

Tate, Georgia Black History Collection
Truman Roach Interview
Conducted by James Newberry
July 8, 2021

Full Transcript

Interviewer: Okay, this is James Newberry and I'm here with Mr. Truman Roach on July 8th, 2021, in Pickens County, Georgia and I appreciate you talking to me, Mr. Roach. Do you agree to this interview?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: Do you agree to this interview? Are you comfortable to do it?

Roach: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Thank you. Could you tell me your full name?

Roach: Truman Jesse Roach.

Interviewer: What's your birthday?

Roach: August 4th of 1929.

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Roach: Tate, Georgia

Interviewer: And were you born at home or in the hospital?

Roach: At home because I had a midwife.

Interviewer: Who was the midwife, do you know?

Roach: Her last name was Watson. I forget her first name. I knew it but they moved from Tate to Gainesville.

Interviewer: I see, and did she deliver many babies in Tate?

Roach: All I know is myself, me. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: So, did you grow up there in Tate?

Roach: I did.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the area there?

Roach: Well, best I can. The area where I was from was the entrance to the company, Georgia Marble Company. Okay? They used to call us the... Well, my section was called Smokey Hollow. The community was called Smokey Hollow because we were down in a hollow and you go up Tate where the cemetery, depot and all that, drugstore and all that was up higher. The reason they called it Smokey Hollow was because during that time, we didn't have nothing but wooden stoves and all that wood and the smoke would come up and that's the reason they called it Smokey Hollow.

Interviewer: Perfect.

Roach: Good name, huh?

Interviewer: It is a good name. It's very fitting for that area to be called Smokey Hollow.

[removes facemask]

Roach: Thank you. That ain't nothing. Now.

Interviewer: I think we'll hear you better now. All right. What were your parents' names?

Roach: Father's name was James Calvin Roach, and my mother was named Dora Green Roach.

Interviewer: And what were your brothers and sisters' names?

Roach: My oldest brother was named James Franklin and my sister was Mary Lois, the next brother was Grady Emery Roach and William Preston Roach was next to me.

Interviewer: So, are you the youngest?

Roach: I'm the youngest.

Interviewer: But your sister, Mary Lois, is living, right?

Roach: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Where does she live?

Roach: She lives in the Wildwood Nursing Home, just like this one, but it's in Jasper.¹

Interviewer: And what did Mary Lois do for a living?

Roach: She taught school and she worked in some private homes. Most of the things she did was teach school.

Interviewer: I see. So, can you tell me when your family came to Pickens County?

¹ Mary Lois actually lives at Grandview Nursing Home

Roach: My family?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Roach: My father came from, I believe, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. And my mother came from Dahlonega, Georgia.

Interviewer: I see. Do you know when they came?

Roach: No, not exactly. But I know my father said he was four years old when he came to Georgia.

Interviewer: So, maybe the turn of the century?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: Early 1900s, turn of the century?

Roach: No, 1800s.

Interviewer: Okay, late 1800s.

Roach: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Okay, and do you know why they came to the area?

Roach: No, I don't. I know why the Greens came. Oh, you were talking about my father. No, I don't know. I surely don't.

Interviewer: Why did the Greens come?

Roach: Because they opened up the Georgia Marble Company and most all of the Blacks came from Dahlonega to work for the Georgia Marble Company.

Interviewer: How did they hear about it? Did somebody come and recruit them? How did they hear about the jobs?

Roach: Well, that's the \$64000 question. I think some of them had already been in Tate but didn't have anything to do with Georgia Marble. I don't know.

Interviewer: Okay. So, can you tell me about your childhood home? What did it look like?

Roach: Oh, my childhood home? It's still standing. Do you know where in Tate that big house they call Tate House?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Roach: You know that green house that sits by the highway. That's where I was bred and born, in that house.

Interviewer: Really? So, did it look the same as it does now?

Roach: No, they gave it a... what do you call that thing?

Interviewer: A remodel?

Roach: Yeah, a remodeling, I call it a face check?

Interviewer: What did it look like when you were living there?

Roach: It looked different but that's the same. It's got a front porch and a back porch, but it was screened in. My brother moved back there some time. He worked with Steve Tate, you know him? He was living in Atlanta. My brother Preston and Steve Tate got him to come and work for him. So, while he worked there the first time, he had to move there. Nobody was living there, because moved to Dahlonega for about eleven months and the back porch, he made a bathroom out of it.

Interviewer: I see. So why was your brother living in Atlanta before that?

Roach: He worked at the Georgia Marble Company, and he got hurt. He worked in the quarry and a pipe hit him on the head. He got hurt and he never did go back to the Georgia Marble Company. He started working for Steve and Steve wasn't paying him enough. So, he quit Steve and he got him a job somewhere in Atlanta and Steve wanted him back, so he paid him enough, so Preston came back and started working for him.

