

Interview with Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander

10/12/77

I was born on January 2, 1898, in Philadelphia, in a house which bore the number 2908 Diamond Street. This house was just this year declared a historic house, not because I was born there, but rather, because my distinguished uncle, Henry Osawa Tanner, lived there the majority of his early life, in fact, up till he had expatriated himself by going to Paris.

My mother said I was destined to be born, because she was cleaning her bedroom on the second floor of the house, when she tried to move a solid cherrywood bed. And as she went to push the heavy bed, she felt something drop. And that was the first time she knew that she was pregnant. She told her husband and he said, well, I guess this is the loss...we're not going to have another baby...because she'd had several miscarriages. However, the doctor came and said, get into bed, which she had done, and I went back into position.

Soon thereafter, she had my brother and sister, putting them on the Ridge Avenue trolley, which, after all, my mother told me, was a wooden trolley pulled by horses. And the conductor started off after she got the two children up into the trolley, and dragged my mother for almost a half a block on Ridge Avenue, between Twenty-ninth and Diamond. She then knew that she wasn't going to keep this baby. But I still stuck. And so my mother used to say that I was destined to come into the world, and if I would tell you my medical history, you would agree with me that I was destined to live for some years.

Before my mother was out of bed, because in those days they kept you in bed forever, my grandfather, Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner, came to visit. He was then presiding over the Kansas district of the African Methodist Episcopal church, and having business in the east, he came to see his new grandchild. And my mother was very concerned about naming me, because my father had named the first-born, my sister, Elizabeth, after his mother. And when a son came, he had to be named Aaron, after my father's father or grand-father, and my father was Aaron. Well, my mother made up her mind, he will not name another one. So she said to her father, Papa, look up in that closet and you will find a bottle of water that Henry, referring to Henry Tanner, the artist, brought from the river of Jordan. I want you to baptize this baby. And she got that idea because we lived in an Irish Catholic neighborhood. And when there was a child born to a family in which one of the parents was a Protestant, invariably they would come over to 2908 Diamond Street, and ask Bishop Tanner to baptize the baby so they could tell the Catholic member of the family, parent, that the baby has been baptized. My mother's reason was that she wanted to name me, but I discovered years later, when I applied for a birth certificate, that my name was not on the certificate. I was only registered as a female child.

Fortunately, my mother was still living, so I got my birth certificate.

Now my mother and father separated. I have no recollection of seeing my father, because I wasn't a year old when he deserted her. I did not know that my father was dead until I was in eighth grade when children told me at school. And I came back and asked my mother and she then told me that what they said was true. My mother never told me why, or what happened.... because my father was a graduate of Lincoln University, the first Negro to graduate from the Law School of the University of Pennsylvania, and therefore held a high position. She never told me, but I only thought the thing out for myself. It was a deep embarrassment in my mother's day, for her husband to desert her, and for her to have to change her style of living.

So she had a sister who was married to Louis Baxter Moore, the first black person who got a PhD. from the University of Pennsylvania. And he was a dean of education at Howard University. Dean Moore and my Aunt Sadie, I wasn't named for her, I was named for my grandmother, she was named for her mother, persuaded my mother to come to Washington and they said, we can always get work for you at Howard University. In addition, our grandparents, the Tanner grandparents, bought a home for us. Although we had a home in Washington, my mother would come back to Philadelphia every time she had a cold, it seemed to me. And since I was the youngest, six years difference between me and my brother, and seven between me and my sister, she left the two older children with my uncle and aunt, the Moores in Washington, and brought me to Philadelphia. So I scarcely ever finished a full term in Washington. But when I got to high school, and my mother had me apply for Girls' High School, they wanted to put me back a year. So my mother said, No, she would not have me suffer that way. She promised she'd leave me till I finished high school.

I finished high school and I was awarded a scholarship to Howard University. Now Howard University played a big part in my life. They used to have speakers from all over the world come to Howard University, and I remember distinctly Booker T. Washington coming. Now I think I remember, I may have heard it so often, but I do recall that they had planned a reception for Mr. Washington, and that he first said, when he got up to speak, how he regretted that he couldn't stay for the reception. And he jokingly said that people who come to Washington and breathe the air of Washington overnight, seem never able to leave. And he was afraid to stay that long. He wouldn't get back to Tuskegee.

Also, in my grandfather's home in Philadelphia I would meet distinguished citizens because my grandfather was one of the better lettered men of his time -- he was a graduate of Avery College and Western Theological School in Pittsburgh. And he was a writer -- I have seven books that he published. They were mostly about religion and the development of the African Methodist Episcopal church.

Now, back to Howard University. I sewed all summer, getting ready to be the best-dressed girl on the campus. When it got to the end of August, my mother told me ... I didn't want to spoil your summer, Sadie, but you're not going to Howard University. I've been out to the University of Pennsylvania, and I have got your credits and I've deposited them, and they are going to admit you. Well, I tell you, I could never explain the distress that I felt. All my friends that I'd gone through high school with, were going, most of them, to Howard University. I was going to live as I had for the four years I was in high school, with my uncle on the campus. I loved the place. But my mother said .. I would be very unwise to let you go back to Washington to Howard University when you have right here in Philadelphia a great university. And I hate to see you so discouraged, but you are going to the University of Pennsylvania.

