



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Alexander Pope, Jr.

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Interviewer: Mary Ann Wyrsh
Transcriber: Sarah Rouse

TAPE 1/SIDE 1

WYRSCH: Today is March 23rd. We're having an interview today with Alex Pope, Jr., at the site of one of his businesses which is the Alex Pope Funeral Home at 2617 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE. Mr. Pope is here and we will begin the interview. Mr. Pope, can you tell us something about how you ... where you were born on Capitol Hill, and the beginnings of your family on Capitol Hill?

POPE: Well, I was born in a neighborhood in Northeast—613 18th Street NE. That's where I was born and that's where I arranged my business. When I was born in 1925, we had an arrangement that whatever we did, it was done from the home. Now we had a funeral home which was located at 315 15th Street SE which was about 12 blocks from the address where I lived. What is important to me is the funeral home played a big part in my general operation because when I first went to school, when I was five years old, the funeral home played a significant role in my going to school because after we got introduced, I prepared to leave the location of the address that I was located. So the first five years of my life I was involved with the funeral home in such a way that the person that had the introduction of me was limited to a time frame of my operations. My operations was concerned with ... at five years old I had to answer some questions for the interviewer. The interviewer was taping the questions asked of me. And I was talking as though I was the owner and operator of the entire funeral home. But I wasn't. The questions she asked me were very simple questions. She was talking about my attending the school and I was talking about the first incident of me going to school was that I had a lot to do.

WYRSCH: Mr. Pope, can you tell me what school you went to?

POPE: Yes, the school was the regular elementary school—it was in the Northeast Washington. I don't recall whether—I remember the later school, but this first school was a local school in the Northeast neighborhood where I lived. I don't recall the name of the school, but it was the regular school that I was scheduled to go to.

WYRSCH: Did you have brothers and sisters?

POPE: No, I had no brothers and no sisters.

WYRSCH: I see.

POPE: I'm the only child of Alexander S. Pope the third—Alexander S. Pope the senior. I'm his only child.

WYRSCH: How did you get into the funeral home business?

POPE: My father was the funeral director. He was a funeral director and he paid very close attention to me, because he considered me as an adult, the way he treated me. Because of my first going to school, he said, "Don't forget that you have a business to take care of." So when I got to the school, I went through everything with the teacher, but when my mother was ready to leave the school, I was going out the door with her. And they told me, "Wait," I was scheduled to stay in the school. I didn't understand that. I thought I was just there to give my name and find out about them.

WYRSCH: Did you start work early on in your father's business?

POPE: Yes, I started—at that time I was five years old when I went to school, and I was in business at that time.

WYRSCH: You were helping in the business?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: Good. Did your father have more than one funeral home?

POPE: No, at the first incident, he only had one funeral home, but he had another business located in the same square that the funeral home was located. What he had learned—he acquired three business places and he used one as a funeral home, one was a department store and the other place was a drugstore.

WYRSCH: So your father ran three businesses?

POPE: No, he didn't run three, he owned the buildings that two of the funeral homes—two of the businesses were located in.

WYRSCH: Would that be in the 300 block of 15th Street?

POPE: That's right.

WYRSCH: Were the other businesses owned by black entrepreneurs?

POPE: Yes, yes.

WYRSCH: I see. Can you tell us a little bit about those businesses?

POPE: Well, the first business was of course the funeral home. The second business was a department store, which was a store that generally was located in the neighborhood. The third store was a drugstore, which sold products related to the drugstore that normally anybody would have at that time.

WYRSCH: What were the names of the people who ran the stores. Do you recall?

POPE: I recall the name of the druggist who ran the drugstore. Uh, reaching for his name now. It's quite ... not sudden to me. I'm a little upset because I can't seem to think.

WYRSCH: That's fine, it'll come to you, probably.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I have a question. You said that you ran the businesses from 1613 A Street SE [ed: not the correct address]. Were there funerals held at both 1613 A and 315 15th Street, or just funerals at 315 15th?

POPE: Just the funerals at 315.

WYRSCH: I see.

POPE: The 613 was my residence. We always lived separately from the funeral home. We never lived in a funeral home. That's one of the features that my father qualified for, at that time, because the average funeral home was located in the residence of the funeral director, at the time.

WYRSCH: I see.

POPE: We were maybe the first funeral home that we didn't live at the funeral home.

WYRSCH: How long did your family live on A Street Southeast? Or Northeast?

POPE: 613 18th Street NE.

WYRSCH: Yes, 18th Street.

POPE: We lived there until, uh, we lived there for 20 years. We moved from there to another location.

WYRSCH: What was your neighborhood like?