Interviewer: What did he do for Steve Tate?

Roach: Anything that he had to do. That was before... what's the name of that place now, Big Canoe? There was nothing up there but Steve Tate's house and a barn. The house that Steve Tate lived in, it burnt down. So, he got that barn down there, he got it built for a dwelling house. That's where he stayed when he died. He owed the government all that money where he never did pay his tax and they had it in for him. So, after he died, they knew they couldn't get money now, so the government took over and they built that Big Canoe out of it.

Interviewer: I see. That's Steve Tate.

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: Now what about your father? What did he do?

Roach: He cooked for the Tates. That mansion house is, that's where they lived. That's where my father cooked. He cooked there until Colonel Sam died. He died in '38, so father stayed down there about two or three years. Then he couldn't put up with his Colonel

Sam's sister and brother, so he left them and went to Dunwoody and cooked for a private fellow that knew the Tates. They wanted him to come down there and work for them. So, my father moved us to Dahlongega for about eleven months and, do you remember any of the Litchfield's?

Interviewer: I know the name.

Roach: Yeah, he worked for the company. So, he called my father and wanted to know if he wanted to come back to Tate. Father told him yeah and his children did, too. He wanted to come back home, too. He got him a job at the company house by the school. It burnt down; I think it did, didn't it? Yeah.

Interviewer: Why did you want to come back?

Roach: So, I could go to school. Because I had finished school. In Dahlongega, they didn't go no farther than 7th grade. So, I finished the 7th grade, and I knew I had to come back to Tate before I could get my other education.

Interviewer: So, they didn't have grades above seven for Black students in Dahlongega?

Roach: That's right.

Interviewer: But how far did they go in Tate?

Roach: All the way. Because Colonel Sam, when he built the whites a school, he also built the colored school. He was a good fellow. He had it built. The lower had half of the upstairs and the rest of it was high school.

Interviewer: It was a wooden building?

Roach: Wooden building.

Interviewer: That's where the head start is today?

Roach: Yeah. All that cleared when Head Start went up. It was down that road though. On the right up in there.

Interviewer: It's sort of near Mt. Calvary.

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: It's sort of near the church, Mt. Calvary?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you tell me; do you remember Colonel Sam?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about his personality.

Roach: It was fine. Great. Couldn't beat his personality. Whatever the whites needed, or the Blacks needed, he did the same thing for the Black people. He was all for one and one for all. At one time, they wrote in the paper that they moved all the Blacks and run them out from Cummings?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Roach: So, they said do you want them to come and run all the Blacks out of Tate? So, Colonel Sam, he got all his ammunition and everything and he said, "If the colored go, we go." And they tried to come and run us out, of course, I wasn't born then. And they didn't show up and that was the end of that. There was no more of that.

Interviewer: Were there any other attacks on Black communities or Black people in the area that you remember?

Roach: All of them. Were there attempts you mean?

Interviewer: Yes, sir, or just any thing that happened that you remember in Tate or in Pickens.

Roach: Well, yeah. Everything that happened I remember it.

Interviewer: Can you tell me, you mentioned that your father did not want to work for Colonel Sam's brother and sister.

Roach: Who worked there?

Interviewer: Luke?

Roach: No, Luke² built a house for himself. Because he had a family. He had three boys and one girl. But Luke and Flora, his sister, they all stayed there, including Sam. They all three that stayed in the mansion down there. Luke and his wife and children, never did move in with them.

Interviewer: Okay, well what about Flora? What do you remember of her?

Roach: Who?

Interviewer: Flora Tate.

Roach: Flora, his sister?

² One of Sam, Luke, and Flora Tate's brothers named two of the sons "Luke" after Luke and "Sam" after Sam i.e. Lil' Luke and Lil' Sam.

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Roach: She...[laughs] I remember I used to work at Sickle's [Sickels as in George B. Sickels and Company] down there, but they closed it down. So, one day I got off of work and it was just about getting dark. So, Miss Flora had come out there at the grass there at the end of the street next to the highway. I looked down there and I thought it was a witch. She was dressed in white and black with a scarf over it. She looked just like a witch to me, and I got scared. [laughs] So, she knew me. They used to call me T.J., they never did call me Truman. We talked for a little bit, and she said, "Well, I guess I better get on back." I said, "Yes, ma'am, I guess you had before it gets dark." [laughs]

Interviewer: Did you ever go into the Tate house?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: What do you remember of the inside?

Roach: Oh, me. [laughs] It looked like a mansion to me. I ain't never seen a mansion. But it was odd, odd like things.

Interviewer: A lot of marble.

