

*Holly James:* Well, on behalf of the Crossroads to Freedom project we would like to thank you for sharing your story with us, and we're gonna start with you, Mrs. Hooks. For the record, can you state your full name?

*Francis Hooks:* Francis Louise Dancy Hooks.

*Holly James:* All right, and your occupation.

*Francis Hooks:* Retired teacher.

*Holly James:* All right, and your birth date?

*Francis Hooks:* February 23, 1927.

*Holly James:* Okay, and can you tell us where you were born and raised?

*Francis Hooks:* Born and reared in Memphis, Tennessee. Born at 612 Stevens Street and later moved to 685 Edith and that's where I stayed until I married him.

*Holly James:* All right, and who –

*Benjamin Hooks:* And she was a very blessed person. I should say that. Her father worked as a bellhop at a hotel and made apparently excellent money, because he built a three-bedroom brick house with indoor plumbing back in 1927 when that was unheard of almost –

[Crosstalk]

*Francis Hooks:* And \_\_\_\_\_ basement.

*Benjamin Hooks:* – with black people.

[00:01:05] Because we lived for the – three-fourths of us had to use the outside, you know, privy down the back, and the lamplight brought in electricity and – but she came up beautifully. Her mother didn't work until all three of her children had finished college and then she went to work.

But while they were school, grade school, she stayed there and took care of her three children, two girls and a boy, and Francis has no inkling, no concept, no knowledge, no idea of what a depression was like.

On the other hand, I was born two years earlier, seven children and we came up hard because my father was a photographer. I'll leave that for a moment. I just wanted to mention that about her. Now go ahead and ask whatever else you want.

*Holly James:* Okay, so you had brothers and sisters?

*Francis Hooks:* I had one brother and one sister.

*Holly James:* And what are their names?

[00:01:58]

*Francis Hooks:* Andrew J. Dancy – Andrew Jackson Dancy, and he turned out to be a physician, and my sister was Anita Yvonne Dancy and she finished Howard University and married a doctor from Beaumont, Texas and moved to Beaumont, Texas.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And her sister received her master's degree and had five children and she lived until she died in Beaumont, Texas. Her brother received his doctor's degree and was a urologist – not urologist –

*Francis Hooks:* Pediatrician.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Pediatrician. My wife received her master's degree from –

[Crosstalk]

*Francis Hooks:* And worked on \_\_\_\_\_.

*Benjamin Hooks:* – Tennessee State University, her bachelor's from Fisk University, and not only was she a teacher for 28 years, but when I went to the NAACP she became my assistant, executive assistant to the executive director, and without her I could not have made it because she spent as many hours in the office as I did.

[00:02:57]

We came – when I was in town, we walked to work only two blocks and I guess that helped us 'cause we walked every morning to work. That wasn't much exercise but it was some; walked every night home. But I spent most of the time on the road.

She stayed in the office and answered the phone, and I received 20,000 pieces of correspondence myself a year that had to be dealt with and the office received maybe 100,000 or so to deal with. Press conferences every two or three days, speaking here, there and yonder and being available for the branches and information.

So it got to the place where about 4:00 in the afternoon my wife would stop everything else and take the list of phone calls that day, 25 or 30, maybe 40, or maybe 50 that'd been made, and she would answer most of the herself.

And they – and in about two hours she would have gone through anywhere from 20 to 60 phone calls because we got a phone call every 30 seconds and some important, some not, but all important.

[00:04:00]

And it got to the place where in the 15 years we were there people said, “No need of asking for Ben. Just ask for Francis. She’s gonna make the decision anyway.” I thought I would mention that because that was very critical to our work at the NAA – and NAACP never paid her a salary.

*Holly James:*

All right. I want to move on to your information, Mr. Hooks. Can you state your full name, please?

*Benjamin Hooks:*

My name is Benjamin Lawson Hooks. I was born January 31, 1925, in Memphis, Tennessee. At that time, my father was a photographer and in the '20s, he made excellent living for his family.

I think I told you he had four boys and three girls. I was No. 5. I had two sisters, one in '27 and one in '32, born after me, but the Depression started with him in 1929 and being in public business, people stopped having pictures made.

[00:05:00]

And as his business went down and down and down, had my mother not been a good manager, we would not have made it at all. If we have a depression now, I’m afraid some people will just die from starvation.

But my mother could take a dime and fix dinner for 11 people, one big head of cabbage, one small thing called skins that you get for a nickel and boil them, and a big thing of cornbread and that was dinner and we never looked for no potatoes, no meat, just the cabbage and the cornbread.

On Tuesday, it was greens and cornbread. On Wednesday, it was string beans and cornbread. On Thursday, we sorta stepped it up. We’d have meatloaf and macaroni and cheese. That was really a big day.

And Friday was also a big day because she made a big pot of chili, one pound of hamburger and I don’t know how many kidney

beans. She could make it and it's strange. Then on Sunday we had what we called a breakfast – I mean had the – what do you call that word – starch, meat and vegetable and a salad.

[00:06:02]

So we ate the traditional dinner on Sundays, beef roast, chicken and dressing, and it's strange. After we got married – Francis and I got married in '56 – that first year or two I lived in my mother's house 'til we could get on our feet and my mother was cooking then like she cooked in 1935 and Francis could not understand that.

She said, "Mrs. Hooks, what's for dinner today?" And Mother would say, "Cabbage." She said, "Cabbage?" You know and for a while she thought my mother was, you know, sort of withholding or doing something.

She didn't know that my mother had not changed except that as she got older she may add a sweet potato and every now and then – very seldom any meat – but every now and then a potato, you know, or something like that.

But seven children came fairly healthy. All of us lived to be almost 70. I'm 83, so it must have been all right, but the point I'm trying to make is in the morning when we had eggs, ten of us eating eggs, we didn't have a dozen of eggs.

[00:07:02]

We had maybe three, maybe four, and mixed it with milk and scramble them and rice. Thank God for rice and grits and if the rice was over an icebox – didn't have a refrigerator, of course, just the box.

You take the rice and make what they call rice pudding with grape – I mean not grape – with raisins and sugar and lemon in there, so – and grits, she could make what we call grits bread. Put a egg in that and bake it and slice it, so that we didn't throw away anything, and they didn't have any garbage pickup in my neighborhood.

They had it in her neighborhood, but I lived on the bayou, big bayou about 50 or 100 feet behind my house, and when we did accumulate garbage, we just simply took it to the bayou and threw it there. Now, that bayou was about a inch deep, but in a flood, when it rained, it was six, seven foot.

