

Interview of John R. Flowers
Interviewed by R. Vernon Boyd
April 26, 1978
Three Audio cassettes
Tape 1 - 63 minutes
Tape 2 - 63 minutes
Tape 3 - 39 minutes
Transcribed by Mary Lee Bartlett
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Tape 1 - Road noise in background throughout all 3 tapes

V. Boyd: What is this? April 25th?

J. Flowers: 6th.

V. Boyd: April 26th, 1978. We're talking to Brother John. N. Flowers. John R. Flowers. [*J. Flowers: Right.*] Why don't you start with your, where you were born and raised. Just give me some basic historical facts.

J. Flowers: Okay. You want me to talk about myself. Are you ready now?

V. Boyd: Yeah, anytime.

J. Flowers: Well I was born in Wilson County, Tennessee about two miles outside of Lebanon and lived there with my parents until I was about four, after which my parents moved to Rome, Tennessee, which was about eleven or twelve miles from Lebanon. My mother died when I was seven years old. I went to live with my grandmother in Bellwood, Tennessee where I grew up and attended grade school. When I first started school, I had to walk three miles when I was six years old to school. It wasn't much of a school building. The county didn't provide much of a school for blacks in that day. So Julius Rosenwald, a philanthropist, came through that country and he gave to the people of Wilson County, money to build schools providing they would raise a certain amount of money. So at our community around Bellwood they raised the money and my folks had a piece of ground, which they donated to the school, and with the money coming from the Rosenwald fund and what they raised, they built a little two room school that went to the eighth grade. And that's where I completed the eighth grade there. And then I was out of school for a year or about two years before I entered high school.

V. Boyd: Why?

J. Flowers: Well, I just didn't have...there was no high school out there. And I had no place to stay in Lebanon. So I finally arranged to live with a cousin of mine. Her name was Lennie Smith [*V. Boyd: Is that Lucille's?*] Lucille's mother. And I spent, I stayed with her a year. The Crutchfields lived next door and they had a son who was about my age and he and I became good friends. He wanted me to come over and live with him. So I moved over there and lived with them until I completed the high school. [*V. Boyd: And the Crutchfield's, that's Margaret Ashworth's...*] Margaret Ashworth's brother, Harry Crutchfield. [*V. Boyd: Brother? I thought it was mother.*] Harry is her brother. I lived with her mother, you know, with the whole family there. But her brother was my friend.

V. Boyd: Was Margaret there at the time?

J. Flowers: Margaret was there. She was nine years old when I went there. And I spent three years in their home and completed high school there. I came to Detroit....

V. Boyd: Now just a minute. Were you having much contact with your dad during this time?

J. Flowers: Oh yes. During the summer, I was with him during the summer months. [*V. Boyd: What were you doing in the summer?*] In Detroit. I would come to Detroit and work at Chevrolet for two or three months where my dad worked. Then I would go back in the fall and go to school. After I graduated from high school I came to Detroit to live. And so far as my formal schooling is concerned, it practically ended there, except I enrolled at Wayne State University in Adult Education classes. I took one course in logic down there and I took another course in the religious education department in the adult education department. As far as my Bible training is concerned, it came principally from reading the writings of the brotherhood. I became a constant reader of the *Gospel Advocate* about 1970 and also the *Firm Foundation*. And then I subscribed to the *Minister's Monthly* when it came out and I read it until they stopped publication of that. Other periodicals, such as *Christian Teacher*, and *Restoration Quarterly* and many other books that have been written by our brethren. About 1964, I believe it was, the first version of the preaching schools was opened in the Royal Oak church building and they called it the Royal Oak School of the Bible. I enrolled in this school for two semesters and I took two basic subjects under R. C. Oliver, a teacher by the name of R. C. Oliver. Where I took the Life of Christ and Hermeneutics and then in the third semester Church Polity, which was taught at that time by Dean Thorman. So as far as my formal Bible study is concerned that just about constitutes it.

Now I obeyed the Gospel when I was about twelve or thirteen years old, but like a good many teenagers when I got in my teen years I became a little bit indifferent and kind of fell away. After I married at 24, I came back. ...

V. Boyd: At 24 or in 1924?

J. Flowers: At 24, at the age of 24. I married in 1932. Then I came back to the church and I became active, publicly active in the church about a couple of years later. But the way I was working, I could only be there every other Sunday. But I continued to study and labored with the church until finally, they began in the early fifties they began to talk about making me an elder. I didn't have any desire to be an elder or a preacher. I just loved to study the Bible and I was teaching the Bible class on Sunday morning. We had a radio program and I became the announcer for this radio program. I also made the announcements at the church services. But it was not until 1954 that I desired to become an elder. In 1952, Brother G. E. Steward was asked to come to Southwestern Christian College. They wanted him there to coach the boys that worked in what they called a preacher workshop to train the students to preach. Brother Steward was preaching for the Westside. He didn't feel that it was expedient for him to leave unless he had somebody at the Westside who he thought had enough depth of the Bible to help to guide the church along the way. So he asked me if I would move my membership from Joseph Campau to the Westside if they made me an elder. I had told him that I would move my membership to the Westside, but not to become an elder. I would come to the Westside and work with them and help out in any way. I didn't want them to promise to make me an elder because I wanted to feel like if they wanted me, after I had been there for awhile and they got to know me, if they wanted me then they could ask me. So I went there in '52 and in January, 1954, I became an elder of the church where I have served ever since. In 1956, I was invited to speak for the first time on the National Lectureship in Los Angeles, California.

V. Boyd: Okay. Before we do that, I'd like to go back and fill in some more gaps [*J. Flowers: Okay.*] before we get to your first speaking. [*J. Flowers: Okay.*] I wish you'd go back and talk a little bit more about your dad and his history, where he came from, and his influence in the church and just take it as far back as you can remember – grandparents even and so on.

R. Flowers: Okay. I don't know where my father was born, but I think in Wilson County. I think the family had always lived in Wilson County, Tennessee. I never heard him say. But he was a member of the church, he and my mother. He married my mother. His family, his mother was a Methodist.

V. Boyd: Can you give full names? As much as you can here. Your father, start with him.

R. Flowers: My father's full name was Edward Flowers, Edward.

V. Boyd: Just two? Edward was his only name? No middle name?

R. Flowers: That's right. He had no middle name. No. He married my mother who was Mallie White. Her family was brought up in the Restoration churches so when I was born they both were members of the church. My father was an active leader in the church. He used to lead singing and participate otherwise. He was not officially an elder or anything, but he was active in the church. After my mother died, he moved to Detroit and became active in the church in Detroit.

V. Boyd: What about your grandparents?

R. Flowers: My grandparents on my mother's side were dead when I was born. I never knew them.

V. Boyd: Well, were they church people and if so, how did they hear the church?

R. Flowers: They evidently were because all of the other members, my grandmother's brother and sister were members of the church, the White family. Anybody that knows the White family, knows that traditionally they were all members of the church as far back as I can remember. But I never knew anyone to say specifically about my maternal grandmother. My paternal grandmother was a Methodist.

V. Boyd: You don't know how the church started in their community?

R. Flowers: No, I don't know how it started because it was there when I came on the scene. But I know that early as I can remember there were efforts to integrate the blacks and whites. Now whether they were worshipping together at that time, I don't know, but I remember the argument. There was Brother E. A. Elam [*V. Boyd: I know Elam.*] and another fellow by the name of Eli Harris. [*V. Boyd: Whose black?*] No, no, they're white. E.A. Elam [*V. Boyd: I know Elam.*] and Eli Harris were white. And they were arguing for integration. They wanted the one church. But there was another white fellow that was very influential in the church whose name was Roy Green who opposed it. And so they built the building for the blacks and named it after Eli Harris. And it was called Harris Chapel and it's called Harris' chapel today.

V. Boyd: And so you don't know anymore about what they used to talk about in your mother's parents' day?

R. Flowers: No, because my mother died when I was seven. I wasn't around that side of the family too much and I never heard them talk too much about it. I know that they were all members of the church.

V. Boyd: Who in your parents, either your mother's or father's side, were in slavery? Any stories about that?

R. Flowers: My father was born in 1885, that's twenty years after Abolition and my mother was younger than my father. So neither one of them were slaves.

V. Boyd: Did you hear him talk about his parents? Any stories?

R. Flowers: Yeah, my father's mother was born a slave, but she couldn't remember anything about it. But she knows she was born during slavery.

V. Boyd: Where?

R. Flowers: In Putnam County, Tennessee.

V. Boyd: That's the Sparta area, isn't it?

R. Flowers: I guess it is. I never did know where Putnam County was, but I've heard Granny talk about that she was from Putnam County. My youngest daughter, after *Roots* came out, she became interested in her roots so she came over to interview and to interview my dad and interview everybody that she could. She wanted to start out and dig the roots, but that's as far as she could get. [*Laughs.*]

V. Boyd: Well, then let's talk about some of those early days too, with your parents and your grandparents. You want to talk about race relations and any good or bad incidents. Not your day, but their day. [*R. Flowers: In their day.*] Yeah, go on back.

R. Flowers: No, I never hear my people talk about any bad race relations. It seems in the particular community where they always lived, whether they realized it or not, they always thought that they were treated rather fairly and I suppose they were because when I was in high school, I had a bank account in the Commerce Union Bank there in Lebanon. And I wrote, overdrew my account. Now in that day, they would put you in jail for that. But I overdrew my account. They wrote me a letter and I went down to the bank. And the banker said, "Do you know that you've overdrawn your account. You've written checks that you didn't have money in the bank to cover." Why I didn't know that? [*V. Boyd: Very much?*] Aw no, it was about fifteen or twenty dollars. So there was another white fellow standing there by name of Cooksey who ran the men's clothing store, one of the largest men's clothing stores. Lebanon is a college town. They had the Law School there and they had a military school there, Castle Heights and they had nice clothes that the college boys would wear. So this Cooksey fellow ran that kind of a store. He heard the man mention the name "Flowers." So he turned around and he says, "What's your name?" And I told him. "Whose boy, which one of the Flowers' son are you?" They always called my dad, "Bud", down there. So he said, "Are you Bud's boy?" I said, "Yeah." So he told that banker, he said, "Look, how much does he owe you?" Said, "Well, I know his dad and he never owed anybody a dime." Said, "Don't worry about it. If he doesn't pay you, I will." He said, "Where is Bud?" I said, "He's in Detroit." He said, "What you doing down there?" I said, "I'm going to school here." He said, "You see that store over there? That's my store. Anything you want in that store whether you've got the money or not. You come in there and your credit it good." [*Laughs.*] I never knew that man. I never saw him before in my life. And I was standing there afraid I was going to jail.