POPE: Oh, I say, it was one of the finest neighborhoods in Washington. That's my say. I made it, I was very proud of where I was born and where I was brought up. I took a lot of pride in the 18th Street address.

WYRSCH: Tell me, do you remember how the neighborhood was, how it changed from the time you were a boy, and then when you moved and then you were a teenager, and then when you moved?

POPE: Well, I just attended the blocks that were ... attended to the address where I was born about three or four days ago. I hadn't been around that neighborhood in approximately 20 years. But something alerted me to want to go back to that neighborhood and I went there and the big surprises I found was that

many of the homes were still there. And a lot of the neighborhood had not particularly changed. The neighborhood, naturally, had changes, but the neighborhood seemed to me to be the same. After being away from that neighborhood, for over 60 years, it looked as though it did approximately at the time that I originally was there.

WYRSCH: Did the neighborhood that you lived in—that particular area of Northeast—did it have a particular name?

POPE: Yes, it was known as Kingman Park, Kingman Park, Northeast.

WYRSCH: I see. Why did you move from that area? Why did your family move?

POPE: Well, my family moved from that area because the next house we moved to was one of the largest homes in the neighborhood. We moved to the intersection of C Street Northeast. When we moved to this new location, we were one of the first families—colored families—to move in that neighborhood.

WYRSCH: I see. Your father was a funeral director. Did he start the funeral business?

POPE: Yes, he started the funeral business as a funeral director in 1923.

WYRSCH: Were there many black funeral directors?

POPE: Yes. Of course, there wasn't as many as there are today. But it was a substantial crest [?] of funeral directors.

WYRSCH: How did you get around the city when you were a boy? What kind of transportation did you use?

POPE: I was the known rider of everybody's automobile in the neighborhood.

WYRSCH: You were the rider?

POPE: Rider. I had contact with all the operators of automobiles. I was known to catch a ride along with them anywhere that I went.

WYRSCH: What did you do for entertainment when you were young?

POPE: I worked.

WYRSCH: Worked?

POPE: Yes, I worked. Because I felt as though I was a funeral director [laughs] when I was eight years old.

WYRSCH: I see. So you felt very much a part of the business and were with your father a lot, as he did things.

POPE: Yes, because my father found out that I was interested in the business, so he let me participate in the business. When I was approximately eight years old, he would go to work, and I kept the business, or at least answered the phones, for him. Because at that time, you had a telephone located where you want to receive a call. You didn't have as much sophistication as they have today. But we had two phones, one at our funeral home location, and another one at our residence. But those two phones were not connected. What we had to do, we had to be at the location of the phone at the time.

WYRSCH: You answered the phone at home?

POPE: No, at the funeral home.

WYRSCH: Let me clarify something. So your father had another job and did the funeral home in addition?

POPE: Yes, my father worked for the ... during the time I was in school, during the time I worked for him, he had another job.

WYRSCH: What did he do?

POPE: He was a security personnel. He worked at a security firm and he had different hours to work, and when he wasn't at work, I would be in his stead. And my aunt ...

WYRSCH: Your father's sister?

POPE: No, she was my mother's sister.

WYRSCH: What was her name?

POPE: Vivian. Vivian Bowser.

WYRSCH: Is it B-O-W-S-E-R?

POPE: No, B-O-W-M-A-N.

WYRSCH: Oh, Bowman. And she was your mother's sister and she worked in the funeral home as well. Was she married?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. What was your mother's maiden name?

POPE: Mary Reynolds.

WYRSCH: So this is Vivian Reynolds Bowman?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. How long did she work with your father in the funeral home?

POPE: Well, she worked there until she went in the government—worked for the government. She worked for my father approximately ten years.

WYRSCH: When was your father able to only run the funeral home, or did he always have two jobs?

POPE: Yes, he always had two jobs, because the job at the funeral home was subject to his ... He principally operated as a funeral director, but the economy of the time and the war service, he had to have two jobs; I mean he had to work at another job to get exempted from the Army.

WYRSCH: I see. So this would have been in the 1930s and the 1940s that he did two jobs.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And you and your aunt helped him out.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: When did you take over the funeral business?

POPE: In the year of 1954.

WYRSCH: Did your father retire?

POPE: He had the duty of assisting my grandmother, who was a native, not of Washington, but she was a native of Columbia, South Carolina. She came to Washington in the early days and raised her family. My father felt at the time of her ... age, that he should give her back her time.

WYRSCH: So he took care of your grandmother?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And you took over the business?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. And when you took over the business, was it still the site at 315 15th Street NE?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And was it just the one site?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And then it became several. Can you tell me about that?