Roach: A lot of marble, there wasn't too much marble on the inside, but on the outside, it was marble all the way.

Interviewer: What did your father cook? What kind of food?

Roach: Mostly our kind of food to tell you the truth. It wasn't the kind of food we're eating now. They had a garden and they loved... Not Pintos and not peas, either. Butter beans! That was their favorite food. Butter beans. And everything out of the garden, corn. They ate that kind of food.

Interviewer: So, he grew it all in the garden?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: He grew all the food in the garden.

Roach: Yeah, he tended all that garden. Miss Flora owned three mules, six mules and they had them down in Georgia Marble Company. They had them mules and a sled and they done all that before they got the high lifts. They had mules for high lifts.

Interviewer: What was the last word you said? You said mules for hire?

Roach: High lifts. I meant they had the mules to pull the sleds that they put the marble on.

Interviewer: I see. And Miss Flora owned that team?

Roach: All the horses, the mules.

Interviewer: I see, okay. So, did they pay her for those mules? I mean, how did that work?

Roach: They had to build a special barn for them. They were right beside the highway there. I bet you they've had that tore down.

Kennedy:³ I think it's still there.

Interviewer: There's a barn across from the mansion.

Roach: That's where they stayed. Yeah, okay.

Interviewer: Were there mule drivers? Men who drove the mules?

Roach: Yeah. There were two mules to a sled. They had two colored men and one white man drove the mules.

Interviewer: So, they all worked together?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: Then, in the quarry, was it white workers and Black workers together or was it separate?

Roach: Yeah, together. Together.

Interviewer: Was that unusual at the time?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: Was that sort of unusual, or different, at the time? For white and Black to be working together?

Roach: Yeah, they all worked together.

Interviewer: So, when you went into Tate, where the depot was and the store, could you go into all those stores?

Roach: Yeah, sure. Nowhere else to go.

Interviewer: So that's where you had to buy food or other things?

Roach: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we had to buy food.

Interviewer: What was there when you were a child? What stores, do you remember?

³ Donna Kennedy – Truman Roach's friend and caretaker

Roach: Company owned one store. Before that, there wasn't a store there. There used to be a hospital. Can you imagine just one-story big hospital? Jasper didn't have a hospital. What else? They had the depot in Tate and a drug store and a store, and a filling station. That's about all they had in Tate.

Interviewer: So, the hospital was built by the company, right?

Roach: I guess. Yeah, by the Tates.

Interviewer: I see. Did you ever travel out of Tate? Did you take the train or a car?

Roach: Car mostly. My father had a car. Oh, out of Tate?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Roach: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Where did you travel? Where else did you go as a child?

Roach: When I worked for the company, I drove a truck. I went everywhere. Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, all those places.

Interviewer: You were driving a truck for the marble company?

Roach: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: And just delivering marble?

Roach: No, not marble. Things they needed besides marble. I didn't mess with no marble. Machines, something to go with the saw. The wire saws? I had to go to Tennessee to get the wires and all that goes with it. That's what I did.

Interviewer: I see and how- [crosstalk 00:22:34] Yeah, you can. Oh, yeah, please.

Kennedy: Truman, where did you travel when you were a child?

Roach: Out of town?

Kennedy: Uh-huh. When you were a child.

Roach: Oh, when I was a child? Most of the traveling I done was to Dahlonega. That's about it, I guess.

Interviewer: Did you ever visit your brother in Atlanta?

Roach: He didn't stay there long. I did while he was there, Preston. But he didn't stay there but about a year. I did visit him. I helped move him back to Tate. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So did your father drive for the Tates?

Roach: No, they had a chauffeur.

Interviewer: A chauffeur?

Roach: Yeah. His name was Tip [Temp] Echols. And Top [Temp] Echols wife taught school and also their daughters taught school in Tate. And Tate also had a colored guy named Reece Castleberry. So, he took care of all school—listen to me—the gardens and the cows and all that. Milking the cows, he took care of all that.

Interviewer: I know that name, Reece Castleberry. Did he have a son?

Roach: He had three sons. Let's see. J.B., Logan, Henry, and Sam. He had four sons.

Interviewer: Did one of his sons, was he on a chain gang?

Roach: Yeah. He was Reece, Jr., I guess that was his name. Yeah. One of the guards, they say that he killed one of the chain guards with a rock and they never did say which one did it, so they gave him the electric chair.

Interviewer: Did his father ever talk about that?

Roach: Uh-uh. No.

Interviewer: Do you know if they were upset or how did they feel about that?

Roach: There was nothing said.

Interviewer: How did you learn about that?

Roach: My father and mother told me.

Interviewer: So, the chauffeur that you were talking about. I was talking with Donna, and she mentioned that one of them was going to drive Mr. Walter Tate. Do you remember Walter Tate?

