk to Dr., uh, King –

JM: Yeah.

BV: About coming. But, um –

JM: How did you –? First let me ask just, just quickly, what were you and your husband doing for work then?

BV: For work?

JM: Yeah. [20:00]

BV: In New York or St. Augustine?

JM: No, when you came back here during this.

BV: When I came back here, I, um, was a beautician.

JM: Mmm hmm, okay.

BV: And, uh, I had my own salon at home that we fixed that and you could do, uh, you could be, uh, given papers to allow you to have it at home. And he worked at that particular time for a drive-in, uh, movie theater and, um, he, he was a gambler and I'll say a very good gambler because he always had the money when it was time. And I don't know, I just didn't like the idea that he didn't have any particular real job, even though he was paying the bills. So I confronted him about that and, uh, he said, why should I worry about that as long as I was being taken care of? But, um, Coach Calhoun, uh, Solomon Calhoun, they have a building in St. Augustine now that they named after him. He was my basketball coach during the time I was in high school. He had gotten him this job at the recreation center. So that's how he got to be a recreation director and had the Little Links and, uh, all of the kids. He was a father figure to kids and, uh, he would put kids before anybody, me too.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

[Laughter]

BV: And, and I would say, "Well, Vickers, what?" He'd say, "Well, I had to buy that little boy shoes." I said, "Well, why?" He said, "Because he wouldn't have shoes to play

softball,” or whatever. But he looked out for them and the mothers would come to him and ask him, “Where are the kids?” And he said, “Just go home. I’ll, I’ll get him home.” And he seemed to know where the kids would hang out and where they would be, and he would father them and scold them: “Okay, Coach. I won’t do it again.”

JM: Yeah.

BV: Yeah, so, um.

JM: I want to come back to that. I’m sorry. I kind of knocked you off the, the trajectory of the events on, on Scott Street. Um, but I asked about your employment partly to, to get a sense of how, how you managed through such a period of, of stress and tension, during that period of all that violence and prospective violence and the fear of violence, how you managed through that.

BV: I, I don’t know because, um, in the shop, uh, at one time, I had blankets up so you couldn’t see the light from the outside and, uh, most of the customers was afraid to come because they didn’t want to come and be caught out there and then something happened to them. The same with Doc [Robert Hayling] in his office, you know. His customers were afraid to go the office and whatnot. But it didn’t me too much because Vickers was a very good provider and he took care of me and I really didn’t have that to worry about. So if I didn’t have any customers, I, I didn’t need them, you know.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

BV: And, uh, and I just enjoyed my work anyway because I never got really paid for what I did because I, if I knew a family that couldn’t afford it and they’d have four or five kids for Easter, I wouldn’t charge the mother and, um, people would say, “Oh, I know you’re loaded with the traffic that you have.” Sometimes I wouldn’t have too much, and then the mothers

would come with their sad stories and they would bring back, and then I had some con people that would try to get over and tell you, "I left my money home. I'll bring it back." And you never see that until it's time to make another appointment. But I enjoyed my work. I couldn't have done it if I didn't have Vickers to take care of me.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

BV: Mmm.

JM: Um, did the Klan ever march openly down Scott Street?

BV: Did they op –

JM: The Klan march as a group down?

BV: No, no. They marched over in Lincolnville.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

BV: Yeah, but not on Scott Street. They came through there like bullies, you know, just shooting and showing their authority and just intimidating you because I remember one night, I was coming from one of the rallies and they were throwing, uh, rocks from upstairs, and, um, the cop had stopped me. He pulled over and he asked me did I have any weapons. So I said no. So he said, "Open the trunk." I opened the trunk and he got the, the wrench that you change the tire with and he said, "You do have a weapon." So I said, "Well, that's the tire wrench." He said, "It's still a weapon and I could arrest you." And it just, I mean, it just made you nervous, I mean, and he could. I mean, what could you do about it? If he said, "You're under arrest," you're just under arrest.