V. Boyd: That was a good endorsement.

R. Flowers: That was a good ...so that's why I say, that's was the kind of rapport my dad had with the whites down there, see. Now this man came to my rescue. All right, on another occasion, I was coming down the street one day and there were some kids outside of a church making noise and they would run when one of the deacons would come out. So I happened to be in front of the church at the time and the deacon ran out and he grabbed me and they called the police. Said, "He's disturbing the public worship, making noise." When the police came to arrest me and asked me, "What's your name?" And I said, "Flowers." And one of them was one-eyed and he had a flap over one eye. And he pulled off his glasses

and he looked and said, "Flowers. What Flowers?" And I said, "Well, Bud Flowers, as he was known here, his son." "You Bud's boy?" "Yeah." He said, "I don't believe," turned to the deacon and said, "I don't believe that this boy would make no noise. I know his daddy and I know his grandmother and his grandfather. Old Ben Flowers and I know. Aunt Lizzie. This boy wouldn't make no noise. What were you doing?" I said, "I wasn't doing anything but passing by." So again on the name, I got out.

So Harry Crutchfield, who was a good friend of mine, bought an old car. And as school boys will do, we used to pick up people to made ourselves a little spending change. Well, a bunch of fellows in town would get together and go out to shoot dice, maybe two or three miles out in the country outside of the city. They would pay us ten cents a head to haul them out there. So we took one load out there and put them out. Rushed back to town – we didn't collect on them – and we rushed back to town to get another and we were going to collect on all of them when we got back. So we brought the second load and while we were there trying to collect our dimes for bringing them out, somebody knocked on the door. Bam, bam! And the man of the house ran to the door and looked and he came back and said, "It's Calhoun and Ladd." Calhoun and Ladd were policemen. [Laughs.] Well, we started to run out and they threw their guns on us so we went back in. And the police came in and lined everybody up against the wall. And they came down the line taking names. They were going to march us downtown to jail or make us pay a fine. So when they got to me, they said, "What's your name?" I said, "John R. Flowers." Again he stopped and he said. "Are you any relation to Ben Flowers?" I said, "That was my grandfather." "Well, what you doing shooting dice?" I said, "I don't shoot dice." "Well, what you doing in here?" I said, "We just brought these fellows over here and they owe us money and we were trying to collect our money." He said, "Look, you see that door." He said, "You get out of here. Old Ben never shot a dice in his life." He said, "Does Aunt Lizzie know you're down here?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, I'm going to tell her." [Laughs.] "You get out of here. Don't you ever let me catch you around a crap game again." [Both laugh.] So I scrambled out the door.

V. Boyd: What about Crutchfield?

J. Flowers: Crutchfield got away. He was on the end and while they were writing up somebody else's name, he took a chance and he made a break for the door. He got out and they knew he was out and they were chasing him, but they never could catch ...he went out the back door and they had to run through all them. And I was so sure that they had Crutchfield and I didn't want to go home and tell his parents so I went downtown around by the jail to see if they were bringing him in. And Crutchfield was down there looking for me so we got together and went home laughing. [Laughing.] I said, "They turned me loose on my family name." And he said, "I ran out."

V. Boyd: Wow. That's a narrow escape.

J. Flowers: That's as close as I ever come to being arrested.

V. Boyd: Well, your dad and grandfather really had a good reputation there.

J. Flowers: Yeah. Nobody in our family, they say, had ever been arrested or had ever been in any trouble. They had good reputations there so evidently they got along pretty well. Now I never heard them say anything bad, in fact, I never knew my grandfather on either side.

V. Boyd: You haven't talked very much about Ben. What do you know more about him? Where he came from and where his people came from. Any slavery incident?

J. Flowers: No. Even my dad doesn't know too much because he died I think when my dad was young. He died early. I never heard him talk about his father. I just know that his name was Ben and they had his picture around. That's all I know.

V. Boyd: As far as you know he was from Wilson County then?

J. Flowers: I don't know whether he was or not.

V. Boyd: You don't know whether he came from a large or small family?

J. Flowers: Evidently it was a small family. Because he was the only, only family. There were no other family, no other children. If he had had brothers or sisters, my dad probably would have had first cousins, but he had none. No first cousins on either side.

V. Boyd: And you don't know about your grandfather's religious exposure?

J. Flowers: No.

V. Boyd: But was he a member of the church?

J. Flowers: No. Evidently not. My grandmother was a Methodist. And my aunt [*V. Boyd: That's Aunt Lizzie?*] so I imagine they came up in the Methodist church. My grandfather, if he was anything, he was probably a Methodist.

V. Boyd: And that was the one they called Aunt Lizzie?

J. Flowers: Yeah, that's the one they called Aunt Lizzie.

V. Boyd: Do you know what her maiden name was?

J. Flowers: It was "Adkism." [*V. Boyd: How do you spell it?*] I don't know. That's what we couldn't find out. That's just how she said it. [*V. Boyd: Adkism?*] Adkism. That's the way she pronounced it. And we never saw it in writing because she couldn't write. That's all we knew about her people. She said, that she had a brother, whose name was Andrew, but we couldn't even trace....

Side ends.

Side 2

V. Boyd: Let me talk about some more about your youth and your early days there in Lebanon. You were talking about race relations. In those early days, do you want to talk about any inter-racial marriages or at least liaisons that developed?

R. Flowers: It was illegal at that time. Inter-racial marriages was not permitted. But there was inter-racial mixing.

V. Boyd: Yes. Any in your family of any significant degree?

R. Flowers: No, not in my family because my grandmother was afraid of that. I suppose she put the fear of God in all the rest of them, [*laughing*] but as far as I know there was never any. As far as close as any one of my family that came to be connected with that was my uncle. There was a white family, a well-to-

do white family and this woman was going with a black man. They didn't live too far from us and this uncle of mine was young. But at night when she would want to look for this black man she was afraid to go alone, she 'd come over to the house and get my grandmother to let this uncle go with her to find him. And that's how I happen to know about this relationship. But my grandmother was always afraid for Uncle John to do that. She was afraid not to. She was afraid to. Because many times these white women would frame you anyway if you didn't do what they wanted done. [Laughs.] They'd make demands on you and if you don't do it, they say that you have approached them or done something. So there you were, you were damned if you do and damned if you don't. See? So Granny was afraid for him not to let him go and was afraid for him to go, but she would always warn him. And everybody else put the fear of God in me about this kind of thing when I was little. So I never heard of anything like this in our family.

But they were rather tolerant there because when things like that became known, I never knew of any lynching mob or anything. I do know of one case where young kids became involved – white boys, black girls. And they asked the parents of the girls to send them away, but they didn't send them away and nothing ever became of it.

V. Boyd: You mentioned yesterday about that trial. You want to talk about that. To illustrate race relations.

R. Flowers: All right. Well, a good friend of mine by the name of Clayton Winton, who lived in Watertown, had been out hunting with us one day and he went home tired and went to bed. His father was a bootlegger. So the sheriff came to the house looking for his father, George Winton. Knocked on the door and Clayton's mother answered the door. And they asked was her if George was in and she said, "No." One of them pushed her out of the door and said, "You're lying." And shoved her out of the door and pushed his way in. So Clayton, laying in the bed, said, "Don't you push my mother." And they shot him two or three times while he was laying in the bed, but they didn't kill him. So he had his pistol nearby so he reached and grabbed his pistol and he killed them both before they got out the door. So they arrested him and took him to jail wounded and they wouldn't let a doctor to go in and treat him. So finally the blacks became enraged over this and they armed themselves and went to the jail and demanded that they allow a doctor to go in and treat him. They got a man named Dr. Thompson, who later moved to Detroit, Michigan, went in and treated Clayton and he recovered. And when the trial came up, one of the best lawyers in the town defended Clayton, by the name of Walter Faulkner, said, "I will take that case. Before he goes to jail, I'll go myself." So blacks mortgaged their homes and everything. They raised money. First they found him guilty of second degree murder and sentenced him to twenty-five years in the penitentiary, but Faulkner appealed the case. And while they were waiting for the case to come up, he asked Clayton to leave because he was afraid that maybe some sniper might pick him off or something. So Clayton went to Detroit and stayed until time for the trial the second time. And when it came up the second time, Faulkner brought his own mother into the court room and he appealed to the jury, "Behold my mother and your mother." And he said, "What would you do if two big burly policemen would walk in and grab your mother in the collar and shove her out of the door and say, 'You're lying.' All this man said was, 'Don't push my mother.' That's all he said and for that he shot him. That he is alive today was not their intention. They shot him to kill him, but he didn't die and he shot them in self-defense." Before Faulkner was through, the jury was weeping. When the case went to the jury, Clayton was freed. He never spent a day in jail. He was freed. And there was no incidents. There was no attempts to mob or lynch or anything. He went back to Detroit. In 1931, he and I went down there together and went all over town and everywhere together among people who knew all about it. There were never any incidents.

V. Boyd: Why did the blacks mortgage their home for that if he volunteered he would do it free?

R. Flowers: Well, he meant if he couldn't get paid. He wanted money for the case, but if they could not get it he would do it and they didn't want him to do it for nothing. They wanted to show that they were willing. If he was good enough to take the case, they wanted to be good enough to pay him.

V. Boyd: That was good. A good story and it does illustrate good race relations.

J. Flowers: Yeah, that's king right there in that particular section of Wilson County, Tennessee, that I know about.

V. Boyd: Okay. Talk a little bit more about the church as you first knew it. Where it was located and typical worship and so on.

J. Flowers: As a child the worship usually consisted of three songs and a prayer and then another song and there would be the "admonishment," mostly they called it at that time because we didn't have a preacher. And the brethren, who did the admonishing wouldn't go up in the pulpit where he was supposed to preach from, but you could stand down in front and admonish. So there would be the admonishment and the collection and the treasurer would always put it in a tobacco sack they had - called RJR tobacco. Most everybody smoked or used RJR and they had plenty of those RJR tobacco sacks. So the treasurer would take it. The collection would usually be in pennies, not over a nickel. If you put more than a nickel in, you were showing off. [*Boyd laughs.*] You were wanting to be seen. 'Cause as far as they knew about the needs of the church, all you needed was some kerosene for the lamps. That was all you had to buy. We went out in the woods and they cut the wood that they burned in the wintertime and so you'd put a little nickel or dime in. But they would always say, "This is for the poor saints." I never knew the poor saints to get any of it. [*Both laugh.*]

V. Boyd: But if you had an evangelist come in for meetings, they'd collect money for that, wouldn't they?

R. Flowers: No. He would have to stand at the door. If the evangelist stopped to hold a meeting, they would quote that scripture, "Let him that is taught the Word, communicate unto him that teaches." And so then you communicate. He would stand at the door. They would bring ears of corn if it was summertime or chickens or whatever they had. If they had a few nickels or dimes, somebody may take some eggs to the store and sell them. So that's the way the evangelist would get paid. He would leave there with a bag on his back if he was riding a horse or if he was walking, then he had to carry the stuff. So that's the way they paid him. They didn't believe in located preachers at the time and they didn't believe in paying preachers' salaries.