POPE: Well, the first takeover of 315 15th Street was taking over the responsibility of the storefronts that we had in the associated with the location of the funeral home. That was a problem. But then, during that time, the property was purchased by the DC government, so we moved across the street, one block down, to the 400 block of 15th Street.

WYRSCH: What did the government want the property for?

POPE: They built the school on the property. [ed: Payne Elementary School is at 305 15th St SE.]

WYRSCH: So you moved to the 400 block of 15th Street Northeast? [ed: Southeast]

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And opened up just a funeral home?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And then when did you expand from that site to your other sites?

POPE: Well, approximately ten or 15 years later, we decided that ... I was married at that time, and we decided that we would change our location. And so we moved from that location to the new location at 2617 Pennsylvania Avenue SE.

WYRSCH: So what year did you leave ... That would have been the move across the bridge, and leaving Capitol Hill.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: Did you close the site at 400?

POPE: No, we didn't close it at that time.

WYRSCH: But you expanded?

POPE: Yes, we expanded.

WYRSCH: And that would have been in the 1960s?

POPE: 1970.

WYRSCH: 1970. When did you close the office at 15th Street Northeast [Southeast]?

POPE: When we sold the property. We had a purchaser who wanted the property on 15th Street. We sold the property to this organization. The property was a valuable piece of property at that time because at that time it was a lot of locations of business places were trying to locate in the area that we lived in. I never forgot how much we got for the property. It was one hundred and thirty-three dollars, which was more than we had valued the property for.

WYRSCH: Was that \$133 thousand, maybe?

POPE: Yes, thousand.

WYRSCH: Let me ask you some more about the time that you were growing up and helping your father and taking over the business. Do you remember hard times?

POPE: Oh, yes.

WYRSCH: Can you talk a little about that?

POPE: Well, it wasn't exactly hard times, but it was ... our business has always been one that deserved attention.

WYRSCH: And what do you mean by that?

POPE: Well, you couldn't leave the funeral home to ... to run itself. It always had some attendants. Every day. As even today, it's well attended. We always put the funeral home first.

WYRSCH: But I was thinking about what life might have been like on Capitol Hill, in, say, during the Depression or during the war. What did it do to ... What changes did it make in your life?

POPE: Well, the changes were not bad, in our case, because the war brought business to our operation. That's why we moved. We got a better location when we moved to this present location, sitting here. We moved here because ... we left from the other side of Capitol, to come to this side, and the move was made because we felt that this was the property that would increase in value. When I moved here, we had

... I remember that our income was 100 dollars on the amount related to the business per month. That amount jumped from 100 to one thousand dollars in the move from the other side of Capitol Hill to this side. We took an increase of ... the difference between 100 dollars to a thousand dollars.

WYRSCH: So it was a very good move for you, as a businessman?

POPE: Well, the first six months—it was a difficult six months. I was the only employee of this business; of course I had another operation going along with this business. I was in the limousine business. That's what kept us going. But when I moved on this location, I moved to this location with the idea that I had that this location would grow. My wife was instrumental in promoting me to come to this location.

WYRSCH: To get back to Capitol Hill, what did you like and what did you not like about living on Capitol Hill?

POPE: Well, what I attribute to the move, my wife was insistent that we could take advantage of this location. This location was all white when we moved here. She encouraged me to move from the other side of the river to this side. It was a difficult decision to move into a predominantly white neighborhood. But she read in the documents to this location the idea that the move would be beneficial to us. We took that chance. We ran this place for six months without any additional income, but in the six months, when people found we had moved here, the business increased approximately nine times. We really grew in the nine months or so that we moved here. And we haven't stopped building since.

WYRSCH: Tell me something about any disasters, any major events when you were small that you remember. Fires, whatever. Is there something that stands out?

POPE: Yes. I don't know where you had discovered—I was the perpetrator of a fire.

WYRSCH: You were the perpetrator of a fire? Oh, my goodness, when?

POPE: When we changed ... It was during the time when my aunt was running the funeral home—Aunt Vivian—and I was assisting her. But we had a situation of moving the property and I thought ...

WYRSCH: Is this when you moved to the 400 block of 15th Street?

POPE: No, this was in the 300 block. Well, what happened was we had a location that we made movements, and one of the moves the accumulation of the properties. It happened very unmistakably because I didn't pay attention to the detail of the move. When we moved, I moved the location of the address to accommodate a thought of mine. And at that time, the thought of mine was not related to the business. And we moved the location.

WYRSCH: So you were—you and your aunt were moving some things? Or moving the whole business?

