

Interviewee: Anderson, Robert L.**Interview Date: March 31, 2009**

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

Interview with: Robert L. Anderson**Interviewed by: Debbie Harwell****Date: March 31, 2009****Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola**

DH: Please tell us your full name and what brought you to this project?

RLA: My full name is Robert L. Anderson. I am at the project because I was brought to give my ideas and observations regarding my fifty years of experience and observation of graduating from Jack Yates High School.

DH: O.K., could you tell me a little bit about your family history and how you came to live in Houston?

RLA: Sure. My family history is one that goes way back. My family is one of the pioneer families of Austin County, Texas. I was born in a little city west of Houston called Sealey, Texas and my great-grandparents were landowners in the Austin County area and the history of my family is well chronicled in the archives of that county. My great-grandfather, again, his name was Louis Downey by the way, my father's mother's father, was responsible and donated the land in the community that the so-called colored school was built on and it remained an active school in the community until the 1960s, after integration became an entity. The family . . . an interesting little aside to that is that long after I had become a lawyer, I received a call from the city attorney in the little city and they were inquiring about the land, and I think that most of the family was not even aware of the fact that my grandfather, when he had donated the land, had a clause in the deeds that if the land ever stopped being used as an educational place for the black

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students, then the land would revert back to the family. The School District there tried to sell the land and found out that they could not sell it. So, they called me and we were able to work out the arrangement with the city and the school district to get the land back in the family, which it still is, by the way. An interesting little aside.

DH: That is great. Now, how did you come to live in Houston?

RLA: Well, my family moved to Houston at an early age. I started school and went to Dodson Elementary School over across, at the time, they were just starting to construct the Gulf Freeway, but on Sampson Street. Because of a severe illness to my father's mother, the family moved from Houston and I was educated, in large part, in the Austin County community and remained there until my freshman year, I think it was. My family then moved to New Jersey following opportunities. I spent the 2 years of high school in New Jersey in a little bedroom community from New York called Montclair, New Jersey. Montclair was quite a nice place and I enjoyed my experience in Montclair, and certainly felt that Montclair was kind of the bedrock of my beginning ambitions and what I had planned to do with my life as an adult. That is where it began.

DH: And then, you came back to Houston to Jack Yates? At what time?

RLA: Yes. After my junior year, my family again decided to move back to Texas and, at that time, we moved back to Houston. I then enrolled at Jack Yates High School. Jack Yates High was located at that time on Elgin Street. This was 1957. The 1957-1958 school year was the last Jack Yates class, high school class, to graduate from the Jack Yates original high school on Elgin Street.

DH: And how did your experiences in high school in New Jersey compare to your high school experiences here?

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RLA: Well, the totality of the experience I think was quite a broadening experience for me in the sense that I got a good handle on comparing what life was like in the North in terms of the experiences that I had there and what life was like, again, reorienting myself to life in the South. The first experience, I suppose, in the New Jersey experience coming from a smaller community in Texas was basically a night and day kind of experience. I knew that I was a pretty bright fellow but I also had inklings that the education that I was getting in my little community was probably not up to par always and when I got to New Jersey, that kind of bore out that experience. I had a fairly, I guess you would say, my abilities in the areas of the social sciences and the basic courses like history and English and that type thing were not too bad but the math and the physical sciences -- chemistry and that type thing -- were kind of behind and it required that I do a lot of work. The first year was very difficult. The second year, it became much easier and I began to hold my own in those subjects. I had to go to summer school in order to make up ground but it was something that I was able to do and did make up the ground, to the point where, when I left New Jersey, I was on target with the rest of the student body there. So, that experience was quite an eye opener for me, from the academic point of view.

From the social point of view, that was not necessarily a first experience but it was an intense experience of being integrated into a situation where I was going to school with the white kids, participating in social activities -- dances and that type thing -- and all of that was quite new to me. It was one of those experiences, I guess, I can recall in a math class. I had a young lady who sat next to me, a Caucasian girl, and I was trying to get some assistance dealing with the math aspect of something that I did not understand and she was a whiz at this. I asked her about the help and for whatever reason, she

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thought I was asking her for a date. Well, needless to say, she was a little taken aback by that, and that also was something that let me know that even in the North, the idea of integration was basically one of the official governmental kind of entity but not really the social part of it. So, that is kind of a little experience that I had there.