And, um, even with that, I still went back and forth every night and I had this little car that would break down on every corner and, uh, I'd have to get other people to help me [25:00], but it, it, I had a drive that I had to be there and I wanted to know what was going to happen next

and what was going to be done. Uh, other people could tell you, but you know how it goes when after two or three people tell you something, it's not the same. And Julia, my girlfriend across the street, she was good at that. She'd get it one way and it wouldn't even be [laughs] be that way. So I just, um, I just had to, had to be there. It was a drive because I felt like after, uh, Dr. Hayling went and asked Dr. King, he turned him down the first time, he wouldn't come, but when he finally got him here and that night he asked me about would I, uh, participate in the churches. I thought to myself, if there's going to be a change, this is the time and they need people. So you can't just sit there and wait for it to happen. You have to be a part. So that's why I did it.

I mean, I just, and, um, my sister, she says she was afraid. She didn't go, neither one of them. One of them, Gwen [Gwendolyn Duncan, president of the 40th ACCORD organization] was in Bethune-Cookman College in, um, Daytona [FL] and she didn't go because my grandmother, if she could keep you from going, she would do that and she would see it on TV and she'd say, "Why are they doing that?" She'd say, "Those white people will never let them eat with them." I'd say, "We don't want to eat with them. We want to be free. We want to be able to go to the restaurant, pay our money, and have the food, not taking it out the back door." She says, "But we've been doing that all these years." I said, "But it's time out for that." She says, "Well, you're going to kill me." I said, "Mama, you just have to die."

[Laughter]

BV: So, so they didn't bother me and after she did the same thing. She said, "You keep going out and I don't know whether you're going to come back safe and I, and I'll be dead when you come back." I said after, "Don't say that. You're sick and you know I'm going to say

you're going to die anyway. You're sick." I mean, she was terminally ill and I said, "I'm going." And I, I just, I don't know. I just felt like the time was right.

JM: Did you have children at the time?

BV: I have a son that I inherited from another marriage and, uh, he was five years old and he's thirty-five now.

JM: Mmm hmm.

BV: He is the best thing that ever happened to me.

JM: But you did not have children at that time?

BV: No.

JM: Okay.

BV: No.

JM: Yeah, yeah. So you weren't also looking over your shoulder at your children in the midst of all this.

BV: Yeah.

JM: Yeah, yeah. How did you, um, how do you recall the, what are the memories that come most vividly to mind when you think about some of the protests, some of the church visits, some of the, all that happened here?

BV: Um, some of the people, I think they wanted to do things, but they had their, uh, peers and their, their garden clubs and this and they, they couldn't afford to be a part or let them know, even if they would do little things for black people behind their backs or something like that. And then there were some that were just pure devils. They were just evil people.

JM: Yeah.

BV: And I don't know and I just, uh, well, I never wanted to do housework anyway. I'm not a housekeeper and I never will be. It's too late now. But, um, to work for them and to see how they would talk to people and you would have to go to the back door to get the paper from the front. If the paper's on the front porch, you still had to go around the back, come in the house, to go to the front porch to pick the paper up when you could just pick the paper up and go in there. I don't know, just, and that bothered me. I just didn't want to live that kind of life and I thought, you know, getting away from here, like going to New York and I did factory work when I first went there. I was always doing things with my hands and did factory work and, uh, that kept me from, you know, working in, in the homes and what-not, and, uh –

JM: Yeah.

BV: I don't know.

JM: Let me, let me ask you about this and, and you might be, you might –

JB: Joe, let's pause for a second.

JM: Okay. We're going to take a quick break.

[Break in conversation]

JM: Give me one sec.

JB: We're rolling.

JM: Okay. Let me take another shot and we'll, and we'll see if, if there's more to bring in. Is that okay?

JB: Okay, okay.

JM: Yeah? Um, I want to ask. I think you might be able to share some perspective [30:00] that we probably can't get otherwise in our visit to St. Augustine. I, I wonder if you

could, being a neighbor right across the street, I wonder if, if you could talk a little bit about Mrs. Hayling and how you observed her bear up through all this.