[00:08:00]

And it would take beds and anything. It was strong. I could see what a flood is because on a rainy day that bayou would – my mother would not let us go too close because you could get killed

down there and anything, trees and limbs and anything, sofas, floating down to the river.

So that I know – we did have, thank God, an indoor commode, but not an indoor bathtub, so I took my Saturday night bath in a tin tub until I was 14 and in the summertime, we had to bathe every night, which I hated, you know, but we had to.

They thought you got dirtier in the summer for some reason, but any rate, big tin washtub and I don't have any regrets. I had a beautiful childhood, no regrets, don't ever recall being hungry, although there were days when we had reached extremity and I didn't know it.

My mother would do what we call now hot water cornbread, fry it and send to the grocery store and get a nickel's worth of – that's what we called it – nickel's worth of molasses.

[00:09:02]

You take your own jug and they would have a big barrel and then come home and have cornbread and molasses. We thought that was a great meal. We didn't know my mother had run out of everything else and cornbread and molasses was – that nickel was the last resort.

And today, my sister, Mildred, still loves the concept of that cornbread and molasses. If she has cornbread now she's looking for molasses to go with it, and that started my childhood. I went to Porter School. She went to Larose. They were two of the leading schools.

We had great teachers and we learned – parts of speech, verb and noun. What's that word, you know, coming together, declining nouns and conjugating verbs and improper numbers and all that kinda thing. We did our thing and I loved school and loved arithmetic and geography. The teachers taught. I can't remember all of it.

[00:10:01]

But I ask these young people today, "What are you learning?" They can't pronounce their names. They don't know anything about parts of speech, declaratory, derogatory, imperative sentences. They don't know – I don't know what they're teaching today, but we had to learn. Am I right, Francis?

*Francis Hooks:*

Amen. You had to learn.

*Holly James:*

So you said you had seven brothers and sisters?

*Benjamin Hooks:* Six brothers and sisters.

*Holly James:* Six, okay.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Seven of us.

*Holly James:* Okay, so what were their names and when were they –?

*Benjamin Hooks:* My oldest brother, Charles Hooks, born in 1912; Julia Hooks born in 1914; Robert Hooks, Jr., 1919; Raymond, who still lives – the others are dead. Raymond was born in 1919. I'm sorry. Robert was in 1917. I was born in 1925. My sister, Mildred, who still lives, born 1927 and I had a sister, Bessie, who died and she was born in 1932.

[00:11:00] It's a tragedy because my sister, Julia, was one of the most brilliant women I've ever known and my brother, Robert, just smart, but neither of them had a chance to go to college because when my sister finished, born in 1914, and when she finished high school, the Depression was just eating in and Memphis State was not open.

Had Memphis State been open to black folk, she would have gone on over there because the tuition was about \$3.00 a year and she could have made it, eating at home anyway, so it wouldn't have taken anything extra but carfare and the same is true of my brother.

When he finished, it was still Depression but breaking, but the school for black folk was in Nashville and they couldn't afford train fare or bus fare to Nashville and they had to get – if they get to Nashville, where are they gonna eat and sleep?

They couldn't sleep in the dormitories 'cause they didn't have any money, didn't have – if we'd had an uncle or aunt up there who would have taken – and that's what a lot of black families did.

[00:12:00] They went to a school where they had some kinfolks. White America has made us pay a terrible price for being black. How many geniuses, doctors who could have discovered new principles, lawyers who could have expounded the Constitution which lost their chance because if they finished high school, they were blessed.

We were proud that all of us finished high school. That was a record because in much of the black community when a black boy got to the eighth grade – and it took him 12 years to get there, you know, being out to pick cotton and so forth – nobody ever thought

about sending him to high school, but an eighth grade education was very good.

If you had mastered it, you was as well off as some with a college degree today really in terms of English and understanding life.

*Holly James:* All right, well, Mrs. Hooks, Mr. Hooks said that your dad was a doorman?

*Francis Hooks:* No, my father was a bellhop.

*Holly James:* A bellhop? Okay.

[00:12:59] So what was – how would you compare yourself growing up to – what was your life experiences like growing up in that environment?

*Francis Hooks:* My father worked at the **Galesa** Hotel and my mom had been a teacher prior to her marriage and then she did a little sub-teaching after marriage.

Basically, my mom was a stay-at-home mom, but she could sew very well, and so when they had the Cotton Makers' Jubilee and when they had the Cotton Carnival, my mom worked. That was the only job, J-O-B, that she had. She sewed and made costumes for the Cotton Makers' –

*Benjamin Hooks:* May have gone on a month, six weeks.

*Francis Hooks:* Yeah.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And she enjoyed it 'cause she could sew well, helped them with a lot of their clothes, their own clothes, and, as I said, they had no financial problems because he father was very – they didn't own a car.

[00:14:00]

*Francis Hooks:* Very frugal man. We didn't own a car.

*Benjamin Hooks:* They didn't own a car. He was a very frugal. They –

*Francis Hooks:* I bought the first car when I started teaching.

*Benjamin Hooks:* He bought it for you, didn't he? He kept it –

*Francis Hooks:* Well, yes, Daddy helped. Yeah, he had –

*Benjamin Hooks:* Car cost – brand new Chevrolet, 1949 Chevrolet, cost \$1,800.00.

*Francis Hooks:* That's right.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Notes were \$49.00 a month.

*Francis Hooks:* And **that car** –

[Crosstalk]

*Benjamin Hooks:* And that ran us out 'cause her salary was only \$150.00 a month.

*Francis Hooks:* Yeah.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And, well, gas was only \$0.35 a gallon, so that wasn't so – really at that time it was not \$0.35. It was about \$0.22 a gallon.

*Francis Hooks:* Twenty-nine, \$0.29.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Twenty-nine cents a gallon in 1949. Her first job was in the county and they would not hire in the city. They had a very prejudiced woman in charge of hiring and she thought –

*Francis Hooks:* She wouldn't hire my sister. My sister had finished Howard University ahead of me and my sister came to get a job in Memphis teaching and this lady, Miss Williamson, she would not hire my sister. Said, "You've gone to Howard University. You don't need to work." So she wouldn't hire her.

[00:15:00]

*Benjamin Hooks:* And wouldn't hire Francis when she graduated from Fisk.

*Francis Hooks:* And then when I went – and when I graduated from Fisk, "You don't need to work. You finished at one of the best schools for black folks."