DH: Now, how did that compare then for you when you came back to Yates and it was not an integrated school or integrated community?

RLA: Right, well, the leaving of New Jersey and moving back to Texas and enrolling at Jack Yates was, in and of itself, another experience. By now, I am a little bit older, a little bit wiser, I think, and, in fact, was able to see the difference in what I experienced in the setting in New Jersey and here in Houston, from the point of view of school, academics. I found that the Jack Yates experience, by now, was quite - I don't want to say easy but it wasn't quite as difficult as what I was getting in the classrooms in New Jersey. A prime example: The New Jersey experience in Montclair -- there are 2 sections of Montclair. One is just Montclair and then there is another section called Upper Montclair. I guess the best example would be Houston and River Oaks. Upper Montclair was quite a ritzy upper middle class neighborhood and the kids from Upper Montclair and the kids from Montclair all went to high school together. Two interesting facts: one, the kids whose parents were the subject of the popular novel - I guess a movie was made of it, *Cheaper By The Dozen* - was from Upper Montclair, New Jersey, and a few of those kids and I were in school, high school, together. I did not know them, per se, but knew of them, that they were there. And the second experience . . . say, for instance, in English classes, whereas, we would deal with English literature, say, from the standpoint of, I can recall at Jack Yates doing what we called a soliloquy in *Hamlet* and

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usually not getting too far beyond those kinds of things; whereas, in Montclair, we were dissecting things like Eugene O'Neal and dealing with modern literature that was of the first rate, and having those things dissected. And also, oftentimes, being able to take fieldtrips to Broadway to New York to see some of that stuff. So, it was quite a broadening kind of experience there.

At Jack Yates, you knew that there were teachers who were concerned and that, to me, was the really big difference. The teachers at Jack Yates took personal concern whereas, in New Jersey, you didn't get that kind of personal interaction and concern on the part of the teachers there. I fell in love with my history teacher at Jack Yates, Mrs. Prader, who was quite a dynamic lady. A lot of theatrics and drama in her presentations that impressed me. Mrs. Cotton, which was my English teacher there was also quite a dynamic teacher. I learned. And even though I felt that the quality and the breadth of learning was not quite as profound as there in Jersey, it was very adequate, I thought, and I think that the students at Jack Yates, by and large, got a pretty good education from high school.

DH: What role did Yates play in the community and how has the pride in the school translated into community life?

RLA: The role that I observed Jack Yates played, I guess, was not really something that I really knew about at the beginning of my experience at Jack Yates. That came sort of later when I was able to see what that school really meant to the community. But as I stayed at Yates and got to know the people and the surrounding community, it was pretty obvious that Jack Yates was a central part of the overall Third Ward, the black Third Ward, community. The school was, at the time that I was there, led by Professor William

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Holland who was quite a guy. I mean, he was the kind of person that anyone could admire, look up to, very outspoken about his beliefs and what he thought about and there were other teachers there who were very outspoken. And it is the kind of role models that I thought were quite necessary. I did not know quite what it was all about at the time but as I have grown older, I see where those outspoken people who were leading that school really did have a major influence on not only me but obviously the rest of the community also. So, Jack Yates was quite an integral part, especially of the Third Ward area of Houston.

DH: Tell me a little about the extracurricular activities that you participated in and your accomplishments in high school.

RLA: O.K., well, having gotten to Jack Yates at a late time, I guess, most of the cliques that are formed in high school and people who have formed friendships and that type thing were kind of already formed and I was kind of a Johnny Come Lately to the whole scene, but I think my demeanor . . . kids began to observe my performance in class and I ended up becoming sort of a part of that crowd that was doing things, that were accomplishing things, and ended up becoming a member of the Jack Yates band, high school band, both the marching band and the jazz band, and got to know a lot of people through that experience. Also, socially, a couple of social clubs that were formed on campus - the Kingsmans Club, I think was one of those that took in the popular students, I guess, of the campus and got to know people like Deloris Johnson and Napoleon Johnson and people who were real leaders in the school. So, developed some life long friends. The Robins Twins, Thelma and Thurmond. Jeanette Vinson. These were all

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people that we started our friendships in high school. They accepted me and, you know, we remain friends even today.