V. Boyd: Well, is that because the issue had not come up or because...?

R. Flowers: It was because it was what the denominations did.

V. Boyd: Oh, I see.

R. Flowers: You were not to do what the denominations did. So if they paid their preacher, you don't pay your preacher. So you take up, I mean, the Lord's Supper was always the last. They said Jesus sung a hymn and afterwards said they went out... So you would take the Lord's Supper and then you sing a hymn and then you go out. Now that was the order of the service until I was old enough to change it myself even in Detroit.

V. Boyd: Back in Wilson County, what time did it start and what time did it end?

R. Flowers: Well, they started when they all got there and they ended when they got through. [*Chuckles*] The Sunday School was what took up the time because it always consisted of arguments. They would come in and one brother would look at the other one and say, "Brother So-and-So, you want to teach the class today." Why he'd scratch his head and say, "Really I hadn't studied anything." "What about you, Brother So-and-So?" "Well, I'd rather for you to go ahead. Today, I'm really am not prepared." This is the way they chose the teachers each Sunday and the teacher, of course, was not prepared as he would admit to begin with. But now what they're going to do is sit there and pick to pieces what he said in order to argue and they would wind up in an argument. They may be there until two or three o'clock in the evening. But after they were through with their arguing then some brother would get up and "admonish."

V. Boyd: Was he prepared?

R. Flowers: No, he wasn't prepared. It's just your turn to admonish, get up and admonish.

V. Boyd: But at least they divided that out ahead of time. They knew who was going to admonish that day?

R. Flowers: No. Do you want to admonish Brother So-and-So?" Nobody knew who was going to make the admonishment. It might be Brother Ed Flowers. It might be Brother Melza Harris, or it might be Brother Carroll White. They were the three leaders there. So they would get up and make the admonishment. Now if he walked up on that pulpit, somebody'd say, "He's trying to be a preacher." Don't go up here. [*Both laugh.*] That's where Brother Bowser or Brother Keeble would go if he comes here. Reserve that for Brother Campbell, Brother Womack, or Brother Winston. These were the parties of preachers in that day that used to come through there. So that was the service as I knew it as a boy. And, of course, we had one cup. That was before the multiple cups as far as we knew out there. They'd have a big pitcher of wine. Of course, it had to be wine too because fermented.

V. Boyd: It really was.

R. Flowers: Oh yeah, there was no refrigeration in those days. That was the only way you could keep it. There was no refrigeration. There was not even canned grape juice.

V. Boyd: Was it homemade?

R. Flowers: Oh yeah. They'd make it in the summertime. When the grapes come in, they made it. As a matter of fact, there was no stigma against wine there. Everybody made it and at Christmas time it was the custom to go from house to house and they would give you wine cake. There was no problem with drinking. Nobody that I know of in that community got drunk or even drunk enough to cause anybody to say anything about it. Nobody ever preached about it. I never heard that it was wrong to drink wine until I was grown. I never heard that. [*Laughs*] They didn't know that. So that's what they used – Wine, it was fermented out of grape juice.

V. Boyd: And somebody made their unleavened bread too.

R. Flowers: Yeah, and they made the unleavened bread too.

V. Boyd: Did you have literature or did you use the Bible only?

R. Flowers: No, used literature for Sunday School. They had the cards for the little children. Only had two classes, the card class and the adult class. And of course, you were in the card class on up into your

teens. And then after you marry, you could go in the adult class. They used the quarterly written by the *Gospel Advocate*.

V. Boyd: Did you have any contact with the white brethren? Did the church?

R. Flowers: Yes, Brother E. A. Elam, he was very active among the blacks out there. [*V. Boyd: And preached?*] And the local...No, he didn't preach, but he would advise them and suggest preachers to them and suggest various things. And he would always bring the literature to his house and we lived right near him and we would go to his house and pick it up.

V. Boyd: And you say he was commuting back and forth to Nashville to work on the *Advocate*?

J. Flowers: I guess he did. At least, he was always home on weekends. He may have stayed in Nashville, I imagine he did at that time because they didn't have cars to go back and forth. I think he stayed in Nashville during the week and come home on weekends. Matter of fact, I didn't know too much about his connection with Nashville at that time. I learned more about that after my reading after I got grown. I knew Brother Elam was always around there usually on the weekends.

V. Boyd: Was he called a farmer out there?

J. Flowers: No. He wasn't. They had lived on what they call Rome Pike in a nice little white house, white frame house with just a few acres. But Brother Elam was not farming when I came on the scene.

V. Boyd: What did most of the blacks do for a living?

J. Flowers: Most of the blacks were sharecroppers. And my father sharecropped until my mother died.

V. Boyd: With what family?

J. Flowers: Well, he worked with, he was working for a fellow named Hugh Grissom when I was born. That was just two miles out of Lebanon. And I think the family was Wilson, I believe, when we moved to Rome. Of course, I was only four or five years old. I think his name was Wilson, Hamilton Wilson. The thing that caused me to remember anything at all about that up there was that Rome was right on the Cumberland River and at certain times of the year, it would rain a lot and the river would rise and overflow and cause the back waters would cut off part of the farm from the other section. And they had some stock over on the other side. And they had no boats or anyway to get over there. So I remember as a little boy, they held me on the banks of the river while my dad took his clothes off and swam across to see about the stock on the other side.

V. Boyd: You mean he didn't have any clothes once he got on the other side.

J. Flowers: No, there was nothing on the other side but cattle [*Laughs.*]

V. Boyd: Wow. What if you ran into someone? [*Both laugh*]

J. Flowers: The only way anybody's get over there, you'd have to swim. The section was absolutely isolated. The back water had cut them off. And I always thought that if my dad could swim that river, he could do anything in this world. As a little boy, I used to find myself walking behind him trying to and watch his footprints and I'd step my foot as far as I could, jump the rest to put every foot in his tracks. My dad swim the river. So that's about all I know about his farming. They didn't farm. I didn't farm. I used to want to because I lived in the country and my grandmother's sons bought this little plot of ground.

I think there was about twelve acres in it and they put my grandmother there and my uncle did fencing, public work. He would build fences for people or quarry stone or just do odd jobs and work by the day if anybody wanted to hire him, but he didn't sharecrop and so my dad we had no... nobody in our family were sharecroppers. My boyhood was spent mostly by myself because all the other boys had to work. Their father's were sharecroppers and they had to work on the farm.

Now there was a farm right across from where I lived and I used to over and beg the man to let me plow. I didn't want pay. I just liked to plow. I liked to see that plow turn that dirt over. Well, they'd say, "You're too young." I was about thirteen. There was a black man who hired me. He was to pay me thirteen dollars a month. And he was going to let me plow and I worked for him one month, but it hadn't come time to plow the corn and I couldn't plow the big turning plow. But he was going to let me plow the corn with what they call a double-shovel when it got high enough. But I didn't stay there that long. When the first month rolled around and he said "I can't pay you, I'll have to pay your dad." Of course, my dad was in Detroit and wouldn't be home until Christmas. *[Laughs]* And so I quit. So he came over then and my grandmother told him, "Yeah, you can pay him. His dad doesn't take his money." Well, he paid me that month and I didn't go back. And so that ended my farming. Well, there was a white family, a very well-to-do man by the name of Calhoun Young. He was a horse man. If Brother N. B. Hardeman was living I'm certain that he could tell you about Calhoun Young because they showed horses together. And also this Kerr Wilson that my dad worked for, he was a horse man. "Cause my dad helped to train, I think, he, first horse sold for four thousand dollars to ever leave the state of Tennessee. I think the horse's name was Vendetta. I'll never forget that horse's name. Well, I loved horses and I loved to plow so I went down to Calhoun Young because I thought he would give me a break, like Wilson did my dad, to help train the horses. And he gave me a job, but he said, "Now we're going to let you plow and we're going to let you ride horses, but right now there's nothing for you to do so I'm going to let you help my wife in the house." Well, I didn't like that. So she had me painting steps and painting the fence and cleaning out the chicken house. I didn't like that job, but I was waiting for the job to plow. So the corn got up almost halfway between your knees and I knew that was big enough for me to plow. So I said, "Mr. Young, when am I going to plow?" He said, "John, there ain't but one mule that we've got left and that's Old Dave and the only reason he's down there is there can't nobody can plow him. They had another black man on the farm by the name of Mose Wilson and Mose was supposed to be the mule trainer. He said, "And even Mose can't plow him." And Mr. Young had two sons at home, Calvin and Joe Haley. Now Joe Haley and Calvin each got a mule. And Mose got a mule out there and there was no mule for anybody else, but Old Dave. So one day I got tired of working with Miz Young in the house and I sneaked out and went down to the barn. And I looked at Old Dave and Old Dave looked at me. "That's the only reason I'm not plowing is because you won't let nobody plow you." So I had found a bridle and I got over in there in the barn where Old Dave was and he put his ears back and showed me his teeth and I was scared, but I couldn't, I was hemmed up and I couldn't get out. And I just hollered, "Whoa, Dave. Whoa, Dave." And Old Dave stopped and I put the bridle on him. I found some harness and I put the harness on Old Dave. And nobody was supposed to ride him. But I led him up beside a fence and I climbed up on the fence and got on his back. Rode him out to the field and found a double-shovel laying out on the side. Now these corn rows must have been a mile long because as I was coming up, I saw them, they were.....

Tape 1 ends.