POPE: No, what we did at the time of the transfer, they had a fire in the neighborhood and I was trying to take advantage of the fire ...

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

WYRSCH: Mr. Pope, before the tape went off, you were saying that you had perpetrated a fire.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: You were a perpetrator in a fire.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And this was when you were a boy, and when you and your aunt were the principal workers in the funeral home. So what started the fire?

POPE: Well, it started in my attempt to run the business with the knowledge that I could run another operation along with the present operation. I'm getting ...

WYRSCH: Well, it may be ... Let me ask you a question. Was it a bad fire?

POPE: Well, yes, it was bad for a small business.

WYRSCH: Right. And was much destroyed?

POPE: No, it wasn't much destroyed, but for a small business, any disruption is hard.

WYRSCH: OK. Were you punished for this?

POPE: Oh, yes.

WYRSCH: And what happened to you?

POPE: Well, my father, he advised me that this was a part of my fault. I was told that. And I had to make adjustments.

WYRSCH: Did you have to pay off some costs?

POPE: Yes, some of the costs.

WYRSCH: I see. How did you do that?

POPE: My not receiving the amount ... that I was receiving [laughs]

WYRSCH: I see. What did you do for entertainment? Did you go to the picture shows?

POPE: I went to the picture shows.

WYRSCH: What else?

POPE: Um, well, I primarily worked—I was very busy, I imagine. [fire truck sound in distance] I worked—the funeral operations was mainly my biggest thing. I paid attention to the growth of the funeral home—was my main attraction. It was not like any other occupation, but I made it my occupation. The funeral work.

WYRSCH: So, even as a young boy, you spent a lot of time in the family business.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: Did your friends comment about that? Did people talk to you about that?

POPE: Oh, yes.

WYRSCH: What did they say?

POPE: Well, they all was interested because I was a great talker at that time. I lost a lot of talk that I used to handle. I'm surprised that I'm talking here today [laughs] because ... if I could tell my whole story as though it was, you would have to spend a week with me. [laughs]

WYRSCH: Let me ask you about sports. Did you play sports?

POPE: Oh, yes.

WYRSCH: What did you play?

POPE: Football!

WYRSCH: Where? For ... at school?

POPE: High school.

WYRSCH: What high school?

POPE: Dunbar High School.

WYRSCH: Do you remember the years at Dunbar?

POPE: 1945, I believe.

WYRSCH: What about professional sports teams. Did you go to see them?

POPE: Went to see them? I played professional football.

WYRSCH: Who'd you play for?

POPE: For the team that was the neighborhood team; this was during the war.

WYRSCH: What was the name of the team?

POPE: Kingman Park ... Associates, something like that.

WYRSCH: Kingman Park Associates. And so was it a black team?

POPE: Oh, yes.

WYRSCH: A black team.

POPE: That's all.

WYRSCH: And who did they play? Who were their opponents and did they have a league?

POPE: Yes, they had a league.

WYRSCH: What was it?

POPE: The league ... I don't remember the name of the league, but it was the only league ... it was considered the finest league in the town. We played at Griffith Stadium in Washington.

WYRSCH: What position did you play?

POPE: I played tackle.

WYRSCH: Tell me about other sports teams. Did you go to see baseball games? Did you go to see Redskins games, did you ...

POPE: No, most of my sporting related to football. We played football every day in the year.

WYRSCH: Who's we? Did you play in the neighborhood?

POPE: Oh, yes.

WYRSCH: I see. Where did you play?

POPE: Oh, various places. I played—uh—I can't remember these places specifically.

WYRSCH: I'd like to ask you about your father and ... was he a native Washingtonian?

POPE: No, he was born in Columbia, South Carolina.

WYRSCH: I see. And how did he come to Washington and how did he get into the business of a funeral home?

POPE: He came to Washington along with his family. They moved to Washington when my father was approximately 18 years old. He came to Washington with his mother.

WYRSCH: And what was the reason they came?

POPE: Well, I guess because of the evaluation of the public at that time. Columbia, South Carolina, was a segregated city and the opportunity was of limited ... so they moved to Washington, where there was much more entertainment and substance for a growth of family.

WYRSCH: Did he meet your mother in Washington?

POPE: Yes, he did.

WYRSCH: Did he always live on Capitol Hill or did he live in other parts of the city?

POPE: He always lived in the Capitol Hill area.

WYRSCH: Where did your parents meet?

POPE: They met on the job. My father had a interest in the funeral home and he met my mother during that interest. They met because she was a business-producing lady who was engaged in the sale of property.

WYRSCH: Your mother was in the real estate business.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see.