DH: Can you tell me a little bit about your experience in the band?

RLA: Yes, well, the band was led by . . . gee, I have forgotten Doc's name right now. It has been quite a while ago but he was the band director - and I will remember it as soon as I finish this interview - but he was quite a kind gentleman who took very little gruff from members of the band. I played trombone. I had been playing trombone, I guess, since 8th grade, and played it in New Jersey and was a member of the band, concert band there as well as the marching band, and just picked it up and when I moved here, remained a part of that. We had some pretty dynamic guys. As a matter of fact, Thurmond Robbins was also a trombone player and Thurmond and I were both a part of the marching band as well as the jazz band. Also, one of the people that stands out in my mind - a couple of people - trumpet players, too . . . John Roberts and Vernell. I have forgotten Vernell's last name but anyway, I think he went on to become, sort of not the star but at least local luminary here in that area. And another guy who did become national and played in a lot of national bands was Malcolm Pinson, who was quite a drummer, who was part of that group. One young man who lived not far from me, around the corner as a matter of fact, who was really a great, great friend as we were growing up, was a young man named Spooky Dancy. Charles "Spooky" Dancy. Spooky was, I think, probably the most dynamic musician that I knew. The guy could play almost any instrument; I mean, just really good but somehow, he just never quite was able to shake his background and had a tragic ending, I think. But that band experience

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was traveling around the state to various football games and interacting with my band mates and members. It was just a great experience.

DH: What was it like to be part of the Turkey Day game?

RLA: Oh, that was something special. I know if you are from Houston and you were living back in that time, everybody knew about the Turkey Day game which was a game against Yates and Wheatley. During that period of time, in the 1950s, there were only, let's see, 3, I think, black high schools in the city. You had Yates, Wheatley, and Booker T. Washington. Schools like Worthing and Jones, those schools had not yet existed. As a matter of fact, the kids that ultimately went to Worthing High School all were at Yates High School when I was there. So, when they moved to the new building, moved Yates from the old building on Elgin, I think was the same year that Worthing High School started. But back then, it was Jack Yates, Booker T. Washington and Phyllis Wheatley. Well, the Fifth Ward where Wheatley was located and the Third Ward where Jack Yates was located were probably one of the biggest rivalries that I have ever, ever seen. I mean, it was just amazing that at a high school game, you would have 25,000 people at a high school game. But they would be there and it was just so much . . . on that game, I mean, if you were Wheatley and you grew up in Fifth Ward, you just bled purple and white, and the same thing with Jack Yates - you bled crimson and gold. So, it was just really a major sized rivalry. I had attended a few of those games but I never knew the ferocity and the enthusiasm of having participated in one of those games as a part of the overall atmosphere in the crowd. It was just full. It was quite an experience. It really was. It meant a lot.

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DH: After you left Jack Yates, you went on to college. Can you tell me a little bit about your college years?

RLA: Sure. After graduating from Jack Yates, I entered Texas Southern University, entered the college as one of the top 100 freshmen in my freshmen class. What that allowed was that I was in kind of an honors program that allowed me to take advanced classes, classes in philosophy and classes that were a little bit out of the ordinary and got me in touch with some first-rate instructors over at the University. I was a pretty good academic person until I became a little bit too social, I think. I joined a fraternity over there, Kappa Alpha Psi, and my grades did suffer for about a year or so during that period of time. But while at Texas Southern, I maintained my involvement in the school from the standpoint I was a member of the Prelaw Club, the History Club, the Mens Youth Council and several other clubs and social organizations such as that, as well as involvement in the fraternity. I maintained a good rapport, majored in history, and had two minors, a minor in political science and also a minor in English. While in school, this was quite a turbulent time in America, the civil rights movement was starting to rage and started student involvement and that type thing, and during my latter part of my experience at Texas Southern, Vietnam War was raging quite a bit. And, for whatever reason, the draft was very paramount . . . at that time and college students were required to, as they are now I guess to sign up for the draft but back then, you not only signed up, you were given numbers and you were subject to be drafted. There was a system called deferment where if you were actively pursuing a college degree or in school of some sort, then you were eligible to seek a deferment, which I did several times. It became obvious that once I graduated from college, I was going to get drafted so I deliberately spent an

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extra year in school to get around that. This was also during the time when Mohammed Ali had decided not to enter the draft or not to be drafted and it really created a dilemma among a lot of thinking people in terms of well, you know, this moral dilemma where you are not really at a point where you are so much against it, could consider yourself a conscientious objector. You certainly knew that you were not that much for the war itself. So, you did the best you could in that situation.

