

## CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Interview with:** Sheriff Monroe Brannen  
**Interviewer:** James M. Denham  
**Date:** June 2, 1997  
**Location:** Lakeland, FL

**J:** I'm James M. Denham here with Monroe Brannen at Florida Southern College on June 2, 1997 and this is our second interview. Previously we spoke for one hour. Mr. Brannen, how are you doing today?

**M:** Very good, thank you.

**J:** Did you have a chance to look at any of those questions?

**M:** I read most of them, yes.

**J:** When we left last time, we were just about to pick up with your career. We just had actually picked up with your career in the Lakeland Police Force. You began that tenure before World War II and then left to go to serve in World War II, is that correct?

**M:** Yeah, that's correct.

**J:** And when you returned, it was 1946 and you resumed your duties pretty much as before.

**M:** Yes, I took the same job back, you know, patrolling the streets or either walking a beat.

**J:** So you had, I guess, two careers with the Lakeland Police Department, before and after the War, right?

**M:** Well, yes. I started on the first of April 19 and 39. And I went into the service,...in '43, but I didn't go back to go to the service til '44 because I got a six-month deferment and then I was in the service about two years, just a month or two over. Come back home in '46.

**J:** Were there any changes since '46? You were gone 2-1/2 to 3 years, I guess.

**M:** About two, a little over two years.

**J:** Were there any significant changes that you recognized after the War, besides your own, having to work through your war-time experiences? What kinds of changes had occurred the year you got back and then maybe the first five years after that?

**M:** Well, when I came back –

**J:** How had Lakeland changed?

**M:** It had changed because they had put in the parking meters in the first of '46. That was one change. And that if you got a red ticket for over parking, they'd charge you 25 cents for over parking, then they went on for about a year, maybe a year and a half, something like that, it went to 50 cents if you over parked. That was one change that they had to Lakeland at that time. And another change that they had there, when I started to be a policeman in '39, the first of March or April anyway, that we worked seven days a week, but they changed over right, the first of '46. When I went back to work, we worked six days a week. And when I left the department, we was working six days a week. And over the years, they changed it to five days a week.

**J:** Eight hour days?

**M:** Eight hour days, yes.

**J:** Would you mind telling us how much you were making at that time?

**M:** When I went to work for the City of Lakeland, we was making \$80 a month and they furnished our clothes and our gun.

**J:** You had to buy your own gun?

**M:** Buy your own gun. And I never owned a pair of handcuffs as long as I was a policeman.

**J:** Did you have a Billy Club or a nightstick, or anything like that?

**M:** No, I just had me a little blackjack.

**J:** At that time, did the Lakeland Police Force have patrol cars?

**M:** Yeah, sure. We had patrol cars –

**J:** What kind of cars did they have?

**M:** Well they put 'em up for bid and they had an old airplane one time down there and they had two or three Plymouth cars down there. I mean they had a Chevrolet and Fords. And my theory is that the Ford Motor Company made the best police car.

**J:** How many would you say there were when you got back to the Force in '46? How many cars were there?

**M:** There was about five or seven, something like that. The detectives had two, the Chief had one, and there was about four other cars, or five patrol cars. But when I went in the service, there was about half that many, you know, cause you couldn't get one.

**J:** Who was Police Chief at that time?

**M:** Roy Hutchison.

**J:** Roy Hutchison, okay.

**M:** And he served in World War I. And he was a nice person. He was in the Police Department for about 31 years.

**J:** Can you describe your relationship, when you were on the Lakeland Police Force, with the Polk County Sheriff's office? Was that centered in Bartow?

**M:** Yes. But the Sheriff here was Bill Chase when I first went to work as a police officer. And he served two terms and he was defeated in 19 and 40 by Dewitt Sinclair out of Winter Haven as Chief of Police. And he had the Sheriff's office then for eight years, two consecutive terms. And then Frank Williams took over and Vince Chamberlin defeated him. But the changes, what you did was about the same.

They didn't have no deputies in uniform at the time, in the '40s, but goin' back to 19 and 37, you asked the question, out in West Florida, there was a police officer, well I say a police officer, he was a Sheriff's deputy. They was working for somebody out there and tried to pull this car over and stop it, and these two guys claimed they thought he was trying to rob them and they killed him. In '37 they passed a law that a person working traffic had to have on a uniform. That was back in 19 and 37.

And Chase was the Sheriff in this county and it was amazing, he went out and got a lot of baseboard or box or something and made like a big card and on Saturday night somebody'd put it on the side of the car, you know, said 'Sheriff's Office', said 'Deputy Sheriff'. But the deputies then would –

**J:** Now was that here in Polk County?

**M:** Right here in Polk County.

**J:** Okay. Okay.

**M:** And they put on a little cap, you know, and you'd see 'em goin' down the road. And that was one thing that happened. What happened even before I was even a policeman, they was dirty up into the '40s and they'd use that on a Saturday night, you know, to get out of a car. But there was no communications here. At that time, about 19 and 40 I would say about '42 or '43, the Sheriff's office down there, I don't remember who but I guess it was Chase who started it. He got on our frequency down there. It was a radio only it wouldn't go but about 15 miles out of our communication service.

**J:** So radios came in then about the time you came back from the service?

**M:** No, no, it came in before I left. The radio was there when I went to being a policeman, in the City of Lakeland. They was put in about 19 and I would say about '35, '36, the radio, because I wasn't an officer then, cause I didn't go to work til '39, but I knew some of the policemen back then and they had to have a call box they'd call in. You know, like the one on the corner of Florida Avenue and North Street.

**J:** Like a telephone booth or something?

**M:** Yep.

**J:** Yeah, yeah.

**M:** You'd go by there and you'd go by there about every 15 minutes and call in. You had one over here off of Southern College, and you had like two patrol cars, one on the north side of Lakeland and one on the south side, you know. That's where the patrol cars went. They had three beats downtown when I was there. They had one walking Pine Street and they had walking around Tennessee and Kentucky, and then one over on Massachusetts and Tennessee. But they three police officers walking a beat. And it was kept pretty good.

**J:** Okay, after you came back from the service and you resumed your operations at the Police Department, did you ever have the occasion to fire your gun?

**M:** Yes.

**J:** In that time, before that time when you left?

**M:** Just before I went in the service, I shot an escaped convict that was running from me, and I shot him in the arm and it knocked him down, and I shot the second time. And that's the only person that I ever shot. That's the only person that I ever shot in my career as a police officer. And this happened in the '40s, I would say about –

**J:** That was before you left for the war, then?

**M:** Yeah.

**J:** Well, what happened that made you leave the Lakeland Police Force?

**M:** Well, when I came back to the Lakeland Police Department and went to work, we was making \$220 a month, but we was working six days a week. And on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of December 19 and 39, me and an officer was riding together, name of Arlo Powell, and we had a call.

We was right at the park in downtown Lakeland. It was 19 minutes to six on October 13<sup>th</sup>. There was a disturbance out there on the corner of Emma and Dakota Avenue. So we went out there and the person that called us was named Shoemaker. And as we drove up there, [Arlo] was driving the car and I was on the passenger side. And the man that called us had, there was three little houses just like this, and the man that called us was in the third house, but when the car

come to a stop it was, you might say between the width of the house and he walked up to the car like you facing me and said, they always called me my first name, 'Mr. Monroe', he said 'a little boy's been chasing me around out there' and I said 'where's he at, Shoemaker?' and he said he was there in the house'. So I opened the door of the car and stepped out and as I was walking back to the house, and I was about 18 foot from where he was at to where I was at, and he was in the house he was up higher than I was cause it was a little wooden floor and he was standing behind the door kind of. I didn't see and he shot through the screen door and hit me right in the face with a loaded shotgun.

**J:** Did he know who you were?

**M:** Yeah, I had on a uniform.

**J:** So he saw who you were when he shot.

**M:** Yeah, and I never did see him. And the officer that was with me was Arlo Powell, and they hit me in the face and he shot right over where I was laying, he told me later, and a black man ran out of the house and as he got outside, the car was sitting like say in-between the two houses, just in an open space, and he shot the second time and hit the side of the car. So a few minutes later, the ambulance came and carried me to the hospital, and I lost my eye. In fact, they'd taken out my eye the same night. And you're not believing this, but they never did put me to sleep.

**J:** Well obviously they had to take the other pellets out too.

**M:** No, no. They don't have to take 'em out. You ever hear of that, that's a bunch of hogwash.

**J:** Is that true? They just left 'em in.

**M:** Well, actually the worst thing you can be shot with is a shotgun loaded with buckshot, powder, a rusty nail, and a dog bite. Them's the three worst things you can be. But the fortunate part about it was that if he'd have just opened that door, I'd have got the whole load right in my face, you know what I mean? Just like it just kind of broke the load.

So I got out there, they kept me at the hospital and the doctor, Dr. Watson gave me I guess a tetanus shot in each arm. So we was there and they got a hold of Dr. Hester. Dr. Hester's still living over here on Lake Hollingsworth, and they come up and told me, they said 'Monroe, let me tell you how it's goin'. We can wait three or four days to take it out or whatever you say, or I can take it out now'. So then they didn't have a lot of things they could do; shot hit me in my face and all, I can just let you feel of them there if you want to, that blood was coming out of.