Well, it was colored folks then and so she wouldn't hire me, so I got a job in the county and – at Barrett's Chapel. Ever heard of Barrett's Chapel? Well, Barrett's Chapel is the largest –

*Benjamin Hooks:* No, actually, that was your second school. Your first school was Miss Stafford and she started off as an assistant principal. It was a good break 'cause only two teachers at the school.



*Francis Hooks:* Yeah.

*Benjamin Hooks:* So she had the one, second – she had the first, second, third and fourth grade.

*Francis Hooks:* I had first, second and third grade.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Miss Stafford had fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth.

*Francis Hooks:* Yeah.

*Benjamin Hooks:* A little school. What was the name of that school out there? Anyway, I went out to see them and it was a little, bitty school with two rooms, outdoor facility.

[Crosstalk]

*Francis Hooks:* \_\_\_\_\_ downstairs.

*Benjamin Hooks:* But Miss Stafford was a wonderful person.

*Francis Hooks:* She taught me an awful lot.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And we meet people now that Francis taught in the first grade and they look like they're old enough to be her father 'cause she's aged very well.

[00:16:00] Some of them **toddle in** and say, "Mrs. Hooks, you taught me." She said, "Taught you?" Yeah. At this school, wherever it was, I'd say she – only two teachers and she enjoyed it.

*Francis Hooks:* I really did.

*Benjamin Hooks:* They had a lot of fun with all these boys, no discipline problems in those days. Strap if you had it and Miss Stafford had a switch and – but the thing – then she went to Barrett Chapel, which is a big school with a high school department, and for some reason they made her the football – the basketball coach.

*Francis Hooks:* The basketball coach. I knew **nada**.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And we had a friend, Joe Sweet, who became a –

*Francis Hooks:* **Irwin** Sweet –

*Benjamin Hooks:* – high school principal in –

*Francis Hooks:* – became a principal \_\_\_\_\_.

*[Crosstalk]*

*Benjamin Hooks:* – and Robinson and Joe Atkins.

*Francis Hooks:* Herbert Robinson, Joe Atkins \_\_\_\_\_ –

*[Crosstalk]*

*Benjamin Hooks:* And they would get together every basketball night.

*Francis Hooks:* They would help me.

*Benjamin Hooks:* They'd be back and forth out in the country, I called it, running to those basketball games and Francis was a coach. Can you imagine that? And these boys would help her and they had a great time.

I didn't – I was practicing law and trying to pull together my practice so I was going to meetings at the Elk's Lodge and the Masonic Lodge and the \_\_\_\_\_ Lodge and the Chamber of Commerce and Junior Chamber of Commerce and the Frontiers Club.

*[00:17:06]* That's how I built my practice, going to meetings at night, meeting people. American Legion, \_\_\_\_\_ where I belonged to at least 20 groups.

*Francis Hooks:* Whatever was \_\_\_\_\_.

*[Crosstalk]*

*Benjamin Hooks:* They met at least once a month, so I had a meeting every night, but basically it was about 9:00, so then we would – if she was not at the basketball, we would get together and make the last movie and then they had a lotta dances in those days. We had a lotta fun when I was – when we first got married.

I was not preaching, so I went to the dances and we had bridge club and just had a great time and black women, it's remarkable. I don't – I can't explain it, but they had Toussaint L'Ouverture Club, Phyllis Wheatley Club, Dunbar Club.

They read books, bettered themselves, sit around and talk, and then they had \_\_\_\_\_ and Sophisticates. These were social clubs of young black women, black and white.

[00:18:00]

Oh, they – and they put on a dance every year, a formal, with – sometimes they'd have ice sculpture with wine running down the – they had – those days in some kinda way was a lotta fun. Then on Saturdays, the bridge clubs met. She belonged to two or three.

Her mother belonged to two or three and I hung around to go – to get the food. They'd cook some of the best food you ever taste in your life and if we got there right – they'd let the men eat or the man eat if he can. I'd always – I was a very greedy person and liked a lot of food and all the clubs – didn't they, Francis?

*Francis Hooks:*

Yep.

*Benjamin Hooks:*

I've never seen such good – I never – coming up on greens and cabbage and string beans and here we got baked Alaska for the dessert and crab and salad and I had never had it, never had heard of it.

Food I had never heard of in my life, they were serving, and they'd be dressed to perfection and they'd play bridge for three or four hours then have food. They had a great time.

[00:19:00]

And then we had about – at least every bridge club organization, eight of them, gave a formal dance once a year. That's eight dances. They gave a closed dance once a year. That's another eight. That's 16.

These various social clubs I talked about, there's about eight of them, so about 40 dances a year and I didn't like to dance and didn't like to go to dances. She was one of the greatest dancers ever lived, so we'd have to go to the dance.

*Francis Hooks:*

I was \_\_\_\_\_.

[Crosstalk]

*Benjamin Hooks:*

She dragged me there and –

*Francis Hooks:*

And then I'd take him on the floor.

*Benjamin Hooks:*

Nine o'clock, the dance would start and end about 1:00. I'd try my best not to get there before 11:00 'cause I could not dance, had no rhythm. You talking about rhythm. This is one Negro boy that never had any rhythm.

*Francis Hooks:*

Not \_\_\_\_\_.

*Benjamin Hooks:* When I get on the floor to dance, I was just mechanical.

*Francis Hooks:* I'd say move forward, step back.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And I could do a march. They did a waltz. Look like I learned how to waltz.

*Francis Hooks:* One, two, three, **four**, one, two.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Yeah, one, two, three. I could waltz. But we had so much fun and after the dance we'd go to Tony's for a hamburger or fried chicken dinner or Gay Hawk.

[00:20:00] Completely segregated, but your big job was to keep outta the way of white folk. If you could stay around for – if you went to school, try not to come any contact with white people, not a policeman, not a fireman, nobody. Only time you have to deal with white people is **Goldsmith** and \_\_\_\_\_ trying to buy –

*Francis Hooks:* Or trying to go \_\_\_\_\_.

[Crosstalk]

*Benjamin Hooks:* And you couldn't – if you went to Main Street and paid – people used to walk and pay their telephone bill, their light bill, their rent, on Main Street or layaway and then walk to Beale Street for a Coca-Cola or a beer 'cause you couldn't buy anything on Main Street. That's why Beale Street prospered.

After you spent the morning, you know, walking around, paying your bills and shopping, then you'd head on down to Beale Street where the restaurants were and the movie theaters, so that life would all – and it was a mean life.