I jumped up and down on the bed trying to break the springs. I cried and she just let me alone. Well, in my day, you didn't do what you wanted to do. You didn't do your thing. You did the thing your parents told you to do. So out to the University of Pennsylvania I went. I didn't know a soul. I didn't even know my way around the campus. I really didn't know anybody to say goodmorning to. But, I buckled down and there was one thing I had learned in Washington. I went to what was then known as M Street High School. It's now Dunbar. It's the school which Judge Hastings attended. Robert Weaver, who was the first black cabinet member, he was appointed under Franklin Roosevelt... Well I don't need to go on. And all of our teachers were graduates of the leading universities because they couldn't teach any place else. And they put in us a determination that nobody would beat us. And I started that way. I used to pray every night, ..ask the Lord to give me the ability to do whatever I had to do the very best I could do it. After a while I began to realize that I didn't need to ask the Lord for that...because I only knew how to do it the best. I only knew how to give every answer possible to a question.

(WMP: Well that's great. Now maybe you'll tell us now what you achieved in your life.)

Well, I finished Penn undergraduate school in three years. I was propelled to do this because my grandfather was approaching ninety, and I was dependent upon him for my tuition. And when I finished my undergraduate school, I received a graduate scholarship and that paid my tuition in full. But I was determined I wanted to be a fellow and do you know, in my day, they only had three fellowships for which a woman could apply. We couldn't get the Harrison Fellowships; just three. The head of my depart-

ment, Dr. Henry Miner Patterson, helped. He said that his department had voted entirely they would support me for a fellowship. Well I knew what day they were meeting. When the meeting was over I was still in the library waiting to hear. And Dr. Patterson told me to come over to his office. When I got over there he asked me what had I done to the books of a student, a graduate student, who was in the library; graduate students who had qualified for the PhD. course, had their own desks upstairs in the library. I told him I had never touched anybody's books. So he said that Dr. Jastro, the librarian, had got up and made a speech against me and said that under no circumstances should I have it, because I had disturbed all these books of a student who was just at the point where she was comparing the citations to make certain they were correct. Well, Dr. Patterson said ..well, I will go back...but it's too late..they've already awarded it to someone else. But when the members of the faculty found out that Dr. Jastro had mistaken me for another colored woman, Jessie Fawcett, who had been one of my teachers in high school, a Philadelphian who graduated from Girls' High School, got the scholarship to Bryn Mawr; they wouldn't admit her and they arranged for her to go to Cornell. I was sick. But they stood behind me in the next year, and I got the Francis Sergeant Pepper Fellowship and that was what I wanted above all..to be a fellow of the university, and of one of the outstanding endowments. That paid my tuition and as I recall, gave me about \$25 a month, which was a lot of money in those days, and at least I knew my car-fare was ready, my lunches settled.

Now, in June of 1921, I received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in economics. It was a great occasion because I was the first black woman in the United States to qualify and to receive the degree. And I can well remember marching down Broad Street from Merchantile Hall to the Academy of Music when there were photographers from all over the world taking my picture. All of the glory of that occasion faded, however, quickly, when I tried to get a position. Dr. Patterson, we used to call him Smiling Sol, was the chairman of the department of Insurance, in which I had minored, was certain he was going to get me placed with one of the insurance companies. But he couldn't. In fact, he became so incensed over the fact that no one would take me, that he refused to recommend anybody that year, to any of the corporations. As a result, I finally won a position with the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company in Durham, North Carolina. The president was C. C. Spaulding. It was one of the leading insurance companies in the country. I became assistant actuary. I must say that my days in Durham were not happy. There was a kind of prejudice down there that I knew nothing about. And there was a life that I knew nothing about. I had never tasted turnip greens; I didn't know what they were. So one day at dinner, and I was living in a very comfortable home of one of the insurance executives, I tasted the turnip greens and I didn't know they were bitter, and I thought that the lady had chicken, the head of the house, and I thought that she'd gotten some of the gaul from the chicken onto the turnip greens. And I said to her,

Oh, I guess some of the gaul got over here. She said, what are you talking about? Well, it ended ... she immediately told me I had to move from her house .. that I was just a fool. Well, I was a dumb fool to go down to North Carolina when I had never lived south of Washington, and I'd been so well protected by living on the campus of Howard University and having a family to protect me. And, in addition, I found a great deal of prejudice among the black people down there against me because I came from the north and because I came from a northern university, and I had never been trained in a black university. And I led two years of great loneliness. I was never invited to join any one of the clubs, I wasn't invited anywhere. I went to church, and I had a good roommate who was very sympathetic, although she was a southern girl, but she was very, very kind.