So, when I finally graduated, knew I was getting ready to graduate, the draft notice came. So, I was trying to decide, well, what am I going to do? So, I made the decision, on some pretty selfish reasons I must admit, that the best place for me was probably the Air Force. I never quite considered myself a follower so I decided that I was going to enter the officer training program for the U.S. Air Force. The problem was the program that I could enter had only one slot and they were going to be starting the class before I could graduate from college. So, I went and spoke to my instructors, my deans, and convinced them of my position and they were all able to allow me to take my exams several weeks ahead of time and I graduated from college in absentia. In the meantime, I took the only slot available which was in electronics. Now, the irony of that is that here I am, a liberal arts major taking a slot in the Air Force in electronics which basically required two years of double E. That was the equivalent of what this job was all about. But I said, O.K., I'll take it. I took the slot and ended up in San Antonio and went through Officer Training School in the Air Force. Got commissioned as second lieutenant and went to Biloxi, Mississippi for my training as an electronic warfare officer, which was the start of another experience for me.

DH: Tell me a little bit about your career in the military.

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RLA: The career in the military, as I said, started off, I guess, one month after I graduated from Officer Training School. I was assigned to the electronics warfare program in Biloxi and during this time, Mississippi was really a bad place to be. While I was in Biloxi, I never will forget my first few days there . . . we were going through orientation and there was a major from Louisiana who was conducting the seminars that we were having for our orientation to the school. A few of the things that struck me was that part of the orientation, the U.S. Air Force actually gave instructions on the social mores of Mississippi. As a member of the Air Force, I could not go visit my fellow member of the Air Force off base that were living in apartments, etc., but the black officers were assigned to base on what we called bachelor officer quarters, BOQ. This was an enforced process by the United States Air Force. And when we got together, it had to be on base at the clubs there, the officer clubs and those type things. We just could not mingle socially together off base. That was brought to our attention early and often. It was also during that experience that President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, which was a really, really bad time, rough time. It was also during that period when the three civil rights workers - Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner - were killed. Those were scary times, even scarier than normal in that environment. And I stayed there for one year, getting through tech school. Very glad to leave when I did get out of that place, sad to say. It was not all bad. Also, we were in proximity to several colleges in the area - Jackson State up the road in Jackson, Mississippi. We would go down to New Orleans quite a bit and they had several colleges there - Dillard University and Xavier and several others. And then, we would go to Baton Rouge to Southern University. So, we found a way and were able to make the best of the experience there but one other

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factor . . .there was about, approximately, at any given time, maybe 7500 or so officers in training on the base of which only about, when I was there, we had 5 African American officers there. So, it wasn't a lot of us around, black folk around, in that officer corps. And we kind of stood out quite a bit. Again, it was the United States Air Force but very socially segregated. Black officers would be at this table big enough for the whole group of us that were there, and then everybody else would be, you know, all over the place. And so, it was a different experience.

So, I left Biloxi and went to Madison, Wisconsin, and spent three and a half years at Madison as an electronics warfare officer in the Aerospace Defense Command. The Aerospace Defense Command is a command whose mission is to protect the United States and Canada, at that time from the Soviet Union, which was quite a thing and we had responsibility for areas that were kind of mystical, in a sense. The Do Line. A lot of folks probably have heard of that, most of them probably haven't but that was our first alert area that kept tabs on what the Russians were doing up in the northern part of the world, all the way up to the Arctic Circle. And I got a lot of good experience traveling. The Defense Command was headquartered in Colorado. Had lots of experience of going to Colorado and also Canada. A lot of experience going to Canada. Spots that I had heard about and learned about in high school - never thought I would get a chance to visit like Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, New Brunswick. I got a chance to visit a lot of those places. Montreal, Quebec City. It was a very rewarding experience in Madison plus you had the University of Wisconsin there which was also a good experience, and I took classes at the University and had fully intended to go to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin once I got out of the military. But instead of being able to . . .