And every time they'd shoot me with this Novocain, it would beat 'em back out, you know what I mean? So I had to urp, and I told 'em about that, so they raised me up in the bed and I said to Dr. Hester, I said 'my right eye was burning' from the powder, you know, and I couldn't see that far, but I could see a little. And I said 'doctor you're hurting me a little, you're hurting me a lot, you're hurting me' and he said 'well Monroe' he said 'all this stuff we've been shootin' in your

face is coming out faster than we can put it in'. You can just feel that knife going right in there and spitting it out, and I couldn't stand it no more. I never said another word.

**J:** So the Novocain was coming out the holes and other places.

**M:** See and what they was afraid of, they was afraid that my head had already swollen, you know, from the, and they was afraid that I would stop breathing, I couldn't get my breath. But they had told my wife, of course she told me later, they told her, they said 'we're this far with him and if we stop and try to hold him right here, you know for a few minutes', so I lived through it.

And there was a lady there that was one of the nurses I guess you'd call 'em there in that part up there, nice person, and I guess she had to say something and I remember what I said to her. I guess I was bloody all over and I told her would she wash my hand. She said it kind of touched her a little bit.

But anyway, the end of the thing, there was a nurse that worked in the operating room there, you know they had one assigned, a dozen of 'em I imagine, and it was over with and about a week she came by and told me but somebody else had told me before she came in. She said 'I've seen a lot of operations in there, and things in my life, but I've never seen one like this one', you know what I mean? And she just keeled over, fainted, you know, she said 'I don't want to see anymore. I don't know how that man went through it'.

So I stayed out in the hospital about three weeks and I was paralyzed in this left side but they finally got it kind of straightened out. He was convicted and got 20 years.

**J:** Now I think you mistakenly said it was 1939, you meant '49 didn't you?

**M:** Yeah, I meant '49.

**J:** I do the same thing.

**M:** I'm sorry.

**J:** I knew you couldn't have gone to the Pacific after that.

**M:** No, this was in '49.

**J:** That's right. I knew that had to be right. I just wanted to make sure.

**M:** Well, anyway, that's the story.

**J:** So how long was it before you could get around and resume your normal activities?

**M:** Well, I didn't go back to work for three months. But I would say I stayed in the hospital three weeks and I had a first cousin come over to stay with me then and he would ride me around

some, and the police would come and ride me around a little. But I couldn't get my nerves kind of settled down, you know what I mean? That was such a shock. People thought well if you ever live through it, it's pretty rough.

**J:** Of course.

**M:** So they was good to me and everything, so I went back to work. We had these same little red tickets you were talking about, the parking tickets and an officer by the name of J.D. Morris was a Sergeant there and he had some problems, it happens some time. He was a good man, but well I don't want to just say the word, but it was, you know, girls or something and he had to leave there. But he was handling the disposition of the tickets, you know what I mean? He'd try to get 'em in, people to pay 'em.

And he had gotten behind with 'em and everything, so the Chief asked me would I be willing to take the work of these parking tickets, and the disposition of 'em. And he was real good, too. He told me, he said that, when I went back to work, he said 'now what time do you want to come in and go to work? You set the time and then if you get tired of staying here, you just tell the Sergeant on the desk that you're goin' home', you know, 'don't come down and stay. If you get tired, go home'.

But I didn't do it. But what it was, nobody's bringing these tickets in so I kind of enjoyed it. And one other thing he said 'if anybody comes here and complains and says I'm not goin' to pay a parking ticket, I won't send no money, if you excuse every one of 'em, I don't care!' He said 'I'm not agoin' to be bothered with it, I don't care what you do'. So if I had to look at the ones that didn't bring 'em in, your tag number, you know, and it was more aggravation than you think it is, but I kind of enjoyed it.

**J:** Yeah.

**M:** And it give me something different to do.

**J:** I'm sure people would come and they'd probably complain 'well I wasn't really parked out of line' and all that kind of stuff.

**M:** It was little things like that: the meter wouldn't work, you know. So I'd say 'just give me the ticket' and I'd just excuse it and I'd say 'next time', you know, make friends. You know. I wouldn't argue about 50 cents or 25.

**J:** Sure. Sure.

**M:** And the first year I was there, I'd taken in more money than has ever been taken in since then til this day. That's right. I'd taken in 33 thousand dollars, would you believe that?

**J:** Wow.

**M:** And nobody, one time speaking of that, there was a lady who come to the station and went in. We had a little scooter go around and check 'em and now they got people walking around, you know. Economy was a good thing. You could go everywhere with that little scooter you know.

Anyway, this lady come down and she was just as mad, and the guys that was, the officer that did it, his name was Irvine Smith, and he'd make 10 people mad every day, you know what I mean? So I just take the other side of the thing. So she said 'I know there's something wrong with that meter!' and I said 'well come on and let's go around', so I got in the car with her and went around there. I wished I could think of her name. But anyway, I said, I put the nickel in there and I said 'now you watch me' and I just dropped the nickel in there. Believe it went over there. And she said 'what'd you do?' And I said 'I'm gonna invest one too now', so she thought well she's gonna have to and I said 'what you did when you come up here and put the nickel in, you pulled down on the handle, and the nickel slipped on through' and so she put the nickel in there and I excused the ticket.

So every now and then, somebody would get two or three. One day, Smokey Sutton, he was the Mayor, and he come there and he had two tickets and he said 'ol' so-and-so put two tickets on my car' and I said 'Smokey' and he said 'yeah, I'm over top' he said 'I don't know you did that'. I said 'you must've stayed two hours'. 'I guess I did'. And I said 'give 'em to me. I'm gonna excuse one of 'em', you know what I mean?

Then, now, I'd write somebody a letter tellin' 'em to come in, so one time, it was kind of funny. A lady came over to shop with us from Winter Haven and she went back up there, day or two, she sent a dollar bill in and said she hoped that paid her bill. So asked the little girl to write me a letter, I couldn't much write too well on the typewriter, so I said 'write Miss so-and-so a little note and tell her thank you for coming to see us', you know what I mean, and 'I'm returning your dollar' and 'be more careful when you come back'. So, you know, I sent the Chief just a little copy of the letter and he said 'that's just great'.

**J:** Sounds like you got into politics a little bit while doing that.

**M:** Well, I stayed there then til '52.

**J:** But I mean, you were meeting the public and you were dealing with them, and you were working with them.

**M:** You know, every time that you see a person today that, everybody don't need a ticket for driving 40 miles an hour, did you know that? Honestly. You know, the best policeman in the world sometime is the man that don't never make an arrest, you know, get along with everybody. He gets him in the corner and say 'John don't do it no more. I'll help you out of this one, but I can't next time'.

We don't have that today. In fact, the Sheriff of this big county we live in here don't have the contact with the people. You've got the door locked. You ever thought about that that's a public



building? You know? What if you kicked it down? You don't have a right to not see the public. That's what's wrong with the department.

I can tell you little things that happened to me this year. I got a little lot out there on Pinewood and Walnut. So people throws trash on it, and one day, three or four months ago, [I went] to clean it up and there was a motorcycle settin' there. And I walked around it and there was no tag on it, so I mowed the lot pretty well. And there was a police car sitting on the corner over there with a man with a dog in it. So he turned on around and come in front of me and I waved him down. And I asked him, I said 'sir, this motorcycle is just settin' on my property, I own this lot here. Would you be kind enough to run it through the computers and see if it's stolen?' and he said 'if you want it moved, you call up a wrecker and do it' and I said 'hell, you didn't have to tell me that to start with. I knew that 40 years ago'. This is what I'm saying. They've lost touch with the people.

**J:** But it's easier for you to do it than it is for him to inquire about it.

**M:** But it could be stolen and pushed in there. So the next morning I went back over there. . . . so I thought about it, and I walked across the street and I asked a lady, 'do you know who owns that motorcycle over there?' and she said 'yes, my live-in boyfriend's boy' and she said 'he's asleep. He's no good' and I said 'well ask him to come out here and get the motorcycle off my property'. So she did.

But the people has lost touch with the law enforcement. One time when Fuller Warren had run for the Governor here back in about 19 and 44 or some years back, around '50, he was a comical guy, and he came up here and he said 'I wanna tell you people' he said 'if you come to Tallahassee to see me, remember one thing, if that G.D. door is locked, you just kick the damn thing down and come on in cause y'all own it anyway! Everybody owns that capitol up there'.

But we don't have nobody no more. This is really the way you can straighten a person out: 'this is wrong and to put you in jail ain't gonna do ya any good, best go a different way in life', but we don't have anymore of that.

**J:** Well, after your big injury and then your time on the Ticket Bureau, I guess you'd call it, that takes you up to what? 195-

**M:** Well it would take me up to 19 and 52.

**J:** '52, okay, where do we go from there?

**M:** Well, 19 and 52, 1951 under the Civil Service Act, the way it was set up, it was like two fingers, the City paid in 50 dollars on their side up to 30 years. And on your right side, you paid in the other with 2% or 3%.

Well, then I had lost my eye. I got a bill through the legislation to increase, it would say if a person like I was, you can't replace my eye and if anybody was hurt in the line of duty, that the City would automatically put aside in their side, say like 70 dollars--it could be 50 dollars. So

they got that through the legislature and the bill was passed. So I got to lookin' at the thing and went and got it and read it, and I was makin' then about 240 dollars a month. And I'd think 'well how much can I get out of this retirement fund now? I can't live on 240 dollars a month'.

