

Up and Down Bridge Street

Excerpts from [*Oral Memoirs of Fannie Belle Watson*](#)
(click on title for the full text of the interview transcript)

Fannie Belle Watson's parents owned a two-story building at 125 Bridge Street, next to Mecca Drug, from 1927 to 1968.

Interviewed by Vivienne Malone-Mayes on July 31, 1990, in Waco, Texas.

Malone-Mayes: I'm interviewing you, Miss Watson, because I understand that your father had a café on Bridge Street. Is that correct?

Watson: That's correct.

Malone-Mayes: I wanted to talk with you about what you remember about the life on Bridge Street and other people on Bridge Street. . . . First, what was your father's name?

Watson: Minnis Watson. . . .

Malone-Mayes: He purchased the place in what year?

Watson: Nineteen twenty-seven.

Malone-Mayes: And he rented it out to other people.

Watson: Right, until he decided to take over for a few years, and then he started renting it out again. It remained like that until the—well, until after the tornado. And after the tornado, well, it had—see, it was a two-story building, and then upstairs it was rented for offices.

Malone-Mayes: What offices were upstairs?

Watson: Well, I can't remember but one and that was Dr. Vandavell, who was a dentist.

Malone-Mayes: Right.

Watson: And after that time, after the offices, well, another person rented it. Well, the person lived up there, and downstairs was always a café. And Mr. Ashford, B. G. Ashford had a restaurant there. And when the tornado came, well, it was demolished.

Malone-Mayes: Well, now, wait just a second. Your father owned the whole building, both floors?

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: Now, this building, is this the building that Mr. Ashford had his café eleven years, or did Mr. Ashford have two locations?

Watson: He had two locations.

Malone-Mayes: Because one time he was on Second Street at the end. . . . But now you're talking about before Mr. Ashford moved to Second Street.

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: He rented from your father.

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: And had a café on Bridge Street.

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: Wonderful. Now, where was your father's building located, say, in relation to the Mecca Drug Store?

Watson: Next door. . . .

Malone-Mayes: So that was the Fridia Building?

Watson: That's right.

Malone-Mayes: And your father's building was located next door to the Fridia Building?

Watson: Right. The Fridia Building was a three-story building. Ours was a two-story building. . . . Now, one time my father had this café, and then he had a poolroom there. All right. And then somebody else rented it, and they had a poolroom as well. Well, now, below that was a taxi stand, cab stand.

Malone-Mayes: Was it right next door?

Watson: Yes, and then there was a vacant lot. And after this vacant lot was a café, a restaurant, as you would have it. And they served sundaes.

Malone-Mayes: Ice-cream sundaes?

Watson: Right. And like that. And upstairs, well, there were offices. And I can remember that Continental Casualty Insurance was upstairs. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Who ran the taxi stand? Do you remember? . . . Was it black owned?

Watson: Yes, yes. It was black owned, but I don't know who owned that building because as I can remember, it was one story.

Malone-Mayes: One-story building next to your building.

Watson: It was a taxi stand and a shoeshine hall. . . . Then there was a vacant lot.

Malone-Mayes: Okay.

Watson: And then the next building was the Williamson building, and that was Mrs. Phillips.

Malone-Mayes: How many stories did it have?

Watson: Two, as I recall. . . . Now that, the Williamsons was Mrs. Phillips's people.

Malone-Mayes: Eudora Phillips?

Watson: Yeah. . . . They owned that. Her people owned it. Her mother and father owned that building. . . . Okay. Do you remember Mr. E. A. Arnold and Mrs. Arnold?

Malone-Mayes: Oh, yes. Yes.

Watson: Now, they were the ones who owned the soda grill. We called that the soda grill. That's where they served food and ice-cream sodas and like that, sundaes. You know, people would go there for that.

Malone-Mayes: Now, was this on the first floor of this—

Watson: It was the ground floor.

Malone-Mayes: —of the Williamson building.

Watson: Right. . . .

Malone-Mayes: What type people went, say, in there? By that I mean this, Bridge Street later became—well, on Saturdays it was really everybody from the country.

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: Everyone was on Bridge Street, but through the week—

Watson: It would just be the local people, as I can remember, would go there. And to have some place to go, well, the people would go there on Sunday afternoon just to have, to get sodas and like that. Those who wanted food would do the same. But mostly they would go there for the ice-cream sodas. And mind you, the theater was next door, the Gayety Theater.

