ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

EDYTHE B. HESLIP AND MARJORIE PRYOR

An Interview Conducted
4 August 1990

Interviewer:
Vivienne Malone-Mayes

Waco and McLennan County Project

Baylor University
Institute for Oral History

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE FOR ORAL HISTORY

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

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ORAL HISTORY MEMOIR

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE FOR ORAL HISTORY

Interviewees: Edythe B. Heslip
Marjorie Pryor

Date: 4 August 1990

Place: Heslip home
Waco, Texas

Interviewer: Vivienne Malone-Mayes

HESLIP AND PRYOR INTERVIEW NO. 1

VIVIENNE MALONE-MAYES: This interview is being held in the home of Mrs. Edythe B. Heslip. Heslip, H-e-s-l-i-p. With her is her sister, Mrs. Marjorie Pryor. Pryor, P-r-y-o-r. Again, I repeat, the date is August 4, 1990. Both Mrs. Heslip and Mrs. Pryor were nieces, I believe, of Mr. and Mrs. E. G. Boykins. Mr. Boykins appears many times in many interviews whenever you begin with Bridge Street because he had a funeral home on Bridge Street, and this was one of the most outstanding and most well-known businesses and most long enduring businesses in the city in terms of the funeral home business. First, I'd like for you to know what relationship they were to Mr. Boykins. What was your relationship? They are both sisters so they had the same relationship.

EDYTHE B. HESLIP: E. G. Boykins, which stands for Euwart Gladstone Boykins, was my uncle by marriage. He was married to my father's sister, Mrs. Pauline Boykins.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, Miss Pauline, what was her maiden name?

HESLIP: Pauline Boyd Boykins.

MALONE-MAYES: Pauline Boyd Boykins. Now, how did you happen to know him?

HESLIP: Well, my father lived in a little town called Coalgate, Oklahoma, and our mother died when I was five and my sister was seven. We stayed there with our

grandmother until we became ten or eleven and when she had a stroke. The school in this little town did not have a high school. Students would have to ride the bus to Atoka, Oklahoma, to go to high school. Our father was working, and he did not want us to ride the bus because we may get home before he could. And so his sister asked him to send us to Texas. He decided to send us to his sister, Mrs. Boykins. Mrs. Pauline Boykins and her husband had never been able to bear children, but had always had a love and a desire for children. And so they took us in. And that's how we came to Waco, Texas.

MALONE-MAYES: And you were about ten or eleven?

HESLIP: I was about eleven. My sister came a year before I did.

MARJORIE PRYOR: I was eleven when I came. You came a year after I did. So you started East Waco Elementary School, so you must have been about ten years old.

MALONE-MAYES: Uh-huh. All right, and so from that point on you spent the rest of your growing up years—you were reared by Mr. and Mrs. E. G. Boykins.

HESLIP: That's right. They wanted to adopt us, but our father never would give them that privilege. He would not give us up for adoption, so we just sort of lived with them and they claimed us as their own, you know.

MALONE-MAYES: Right, and so that means that you did have firsthand observation of many things that took place in the Boykins family. First—and also, you had here—I'd like to make mention of these articles that appeared on Mr. E. G. Boykins. That if we can refer to the *Waco Times-Herald*, Waco, Texas, Friday evening, January 15, 1971, which is about how close to his death?

HESLIP: He died in 1972.

MALONE-MAYES: He died in 1972. And this—the title under his picture, the caption, says, "E. G. Boykins, a funeral director for half a century." So, for fifty years. And this article can be looked up in the morgue at the *Waco Tribune-Herald* now. It was, of

course, the *Waco Times-Herald* is—was the evening edition of the *Tribune-Herald*. And this article tells, and that you've probably have heard him tell stories, of his childhood, and how he became involved in the funeral home business.

HESLIP: He was playing ball at one of the neighborhood places, like all boys will get out and play ball and a Phillips Funeral Home attendant stopped him and asked him to go with him to go pick up the body of a deceased person.

MALONE-MAYES: Excuse me one minute. Now what was Phillips?

HESLIP: Undertaker of a funeral home. That was known as Phillips Undertakers.

MALONE-MAYES: Where were they located?

HESLIP: They were located here in Waco, Texas.

MALONE-MAYES: But you don't know—

HESLIP: But I don't know whether they were on Bridge Street.

MALONE-MAYES: I just thought they may have been one, but you're not sure.

HESLIP: No.

PRYOR: I think they probably were on South Second Street—

MALONE-MAYES: Could have been.

PRYOR: —because I think there were a few business establishments there. Seems that I recall that it was South Second Street. (break in recording)

MALONE-MAYES: We've covered quite a bit, but I can still go back. First, we will have to go back to his—when he connected up with Dennis & Boykins. We stopped off where Mr. Boykins helped the attendant pick up the remains. So we're going to have to go back to his first—where he worked first and his apprenticeship and when he became licensed and these type things.