Ed Crump was the boss and you dare not ask a white policeman a question. They were killing Negroes and Negroes killing each other. We were the murder capital of the world at one time. We killed two people every Saturday night at least.

[00:21:00] And I went down on Beale Street with my father, but on Saturday night I was frightened to death 'cause I knew it was dangerous, but I enjoyed life. Had a little Bethlehem Center across the street from me. I read every book in that library. Had a good library at the school. I read every book.

We had a great principal, Blaire \_\_\_\_\_, who wanted us to be the best and I learned those poems. “Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul. Life is real! Life is earnest! And the grave is not its goal. Up and running, still achieving, still pursuing. Learn to labor and to wait.”

Yet, you had to enounce and do the – you know, you had to do it, like **can't you** do that. We have to do that. We had to do that, English, Chaucer, and all the great English literature, Shakespeare. We did that. We had plays. I was a Latin scholar and I could translate whole pages of Latin and –

[00:22:05]

*Francis Hooks:* We had to learn Latin.

*Benjamin Hooks:* We had to learn Latin and I knew chemistry.

*Francis Hooks:* We took a course in Latin \_\_\_\_\_ –

[Crosstalk]

*Benjamin Hooks:* We – I learned about – what's that H<sub>2</sub>O and SO<sub>4</sub> and they had a few little instruments, had Bunsen burners and we had some – it was a great school and, of course, I remember history, 'cause you had to remember all the presidents, George Washington and then Adams and Jefferson and Madison and Monroe and all.

We had – there was many 'cause it stopped at Roosevelt.  
(*Laughter*) It did and we had to know the 1812 War, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the War of Spanish American.

Of course, World War II had not started. I finished high school in '41 and headed straight for LeMoyne College and they had a great school, great teachers. Oh, my God, LeMoyne had some great teachers.

[Crosstalk]

*Francis Hooks:* Had two Fisk graduates here.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Ooh, they had some great teachers and a great school. Booker Washington was a great high school, capstone of Negro education in the South. We lead –

*Francis Hooks:* And others follow.

*Benjamin Hooks:* – and others follow.

[00:23:00] Washington, Washington, our school boys. How we love ya! Then we had a ballet every year up at the Ellis Auditorium and finally the people – white folk – built us a stadium, so we had our own stadium for football games and, of course, we played Manassas and mostly we played out of town schools, Pearl High in Nashville and Chattanooga and Knoxville, St. Louis.

There was about 18 we played from across this Mid-South area and it would be 3,000 or 4,000 people there. Then Mr. Lee had what he called the Blues Bowl where two leading schools played. Dr. Vinson and his wife went to Cotton Carnival once and they had a little nephew lived with him and said, “Daddy, Daddy.”

They called his uncle Daddy; said didn’t see no colored folk. Only job colored folk have, put on a white smock and lead the mules. Folks were, you know, drawn by mules and you see a colored man with a big white smock on.

[00:24:01] So Dr. Vinson and his wife started the Cotton Makers’ Jubilee. We had our own kings, our own queens, our own royalty and really our parade was the biggest parade in town and on Friday night when that parade hit Main and Beale and started down be 100,000 folk down there and finally the white folks said, “Well, let us come.”

So white king and queen would come and sit on the reviewing stand and the most prominent black folk in Memphis were either king or the queen and the Jubilee court. It was designed to give us our way out.

Then they had what they called the Mid-South Fair, but the black folk had to the Tri-State Fair led by Dr. L. G. Prowse, whom I knew very well because his office was in my building where I worked, and the Tri-State Fair is where I met this gal.

And it was the same as the Mid-South Fair, the same fairgrounds, the same \_\_\_\_\_ and rides, but we had hogs and cows, you know, agriculture and pies. I would go with my grade school principal because we took in – we – in our grade school, we had a teacher of domestic art, which was sewing, and domestic science, which was cooking.

[00:25:05] So we prepared shawls and blankets and knitting and crochet and food and took it to the fair. All the schools did. We had 25 or 30

schools. We had tremendous exhibits from all over the Mid-South, Mississippi and Arkansas, and folk came there. I suspect there'd be 50,000 people there.

So I had a young – beautiful, young lady I was courting. She's dead now, so I don't want to say too much about that, but her name was Marie and among other things she had long hair. Anyway, she – it came down below her waist.

And that Sunday morning rather early I went out to the fairgrounds where she was – she always had two jobs. She was teaching school, but she had a friend who had a concession, so she was selling ice cream in a little thing and we struck up a conversation at the fairgrounds, which was the first time we ever really talked, though our families knew each other.

[00:26:00]

Later on that evening, I came back to the fairgrounds with my girlfriend. I like to tell this. My little nieces make me tell it every time they saw me. "What happened, Uncle? What happened?" And I said – and she ran up to me a little bit – ice cream, ice cream – and hit me on the leg. Ice cream, ice cream.

I said, "What do you want?" Ice cream. Ice cream. And so then I took my girlfriend home and came back with Francis and her chaperone said, "Well, you can go. He can drive you home." That's how the relationship started.

We courted a couple of years and had a great time, went to dances and balls and bridge club meetings and eating at, as I said before, the Gay Hawk and Tony's. Tony's Restaurant had some of the best food I've ever had 'til this day.

Get a whole half fried chicken for \$0.50. Fry the best shrimp town and his steak. I had never had steak. You know, my family never gave me a whole steak. I didn't know what that was.

[00:27:00]

We had never had a steak at home that I can recall. Had it at her house 'cause her mother was a great cook, but sometimes what her mother cooked for the whole family I thought was mine. It was such a small portion.

I'd take it all and they were looking at me. *(Laughter)* This gal has been – we've been married how many years, baby? Fifty-six years?

We adopted one daughter, Pat. She's taught now 30 years, retired and has two grandchildren. One of our grandchildren was a Rhodes Scholar, but he decided to go into professional football instead and did very well in pro football for eight or ten years, so we've had a good life.

Her mother had a stroke and was not able to speak or use her right side for 15 years and my wife and her sister, Tete, took care of their mother. The president couldn't – Reagan couldn't have had better treatment. They had two women who – she had 24-hour care and she was the boss even with that stroke.

[00:28:01] She'd go in that icebox and, oop, oop, oop, tell you what she wanted to eat and how to fix it and just ran things and she loved Jim Bakker because he sang those old time –

[Crosstalk]

Francis Hooks: \_\_\_\_\_ Jim Bakker, the religious man used to come on television. Did you ever hear?