Roach: Walter? Oh, you're talking about Steve Tate. Steve Tate, me and my brother drove him and his wife to New Orleans. Is that what you're talking about? We chauffeured 'em. Me and Preston, both drove them. Preston had his wife; Ms. Lucille and I drove the car for Steve. I remember they stayed out there, I think, about six months, I guess, and Preston didn't go back, and I went back. I drove a pickup truck to go back and get back. Steve had another fellow; he was a white fellow. He drove the car, him and his daughter, to pick up Ms. Lucille. She had her car already out there.

Interviewer: You stayed out there six months? Or you just drove them out and-

Roach: We drove them out and came back. We left them out there.

Interviewer: Okay, I see. Do you know of a Walter Tate who died in a car accident?

Roach: No, I don't remember him not too good.

Interviewer: Okay. So how long did your father, when he came back to work for the Tates, how long did he stay with them after that? When he came back from Dahlonega.

Roach: He didn't work for the Tates. He worked for Georgia Marble, when we came back from Dahlonega.

Interviewer: And how long did he continue to work there?

Roach: Until he retired... until his death.

Interviewer: And when was that?

Roach: When did he die?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Roach: 1967.

Interviewer: And what about your mother, what did she do for a living?

Roach: She... Not that you'd call it babysitting, she has kept [house-kept] different families. But she went back to work for the Marble Company to help Daddy cook up the company house, we called it, until she retired.

Interviewer: So where was this company house?

Roach: Company house? Next to the school. [marble Tate High School now Tate Elementary School]

Interviewer: And what did it look like?

Roach: Oh, it was a big, old two-story building. It was large. Because they kept all of the schoolteachers, I'll put it that way. And downstairs, was where Mr. and Mrs. Pruitt stayed. They took care of the cooking and all that. He was my boss at Sickles.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to the Tate gym?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: What did you do there? Could you play sports there?

Roach: Tate Gym? It was next to the school. Yeah, I've been there lots of times.

Interviewer: What kind of events did they have there? What kind of-

Roach: Fence? They didn't have no fence.

Kennedy: Events.

Roach: Events?

Interviewer: Games, community stuff.

Roach: First, it was the school's gym and since the school turned it to be a middle school. [Tate Elementary] They build them another gym. I guess you'd call it a gym, it was a little... next to the school there. And the community bought that, we called it a gym. Tate gym. All kinds of events. Family reunions and all kinds of services.

Kennedy: Truman when you taught physical education... Remember, at the school, you taught? As a P.E. Teacher? You taught kids physical education.

Roach: Yeah.

Kennedy: Did you play with your kids in Tate gym?

Roach: No. No. Tate gym, we never did play no ball there.

Kennedy: Where did the Black children play sports?

Roach: Outdoors. We had a court.

Kennedy: In Smokey Hollow?

Roach: No, up on the hill, right next to the school. We had a big court. Tennis court and a basketball court.

Kennedy: Okay.

Interviewer: So that was the wooden school?

Roach: Yeah.

Kennedy: We have pictures of that.

Interviewer: Right, well, I'd love to see those. So, tell me, how many grades at your school? Was it 10, 11, 12?

Roach: 11th.

Interviewer: So, when did you graduate? Do you remember the year?

Roach: Yeah, 1947.

Interviewer: What did you do after graduation?

Roach: I worked in... No, I didn't. I went to college.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Roach: I went to college at Fort Valley for two years.

Interviewer: What did you do at Fort Valley? What did you study?

Roach: I studied physical education for the last year and music. I sang in the choir and that was my favorite I studied.

Interviewer: What part did you sing?

Roach: I sang baritone.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the songs?

Roach: Oh, that we sang?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Roach: Well, the school song. I remember the Fort Valley school song, I sung it the other day in the bed. What was it? "Fort Valley State, Fort Valley State, our lives to thee we dedicate. Our souls we blend to sing thy name; eternal praise we do proclaim." And it went on like that. I could think of it if I was in the bed. [all laugh]

Interviewer: I should interview you in the bed. [laughs] So why did you choose Fort Valley State?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: Why did you choose Fort Valley State? That's a long way away.

Roach: Why? Because the principal... We had a principal, he was Archibald, he's a West Indie and 1947 was the last year he taught in Pickens County. So, Professor Brown, he came to Tate that summer. I didn't know what school I was going to. But he came to Tate, and he was the principal at Hawkinsville. When he left Hawkinsville, he came to Tate. So, he knew about Fort Valley. He's the one that got me in Fort Valley.

Interviewer: I see. Because Hawkinsville and Fort Valley are kind of close.

Roach: About 30 miles difference.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what about your sister? Where did she go to college?

Roach: Spelman in Atlanta.