Now, who owned that building? I think it was owned by a Jewish man named N. M. Gay. I think that's who owned that building next to the Williamson building. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Now, was the name of that theater? Gayety or Gem?

Watson: The Gayety? Gayety.

Malone-Mayes: I know there was a Gayety Hotel.

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: And a Gem Theater.

Watson: Yeah. Well, the Gayety was first. First that was called the Gayety Theater, then that later became the Gem Theater. . . .

Malone-Mayes: After the theater, what came next?

Watson: After the theater was a clean and pressing shop. Now, the person who owned it when I knew about it was named Mr. Barnes. He lived on North Eighth Street next to the Hysons. That's where he lived. Name was Lucky Barnes, and he had a clean and pressing shop. . . . And then there was a shine stand downstairs, where you get your shoes shined and like that because I used to get my shoes shined every Sunday morning going to church. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Then next, was this cleaning shop on the ground floor or upstairs?

Watson: It was on the ground floor. And it seems to me that the stairway was between the theater and the cleaning and pressing shop because you would go up those stairs. On the left side was where the living quarters, and on the right side was where they used to have dances. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Was this in any ways of the time of the Farmer's Improvement Bank?

Watson: Um-hm. I'm trying to think what came first. I'm trying to think did the bank come first or if there was a building between. If there was I don't remember what was in there. . . . Now, the bank was a Farmer's Improvement Bank, and after Farmer's Improvement Bank was a *Messenger's* office—of the paper, you know, the black paper.

Malone-Mayes: Yes. The *Waco Messenger*?

Watson: That's it.

Malone-Mayes: Now, the paper was owned by whom at that time?

Watson: His name was Mr. [A. T.] Smith and he lived on Taylor Street. . . . The Farmer's Improvement Bank was owned by another Smith. . . . And now we're going on down the

street. We're leaving the *Messenger's* office. The Smith, the Farmers Improvement Bank, the president of that bank was named Mr. [R. L.] Smith. He was at one time, he was the president of a college in East Texas. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . And what came after this? We have the bank and then we have the publishing, *Waco Messenger*.

Watson: All right. And then we have an antique shop. All kinds of antiques or what have you. Now, Mrs. Wilson and her husband [Henry Wilson] owned that. Mrs. Gertrude Wilson. . . . And after that was a feed store. And as far as I can remember, that was the end of it on that side. We have gotten to First and Bridge. First at Bridge.

Malone-Mayes: Were there railroad tracks there?

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: Going across. I know the Interurban track went, uh—

Watson: East and west.

Malone-Mayes: Right. But north and south, were there railroad tracks?

Watson: That's right, and there was a hide house right around that corner to the left. You know, from this feed store. Now, that's as far as I can tell you about that side of the street.

Malone-Mayes: Excuse me. But what do you mean by hide house?

Watson: Well, I guess they cured skins. Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: Cowhides?

Watson: I'm sure that's what they did because it was not a taxidermist. But they did something to those hides. Now, I don't know because I know it was quite smelly, whatever they used on those hides. But I don't know what kind of hides that they had.

Malone-Mayes: So the feed store was owned and operated by white people?

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: And so we really end the ownership of black people when we left the—

Watson: When we left Rudolph's mother, Mrs. Gertrude Wilson and her husband. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Now, let's cross the street now and go on the other side.

Watson: Now we'll start on the other side.

Malone-Mayes: Right across from the Mecca Drug Store. . . .

Watson: Well, now, on the corner there was a poolroom. At one time there was a barbershop on that side of the street, but that came on in later years, too. . . . And next to that was a shoeshine shop. There were not any two-story buildings on that side until you get out of there to . . . Estelle and Dixon.

Malone-Mayes: . . . Estelle and Dixon Funeral Home.

Watson: Yeah. Now, that's way down the street. But I'm going to bring you to it, though. Now, there was this shoeshine stand next to this poolroom. . . . And then there was a barbershop. Now, the man who owned that barbershop was named Sam Hill, but I don't know who owned—I don't know who owned that property on that side of the street. And next to that barbershop was a grocery store, and that was colored. His name was Mr. Ellis, and his daughter taught at Jefferson Moore—I mean at Moore High School. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Ellis Grocery. . . And all of these are black-owned and operated businesses? Right. . . . They may have been renting the building, but it was their business.

Watson: That's right.