BV: Um, Mrs. Hayling was a very quiet person. She didn't make waves and you didn't see that much of her. Only when she had the two little girls and she brought them over across the street to get their hair done or something like that, but, uh, most of the time, she was in the house. I, I don't know if that was because of the danger of being outside or she was just that type of person, but you couldn't meet a sweeter person. She was just low key, very sweet.

JM: Did she, um, that, that's a tremendous, obviously a tremendous level of stress for a family to face that kind of threat of violence. Men obviously are coming to help protect the house and all. Do you have any other kind of thoughts or recollections about all of that, all that the family had to face in those ways with Dr. Hayling being attacked and beaten, all those sorts of things?

BV: Yeah. I didn't, um, didn't see it in her because I didn't see her, you know, that much, but I know it had to because it, he worried *me* and I'm across the street from him and just a neighbor. So you can imagine what a wife would feel not knowing whether he's going to even come home or not, and then when he gets home, then he goes down the street with the boxer dog. So she had to, it had to upset her, yeah. I know I went to Ft. Lauderdale one time. It was during the Christmas and, um, Gwen said, "That's Mrs. Hayling." So we wanted to speak to her. By the time we'd get close to her, she'd cross the street and Gwen would turn around and come around and we'd get close to her and she'd cross the street. So I said, "Ms. Hayling, Ms. Hayling, this is Barbara from St. Augustine." And she stopped and she said that her brother, I think it's her brother, had just been robbed at the filling station and, uh, uh, was it a cousin or

someone had just been robbed at the filling station and she was trying to get the dog back home.

I guess she didn't want to go through no more drama or whatnot.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

BV: So.

JM: Did you, uh, did you have any, um, further kind of interaction with Dr. King or with
-?

BV: No. The first time that Dr. King came, um, they said Dr. King was coming and, um, Dr. Hayling and all had set up with the different businesses to meet him and I was president of the beauticians association, but I didn't have time for Dr. King. I, there was a convention going on in Daytona. So I had to go to this convention and I asked Queenie Mitchell, McCall now, if she would go in my stead and represent the beauticians. And she said, "Well, you're not going to stay and meet Dr. King?" Well, he wasn't really famous then, you know, like Dr., Dr. King now, you know, and he was doing wonderful things, but to me, it was more important for me to go to this beauticians' thing. So then we he got famous and everything, I said, "Oh I missed the boat. I'll never have that chance again."

But he did come back and then that night that I did meet him, he was supposed to be at the St. Paul Church, they told me, and I was late because one of my customers made me late and they said, "No room in St. Paul. You have to go to First Baptist." I said, "No, I want to go with Dr. King." They said, "Well, he would be both places." So I went to First Baptist and, uh, Rev. Abernathy was there and, uh, then Dr. King came over after that and that's when I met him and then we all had a chance to shake his hand and everything after everything was over and his hands was just like cotton, just as soft. But, um, yeah, and then he, he never forgot a name.

They said that, um, once he got your name, if he saw you a year from now, he could call you by name, mmm hmm. But that was quite an experience, yeah.

JM: How did you, um, how did you respond to being turned away at the, at the kneel-ins?

BV: Um, one of them, well, I expected it and, uh, knowing St. Augustine, I knew, but I went to the Grace Methodist Church and there was an insurance man that came every Monday [35:00] and that was his living. And he came and I said, "Now he comes to my door every morning to get my money." And his feet looked like they was that long. I know they weren't that long, but when he put his feet right down, I was kneeling, and he put his feet like that, it just looked like it was bigfoot. And I just knew, I said, "Oh, if he kicked me down the steps." I was in horror and I said, because I know what he's thinking: "the nerve of her thinking that she can come in here and worship with us." And, um, that Monday, this was that Sunday, that Monday, he was at my door and I said, "I don't believe you are at my door." And he says, "Well, what?" I said, "And you, who were there at your church," because you're not supposed to talk to white people like that, but I said, "If you don't get away from here and don't you ever come back here again." I was, it was Metropolitan Life Insurance way back then and I didn't think about canceling the insurance or turning it in or anything. I just dropped it, didn't worry about it anymore. It just upset me so.