HESLIP: He started with Phillips Undertaking Company which W. L. Dennis was managing. His salary was a dollar per week. And in 1920, he bought one-half interest in the Jones & Arvis Undertaking Company.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, at that point's where I wanted to know where he got the money from to buy the one-half interest.

HESLIP: His mother had lost her husband and had some insurance, and she gave her son all of the money from the insurance to go into business.

MALONE-MAYES: But this husband was not his father.

HESLIP: No, it was his stepfather.

MALONE-MAYES: His stepfather, and his name was?

HESLIP: Last name was Johnson, the first name was William.

MALONE-MAYES: Okay, this man's name was Johnson, and his father, Boykins, what happened to him?

HESLIP: His mother and father were divorced. They separated when he was very young, four or five years young.

MALONE-MAYES: Four or five years old. All right, now another thing I think we mentioned was how he received—well, let's move on to how long—you don't have any idea the duration of time he spent with Jones. He bought out the Jones & Boykins—

HESLIP: Jones & Boykins Undertaking Company in 1920, when he bought a half interest. Then in 1923, he bought out Jones and changed the name to Boykins Funeral Home. And on April 19, 1924, he and W. L. Dennis got together and formed a partnership known as Dennis & Boykins Undertakers, and that was the first location with the Bridge Street—first location was on Bridge Street.

MALONE-MAYES: And this is where they were known as Dennis & Boykins and the first location of Dennis & Boykins Funeral Home was on Bridge Street on the side opposite the Mecca Drug Store.

HESLIP: That's right.

MALONE-MAYES: They were across the street from the Mecca, but about midway you told me, I think, the block.

HESLIP: That's right.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, you said that you do remember—Mrs. Pryor remembered especially, you remember slightly, that you did visit this location.

HESLIP: Yes, I did.

MALONE-MAYES: And you also said you came earlier, even before you began to live here.

HESLIP: (both talking at once) That's right. Even before we moved to Waco we'd come down with our dad.

MALONE-MAYES: Right, yeah.

HESLIP: That's where the establishment was then, on Bridge Street, across from the Mecca Drug Store. And later it was renovated and enlarged and was moved across the street where there was a more suitable location for a funeral home.

MALONE-MAYES: And what were the reasons why they wanted to move across the street?

HESLIP: I think the traffic on that side of the street was a little too busy for the serenity they needed for a funeral home. At that time, there was a street—an alley behind the establishment which was called Death Alley, and that certainly was not in a desirable location because there were so many confrontations going on that the people who would be coming for a wake or to visit or to view their loved one's remains, you know, didn't

find it safe. So I think they were very happy to move across the street. They were still on the same street, but it was certainly a more suitable location.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, let's go back to your relationship with the funeral home. After you moved, you began to live with the Boykins. You leave school, and proceed from there.

HESLIP: Often when we left school at the end of the day, we'd have to go to the funeral home to wait because my aunt attended most all of the funerals that her husband had charge of. And we would go there and wait until she was ready to go home. So we would walk from Moore High School up First Street, South First Street, and go to Bridge Street and wait there until we were ready to be carried home or wherever we were to go that afternoon.

MALONE-MAYES: And he would provide your transportation.

HESLIP: Yes.

MALONE-MAYES: He provided travel to take you home.

HESLIP: And if he knew he was going to be on a funeral and wouldn't be around, he would leave word with a driver to pick us up and take us to our aunt's house in East Waco on Elm Street.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, what was the name of your aunt?

HESLIP: Eula Shackles. She lived in the old Boyd homeplace, 1007 Elm Street. That property still is in the family, but it's rent property now.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, that's Mrs. Boykins—at this time was she—before she married Mr. Boykins she was—

HESLIP: A teacher in Crawford, Texas.

MALONE-MAYES: She was a teacher in Crawford, Texas.

HESLIP: Yes.

MALONE-MAYES: But once she married Mr. Boykins, she did not work anymore.

HESLIP: That's right.

MALONE-MAYES: She never learned how to drive. Consequently, she was always chauffeured around. I know you wouldn't dare refer to that in those terms. (laughs)

HESLIP: But I enjoyed that.

PRYOR: Did you tell her about your experience at Goldstein's?