Tape 2

V. Boyd: So you got Old Dave set out in the field.

J. Flowers: Yeah. And Mr. Young was out in the field training his horses. So when he came to put his horse in the barn, he missed Old Dave. So immediately he got scared and he run to the house and he asked his wife, "Hey, Jeannie, where's that boy?" And she didn't know and they began to look for me

and I was gone. So Mr. Young got on his horse and he came out to the field as fast as he could. And when he got there, I was going down the row, I was plowing. And he started yelling for his older son and Mose to go catch me. "Go get that boy because that old mule is going to run away with him and tear up all the corn out here." Well, they started after me, but when they got near me, we were doing all right. Old Dave was stepping like he was supposed to step. So then Joe Haley says, "Wait, Pa, wait." [Laughs] I made my round and they were all waiting at the end and when I got up there to the end there everybody was looking at me. They had one line on their mule. They train them so you could put one line on the left side. Then when you get to the end of the row and you want the mule to the right you say, "Yaa," and he knows to go to the right. And you've got the line on the left and if you want him to come to the left, you pull him, but you could train him to work without a line. If you want him to go to the left, you say, "Haw" and he go to the left. Well, I knew that's what they said, see, but I had two lines on him "cause he wasn't supposed to be worked. Nobody said a word when I got up to the end of the row. So I just pulled on around them and I knew that I was on the spot. I figured Mr. Young was going to take me to the barn anyway, but I pulled Old Dave around and went right down the row again. And we were stepping. And Joe Haley said, "Pa, he's doing all right. Let him plow. He's doing all right." So they waited until I'd done another round. The Old Man Young said, "Listen," – they didn't know I rode him out there – "When you get reach to go back, you get up behind Mose. No Mike, Old Mike that was the mule's name. Mike was my mule. Dave was the old white mule that Mose worked. He said, "When you get ready to come back, you get up behind Mose on Old Dave and don't try to ride that mule 'cause he'll kill you. Nobody rides him." Well, the rest of them didn't know I rode him out. So I plowed him all day long and I took one line off of him and when I got nearly to the end of the row, he had a blind bridle on, I walked up beside him, "Yaa," and tapped him on the side of the nose and he'd wheel, and went to the left went to the right. Every time I get to the end of the row, I yelled, "Yaa," Old Mike would turn. I took that line off of him. Like everybody else now I had one line. When we got ready to go home that night, Mose said, "You get up behind me on Old Dave." And I said, "No, I'm going to ride Old Mike." "No, you don't. Mr. Young said that mule will kill you." Well, Mr. Young's sons, they were adventurous too, and they said, "No, Mose, let him ride him. He ain't going to hurt him out on the plowed ground." Mose said, "Yeah, but we don't want that old mule tearing up all of the corn and stuff out here." Joe Haley said, "You get up on him." I said, "I rode him over here." "Get up on him." I got on him and the old mule just humped up on his back and said, "Mmm, mmm" and that's all. I rode him on in. Before I got there, Joe Haley run out and yelled, "Hey Pa, come here." Old Man Young come out there scared to death. I rode him on in. So they let me plow. They let me plow and finish up. Every day then I plowed that old mule. So one day, they wanted the garden plowed out. Now they always put their best plow mule in the garden and the best man. So Old Man Young said to Mose, "Mose, you know I believe Old Mike is a better plow mule than Old Dave." He says, "Yeah, he is quite steady." "Well, I believe you better get Old Mike and plow out the garden." Old Mose went down there to get Old Mike and he jumped up on him to ride him up there and Old Mike threw him up in a tree. [Both laugh.] Everybody run and grabbed, "What's the matter with that mule? What happened to him? That boy's been riding him around all that time. What happened to him, Mose?" Old Mose said, "I don't know. That mule crazy." "Well, lead him." So he led him up there, hitched him to – they had a plow, didn't have but one plow and they called it a "bull tongue." It's supposed to lay off rows. He hitched Old Mike to that thing and down through the garden tearing up everything. [Laughing] Everybody was chasing him. Mr. Young, Joe Haley, Cameron, and everybody. "Catch him, Mose, get him out of there, Mose."

V. Boyd: Old Mose and the mule just didn't have good chemistry, did they?

J. Flowers: That mule, the reason they couldn't work him, some adult had done something to him before they bought him. And they knew that no one was able to ride him or do anything to him and they didn't know what to do with that mule, but they found out that a kid could do anything. A kid could ride him, plow him or do anything, but no grown up. That's the way he was. And so that summer that I worked there with them off and on. Plowed the corn a little bit and worked with Mrs. Young and so that was all

of my work. The only work, only money I ever earned in Tennessee. Then the rest of the time in summer when school was out, I fished. And I guess I'm lucky to be alive. One day I was way back from nowhere. I don't even know where I was, just rambling through the woods and I found a great big pond. It was a beautiful pond. People had to make ponds down there. There were no streams that runned through that section. And I couldn't swim, but I wanted to swim in that water. There was a rail fence over there and I got me a rail off of that fence and I put it in that pond and I got on that rail, like kids would ride a tire today, but I was riding this rail. And I'm riding it pretending I'm swimming just kicking my hands and feet. And all of a sudden, I looked around and there my rail was way over there and I'm over here. And I got scared then and I let down and when I let down I felt the water closed up over my head. Well, I came up then just paddling and beating away and I spotted my rail, but I was beating so fast that as I would get near the rail, I was pushing the rail further away from me. And I couldn't catch up with it, but I'm just fighting for my dear life. By the time I got tired and let down the next time, the tip of my toe could touch the ground, but I had to hold my head up like this to breath. And I was afraid that I would go backwards, and I couldn't afford to go back, then I fought my way out and I got out of there.

V. Boyd: That's frightening for a young kid. How old were you?

J. Flowers: Oh, I would say maybe about fourteen. Something like that, fourteen, fifteen. So I would go out in the winter time and I would go rabbit hunting in the day time. I didn't have money to buy shells so I had some dogs. I knew an old man down there who used to buy rabbits for his cats. Well, I knew where every rabbit stayed that was around there. And they had rock fences. And I would take my dogs and I would go to the rabbit hole and stop it up. I'd take my dogs out there and jump the rabbit and when he couldn't get into his hole he'd run in the rock fence and I'd pull the rocks out and catch him. I'd take him down there and old Henry Calhoun would give me fifteen cents for the rabbit and I would buy three shells and come back and go hunting. So that's how I learned to hunt and fish. Well, everybody around there called me a "bad boy." I had a reputation because well I had no work to do, but all the rest of the boys would want to leave their chores to follow me and I didn't have anything to do. Well, they'd say, "He don't have nothing to do. You've got work to do." And I was a bad influence on the rest of them. They'd want to go hunt and fish like I did, but that was just the kind of life that I lived. Really what brought me to Detroit was, I'll tell you this. They started building a highway at the Wilson County line to go all the way to Carthage and I lived four miles from the line. Now I was sixteen years old now. I went up to this highway and got a job on the highway. They had people who followed this highway company and these were what they called [*Levee?*] camp people. They rented a big house and these people stayed there. Well, I stayed up there during the week, but on the weekend I would come back home. Now I was getting big money. Nobody ever heard of making \$2.10 a day, no man. Now they were paying me \$2.10 a day. I was driving. I was what they called a skinner driving the wagon. They'd load it with rocks and I'd grab the wagon. There were others doing the same thing. But now these [*Levee*] Camp people who had a reputation of being rough and tough -well, I wasn't brought up that way and I didn't know how to be that way - they told me that if I worked on this camp, I had to be that way. I had to learn how to swear and drink whiskey and shoot dice. Well, I said, "Yes sir and no sir" to all grownups. So one day at the breakfast table, I said "thanks" for a biscuit. One man grabbed a biscuit and he threw it and he hit me in the mouth. And he swore and said, "Don't you ever say that again. You say give me one of those so-and-so cat heads over here." Boy that hurt my feelings. Everybody carried a gun or a razor or something in his pocket. So I went to the boss's son, the big man, the owner of the whole outfit, his name was Y.Y. Philip. He had a son and his name was Denzel and I went to Denzel and I said, "Do you know where I can buy a pistol?" And he said, "Yeah, I've got one." For five dollars he sold me a little ol' what they call an "owl head," a thirty-two owl head. Now I was going to shoot somebody if anybody ever threw a biscuit at me. So I put this pistol in my pocket. I came home on the weekend and had this pistol in my pocket and pulled my coat off to pitch horseshoes with the boys. There was an old man by the name of Paris Sweat looked down and saw this gun in my pocket. He said, "Boy, you ain't carrying nothing but trouble in your pocket. I'm going over there and tell Aunt Lizzie on you." Well, I took the gun that day and

traded it to a man for a shotgun and an old pair of dogs so I didn't have it. He did go over and tell granny. Granny wrote my dad and said, "You better come get him because he's working up here on this highway and he's with them bad fellas up there and he's carrying a gun." So that ended my life in Tennessee. [Laughs.]

V. Boyd: Now let's see. You were out of high school by that time...

J. Flowers: No, I wasn't out of high school. Then I came to Detroit and I got a job over there at Chevrolet and I came back to finish high school, see, each summer. I had three more years of high school to go.

V. Boyd: That was just a summer job.

J. Flowers: Right, right. That was just a summer job there, a summer job. And so that was it. So from that day until this, I never lived in Tennessee again.

V. Boyd: We're talking about adolescence. You want to talk about sex education. How did your dad or other people initiate you?

J. Flowers: Well, they didn't talk about that. That was something that only the kids would talk about between themselves. You would hear older boys. They talk. And so that's the way you got your sex education.

V. Boyd: Your dad never did try to say anything.

J. Flowers: No, nope. Never mentioned it.

V. Boyd: You couldn't talk about it back then, could they?

J. Flowers: No no, no that was a subject that you didn't talk about. I doubt if even the married people ever discussed it between themselves. They just acted. [Laughs] There was nothing to say.

V. Boyd: Well let's see. Is there anything else? I guess we've covered several areas of your youth. Let's go on back now, you said your first speaking opportunity came....

J. Flowers: In 1956. I think it was in 1955, the Lectureship, the National Lectureship, at the National Lectureship, I don't know remember where it was held. But at any rate, the brethren had begun to ridicule the eldership and, of course, the elders....

V. Boyd: Where was it in '55?

J. Flowers: In '55, I don't know, I don't remember where it was.

V. Boyd: But you were there?

J. Flowers: No, Brother Steward and his wife came back and told me how they were ridiculing the eldership and making fun of the elders that they knew and talking about them. Well, they said to me, "Well, they have never seen any elders, who come near meeting the qualifications of elders. They have never even heard an elder speak." And they said, "I just wish that there was some way that you could go to the Lectureship and uphold the elders."