But, um, other than that, at the other places, it was just something expected. Like, um, my niece was saying she saw this movie, *The Help* [Hollywood film in current release in the U.S., on the theme of the lives of black domestic workers in the Jim Crow South]. And she said, "Did people live like that?" It was about the maids and how they talked to the maids. I said, "Well, that happened." But she said, "Well, how did you do, do that? I don't think I could take that." I said, "It was a way of life." I said, "If you had to stand in line and you had babies to

feed, you had to get baby food, you just moved out the line and move on in when you could get the baby food.” I said, “That’s why you all say I’m a fanatic about the civil rights.”

But it just, I just felt good to know that, uh, we were going to have a chance and, you know, other people wouldn’t have to go through all that, the kids of today, and, um, like I said with the voting rights and what people went through. And I ask the kids now that can vote did they vote? “No, ma’am. No, ma’am.” I just, well, I just can’t believe it. Like my sister told me with the monument, I said, “I can’t believe the people are not donating and participating, trying to help get the monument in.” She said, “Because they don’t feel the way you do about the monument.” The monument, it just meant the world to me because it recognized all of those people that came here that you hear nothing about. Oh, Dr. Hayling and, uh, Andy Young [former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young], Dr. King, yes, but they couldn’t have done it alone. They needed everybody who participated and they put their lives on the line. They could have been killed. Some of those college students left college. Their parents paid for them to go to college. It might have been the last money they had to send them to college and they’re in St. Augustine fighting for civil rights, and they were white. They didn’t have to do that. And I thought, “What other way could you do to recognize those people?”

JM: How did the idea first come to you and when?

BV: [Sighs] I guess it was about, about ten years ago and, um, other people were talking about the monuments and I had gone with these different groups and they didn’t, I didn’t mention the foot soldiers. I just said a monument, but they were thinking about a King monument, or whatever, and then when they said, I went ahead and I did this with the monument and thing and they were trying to do, they were not trying to do a foot soldiers monument; they were not. They were trying to do a monument and nothing is preventing them from putting up

the kind of monument that they wanted. I didn't want that. I talked to Dr. Hayling. Guess what he said? "Well, my dear, can't you just get a plaque or a, a marker?" I said, "No, I want a monument." [speaking as Hayling] "Do you know what that entails?" I said, "Yes, hard work, but we're going to get a monument." He said and then he would call, "My dear, I wish you would just settle. You could just put a plaque on the ground." "Dr. Hayling, we are going to have a monument."

JM: How did you begin to organize towards that goal? [40:00]

BV: It happened, uh, the Council on Aging, the, uh, Cathy Brown.

JM: The, the which?

BV: Uh, Cathy Brown was the director.

JM: Cathy Brown, yeah.

BV: Uh huh. And she wanted to, uh, organize a mayor's senior advisory committee to help the city, uh, know what they wanted to do. So she organized it and the president, something happened and he quit. So then they said, "Well, maybe this won't work." I said, "Yes, it will if you want it to work." So then they made me president, which they shouldn't have done that because I wasn't going to give up, and they made me president and I made it work. And I went one day and she, the, uh, secretary said, "Well, there's no meeting today because nobody signed up." So I said, "Well, when did you have people to sign up? I mean, it's free to everybody to come and do." I said, "Don't do it do that way." But what happened was, the mayor was about to switch and thing and they said, "Well, how do you know we're going to have the same mayor?" I said, "We don't, but we do it until we have another mayor."

So we did this and I went to Cathy one day. It, it just kept, I just kept thinking and thinking about the foot soldiers and I told her what my dream was. She says, "That's good," she

said, "But if you do a Martin Luther King, uh, monument, you'll have better participation. The community will rally and you'll get it done in no time." I said, "But that's not what I want." She said, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "The foot soldiers monument, the people who really put their lives on the line and what-not." So she says, "Well, I don't know whether you can get money like that." I said, "But I can try if you think." So she said, "Well, you ask Gardner." George Gardner was the mayor. "Uh, if not, then you can organize your own group." So he said he wasn't getting enough participation. So he says we can switch over.