HESLIP: I had been to Goldstein's shopping. After I finished shopping, I entered the waiting room there at Goldstein's, but blacks weren't supposed to sit there. As I sat down to wait for the car, a white lady ran out and hollered, "Nigger's out here! Nigger's out here!" A clerk came and told me I was supposed to get up, and I told him, "You get the manager." When the manager came and told me I was supposed to get up, I told him that there wasn't black or white on those dollars I had spent and I wasn't getting up. I was waiting to be picked up just like everybody else. During the argument, this nine-passenger Packard came up, and I walked out and got in it, and all of the eyes looked so funny because it was the funeral coach. (all laugh)

PRYOR: I didn't have any such experience because I felt selfconscious riding in those long black cars. (all laugh)

HESLIP: I enjoyed them. When I had my wedding, my whole wedding party got in that long Packard.

MALONE-MAYES: I know. (laughs) And I think that in those days, the name Packard really was just like the Cadillac is today.

HESLIP: That's right.

MALONE-MAYES: I remember hearing about, you know, getting a new Packard. That was the name of the car.

HESLIP: My uncle believed in keeping up with all the modern things. Every time something new would come out, he'd buy it for his mother and his wife, all the modern appliances, as soon as they came out. When TV came out, Mother wanted to try everything they advertised. (laughs)

MALONE-MAYES: This is very interesting. Let's go back now. This is really in the twenties that he became involved with W. L. Dennis. Is that correct? Am I correct?

HESLIP: That's right.

MALONE-MAYES: It was 1924?

HESLIP: That's right.

MALONE-MAYES: And so this is really Bridge Street in the twenties. Can you give some feeling of the life on Bridge Street in terms of comparing—just, say, like when the Great Depression hit, you know, in the thirties? Or were you too young to make any observations or remember any—for example, what happened to his business?

HESLIP: It did not affect his business because people have to have food, and they live and they die. People continue to die.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, how can they pay for the funerals?

HESLIP: Well, they always paid him in different ways. They paid him in the hogs, and they paid him in property, or they paid him in whatever the crops that were good that year. They'd pay him in that. And a lot of them never did pay him. He had more money under the ground than he had on top when he died. If you look through the books you can see where some of them never did pay, but he never did refuse anyone. He was just like a doctor. With or without money he would give you a decent funeral. And I've known times when people couldn't get a flower or anything, he'd buy a flower for them. He was very, very, very generous. Should have been a rich man but he never did become rich because he gave away so much.

MALONE-MAYES: Another thing, on this funeral business, did he not have a burial plan?

HESLIP: That's right. He had the Family Circle Burial Association, and a lot of members belonged to that. At that time, three hundred dollars was as high as you could get with Family Circle Burial, but at that time, three hundred dollars was a decent funeral.

MALONE-MAYES: That's right. And so that was another reason that people could kind of pay on their funeral.

HESLIP: They paid twenty-five and thirty cents a week for their burial premiums.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, in the Depression years, I realize that people paid him in all these various ways, but did he not experience, if you looked at his records, a tremendous decline in cash?

HESLIP: Well, the fall of the Farmers Improvement Bank that was also there on Bridge Street was unfortunate. When it closed, he lost quite a bit of his money. That's where he was banking and that's where he had his little savings, and that set him back. But he went to a white bank in—what was—sister, what was his name that he was so fond at Texas Coffin Company?

PRYOR: Mr. Tidwell.

HESLIP: Mr. Tidwell at Texas Coffin Company. They became personal friends, and he arranged for him to get with the white bank that would buy his claims and pay him. They would pay him the money and the bank would collect from the people.

MALONE-MAYES: Wonderful. That was wonderful. Now, that was the thirties. And what effect did the forties have? In the forties we get World War II and Bridge Street really got to booming, did it not?

HESLIP: That's right. That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: In fact, where were you in terms of the soldiers? In other words, were you too young? Because I can't conceive of your being down on Bridge Street with the soldiers walking around down there.

HESLIP: We were always at home when the soldiers got out to come over here. We were already at home protected because they had to work all day. But I finished high school in 1941, and I started—at that time you could finish in January. I finished in January, and I went over to Paul Quinn College to try to get hours up until May. I was in class when Roosevelt came over the radio and declared war. And it became—the whole town became prosperous, but then all the men had to go. There was a shortage of men. And I never will forget how we all cried. The man had to turn out class because we were all crying because we knew what it meant: World War II, and we were fighting.

MALONE-MAYES: But, now, you were already gone.

PRYOR: Yes, I was gone.

MALONE-MAYES: You'd gone to college.

PRYOR: Wiley College in Marshall, Texas.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, Wiley was considered, at that time, one of the prestigious schools for blacks in this state.

PRYOR: Well, perhaps so, but that wasn't my reason for going there. I went there because it was tradition in my family on my mother's side. Both [parents] attended Wiley College, and that's where they met and fell in love, and they both graduated from Wiley, so I didn't have a choice to make. I just was going to Wiley College.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, who supported your education?

PRYOR: My daddy.

MALONE-MAYES: Oh, really?

PRYOR: My daddy did that. He wanted to do that.