And they passed the bill so I'm in front of the Civil Service board and the guy by the name of Emery Walker, director of goods down there, and he said 'Monroe, I hate to say you ought to go into retirement'. I said 'no, I just can't live'. So they sent me to the doctor and told me I had to go get a medical clearance and went to a doctor who said 'I know what's wrong with you, you lost your eye, didn't even charge me anything'. So I went in front of the Board and told 'em I wanted to go into disability retirement so they figured it all out and it come to 99 dollars and 96 cents. Well you know I couldn't live on that money either.

So I run for Constable. And they was four of us, there was myself and a man named Ogden and one named Purvis and one worked at the hospital, and I didn't beat 'em very bad, I beat 'em nine to one. I got 9,000 votes and all of the others got 1200, so I was a pretty popular boy.

**J:** That was in 1953?

**M:** '52.

**J:** Okay, what were your duties there?

**M:** Well, the duties as a constable then, back in the horse and buggy days, back you know when they had constables, they actually had constables before they had sheriffs, did you know that?

**J:** Mm-hmm.

**M:** And they called 'em the keeper of the stable. You ever told that? Or you knew that?

**J:** Mm-hmm.

**M:** And everybody'd go to you in a crisis, you know, to make noise. Well there was no direct telephone lines in Polk County then. If you called Auburndale, you had to pay for it. If you called Bartow, you had to pay that. If you called Plant City, you had . . . .

See the Sheriff's office was in Bartow and they had say two or three deputies living around in this area, maybe four or 10 or something, but not very many because, I think they had four. And then Pat Gordon had been Constable. He's deceased now. So then you see you run in May and April . . . . that's when you run for office, as you well know, then but they set it up so that, and I didn't have anything to do.

I couldn't go back to the Police Department, so I got me a job, two or three little jobs around, paying me a little something, a dollar there, dollar an hour. So a man by the name of Woodale was a Roadmaster for the Coastline Railroad Right of Way Department, you might call it. And I went up and asked him, did he have something I could do, and he said 'yeah, you can go to work

down in the shop' and I said 'how much you gonna pay me?' and he said 'a dollar and 52 cents an hour' and I went to Penney's and bought me five pair of dungaree pants.

So I worked there a few days. I went to work there about July 1<sup>st</sup> or June, and he called me and he said 'bought a brand new truck and the guy that was gonna use it', they had a bucket on the front end of it just like all the tractors have where it was built with an arm and you could go out and scoop it into the dirt and pick it up and come it over and dump it into the back, on the body on back was a dumpster. . . . Then there was the fee system then.

**J:** The Fee System as Constable.

**M:** Yeah. And the Sheriff's office was under the Fee System. So anyway, I went to work there and, well I rented the office that Mr. Thornton had, that was elected Sheriff. And I had one girl. So the first month, I was there, I went to work. I had worked about like 26 days and I had served 29 warrants arresting people, you know like arrested them for bad check or a fight or something disorderly, and then I –

**J:** Was that for the County Court?

**M:** Yeah, the County, see I was working for the County then.

**J:** Right.

**M:** And the most that you could make with the statutes, for instance, you'd taken in 15,000 dollars. You paid for the girl to work for you, you paid her like 50 dollars a week, you paid for your gasoline, you furnished your car and your rent. You'd do good but if you made over 7500 dollars at the end of the year –

**J:** In fees.

**M:** On fees, it was just like you'd taken in 15 and it cost you 7-1/2 to make it. But if you'd taken in a little bit more, then you had to give back to the General Funds of the County the difference.

But anyway, the Justice of the Peace was named Rudon, oh I can't think of his name, he's a crippled man right now. And he called me in and said 'I want to show you something' he said 'in 26 days, you served more warrants than Pat Gordon did in the whole last year together.

So then, like the civil process, the people that, for instance, anywhere within a mile of your office, for instance, if your wife was suing and the attorney brought a paper in there or the secretary and asked you to serve this paper on a man, and you got 15 cents a mile to go there and 15 cents a mile to come back, and you got two dollars and 67 cents, maybe two dollars and 90 cents or so to process those papers. But at that time, if we served a warrant on you, whether it was murder or either traffic violation or something and carried you to Bartow, booked you into the County Jail, the county would have to pay you 16 dollars and 45 cents.

**J:** Now did you have a firearm at that time, as Constable?

**M:** Yeah, I carried a pistol.

**J:** Yeah, cause you're serving warrants on people that aren't good people.

**M:** I was a Constitution Officer.

**J:** Okay, right.

**M:** Cause it's just like the Sheriff was. I had the same power in this district as the Sheriff did, but the statutes also say that I couldn't go out and have a sale, like an automobile, you know what I mean? The Sheriff has to do that. Then people would just wake me up at nights, you know what I mean? It went on for about six months.

**J:** So your main duty then was serving warrants and orders to the court.

**M:** Yeah, from the court, and warrants and bad checks, people give 'em all the time, and taking furniture or a car away from –

**J:** So did you work with the Judge's Chambers mainly?

**M:** No I had me an office right side of his.

**J:** But you got your walking papers and your orders from the court, didn't you?

**M:** Not so much as that. The biggest thing he did was he practiced law and did this on the side, you know what I mean? So the biggest thing he did was serve warrants. And then if you didn't pay for your car. And they come out and say they want me to get a Repossession Warrant.

Well if they owed 1700 dollars on it and it was worth four dollars and 95 cents, or whatever it is, that you could say for instance say that the man owed you that much, and you'd have to put up a warrant to take the car away from him, you know what I mean? And then you had to give him three days and then he had 17 days to come in and put the car in storage, or furniture, or whatever it may be.

But they had to put up, now if you owed 10,000 dollars and you didn't want to put up but five, you know what I mean, because the fact that's all you'd have to put up cause that's all that man would have to put up to match it, so he had so many days to come up and get his stuff back before the courts come involved. The same amount of money was put up to repossess it and get his car back.

So a deputy was working me to death and I'd go home and people would go down to the Police Department to call their debtor. Well they had to call long distance. So some of 'em would come and some of wouldn't, but most of 'em would say 'well you'll have to call Monroe, maybe he'll help you some'. And I went ahead and [helped] I'd arrest nobody. You did it on your own

time and your own pocketbook. There wasn't no way to charge anybody. But I kept that then for eight years. But then I didn't quite finish up.

I went down to see Leo Brooker, was the Chief of Police then, and Leo went to work in 19 and 34, and that's the only job I think he ever had, except he was United States Marshall for about two years one time when Holland was, I guess he was in the legislature then.

**J:** Senator Spessard Holland?

**M:** Yeah. nice guy, good man. And Leo had that job a little while then he got to be Chief, so I went down to see him and I said 'Leo, if I bought me a radio, could I get on your frequency?' and he said 'yeah'. I said 'you want me to tell anybody?' and he said 'no, hell no' he said 'just go ahead and get one' and I said 'I'll do this too, I won't interfere with none of your calls, but if I go to Jacksonville, I'll come by and leave a note on your desk or call and tell [you] I'm gonna be out of town for four hours or five hours, but if I'm goin' down the Quarters on Fifth Street or if I'm goin' to Tampa, I'll tell you where I'm at. If I go to the County Jail to carry somebody, I'll call out and tell you where I'm at so you won't have to hunt me' you know what I mean?

If you hunt me, then you know there's something wrong with me. So he was real good to me that way. And the policemen here was real good to me, you know. And I was part of the game, you know.

**J:** Sure, they knew you! They knew you and they worked with you.

**M:** This is what's, they're more jealous of you in a Police Department and a Sheriff's Office and a funeral home than anything you can talk about.

**J:** Well, that's some of the stuff I kind of wanted to get into. Was it that way when you were a constable, between the Sheriff's Office and the Police Department?

**M:** Well, the Sheriff's Office –

**J:** Because the way I see it, the way you've explained it, you seemed to be kind of in the middle.

**M:** Well, I was kinda in the middle, quite a bit, because see the Sheriff of the State is a Constitution Officer in this County, but then there wasn't no direct connection and they didn't have the lines, and so I knew practically everybody.

I could call more people by their first name than anybody in this County I imagine at one time. And they was real good to me. In fact, a lot of people don't know that I got kind of a photostatic memory. I don't have it no more cause I quit practicing it.

But then one time, just a little story, about one or two o'clock in the morning, the phone rings and this was kind of my last days of being Constable. It was a man from the Lakeland Police Department and he said the lady said that I'd called a deputy cause they had a farm here and he come down here and he wanted to try to help me, and actually he said then 'you might call

Monroe, and if he gets up and comes down here and does the work for you, what you say that you'd like him to do, he'll charge you five dollars or seven dollars or something for his mileage out and back'.

So she got me on the phone, so I dressed and come down there. And when I got down there, she had a child, a boy or a girl, I think it was a girl, like four years old, and her husband was having some problems and he went and got the baby and carried it to his mother. A little ahead of that, they'd called the deputy and he came down there and he told her there wasn't nothing he could do and he drove on off. Well this is the worst thing a policeman can do. They is some things you can do sometimes. Sometime you have to do it, you know. So that's when I was called.

So I went down there and asked him 'where's she at?' and she told me. And my policy was, I wouldn't let a woman ride in my car. You know, I'll meet you there but you're not goin' to ride in my car. Now if I arrest you, that's a different story, you know. Then I would take a chance that way. I wouldn't do it. I just, too many things that you know, well the President of the United States, he's gettin' some good write-ups right now.