Interviewer: Did any of your other brothers go to college?

Roach: Yeah, all of us. My oldest brother, Chester, he went to Savannah State. Grady, after he got out of the Army, he didn't finish school before he went into the Army, [he went to Dahlonge?] so he finished school in Tate in 1946. He went to Morehouse. Preston, he went to a barber college in Atlanta. And that left me, and I went to Fort Valley.

Interviewer: So, what did you do after you finished at Fort Valley?

Roach: [laughs] I got married.

Interviewer: Who did you marry?

Roach: I married a girl from Sandersville. We called it Sandersville, between Milledgeville and Sandersville.

Interviewer: I know it very well, yeah.

Roach: She was in Atlanta and me and a bunch of the boys always went to Atlanta about a week before Christmas to do our little Christmas shopping. But mostly we went to get our liquor. We could get plenty of white liquor in Tate, though. But we wanted that good government, so we got the liquor... My brother-in-law, he had double kin folks. Her name was Essie and she stayed in Atlanta. She had left home, and he wanted to see her and me and Leron and the other three guys went to see where she lived. I found out because Leron told me the address. We went down to see her, and I got hooked up with her. She told Leron to tell his mother, Leron's mother was her auntie. She told Lee to tell her, she said, "Tell Aunt Essie I'll be up there right after Christmas." Leron didn't have time to tell her, so I told her.

Interviewer: Her name was Essie?

Roach: Essie Mae

Interviewer: What was her last name?

Roach: Stephens

Interviewer: What was she doing for work in Atlanta?

Roach: She worked at a café.

Interviewer: Do you know what part of Atlanta she was living in?

Roach: No, I don't, because that was the first time, I had seen her.

Interviewer: What did you like about her?

Roach: What did I like about her? Her shape, her face, everything Essie loved me, oh boy.

Interviewer: And y'all married in '48 or '49?

Roach: No, it was '51. We got together about a year, exactly a year. My brother got married, Preston, he got married at 26 in December 1950. I wasn't going to let him outrun me, so I waited about a month, and I married in February 2nd. I said Preston ain't going to out do me And Essie was wanting to marry, too, you know, and that's who I was married too.

Interviewer: Where was your wedding?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: Where did you get married?

Roach: At the courthouse in Jasper.

Interviewer: In Jasper?

Roach: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: So, you came back home to get married?

Roach: I was already home.

Interviewer: So, she moved up with you?

Roach: Oh. What do you mean come back home?

Interviewer: Did you already move back to Tate and then y'all married in '51?

Roach: Yeah, because my brother, Chester, he had rented a house in Smokey Hollow. That's where he moved to. So, him and his wife hadn't been quit, not along, and he left all that furniture and he had two children. He left all that furniture. So, I hit it lucky. That's where I moved to.

Kennedy: You moved to his house?

Roach: Yeah.

Kennedy: And it was furnished?

Roach: Yeah.

Kennedy: And Essie was from here?

Roach: Yeah.

Kennedy: Originally?

Roach: Huh?

Kennedy: She was a Stephens, and she was from here, right?

Roach: She was a Stephens, and she was from Deepstep.

Kennedy: I've never heard of it.

Interviewer: Deepstep, Georgia. Oh, wow, that's near Milledgeville.

Roach: That's between Milledgeville and Sandersville.

Interviewer: Oh, I know Deepstep, that's small. Deepstep is small.

Roach: Yeah. You know where it is?

Interviewer: I know someone from Deepstep, yeah.

Roach: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: So, she came here and y'all lived in your brother's old house?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where was that house?

Roach: In Smokey Hollow.

Interviewer: Okay, and how big was it? How many rooms?

Roach: One, two, three, four.

Interviewer: Four rooms?

Roach: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Okay, and did y'all live there most of your marriage?

Roach: No, I was glad when we moved. We moved right across the street. It was way off of the road. We stayed there; I don't know. He had that stand up there where they had that store. Olin Collins runs it, and he was ready to retire, Essie Mae to bought it from him and I didn't have anything to do with that. I helped her and we moved from there. It wasn't long before they built those apartments up at Mt. Calvary, so we moved up there. We were getting old then and we had to use upstairs, and she couldn't make it upstairs. So, Ms. Hazel Mosley, she ran the apartments. She got us to move up here in Jasper. At Mosley Heights, you ever hear of them?

Interviewer: I haven't.

Roach: That's where they built them. That's a pretty place. You can see the mountains. That was so pretty. Mosley Heights, it's here in Jasper.

Interviewer: So that's Hazel Mosley?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: Hazel Mosley is the one that owned out there?

Roach: She was the director. It was the City of Jasper apartments.

Davis⁴: It was the Jasper Housing.

Interviewer: I see.