HESLIP: Of course, they helped.

PRYOR: Oh, yes. Mr. and Mrs. Boykins helped in terms of clothes and transportation and all, but in terms of tuition, my daddy was responsible for that. He was the principal at a school in Coalgate.

MALONE-MAYES: That's wonderful.

PRYOR: Of course, I worked, too. I helped myself by working. I got a scholarship plus I worked for ten dollars a month which was applied to my schooling. But I can recall Bridge Street, though, in terms of activity. The Mecca Drug Store was just what we would consider an ideal drug store. I mean, you could go there and you could order an ice cream soda and other confections as well as drugs. You could sit down, and you'd have interaction with the people who were in town from the rural areas.

HESLIP: Especially on Saturdays.

PRYOR: And often they would do their shopping, and they would end up at Mecca Drug Store. Some of them would end up at Boykins Funeral Home because Mr. Boykins would have one of the men who worked there to carry them home no matter which direction in the rural area. So they would do their little grocery shopping and they would go to the square and do their clothing shopping. And there was a fish market that everybody patronized because they had good fish. And the women, in particular, would know that if they came to Boykins, he would see that they got home. So, really, we were just the center of activity there. One business helped the other business. The men would go to get their haircuts there on Bridge Street, and I think they had a good relationship with different businesses there until night would fall on the weekends. And of course, as my sister said, the soldiers would come to town and it was best just to leave it to them because they would frequent the—at that time they could buy—I think they could buy liquor, couldn't they?

MALONE-MAYES: Now, Waco was dry, wasn't it?

PRYOR: It was dry later, but during World War II—

HESLIP: I think it was dry then.

PRYOR: Where did they get their beer?

HESLIP: They went to Marlin.

MALONE-MAYES: To the line.

HESLIP: To the line.

PRYOR: But I thought they drank beer in those places, because I know this East Waco place sold beer.

HESLIP: The line was here. They had beer before they had liquor.

PRYOR: Yes, but there was a liquor store, too, on Bridge Street.

MALONE-MAYES: There was a time—now, you remember probably better than I, but we really kind of need to remember when Waco was—Waco was wet.

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: I remember that most of those liquor stores that went down to Perry and on the line came right from Waco.

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: Do you remember, they voted it dry like one day and those liquor stores opened up within the week.

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: And so Waco was wet.

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: But now, I don't remember when it was wet.

HESLIP: They could buy liquor, too. That was back in the early forties. I'm almost sure they could because there'd have to be some reason for the people to get so spirited and to

have the conflicts and confrontations they did. Do you recall? Do you remember? Even in East Waco they had places where they sold beer.

PRYOR: And we could look forward to getting some remains every Saturday night.

HESLIP: Almost. That's true because there was going to be a shooting or a fight.

PRYOR: They did more stabbing then. It was rare to find people shooting each other. I guess they just didn't have guns, but such things as stabbing and—

HESLIP: Choking until their tongues fell out.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, where did they get—maybe it's because, you know, hospitals were very segregated and very messy.

PRYOR: The city clinic on Sixth and Columbus—

HESLIP: They had a free clinic, and then the ambulance—my uncle ran an ambulance service at that time. He had an ambulance service and they would take them to the hospital, but I think the hospitals at that time could pretty well look at them and take the vital signs and see if they were going to make it or not. If they felt they could make it, they would wait on them. If they felt they weren't going to make it, they'd just let them lie there until they died. A lot of them died from the lack of medical attention because they didn't have any money. They didn't have a way of paying for it, and there got to be so much of it until I think that's the attitude that they took. However, they did save a lot of them. But they went by the vital signs.

MALONE-MAYES: Well, I was just wondering how many nights did he pick up—

HESLIP: On Saturday nights maybe he would have two or three. He had an ambulance service during that time. He ran his own ambulance service.

MALONE-MAYES: Was it like it is now? Did the justice of the peace or someone have to—

HESLIP: Yes.

MALONE-MAYES: Somebody had to verify that the person was dead before he could even take them.

HESLIP: I think that always has been the requirement. That was the state requirement and that was enforced then.

MALONE-MAYES: Okay.

HESLIP: They would call them to come down to the funeral home in the event someone would pick them up in the alley or something of that nature. The justice of the peace would have to determine whether the person was dead or not, and the cause of death, if possible, because all of that information is required on the forms that have to be filed with the state.

MALONE-MAYES: Now, this is 1940, and he's still on Bridge Street?

HESLIP: Um-hm.

MALONE-MAYES: Throughout all the forties, he remained on Bridge Street.

HESLIP: I don't know about that. Not through all the forties, because I finished high school in 1941, and he was on Webster when I finished high school.