Malone-Mayes: That's wonderful. And we have Ellis Grocery Store. And then after Ellis's Grocery Store, what came?

Watson: It's Estelle and Dixon Funeral Home. . . . And then upstairs was a lodge hall. I guess you would describe it—

Malone-Mayes: Do you remember which lodge it was?

Watson: Yes. It was the ladies. The name of that organization was The SMTs, the Sisters of a Mysterious Team. And they had juveniles, you know, children to go up there to learn that kind of work.

Malone-Mayes: And what would you all do when you go? You say—who were some of the people who—juveniles who went with you up there?

Watson: I just—now you want me to name some of the juveniles, the children who went? . . . As far as I can remember, I really can't think of anybody but the Richardson children: Maurice, George Richardson, all those Richardson children. . . . And their mother was over us.

Malone-Mayes: And this was the SMT, but it was not part of any larger, one of the other lodges that I've heard of?

Watson: The Woodmans. . . . They used to meet there.

Malone-Mayes: They met there, but was this group you were connected with part of the American Woodmen?

Watson: No.

Malone-Mayes: It was part of one of the other lodges?

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: The reason why I'm asking you is because that seemed to have been a day of the lodges.

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: Seemed like it was really popular.

Watson: It was. They were.

Malone-Mayes: And they had big parades and just everything.

Watson: The Daughters and—

Malone-Mayes: Right. And a lot of mystery in terms of—

Watson: Yeah. Now, Dr. Smith was very much connected with that. The Daughters—I can't think of it but that was a great big lodge. And then there were some more.

Malone-Mayes: I know they had the Knights of Pythias with W. S. Willis.

Watson: Right. And Mr. Jackson.

Malone-Mayes: Was Arthur Jackson with the Knights of Pythias?

Watson: Uh-huh.

Malone-Mayes: And then they had others, though, that were—

Watson: We used to meet at the G. S. Conner Building, too.

Malone-Mayes: Yes. I know that. On third floor.

Watson: Right, and that was this same lodge of which I am speaking. Well, now, we used to meet around there. The ladies and the children. But they met separately. Just as we had a matron—

Malone-Mayes: Over the children. Right.

Watson: The children had—but the grown-ups met in—

Malone-Mayes: In Conner Building.

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: Which was at Second and Franklin.

Watson: Right, that was a three-story building.

Malone-Mayes: That's right. But now, your group met on Bridge.

Watson: Yeah, and that was at—

Malone-Mayes: On the second floor.

Watson: And then we went around to the Conner Building after a period of time.

Malone-Mayes: Oh, I see. It began on Bridge.

Watson: Right. . . .

Malone-Mayes: And then later the whole operation moved to the Conner Building. And then, after—was this above the funeral home? I'm getting mixed up now.

Watson: Yes, yes. The funeral home was downstairs, and the lodges met upstairs. Now, we met on Saturdays. Children met on Saturdays. I don't know when the grown-ups met, but I know the Woodmans used to meet at night. . . . And Mr. Ellis was connected with that in some way or the other. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . Well, what came after the funeral home?

Watson: After the funeral home was a place where they had rummage sales. Now, who operated those rummage sales, I don't know. But that's where they had rummage sales. It was a rummage place. For all the time it was a rummage place. And after that was another feed store, and that was where people used to take their corn. And they would have it ground into meal. Of course, but that was not owned by black people. . . . It was owned by white people. And that rummage place over there, I can't remember anything but whites owning that. So when we leave the funeral home on that side of the street, well, that's as far as I can go. But in later years they had a café over there, and they had a colored-operated bank in later years. . . . And it was a barbershop down there, too. I'm thinking I don't know whether the Simmons Barber Shop was down there or if it came back up the street. And then there was a cab stand on that side of the street, in later years.

Malone-Mayes: Now, you say in later years. I would imagine, let's just pick up, say, during World War II. . . . Was your father in business during World War II?

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: Or was he still, or was he renting the place then? Do you remember what years your father actually operated his café?

Watson: A short time during the war he went back into it. And then he came out of it again and rented the place. . . . He never did operate it anymore. He just rented it, you know. And well, the tornado came. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . So in the twenties it was sort of lively and prosperous, Bridge Street was, for all of the black businesses.

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: But then when the Depression hit in the thirty-tvos and threes and so forth. . . . Did a lot of the businesses fall then?

Watson: Yeah. A number of them did. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Because the bank had failed by now.