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my commitment to the Air Force was basically a four year commitment. Once you receive the commission, you obligated yourself actually to a twenty year commitment but four of those years were for active duty. So, I was fully expecting to get out of the Air Force after four years but a national emergency came up and President Johnson extended all candidates for getting out or to active duty for another year, an additional year. So, in that reassignment and the extension of my duty, I left Madison and went to Bangor, Maine, New England, which was another real experience. I was stationed at a little place in Maine called Dover-Foxcroft, and their claim to fame is that they are one of the two or three hyphenated cities in the country. Dover-Foxcroft. It also was the birthplace of the inventor of the machine gun. The guy who invented the machine gun is from that area. There was a major Air Force base about twenty miles away in Bangor, Maine, and that is where we did things and had to travel most of the time when we wanted to get away, so to speak, we would go to Bangor. Bangor is not a very big place. So, that was not a very big experience to go to Bangor but it was a good place. I enjoyed New England.

When I got there - by now, I am a captain - promoted to captain. The base was commanded by a major which meant that I was pretty high on the pecking order at that point in terms of command. So, I was third in command. You had a base commander and you had exec officer and my slot. I observed that we had maybe about 200 young air men on the base and a lot of them were noncommissioned, not sergeants, etc., but air men, per se. So, it was really kind of an isolated place and there wasn't much to do there. I thought about and looked at and discovered that there was a job corps site maybe about 50 miles or so away. So, I worked out the details with the job corps director and we were able to get those guys and the job corps to allow our men to come up and socialize with

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the girls up there. That made duty just a little bit easier on that mountaintop! But the thing that struck me about that place was how tremendously cold it got. Boy, you would be in your room some mornings and it would be thirty degrees below, twenty degrees below zero and your heating source was basically steam - World War II type buildings in that place. Boy, if it weren't for electric blankets, I don't know how we'd make it. But I was there and as I was thinking that I was getting ready to get out, I had assignment to leave Bangor and go to Tuli, Greenland. I said, oh no, this can't be the case. I've got to do something about this. Anyway, I was able to find in the regs that it was not the Air Force's policy to assign you to two isolation spots one after the other. So, I used that technicality, was able to convince the Air Force people that I was ready to get out and needed to get out. So, I was able to get my release and was able to get out on an honorable discharge, and on my way to the next phase of my life.

From there, it was kind of an interesting circumstance. I was at Texas Southern during that summer with my girlfriend who eventually became my wife and she was registering for the summer school session and I am just over there with her. While I am in line with her, the dean of the law school who I had met while I was a prelaw student back in undergraduate school many years ago, happened to see me and remembered me. We engaged in conversation. He asked me what I was doing and I told him what my plans were. As I said, I was fully expecting to go back to Madison, Wisconsin. He said, "Well, why don't you come up and talk to me?" And I did. From there, he offered me a scholarship to law school and I started law school that summer. And then, the next phase.

DH: Now, how did you become involved in civil rights work?

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RLA: Well, at law school, I had been a very active student. I was president of my student government at law school, became the first black delegate from a black law school to the ABA, American Bar Association Convention, and in these activities, also, by the way, was a recruiter for the law school, took a recruiting trip to the northwest recruiting Native Americans to the law school in my senior year and was pretty successful in getting maybe five or six Native Americans to enroll in the law school. Well, during all of this time, I met two people, husband and wife, Mark and Gabriel McDonald, who were two prominent lawyers here in town. Mrs. McDonald was sort of the recognized authority on civil rights cases here in Houston. A brilliant lady. Graduated from Hunter University and had worked for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. And when she and Mr. McDonald, who is a past president of the National Bar Association which is the black equivalent to the American Bar Association, they somehow were interested in me and took me on. Mrs. McDonald was instrumental in getting me an internship with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. So, I started to work for them even before I was licensed to practice law. And fortunately, when I graduated in August, I took the Bar that September and was able to pass the Bar the first time around and went to work for them, and actually went to work for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in their office. That is where I became engaged in the civil rights practice doing a lot of Title VII which are job discrimination cases and Title VIII of Civil Rights Act of 1964 which are housing discrimination cases. I traveled the state working with Mrs. McDonald in doing that. Some of my most frightening experiences, I guess, in Texas, were going up to East Texas to some of those companies up there where, I mean, the pattern of discrimination was so apparent and pervasive that it was the kind of thing that .