Tiffani Smith: Tammy Faye Bakker's husband.

Francis Hooks: Tammy Faye Bakker.

Benjamin Hooks: Tammy Faye and Jim. Well, Jim had those old songs, you know, "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," "Blessed Assurance," that I loved, that my mother loved, my mother-in-law loved, and I told you I had a great mother, great manager.

My father was a good photographer. He took to the grave a great ability, one of the greatest retouchers. We used to retouch pictures then with a pencil and he was a genius at it.

My brother, Charlie, was a genius at photography and they went in business for – he went in business with his older brother, in 1907 and they stayed in business until 1982, 75 years.

[00:29:00] At the time of the death of the business, they were the second oldest black business in town. T. H. Hayes was the oldest, funeral home, but after Charlie died, there was nobody else to carry on and, unfortunately, the business went kaput and a strange thing, I think – I have to be careful how I say this – that somebody stole all of my negatives.

Francis Hooks: Mm-hm.



*Benjamin Hooks:* I think they did. Maybe they didn't. That's a dispute and I'm on the air and I don't want to say something I can't back up, but whatever they did, they got them, but I'm so glad now because Delta State ended up with them, a university down in Mississippi.

And they have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, you know, getting them in good order that I could never have done, so it came out for the best and we would have four or five exhibitions of Hooks Brothers photography.

They go back, as I said, 1907. If we could have found them, we had pictures of Booker Washington and **Scott Bond**, the secretary of war speaking here.

[00:30:01] So we had a great time. Booker Washington also had a great drum and bugle corps. This gal was a part of it. We were famous.

*Francis Hooks:* I was not a drum major. I was a bugle player.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And my sister was in it. It was about 100 –

*Francis Hooks:* \_\_\_\_\_.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Was it 100?

*Francis Hooks:* Close to 100.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Seventy to 100 members and they went to New York. They got what they call the Jubilee Dip and what that was, they'd be playing, "Da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da," you know, and one of the big – and they'd stop and all of them would do a dip. Look like they gonna fall down.

[Crosstalk]

*Francis Hooks:* But they \_\_\_\_\_ on the football field.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Look like they gonna fall down and all of New York went wild and they brought it back to Memphis, this Jubilee Dip. You could hear them hollering in Arkansas. Sherman Booker Hickman was a great doctor and he was also a Army officer and he was the man who drilled them –

*Francis Hooks:* Yes, he was the director.

*Benjamin Hooks:* – the band and I talked to you about the Blues Bowl. Had the American – we had a great time.

[00:30:58] When I first started practicing law – I remember like it was yesterday – café where I had my dinner, meat and two vegetables and cornbread, \$0.50, you know, and I ate there and a man would take me to dinner and get – and drill me about different questions for a fifty-cent dinner.

So what else can I tell you? We could not be firemen when I was coming up, could not be a policeman, could not be anything except a maid at the courthouse. They have to have maids, so I'm not depreciating that, or work at the garbage department and they treated them like dogs.

That's why when the big sanitation strike came, they had been arguing for years to make things better. Am I talking too much? Am I –

*Holly James:* Un-unh. No.

*Benjamin Hooks:* They'd been arguing for years to make things better and we had not been able to help them and finally they decided they had all they could take and it's ironic that the sign didn't say less hours, more pay, but I'm a man –

*Francis Hooks:* I am a man.

*Benjamin Hooks:* – and treat me with respect. Here I am, a grown man, walking down the alley with a garbage can, garbage – tin **garbage** on my head, with all the debris falling down on me.

[00:32:06] At 12:00, you don't give me a place or a time to wash up for my lunch. I gotta try to find a place. When night comes, I gotta go home on public transportation. Don't make enough to own a car and you don't give me any time to do it. If I wash up, it's on my own time.

No place, so I got to hide out somewhere and try to put on something and they finally went on strike, 1,300 strong, and Loeb was as crazy a man as ever walked in a pair of shoes and I've heard that he was not so much a segregationist, but he was plantation.

I know what's best for you, and underneath his desk a great big shotgun. Can you imagine that? The mayor of city. And the

white folk of Memphis supported him. The strike could have been settled, but he would not let them settle it.

[00:33:00]

We had Fred Davis and J. L. Netters, J. O. Patterson on the city council, black people. They had a strike in Atlanta. They went down there and found out how they settled it and what they did was the city couldn't check off, so they let the Red Cross check off the dues and give them to the union.

They came back to Memphis with that plan and, surprisingly enough, the city council adopted the plan. Yeah, you can have a check-off with the United Way and the strike was over and they would have gone back to work.

Loeb vetoed it and we could never get that single – that extra two votes to – we were a vote short on – what you call it – overriding the veto and there was a man on the city council named Bob James. He was an old man then. He must have been 100 when he died.

I must have seen him 50 times in the last two years of his life and never saw him that he didn't bust out crying like a baby because he realized he'd made a mistake in not voting. Said, "I don't know what happened to me, why I did that, why I let them make me, you know, vote wrong."

[00:34:00]

And he said, "Many nights I can't sleep a dab." Because Dr. King would not have been back here. He would not have gotten killed if the strike had been settled, no reason to come here, and it should have been settled. After Dr. King was dead, they did the very thing they wouldn't do while he lived.

They got a majority to override Loeb, and Loeb was mean as a junkyard dog – lowdown, lowdown – as far as I'm concerned. I have absolutely, positively no respect for him because black folk put him in office the first time thinking he was anti-Crump.

And he campaigned up and down Beale Street like he was a colored man, up and down Beale Street. All the black organizations endorsed Henry Loeb. That's our man and then he turned out to be the stumbling block that caused Dr. King to come back and get killed.

Then they finally decided to have black policemen, but they could not arrest white people. If they saw a white man breaking into a store, they had to call a white police to come and arrest him.

[00:35:02]

They had no jurisdiction over white people, just over black folks, and they all were stationed right on Beale Street, 13 of them, and then we finally had blacks in the fire department, but they had to give them a separate station 'cause the white firemen would not work next to them.

And, you know, fire departments are funny because they usually stay on three days and off three days, so they would bring their food and cook and live there. They may not go out of the fire station once in a month, so we have been through it here and many changes have been made. I don't need to talk about them.

Rhodes College used to be Southwest. They were prejudiced, of course, and anti-black. No blacks could go there. Memphis State, you couldn't go, so we were relegated, if we could make it, to LeMoyne. That's as far as we could go.