Watson: Right, it failed during the Depression. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Now, when did Dr. [W. G.] Sorrelle move in? He should have been down there pretty early, too.

Watson: As far as I know, Dr. Sorrelle always rented from Dr. Fridia.

Malone-Mayes: Oh, he was above the Mecca Drug Store. . . . We never did talk about second story of the Fridia Building.

Watson: Well, now there were offices above the drugstore, and Dr. Fridia was practicing during that time.

Malone-Mayes: Oh, yes. He was a physician, too.

Watson: Yeah, and one time Dr. Mitchell was on Bridge Street. But I just don't remember where he was. I don't recall. It will have to come to me. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . I'd like to know now more about how you—did you go on Bridge Street much? Or did your people shield you from Bridge Street?

Watson: That's true. Because everybody talked about how they sheltered me.

Malone-Mayes: That's what I figured. That they probably didn't allow you hardly to know—I'm surprised you even know this much about Bridge Street.

Watson: My daddy would—you know, I would want to go in the drugstore. Now, I was allowed to go in the drugstore with my mother because we used to go there on Sunday afternoons. They had a soda fountain, too.

Malone-Mayes: It seems that Sunday afternoon was kind of the day for the local people, church people to go down there.

Watson: That's right.

Malone-Mayes: But on Saturdays, the country people were around.

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: And you all stayed home on Saturdays.

Watson: Yeah, we stayed home. And then when I'd go in the drugstore I'd have to go close. Pipkin and like that, you know—(unintelligible). But when my mother would go, we would walk in the door, and then we'd go down to the soda grill and get ice-cream. We'd sit at the tables and talk to friends, and then we would leave because we never did eat in town. We always ate at home. My mother used to prepare my father's food and take it to him. But we never ate in town.

Malone-Mayes: You never ate at his café?

Watson: No.

Malone-Mayes: You never had one meal at your father's café?

Watson: No, no.

Malone-Mayes: Did your mother ever go down there? Because she was an excellent cook and everything.

Watson: She would go down there and take his food, you know. But she never would, he never wanted—

Malone-Mayes: Wanted her to work down there?

Watson: Occasionally, but not often. . . . So I didn't get to make Bridge Street until I went to college at Paul Quinn, and then he allowed me to go in there because I would have to catch the **streetcar** to go. We didn't own a car. Had to catch the streetcar to go to Paul Quinn and come back. And then he allowed me to have an account at the drugstore. And I would carry

my friends in there and get ice-cream. (whispers; unintelligible)—run it in the ground. I'm so glad I had a chance to go.

Malone-Mayes: (laughs) I know it's the truth. I know it's the truth. And, you need to tell it out loud.

Watson: But it was a nice place to go, mind you, now.

Malone-Mayes: Of course. I remember.

Watson: But I just wasn't allowed in there.

Malone-Mayes: I know.

Watson: Without—

Malone-Mayes: Your mother or somebody who was supervising.

Watson: Right. A grown-up.

Malone-Mayes: Right. But did you all sneak in there? Like, I know someone told me that they used to sneak down there on Sunday afternoons.

Watson: I would sneak in there. I tell you I'd have to shave the side of it, go up under a rail. There was a railing where Dr. Clemons kept all of his supplies in a basement. And I would go up under there. And the door did not—the door was at an angle like this, and Second Street was like that, and come around, and come back to that door like that. We was not allowed, children were just not allowed to go without the parents or some other adult. When they did, they had slipped in there.

Malone-Mayes: Well, that was kind of nice of Dr. Clemons and the people who worked there not to tell on you all because I'm sure your father went in the drugstore.

Watson: He was always, always up there. Stayed up there.

Malone-Mayes: Just like my father and all of them were always there.

Watson: They were always there.

Malone-Mayes: So that was nice that they didn't tell on you all.

Watson: Slip in here and get me some ice cream and something. And I'd have the money then to go in there. But when I went to Paul Quinn he just allowed me to have—

Malone-Mayes: Have an account at the drugstore.

Watson: I could go to the drugstore and get about anything I wanted. But mostly it would be in there to show off for my friends that I could get them some ice cream and something like that. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . We're going to bring Bridge Street up to right before the tornado, and the impact of the tornado on Bridge Street. Now, your father passed before the tornado.

Watson: Right. And then, when the tornado came—now, I'm thinking that I don't know what it did to the Fridia Building. I know it was all gone.