Kennedy: Truman, would you want to talk about when you used to... Remember I asked you one time, as a joke, have you ever been in jail? And you said, not in a long time. And I said...

Roach: What?

Kennedy: Tell them about when you would go to jail.

Roach: Jail?

Kennedy: Yeah.

Roach: Oh. I went to jail about every weekend.

Kennedy: Tell them why.

Roach: We didn't live that far, I'm telling the truth, from the main road. All you had to do was take one step and you're in the road. I had a little drink and by the time I hit the road, the law was always watching me. And by the time I hit the road, here he'd come down the road and pick me up. You didn't have no problems out of me, but I went to jail

⁴ Justin Davis

somehow. I often wonder why. You know, he's doing his job. He kept me. [laughs] He made sure that I was sober when I got out of jail and that I was ready to go to work. That's when I'd get out.

Kennedy: How did you get out of jail every weekend?

Roach: Boss man or daddy, [laughs] it didn't cost much, but the idea of me being in jail. Sometimes, they wouldn't let me out until Monday morning. Just in time to get ready and go to work.

Interviewer: What jail was it? Which jail did you go to?

Roach: It was this old jail.

Interviewer: In Jasper?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: The brick-and-marble one?

Roach: No, this was the old jail. You can see it now. It's after you cross the bridge, the wooden bridge? You know where the wooden bridge is? It's when you come in.

Hoomes⁵: The Woodbridge Inn wooden bridge?

Kennedy: Yes.

Interviewer: It is that jail then. Oh, okay. Where did you stay in the jail? Upstairs?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: And who was the Sheriff at the time?

Roach: Oh, my Lord. Who was the Sheriff? Was it Cagle or Stancil? It was one of them.

Interviewer: It was the 1950s, yeah. It would have been Fred Stancil, or I can't remember Cagle's first name. Bill Ray was a sheriff.

Roach: Bill Ray was the law.

Interviewer: What does that mean? He was the law?

Roach: He was the officer, and he didn't have nothing to do with Jasper then. He was the law mostly for the company.

⁵ Kelly Hoomes

Kennedy: The Marble Company?

Roach: Yeah.

Kennedy: He told me it would be better to be in jail than to deal with Essie.

Roach: Because he worked for the company. He drove a crane, an overhead crane on a track. And I remember one time, we were working, and this was during the summer, me and three more guys, he had two more guys, working on the railroad. And this guy claimed that the big boss, Bob Key ... you see, he couldn't keep no men because he was too evil. He wasn't evil with us. This guy came and he told us to use the old spikes and don't use the new ones until we used to the old ones. This guy came in and he just picked up all the new ones he could. And Bobby Keys told him, I told you to use the old spikes. He said, you don't tell me. He drew back to hit Bob Key with the hammer and Bobby Keys happened to catch him and broke his arm. Bill Ray was the law. He jumped out of the crane and sent this guy on home. He sat this guy after that. Boy, that was close. If it hadn't been for Bill Ray, he'd have probably killed Bob.

Interviewer: Who was that guy who did that?

Roach: I don't remember his name, because he didn't live around here.

Interviewer: So, these are the spikes for the marble?

Roach: No, for the railroad.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, all right. Where were those tracks? Was that over in Tate?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So why didn't you want to go back home to Essie, instead of to the jailhouse? When you were drinking?

Roach: Oh, Essie was in Atlanta. She was boarding in Atlanta.

Kennedy: No, you told me one time that it was easier to go sleep it off in jail than to go home and have Essie deal with it, if you'd been drinking.

Roach: Oh. [laughs]

Kennedy: You know, Essie was a force to be reckoned with.

Roach: I'd come out better in jail. If I'd a got home and had a hangover, she'd say, "You ain't gon' stay here if you're not going to work. You're going to leave here." So, I had no other choice but to stay home and work every day. There wasn't no way for me to come home.

Interviewer: What did Essie do for work?

Roach: She worked with her father and mother, as long as they got [inaudible 00:48:51] grown. Then she started working for the school at the kitchen school up here.

Interviewer: So, she worked for the Braswells?

Kennedy: Boswells.

Interviewer: Boswells. Okay, then went to work at the school.

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, when y'all got married and came back here, you went to work as a teacher then? A P.E. teacher?

Roach: Who me?

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Roach: Georgia Marble.

Interviewer: Okay, and what did you do for Georgia Marble then?

Roach: I worked in Sickles. The Sickles. where I worked. The had a plant and we did get all the lumber. And made headstone boxes for the headstones, because the company had big contract for headstones. You had to keep that up. I didn't help build the boxes, but I put the lumber in the plant and had it cut off, so the rest of the guys made the boxes. That's what I done.

Interviewer: Was that in a big warehouse?