Francis, no, we can't do that. Just ask for – they may have a question for you. I've been doing most of the talking. You want to ask anything?

Holly James:

Oh, yeah.

[00:36:00]

So was most of your family college educated or what motivated you to go to college after high school?

Francis Hooks:

My mother had grown up in Philadelphia and when she came back here she taught. She did substitute teaching and was just –

Benjamin Hooks:

And did regular teaching.

Francis Hooks:

Well, yeah.

Benjamin Hooks:

At Bolton School.

Francis Hooks:

Well, she did sub-teaching in the City of Memphis but she did permanent teaching in the county. You know, she was out there before she came into the city.

Benjamin Hooks:

And this is what was funny about it. It's a small – it's a short car trip, but in those days she would leave on Sunday night and stay out there.

Francis Hooks:

She'd have to stay the whole –

Benjamin Hooks:

Stay the whole –

*Francis Hooks:* \_\_\_\_\_ –

*[Crosstalk]*

*Benjamin Hooks:* Because there was no – she didn't have a car.

*Francis Hooks:* – 'til Friday evening.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And there was no public transportation. It was about 30 miles. Train didn't run regularly, so she had to stay there –

*Francis Hooks:* In Bolton Bottoms.

*Benjamin Hooks:* – Sunday night, Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday night, Thursday night. Friday night, she'd come – get on the train and come back home and be here Friday night and all day Saturday and all day Sunday and Sunday night –

*Francis Hooks:* Sunday night, go back.

*Benjamin Hooks:* – just get on that train and try to get to what they called Bolton Bottoms, wasn't it?

*[00:37:05]*

*Francis Hooks:* Bolton Bottoms.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And she taught at the school out there. Isn't that strange? Today, it's just a car ride.

*Francis Hooks:* Mm-hm.

*Benjamin Hooks:* But in those days, if you had a car it was too far to drive back and forth with the speed limit and the roads being what they were. It was a major job to get through some of these county roads. If it rained, impossible, 'cause they were broken up and mud gullies and so forth, but nobody in that school had a car, so she had to stay the week.

Ain't no way to get back and forth, but if something big came up, death in the family or funeral, she could make arrangements for somebody maybe to try to pick her up. But Memphis has grown, as you know, progressively, black mayor, black superintendent of schools.

From time to time, black majority on the city council or county court, black mayor of the county, and blacks holding chief administrative offices, about – oh, many more judges.

[00:38:03]

I was the first black judge in the South. I was appointed by Frank Clement in 1964 to take office in September of '65. You would have thought that a earthquake had hit Memphis. The lawyers went crazy. Why you gonna give this man a judgeship and he has not run for office?

He should run in our bar primary. Let us vote on him. And two years before then I couldn't even belong to the bar primary – to the bar. I came back to Memphis and got a copy of the Constitution. This, that Memphis had showed the county bar association shall be open to all white lawyers practicing in this vicinity.

So for 13 years I couldn't belong to the bar association. Now they want me to run in their primary with 500 white lawyers and ten black. Ain't that stupid? And thank God we didn't have any rule then about some kinda commission deciding who gonna have to be – the governor had – he could choose anybody he want like the president.

[00:39:02]

I'm – I don't like the Supreme Court, but I'm glad the president still has a choice 'cause he's better than committee. Committees ruin everything, but the point I'm trying to make is that when Mr. Clement – Governor Clement appointed me, you'd have thought he'd put a gorilla in office.

They fussed about it for a year, but they couldn't do anything about it and on the first day of September, 1965, I held up this right hand and during court, I sat back there, the flowers and the food, my wife crying, everybody crying, and here comes the bailiff.

“Judge, Judge.” I don't know you talking about me. “Judge.” And finally he said – he touched me. I said, “Oh, yes.” He said, “The people out there waiting to address the court.” I shall never forget it. I put on my little black robe and walked back out there and I'd heard it at the Supreme Court. I'd heard it at lower courts.

[00:39:59]

Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! This honorable criminal court of Shelby County, Tennessee is now open for business pursuant to adjournment. All persons having business draw nigh and give attention shall be heard. Be seated, please.” I said, “That's right. I'm in charge.”

Great day and, of course, the next year I had to run for office and they were determined to get me out, but I had a good man at the NAACP, Jesse Turner, Jr. – Jesse Turner, Sr., and he let them know if anybody ran against Hooks there'd be somebody running against every judge and there were 22 of us.

So they got busy and discouraged – and so nobody ran but the 22 of us. One vote put us in and I got a six-year term, left to do something else, and wouldn't leave, though, until I got a successor and I got Governor Ellington to agree to appoint Odell Horton. When he left, he got **Otis Hicks** and that judgeship **and division**, I made changes down there.

[00:40:58]

I put in – they had a system of what we call pardons, suspended sentences. Get your sentence and you – the judge could suspend it and have them come back and report. Well, in the ten years before I went on the bench they had granted two between three judges over a period of ten years.

I granted seven the first day I did it. Again, the walls fell in. Today, it's a well-used tool, you know, been worked out. They recognize this little crazy boy had made an automobile accident, drunk or something, no need of putting him in jail and we suspended him and made him act right.

And then went to the FCC and I made all kinds of changes there. That was a great day. Howard Baker called me – Nixon did not know me, but Howard Baker did – at 8:00 one morning and said, "Ben –." It was 7:00 Memphis time.

"Would you like to have a shot at the FCC? You won't probably win, but you have a great chance." And I told him I wasn't interested.

[00:42:00]

Francis was listening and she said, "Who was that?" I said, "Howard Baker." "What did he want?" "He wanted me to consider going on the FCC." "What'd you tell him?" "I said no." She said, "Pick up that phone and tell him yes."

And I called him back in about five minutes and that – I went on the FCC and made all kinds of changes. Then I went to the NAACP and when I left there we had 506,000 members on role and had a magazine called *Crisis*, with 412,000 – what's that word – circulation and since then I've done everything I could to repay the people for being so kind.

Francis has been my right hand, my anchor, my most severe critic and most loving wife and that's about all I know to say unless you have some other question.

All my people – by the way, you asked that question – all of my brothers and sisters would like to have gone to college, but they simply were not financially able. It was understood in her house that all of them were going to college.

[00:43:00]

Her father saved up the money. Here these two little girls were finishing high school, going to Howard University, which is the best school black folk had in the world, two little girls, all dressed up in their white dresses and white saddle oxfords on their way to Howard, three trunks of clothes.