Malone-Mayes: That's right.

Watson: Because ours was gone. And we could not put that building back two story because—but we did put it back one story. And there was a barbershop there. But if you wanted to go up, see, a long time ago you didn't have to have all of those steel beams and everything up there. But after that, well, I guess, the city ordinance said that one would have to have those steel beams. And my mama said we'd never be able to pay for those steel beams. But we did put it back one story. And they put those—and then, during the war—now, during the war or just before the war, well, the Kuykendalls bought a building down there on Bridge Street. And then Rudolph Frierson bought one. And then Rudolph's stepfather bought one down there on Bridge Street. That was down in there, well, by the funeral, down there by the funeral home.

Malone-Mayes: Now, which side?

Watson: Oh, on the drugstore side.

Malone-Mayes: On the drugstore side. Okay.

Watson: Right. I just don't remember anyone owning a building on the right side.

Malone-Mayes: Okay, opposite the Mecca.

Watson: Right. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Well, how would you describe the relationship between the whites and blacks on the Square in general?

Watson: I think they had a good relationship. As far as I know, they had a good relationship on that Square.

Malone-Mayes: Yet, the businesses were segregated.

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: Except, say, like the—I remember the little fish market on Second Street near the alley. I know no one was served there, except you went up—everybody stood, you know, to go get their fish. Standing places like grocery stores, things like that, all of the customers were treated alike.

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: But now, pool hall. I'm sure blacks favored blacks and whites favored whites. Right?

Watson: And I cannot—

Malone-Mayes: And cafés?

Watson: I cannot remember a white pool hall on the Square. I just don't remember one.

Malone-Mayes: And cafés, now, I know that some man had kind of a little stand up there.

Watson: Yeager. Yeager had one, had a big café. And it's a lady, who used to—who ushers in your church—used to work at the Yeager Café, right there next to John Bashara. John Bashara had a candy kitchen.

Malone-Mayes: Um-hm.

Watson: You know, he made candy. All kind of candy. And he made that candy. Now, he didn't make it where he sold it. He made it down there where Dr.[H. L.] Smith's office was. See, that used to be a great big lodge place upstairs where Mrs. Nell Watkins worked. They kept all the business of this big lodge. I can't think of the name of it right now. The Knights and Daughters of Tabor, that was the name of it. That was a big lodge, and Mrs. Freddie Webster worked there, and Mrs. Hodges.

Malone-Mayes: Now, where was this?

Watson: That was right on the Square. You never did know where the theater was? There was another theater around there on the Square called the Gem.

Malone-Mayes: Now, I remember the Gem on the Square.

Watson: Do you? All right. Well, now, Dr. Smith's office was upstairs next to that or somewhere along in there. And this, all this big lodge stuff was upstairs. Mrs. uh—and it was so large until they had those, oh, had three secretaries working there. See, Miss Nell didn't, after lodge went out, well, Miss Nell came down and worked for Dr. Radford when he came to Waco. But those three women worked in this. It was so large, they needed three secretaries. Mrs. Lonnie Hodges can tell you about it because she worked there.

Malone-Mayes: . . . Now, what's your earliest recollection of the Square? I know you were a child, I'm sure. . . . I know you probably, your people, parents—for example, I can remember my father going up in the Conner Building and leaving me in the car while he went up. And I can just remember sitting there on Saturdays and watching the country people go by and talk and laugh. And I just watch people. People watching was really a great sport for me and for everyone.

Watson: Yeah, people used to go around in cars, you know, and they would see. They would sit out in the Square.

Malone-Mayes: That's right. And just looking.

Watson: Trying to see the people going—

Malone-Mayes: Because on Saturdays it was really a time when people of various communities—

Watson: Would come

Malone-Mayes: And meet one another.

Watson: That's right.

Malone-Mayes: And get to know one another. This is how you find people that maybe came from Gholson marrying somebody from Harrison Switch.

Watson: Or you'll see them just meandering, you know. And the ladies who worked out in service, you know.

Malone-Mayes: Yes.

Watson: And the, the—

Malone-Mayes: Through the week, maybe?