MALONE-MAYES: So you think that he moved off of Bridge Street. We're going to wait and see until she checks that. I'll stop here and we'll think about it and try to get the correct results. (pause in recording) Now we're going to correct when Mr. Boykins moved—it's really Dennis & Boykins moved from Bridge Street to a location on 212 Webster Avenue. And you said that you had thought it was 1941, but it turns out—would you tell me what year—the exact year that they moved to the location?

HESLIP: It was after the death of Mr. Dennis that Boykins purchased the Dennis interest in '44. And E. G. Boykins Funeral Home had its beginning at its present location in '43. He moved there in '43.

MALONE-MAYES: But Mr. Dennis died in what year, about '43?

HESLIP: Mr. Dennis must have died in about '43. It was after his death that Boykins purchased the business interest, in '44, and named the establishment E. G. Boykins Funeral Home. It's at its present location at 212 Webster since 1943, since 1943, at its present location.

MALONE-MAYES: I'm going to turn the tape.

(tape1, side 1 ends; side 2 begins)

Let's pick where the Bridge Street address was for Dennis & Boykins Funeral Home.

HESLIP: Okay, Dennis & Boykins Funeral Home was located 116 Bridge Street.

MALONE-MAYES: 116 Bridge Street.

HESLIP: Uh-huh. And then during the Jones & Boykins days, Boykins was at locations first at 124 Franklin, that's Jones & Boykins, and later at Second and Clay, just five hundred feet from the current place of business.

MALONE-MAYES: Well, from where he is now.

HESLIP: Um-hm. Um-hm.

MALONE-MAYES: That's where Jones & Boykins—

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: Then when Boykins went to Bridge Street, he went down there with Dennis.

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: So Dennis & Boykins went to Bridge Street from the Second and Clay location.

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: Dennis & Boykins went there in 1924, and Dennis died in approximately 1943, and Boykins bought out Dennis's interest in '44, and moved to 212 Webster.

HESLIP: This is 1943.

MALONE-MAYES: This was 1943.

HESLIP: 212 Webster.

MALONE-MAYES: Was he at 212 Webster in 1943?

HESLIP: That's right.

MALONE-MAYES: Okay, but you don't believe that Dennis was alive when he moved to 212 Webster.

HESLIP: No, I don't believe so.

MALONE-MAYES: You believe that he moved there by himself.

HESLIP: Yes, I do.

MALONE-MAYES: We don't remember exactly when Dennis died in '43, but the relocation took place possibly the same year of his death, and his move—

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: —to Webster. Let's back up a moment because this tells us that he ceases to be on Bridge Street, and I think that we still are interested in E. G. Boykins because I feel that he's been a monument and a role model for boys of this whole town. And I think that what we should do is go back to his early childhood. For example, where was he born and when?

HESLIP: He was born at Rockdale, September 15, 1898, Rockdale, Texas. He and his mother moved from Rockdale to Temple in 1901. In 1912, they came to Waco where Boykins attended public schools.

MALONE-MAYES: Okay, I think that's quite interesting that he was not born in Waco and that he came to Waco at an early age, and he was still really a child, a boy. I'd like to go back to something else about Bridge Street and the life of Bridge Street. What was his interrelationship with the political scene? For example, I know that Lawyer [Richard D.] Evans was—was he on Bridge Street during the same time of Lawyer R. D. Evans? And I know Lawyer Evans, from reading the available correspondence, that he was sort of a political activist. And I know that Dr. J. Newton Jenkins and quite a few of them would meet with the city fathers to—

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: —and did he have any—or was he too busy? Because I know that he was—

HESLIP: No, I don't think he was too busy. He and Judge Evans had a close relationship. In fact, I think we have a picture down to the funeral home where they're both on it. But he admired Judge Evans very much, and I recall vividly when Judge Evans was killed June 26, 1938, in this car—railroad accident. He was crossing the railroad track. But yes, Mr. Boykins was involved politically. He wasn't what you call—what do we call these people—he wasn't an anti, but he believed in sitting down and negotiating with authority and trying to help improve things. Very interested in the organizations like the YWCA—I mean YMCA and anything that was for the betterment of the community. In fact, he once sponsored a baseball league for young men. At first I think they had competitions at Katy Park, then. That's where they played. And he was a real baseball fan. I would go to the games. We would even go to Houston sometimes to the games.

MALONE-MAYES: Uh-huh. Now, when you say he sponsored the league, he sponsored it as team or—

HESLIP: A club. There were other sponsors, and they formed a league and they played in competition with each other.

MALONE-MAYES: And also with other cities. Their winners would go to other cities. And what other things do you recall that he did?

PRYOR: He was very generous. He belonged to Second Baptist Church, and when they had financial trouble, he's supposed to have bailed them out completely because he just had an inner desire to help and to give. He didn't seem to want too much for himself. The more he could serve the people, if they could pay or if they could not pay, that's what he did.