*Francis Hooks:*

In those days you had to take your own linen for the beds and everything.

*Benjamin Hooks:*

So they had – it was understood they were gonna –

[Crosstalk]

*Francis Hooks:*

\_\_\_\_\_ wooden trunk we had.

*Benjamin Hooks:*

– go to school and they did. As I said, all of them got advanced degrees and they have all done well.

*Holly James:*

So what was your experience like in college compared to being in Memphis?

*Francis Hooks:*

My experience in college?

*Holly James:*

Mm-hm.

*Francis Hooks:*

Quite a different setup because you had students or you had classmates from all over the United States, from South America. It was a mixture, very challenging.

[00:44:02]

*Benjamin Hooks:*

And then let's face it. Francis has – she's gotten over it, I think, now, bless her heart – always had this complex because she was darker.

In a black family you may get the dark child and the bright child, you know, based on your bloodlines and she had, you know,



ancestors, aunts and cousins that she knew who were very dark and she happened to have been the darkest child in her family.

Her sister, on the other hand, was very fair and so in school she suffered a little complex because people were mean then. That ain't your sister. Y'all couldn't be sisters, and there was a time when Francis couldn't get up and make a speech.

*Francis Hooks:* \_\_\_\_\_ you had red hair and –

*Benjamin Hooks:* And – oh, and that's why I was surprised and happy when we adopted the term "black," because if you were my color and called somebody black, there was a fight to death, you know. Oh, that was the worst name you could call somebody, that they're black, especially if you were sorta bright.

[00:45:02] Every time you said it, it was gonna be a fight, so I didn't have any fights 'cause I didn't call anybody black. I learned early to not do that, but she made it in spite of that and made – she started the volunteer placement program.

She sent more black kids to college than anybody in this city, she and a man named Jed Dreyfuss who had a jewelry store. They sent hundreds of young black kids to college who had no intention of going to college.

And she had about 1,000 people who were counselors, most of them white, that had these kids in their home for dinner, for lunch, for overnight stay 'cause these little black kids at Carver School, 1,500 of them had never had an experience with a white person, most of them, except for the grocery store or the department store, never knew what it was to know a white person as a individual.

And the white people who had never known anybody but their maid or chauffer, so they had no idea what we thought. All they could go by was what Mamie said and Mamie was saying something to keep her job.

[00:46:00] The chauffer was doing something to keep his job and that's the only white – colored – I've had black – white men tell me, "I never knew anything about black people 'til I met you." On the FCC one of the commissioners said, "I had determined to resign if you came here acting a fool."

He thought Jesse Jackson was a fool. "If you came here like Jesse Jackson demanding this and demanding that and making speeches

and doing this, I was gonna leave.” And we became best friends, had dinner at each other’s houses every other Friday. Isn’t that strange? Just what – and he opened his mind now.

He had never known a black person. He was 58 years old. Never had a meal in a black person’s house or a black person ever had a meal in his house. Never had a black secretary. Didn’t even have a black chauffer. He didn’t know any black people.

He says, “I know one black man. He’s a chauffer for the commissioner, you know, \_\_\_\_\_ the commissioner. That’s the only black man I know in the world and we’ve had black maids, so that was it.”

[00:47:00]

I hope I have not – oh, yes, I should say I went to the Army and there were a million blacks in the Army, only about 70,000 in combat. I was one of the unlucky 70.

I went to Howard University as a soldier, had a great time, did one year’s work in one semester, was in class six hours – from 9:00 ’til 6:00, geography, chemistry, physics, math, physical training, military intelligence, had seven classes.

I went to school at 9:00, didn’t get out ’til 6:00, and spent the rest of the night trying to do my homework. Then went and joined the 92nd Division and made it through on the front lines, shot at, received a combat infantry badge, expert infantry badge, lot of campaign slogans.

So spent 20 months in Italy waiting to go to Japan to get killed. When war ended in Japan, I was the happiest man ever lived ’cause there were 10 or 12 divisions waiting to go to Japan, just waiting on the ships to take us.

[00:48:00]

And reading about their suicide tactics and so forth, we knew most of us, at least half of us would be killed or wounded in the first six months.

So then I came back and decided to go to law school and I’m happy about that and had a great experience, lovely family, good people that I met, black and white, and I’ve always tried to make a change and leave that position better than I found it.

Started a chicken system, Mahalia Jackson chicken system. Had 27 stores in nine states, but my principle partner went bankrupt and I had to go under Minnie Pearl chicken system. I started with –

what is it – Mutual Federal Savings and Loan Association, so I’ve been banker and we did well.

And I went on the bench and couldn’t do it any longer. We had to merge with a white institution and we did, so I’ve had a lot of experiences, beautiful experiences. I look back on a well-spent life.

[00:49:00] I’m just sorry that I’ve been sick now for the last year or so, can’t hardly leave the house. When I leave you, I’ll be going to bed because I can’t – Francis, give a closing remark.

*Francis Hooks:* What do you want me to say? Everything he has said is true and he has been a phenomenal man, I guess would be the only way I could describe Ben Hooks. He’s been touched by God to do so much for so many people, not only in his family but in families of people.

If anyone came to him and needed help, he was there to help them and with his mind – you know, I look at him and I said, “How did this man get this mind?” It is such – he’s just so bright and he’s kind. What else do you want me to say?

*Benjamin Hooks:* Well, I’m glad you said that. Oh, I should have said I’m also a preacher.

*Francis Hooks:* Yeah, he’s a minister –

*Benjamin Hooks:* A Baptist.

*Francis Hooks:* – which was a shock to me.

[00:50:00]

*Benjamin Hooks:* And she said she wasn’t ever gonna marry a minister ’cause –

*Francis Hooks:* Amen.

*Benjamin Hooks:* – an AME bishop’s son courted her to death and she said, “I don’t want to be a preacher’s wife.”