So then we came up with the name "St. Augustine Foot Soldiers" and then we went in to get the 501[3][c] [she intended to describe 501[c][3], a non-profit organization] and we got it done. And one day, uh, this lady, Nena Vreeland, she called and she says, "Barbara, I understand you're trying to do this monument." She said, "What does it take, uh, to get it started?" So I said to myself, "Now if she's going to give a donation, just give it. What, what does it take to get started? She's not going to give that." And I said, "Well, we have a sculptor and it's going to take at least twenty thousand for him to get started. She says, "You got it." I was, she, she says she thought I had fallen out, she says, because I didn't say anything for two or three minutes.

JM: [Laughs]

BV: Honestly, but I was so shocked and then after then, you know, different ones would send in money and send money like that, and then my grandson says, um, he works for UPS and he says, "Nonna, I'm going to try to get a grant from UPS." And, uh, so he did and, uh, we were emailing back and forth and I was doing all the wrong things and they were trying to get it on my volunteer hours. And at that particular time, I had volunteer hours galore because I'd volunteer anywhere there was to volunteer. And, um, he said that he thinks they could get it and they were

going to give us five thousand, but when the deal went down, they gave seven thousand and four hundred, I think it was. And I said, "Now I know there's no stopping now and Dr. Hayling, there will not be a plaque."

JM: [Laughs]

BV: And money kept coming in.

JM: What was your overall project budget, approximately?

BV: What did we have?

JM: What did you think you had to get all together?

BV: Uh, around, well, at first we thought it was about sixty thousand, but all together, it run about seventy thousand dollars, uh huh.

JM: Yeah. And how did you get, how did you get from twenty-seven thousand and change all the way there?

BV: Okay. Uh, we had the, uh, the sculptor come to sign, um, the contract and we had that in the plaza and, uh, he signed and then we gave him the twenty thousand dollars to begin. So this man walks up to me, Phil McDaniels, and he said, "Barbara," he said, um, "You almost there?" I said, "No, we need [45:00] another, at least another twenty thousand dollars." He said, "Okay." He says, um, "I'll check with you in a couple of days." He says, "We'll get that in one night." One night?

So he called and he asked me to meet him to the lawyers, uh, lawyer Canan, Patrick Canan, and he, um, was excited and I told him about the civil rights story and why I was interested in getting the foot soldiers and what it meant and this, that, and the other. And he was all gung-ho. So he had his secretary to pull out a list, get on the phone, and, and invite them for a hundred dollars a head. And, um, he said, "All I want you to do is get some of the people who

took part in the Civil Rights Movement to be there that night and talk to the people and get me a little bit a music,” and that idea that got Doug Carn to play. And Freddie Thompson, Freddy Thompson was one of the ones that, um, uh, was under the hedges with me when they, uh, beat Andy Young that night and we were down up under the hedges that, that night and the rocks kept coming. So he had a good story to tell and anyway, that night, uh, Phil raised twenty-four thousand and it looked like the money was just, it was just coming.

And I was so upset and I kept telling my sister, she said, “I don’t understand why you’re upset. This is your obsession.” She says, “You can’t expect other people to feel the way you feel.” Because I felt like every church, every black church in St. Augustine would have been there to help and they weren’t. We got one black church, the poorest church in St. Augustine that has very few members, they sent a hundred dollars, not another black church.

JM: Why do you think not?

BV: I don’t know. Then the American Legion, I had been behind them and they didn’t do anything, but when Phil invited them, then they came through with their money. So –

JM: Let me ask you about – I’m sorry.

JB: I’m going to pause for a minute.

JM: Okay.

[Break in conversation]

JB: We’re back.

JM: Okay. We’re back after a short break. Ms. Vickers, how, I want to ask a, this is a complicated question, or, or, or a straightforward question with a complicated answer. So I hope you’ll take some time and, and help fill in all the, the, the complexity of it. Um, St. Augustine had done very, very little over the years to, to document in a public way its civil rights

experience. In fact, many people would say that they did everything they could to kind of erase that history.