**J:** Yeah, I understand, yeah.

**M:** So I went out there and walked up and knocked on the door. A lady come to the door. They knew who I was when I walked up and I said 'you know this lady here?' She drove a car out there and somebody was with her, I remember. And she said 'yeah' and I said 'you got her baby?' and she said 'yes'. I said 'where is your son?' and she said 'he's gone, we don't know where he's at' and I said 'has the court awarded you this child?' and she said 'no'. I said 'you don't have any right to it then, do you? Here's the mother right here, you admitted she was your daughter-in-law. I suggest you go get the baby and clothes..

So I came on back to the Police Station and she said 'I want to pay you,' and I said 'you don't owe me anything' I said 'I'm sure that you need it worse than I do' and went home. Never seen her anymore and I don't remember her name cause I didn't try to.

So when I run for Sheriff, I set down one day and talked to [someone] and he said 'you can't beat Hagan Parrish'. He lived in Winter Haven. Went on to a few days later and we met again and I told him about what I was doing and I told him what I'm gonna do and he suggests, he said 'you go to every city in Polk County and you get out and see if you can find one person you can call by name'. I didn't have no trouble with that.

**J:** Now who told you that?

**M:** A friend of mine, he's a lawyer, Billy Narville was his name, he's dead now. And I'd been doin' that and I was standin' on the platform on citrus boxes and I didn't see nobody that I could call by name. I knew a lot of people in Frostproof but I went by there just to see who I could see.

**J:** Nobody was there that you knew, huh?

**M:** So this woman walked out there, had on levi pants, like I got on you might say, and she walked up to me and said ‘aren’t you Monroe Brannen?’ and I said ‘yes ma’am’ I said ‘aren’t you the lady that come and I went over and got your baby one night?’ and she said ‘yes sir’. She said ‘I want to tell you something, I didn’t live in Polk here, I lived in Highlands County’ but she said ‘I worked in this packing house’. She said ‘I told every person in the packing house, everyone that’s come in and I know most everybody that’s here, what you did for me and that you should vote for this man’.

And I made up my mind right then that I could beat Hagan Parrish. That’s the God’s truth. Polk County, there was more people in this section, and I knew people that, like the Tyres down we’ll say in Frostproof, and the Latt Maxcy and John Maxcy and Ben Hill Griffin, Earl Davis, Ken Davis, Everett Dason, Hunter Dason, Agnes Dason . So then I went running –

**J:** Now was that in 1960?

**M:** It was in 19 and 60. See I didn’t go out of office then. And money was hard to raise. The incumbent can raise the money.

**J:** So you were running against the incumbent, who was Hagan Parrish?

**M:** Yes. Hagan Parrish, and he was a pretty good policeman, pretty good officer.

**J:** How long had he been in -

**M:** He didn’t last but one term.

**J:** He was only in one term.

**M:** Well, he was appointed one time. He served one term and then was trying to make the second one. But he was in twice, appointed one time and then he ran and was elected one time.

**J:** Now, you both would have been Democrats.

**M:** Yeah, both were Democrats. But anyway, two people in Polk County, both of ‘em deceased, one of ‘em called me up one day, lived right here in Lakeland, and he asked me in ’39, he said ‘Monroe, I wished I’d run; he didn’t like Hagan, ‘and helped you raise the money when you runnin’ against him’. He said ‘I want you to run against him’.

So just before Christmas, in 19 and 59, he called me up and said ‘come by the office’. He gave me five 100 dollar bills. And I asked him about a person who lived in Winter Haven and he said ‘he’ll be over here in a day or two’ and said ‘I’ll call you in a day or two’. Both of them was in World War II and he liked to tell us stories about that.

So the next day or two he called me up and said to stop by. And he just handed me five 100 dollar bills. So, that’s all the money that I had when I went down to qualify, but I had a little

money that me and the wife had saved up and put together, I think it was 5000 dollars, and I had a hard time staying in there for money. When the run-off came, there was Pat Gordon.



## CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Interview with:** Sheriff Monroe Brannen  
**Interviewer:** James M. Denham  
**Date:** June 2, 1997  
**Location:** Lakeland, Florida

**J:** We're here today with Sheriff Monroe Brannen. Today is June the 2<sup>nd</sup>. This is the second hour of our discussion and we were just speaking of Governor George Wallace and his 1968 Presidential speech here in Lakeland.

**M:** Okay that's correct. Anyway, I met him and his people at the airport so we got to the Linder Air Field out there where he was going to speak. John Tolson came over and he was a Captain or a Major or something and told me, he said 'we just got information they're gonna assassinate him, you gonna stop it?' and I said 'hell no we're not goin' to stop it'.

**J:** You mean the speech?

**M:** Yes, we're going to go through with it. And I stood right close to him as I am to you, one or two people around us. As soon as we [found out], we told him though. We went to a room and came back and told him what they told us and he looked kind of funny.

**J:** Was that before he spoke or after he –

**M:** Before he spoke.

**J:** Okay.

**M:** 'And now when we get through, you get through speaking, we're not a'gonna take up no time for you to shake hands with people, we gonna put you in the car', you know what I mean? So as soon as it was over with, everybody's just carried in their arms almost and put him in the back of the car, hopped in there and drove for four or five so we outrun everybody-- got to the County Line down here, you know what I mean, over in Hillsborough County.

The next week after that, that's when he was runnin' and then they had a fella', a guy by the name of Young out in New York State or New York City, a Mayor or something up there that was runnin' for the President of the United States and Goldwater was running and –

**J:** That was Lindsay, I think Mayor Lindsay in New York, I believe, if I'm not mistaken.

**M:** But there was one named Young, I thought ran too, but I could be mistaken. And then Goldwater was another one and Rockefeller was another one that was runnin'. So the morning that he was to speak, Goldwater and four or five of 'em spoke there –

**J:** Here in Lakeland?

**M:** No in Washington.

**J:** Oh, okay.

**M:** We had went to Washington. When we left here, I went up there the following weekend to be with this convention.

**J:** Oh, okay.

**M:** I was just a little out of step there, what I was doin'. But anyway, that was the reason I went up there, and there was a lot of people, like Goldwater, and different ones coming from each state making a speech running for the President, so they had people there, like 10,000. And the Governor of Florida then was Kirk, I believe it was. Claude Kirk.

And he came in with Goldwater. But they knew who was out there. And I was there and one of the County Commissioners, Alan Trask, was there. There was a lot people there. Ray Clemmons and a lot of people. So they asked me and said 'go out there and bring the Governor in', you know. So I went out there, they had Secret Service runnin' over each other, and brought him on up there, so he got on the platform with Rockefeller, he was a Republican.

**J:** Right, he had just changed parties -

**M:** That's right.

**J:** And then got elected.

**M:** And got elected. So I told his Secret Service men who I was, so Kirk always called me 'Sharif' -

**J:** Sharif?

**M:** Yeah. He was a comical man, but anyway he said 'Sharif' he says 'I'm sure glad you have been taking care of me'. So when he got through, he called Rockefeller over there and he said 'I want to show you a real Sheriff from Polk County' and he introduced him to me. But he said in his speech, what I've been getting up to, I never seen him no more.

So the next day that George Wallace is supposed to speak I got to thinking about it and well, so I picked up the phone and called the airport and asked them 'could I amend my ticket to come a day home earlier?' because I just got through with this, you know, I didn't want to be up there when somebody a'might got killed.

And you know, he was so, I don't know -- determined not to go by some rule that we should have in this country long time--this people should have equal rights regardless of the color of his

skin, you know, no matter what they come from, but I liked him. But anyway, I came on back home and I never did see him no more. I saw him the one time after he'd got shot.

**J:** That was four years later wasn't it?

**M:** Yeah, four years later. But he was up there. He could talk. He was a good speaker.

**J:** He could get you stirred up, couldn't he?

**M:** He doggone sure could, and he had guts, let me tell you. He wasn't scared of anybody. But I was up there when they was all speaking and I came back after this here, I took the plane the next day and flew to Boston, and he was to come in about the fourth day before or after that. But what can you do though, you know? There you got, you're ordered to so-and-so, you don't want nobody to get killed, you know. Are you goin' to let him speak or not?

**J:** The tip that they got, was it just an anonymous tip?

**M:** Yeah, just an anonymous call. We kind of thought it was a crank call.

**J:** Yeah, but you couldn't take the chance on it.

**M:** But we let him speak. We did. But we didn't let nobody else get to him. You might've killed some of us but I don't think, but you have to make a decision, and you hope you made the right one.

**J:** Well, we're talking about George Wallace. And when you think about George Wallace, you think about desegregation, bussing, all that kind of stuff. And those were hard times. Those were a lot of disorganization, a lot of things that were occurring. And the Civil Rights Movement. What were some of the things that you remember, that you had to deal with? For example, some of your colleagues in a Lake County like Willis McCall –

**M:** Yeah, Willis McCall.

**J:** And is it is L. O. Davis up in St. John's County?

**M:** Yeah. It was –

**J:** Anyway, there was a lot of ruckus that occurred in Lake County. Were there any similar episodes here in Polk County?

**M:** Not too bad. We had marches and things like that, but we didn't have too much trouble. I had one year when I was in the Sheriff's office and we was trying Glenn Darty's daddy for first degree murder when the Civil Rights thing come along.