POPE: And they met because of her nature in the real estate business. My father at the time of their meeting was a worker for a funeral home, the John T. Rhine's funeral home.

WYRSCH: John T. Ryan? Was that a black funeral home?

POPE: Oh, yes.

WYRSCH: I see. And where was it located?

POPE: In Southwest Washington.

WYRSCH: And so it's John T. R-Y-A-N.

POPE: Not Ryan R-Y-A-N, R-H-I-N-E.

WYRSCH: OK. So your father worked in a funeral home. And then that's when he met your mother.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: Do you know the year?

POPE: I don't know the year exactly.

WYRSCH: And then, did he ... he started his own funeral home after he was married?

POPE: No, he married ... he was ... he started his own funeral home just about the same time he married.

WYRSCH: I see. And your mother did not work in the business. Did she continue to work or did she ...?

POPE: Oh, yes. She worked in the business, with the business, as soon as they married. That was one of the reasons they married. Because of the business. She was working for this black-owned company that represented a marketing idea, and that when she went to work for this company, she met my father while working for this company.

WYRSCH: Did, so, your mother, and her sister, and you and your father all worked in the funeral home at one time. Any other family members?

POPE: Well, of course, there may have been one or two additional members of the family.

WYRSCH: Were there any particular difficulties or issues that black funeral home directors had to deal with that others did not?

POPE: I don't find anything particular that I can address that there was any segregation in the matter of the funeral homes, because at that time it was expected that the funeral home wasn't considered black because they did only black work. That was a feature; that was the principal thing. It was all you expected during that time.

WYRSCH: That black funeral homes would have black clients?

POPE: That's right. That was the way it worked.

WYRSCH: I see. OK.

POPE: So any difference in that ... it wasn't brought to the attention of the people at that time. A black firm felt that it was stronger than the white firm, at that time.

WYRSCH: And why was that?

POPE: Because that's the way they felt. They had pride in their work. And even today the black firm has as much at stake as any other firm because of that factor.

WYRSCH: I'm going to change the subject and ask you about trains. I understand you like trains, model trains.

POPE: Model trains is my main name.

WYRSCH: Main name—Alexander Model Trains Pope.

POPE: That's right.

WYRSCH: How did you get interested in trains?

POPE: I got interested in trains when I was eight years old.

WYRSCH: What happened?

POPE: Well, during the time of our location, I began to think of what occurred with the trains.

WYRSCH: Were you near a train track?

POPE: Oh, yes. Union Station.

WYRSCH: You were near Union Station over on 15th Street. I see. OK. And so trains became an interest.

POPE: Yes. When I was eight years old.

WYRSCH: What did you do then? Tell me about it.

POPE: [Laughs] Well, there's a lot to tell you. But, I, everything that I worked for has a relationship to running trains. I have one of the largest layouts in the world today. My entire house that I live in is nothing but trains.

WYRSCH: And when did you start collecting these trains?

POPE: When I was eight years old.

WYRSCH: When you were eight. So from eight till now.

POPE: Until now.

WYRSCH: Tell me about Union Station. Do you remember when it went up?

POPE: It was up when I was a boy, but everything was involved around the Union Station.

WYRSCH: Tell me a little bit about that.

POPE: Well, at that time, the Union Station was a one of the largest stations in the universe, in the world. And everything related to that station I can remember ... Union Station was a part of my layout plan.

WYRSCH: Did you go there a lot?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: What did you do there? Did you just go to see the trains?

POPE: I went there every day. When I lived ... See, my grandparents lived about three blocks from the station.

WYRSCH: What, your Reynolds grandparents or your Pope grandparents?

POPE: My mother's family—Reynolds.

WYRSCH: And where did they live?

POPE: 314 G Street SE. [ed: should be NE]

WYRSCH: So, near the station.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And you would go there every day.

POPE: Almost every day.

WYRSCH: What would you do?

POPE: Well, I was involved in anything that was available to trains. I followed the station's attitudes towards their trains.

WYRSCH: OK. Tell me a little bit about your grandmother Reynolds and your grandfather Reynolds. They lived at 314 G Street SE ...

POPE: Northeast.

WYRSCH: Northeast. I'm sorry. And what did they do? What did your grandfather do for a living?

POPE: He was a shoe carpenter.

WYRSCH: A shoe cobbler?

POPE: Shoe cobbler, yes.

WYRSCH: I see. Did he work from his home?

POPE: Yes. Well, he worked—he had a shop. He had a shop.

WYRSCH: What was his first name?

POPE: I called him Granddaddy. [laughs] Now, his first name was Walker E. Reynolds.