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. . . and not so much East Texas but also other places in the state . . . the pattern of discrimination was so pervasive that almost all you needed to do was file a lawsuit. These people had to get everything in order. The big thing was the cost factor and also the time factor that it took to develop these cases because nobody admits to that. Nobody wants to say that they are discriminating. So, you have to develop your case by discovery and statistical data and that kind of thing. So, it was very rewarding to see a company who had not hired a black beyond janitor, having to have to now open up their . . . it was quite a rewarding experience to do that.

I worked with the Legal Defense Fund which also required us to come to New York to the headquarters quite a bit, so got a chance to go back on the East Coast quite a bit. They had conferences at least twice a year outside of Washington, D.C. in a little place called Warrington, Virginia, where we would bring in litigators from all over the country and strategize and deal with tactics as to how we were going to deal with this whole thing, these similar things that were being experienced over the whole south. So, it was a very organized joint effort and, you know, I like to think really broke the backbone of segregation in those major industries. They have become more settled now. The advent of conservatism in this country also has tightened up the whole thing and it is very difficult to deal with these cases nowadays but that was, you know, opened up a lot of things for blacks.

So, I worked for the McDonalds and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund for two and a half years. At the end of that term, fortunately or unfortunately - I am not sure which - I was recommended by three or four civic leaders to fulfill a judicial appointment, the City of Houston, as judge of the municipal courts of the City of Houston, and I certainly did

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not think I would get it. I am every bit of thirty-one, thirty-two years old. I am thinking much too young to even be considered in something like that. Anyway, I had an appointment with the mayor who, at the time, was Louie Welch. Back up a minute. Part of my responsibility with the Legal Defense Fund was we worked on cases that were not necessarily out of our office but help out in certain cases and one of the cases that my office helped out on was the Angela Davis defense in California. I did some of the briefing work in that particular case. And that is kind of relevant because when I was interviewing with the mayor for my appointment to the bench, one of the issues that he brought out was my work on the Angela Davis case, and quite surprising because I didn't even think anybody knew about that work. So, what it led me to understand is that Big Brother is watching and listening so you had better know that things are not as they might appear on the surface. So anyway, that interview with the mayor obviously went fine because he did appoint me to the bench and I became the second full-time black on a court here in Houston, and for much of that time, there were only two black judges in town, me and Andrew Jefferson, Judge Jefferson. So, I remained on the bench for fifteen years and finally resigned because I had family tragedies that I had to deal with. My two boys I had to raise. My wife died early on at forty with breast cancer. And so, it became a situation where I had two less than teenage boys to raise. So, I had to make a choice there. So, I decided that this was what I had to do. And those guys turned out real well. They are college graduates. So, you know, I am not at all sorry about that. But it was a great experience on the bench. So, from that time to now, I have been in the practice of law doing the kind of cases that I kind of enjoy - probate, property law, and some family law but primarily probate and property law. So, that is kind of what I do now.

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DH: Tell me about your experience starting a law firm, the first black law firm.

RLA: Yes, one of the things that I had always wanted to do when I got out of law school, it was pretty obvious that as I went down back and forth to the courthouse, the black lawyers which weren't that many, were middle-aged guys that were still doing what I was doing and they were getting court appointments and that type of thing. That is a whole another story, dealing with the history of black lawyers in Houston but the whole idea struck me that one of the things that was not happening is that these guys who had had this good experience really had no way to pass it down that I thought would be helpful to people such as myself and other youngsters who were now beginning to get out of law school and start practicing law. And I thought what was missing was there was no organizational structure, no law firms that this thing could be passed down to. So, I made the attempt to do that. The first attempt, I went about it with guys that I had graduated from law school with or had been in law school while I graduated, not the best way in the world to do that. Sometimes, you like a guy and he is your friend but when you are into getting a legal group together, it may not be the best person to be a part of something like that for a lot of reasons. And then, the first attempt did not work. And then, the second attempt I tried, I tried to use a different technique in terms of getting these guys together. We put together the law firm - Anderson, Hodge, Jones and Hoyt - and were successful for about four, five years at it. And part of that group that we had eventually Judge McDonald, in between her appointment as a federal judge and her leaving the practice of law, worked for me at that time in my law firm. Actually, did not work for me but had an association with me. We also had Representative Safronia Thompson who was a part of that group, a professor over at the law school, a Harvard graduate, Professor Webster,