V. Boyd: Had you ever gone to a Lectureship?

J. Flowers: No, never had been to a Lectureship. I didn't even know what a Lectureship was. And they asked me would I go. And I said, "Yeah, but I can't afford to go because I have five children to support and I can't take the time off." So they said, "Okay, if the church would send you." So they asked the elders and they said, yeah, they'd be glad. They'd pay for the week's work that I would lose in Los Angeles, California. So then they gave me a subject to speak on, "The Work of Elders." And that was my subject. Nobody had ever heard of me. They looked at the program. Douglas Greer, from Washington, came to me and said, "Is your name Flowers?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Did you ever speak on the Lectureship before?" And I said, "No." He said, "I didn't think you had." I said, "Why?" "You wouldn't let them make a fool out of you like this." "What do you mean?" He said, "Don't you know that anybody that come down here and talk about elders, they're going to make a fool out of him. And you never talked on the lectureship before. You've never been on a lectureship. Man, don't you know that they're going to put you on a hot seat and they're going to ridicule you." And I said, "Well, I've been ridiculed before." "You've never been ridiculed like this." And I said, "Well, I've experienced a lot of things for the first time." So he said, "Well, I tell you what, if you get up there and say that an elder's got an ounce of authority," he says, "I'm going to be the first one on you myself. Do you know who I am?" I said, "No, I don't know who you are." [Chuckles] "Furthermore it really doesn't matter." So I was to speak on Friday, the last day. Friday came. Everybody was there. The house was full. Here's an elder going to speak. L.M. Jones was speaking on the qualifications of elders. He preceded me. They asked L.M. to come up and take a seat on the rostrum and they asked me to come up. L.M. had Nichol's *Sound Doctrine* in his hand and that's what he preached out of for the qualifications. When he got up there and he looked around and he laughed. He looked around and he started laughing and then the house started laughing. And he says, "Here I am sitting up here on the rostrum with an elder. I never heard an elder preach and further more I have never sat on a rostrum with an elder and [Laughs] here sits one." So everybody laughed. And L.M. went on to do his qualifications. When he was through, I think it was J. S. Winston who got up and introduced me. And he told him, you know, that not to expect what they had been used to from other elders and everything that they might be surprised. When I got into my subject and I went on to set forth what I considered the Bible taught was the elders work. Well, nobody there had ever heard of that. They always thought that was what the preacher was supposed to do. But when I was through, it was near lunchtime and Brother Kennedy was the chairman. Brother Kennedy said, "No, there's the man and you all have heard him." And said, "Now we usually put them on the hot seat after they're through." And Douglass Greer threw his hand up and said, "Brother Kennedy, I don't think anybody here wants him." And Shelton Gibbs then hollered, he was a youngster, some of the others, Calvin Bowers, Pitts. All of the younger preachers and they began to holler, yeah, they wanted to question. And Brother Kennedy said, "Shut up." [Laughs] And Gibbs said, "Well, if what he's saying, I want to know. Where is the Board? Where is the Board of Elders? If what he says is true then you guys haven't been telling us this and we want to know. We want to ask a few questions." Brother Kennedy said, "We're going to lunch now. You all shut up. That's the trouble now, you youngsters run your mouth too much." Brother Kennedy just shut him up and, said "We're going to ask nobody nothing." So we went to lunch and come back in the afternoon and they kept on hollering that they wanted to ask some questions. So then they chose a panel, Brother G. E. Steward, G. P Holt, and myself, but all the questions were directed at me and I just wheeled them off and gave them Bible and nobody, everybody would look at one another and figure you going to attack it, nobody ever said anything so finally there was a fellow from down in California by the name of F. F. Carson and taped this. They have tapes of that sermon. It's all over now. I don't know. I meet people from time to time who tell me, "I've got that tape recording." I've got the tape. It's broke. I don't know whether it can be pieced together or not, but I have got part of it. It's on a reel. It's one of those reel kind. Well, they tell me they have it. Well, Carson said he wanted to publish it. Brother Hogan said *The Echo* was going to publish it, but they never did. But at any rate, the brethren all got together and discussed it among themselves as to whether that was false doctrine or what. Finally they decided that if I would come to Houston, that was '57, they would be ready and

prepared for me. So then they asked me if I would come to Houston that next year and I said, "Yeah, I'll come to Houston." So they invited me back to Houston the next year. 1957. So '57, it was about the same thing. In 1958, they had a Lectureship here. So they put me on here. So Ernie Steward and I were on the same night. That night Clifford Tucker was there. Ernie Steward was there. Let's see who else. There was a whole bunch of white men. Harvey Dykes was there and all of them because they had heard the attitude that the Blacks had. So they gave me a Friday night. That was the prime time. [Laughs] And the house was full. Well, that was '58. So in '59, I was invited to go, but I think I didn't make it in '59.

V. Boyd: Excuse me, in Detroit, '59, was there question and answer afterwards?

J. Flowers: Yeah, oh yeah. Questions and answers see. But nobody never tried to make an attempt to rebuttal, until it was in the sixties. So every year, I was invited then for about ten to fifteen years after that. Different preachers would tell me what they were saying that they were going to do, but he'd tell me, they say when you leave here, but when you come back, they don't ever do it. I said, "I don't know." "They talk about you behind your back, but when they get to your face they won't say nothing." I said, "Well, they know it's the truth. They can't do anything with it." But in 19.., I forgot the year, but it was in the early sixties, Brother Keeble was in Indianapolis and I spoke and when it became question time come, Trone raised up and Trone was going to show that the preachers was over the elders. And Trone got up there and mentioned what Paul said to Timothy for this cause. Let me see. No, how was that. No, he was quoting from the passage where Paul said to Timothy, "The things which you have learned of me, you commit to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." He said that that was to Timothy as a preacher and that meant that all the teaching all over, I mean that command was over, was a higher command than the command that he gave to the elders in Acts 20:28 because evangelists come first. Now elders were to do this if there was no evangelist. Acts 20:28, Paul was leaving and he said after my departure you do this. But now you don't do this, elders, when there's a preacher there. And Brother Keeble wouldn't let me answer. And Brother Keeble wouldn't let it go no further. Brother Keeble just got up and said, "Now, Trone, you know better than that. Trone, say you ought to have more sense than to get up here against him. He comes from Tennessee. I baptized his daddy. He come from 30 miles of my home. He's got too much sense. He liked to killed you in Detroit." And said, "Here you come over here for some more. Shut up and sit down." And everybody started hollering, "No, Pop, let him go on. Let him go, Pop" Cause all the boys they told me, "I never wanted to see you shut a guy up so quick as you were going to shut Trone up." But Brother Keeble wouldn't let him go. Brother Keeble said, "No, there ain't no use because you know you don't know what you're talking about so sit down, Trone." And you know that was him. That's how he'd do. He would just take charge. He stopped it. He wouldn't let it go no further. Now that's the only time that anybody ever tried to rebuttal me on anything that I said although there were many times they'd come to me privately. So at another Lectureship, they kept emphasizing nobody could ordain an elder, but an evangelist. It was absolutely against God's law for them to do that. So in this Lecture, I got up and said, "Well, I wouldn't say that. I would not say," I said, if some brother had made that statement, I said that "I think that as an elder I have as much authority to ordain another elder or a preacher or anybody as anyone else." "Book! Book! Book!" They threw their Bibles out and I said, "Open your Bibles to Philippians the fourth chapter about the ninth verse." I said, "Now you know who the Philippian letter was addressed to. It wasn't addressed to preachers 'cause Paul specifically mentions the bishops and deacons. Now he said 'the things which you've seen of me and which you've heard of me, this you do.'" And I said, "Now he didn't tell them, now, you could do everything that you've seen me do, except ordain elders, but he told them whatever you've seen me do, whatever you've heard me say, then you do it." Boy, they never knew that verse was in the Bible. Then they went to get the smartest ones among them, Clyde Muse, Andrew Hairston and all of them, they all got together and they mumbled and mumbled and mumbled out there to decide how he was going to trap me. So at lunchtime, I was sitting at the table eating and Clyde Muse came up....

Side ends

Side 2

J. Flowers:too much. It proves nothing. Well here he's going to try this argument on me privately see how I answer it. Then that night when we come back, when the panel was, then he's going to pull it. So he says, "Whatever proves too much proves nothing." And I says, "Yeah, I agree with that." He says, "Now you say when Paul told them elders that whatever they seen him do to do." "Yeah." He said, "Do you think them elders could pick up a poisoned snake and it wouldn't bite him." And I said, "Clyde," I said, "You know when it comes to study the Bible, people usually approach it in one of three senses." I said, "Now there's the matter of 'reveal sense' and then there's the matter of 'common sense', and then there's 'nonsense.'" I said, "That's what you're using." [*Laughs.*] He dropped his head and smiled and got up and walked on out. [*Laughs*] Told the brothers they better not use that. Old Clyde Muse he laughed about that for years afterward. He told me later that, he said "I'll be frank with you, Brother Flowers, we didn't know that you were as well read as you were," he said. He laughed about that. So after, A.C. Colston left Memphis, he turned against the eldership and he went somewhere else and he got a job. I don't remember where, but anyway he got fired from that job. So finally he went to Buffalo. The Madison Church where Ira North preaches was sponsoring his work, supporting him in Buffalo, New York. At this particular Lectureship, all of the preachers got together out there after my lecture and they were all plotting about how to tear it to pieces. And I walked up there and I said, "Look, fellows," I said, "Now I've been nice to you." I said, "From time to time I've been lecturing on this Lectureship for years and you fellows talk about me behind my back, but nobody will ever face me publicly on anything I have said to try to prove that it is untrue." I said, "Now the white brethren have gotten in the wind of what you're teaching. I was in Harvey Dyke's office at the Vinewood Church in Detroit and he asked me about you brethren. All of you National Lectureship brethren are going around all over the country and teaching about this evangelistic authority." And he says to me, "Now, Brother Flowers do you want to hear something." I said, "Yeah." I said, "Do you know what he did? He dialed B.C. Goodpasture in Nashville, Tennessee." And he did and I was sitting right there. And he said, "Brother Goodpasture, there are a bunch of our Black brethren, who have banded themselves together into what they call "National Lectureship." And said this is the most influential gathering among them and whatever comes out of this, this is what guides their churches. He said, "Now what they're teaching is evangelistic authority. That the evangelist has authority over the elders." He said, "Now many of these brethren are being supported in various places by the white churches." He said, "Many of them are called to hold meetings in different places and our white brethren don't know this." He said, "I wonder if there is some way through the *Advocate* that we can warn our brethren about these fellows." He told Goodpasture that, Dykes did. So I told them that. I said, "Now this is what Brother Goodpasture said." I know that that Madison was supporting Colston because I read it in the *Advocate*. And I said, "Now, I'm going back and tell Brother Dykes, the names of everybody that's here plotting." Man, Colston run to me, came after me, "Brother Flowers, you haven't heard me say a word. You know I've always been for the elders." [*Both laugh.*] "I've always been for the elders. I was just standing there. I wasn't saying a word about it." [*Laughing*] I said it because of him. I knew where he was getting his pay from. Scared him to death. Boy that caused him to be my friend. Everywhere he's see me, he'd run and put his arms around me, you know, and say, "Brother Flowers is one of the finest elders we've ever had." [*Both laugh.*] "And he's not only a great elder, but he's a great preacher."

V. Boyd: You wouldn't convert them by logic, you'd convert them otherwise.

J. Flowers: Yeah. That'd stop you. That'd stop some of the meeting you've been holding down there. After that, they lightened up on me then.

V. Boyd: Well, did Goodpasture follow through on that?

J. Flowers: No, no, he didn't. Probably Brother Keeble was living at the time and he probably talked to Brother Keeble about it. You know Brother Keeble, "Ain't a word of it so. I know my brethren" and all like. Oh it might be if somebody he didn't like, he might say, you know, it may be one or two or something, but I think Brother Keeble smoothed it over because Goodpasture never said anything at all about it. The only thing where the Black brothers' attitude has ever mentioned about was this quotation from your article that I read here recently.