WYRSCH: R-E-Y-N-O-L-D-S. Walker E. Reynolds. And what was your grandmother's name?

POPE: Grandmother's name was ... [long pause]

WYRSCH: Well, it doesn't matter if you can't ... It was Grandma Reynolds.

POPE: Grandma Reynolds.

WYRSCH: Grandma Reynolds was what her name was to you. And they lived on 314 G Street NE for a long time?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. And you would go to their house every day.

POPE: Approximately every day.

WYRSCH: And did your grandmother work or ... ?

POPE: No, she stayed at home.

WYRSCH: And so you didn't live at 314 G Street.

POPE: I didn't live there but at the time I, uh, on weekends I spent the entire time there.

WYRSCH: I see. Why did you do that?

POPE: Because my mother worked.

WYRSCH: Where, in the funeral home?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. So you spent time with your grandparents while your mother worked. I see. When did your grandparents die?

POPE: My grandmother died first. Uh, she died ...

WYRSCH: It's not important. Did the house on G street Northeast belong to your mother or did it belong to your grandparents? Did your mother take over that house?

POPE: No.

WYRSCH: What happened?

POPE: She had three sisters and three brothers.

WYRSCH: Your mother did?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: So when the grandparents died they all sold the house.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. That's a large family. Did they all live on Capitol Hill?

POPE: Oh, yes, large family. I have one large family. Lots of cousins.

WYRSCH: Did people from ... your cousins, did your cousins go to your grandmother's as well? Were you all there ...

POPE: Oh, yes, we are all family. We saw each other once a week. On the weekends. Sunday.

WYRSCH: Did you go with your cousins to Union Station?

POPE: Oh, yes. Well, not to Union Station. They didn't participate in the trains as I did.

WYRSCH: Uh-huh. They weren't as interested in trains.

POPE: No, they weren't interested in trains. But I was.

WYRSCH: I see. And so you would go to your grandmother's house and then go over to Union Station. Did you talk to people who ran the trains?

POPE: Yes, I talked to everybody.

WYRSCH: You just roamed around the station.

POPE: Yes, I felt like I owned the station!

WYRSCH: Did you?

POPE: Well, I contributed a lot to the station.

WYRSCH: Tell me your favorite memory of the station, when you're thinking about your time as a boy in Union Station.

POPE: Well, my favorite was, that the Union Station was the opportunity for you to get ... to have knowledge of what went on. Because everything related to the train operation was found at the Union Station. The Union Station, as it grew, it had the development attitude towards the general public towards trains. And at the time that I was involved in it, Union Station was very involved in assisting persons like myself with trains.

WYRSCH: With your model trains?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. So you got your first model trains when you were eight. And now you still have them.

POPE: Yes, I still have them. Everything. You should see it.

WYRSCH: That's wonderful. I want to ask something about the station and where your grandparents lived and where you lived. You were close to the Capitol and the Mall, where lots of things were going on. Do you remember particular events, say the end of the war, or any big marches. Do you remember any big events, being so close to it?

POPE: Yes. Which part of it do you want to know? I was involved ...

WYRSCH: We were talking about particular events that you remember, when you were a boy, where there were lots of crowds in Washington, or that you went to see a certain thing. Do you have a particular memory of the war or big events, disasters?

POPE: Well, I remember certain things about ... that happened. Like ... I can't place ... Anything that went on in Washington, I was part of. I'll go back to the most recent thing I can think of was the death of John F. Kennedy. I played a part in that. I met the train ... his plane ... at Andrews Air Force. And it was approximately seven or eight o'clock at night and I was in the cortege that went from the airport to the White House where he resided. And during that time, I was part of the program of assembling the people who were interested in his burial.

WYRSCH: I see. So the people who would be in the cortege, the people that would line up in the funeral procession, I see. So you helped with John Kennedy's burial. I bet you were very proud of that—of the opportunity to do that.

POPE: I was disturbed because of his death. It was one time that I failed the company because I couldn't tolerate the system that I was under, in his death. John F. Kennedy was a great person to me. I worked with him as a limousine service.

WYRSCH: Oh, so in your other business you worked with him. So you knew him.

POPE: I did.

WYRSCH: So it must have been very, very painful.

POPE: The most painful thing I ever experienced. I didn't even realize it until you brought it up.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/SIDE 1

WYRSCH: Mr. Pope, you were going to tell me about your grandfather, uh, Reynolds, your mother's father who lived on G Street Northeast.

POPE: Yes, my grandfather was a fine man. He ... he really raised me. I knew more about him than anyone in the family because he used to tell me everything.