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who is no longer around, and ultimately, one of the main members in the firm became a sitting federal judge who is still on the bench, Judge Kenneth Hoyt. So, we had a dynamic group, we did well and, at some point, things just kind of went awry and the firm broke up and we went our separate ways. By then, the experience was a little more than I wanted to deal with, other things were happening in my life like running for state representative, which was kind of a crazy idea but at the time, it made a lot of sense. Barbara Jordan, Representative Jordan, had decided that she was not going to seek reelection, was going to retire, and it caused a ripple effect in the political scheme of things. People who were part of the state legislature decided that they were going to resign and run for the office. Ultimately, Congressman Mickey Leland won that race but Anthony Hall who is still a political operator on the scene, so to speak, Councilman Judson Robinson - these guys were all part of the political scene that saw an opportunity and decided it. So, that left some vacancies. I decided that I had something to offer in that realm so I took up the mantle to run for the seat that was being vacated by Anthony Hall, state representative, and, in that race, I was defeated by Representative Al Edwards. It was an experience that I won't forget. It was an experience that I thoroughly detested and I certainly was not at all enamored by that experience. So, I just kind of backed off of that rough and tumble world of elective politics. So, that was how I just decided that wasn't for me. I got good advice from a couple of people. Mr. Mack Hannah who was the founder and chairman of a financial institution here called Standard Savings and Loan for many years operated on Dowling and Wheeler. Mr. Hannah was one of my, not only advisors and mentors but also contributors to my campaign, and Reverend William Lawson perhaps unknowingly gave me the best advice of the whole group of people that

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I went to when I started to undertake this journey. He told me, "Judge, you know, I think you are a little bit off base here. Perhaps you should stick to the judiciary. I don't think you are going to like this state representative thing." Told me up front that he didn't think that I would be cut out for that, knowing that I would not get his support, which was O.K., you know. That kind of ambition has an intoxicating effect and sometimes good advice, you just don't listen to, but I didn't and I had one of the worst experiences I think that I have ever had. I considered it a classless experience.

DH: I want to go back to high school and ask one question that I forgot earlier. Could you tell me a little about your experience with Quentin Mease and the YMCA?

RLA: Mr. Mease was, I guess the best way to characterize Mr. Mease was a gentleman in every sense of the word. A very low keyed, very effective gentleman who was not from Houston but did a lot of great things for the city. I have nothing but the utmost respect for Mr. Mease. Now, the Y at the time that I was in high school, I basically knew as the place that we would go and party on Friday nights. They had a Y canteen, I think it was called back then. I am not sure - I think that is what it was called. I know the YWCA and the YMCA both had these youthful kind of youth programs that dealt with social kinds of things. I did not really know Mr. Mease. I met Mr. Mease later on. As a matter of fact, my office and his office were next door to each other for several years - I guess maybe three or four years - and had many opportunities to sit down and talk with Mr. Mease and got to know him fairly well. I just marvel at some of the things that he was able to do in his career here in Houston, coming in from out of state and kind of getting involved. That was who he was and a lot of good things behind the scenes. It is not a name or someone that was ever out front leading the parade, so to speak, but quietly

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in the background doing the things that were necessary to make the parade successful.

Mr. Mease was quite a guy. He was very much quite a guy.

DH: Is there anything else that you want to add that I have not asked?

RLA: Only to the extent that having observed Houston and the progress that has been made in this city over the 50 years since I graduated from Jack Yates, I could only say that it has just been a very unbelievable experience how far the city has come, and I have had opportunities to move on, live in other places, do other things, but I love it here and I just think that it is one of the greatest places in the world. I love the diversity of the city. I think there is a lot of progress that has been made in race relations and other aspects of the city and it is just one of the better places I think in the country to live. I just think that it is a place that I will be until I die. By the way, I am wearing my Jack Yates fiftieth anniversary pin here, too. We had a great fiftieth reunion in November of this year. A lot of the class was still around and we really had a great time. Three days during the Thanksgiving holidays of getting together, sharing memories and just having a great time. I really enjoyed that.