V. Boyd: Well, Andrew Hairston had an article in the *Mission* magazine one time that documented the differences between the black and white churches.

J. Flowers: Right. He had an article in the *Mission* and the same thing was run in, was it *Teacher*? I read it in the *Mission*, the first time that I read it and then I guess it was in *Teacher*. But anyway, yeah. Where Andrew was showing, I don't think he specifically told what the difference was, but he did say that there would never be any real integration between... Yeah, he did say this, the whites do teach that the elders have the sole rule or something, but he says that the black preachers definitely have to be dealt with when it comes to setting the policy of the church. He put it that way, but nobody much reads *Mission* and the *Teacher* either. I'm going ...at that time anyway. I think more of them take the *Teacher* magazine now. But at that time, we have taken it and given it to our teachers for a long time, but Andrew did make that statement there. And so I think you in your article, you made a reference to that.

V. Boyd: Well, you've had quite a history with the National Lectureship because you've been about the only one that's stood up and talked about elders.

J. Flowers: I was the only one and so that's what I'm known as. Just like you heard Landon Saunders say the other day, "You spoke on the elders." When you mentioned Flowers, then they [*unclear*] of the elders. They're not concerned about what aspect or what my viewpoints, it's just the fact that he talks about the elders. That's the man that talks about the elders.

V. Boyd: Yeah. You're such a rarity....

J. Flowers: Yeah, yeah.

V. Boyd: ...among the black brotherhood.

J. Flowers: But it's changing now. You see at that time none of our brethren had ever attended any Christian school other than NCI and Southwestern and, of course, they just didn't talk about things like that. And the white brethren didn't talk about it much to the blacks because they assumed, that even among the black preachers there was just so much illiteracy and they were the top, that there just wasn't anybody qualified for elders and so there wasn't no need to talk about that. So I suppose that was the assumption that they operated on because nobody ever talked about it. We had a fellow come over from Gary, Indiana, and he preached for us one Sunday. And he preached to me. Just watched me all the time. I took him home with me for dinner and he asked me later if I paid any attention to him watching me. And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Do you know why?" I said, "No." He said, "You are the first black elder that I ever saw and I've been preaching for twenty years." He said, "When I became a Christian, there was no elders in that church and I did never ever hear anyone even talk about it." I asked, "You never heard of elders?" "Yeah, I heard white people in the white churches." "Then why didn't you think about the blacks?" "Well," he said, "That something nobody else ever talked about it so I didn't talk about it. We didn't know. It was something that years went by and it was never mentioned. So I heard

about you and so,” he said, “You know, I didn’t know how elders reacted when preachers preached. So I kept watching you to see what you were going to do with me.” [*Laughs*] Well, I never was the type that said “amen” a lot and so I told him, I said “Brother Martin, no, that’s the just the way I am. I don’t say a lot of ‘amens.’ This way I leave it, everybody will take you for what they understand and not just watch me to see whether I’m approving or disapproving.” I said, “For that reason I just don’t let the people know ...I treat everybody the same way and I treat every sermon the same way and they never know whether I’m approving or disapproving from my reaction.” And I said, “And I think that if I treat everybody the same way, why then the people can’t say if somebody get up there and do preach something that maybe I might not wholly agree with, and they say, ‘Brother Flowers don’t like that.’ And because you may preach something that I disagree with, I’m not going to say it’s false preaching, false doctrine and I’m not going to say that it’s not even true, but what I will do is I will take it home and after I study it awhile or study it and if I do find that it not to be true, I will tell you about it. Because I didn’t think you’d deliberately get up there and preach something false.” “So that’s why” he said, “I just didn’t know. I kept watching you and you wasn’t saying nothing so I didn’t know whether I was doing right or wrong. I said, “Well,” I said, “If you study your lessons, you ought to know. Anytime I get up there to preach if I say what I intended to say then I think I’m saying right anyway whether I am or not.” [*Laughs*]. If nobody agrees with it, I think it’s right. And I said, “They’ll have to tell me if it’s not right. I’m not going to assume that it might not be right. “

V. Boyd: Let’s go back and kind of fill in some gaps on your coming to Detroit and your exposure to the church in Detroit. When you first came where did you worship?

J. Flowers: Oh, at St. Antoine. There was a little storefront at St. Antoine and Alexandrine.

V. Boyd: The date of that? Date? What year?

J. Flowers: That was 1925. That’s when I went there. I didn’t place my membership because I was only going to be there, to be in Detroit just during the summer. And I didn’t really have any active part. I would just go in and sit, and observe.

V. Boyd: You were just a teenager?

J. Flowers: Right. Well, no, I was twenty-one old. [*V. Boyd: Oh, twenty-one.*] See I was twenty-one when I graduated from high school. See, after my grade school, I was two years before I ever entered school again, and so I was twenty-one when I got out of high school. But I was a teenager then, seventeen. Graduated in ’29 from high school at twenty-one. I was a teenager as you say, yes, seventeen years old. And so each summer, I would attend the services there, but when I began to take an active part was after I got married. I married in ’32, but then Brother Bynum, who was preaching, he urged me to become more active. And he recognized that I had some speaking talent. So after that then I became active, studying the Bible. And making announcements in the church and ushering, doing things like that. Well, I would say about thirty, thirty-three or four somewhere in there. But it was not until 1947 that I began to teach Bible class. At that time we were at Joseph Campau. We bought that building in 1945 and moved from Cameron over there in 1945. And so I was growing and so I was making an announcement for the radio and the public begin to regard me as a preacher because those who would listen to radio thought that I was a preacher. They would come to the church thinking that I was a preacher. They knew Trone was a preacher because he was doing the preaching on the radio, but they just assumed that I was too. Then the members of the church began to clamor for me to preach. Members used to call me and say, “Brother, why don’t you preach?” One fellow, Cooper, I never will forget it, he stood outside the church door and I came out the door, he asked me, “Why don’t you preach? Is it that you just don’t know what to say?” He said, “Well, you can sure say whatever you want to say. And you can learn how to preach, can’t you?” [*Laughs*]. So then I began and Emmet Mobley, who was one of the deacons out at

the River Rouge church now was teaching the adult Bible class at Joseph Campau and he asked the elders if I could share in that teaching with him. And one day Trone was away at a meeting or something and Sammy Holt, one of the elders preached, but he didn't want to preach that Sunday night. And so he asked me to preach. So I preached that Sunday night. That was the first time they had ever heard me preach.

V. Boyd: What year?

J. Flowers: I think that was about '48, probably '48. And there was an old woman in the audience. She was not a Christian and she heard them announce that this would be my first sermon. And when I had finished that night, she came over to me. And she said, "They said this was the first sermon that you preached, but you must have been preaching somewhere in the corner." Well, she was right because I had been preaching ever since I was six years old, but you know, it was preaching, just preaching – cats' funerals, dog funerals. Anything that died, I preached their funeral. We played church all the time. I came up with a preaching family and everybody that I came up with was trying to preach. Some of them went on to become noted Gospel preachers. There was Sutton Johnson was probably one of the better known evangelists among my cousins. And then there is Thomas Rucks, who is down in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. He's retired now. He preached there for about forty or fifty years. But all of us just came up there and just preach, preach, preach, preach, preach. We wore out Bibles and quote scripture around. So those ...she said, "You've been preaching in the corner." But for real, I just had not been. And so I started that a way.

V. Boyd: Well, describe the church and its services and what was different in Detroit from what was different at home.

J. Flowers: Well, there wasn't anything. When I first started, these people, you see the church was only seven years old in Detroit. It was started by people who came from the same section that I came from and so they followed just the same pattern, except they had a preacher. That was the only difference. They had a man that stood up in the pulpit. Among those who stood up there in the pulpit, there was Brother York, Brother Baldwin, a fellow by the name of Baldwin, the man's father of one of your members. Brother York and Brother Baldwin and Brother D.M. English and then later Brother Bynum.

V. Boyd: Who really started the work there in Detroit?

J. Flowers: It started in the home of a man by the name of George Yowell. Now whether, I don't know if any one person could take credit. Maybe Brother Yowell got them together, but Brother Baldwin was here at the time, B.C. Berry and Brother York. All these people were around here. I don't know. That took place in 1918, seven years before I came. But it hadn't gotten very far in those seven years.

V. Boyd: Most of those people were still there when you came?

J. Flowers: Oh yeah, oh yeah. And many of them until in the last, well, I'd say in the last seven or eight years. We have had more deaths among those pioneers. They've just began to die in the last seven years.

V. Boyd: I happened to think of another area that we didn't cover before the way that I'd like for us to. Let's go back for a moment to Wilson County and talk about the visiting preachers. You mentioned a string of names, but tell me who specifically was the first outstanding evangelist that came in and held some meetings. Talk about that some.

J. Flowers: Well, the preachers, as I recall them, was one by the name of Winston, Tobe Winston. [*V. Boyd: Any relation?*] I don't know whether he was related to J. S. or not. But his name was Tobe

Winston. [*V. Boyd: T-O-B-E?*] Yeah, I guess that's the way you spell his name. I don't know. I was just a little boy and I just remember just Tobe Winston.

V. Boyd: Where did he come from?

J. Flowers: I don't know that.

V. Boyd: Is he in Sister Tuggle's book? Or do you know?

J. Flowers: I don't remember. He was dead – probably not, he might be in a memorial section - but Brother Winston and there was another one by the name of Brother Womack and another man by the name of Alexander Campbell.

V. Boyd: Both of those were Nashville?

J. Flowers: Used to come up there from Nashville. And Brother Bowser occasionally and Brother Keeble. These were the only preachers that I remember as a boy in Wilson County, Tennessee.

V. Boyd: What do you know about them? What do you remember? Anything interesting?

J. Flowers: Well, about the most vivid thing, I suppose, would be Bowser and Keeble. The others seemed to be quieter. Nobody at that time preached real loud. Everybody was more or less conversational because as I understood the reason for it, they used to ridicule the denominations a lot. And denominational preachers huffed and puffed. The Church of Christ preachers didn't preach like that so he just talked. So Brother Winston, Brother Womack, now Brother Bowser would holler, but he didn't come there too much, but did come enough recruiting students around. And Brother Keeble was probably better known. I can remember more about him than Bowser. Because he didn't live far away and another thing, he would always created so much animosity.

