

Monroe Stevens

Interviewer: Mr. Moore Tell me where and when were you born?

Mo: I was born in Florida. Which the city is Glensong Florida. 1926, May 15. I am sorry. March 15, 1926 when I was born.

Interviewer: Florida. Because I know that Waterloo does have a sizable Florida population here.

Mo: Not too many here is from Florida. There is a few families here from Florida.

Interviewer: Describe what was your neighborhood like growing up in Florida.

Mo: Well, my neighborhood like in Florida growing up it was pretty unique. There was nothing to do.

Interviewer: Where you in the country.

Mo: Yeah.

Interviewer: So tell me what was school like? Where did you go to school?

Mo: School was good. I went to Saint John. Middle School. They went from k-9 at Saint John there. So after that I went to Tampa to live with Mienny (sp) I went to Milton High there. I didn't graduate from there because it was time for me to get a job.

Interviewer: It was time for you to work

Mo: It was time for me to work.

Interviewer: This was in the thirties right?

Mo: Early forties.

Interviewer: Early forties. What was your first job in Florida?

MO: well my first job in Florida. I worked at Phillip Construction building equipment that uh they supplied building materials see. So that sheet rock, bricks, blocks and all that. I worked there until I was seventeen and a half years old. And I went to MacClaster's shipyard. I forced my age up and I worked at McClaster's shipyard until I went off into the service.

Interviewer: Ok. So you are at the shipyard and then you go into the service. What branch of the service did you go into.

Mo: I went into the Navy.

Interviewer: Where you drafted.

Mo: I was drafted.

Interviewer: Ok. Tell me about that. What year was that?

Mo: I was drafted in 1943. It was alright but I got out because I had a bad knee. I guess they didn't have time to repair knees back then. I so I had a bad knee and that is how I got out.

Interviewer: I bet you weren't disappointed about that.

Mo: NO I was not. So I got out in so after I got out of the service I came back to my hometown. And I started working for a drycleaners service.

Interviewer: This is Quency, Quency Florida.

MO: Yes. And from then on everything was history. Let's see. I got married when I came back. And I had one child was born in Florida. My oldest daughter was born in Florida.

The rest of them were born here in Waterloo.

Interviewer: In Waterloo, Ok. Tell me about it, tell me about how you would make this move from Florida to Waterloo.

Mo: Well, I don't know. Well, really how did I get to Waterloo. See my wife has a couple of sisters from Waterloo. And so she wanted to be somewhere around her sisters. Since that was only the three sisters. She wanted to be around them. And she came to Waterloo and she liked it. I didn't come when she did see. Because she was only coming to go on a vacation you know, so I didn't come when she did see. So later on I came here. And I was planning on making an arrangement to follow my job which was McClasters had moved to Pennsylvania. And so that oh after leaving the service you had so long you could apply and I was waiting on some sort of education. I was going to go to school for welding. I always like to weld and I decided to go to school for welding.

Interviewer: Let's talk about Waterloo specifically. This is really important because of what you would do for Waterloo is amazing for the community and politically and in the neighborhood as a whole. Specifically the black neighborhood. Excuse me. So your wife is your connection to Waterloo? Through her you would come?

Mo: Yes, through my wife I would come to Waterloo.

Interviewer: Tell me about the first day when you came to Waterloo, what was happening, what was going through your mind, what would you do?

Mo: Well the first day I got to Waterloo, I came in September and it was just beginning to get cool. I don't know whether I was going to stay here or if I need to leave see. I wanted to, I went to John Deer's and I put in an application in for a job. So, in fact I put in an application and they hired me the same day.

Interviewer: This makes Waterloo look appealing to you.

Mo: After my first and second check looks good and good, I said you got to make a home somewhere, so why not here.

Interviewer: How long would you be out at John Deere and what was your role?

Mo: Well my first role out there I drove trucks. My second role I was point (?). And when I left Deere's I was in the mill room chipping and grinding. Deere's was really a great place to work at that time. But they laid off. I was there six and a half years and I was laid off two or three years of those. Especially when a man has a family so I went to Rath's and got a job. So before I went to Rath's and when Deere's laid off for the last time even Rath's wasn't hiring. So what I did, I left and I stayed in Minneapolis for a year. I got a job at Manufacturer. They make balers they make snow glaze for the army. I worked there for a year. John Deere's called me back. I went back to Deere's and worked one month and was laid off again. And I said well this is it, I have got to find something different. So I went to Rath's and got a job just like that.

Interviewer: So you would spend the rest of your career working at Rath's?

Mo: Yeah, thirty years I put up at Rath's.

Interviewer: Ok tell some of your responsibilities. I know that you were in the Union you were very active. You were in leadership roles, you were an officer in fact. Tell me some of the position you held as a union employee in Rath. Excuse me, as an officer?