WYRSCH: He was the shoemaker, the cobbler?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: And you said he raised you. Was that because your father was so busy?

POPE: Yes. And my mother was busy.

WYRSCH: With the business.

POPE: With the business.

WYRSCH: I see. Anything else you want to say about your grandfather Reynolds? Walker E. Reynolds?

POPE: There was much to say about him. I don't know how to start. He broke his legs twice, and that was because he was always involved in doing something. But Granddaddy was one man that ... I think that very few men have the relationship I had with my grandfather. He was a the clerk of the Providence Baptist Church.

WYRSCH: Where was the Providence Baptist Church?

POPE: The original Providence Baptist Church was in Southwest Washington. I can't seem to place the location of it now, but I should be able to ...

WYRSCH: That's OK, no problem. I have a question about other black funeral homes on Capitol Hill. Can you tell me a little bit about those?

POPE: Well, the first I would like to tell you about is John C. Rhines Funeral Home.

WYRSCH: R-H-I-N-E-S? An S on the end or no S?

POPE: S. Yes, Rhines. Funeral Home.

WYRSCH: And that was in Southwest but also on Capitol Hill?

POPE: Well, Capitol Hill is Southwest.

WYRSCH: That's true. Part of Southwest is Capitol Hill.

POPE: So it's hard for me to distinguish the two. Because we did this thing which ... the city as though you may have heard that it be—the city was one city.

WYRSCH: So there was John Rhines Funeral Home and that's where your parents met.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: Any others that you'd like to talk about?

POPE: Henry Ford Funeral Home.

WYRSCH: Henry Ford? F-O-R-D?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: Where was it?

POPE: This was in Southwest Washington.

WYRSCH: Southwest also?

POPE: Yes. There was a Thomas E. Frazier.

WYRSCH: How did you spell Frazier? F-R-A-Z-I-E-R?

POPE: That's correct.

WYRSCH: I see. And where was the Thomas Frazier Funeral Home?

POPE: They were in Northwest Washington.

WYRSCH: Northwest. But they served Capitol Hill?

POPE: Yes. The entire city was served so far as Capitol Hill. You see Washington is a small area but it's a big place. But I think of Washington as one place; I don't think of it as communities as such.

WYRSCH: I see. So your clients, the people you served, came from all over the city.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. So it wasn't necessarily just people on Capitol Hill.

POPE: No, it wasn't.

WYRSCH: I see. Let me ask you about churches. What church did your family belong to?

POPE: My family belonged to the Providence Baptist Church.

WYRSCH: That's the one your grandfather belonged to. And that was in Southwest.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: So you went from Northeast to Southwest to go to church?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: How long did it take you?

POPE: Less than 15 minutes.

WYRSCH: Less than 15 minutes. And did you always worship at that church?

POPE: Well, I became—I attended the Catholic church when I was an age, approximately 12.

WYRSCH: What Catholic church?

POPE: Holy Comforter Catholic Church. But the name of the church that I attended was St. Cyprian's Catholic Church.

WYRSCH: Right.

POPE: That was the first church. They tore down St. Cyprian's.

WYRSCH: So at 12 you began to go to St. Cyprian's Church. There at 12th and C.

POPE: Yes. Thirteenth and C [SE].

WYRSCH: Why did you change?

POPE: Because of my religion.

WYRSCH: You changed your religion.

POPE: Well, yes, I didn't address the ... it was the way that my family went. My father was Catholic and my mother was Protestant. Later on she became Episcopal. Yes, she changed to Episcopal.

WYRSCH: Did you go to the St. Cyprian school or to just the church?

POPE: Just the church.

WYRSCH: I see.

POPE: I went to the school—I went to the Charles Young ...

WYRSCH: Y-O-U-N-G?

POPE: Yes; Brown Junior High, and ...

WYRSCH: And Dunbar?

POPE: And Dunbar High School, and then Howard University.

WYRSCH: You went to Howard. Did you graduate from Howard?

POPE: Not fully.

WYRSCH: I see.

POPE: I had three years of college.

WYRSCH: And then did you have to go to a separate mortuary school?

POPE: Yes. I went to Echols Mortuary School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

WYRSCH: How long was your course there?

POPE: One year.

WYRSCH: Was that after Howard?

POPE: It was after Howard.

WYRSCH: I see. Did you continue to go to St. Cyprian's and then Holy Comforter Church after you started there at 12?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I see. So you remember it being torn down.

POPE: Yes. Very sad.

WYRSCH: I'd like to ask questions about summer in Washington. It's very hot. There wasn't air conditioning when you were growing up. What did you do to keep cool?