**J:** Now who was Glenn Darty?

**M:** He was the State Attorney from Lake Wales. And his daddy killed Judge Bob, used to be Bobby Stokes, he used to be a Judge . . . Glenn was the State Attorney and his daddy killed Mr. Stokes' daddy over there. I'm not going into what it was about or anything but I could tell you a few things.

So, when we was trying Mr. Daughtery over there in the courthouse, I went over there and there was just a little, it was right after this . . . desegregation thing. And the night before that, we got a call out here around Mulberry, Willow Oak. Some of those miners out there and people like that, you know, that didn't want people to move in, any black people. They built a house, some builder did, and sold it to a black man from Bradley. So the bunch down there went down there and tore the wiring out of the house. So I had a deputy and I went down there, and the one thing was that if anything happened like that, I'd be the first one there. If anybody get killed, it'll be me, somebody.

So the man that was working with me, or working in Mulberry at that time, was Combee. So we go down there and saw some old crackers standing around these miners and I went over and talked to 'em. And they said 'what you gonna do about it?' I said 'you haven't given me a chance to do anything'. I said 'I wanna tell you now, I'm tellin' every one of you' and I guess this deputy's coming down here now. I was by myself but not scared of him and I said 'let me tell you now, if anybody gets killed down here, I'm in charge and one thing: enforce the law. I'm tellin' you people to get away from here. We'll straighten this thing out. I haven't had an opportunity to straighten it out. All this big talk y'all are doin' down there'. And there's always one or two in the crowd you have to control, but they liked me pretty good. They respected me. They left.

The next morning, when we was there we had to get this preacher over here in Winter Haven, who was it, a black man, I don't remember his name; he's still over there and a white man and two or three from Tampa, about five or six of 'em, came to the courthouse. And this white man came with 'em and said he wanted to see me. And I said 'well I'll see you at 12 o'clock--good excuse because I was over in the courthouse. I'll see you at 12 o'clock down to my office and they said alright. Adkins, Adkins was his name.

**J:** Yeah, sure. I know him. I know him.

**M:** Yeah, he was the one from Winter Haven. I don't remember the rest of 'em. And the spokesman was the man from Tampa, the head of the NAACP to represent his people, the black people.

**J:** It wasn't Bob Saunders, was it?

**M:** No, I don't remember who the black man was, it might have been. It's been so long. So we come in and come in the office and everybody sat down.

**J:** Big guy?

**M:** Yeah.

**J:** Real big guy?

**M:** Big. Pretty nice. But he wasn't a bad man to talk with.

**J:** Big man, though.

**M:** But he did the talking. And he says 'Sheriff, do you believe a man has the right to live where he wants to?' and I said 'yes sir, under the Constitution of the United States he has the right to and live in any society he wants to live in'. He asked me another question and I said 'well I answered your questions, what else have you got?' Now I asked them and I had done had my words figured out so, but you have to change, you don't know what you're goin' to say.

I turned and said 'who built this house for that man down here?' He said 'this man right here'. And I said 'Did you build that house?' and he said 'yes sir'. I was only gonna ask a question and I said 'how much did he pay you down?' and he said '\$100'. See that's what I wanted to get at, you know. It looked like it was kind of a deal that would give you \$100, you could pick up \$100 pretty easy to get a house started, and I figured it was on account of the people, maybe it was black or something like that. And he said 'I'll do this', he said 'I'll give this \$100 back not satisfied' and I said 'well that's fine'. Kind of the end of the story again I told him, I said 'well thank you all for coming' and I had a person working with me by the name of Sammy McNeal and he was a black man, a Deputy, good man.

So I called him up and told him to come to the office and meet me when I got there. And I said 'Sammy I went down there in Mulberry just north of Willow Oak and last night I was down there and some of your people and this builder come there and I said 'now you go down there and tell your people anything you want to, but you tell them that I said that my job was to enforce the law, that's all I want you to tell them, that I have an obligation on my oath to enforce the law and that's what I'm gonna do'. And he came back in a few minutes, called me said 'I went down there and everything's taken care of' he said 'the man was glad to move back to Bradley' or wherever, and he said nobody got hurt. So, you always got a judge sometime down the line and what. He's dead now. Next day or two he called me up and said he wanted to talk to me.

**J:** The deputy?

**M:** No, a Judge.

**J:** Oh, a Judge.

**M:** A Circuit Judge. And he said 'what happened down there in Mulberry?' and I said 'you mean Willow Oaks, sir?' and he said 'Yeah that's it' and I said 'not nothing too bad, why?' and I explained it to him and I said 'nobody got killed did they, Judge?' and he said 'no' and I said 'nobody got hurt did they?' and he said 'no, as I know of'. I said 'I made my own rules 'cause I had the guts to do it', you know. And I'll tell them guys to their face. You don't see no gun on me.

I most of the time didn't even have one around. But a lot of things could be settled if the number one man would come to the front. You know what I mean? So he moved away, everybody's happy and never heard no more from him. But every time you see a person now in law enforcement, they got that pistol. Pull you over for anything but man he's got his hand on his pistol, just like he's ready to shoot you. I don't believe in that. I don't believe in that. I believe in enforcing the law, but I've enjoyed the time I've been in law enforcement. But that was one example I had that nobody got killed. And I don't think there was nobody got killed, I don't remember, that was just to take a person's life in the 16 years that I was Sheriff.

Now we had people killed for other things, but I don't never think we had a racial anything, you know like a white and a black. I never had no trouble. I one time was out here on Fifth and Kettles, and we had a guy by the name of Blackjack, is what they called him. Drove up there and I'd go up there about once a month and just stop and talk to two or three black people. So I drove up there and all at once this black lady run out of there just a runnin' and screamin' and I looked and right behind her was a man with a knife. So he said 'heyyyy Sheriff! This man's after me to kill me!' and he threw the knife back inside there. And he come on then he come and started . . . just standing there and this black man had a little place over there, he's dead now, and he walked over there and the man was about your size taller than me and I weigh 150 pounds and his name was Stephen and he just walked between me and this black man and he got him right in the waist and he said 'Mr. Brannen go ahead and leave, I'll take care of him'. He told him, he said 'Mr. Brannen comes out here every now and then to see us people. He don't bother us and you not goin', and if you touch him, you done touched your last'. It was kind of funny.

One time I was up in Davenport we got a guy up that was bad. Let me tell you. You may not believe this, but I can prove it. He lived in Davenport. I never did personally know him, but one time he tore up one of our cars, just kicked the whole seat all to pieces in the back, he was that tough. And he was not as stout looking as you are, but he was . . . and I don't know weighed about 180 or 190 pounds. When you go over, where 27 goes over 92 going into Haines City, right on that corner that this man had a restaurant there. And his name was John Mattacourse and he was just about that big around, always had a big cigar, but his brother worked in the jail down there, and he and his wife was just having so much problems that he told me the best thing to do was to quit. And he went to court and got a judgment against him or something for alimony, so I drove up to see John this one day.

I'd been over there and I never did like to wear a coat driving a car, but I always wore a suit of clothes. This bad guy comes up, he and his brother, in this old broke-down car and this little runt is standing there and this woman, this deputies ex-wife was crying and saying we didn't try to help her to get some money. And John said 'hey, will you people just go on somewhere or another' and they went cussing him a little bit and he said 'the Sheriff's standing right over there' and I finally walked over to the door and I said 'he told you to go on' and I said 'why don't y'all just leave'. And I don't see on my left side and I was standing there, and he hit me right in the side of the head. I hit him one time with that right there and the best way for me to knock you down is when you're walking, did you know that? I can knock you down with my fist if you're walking. I knocked him--knocked him completely down and I jumped on him. I let him turn over, and my hand was just getting cut in that cement. So a guy drove, a taxi cab driver, his name was Herb Key, and I said 'Herb! Get my handcuffs out of the car! They're over

on the other side!’ And finally he got ‘em over there and, you know, you can pick that thing and hit it just like, and it snatches it’ll catch around here. I had one on him. So I snatched him and got the other one and just got up off of him. And I told him, ‘now if you draw back to hit me again, I’m gonna stomp you into this ground’ and he just kept looking at me. So I asked them to call and ask them to send a deputy down there, so in a few minutes –

**J:** You had the cuff on you and then you had the cuff on him too.

**M:** I had it and he went and got, because I didn’t even have the cuffs or anything. The cuffs was in my car. And I asked the guy that drove up there, Herb Key was his name, I had ‘em hooked on there for, just like you’d pull down and release your brakes, you know. I had a pair hanging right there. So he run and got ‘em and handed ‘em to me and I just happened to have enough. I snatched, he give ‘em to me. When I had that one tight, so I snatched around and got this one on ‘im.

**J:** Oh, okay, together.

**M:** Then I got up off of him. So I asked, but they know we’d send two or three deputies to wrestle him, but I wrestled him by myself. The last time I saw him someone had arrested him over there and had him in jail down there, and he seen me and he was wanting to complain and I said ‘wasn’t you the guy that hit me in the face?’ and he says ‘no, it was my brother’. He fooled around and got killed.

**J:** He got killed.

**M:** Somebody killed him. He was –

**J:** Wow. A wild man like that.

**M:** He was, but I think that, we’ve got some girls in law enforcement now. Well their hearts are not as large as mine, their arms is not as large as mine, they’re not as heavy as I am, and I don’t, think there’s a place for a woman but sometimes just being out here, it’s no good. And maybe my philosophy of law enforcement is out of date too.