MALONE-MAYES: One thing I remember and I just wonder if you remember, he seemed—many people seemed to have trusted him very much. He seemed to have been—and many people who are—I remember particularly like Mrs. Larkin and people—I can't even remember their names. I just remember their faces. But they seemed to have turned their business over to him. Now, I don't know whether it's because he—could depend on him to bury them, you know, or whether they—but, I mean, many people just seemed to turn their whole estates or their whole business—all their business over to him to manage.

PRYOR: They would seek him out. They'd come by there and they wouldn't sign papers or buy property or do anything unless E. G. looked over it. If E. G. said it was all right, then they would do it. They had a lot of confidence and trust in him, the older people and people in Gatesville and McGregor at that time. He had that reputation at Gatesville and McGregor. He was burying just about everybody in that part of Texas, and they had the utmost confidence in him.

HESLIP: Yes, he would advise people about the property and even sometimes family things, people who have children and needed help or were in college. In fact, he

advanced money even for tuition and the like. If he got it back it was all right, if not—if he saw the kid come out to be an outstanding person he would say, "Well, I helped make that child." And everybody was almost a relative to him because they'd call him E. G., and he'd call them "baby" and "honey" and "sugar" and "aunt." In fact, there's one lady who never bought a pair of shoes. She told me she'd never bought herself a pair of shoes. E. G. bought every pair of shoes she wore. And I think Mr. Vickey says that when his mother was struggling with them, he would go to Lacy Coal Company and order whatever amount it would take to carry a family through. He'd order their coal every year. So it was just a matter of helping your people and being with them, and not fighting so much for rights as just helping where it was needed right there at home, food and clothing and housing and what have you.

MALONE-MAYES: And this was a very hard period, too, back in that period where people were having a very hard time surviving.

HESLIP: That's true. And Mrs. Boykins had two families there on her street, we lived at 1016 Primrose Street, and she was Santa Claus to them every Christmas. She bought their shoes and clothes and dressed them up at Easter time, and they were very grateful. They would come over and do things around the house for her. We never did have to do too much because he was so good to people, people were always asking what could they do for him. And my sons, after they came in the world, they didn't even cut their lawn because there was always someone to do that, and there was someone to come in and wash the woodwork and clean up the house for Mother. She didn't have to do any of that. He paid somebody or somebody that he had helped was always willing to do all the things that needed to be done.

MALONE-MAYES: And this was the reputation he had throughout the city of being a very trustworthy person.

HESLIP: I notice we mentioned Mr. Tidwell, and this article in the paper mentions Mr. Compton, too. That's the older Compton of Compton Funeral Home. They were closely allied. Yes, he had a close relationship. And then finally with the Hatch family, too. But I remember particularly with Compton, he mentions him in this article, M. M. Compton, Mr. Tidwell, and Mr. Compton. And any number of times he would take the risk of signing notes at the banks and all for people. He had a good relationship with the white business community. He certainly did.

MALONE-MAYES: I've heard this throughout, but that was the business community of the undertakers. What was his—which he probably—I don't know—what relationship did he have with the businesses, say, on Bridge Street in terms of, you know, they had a few white businesses on Bridge, but also the many black businesses.

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: Insurance companies and the Mecca Drug.

HESLIP: And beauty parlor.

MALONE-MAYES: Right.

HESLIP: But he would always insist as best you could that you patronize black businesses.

MALONE-MAYES: Oh, yes.

HESLIP: He wouldn't let anybody do any repairs on his home or anything unless they were black. He certainly was loyal to the business community. He and Dr. Clemons were very closely related in terms of business and friends, too. And the Atlanta Life Insurance Company had its offices, I think, upstairs, and one of the other insurance companies. He worked very closely with the black insurance companies. He would encourage his clients to seek insurance policies. And I recall, I think there was a lady who ran a second-hand clothing shop, Rudolph Frierson's mother, there on Bridge Street.

It seems to me she was to the left of Boykins establishment, going toward the bridge, after he moved on the same side as the Mecca Drug Store, Mrs. Frierson. Then there was a restaurant, a cafe. How often we would eat there.

PRYOR: Irene's Café, and he helped finance her.

HESLIP: Yes, I think he set her up in business.

MALONE-MAYES: And you don't remember the—Mr. Watson had a cafe off and on. He never—

HESLIP: Who was that?

MALONE-MAYES: Miss Fannie Watson's father.

HESLIP: Oh, yes, that's true.

MALONE-MAYES: He owned the building there, but she said he normally rented it out to other people.

HESLIP: That's true. That's true. That could have been this building that she had her restaurant in. I'm not sure.

MALONE-MAYES: It was right next door to the Mecca Drug.