Roach: No, it wasn't very large. Right next to the highway there.

Interviewer: How long did you do that?

Roach: About 22 years.

Interviewer: Okay, what other jobs did you do?

Roach: What?

Interviewer: What other things did you do for work?

Roach: I went to work for J.E. Lovett Construction Company out of Smyrna, building sewer lines and water lines. That's what I loved. To be outside and don't stay in one place all the time.

Interviewer: So, did you drive down to work in Smyrna?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you drive yourself or ride with people?

Roach: Me and about five or six guys altogether rode together.

Interviewer: How long did you do that?

Roach: About 20 years.

Interviewer: Whoa, okay, so did you go to work anywhere else after that?

Roach: No, he went out of business. We done caught up with all the sewer lines and all that. I came back to Tate, and I was already living in the projects. So, one day, the guys out there cutting grass and one had a weed eater. Not far from there. And this other guy caught a rock and slung and hit Michael in the face there. And they had to call Ms. Mosley. She said, "Truman, you're not working. Why don't you go to work with them?" Leonard said I can make the rest of the day. She said, "Yeah, you come in the morning." And that's when I started working with the Jasper Housing Authority. I stayed there until I got ready to retire.

Interviewer: What did you for the Housing Authority?

Roach: Maintenance.

Interviewer: Maintenance?

Roach: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: So, different jobs?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: Were they just there in Tate? Or in Jasper?

Roach: Both.

Interviewer: So, were you in your 70s when you retired. 60s or 70s?

Roach: I was 69 and I was going to stay until my 70s, but I had to have a hip replacement and I intended to go back to work, but my boss man told me, it wasn't Hazel, it was Ann Dobson then. He took Hazel place because Hayes had retired. And he said, "You want to go ahead and retire now or work on until you're 70?" I had just another year. I said, "I believe I'll just retire." And he said, "All right. That's up to you." And I retired when I was 69.

Interviewer: Okay. So, before we finish up, I want to talk about your church.

Roach: Okay.

Interviewer: Mt. Calvary?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: When did you start going there? As a child?

Roach: Oh, yes, let me tell you this. Sister Watson and I know it and I remember so good. I wasn't over three years old, and I had just got through nursing from Mother and she and Sister Watson would sit together. I started crying and Ms. Watson reached in and got a handkerchief and gave to me and mother, because mother didn't have a handkerchief. And I kept that handkerchief, oh Lord, as long as I can remember. Ever since I had a pair of pants on with pockets in them, I kept her handkerchief. I had it all my life. I swear I kept it because she gave it to me. She's the one that birthed me.

Interviewer: She was the midwife?

Roach: Yeah, midwife. Yeah.

Interviewer: Sister Watson?

Roach: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: So, you were at that church from the time you were born really?

Roach: Yeah.

Davis: Now, Truman was Sister Watson, her husband a preacher at one time? I remember him.

Roach: They ordained him at Mt. Calvary. That's where that come in, yeah. Mr. Watson, he came from Milledgeville. That's the reason he knew all of the Blacks there. When World War II began, that's when most all the coloreds left the company to go North. Them in the South, came to Tate. That kept Tate covered real good.

Interviewer: Why were people leaving to go North at that time?

Roach: Who?

Interviewer: A lot of the Black workers, why were they leaving?

Roach: Because they could get better jobs. Real better jobs. Then, they had a bathroom too. We didn't have no bathroom in Smokey Hollow. In fact, we didn't have running water. But about two houses had running water. That water came from up on the hill there going to the Tate mansion.

Interviewer: Who had those houses with running water?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: Who lived in the houses with running water?

Roach: They didn't have running water. They had to put running water in there themselves.

Interviewer: So, they got hooked up to the water that was coming down to the mansion?

Roach: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: I see.

Roach: And Fred Anderson's house, he lived there. That's the first running water that came down the mountain, he lived down there. And they put in all that.

Interviewer: What was his name?

Roach: Fred.

Interviewer: Do you remember Olin Collins?

Roach: Yeah!

Interviewer: Tell me about him.

Roach: He's a stingy man. He's good though. I used to work with him when I was in school. He was good.

Interviewer: Stingy? Did you say stingy?

Roach: Yeah!

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: What do you mean? Why was he stingy?

Roach: Because he'd get everything for nothing and wouldn't pay them nothing and he had that stand there. Mm! He was something else.

Interviewer: So, did he have a lot of money?

Roach: He must have. Yeah, he had to have.

Interviewer: What did he sell at the stand?

Roach: He sold good canned food, drinks, and his wife ran the kitchen there for a while and I guess she got tired of messing with him, and she quit running, cooking in the kitchen in there. So, he sold a little bit of everything. Like baking powder and all that.