**J:** Did you ever have a woman on the patrol car?

**M:** Yeah.

**J:** When did that happen?

**M:** It happened about ‘74 or something like that, we got to adding some. We had ‘em as matrons and the bailiffs of court and things like that.

**J:** But ‘74 was the first one?

**M:** I would say that would be about right. I may be right. You know, it's been a long time and I could be a little bit out of date as you know in '65 you had to do a lot of things. I didn't say it before, but you asked me. You know in '65, then in the jail, well I had, they'd have done it down there, I'm just as guilty as anybody else, I put a white man together and a black man together. And we had the same thing where we had a black woman or a white woman, we kept things segregated.

**J:** That must've been kind of hard to do. I mean, it doesn't seem to me that there would be a lot of space, a lot of different rooms and stuff.

**M:** Well, you can fix anything. You can put beds over here. And the thing about it, you didn't say, the average women down there was say, like anywhere from 10 to 20, you know like that. It wasn't too bad. But there's too many things that can happen that policemen, just like locking a woman up, you know what I mean, 'he touched me'. Hell I wasn't goin' to put up with that. We're living in a different world. We're gonna put some matrons in here.

**J:** Yeah.

**M:** So, I think there's a few things that I accomplished down there, in things like that.

**J:** Now you mentioned before, the black police officer you had and the problem down in Mulberry. Was that your first black officer?

**M:** No I had more.

**J:** When was the first black officer that you can remember?

**M:** When I went into the Sheriff's office, I had two or three.

**J:** Already?

**M:** Yes sir. But we had Speed, you know, the coach that's a schoolteacher here? [Willie] Speed? I hired his brother. And then there was a guy in Lake Wales, Percy Wilson. I gave him a job. You know what I mean? I had some black deputies it was a good thing.

**J:** So how many would you say there were when you took over the Sheriff's office?

**M:** I think there was about the same in there. They had a few down there, the Sheriff did, but I don't think he had no woman deputy. Now I didn't have none, but I had bailiffs of the court, you know what I mean, women. Because you got to have a woman go to the restroom and things like this.

**J:** Would you say, during your tenure from 1960 to 1977, that the black officers numbered, how many would you say in 1960?

**M:** Well there was very few.



**J:** Very few. Were there more in '77?

**M:** Well yeah 'cause I'd increase it, everybody did. And everybody had a black deputy but then it was better. I know one time when I was Constable I carried a person, his name was Dynamite Jones, was the black man's name, and he thought a lot of me, so I had a black prisoner and asked him if he would ride up there with us and he said 'yes sir'. And we came back –

**J:** Chattahoochee?

**M:** Chattahoochee. And that was a hard trip to make.

**J:** Gosh! Chattahoochee's 300 miles!

**M:** I'd drive up in five hours driving 90 miles an hour.

**J:** Five hours?

**M:** Five hours, driving 90 miles an hour. Would you believe that?

**J:** That was before I-10 was finished.

**M:** Yeah, you went all through these little, I drove from Lakeland, many times in five hours, but that car would make it to 75 miles an hour. When I was Constable, that was the worst job I ever, I'd drive up make a mile a minute. You have to drive a darn car to make a mile a minute on them crooked roads, would you believe that?

So we came back to Don Quixote's restaurant up there, right in Tallahassee, and I said to him 'Dynamite'. But we went to the door and they fed him at the back door, set up a table back there for him. And I got tired driving, you know, coming back, and I let him drive, and he was a good driver. Dynamite Jones. And it was a funny thing about him.

One day I drove out there and he had a little house over there, and he had a nice looking wife, and he was a clean, big husky man, but they were just having kind of confusion. I was standing over there at the hotel and I went and heard 'bam, bam!' and I just walked on across there, then a man run out of there, and she had shot him!

**J:** Dynamite?

**M:** Had shot Dynamite! His wife shot him. She claimed that he beat on her the morning before and bloodied her up. But the little guy working for him took that pistol and run out around and hid it. So I walked on over there and I said to him, I said 'I seen you run out of the door, go ahead and get me that pistol' and I arrested her. And she wasn't ugly. I said 'get in the car' and she got right in. So I forgot the pistol. I don't remember what happened to it. I think it kind of got her on probation or something. And I was standing right on the corner when the gun was fired across the street.

**J:** Now was he alright?

**M:** Yeah, you couldn't kill one of 'em. She shot him in the shoulder, I think it was. It scared him pretty bad.

**J:** Now he had a –

**M:** A little beer joint.

**J:** A little beer joint too, while he was on the force?

**M:** No, he was, I was Constable when that happened.

**J:** Oh, Constable, I'm sorry.

**M:** But it was just kind of funny. But when I was Sheriff, then he died. He was a good man. Pearson was the guy's name [and one time he walked up from a cellar] in front of me and just walked right over to the car and said 'if you touch him you won't touch nobody else'. So he says 'Mr. Brannen, just leave, I'll take care of it'. But this here is when I was in the Sheriff's office –

**J:** Okay, these are pictures from –

**M:** Ecuador.

**J:** From Ecuador and this is obviously an old yellow envelope that I've got here and it's addressed to Sheriff Monroe Brannen, Bartow, Florida. And we see pictures of, what are these 10 x 12 pictures?

**M:** Yes, yes.

**J:** And I see pictures of you. Now is this you here? That's not you, is it?

**M:** No, here's my picture, right there. There's me, right there, the one with the –

**J:** Okay, yeah. Now what year would this be?

**M:** This was back in the '60s. I think it's right on top of that envelope there somewhere.

**J:** Okay.

**M:** Is there some writing or a date on it right there somewhere?

**J:** No date on it. No date.

**M:** See this guy right here? He worked for the Federal Government. He was an Ambassador kind of thing over in Ecuador. He's the man that got me to go down there that time.

**J:** Now what was the reason you were down there?

**M:** Okay, one morning, about 10 o'clock, some people in Miami called me and we had bloodhounds, and he had been working with us down there by the name of Vernon Meadows. He's the one running our dogs, and there wasn't any dogs in the Police Station or anything like that. The Sheriff's office had some. And he worked for me down there and this call from Miami, from some person down there, I don't remember what he was now, wanted to know if we had any dogs so they referred him to me. The essence of the story down there in Ecuador, you know, the air is so thin or something that you can like walk from here to your car and get out of wind.

**J:** Right, it's really elevated.

**M:** Yeah. So what had happened there on those mountains one Sunday, or we'll say Sunday, you could go around and around and around and around and go up on one of those mountains there so far, and then you'd have to walk way on up there. And four or five students, children, went up there and had a party and before they knew it, the fog had come in on 'em. And they couldn't find 'em in two or three days, so they called me on I think it was a Tuesday evening or something or other and wanted to know if I would carry the dogs down there.

So Vernon and me started down there. It was kind of funny, we went to Miami and we got down there about five or six o'clock, it was dark . . . because of a plane, and they'd built a wall around just about as much space as a man could walk, and they put about 15 horses on this plane, a cargo plane. And Vernon and I finally got, and there was two dead-head pilots there that was going to pick up a plane in the Panama Canal Zone, and then the two pilots on this thing, and it was the worst trip I ever made in my life. So it was this old freighter, if I knew I had to went down there, I wouldn't have went. So there's just about as much space as I got here and I sat right behind the pilot and he sat on the other side. So we left Miami about 11 o'clock at night.

The next morning, just at the break of day, we was in the Panama Canal Zone settin' down to get some gas. So they get some gas and unloaded the horses and those crazy people down there, these race horses would go and stick their heads out of this thing and look down there, you know, and they'd just scoot backwards. And finally, I told the pilot there, I said 'Sir, if you would talk to those people, I'll unload these horses for you'. So he could speak Spanish or something or other over there, so everybody; so me and Vernon got a rope on the horse and kind of petted him around and, you know there's always kind of, way up there, there's a step up over like that . . . around, and I said 'now Vernon, you get down there and take this rope'. We got a collar on 'im and put it on him. There was 16 of those boogers down there. We got him where he kind of quieted down . . . and I said I had a little whip and I said 'now get on . . . The damn plane was way up here, you know how those things are. And they had these dark . . . on the side . . . and when I hit this horse, I'm gonna hit him on the rear to make him jump that . . . so we unloaded every one of 'em without any trouble.

So then they had a bunch of like hi-fi's and stoves and refrigeration and loaded the plane up again. And then we flew somewhere over there, way away from Ecuador, loaded so heavy with this darn stuff and it was about four o'clock in the afternoon then, day and night. And when we got over to that place, they met us with another plane to get us to Ecuador. So they told us that these people had been disappeared for two days, or something like that.

So the next morning, Vernon had, this guy's picture I showed you just a minute ago here, I thought I did, nice looking guy, he was from Tennessee, but he worked for the Federal Government somewhere or another, had on a white hat. I don't know what but he's somewhere or another. He's the one who picked me up at the airport. And he took me down to his store so the next morning, you could drive about 10 miles around up there on the top of that mountain, but them kids had went another 10 miles into those caves down in there somewhere. I didn't go down there. I couldn't hold out. But those people could run and they carried the dogs for 'em, you know what I mean. And they spent all day Thursday hunting.