V. Boyd: Why?

J. Flowers: Well, he was talking about the denominations. And my grandmother was a Methodist. And actually I hated this thing. Divide the family. My father was a member of the church. And my aunt, Aunt Hattie was a Methodist and they, the family would fight. My dad had a brother, Andrew, and he was also a member of the church. And then all of my people from my mother's side. Granny and Aunt Hattie would fall out with everybody and all of the people in a small community, this thing have an effect on the kids and even the children. People I played with and everybody, they would avoid the Campbellites during the meeting time. So I got to the place where I just hated to hear the name Keeble because this was what he created around there. So I remember him better than anybody. I remember Bowser. He did the same thing, but he wasn't there, you know. I don't have that same memory of Winston and Womack. And Campbell, I don't remember too much about his preaching at all.

V. Boyd: What did you do have a Gospel meeting once a year?

J. Flowers: I don't think it was once a year, but it might if they got somebody to come. I think it was whenever they could get a preacher to come out.

V. Boyd: Okay then, back to Detroit. What about the preaching of say Bowser or Keeble, or outside people?

J. Flowers: Didn't have much outside of the local preachers in early years. Now Brother Bynum, I think it was in, back in the early, early forties or late thirties that they brought Brother Keeble up here in a meeting. They rented a hall on Ferry Street. And Brother Keeble did pretty good for the first night, but the second night I think a lot of white people came. And when they showed up, Brother Keeble began to tell a lot of jokes. Now Brother Bynum didn't joke. He was a serious preacher and he'd preached there for years. Brother D. M. English didn't joke. They were the better educated preachers that ever preached there. There was no joking and laughing so the people here were just not used to that. Then when Brother Keeble started to turn the thing into a burlesque show, the people just got mad and demanded that Brother Keeble be sent home. [*Laughs*] And they called the meeting to a halt very quickly. I never knew him again to hold a meeting here until way late years when Black came here and started preaching in Inkster. And he brought him out there to preach at a tent meeting. But he didn't go over here at all. Not among the blacks. They just didn't like him.

V. Boyd: Would you tell me about your first meeting with Bowser there? You said that you didn't know of him in Tennessee though.

J. Flowers: I did know of him in Tennessee. He had come to our place. I said I knew him from time to time that he had come to our place, but I didn't know him like Keeble. So I hadn't seen Brother Bowser for years. I went to a barber shop on St. Alban and Maple and I wasn't thinking of anybody like him and I came out and I saw this old man with one arm and his shirt sleeve hanging straight down and his collar seemed to be dirty and he was out there singing. And he started preaching and he had a young kid with him. And I stood there and listened. I recognized the fact that the man was from the Church of Christ. So I stood there to see what was going to happen. And people began to question him and some of them were drunk coming out of bars and different places. Finally one big fellow walked up, whom I recognized, J. B. Mayberry. He was a plumber, the first master plumber among the blacks here in the city of Detroit, but he was a member of the Church of Christ. So he walked over and joined them and when it was over I asked him who that was. He said, "That's Brother Bowser, don't you know him? And that's his grandson." He was on a street corner. That's when I became reacquainted to really know who really he was 'cause I had not paid too much attention to him as a kid in Tennessee. He didn't come there that often.

Tape 3
Side 1

V. Boyd: And you're hearing him preach on the street. [*Talking about G.P. Bowser*]

J. Flowers: Yeah, but I don't remember him in those days preaching in the church. That was before the Westside had been established. And the next time I remember him was after we bought this building in '45 at Joseph Campau. Brother Bowser wanted to use the school building. It was an old Lutheran building and there was a school building connected with the main church building. Several rooms in the school building and Brother Bowser wanted to use it as a school. And so he opened his school there in that church building. Now the Westside at that time had begun. It began about 1940. So he put his membership there with the Westside, but I wasn't connected with the Westside and never really attended their services. But I know he didn't preach regularly there because he wasn't in town that much. So that's about all I know about him.

V. Boyd: You mentioned the first time that you met him on the street, he was very unkempt.

J. Flowers: Yeah.

V. Boyd: That was just his style.

J. Flowers: That was the impression that I got of him every time I saw him. At the time, they wore separate collars from the shirt and it seems that this collar that he had on was discolored. It was supposed to be white, but it was always yellow looking, dirty looking and this sleeve on the hand that was cut off always hung down beneath the coat. I remember that and it always looked dirty. And his clothes didn't seem to fit him. Usually he just didn't seem to be a man who was too much concerned with his appearance. No crease in his pants and no shine on his shoes. More concerned with what he was going to do and what he was going to say than he was with how he looked.

V. Boyd: What kind of reaction did he get out of the people on the street?

J. Flowers: Oh, he usually drew a crowd. At that time almost anybody who stopped to preach, because it seems that everybody was interested in religion in some way, so he would get an audience. He usually would get an audience. Of course, this was the only time that I saw him personally, but I heard that was the way he did in every city that he went. Personally that was a first and only time that I saw him personally on the street.

V. Boyd: So you never, you don't recall hearing him in a formal preaching series?

J. Flowers: Yes, yes I do.

V. Boyd: But that's later on, on the Westside?

J. Flowers: In meetings. I had heard Brother Bowser in meetings, in the tent meetings. Now he had preached under a tent even in Tennessee, as I recall. And I have heard him at a tent meeting even in Detroit.

V. Boyd: Where was the tent meeting in Detroit?

J. Flowers: I don't recall just where, but it's been so long.

V. Boyd: But it was the Campau brethren that ...

J. Flowers: No, Westside, [*V. Boyd: Westside brethren.*] Westside brethren that supported him. No, at Campau, I don't recall we ever had a tent meeting. We had sponsored a tent meeting, but it was held out in the Wyoming church area. Eight Mile Road, Wyoming.

V. Boyd: To get that started?

J. Flowers: Well, that's what it was designed for, but it didn't actually result from the meeting. I think the meeting was held back in '47, the first one. [*V. Boyd: By Bowser?*] No, no, it wasn't held by Bowser. That one was held by G. E. Steward, but as I say that was sponsored by the Joseph Campau church, but I don't recall that they ever sponsored a meeting with Bowser. It seems to me that Westside sponsored a meeting with Bowser. Or he might have just set the tent up himself when he was living there.

V. Boyd: Okay, do you have any more to say about Brother Bowser and his school in Joseph Campau?

J. Flowers: No, because I was working the way I was working and I lived on the west side and I was never over there during the day when the school was in session so I didn't know much about it.

V. Boyd: Would you start from the beginning and kind of take what you know of the Joseph Campau problems? Kind of take a long run through that. How it started and so on.

J. Flowers: Well, yes now, the way the trouble started there – I think Brother Trone started preaching there about 1947. And he was quite popular with the congregation and especially with the younger people. And at that time I was considered to be among the younger ones because all of us had small children and felt we had a lot in common. We all rallied around him and everything was moving along, we thought, very good. And the work in Baldwin, somebody suggested that there was a family in Baldwin that was a member of the church, but there was no church up there. And they wanted someone to come up and help them. So the elders decided to send Brother Trone up there to preach. So Brother Trone went up there and held a meeting, but this family lived up there – they lived, of course, Baldwin is just a rural area- I think that they had hogs that slept up under the porch and they had dogs that slept in the house. So Brother Trone wasn't used to that and he didn't want to stay in there. So he moved, I think, over with Brother Smith, who was a Methodist preacher, and stayed with him. And Brother Smith later obeyed the Gospel – not during that time. So the next year they wanted Brother Trone to go back. Well, he would not consent to go back unless they gave him more money so he could stay somewhere else. He didn't want to stay in the home of these people where the hogs slept under the house and everything. They had a deacon at Joseph Campau at that time, who was a secretary of the church, and he was a very stingy man. He didn't want to spend money. So he questioned the amount of money that Brother Trone said he would need to go. He told the elders that he had been up there and he knew just what it would cost to drive up, what the gas would cost and that Trone should be made to stay in the homes of the people so that the church wouldn't have to pay any extra. Well, Trone resented this on the part of Kellogg for interfering. Well, Kellogg began to pull on the elders and tell them that they had the authority of this church and they are supposed to make Trone go and he said, "He doesn't have a say about whether he goes or not. You're supposed to tell him he goes." So then they had the elders on the spot there and the elders finally they said, "Well, Brother Trone, we want you to go." Brother Trone says, "Well, I'm not going unless I get what I want to go." They said, "You know that constitutes rebellion." And he said, "I think the congregation have something to say about this." And they said, "What do you mean by that?" So he told them that he just felt that they didn't have all the say. So that was the beginning of it. Well, they asked him then, "Don't you take the pulpit Sunday" that Brother Sammy would take the pulpit. And I don't remember now whether Sam took the pulpit that Sunday or not. But anyway, this thing – I believe he did- and Trone allowed it to be, but later Trone came to us, all the younger people that were there and got us all together and he began to talk about how the church was growing and how good we were doing. But it seems that the Devil wanted to come in and start something. Then he began to talk about how Christians were supposed to treat the sick and supposed to do this and to do that. Now he pointed out that these elders didn't do that. Well, we didn't know why. I mean I didn't know why he was saying that. He said they didn't. And he said, "Now don't you think that they ought to do it?" We said, "Yeah." We decided then to tell the elders what they ought to do so we called a meeting with the elders. We were just going on what he said and pointed out to them what they weren't doing and what they were supposed to do. Well in this meeting, they proved to us by bringing in witnesses that they had been visiting the sick so it made us look kind of bad.

V. Boyd: Okay just a minute [*Break in tape.*] Okay now....

J. Flowers: And I was saying that Trone didn't want to go up there for the amount of money that they wanted to give him. And then all of us youngsters brought the charge against the elders that they were not visiting the sick and doing the things that they were supposed to do. They brought in witnesses to prove that they had been. Well, it made us look kind of bad. Now Trone had told us, "Now look you're never to mention me because they can't hurt you, but they can hurt me, you know." Naturally we weren't going to say that Brother Trone told us so. Well, we felt a little bit bad. Bill Lamar, whose gone on now, he was a young fella about my age. He and I were the most active ones. So then Bill came to me

and he said, "John, I think, you know, we better let that thing alone." I said, "Yeah, I think so too." So we told Trone that we'd drop it. So then he called us all up again one day and said, "I have something I want to tell you all." A whole bunch of us. He said, "You know they've got this school over here and they want to get accreditation and the only way they can do, they will have to have a principal that has a college degree. Now there is a preacher in Memphis by the name of E. W. Anderson who has a college degree. And they want to bring him in to [Loud bang] Oh, some holes there. They want to bring him in to be the preacher here and take over the school and that means they're going to fire me. Do you all think that's right?" And we said, "No, we don't think that's right." So then we got up into the air again. And we were going to rally behind him. And we decided to wait until, you know, they did something about it and then fight it. We waited awhile and then his mother called one day. She said, "Do you all know that they are trying to get my baby out of there?" So we didn't know that. So then we talked to him again and he said yeah that they were. They had threatened him and everything and that they were going to put Brother Anderson in. So we called the elders on the carpet again. So they wanted to know, "Who told you that?" And again we couldn't tell where it come from.