*Francis Hooks:* I did not want to be a minister’s wife.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And when I found after five years of marriage that I was gonna be a minister, it swept her off her feet and I pastored –

- Francis Hooks:* I was ready to throw in the towel.
- Benjamin Hooks:* – Middle Baptist Church.
- Francis Hooks:* I said, “Oh, no.”
- Benjamin Hooks:* I went there in 1956. They said they had 50 ministers in 50 years. I’ve been there 50 years, 52 years, and then 20 years in my – I mean ten years in my journey there I was called to another church and did something unusual. I ended up pastoring two churches for 30 years.
- Francis Hooks:* Two churches, one in Detroit and one in Memphis.
- Benjamin Hooks:* The church in Detroit was what you might call a mega-church.
- Francis Hooks:* Every other Sunday, up and down the highway.
- Benjamin Hooks:* I had an attendance every Sunday of a little over 2,000. I had enrolled membership of 3,500 and a casual membership of close to 7,000 and every Sunday morning people looking for chairs to sit in and church that held 1,800 people by count. We had a blessed time.
- [00:50:58]* We had the largest Sunday school in the city, largest missionary department.
- Francis Hooks:* That was in Detroit.
- Benjamin Hooks:* Started our own athletic club, athletic league, had boys playing baseball, had a camp. I resigned there.
- Francis Hooks:* Yeah. We used to take kids to – for a week long to camp and it was very interesting.
- Benjamin Hooks:* She became my director of youth there and we started a scholarship program that was still going on.
- Francis Hooks:* The scholarship program \_\_\_\_\_.
- [Crosstalk]*
- Benjamin Hooks:* A bus tour to bring our kids –
- Francis Hooks:* We would bring them from Detroit all the way down –

*Benjamin Hooks:* All the way down to about eight black colleges.

*Francis Hooks:* Yeah.

*Benjamin Hooks:* You know, they'd never had anybody go to college, that church didn't and we ended up with 45, 50 in school every year.

*Francis Hooks:* Yeah.

*Benjamin Hooks:* And we came down to Fisk and then to LeMoyne and then on down maybe to –

*Francis Hooks:* Tuskegee –

*Benjamin Hooks:* – Arkansas and back up.

*Francis Hooks:* – and Alabama.

*Benjamin Hooks:* We'd try to go to about six or eight colleges a year; paid it for them. They didn't have to pay a dime.

*Francis Hooks:* They didn't have to pay anything.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Lotta times they were blessed to stay in a dormitory. We had to take a sleeping bag, so you may stay at a church with a gymnasium and they got fed.

*Francis Hooks:* We did have fun.

[00:51:57]

*Benjamin Hooks:* Otherwise, they stayed in a hotel; big air-conditioned bus that my church owned. We \$284,000.00 and bought our own Greyhound bus back there in 1970, I think it was. That's a lotta money then; \$284,000.00 is what that bus cost, but it was –

*Francis Hooks:* But he was such a giver, you know, and I think God has just been kind to both of us because of the outreach that Ben Hooks has –

*Benjamin Hooks:* And I should say this to this audience. I'm a tither. I believe strictly that one ought to at least give 10 percent. In the last ten years, I've given my church more than the tithe.

*Francis Hooks:* Yes.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Well, some people call it double tither. I sometimes give 20 percent pretax and my local church, I've given over a million dollars in the last ten years to that church. That's how much I love it and love the work of God and I've helped churches all over the nation to make it.

*Francis Hooks:* Doesn't hurt to tithe. That belongs to God.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Yes, and she's a tither.

*Francis Hooks:* Yes, I'm a tither and when I don't tithe, sometimes, you know, you get chintzy.

*[00:52:59]* And whenever you get chintzy, you pay for it, so if you haven't started tithing, just try it. Try it for three months and see how you will feel.

*Benjamin Hooks:* You can't do better with 90 percent than you did on a hundred and just try it. Believe in it and it's not a matter of getting more money. It's a matter of having \_\_\_\_\_.

*[Crosstalk]*

*Francis Hooks:* Satisfaction.

*Benjamin Hooks:* Treating people right, understanding how to react when people don't treat you right. It gives you a healthier life, a better lifestyle, a better appreciation of other people. I don't tithe to get money. I tithe to have peace in my life and for 50-something years – 55 years, long before I started preaching, I was a tither.

My pastor taught me tithing and I started tithing as a member, trustee at First Baptist Church of **Lauderdale**. I started tithing then and I've never missed a day and people used to look because they used to publish it. I stopped them from doing that. Reverend, you gave a \$300.00. Well, I had made \$3,000.00.

*[00:54:00]* Then some weeks I gave \$10.00, didn't make anything but I just gave \$10.00, but every week I gave at least 10 percent, so I've been blessed – blessed. I've spent more time, however – if I had my life to live over again, I'd take a little more time for myself and my wife.

*Francis Hooks:* Amen.

*Benjamin Hooks:* We never took advantage. We could have gone to Israel, didn't get there, been treated as a potentate if we'd gone to South Africa. They had it all arranged and my sister got sick. You remember that?

I had paid \$1,800.00 for us to go on the blue train, lost that money, but I've just been blessed and I'm thankful for it. Wish my health was a little bit better now, but –

*Francis Hooks:* We're still here, so we just \_\_\_\_\_ –

*[Crosstalk]*

*Benjamin Hooks:* And I want to say to our young people, black and white, this country has overcome a lot, but there's still a lot to be done.

*Francis Hooks:* Amen.

*Benjamin Hooks:* We've come a long, long way in our treatment of women when they could not even own a house without being controlled by their husband, could not vote until the 1920s in a presidential election.

*[00:55:04]* Think about that, how we mistreated women and mistreated minorities, but little by little we made changes. I've come from a completely segregated situation where I could not even go into Peabody Hotel lobby unless I had a mop.

I couldn't walk through to look at the ducks and now I can go there and have a filet mignon and diet coke and make it on through, so young people, go to school. Open those books. Study. Learn! The half has not been told. The best poem has not been written. The best song has been sung.

The best invention has not yet been made. It's up to you. If you're gonna do anything, do it well! Sweep streets. Sweep streets like Mahalia Jackson could sing. If you're gonna carry out dishes, carry out dishes like Leonardo da Vinci painted. Whatever you do, be the best of whatever you are.

*[00:56:00]* At the end of the day, let it be said no man could sweep this street better than me and then we can be judged by the content of our character –

*Francis Hooks:* That's right.

*Benjamin Hooks:* — and not the color of our skin, our prior condition or by religion and that's what we're working for. Roy Wilkins and Thurgood Marshall and Walter White and Rosa Parks and Mary Bethune, Martin King put it down on the road that we might live. God bless you and God keep you. Amen.

*Tiffani Smith:* \_\_\_\_\_.

*Benjamin Hooks:* That's about all I have.

*Holly James:* Well, thank you very much for your story and we very much appreciate it at Crossroads.

*Francis Hooks:* Crossroads.

*[End of Audio]*