BV: Mmm hmm.

JM: In a public sense. And here you want to bring a very prominent civil rights monument onto the very central plaza that has architecturally kind of defined the city, the heart of the city over its long, long history. Um, how did you navigate through that and what kind of reaction did you receive?

BV: Well, what happened, we went to the city commission meeting with a proposal. Um, there were two other groups that had gone there and asked permission to do a monument. They didn't say foot soldier monument. They wanted to do a monument and the two groups were feuding and the city commission for them to get together, come back, and then they would, you know, see what they could do about it. So, um, I was in one of the groups. So I left that group and I went to the other group and tried to organize something to do the monument and, uh, they said that, um, it was their idea and they had to do this and we had to go under their umbrella and whatnot. So, uh, the people that I had with me that, uh, that had money and they were ready to, you know, put out money. They, uh, they said, "I don't think this is going to work." So then I said well and that's when I went on with, with Cathy and did the other. But like I said, they still have their, uh, chance to do what they want to do.

JM: Oh sure, sure, sure. How about what is your sense of the, of the city government's reaction to the whole process now completed?

BV: Um, the city was very slow and, um, they didn't help because I thought that maybe that they were going to participate in things and, uh, uh, city commissioner Errol Jones, [50:00] he said that he had five thousand dollars allotted to him to do work downtown.

JM: And let me say for the tape, excuse me, he is African American.

BV: Mmm hmm.

JM: Yeah.

BV: And that he would give us that, but then it boiled down to the city would use it, you know, not just give it. So they did the prep work and whatever for the monument thing. That was at the last minute after everything was done and, um, they did it that way and then the following month, they did the walkway for, uh, Andy Young with the footsteps [the Andrew Young Crossing] and they paid for that, uh.

JM: The city paid for that part.

BV: The city paid for that, yeah. So it's a, it's a lot in St. Augustine that I still don't understand, you know, but I can say that when I was having problems, I got good rapport from both the mayor and the city manager and the lawyer because there, there were some law things about the law and whatnot and, uh, I can't say anything against that. But St. Augustine as a whole, it still has a long way to go. I'll, I'll put it that way.

JM: Yeah. The money, did any much at all in the end come from the white business community?

BV: The money that we raised?

JM: Yeah.

BV: Practically all of it. We got very little from the black community, yeah.

JM: So –

BV: Now we got small donations, you know, from individuals and whatnot.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

BV: But, uh, most of our, uh, major donations and things. Now Hank Thomas –

JM: Yeah.

BV: That was with the Freedom Riders.

JM: Freedom Riders.

BV: He [coughs], he gave us a sizeable donation and, um.

JM: But say Phil McDaniels is, is white?

BV: Yes.

JM: Yeah and the most –

BV: And McCann.

JM: And?

BV: Canan.

JM: Canan is white and, and the lawyers that they gathered together then were the, the white attorneys mostly.

BV: Mmm hmm.

JM: Yeah, yeah, interesting, yeah.

BV: Yeah.

JM: I was about to ask one thing and it's just slipped my mind. Um, oh, I know. The, the, the, I have to ask and I'm very interested, how did it feel on the day that you did the formal installation?

BV: I think I just lost it.

JM: [Laughs]

BV: I mean, it just, it's happening, I said, and I, my, my family came. I had my family from Ft. Lauderdale. I had twelve altogether that came and, uh, they said I didn't seem nervous, but I was nervous and, um, when it all happened and everybody spoke and they called me to

speaking, I [laughs], I just was lost for words and I just, I was tired. I was tired because when my family came, it takes a lot out of you and I was already tired from going through with these others. And I just was low keel. I didn't even talk to Doc [Robert B. Hayling] that night much. You know, the people were there. I just set. I was, I was just elated.

Dr. Robert Hayling: On the program, on the program when it was time for her to speak at the unveiling and all.

BV: [Laughs]

JM: Dr. Hayling is, is –

RH: She just, she, she gave a hand wave and everything and everybody clapped and so forth.