HESLIP: But I know he was a close friend of Mr. Ashford, who had a restaurant over on the corner of Second Street.

MALONE-MAYES: On Second Street.

HESLIP: That's right. That was more or less just a little business community; Franklin, Second and Franklin and Bridge Street. The Square we called it. You would find, sometimes, black people operating the cafes or restaurants—

MALONE-MAYES: Or barber shops.

HESLIP: That's right, barber shops.

PRYOR: And they had a beauty shop on the corner.

HESLIP: Yes, and then there was the Gem Theater, too, that wasn't too far from that. It was on the Square, I think. It was destroyed during the tornado.

MALONE-MAYES: Well, that's another thing. I think we close out there, that when the tornado hit he was gone from Bridge Street. That's what most people—

HESLIP: That's right. That's right. But it did cripple a lot of black businesses there. In fact, it just destroyed the business community of most of Waco, the black business community, because there were few businesses in East Waco. But Bridge Street was just a center there. I think the mere fact that the people had to ride the streetcar, they could stop right there at the Mecca Drug Store and board the streetcar.

MALONE-MAYES: It was convenient.

HESLIP: That's right, going either south or east they could transfer after they got over in town. Mecca Drug Store was really the hub of all the activity. That's right. And they transferred to the bus. That's right. They would transfer to the bus. The streetcar would give you a transfer that you could catch the bus to go to south Waco or north Waco. Years ago, they used to be street cars going to south and north Waco, but later buses were put on the line. But you could still—I think the East Waco line ran longer than any of the street cars. In fact, around there on Fourth Street was the Interurban station.

PRYOR: That's right. The Interurban went on Bridge Street, didn't it?

HESLIP: That's true. Yes, it passed right here on Bridge Street.

PRYOR: Passed through Bridge Street going to the urban station.

HESLIP: Denison, Texas. Uh-huh.

PRYOR: That's the one you could catch going to Dallas and Denison. In fact, when I came to Waco to live, I caught the interurban in Denison. My daddy drove me that far, and I had been here before visiting. I rode all the way on to Elm Street. I pulled a cord and got off there.

MALONE-MAYES: Uh-huh. But you could have ridden it all the way to Bridge Street if you wanted to.

HESLIP: That's right. That's right. That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: You could have ridden it all the way—

HESLIP: All the way to Bridge Street.

MALONE-MAYES: That is interesting. I didn't know that.

HESLIP: That mode of transportation made a lot of difference with people coming to town.

MALONE-MAYES: That's right. That's right. As you say, he had a great rapport with all the country people, too, who came in on Saturdays.

HESLIP: Willow Grove community, Bosqueville, Axtell, Harrison community, all the surrounding communities. They could come there and wait or come there and meet their friends or what not. If they had things to bring in to sell, sometimes women had eggs to bring to the market, they could come and stop there with them until they could make it to the places they were delivering. We never had to buy anything like bacon and eggs and garden foods, butter and jellies. They just brought that to the funeral home because Uncle Boykins had done some favor for them. He had signed a note or helped. Cakes and pies and everything. They were just brought to us.

PRYOR: We didn't have to worry about anything.

HESLIP: That was more or less his pay. (laughs)

PRYOR: They had the World War II and everything rationed; we couldn't tell nothing had been rationed.

HESLIP: He had a good relationship with Nate Chodorow, too, and Harry Daum and those merchants located on the Square.

MALONE-MAYES: What about the Fadals? They were all around then.

HESLIP: The Fadals? That's true. Yes, they had—

MALONE-MAYES: Drug stores. Not on Bridge, but—

HESLIP: Not on Bridge Street but over on—

MALONE-MAYES: —by the Square.

HESLIP: Um-hm. Because often he would send people to Mr. Chodorow to get garments or material or shoes, and he would pick up the bill. My aunt and Mr. Chodorow would really have a contest on trying to, as we call it, Jew him down. (laughs) Because he had things just as good as Goldstein's if you knew how to pick them. We'd go there and shop, too.

MALONE-MAYES: What is your opinion? Don't you think that there was a closeness between the Jewish business people and black people?

HESLIP: Definitely. More than others

MALONE-MAYES: More so than even other whites.

HESLIP: I should say so, yes.

MALONE-MAYES: In fact, do you not even feel that when you got downtown that you had sort of a closer feeling toward Goldstein's than you did most of the other stores even downtown?

PRYOR: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: And then it seems as if the Fadals were Assyrians or something.

HESLIP: That's true.

MALONE-MAYES: In other words, they were considered white, but—

HESLIP: But they had different views—

MALONE-MAYES: —like Jews are considered white.

HESLIP: Definitely. And seems that their way of treating you, and the relationships with their customers, was a little bit different from this American white that you had to trade with in terms of trying on garments and making exchanges and things like that.