Watson: No. They didn't come until Saturday. (both laugh) I don't think they did. Now, they could have, but I don't think so. And the chauffeurs and like that. They, the chauffeurs might come on through or something, I guess, maybe get a half hour off. I don't know. But I know children, we didn't—we went to school. Now, the children came up First Street to the school down at Jefferson, down at Moore High School. And children came up the Second Street, and they would come to town as far as Franklin. The children who lived back off of here, well, they would go Franklin Street, I think, until it got to Third. And then I guess—

Malone-Mayes: What you're saying is the children were not allowed on the Square.

Watson: No, they just go through.

Malone-Mayes: But those were city children like you.

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: But the country children like my people—

Watson: They came on Saturday.

Malone-Mayes: When they came on Saturday. But on Saturday the little children were everywhere.

Watson: Right. Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: Because the people were getting their groceries, and it was just like a picnic. . . . And little children were very much in evidence on the Square on Saturday. But I would imagine that the city children like you didn't go down there to be with those little country children (laughs) on Saturday because you all could go through the week if you had to.

Watson: Right. Yeah. Well, I tell you—and then, most of the—now, the grocery store that they traded was on the south side of the Square. And then the people went—now, there were fruit stands and then they sold sodas and things. Chris and other things didn't—on the Square they did not go to John Bashara's other than to get candy and like that. I didn't go in there even till my daddy carried me in there.

Malone-Mayes: Right.

Watson: But now, down here were Big George and all of these Assyrian people had this stuff. I can't think of the lady. But anyway, it was Assyrian lady that had sold fruits, not vegetables, just fruits and candy and stuff in there. But there was a fish market and then there was a meat market on the Square, a big meat market. Can't think of their names right now. And the fish market man's name was Mr. Henry. And right over there on Third Street was where people went to get meat. That was on the corner of Third at Franklin. That was Dollins market. That was a great big market where the people would go.

Malone-Mayes: Now, what people? The city people?

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: And the country people.

Watson: Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: On Saturdays.

Watson: Yeah. During the week and on Saturdays, they would go. And then, the people—you know where the Hilton Hotel is?

Malone-Mayes: Um-hm.

Watson: Piggly Wiggly used to be there, and the town people would go to Piggly Wiggly. And there was a shoe store next to that. They would go on over to Miller-Cross and buy shoes. Then there was another grocery store on the corner of Fifth at Washington. . . . But the children used to go around Third Street all around, I don't know. Come to North Waco. All those kids that lived back over in this way, and kids that lived between Third and Second went Second Street. And Cleo and all that bunch came on around the south side of the Square. I mean Franklin Street, not the south side of the Square, it went around Franklin Street on around Third Street and on up Austin Street. That's the way they went. They didn't—

Malone-Mayes: Go through the Square?

Watson: No indeed. Nobody went through the Square. We had to go through the Square, but you didn't stop. (laughs)

Malone-Mayes: I know.

Watson: You just went on up there. Why do you think we'd have stopped? What was you going to stop for? See, kids used to take their lunch to school back then. And then the parents would give them money, you know. They'd have money to spend in the cafeteria and like that. Kids used to take lunch to school all the time. I carried my lunch to school until I quit teaching. Sometimes I'd eat in a cafeteria or something like that, but we used to take the lunch to school. . . . I used to go to North Seventh Street School. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Excuse me, but I just wanted to know what did—we talked about the Square and Bridge Street and then the tornado. Do you think that really changed the whole complexion of the Square?

Watson: Yes, I do.

Malone-Mayes: And this really changed a whole lot?

Watson: Yes, I really do.

Malone-Mayes: On Bridge Street.

Watson: I really do. I think it did.

Malone-Mayes: For one thing, it destroyed a lot of the buildings and they rebuilt. By then, during the rebuilding period, is that not when many of the businesses moved to Clifton Street?

Watson: Well, they were scattered, I guess. A few of them didn't go back into business or anything. It was a different breed.

Malone-Mayes: Um-hm.

Watson: You know.

Malone-Mayes: Right. I know that you were given some money to help rebuild your building.

Watson: Yeah. . . . Yeah. The Red Cross.

Malone-Mayes: Somebody, yeah, collected money.

Watson: Somebody, because it furnished money that helped to put them. Because I know—I don't know exactly who it was or what it was, but I think it was the Red Cross that saw to it because of—do you know the president of First Federal Savings and Loan? . . .

Malone-Mayes: Harry Jeanes, right now.

Watson: He's the one.

Malone-Mayes: Oh, really?

Watson: He was on Franklin, on the south side of Franklin. Now, what that was there, I don't know. Maybe it was, I didn't know we had a First Federal Savings and Loan at that time. But he was—wherever it was, the money went through him, that was given to my mother to help her to rebuild.