Mo: I was department Steward and steward captain of my department. And next to you was assistant division of steward. And when Rath's closed I was division steward that time. And I think that working in the union gave me a greater outlook that I could feel the need of a lot of people some people that did not have the ability to take care of

themselves on the job. And the union sent us to school after school after school to learn how to communicate how to communicate with those people. With employees and also management. Because they sent us to take management courses where would be able to deal with management. You remember that guy I introduced you to yesterday, he played a great role in the union when it comes to minorities.

Interviewer: You talk about minorities this is important. Because you are talking about a time period, the forties the fifties and the sixties, Pardon me. The fifties the sixties and the seventies. You are here at Rath and you are union official and I know that you had to deal with a lot of racism and discrimination. So I'm quite sure this is where you have done a lot of your work. Give me two examples of when you had to come in and deal with some racial discrimination.

Mo: Well, I had a quite a few racial discrimination that I had to deal with and I also had some personal I had to deal with. Because at that time Rath's in certain departments there was a lot of race in different departments. There were some departments there in Rath I think there was something like 50 some departments completely white. There were no black in there. When the unions started cracking down on race. Then there was a situation the affirmative action situation pushed women's in the same category that the black male. So that made the white women and the black women all were in the minority. That the white male still had the upper hand on the minorities because his wife could get a job and I applied for it. And they say, oh we got a minority in the job. So this was a tough situation when it come to equal pay. Therefore a job was classed at ABC. That oh there was Dave and this fellow there got a different job because a job could not get a C job but a women could get an A job. A job mean that it is a male job only.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of lifting.

Mo: Yes. A B job was in between but a C job was mostly females. And a B job female or males could do that. So females decided that they wanted to do A jobs. And a few went over and did them.

Interviewer: Ok let's talk a little bit about, now you are the union office. I know that they were real; I know that the union always encouraged their African American officers to be active in the community. IN fact, they encouraged it. I am thinking specifically of an article in the Courier, "The UPWA Local 46 Life Membership of NAACP" This is the title in the Courier. This local forty six is you. This is the union you are affiliated with. Tell me a little bit about this article.

MO: Well that particular article at that time, I was chairman of the equal rights committee of local forty six. I encouraged that the local itself to push it a lifetime member of the NAACP. So as they, I didn't have to twist arms or anything. They were willing and glad to be member of NAACP. Because they said they like numbers here. I was in it to check to the NAACP. I received a plac. And besides that it was another member of a local forty six he was working at Raths, his name was Herb Cox. Pledged a 500 dollar life membership of NAACP. And they presented me his plac that night. And there was another young man that I really know well his name was Walter Hinnerson. I received that plac see. And I was stepping out of there with three plac. Herb Cox, Walter Hinnerson, and Local 46.

Interviewer: This is good because I am thinking. Here is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. You know you have this huge factory, this huge business. Powerhouse. Here you are a union member officer at the time and they are buying this membership. How does the union or the company benefit from this.

Mo: I think the union really benefited because there was communication. They had to back up what they if anything happened in the community that was a racist situation because the union had money in the pots. You know what I mean. So you put your mouth where your money. The money was there so they could speak too. They wouldn't try to change any policy the NAACP but they would get behind the NAACP in whatever they could do to encourage them to move forward.

Interviewer: Now also I know that the union encouraged you to be active in your community and to be political. And you would be, you would become very political in your prime in the community. You would be out there making things happen. You and Jimmy Porter working side by side making things happen. I am thinking specifically, let's talk about the article by the Courier the article is titled, Stevens to Head East Citizen Unit. That is the article in the Courier.

Mo: East side citizen committee this thing come about, Mrs. Adler Tidwell that really spearhead this thing to organize a committee that we can look in on the voter registration, board of education. And we can choose who we want in our neighborhood. And then that committee was organized. To place officers was that the first president was the Reverend Berg. He was president of that organization and I was vice president. And when he stepped down. He had a church in Cedar Rapids and I think he stepped down to put more

emphasis on his church in Cedar Rapids. Then that is so that left the door open for me to step up as President.

Interviewer: I know that you would be instrumental in getting Dr. Harvey.

Mo: Dr. Don Harvey. This committee was instrumental in election Jim Jackson to the legislature. Also that we.

Interviewer: During what time was this about.

Mo: It was in the sixties. Getting Jim Jackson to the legislature, getting Dr. Harvey to the school board. Also we ran...

Interviewer: Why was getting Dr. Harvey important?

Mo: Well Dr. Harvey was the principal of a school in Texas before he went back to school to become a doctor. That was we figured that he really if anybody would know education it would have been him because he was an ex-principal.

Interviewer: This African American, he was the first. This is good we need to have representation on the school board and you are part of that.

Mo: We work hard for candidates. We was going to vote for a candidate on that side of town then the candidate then the candidate have to come to the black jungle. He ought to come down here because we wasn't going to let anybody dictate to us in the black jungle I mean. If they want our vote they got to come down and let us know that this is our choice. So I think this committee serviced a great purpose during the time.