PRYOR: You had a good relationship with the Jewish and the Italian merchants.

MALONE-MAYES: Well, I appreciate this, and I want you to know, I think this is going to be a big help to our Bridge Street study. We appreciate your cooperation with it. I think before we leave, though, that we need to connect up that the oral history department has already done a study of you, have they not, Mrs. Pryor?

PRYOR: That's right. Some of the things that perhaps we mentioned here might occur in the oral history interview I had about three years ago.

MALONE-MAYES: But that was about your life, though.

PRYOR: That was about my life, yes.

MALONE-MAYES: And about your career as a teacher here in Waco public schools.

PRYOR: That's true, and things that happened during that—particularly the integration of schools and the like. I think we had more focus on that type of thing.

MALONE-MAYES: That was the focus of that interview. And in your case, you spent most of your life after college—did you ever tell me, both of you went to Wiley, right?

HESLIP: I went one year, but the matrons were so strict on the girls, and I did not like the discipline at Wiley, and I did not like the curfew. I was always my own boss. I was an individualist, more or less. I started going with a young man, and the matron opened my letter when he wrote me at school and said that she didn't believe my father approved. And I said, "Well, my parent surely approved of him. I don't think you have anything to do with it." So I felt they were going to ask me not to come back. So the next year I did not try to go back. (laughter) My sister was a senior there and I was a freshman, and I

felt like she was ashamed of me and I had disgraced her enough. So I went to Langston the next year. I went to Langston.

MALONE-MAYES: Well, that was a more prestigious school though.

PRYOR: Because—well, Langston was a state school.

MALONE-MAYES: Right. Had more money.

PRYOR: It was a little more liberal than religious schools. See, Wiley was a religious school.

MALONE-MAYES: But now do you think any school was any more—

HESLIP: Well, Oklahoma—

MALONE-MAYES: In Oklahoma, yes, but do you think they inferred that Wiley was any stricter than Prairie View? (laughs) Well, I can assure you, it couldn't have been any—I called Prairie View the state prison number two. It couldn't have been any stricter than—

PRYOR: I didn't have any problem with it myself. I liked it.

MALONE-MAYES: And so you spent only one year and you graduated from Langston.

HESLIP: No, I just spent one year at Langston. Instead of taking academics, they gave me a check where I had to fill in my tuition, and when I got there, I saw where you could take cosmetology so much cheaper than the academic courses, and so I took cosmetology. I went to Oklahoma City and had a ball at the department stores and stayed in fine black hotels and everything. And I took cosmetology at Langston, and that's where I was when this captain came over looking for a beautician to work at the Camp Gruber army camp. I was a senior and I was good in it and was just finishing, had passed the board, and the instructor recommended me. So I left Langston. My folks thought I was still in college, and I was over at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, working for the whites, a beautician to the whites. And it was good money. I had to take all the inventory. I had to shop and buy

everything for the whites. I fixed their hair and their nails and everything. It was two of us working there when I first got there, but one of the beautician's husband was shipped out and she went with him, and so I was in control of the whole thing. I worked there until my fiancé wrote and said that he was coming home. The war was coming to an end. The war was coming to an end and he was coming home. So then I came back to Waco and announced my engagement and I married. I just wanted to get married. I didn't want any more schooling, I felt, at that time. I came home, and when he got here, well, I had put it in the paper and announced our engagement. And about two weeks after he got here, we had our church wedding. Later, I went back to school and finished Paul Quinn after I divorced my first husband.

MALONE-MAYES: I shouldn't keep this on tape, but your wedding was the first I ever saw in my life and I thought it was the most beautiful thing I ever witnessed. I never shall forget it. But the compliment is to you, but the compliment is for the Boykins who paid for it. (laughs) That's who I'm really complimenting.

PRYOR: They really did. He didn't want anything left out. Even hired the photographer and *The Chicago Defender* society editor to take the pictures and cover the story.

MALONE-MAYES: Isn't that something. *The Chicago Defender*.

PRYOR: Also *The Pittsburgh Courier*, *The Black Dispatch*, and the local papers.

MALONE-MAYES: Well, that's who I meant to compliment.

HESLIP: He was generous. He would fuss sometimes, though, but you knew his bark was worse than his bite.

MALONE-MAYES: Do you think you all kind of had a—that you could kind of like, you know, get whatever you wanted out of him if you just—you knew—

HESLIP: And I really took advantage of him more than my sister. (laughs)

MALONE-MAYES: Well, I sure wish to thank you. And thank you very much for this interview. It will be a valuable addition to the oral history memoirs at Baylor's Texas Collection. I enjoyed and appreciate this time with you and I look forward to our next session if we feel it is necessary. Thank you.

HESLIP: Thank you.

(end of interview)