V. Boyd: Just a minute. [*Stops and asks a woman for directions.*] Is this the way to Centerville?

Woman: Yeah, let's see. Yes, I don't live here. My husband was born and raised here. Yes. Just keep on going. Now it's going to be quite a distance. [*V. Boyd: I understand.*] You have to hit the main road and turn right.

V. Boyd: Okay. Thank you.

J. Flowers: And so we're in the corner again. We can't tell who told us and then they insisted, "Well, where is all this thing coming from?" And we couldn't tell. So finally we decided, no, we're going to leave this thing alone. So we called Trone and we said, "Now wait, they say they are not going to do it. Since they say they're not going to do it, let's leave it alone. Forget about it." "Well, okay." So one Saturday morning we were going to a business meeting and he called me up and he says, "You want me to preach truth, don't you?" "Yeah, I want you to preach truth." [*Background noise gets louder.*] "You want me to preach truth. Now are you going to be with me if I get into any trouble?" I said, "No, I don't promise that." I said, "Now I want you to understand something, Orum." I said, "I think that you don't understand me" I said, "I'd be perfectly frank with you. I am not with you. I have never been with you." I said, "I take sides with issues and that's what I have been doing is taking sides with an issue and when you are on the side of the issue that I think is right, it happens that you and I are on the same side. Now what you have told me in the past, I thought it was wrong for the elders to do that and so I was going to use whatever influence that I had to stop it. Now again if what you're preaching is truth and you get into trouble and I see that it is truth, I'm for the truth. But to just say that I am with you, I don't want you to look at it that way." He said, "Well then you're going to double cross me." I said, "No, I'm not going to double cross you. It's like I say, I'm not with you and I'm not against you. Now if what you're doing is right, then okay I'm for it, but I'm not for you going out here preaching something to get into trouble and think that I'm going to patch you up because you got into trouble. I'm not for that." He said, "You know elders are supposed to have children, don't you?" I said, "No, I don't." "You don't believe elders are supposed to have children?" I said, "I believe it, but I don't know it." "Well," he said, "You know what the Bible says." And I said, "Well, no, I don't and the reason I say that is because this thing was debated before you and I were born," and I said, "By people who are supposed to know more than we know about the Bible." And I said, "You're talking about Brother Manuel and he was here when I come here and he was here when you come here. We didn't put him here." Now I said, "I know I have a book that has Brother Lipscomb in it, Brother Sewell in it, and others." And I said, "Now they differ. And I know that all over the brotherhood that they have been different. And I am not willing to try to straighten that thing out and I'm not going to get into no battle over that. So if you go out there preaching on that and you get into trouble, don't expect me to come to your rescue." He said he was going to preach it. I

said, "That'd be on you." So he said, "Well, if you're not with me, you're against me." And I said, "If you're going to try to make trouble, I'm against you." So then he began to try to find different things that was wrong with the elders. So the next call came from his mother and she said, "Ain't but one thing that's going to ever give us peace in this church, we've got to get those old devils out of there." I said, "Now Sister Trone, I've told Orum and I'm telling you that that never was what I was after – getting the elders out of there." I said, "As long as I thought that they were going to do Orum wrong, I was for him, but now to go out and try to get the elders out, I'm not into that. So then she called Bill and Bill told her the same thing. So then she said, "Well, from now on, I'll talk to the girls and so, you know, I won't bother you all anymore." "Well, don't bother me. I'm not for that." So that was the beginning. It was along about '49 or '50 and so little by little he began to talk to different people and finally he began to come out and preach "majority rule." And then the elders, they would fight back and respond back and forth about this 'til finally Kellogg talked them into firing him. "Fine, we've got to get rid of him." Now instead of them giving him a notice or anything, one day, I think it was one Friday, they sat down and wrote a letter and give it to Kellogg. No, they wrote it in the week so he'd have time to get it Friday and that Friday we had a picnic. So we were out on the picnic and when Trone got home, this letter was in the mailbox. That "You're fired as of last Sunday." [*chuckles*] Now you know that was – "As of last Sunday, you're fired." You don't even go into the pulpit this Sunday. So Trone went in the pulpit with this letter and he went in there crying. He told them that he had his wife and three little children and he had no money and he had no pay coming today. And he worked for the church all week, working and holding classes and doing all the work. "And they sent me a letter and I'll read it to you." And he read it, "Fired as of last Sunday and I got the letter Friday." Man that church was bedlam. Boy, I thought they were going to lynch somebody. So we finally got the thing quieted down enough to get through the day. And so then I took issue with the elders. I didn't want to take sides with him and I had to work then away from him to show the elders that they had done wrong. They shouldn't have done that. So then they took it back, they let him work....

V. Boyd: They let him what?

J. Flowers: They let him preach on. But he got bold then. Oh, he got bold then.

V. Boyd: He won the battle.

J. Flowers: Yeah. He got bold then. And he got so bold that then they decided that, well, we better get him out of there. And he wouldn't go. So they went down then, went down to the courts to see about getting him out. The judge told them that they didn't have any by-laws so he didn't know how to judge the case. "You'll have to get bylaws." He told them, "Go back and get ten, well, as many as ten ministers in your fellowship who know what your teaching is and who have been preaching for at least ten years. And draw up by-laws stating what your doctrine is." And they said, "We can't do that. That's against our religion." And he said, "Well, what you doing down here?" "Well, we can't get him to leave." And he said, "What has been your procedure? How have you been getting them out? You say you have the authority to get them out." They said, "Well, no one had every rebelled." He said, "Well, so now he has rebelled and you come down here for me to remove him, but you have no bylaws stating." "Well, we have the Bible." And he said, "I can't accept that." They said, "Well, we can't write by-laws." And he said, "Well if you can't write bylaws, then you'll have to go back and settle it yourself." But Trone was there too. So Trone went on out and got Wilcox and they wrote some bylaws. They wrote the bylaws ready to go back to court and then that's when the Lectureship came in, 1951, I believe it was. So everybody preached him down and made him come out and tear the bylaws up, but you know he only tore up one copy. There were a lot of copies. I had a copy of it myself. [*Chuckles*] He had other copies. So after they showed him he was wrong and then he finally made a confession and he came out and said, "Now if I tear the bylaws up will that satisfy you?" So he tore them up, but as soon as the brethren left, it started all over again. It never ended. It was determined then to go on through. It started over again.

And the next time the elders thought they couldn't stop him and they thought he tore the bylaws up and so they initiated it and they went down to get an injunction to put him out. So when he come up to court, he had bylaws. Well, their lawyer told them he didn't want to take the case because he didn't think they could win, but they believed that they could. So then I had decided to leave. I said, "I can't be with them and I can't be with him so I'll go." So they went on then and they fought that thing all through the courts – lower court. Then it went on to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the lower court that the people ruled by majority and that the elders were not elders because the majority of the people had voted them out. And therefore the property belonged to the majority and they were meeting on the same premise in the afternoon. So then he got an injunction that "injunctioned" them off of the premises so they could not go back on. And that was it. So they went out and went out on Arndt Street and started up there. Worshiped there for awhile until this....

V. Boyd: About what numerical division occurred at that time?

J. Flowers: Well, I would say probably seventy-five percent and twenty-five. Probably twenty-five percent went with the elders and seventy-five percent went with him.

V. Boyd: Total membership at that time was what?

J. Flowers: Oh I would say that the total membership at that time was about 500. Of course, some quit. [*V. Boyd: Right.*] Some went to different congregations like I did, [*V. Boyd: Right*] but it was just about like that went in the splits....

Side 2

J. Flowers:all the churches here in Detroit and all those outside were supposed to, but he never did quit going to the Lectureship and they really never did quit using him, but they would always claim that what they were trying to do is to find out more. That's the Church of Christ. You know the Church of Christ.

V. Boyd: Yeah. I'm supposed to make a right turn.

J. Flowers: That looks like the right road. That looked like the main road. And so little by little, you know, after awhile, people began to kind of forget it and everything. But the Westside held out until they finally made a disposition of it. After the elders bought this other property and everything, Trone got together with them, knowing that they weren't coming back then and went to them and told them that he was wrong. And he wanted to say "Sorry" and "Let's go back together. You all come on back." But they weren't going to do that then because they bought some more property. So then they said, "Well then we forgive you, Brother Trone. You all go ahead on and we'll stay where we are." Well, then we think that the brotherhood needs to know this. Well, Brother John Holt, that was the old man, Granville's father, agreed to go with Brother Trone and they would go around to the different congregations and they did.

V. Boyd: Before we get too far off, I want to make sure that we are going in the right direction.

J. Flowers: Yeah, yeah.

Stops tape.

V. Boyd: Did he have any trouble patching it up at the various churches?

J. Flowers: No, they had all agreed to accept whatever the two churches there decided on. Whatever way they decided to settle it, well, we would accept that. So Brother John Holt and Brother Trone came to the Westside and told the Westside. So we accepted and they did that all over. And the people outside of the city accepted what was done here. And that's the way it was settled.

V. Boyd: Well, anything you want to say about the trial? You said you didn't go to the trial.

J. Flowers: No, no, I didn't go one day. I wasn't for that. I didn't think they could win anyway so I stayed away.

V. Boyd: What's been the fallout between you and Brother Trone since then?

J. Flowers: Well we have been, really, we have not really fallen out.

V. Boyd: I mean, what's the result of the relationship?

J. Flowers: Today we are friends. In fact he has come to me and now he preaches as strongly for the elders as anyone else. In fact, he claims he is one and he says that the only reason he doesn't have elders there now is because he doesn't have anyone to qualify to be ordained along with himself. But he's come to the realization that the church has to have somebody in it to guide it and he believes in elders. This is what he says now. So our only disagreement was that at the time he was saying that - not on those elders - we didn't disagree, I mean as to whether they had done right or wrong. I don't think they had done right, the way they handled that thing. And when he come down and take the Bible and pick out scriptures that I didn't think that taught what he said they taught, such as, passages in the Book of Acts. After the Jerusalem conference they chose men to take the decree around. Well, he said the word "chosen" meant a vote by the majority of the people. And when it said that the Apostles and the elders came together with the whole church, his contention was that the whole church helped to make the decision. That the whole church, it says it "pleased the multitude" and he figured that they voted on the matter. And, of course, everywhere the word "chosen" and when they chose someone to travel with Paul, he said that that meant that the whole church had to make the decisions. Well, I disagreed with him on that. As long as he held to that position, then I held that he was preaching false doctrine. But he don't claim that now. Says that [*unclear*]. So we're friends, such as it goes. He doesn't have too much to do with anybody. Just when you meet him out, we speak and things of that kind.

End of tape