**J:** So you took the dogs with you?

**M:** Yep. Loaded the dogs with the horses and us, on the same plane.

**J:** Now, you must've been quite well known as an expert with dogs for them to call you like that.

**M:** No, well they knew we had some dogs, the people in Miami, cause we'd carried down people a lot of time would call you about some dogs. A lot of people. This county could afford to have some, you know what I mean? And it was Cracker Jack dog.

**J:** Now were dogs used pretty much everywhere back then in the '60s?

**M:** Well, most of the prisons used 'em, because you know the population of Polk County wasn't like it is today.

**J:** Right.

**M:** But the cities couldn't afford to have dogs. We had 'em down there when Sinclair was here, back in the '40s.

**J:** Now did you find them?

**M:** Well, the funny end to the story then, they went and I stayed about 10 miles really from where they was hunting at, stayed all day Thursday and didn't find 'em. The next day, it was about this time of the evening, everybody was up there, but we stayed and had a bunch of people cause I wouldn't go that other, like 10 miles, I don't think I could've hold out that long. They had to walk because . . . They called us and had found one of 'em, that he'd finally got out of the cave and was just goin' to do something or another, and one was found.

So there was three that was missing, three or four, and they found him and asked him about where this was at and he could tell 'em so they put one of these dogs or both of 'em on this trail

and backtracked it and found the other two. It then was late in the afternoon so they was just about, and some of the people that these children belonged to was along, and they spent the night in that cave, so the next morning two doctors went up there, or three, and they were give out the dose but native people would carry the baggage for you, you know what I mean? And they toted 'em out on regular old GI cots, you know like we used to live on, I call them GI cause that's what I slept on when I was in service overseas, you know what I mean? Something on that same thing. And their feet was frozen so they put your foot up under here and one under here, you know what I mean? And they have two people carry it, one on each end and if one would get tired, they'd get another. And they'd finally get some feeling back in their feet, they was frostbitten and everything else.

So it wound up, the next day was Saturday and we was gonna come back Sunday or something like that and all at once there was . . . with this Dean I can't tell his last name. I wish we'd run across a picture, I might remember; he was a nice guy and he was from Tennessee. I went to bed, had a little hotel, pretty nice little thing, had good food. And he said 'you see that guard out there?' and I said 'no'. He said 'there's two detectives out here. They were assigned to me and you'. He said 'they were going to assassinate you two people because there was something to do down . . . That's just how crazy people is now. You take your time, don't get a dime for it, flew over there and all this stuff.

So the next morning at the Embassy Building there was just paint throwed all over it, everywhere, and said 'Yankees, you better go home'. So wherever we went, they was two guards around us for a couple of days, and then we couldn't get a plane and he got sick. That was the sad part. And they wanted to hold him over for a day or two and then the next day he come on home. When he got into Miami, they quarantined him and the same day that happened, we had a deputy get killed. When I got off of the plane in Miami, we stopped at one stop coming from over there and they called out my name. They said 'would you come to the desk please'. So he said 'Sheriff we have to tell you we have this plane, we'll hold it up for you'. He said 'you had a man killed this afternoon and they wanted you to call 'em right away'. They knew I was on the plane coming home, they done run that. And he said 'if you want to ride this plane on to Tampa, get back on and we'll carry you right on over there and he said 'well you got a car here to pick me up', so I didn't. But anyway we'd lost a deputy the next morning right here in Polk County. A man killed him.

**J:** What year was that?

**M:** I believe it was about '65.

**J:** What happened in that situation?

**M:** About killing the deputy?

**J:** Yeah.

**M:** He got off of work at the jail and like anybody else, he went down here to the shopping center there at Bartow around where the Ford place is, and there was a drugstore there. He had

got kind of acquainted with the guy and he was the neatest guy, and they was talking, and somebody run in there and said that there had just been a robbery right down there in one of those quick loan places, and he run out there and the druggist did too.

The druggist jumped in the back seat of the car and he's taken out after him in his personal car. And over there around Alturas, the man that had robbed it, he and his wife sat in the car, and he stole about \$250, not a lot of money, and they noticed he was done so they stopped the car and come back and said 'what are you following us for?' and as he come by there from where he did, he turned the license plate up, and he shot the deputy right, kind of right in here, and he'd taken the pistol and pointed it at the man in the back and said 'don't you move', and as he left, he turned the license plate up but in an hour or two they done already caught the guy. And that's what happened. But it does happen. But I enjoyed the trip to Ecuador.

**J:** Now, here's Edward Amuro, that's a famous, famous fellow there. And I see Senator, at that time Senator Hubert Humphrey in that picture. Were they involved in this caper?

**M:** No, they was goin', these pictures I picked up as I'm ready to leave and just stuck 'em in.

**J:** Oh, okay. Okay.

**M:** But they're the ones I wanted to show you. That was the first . . . I want to tell you about the next one. Here it is right here. He was a great hunter and everything, that's him right there. That's the guy that got me to go down. Here he is again right there.

**J:** Now were these people you were looking for, were they Americans?

**M:** Yeah. Yeah. All nice people.

**J:** The people you were looking for?

**M:** Yeah.

**J:** How did they get up there in that mountain?

**M:** Well, they went up there on a car and got out and went way back in there –

**J:** Just kind of, okay, they just kind of got lost.

**M:** They got lost. That was the word for it. Now here's a picture was taken of me and the Attorney General Bob from Miami.

**J:** Oh yeah! Bob Shevin?

**M:** Yeah.

**J:** Yeah, I recognize him. Sure.

**M:** I always liked him. But we come on back and then they wouldn't ship us our dogs.

**J:** So you had to leave the dogs down there?

**M:** Well, they quarantined him when he got back but they just put the dogs on the plane coming back. We went down there and I rode that freighter down there and I was so aggravated about the thing, but the only way to kind of look at it is you saved somebody's life, you know.

**J:** So were all the people rescued eventually?

**M:** Yeah.

**J:** None of 'em died or anything?

**M:** No, nobody died. They was up there for just, like one day being a week. But if they hadn't got a hold of us, they'd have never found 'em. But somebody was in the Police Department or the Sheriff's office down there, you know you get connections were you think of 'hey John', you know what I mean? 'Help me a little bit'. But that's what happened. One time when I was Constable here, we had a woman and a man, I don't remember the lady's name. Is it over?

**J:** Yeah, it's doin' okay.

**M:** That had put out a lot of checks here, bad checks. And there was another guy that was with 'em and he left here. So I had information one morning, a phone call, and this man said 'Monroe, the party you're lookin' for just called a phone number here in Lakeland from Jacksonville' and I knew Bill Whitehead up there was a Chief Deputy for Rex Sweat, so I got him on the phone and I said 'Rex, I got a telephone number that was called just 15 minutes ago and I got a warrant for that man and woman' and he said 'we can't'. I said 'Bill don't come up here and tell me, we have ways to find out that, don't go giving me, we're too smart for that, don't come here tellin' me you can't find out where that call comes from' and I told him I'd call him back. He went out there and he got the man or the woman, one of the two, so he called me or somebody in his office in Jacksonville. He said that we'll get the other guy. And I said 'I'll be on my way up there'.

So I drove up there and got up there and he had both of them there. There was a guy by the name of Harris. He lived here and he was an alcoholic. I drove up the Sheriff's office. And his mother used to always call me when Bugg, Bugg Harrison was his name, was drunk. So we got started to leave from Jacksonville, the man and woman said 'Ol' Bugg Harrison is outside of that house drunk-- that mobile home. Why don't you go over there and get him?' Well his mother had told me three weeks ago that he went off and she couldn't find him, so, ordinarily I don't go to a man's house.

But anyway, we drove out there, Bugg Harrison. So I said 'you want to go home?' and he said 'give me five dollars' and I said 'I ain't givin' you anything' and he said 'I need to get my clothes' and he was drunk and he said 'I don't have clothes' and I had an old Army thing that

when you come out it certainly looked like it was a raincoat pulled over you and I had one in the back seat and I could just put that thing over him. Found an old pair of britches around there so I put 'em on him. So he just had the shakes and was just shaking like this. So we started back home. And then I have an accident so we got up there around Leesburg and there was an old tractor ahead of us and the man was pulling it and then behind it he had something else sitting up there and there was one of these little pins you put in a drive shaft and they were pulling a trailer with it and it was goin' 'bumbumbum'. And that thing was layin' on the corner of his trailer like that and just as we got goin' by, it fell off and as I drove, it spun it around and it went right through the gasoline tank. So a man drove up beside of me says 'hey sir!' he says 'you're losing all your gasoline!'

So I stopped and it was just pouring out. So I wound the car up a little bit and stopped at a place when they used to grease cars, you know and they run it up on it and they got a bar of soap and they just shoved it in there and said 'I think you may be able to go on down the road. So I drove.

**J:** A bar of soap.

**M:** So we drove on to the marketplace and the guy said 'we don't have one'. 'Yes sir'. So we drove on. I knew a guy that had the Ford place. He's dead now, maybe I'll think of his name. And I drove in there, and I said, whatever his name was and the man said 'we don't have a tank.' Now I'm running and I said 'You remember me back when I was in the Police Department? You come by my house one day looking for a guy by the name of Williams that you'd sold a bunch of trucks to' and I said 'you'd remember my uncle. I'm a Lake Butler boy when you had a car place there'. So he went out and asked the guy. He said 'can't you help the man out a little?' and he said 'no I don't have one but I - '. And it made me kind of mad and I never seen him anymore.