Malone-Mayes: Rebuild, right. To rebuild the building.

Watson: And everybody who owned one, they were given something.

Malone-Mayes: Right. But like you said, it was just not the same.

Watson: No. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . Now, what I'm concerned about, I haven't heard you mention Lawyer [R. D.] Evans. And it seemed—

Watson: Lawyer Evans's office used to be in our building. I forgot about him! Lawyer Evans used to be in there. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . And most of what I know about him I learned from the Conner papers and through Dr. Conner's letters through the thirties. Because he seemed to have been an

activist trying to help black people to improve themselves. And he seemed to have been interested in the vote, and all kind of political activities.

Watson: Right. . . . That didn't even come to me, because he surely did used to be in our building.

Malone-Mayes: Um-hm.

Watson: Upstairs.

Malone-Mayes: Do you remember who he was up there with?

Watson: He was up there with Dr. Vandavell. Seem like to me Lawyer Evans was up there first. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . But as I said, up to that—why, I say '31 or '32, it seemed like things just—people were kind of prosperous seeming.

Watson: Yeah. Yeah.

Malone-Mayes: Even city people. Now, the country people, even through the Depression, they were eating because they could have gardens. . . . But imagine just the life, like I said, that in the twenties Bridge Street was booming. Let's say from the twenties on back. I really wish that we could find or you could remember hearing—I'm, we're trying to go back as far as we can on Bridge Street. Some of this you may not—you could have just heard.

Watson: Yeah

Malone-Mayes: Like, did your father buy that building, say, from white people?

Watson: Yeah. . . . I know he did. . . . And seems to me that they had a jewelry store. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Were they Jewish that he bought it from?

Watson: I think so because the Jewish people owned everything around here, practically.

Malone-Mayes: That's right, during that time. Especially down in that area. And they were pretty lenient in selling to black people, right? Don't you think?

Watson: Um-hm.

Malone-Mayes: That was the consensus.

Watson: Yes. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Well, I want—in the thirties, when we had the Depression, how did the Depression hit the Square? I mean, not the Square, Bridge Street. I'm sorry.

Watson: The Depression hit everybody, practically. . . . Banks closed. Seem like to me the Depression really came in January or something. I know I was off in school when it really—it was pretty bad. . . . So it just did a lot to the people. Not only did it—you know if the white ones were suffering the black ones surely were. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . Well, December 7, '41, when Pearl Harbor was hit. So then we begin World War II. Now, then that's when the Square picked up again.

Watson: Yes.

Malone-Mayes: And with the servicemen all around and everybody around town, Bridge Street picked up with it.

Watson: Well, I can't tell you too much about it, during that time because—

Malone-Mayes: Were you in Waco?

Watson: I wasn't allowed up there. (both laugh) What I'm saying—

Malone-Mayes: I know. Yes, because your people had warned you about those bad, those sorry soldier boys.

Watson: The soldier boys. Right. That's what they called them, those soldier boys.

Malone-Mayes: I know what you mean.

Watson: (speaking at the same time)—soldier boy. Just like they had a USO.

Malone-Mayes: You know, I probably went to the USO more than you did and I was little girl because a lady lived with us who worked at the USO, named Ruth Gregg(?). She's from Kansas City or someplace, but she had to be down there every weekend.

Watson: Yes.

Malone-Mayes: And so I got to go down there with Mother and Daddy. But I used to just look at all those young adults with all the soldiers dancing and everything.

Watson: Yes. The coeds were supposed to go and dance with the soldiers.

Malone-Mayes: Yes. And were you allowed to go down to the USO?

Watson: No. No, I think I did look in the USO. But I never did get to go when they were frolicking or whatever. . . .

Malone-Mayes: But now, seems to me after the war, and that was '45, '46, and we have a period there from '45 to '54 before the tornado.

Watson: Well, listen—

Malone-Mayes: The soldiers were gone.

Watson: —they left town. They left Bridge Street.

Malone-Mayes: Right. Even before the tornado.

Watson: (speaking at the same time)—Bridge Street got dead.

Malone-Mayes: Before the tornado, after the soldiers left.

Watson: Yeah, people were frequenting Clifton Street.

Malone-Mayes: Right.

Watson: You know. But now, I can't remember. Well, let me see, barbershops were on Clifton Street, eating places, nightclubs.