Interviewer: This is one of the many things you would begin to do politically. I also have one thing from the Miami paper. Here you are attending the National Democratic Convention in Florida. Here you are, you and Jimmy Porter making things happen. Kind of tell me about how you got involved in that and actually what happened.

Mo: You see Jim and I had been working in the political arena ever since 1950. Jim Porter and myself. Because our friends work was when I was working at Deers at that time and Jim was working at Deers at the time. We was on strike in 1950. So there was the president of the union, a guy by the name of Carl Dahls. He wanted to run for state rep. There was a very active guy in our community by the name of Cuba Tidwll. That he wanted someone to go out and knock on doors and pass out leaflets for Carl Dawls who was running as a representative. So he came down to the Pickett shack. He came down to the picket shake and he said you two young fellas there I have some work I need you to do. Just like that so me and Jim was went out and forth. I am pretty sure that you two guys could do it. I looked at Jim and he looked at me. And I say, well if he think that he think we can do it and we don't know too much about it we probably can do it. We should give it a try. They give us two big shoe boxes with people names on cards that we supposed to knock on doors on our community. He didn't send us outside of our community. Sent us right in our community. And Jim and I went on the corner of Lin and Cottage street and we sit down on the curb and we went through the box to see what we was gonna do. In fact, Jim live on the corner on Linn and Cottage and I lived just one block on Sumner street. So we make one of the two of our stopping place so that we can restock our cards. So that is how it begin and we started knocking on doors. And every years since then we knocking on doors in the political arena. And so that we joined the democratic party. And I know that I made a precinct. I served as ward leader. Also Jim he served as ward leader. We were both on a district democratic party. So that's the way we got started. We had to head off every precinct committee person. So that was in 1972

when McGovern was running for the president of the United States. All the way to the precinct caucus to the state convention that well I went on committee all the way see. So when they got to the state convention, practically a lot of labor people on the committee see, when it got to the delegates Senator Edmond must have, delegates was kind of small and some of the labor delegates. See you had to have so many to make up a group see. I think it was about 2 % no 1% well either 1% or 2% black to be a group see. They pushed me over, no they didn't push me I decided to go over to the Edmund group. And one of his delegates was from the same state as he was, Benedict Harris. He was at that time the director at UNICUE. So that it was me, him, and his wife Diane. See the votes got down to the three of us as a delegate. And then Benedict say well I'm not going to have time to go because I got things to do. And then his wife said well let Monroe be that. And that why I became a delegate then. And then the National Committee man, Robert Fullerton, he was a delegate so that he come down with back trouble a little bit before the convention and he was confined to the hospital so that he couldn't go. And so he called me up to his hospital room that night the night before we left here. And he told me that by the time that I got to Miami Beach I will be an active delegate from the state of Iowa and so that is when I got to Miami, I don't know. We were so tore up when we got there. So that we just scattered when we got there. My brother came down. I have a brother that lived in Miami. And he came down to the airport and picked me up and we went down to his house. When I came back from the hotel the Duke was looking for me. And he said, well where you been? I said oh I've been on to see my brother. And he said, oh, you got a brother. I said yeah I went on to see my brother. He said do you know that you were

elected as a delegate from the state of Iowa. And I said no I got elected last night when I talked to Bobbi back in Waterloo. So that is when it really started right there.

Interviewer: Would you accomplish what you set out to do?

Mo: Yeah I was able to do what I said I would do. We had just me and another delegate from the state of Iowa from Waterloo that we were gonna switch off. She would go on the summer session and I would go at some section of the she wanted to go in that didn't appeal to me. It didn't amount a lot of me, but it means a lots to her. So we would just switch tags you know and she would go on in. I think that it was nice. The first two, three nights I think we stayed on the convention floor all night long. So when it came to Governor.

Interviewer: Tell me this, because this is a huge deal in which you are participating what you are involved with. Tell what would you come away with this experience.

Mo: I come away with a great lot of experience. I came away with that you see what a dog eat dog mean. Political is a dirty is it is really dirty. Especially when you are trying to bargain for what you want over there and what you might get out there see what I mean. After all candidates release their delegates early. In fact, they release before the former governor was nominated see. They release the delegates then. You are free to move the floor however you want to.

Interviewer: That's ok because here you are you come away with, you've been able to travel, you had this great experience politically, you benefit from it. You become a stronger lobbyist.

Mo: Yeah I become a stronger lobbyist back home here. And I become more strong working in my precinct. I become more strong, more aware of how to deal with the peoples and how to deal with those, it is a different in those that know how to vote and those that do not know how to vote. You have to fresh till them. There is nothing behind that curtain that is going to hurt them. Nothing behind that curtain is going to hurt them. Whatever decision that they make behind that curtain is for you and your god. No one makes you vote no way that you don't want to vote. When you walk behind that curtain there is nobody there but you. You don't have to hurry, you can take your time. If there is something you don't understand you can back out and ask question. And so many people are afraid to back out and ask question because they don't want be people to know that they don't know how to vote. There are a lot of people today that don't really know how to vote.