Interviewer: Did he sell to blacks and whites?

Roach: Yeah, oh, yeah.

Interviewer: So, at Mt. Calvary, did you sing in the choir?

Roach: Yes! Yes! Yea! Did I sing? Lord, yeah! And somehow, I got... Well, I quit going to church a little while and then I started going back and all the people, before I got there, "Why don't you come and go back to the choir?" All the choir members said, "Come on back, Truman." And I loved to sing. I didn't want them to beg me. I was going to come back anyhow. [laughs] So, I went on back. I got as far as the steps there to go in the choir and the preacher said, "Uh-uh. You got to practice, or you'll be wrong with the choir. You'll come up here to sing and you ain't got it. You got to practice. Go back and sit down." I sat down that day and I didn't miss choir practice no more and I went on back to singing. So, we sang good. There wasn't but three boys in the choir. That was Preston, Robert, and myself. And we got to singing and Mary Ann, that's my sister-in-law, she was playing the piano and she said, "Preston, why don't you and Truman and Robert start singing by yourself." She said, "Truman used to sing in choir all the time and he knows how it goes." So, we got together and said, "That would be good." Preston said, "You need to play for us." She said I don't need to play for you. Truman and them, when they were signing in quartets they didn't have no music. They sounded good. So, Preston decided we would do that. [laughs] And Mary Ann, we were practicing one day down at Preston's house he lived in Canton. Me, him and Robert were singing a song and he hollared in there, Mary was in the kitchen or somewhere. He said, "Come here Mary Ann, a minute." So, she came in there. He said, "How do we sound?" She said, "You're sounding good. I told you that you didn't need a piano." And Preston told Mary Ann, "You're fired." [laughs] It done her good. She didn't want to grin, but I know she did. She said, "I tried to tell you Preston that they'd sound better without music." And he said, "You're fired." [laughs]

Interviewer: Was Preston married to Mary Ann? Were they husband and wife?

Roach: Huh?

Interviewer: Preston and Mary Ann, were they married? Okay, and was it Robert McClure the third in your trio?

Roach: Yeah.

Interviewer: And did y'all travel around to sing?

Roach: Yeah. All the white families, the white churches. Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, so you sang at Black and white churches?

Roach: Yeah! Yes, sir.

Interviewer: I see.

Kennedy: I've got a —.

Interviewer: What kind of songs did you sing?

Roach: Oh, boy. Them old songs we got them together, Oh How I love Jesus, and all them. I could name almost a thousand of them.

Interviewer: And you were baritone?

Roach: Yes, sir.

Interviewer: Still then, baritone.

Roach: Yeah, I got the baritone. Tate had to have four fellows. They were older than us. I remember them so good. One of them was Cornelius Rucker, James Pitts, and O.J. Crowder. He's some kin to... and who was the other one? Henry Lee Gunn. Okay. They had Rucker was the baritone and O.J. Crowder was the bass. So, Mr. Rucker heard me singing in the choir and he loved singing. That's where I got a lot of learning, too. From what do you college And, after all the fellows had moved up north, especially O.J. He had the bass and he had me be the baritone. So, I had the baritone on all the songs from then on. That's the reason I love baritone.

Interviewer: That was another singing group?

Roach: Yeah, they could sing, too. There wasn't any TVs then, but they were all over the radio. Some big company, a tire company out of Canton they had them for, what do you call that now?

Interviewer: Like for advertising?

Roach: Yes, there you go.

Interviewer: I see. Did you ever serve in the military?

Roach: No. All my family did, except me.

Interviewer: Okay, so your brothers and...

Roach: All except my sister and mother.

Interviewer: Did they serve in World War II?

Roach: All except father, he was World War I.

Interviewer: I see. So, for those folks who left in the 1940s and went North, where did they go? Do you know what cities?

Roach: Some went to Columbus, Ohio. Some went to Tennessee. Some went to Detroit. Some went to... One fellow, who was that he sung in the choir too. He went to Chicago. What was his name? I can tell you in a minute. Oh, they were all scattered around.

Interviewer: Did they ever come back and visit?

Roach: Yeah, especially at homecoming at Mt. Calvary.

Interviewer: I see, and did you ever think about moving North?

Roach: Uh-uh.

Interviewer: What kept you here? Why did you want to stay?

Roach: Because I loved Tate and I was born here. You know, a lot of people... Lots of them, when they moved, the people would ask them, "Where are you from?" And they were scared to tell them Tate because it's too small. Oh, boy, that hurts me. Tate, Pickens County is good to me. That's my home. I wouldn't want to move for nothing in the world. No, sir.

Interviewer: Well, I appreciate this. This has been great. Thank you so much.

Roach: Yeah, you're welcome.

Interviewer: Well, we will conclude there.