Malone-Mayes: You know, that's when Haywood Weaver began the Alpha Theater on Clifton.

Watson: Uh-huh. And so that was, you know—

Malone-Mayes: They were veterans, see, coming back and they could—

Watson: Yeah. That was just about it. They would go, they had eating places like restaurants and things like that, and nightclubs, barbershop, shoe shop, clean and pressing.

Malone-Mayes: Herbert Walker was up there, although he was a long way. Walker's Auditorium.

Watson: Right. Right. Right, and then there was James Jackson's place. They had a place.

Malone-Mayes: Yes, right there.

Watson: . . . James Jackson's people had a nightclub and then folks used to go there a lot. In other words, just nightclubs up and down, up Clifton Street. . . .

Malone-Mayes: Listen, I want—you may think this is an unfair question. But I think it is one that people are interested in. You don't have to answer it if you don't want to. But

where did your father get the money to buy these places? I've been asked that a lot of times. I imagine you've been asked that before. . . .

Watson: Well, I tell you what. There was a club that they had around there on Franklin Street, and it was a gambling club. He and John Bashara were in that together. They had, I don't know, books and stuff up there for a club and all of that, and then it was a poolroom up there. And then this gambling went on. But see, we didn't go up there. We weren't allowed there. We used to have to stay down on the sidewalk because it was an upstairs place. We stayed on the sidewalk, and my mother would take my father's dinner to him. . . . We stayed on the ground and he would come and get it. And he would hurry away. Hurry up and go because he didn't want nobody to say anything for us to hear. . . .

Malone-Mayes: So he more or less ran these gambling games, and he probably didn't do that much gambling himself.

Watson: No.

Malone-Mayes: As he did cutting the games, seeing, providing just the—because that's the people who make the money.

Watson: Um-hm.

Malone-Mayes: The people crazy enough to be gambling don't make any money. It's the people who cut the game.

Watson: That's it. . . .

Malone-Mayes: And your father and Mr. Bashara were in business together?

Watson: Um-hm.

Malone-Mayes: Well, did they have both blacks and whites up there or mostly whites up there? . . .

Watson: Just blacks.

Malone-Mayes: Black?

Watson: Only. And John Bashara never showed his face.

Malone-Mayes: Uh-huh. But he was kind of his sponsor, kind of helped in the background.

Watson: Yeah. . . . And I tell you somebody else who used to—the first business that my daddy had—excuse me, you remember L. Fred?

Malone-Mayes: Yes.

Watson: First business of his, Mr. Fred, the old man Fred, put my daddy into that business.

Malone-Mayes: Now, what was his first business?

Watson: I don't know what his first business was. But I know he said, I heard him often say that Mr. Fred put him in the first business that he ever owned. And so anything that he needed or anything like that, well, that's who he would go to. The old man, not Mr. Izzy. The old man. . . .

Malone-Mayes: . . . But anyway, we are interested in going into the history of the people who did participate in the life of Bridge Street. Because after all, they helped to make Bridge Street what it was and what it became, by being—how were they able to do that? That's why I asked you about his background and how he came about to do that, to get the money because not only did he own the land or the property on Bridge Street, he owned property on—did he own the place on Franklin where he had the pool hall?

Watson: No.

Malone-Mayes: He may have rented that from someone.

Watson: I'm not sure, but I think John Bashara owned that.

Malone-Mayes: . . . And your mother, when you were growing up was she working then or was she just a housewife or what? . . .

Watson: Mama was a housewife. She used to sew.

Malone-Mayes: Well, when did she began to work out? After your father passed or what? . . . And he passed shortly before the tornado.

Watson: Yes, '45. . . . Well, after he passed away, then she had to take over.

Malone-Mayes: She had to take over. Then she really became a landowner on Bridge Street.

Watson: Right.

Malone-Mayes: And she had, like you said, she had to manage the place. And when they gave you the money she had to make the decisions on whether—how much to build or not to build and to manage the property and all. And then I imagine that probably—well, what ultimately happened to the property? Let's say that. After the tornado.

Watson: All right. After the tornado, well, the building was put back as a one-story building, not a two-story building. And the renter who was in there operated a barbershop

until they got in readiness to build the convention center. And when they built the convention center, that took Bridge Street.

Malone-Mayes: In other words, urban renewal bought you out?

Watson: Right. . . .