JM: I don't think the microphone can probably pick that up so let me just, Dr. Hayling was just observing that, um, at the ceremony when, when, when Ms. Vickers was called to speak, she just sort of waved her hand and the crowd, rather than, she was so moved and, and the crowd responded with applause, yeah.

BV: Yeah.

JM: It, it seems –

RH: Now what she has left out, she has tremendous organizational ability.

JM: Mmm hmm, mmm hmm.

RH: She doesn't take no for an answer.

JM: Mmm.

RH: And she will get on her telephone and work through her group.

JM: Yeah.

RH: She mentioned the, um, agency on aging and so forth, the council and all.

JM: Yeah. Dr. Hayling, may, may I ask you about this tomorrow when we do a session just because I know the microphone is just not going to get you over there and it doesn't really do justice when I –

RH: Oh I understand.

JM: I feel a little bad when I have to repeat because I'm not doing you justice.

RH: No problem, no problem.

JM: But Dr. Hayling is making the point really crediting Ms. Vickers with, with, with excellent organizational skills and, and real commitment and real, um, uh, determination to see it through.

RH: Resolve.

JM: Yeah, to get to, to get to the result.

JB: Joe, can we take a [clears throat] take a short break? I have to use the men's room.

JM: Sure. We'll take a short –

[break in conversation]

JB: Okay, we're rolling.

JM: Okay. We're back on after a break. Ms. Vickers, I want to invite you to share, um, any final thoughts, but one last question from me before we, before we do that. Um, my, my own personal sense of the monument's significance is, is that of an outsider's. I haven't spent any time in St. Augustine in my, in my life. Um, and coming here and thinking about this history [55:00] since it's kind of the work that I do, it seems to me a quite significant thing that you've done to, to give that, all of this history a, a physical presence through a piece of art like that, that will be here now and help define the city now. And I wonder, I wonder if, if it feels to

you that, that maybe there will be some, this might have long and important implications for the city over the years to come, you might hope. I, I –

BV: I hope.

JM: Yeah.

BV: Mmm hmm. Yeah, I hope.

JM: Yeah. Any, any, um, any final things that you might want to offer? We've, we've obviously just moved fairly quick, quickly through a lot of history and, um, a story, a theme, an issue, anything final perspective that you would like to share?

BV: Um, doing this monument, um, it took years and I met people that was working on the committee and, uh, it changed my perspective a little with white people that, that I know they all are not the same. You know that. And knowing what you've been through, you have some kind of bitter taste and you figure, well, later on they're going to change. You're going to find out their true colors. And, um, well some I did, but, um, it has brought closeness to some of the people that took part in the organization.

Um, doing the civil rights monument, meeting Dr. Hayling, and all these years, you know, and we're still friends. It, it means a lot that you know these people, you know. And I don't know. Um, like his brother now, he never gives up and I thought maybe after leaving St. Augustine that that would be it for him, that he would have had enough, but I think it will go with him the rest of his life and he feels the same thing, the way I do, that there's still not enough done. There's still so much to do. I can't do it all. He can't do it all. But we can still try and try to keep things going, keep the young people motivated, the ones you can. There's some kids that you'll never reach, but there are some and if you don't help but one or two and make them see the significance in our forefathers, what they went through with, and I was reading something

one day about downtown and the plaza. Black people were caught after dark in the plaza. They were, they beat them. I mean, that's just ridiculous, but people lived through that and my grandmother used to tell me stories about, you know, how the people would come in your homes and pull your, uh, siblings out, take them out and hang them and all that. And I can't blame her for feeling the way she did. I mean, those people lived through that. I just heard it. I and I'm thinking I lived through something? No, no, but if I can help to make a difference, I'm still ready. Eighty-eight and ready to go [laughs].

JM: It's a, it's a real honor and privilege to be with you. Thank you so much for sharing, sharing this interview with us.

BV: You're very welcome.

JM: Thank you.

BV: Thank you.

[Recording ends at 57:58]

END OF INTERVIEW