So I went up to the first filling station I got to and I said, bought one gallon of gasoline, and went about 75 miles an hour. I drove an hour and I went and got me another gallon. So when I got in Polk City, I said the devil with it. I got the radio now, you know, I can talk to somebody and when I got to the Lakeland Police Department, you won't believe it. I drove up there and the car went dead. And they let me have a new car there to carry 'em on down to the County Jail. So the next morning, he got another gallon of gas and he carried it down there, and they said 'Monroe, what we'll do' he says 'you won't want to keep this car very long anyway, we'll just put a patch over it'. So they put a patch over it. But this was a great trip. I got a lot of letters. His name is Dean, I wished I could find him. He's a nice looking guy.

**J:** Well, so that takes you through the '60s. Were there any Civil Rights disturbances with regard to the integration of schools or anything the Sheriff's Department had to get involved in?

**M:** When I was Sheriff, when we had like these marches, and I fell out with Leo and John Tolson in a business-like way because I didn't think they thought I handled it right. We had one evening -

**J:** Now Leo?



**M:** Leo Booker. He was the Chief of Police.

**J:** Chief of Police.

**M:** And John was a friend. We were friends. We all grew up around here you know and we worked together. We had one evening that the black people was goin' to march across Lakeland and they come all the way down Florida Avenue over here to we'll say like down there about Belvedere Street or one of those streets and then they went back.

So it made the white boys mad and the following day or maybe say on a Sunday evening about five o'clock or six, they all gathered up out there at Wabash Avenue, must've been 300 there. I never seen so many boys, from four years old it looked like to 17 or 18, you know, and they were bad. So I went out there, right to the city limits, just about right here and I said 'you're not goin' any farther' and they just said 'well why? The black people, y'all let 'em walk down' and I said 'I didn't have nothing to do with that'. I said 'the Chief of Police let 'em do that. But y'all are not goin' any farther than right here now. Just make up your mind'.

**J:** That was the whites?

**M:** The white boys.

**J:** That was the white boys, they were going to take 'em on, huh?

**M:** Take 'em on, you know what I mean?

**J:** They were going to take 'em on.

**M:** But of course, 'y'all let 'em walk down Florida Avenue, now we gonna go down through Memorial Boulevard' and I said 'no you're not goin' down there.' And I said 'I know your daddy' so they got to whispering among themselves and said 'we don't have no way to go' and I said 'there's a half a dozen cars there, just pick out the one you want to go loadin' in there'. So there's always a smart tail, you know, and one of the boys, I guess he had a piece of an ax, and we arrested one person right around the back of that car. And finally we just kind of stayed there and they said 'how can we march?' I said 'you can march, but you have to march four foot apart and you have to have a permit. You're goin' to have to abide by the law'.

**J:** And the blacks had a permit?

**M:** No! That's what I was mad about. Leo –

**J:** Oh, they let them do it anyway without a permit.

**M:** Yeah, but I didn't let them white people do it. I stood up. That's what I got mad about Leo.

**J:** So they were in the county jurisdiction before they got to the city.

**M:** No, you didn't follow me. We had two groups. The blacks marched down Florida Avenue –

**J:** No, I know, but the whites were coming out of the county into town –

**M:** Well, you know where the Boulevard runs out there, you know where Wabash Avenue is? They gathered up out there around those truck stops.

**J:** Kathleen.

**M:** And you know it's just about three miles west of Lakeland down there on the north side. Well if you go down the Boulevard, just go straight on across there. And they was all down there. But they'd marched up about a mile that day and I had to stop every one of 'em. Until I kind of broke it up. The next day, there was some more that done it again. We was right there again. So I said 'you can march, but you goin' to abide by the law', you know, 'and you get you a permit and you can march two abreast four foot apart so I can walk in front of you if I wanted to, you can't block the road'. They did it the third time and that was the end of it. But what I got mad about was that Leo and them didn't do what I did, you know? Just cause you black, as far as I'm concerned, you abide by the law. But that happened in my administration.

**J:** You mentioned the gentleman in Jacksonville or Duval County, the Sheriff there -

**M:** Yeah, Rex Sweat –

**J:** That you worked with?

**M:** No, I worked with him over the phone.

**J:** Who were some of the sheriffs that you worked with around here and, during that time you were sheriff, who were some of the closest relations that you had with other sheriffs?

**M:** Well, when I was first elected Sheriff, Ed Blackburn was Sheriff in Hillsborough and Malcolm Beard beat him, and Willis McCall was up on this side. Broward Coker was in Highlands County and one of the, he's dead now, he was over in Hardee County, what was his name, he had a brother that worked for Citrus Mutual, that was some of the sheriffs. And Willis McCall was sheriff in Pasco County.

**J:** Or was it Lake County?

**M:** No, Willis McCall was in Lake County and, what was the sheriff's name over there in Pasco County at that time? I can't recall it right now. He's dead now.

**J:** Now Dave Starr, was he a colleague of yours in Orange County?

**M:** Yeah, and I worked with, I don't remember the sheriff's name yet in Osceola County right now, I should've remembered it.

**J:** The Sheriff's Association was certainly in existence then.

**M:** Yeah, the Sheriff's Association was put in effect about 1926.

**J:** Okay. What kind of help and support, and also activities did you have with them while you were Sheriff?

**M:** Well I had a good relation with all of 'em. We always got along real good.

**J:** Did you have yearly conventions or –

**M:** Yeah, you have 'em twice a year.

**J:** Twice a year.

**M:** And I was Chairman of the Board of the Sheriff's Association for three years.

**J:** When was that?

**M:** In about '73, along in those years for three years, four years, something like that. And I was on the board a lot of times and I often visited the legislature.

**J:** How often did you go up to the legislature?

**M:** Every time they was in session.

**J:** Every time they were in session?

**M:** I went up there and maybe spent a night or two and then come back. But when I was on the board, when we was trying to get some things through the legislature up there, you know, three or four of us would go up there, the sheriff from Duval County that died here not too long ago, he served after Rex Whitley. [Probably Dale Carson]

**J:** Did you work closely with the legislature, the legislative delegation from this area?

**M:** Yeah, real good. We had no problems. Cause you know they was all friends of mine and we was kind of elected at the same time. We got along real good. We never had problems.

**J:** What about the U.S. congressmen?

**M:** Well I was always close to Spessard Holland so when he was elected for Governor and I think he had taken the place for a guy by the name of Andrews in the House of Representatives or the Congress. But he was a good guy, and he was a good Senator. And if you wrote him a letter, he'd darn sure answer--and the next day. I'll tell you a little story.

They was a guy who was a drunk here in Lakeland, and he worked at the Post Office. He'd invariably get drunk, and he would call me and say he wanted me to get a will made for him. So finally I got tired of it and we had a lawyer over there in Bartow and I told him that he wanted everything he had made to the Florida Sheriff's Boys' Ranch so he said 'well bring the drunk down here and I'll fix it for you'. And he fixed it and one day I went in Mike's Men's Store right after Christmas to buy a suit of clothes, they marked 'em down. Well I walked in and they said a man had just come D.O.A. at the hospital just a few minutes from out on the Boulevard out there and I figured 'I betcha that's him' so I went to the hospital and it was him.

**J:** Was he hit by a car?

**M:** No, he got strangled. What he did, he drank that booze and went home one night and got loaded, it got in his throat and he strangled. His family said he strangled himself to death. But he had been married to a lady that was buried in Alma, Georgia. I guess that was his second marriage or something or other. So, kind of the end of the story, I was made the administrator of his estate. He said he was working on in the planning this boys' ranch and he didn't have no relatives nowhere, that was his story. So he had an insurance policy for \$10,000 with the government, so it takes eight months as you well know to whittle out a will, you know, and everybody's satisfied and nobody's protesting it. So he had another little policy, like \$2500 or \$2000 but he had never paid the funeral expenses on this wife up there where she was buried, so when he died, actually he had a debt from a credit union and a man knocked on the door down there at the office and he said he come to talk to me to see if I could pay him that money. I said 'how much he owed?' and he said '\$1200'. And I said 'how much did he borrow?' and he said '\$600' and I said 'you going to trade now? I'll give you the \$600, I'll write you a check for \$600' and he said 'give it to me'.

So kind of the end of the story, they finally worked it all out and everybody was paid out, then he had to be buried. We had to send him to Alma, Georgia. And he called up there to Alma, Georgia, and the man said 'he didn't pay me for the funeral services for his wife. I don't want him up here'. And he said 'let me go a little farther with you', he said 'the sheriff was the administrator of this' and he said 'I'll just tell you what he would do, if he tells you he'll pay it, then he'll pay it his self' so he said 'well send the casket on up here'. So we buried him.

So I went through all the garbage you have to go through and so wound up in the Post Office down there and asked the lady down there that worked in there 'is this all we need?' and she said 'yes' so I walked over and dropped it in the Post Office. It went for 8-1/2 months and didn't hear nothing from it. This is the way government's run. And I paid all the little debts off then so one day I got tired of it so I called the girl in and was a nice person, and I said 'write to this man', and I dictated a letter to Uncle Spessard. So I went to a funeral the next day or two and the lady there called me off and said 'we got a call from Pennsylvania this morning that said that they got a letter from Spessard Holland, and it said we didn't get the receipts and this thing' and she happened to be one of the ones that helped me put it together a little bit down here, like what all I had to do to get the money.