POPE: I stayed cool. The fact is at that time, I stayed dressed all of the time.

WYRSCH: And why was that?

POPE: Because it was the custom.

WYRSCH: The custom. In the funeral home business, to be dressed all the time?

POPE: Yes, all the time. Even as a young man.

WYRSCH: So what did you do to stay cool?

POPE: I stayed cool because of the nature of life at that time—it was cool. It was no difficulty. I don't recall any difficulty.

WYRSCH: You don't remember being very hot and sleeping in the parks, or ...

POPE: No.

WYRSCH: OK. Now, your mother was born in Washington. And where was she born?

POPE: I believe she was born at the same hospital I was.

WYRSCH: And what hospital was that?

POPE: Columbia.

WYRSCH: Columbia Hospital.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: OK. And she had five brothers and sisters. You said there were six children in her family?

POPE: Eight children. Two died early.

WYRSCH: And her parents lived at 314 G Street NE.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: When you were born, where did your mother and father live?

POPE: They lived at ... apparently, when I was born ... I can't rightly place where they lived because they lived somewhere in the neighborhood of 18th Street where there was a family home. It was just about a year that they lived elsewhere than the family home.

WYRSCH: So the family home at 1613 18th Street was your home most of your life.

POPE: Yes. Most of my life.

WYRSCH: Most of your life. Mr. Pope, you were going to talk a little bit about your father. He came from Columbia, South Carolina, when he was 18. He met your mother and he was about 22 when you were born?

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: You said that he came with the rest of his family. What happened to his brothers and sisters or his mother; where did they live?

POPE: They lived in the 1300 block of Wallace Place NW.

WYRSCH: Did they live all together there?

POPE: Well, not all of them, but they all lived in that neighborhood, Northwest Washington.

WYRSCH: Did you go to visit them?

POPE: Oh, yes. [laughs; emphatic]

WYRSCH: What do you remember about that?

POPE: Oh, fine time. Oh, boy!

WYRSCH: How many came?

POPE: Everybody'd come on the weekends.

WYRSCH: Yes. But how many came from Columbia, South Carolina?

POPE: Oh, all of my father's people. His brothers and sisters all came from the same place. They all came approximately the same time. At that time, when you moved, you moved the whole family.

WYRSCH: I see. But his father didn't come?

POPE: His father didn't come because he was deceased.

WYRSCH: Oh, he was deceased at that time. Where were your parents married?

POPE: They were married in Washington, D.C. And they were married at the church, Providence Baptist Church.

WYRSCH: In Southwest.

POPE: In Southwest Washington.

WYRSCH: Because your mother's family belonged there.

POPE: Yes.

WYRSCH: I'm going to ask you if there's anything else you want to tell me about your growing up in Northeast, any particular memory that you have that you want to share.

POPE: I have a million memories. It's hard for me to draw back at that time. But anyway it was, I enjoyed ... I have enjoyed my entire life. I don't remember any bad times. Because I made a good time out of bad times. I don't have a bad memory. I don't see anything as being bad. And that's the truth. I mean, most people who like to say, well, during the hard time—there's no hard time for me. I don't remember no hard times. It's always been the same to me. Even today, at 80 years old, I see people ... I can only think of the goodness of the entire life. It was a wonderful life for me. And it's still going on.

WYRSCH: I have one more question for you, about your father. Did he ... He stayed in the funeral home business with you? Or did he retire at a certain age?

POPE: He retired about a year before his death. That was because he went to take care of my grandmother.

WYRSCH: OK. And your aunt, did she stay in the business?

POPE: No, she didn't stay in it. She went to work for the government.

WYRSCH: During the war? Maybe? Or after that?

POPE: Just about ... during the war.

WYRSCH: I don't have any more questions. Again, is there anything else you want to ask, or tell me?

POPE: I don't think I can think of anything particular to tell you. The only thing I can say, that, as a man, I have a wonderful memory of a wonderful life with all of my people. I don't remember any sadness that any of my people experienced. Although we had problems, we accomplished those problems with going about things in a normal way. And it's been an enjoyable life, as I see it today. And I hope to be able to see many more days like I have had. I enjoyed working with the public, which is responsible for my endeavors. The public, to me, has always been a responsibility. I cannot say anything that would disturb my relationship with the general public.

WYRSCH: Mr. Pope, thank you very much for your time today. We very much appreciate it.

POPE: Well [laughs], I really have enjoyed this day with you. I have been served with your patience. I just can't relate to the many things that I have done in such a way that possibly will be helpful but I gave you my full and best attention I could. Thank you very much.

WYRSCH: Thank you.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

END OF INTERVIEW