And at any rate, I was waiting to get married. Raymond wrote me ... now when I say Raymond, that's my husband, who died recently, Raymond Pace Alexander, wrote me almost daily, and I wrote him daily. He wanted me to marry him, and I told him no, we might have a baby right away probably, and I didn't want that. But Raymond had finished Harvard Law School, came back to Philadelphia, passed the bar, then I resigned, and I came to Philadelphia in October of 1923, when he had passed the bar and in November, on November 29, 1923, I married Raymond Pace Alexander.

I stayed home the first year of my marriage. I couldn't get any work in Philadelphia..I <sup>couldn't have</sup> worked in the public schools because they didn't appoint people of my racial ancestry to high schools, and I was certainly not prepared to work in the primary grades. I worked with P.T.A., Parent Teachers Association, and NAACP..it was then the Odd Fellows Association which later became affiliated with Urban League. But this didn't fulfill my ambitions. My husband asked me what would I like to do, and I said, well, I think I'll study law, if you can afford to send me. He'd only been practising for a year. So he said, yes..he would do it, if I wanted to go, that would be fine. So I went to law school, and I enjoyed law school. However, I met with many obstacles, but I was strong enough then not to let them worry me. And also I realised that on the campus, as a graduate student, I had become really a pet.

(WMP: What law school did you go to?)

Penn. I was really a pet at Penn as a graduate student. Booth was a girl who came up from Texas and she had a teaching fellowship. She was working for her PhD. She told me some years later that she was scared to death all the time because they told her when she arrived that they had a Negro student and they were very proud of her, and they hoped that Miss Booth would not in any way offend the student and I was that student.

As I tell you the Jastro fiasco ... I was telling you I didn't get the fellowship .. that was something that hurt my professors deeply. Everybody was upset and they were trying to make me not lose courage, which I didn't. In the law school, Dean Michael, who didn't call on me, I would meet him in the hall and attempt to say good morning, and he'd walk as if he didn't see me. He told the other women students under no circumstances to invite me to join their club. And the women told me it's not them...after they got out...almost apologizing to me.

I made the Law Review my first year. Dean Michael said I shouldn't be appointed. Then the next year, my second year, I made it again, and the editor of the Law Review told Dean Michael that he would not be editor if the people who qualified were not on the board.

(WMP: Who was that?)

His father was once a teacher out there. Amram. It was Phil Amram who stood up, and that's how I made the Law Review. I had made it, but was actually admitted to it, and wrote many notes.

When I graduated, I'll never forget, the boys looked at the program and they saw my degrees; bachelor's, master's, PhD., and they began laughing, and they said, what degree is Sadie going to get next? And then, somebody yelled ... Mamma, Mamma! Mamma didn't come that fast. I passed the bar, and I remember going to the first bar meeting of the Philadelphia Bar Association ... a reception, a chancellor's reception. And General Francis Shunk Brown was at the head of the line. And when he saw me he said ... here she comes, she made the highest mark on the bar exam. Now I never had common sense to write to ask if that was a fact, so I could write it down, but that is what he said.

My husband opened his office to me and I enjoyed working there. He had a little difficulty with only one of his partners who didn't want a woman in the place, and my husband said..then 'I guess you would like to resign. And that stopped that. But at the same time he was never very nice to me, and he eventually did leave, or was asked to leave.

I had an unusual experience in my practice in the beginning. My husband assigned to me what he didn't want and what the other men didn't want. I don't know how the women are getting along today, but in order to get your foot in a firm, you had to take what was offered you. And he offered me the work of the Orphans Court. It was too tedious, and there was no occasion to be tried, and no excitement of a jury trial and so forth. Well, he needed me because if the Orphans Court work had been neglected ... so I got to work to clean up the backlog. One day, Judge Thompson of the Orphans Court, told his tipstaff to tell me that he'd like to see me. And I saw Judge Thompson's law clerk and asked him when I could see the judge and I went

to see him and he said...we've been watching you, and you have a lot of this work. Now I want you to learn to do this work so well that when a judge sees your name on a backer I'll know this is all right. Now, every Friday...and that was on Friday you handed up your petition, after the judges have had their conference, Mr. McBride, that was his personal tipstaff, will call you. I want you to come over, and I'm going over your work, until I feel that you know what you're doing. Now, I did this for about four months, five months, until he said...well, I believe you've got the swing...you can go on your own. If you have any problems, you come to see me. And I thanked him and I have always appreciated it because that is a great thing ... to be able to hand up a petition to the judges of the Orphans Court and never have them ask you a question. Just take it for granted that if you've done it, it's all right. However, as I reflect upon what was done, I'm wondering whether the judges didn't get together and decide that...she's coming in and we don't want to be tangled up with some woman, because they did have one woman in particular, who never knew what she was doing. And they thought, well they'd straighten me out from the beginning. And the reason I question it is that once I had to take several petitions on an accident case in which a young boy had lost one of his limbs. And he came from a very prominent black family. He had a lot of witnesses because the boys were all out in the street playing ball, when the accident happened. There were plenty of people to testify as to what took place. Well, when I came in for guardians to be appointed, and the judge counted up the amount of money that had been awarded each one of these boys, he turned to his tipstaff, Mr. McBride, and said...did you ever see anything like this? What do you think of these niggers getting over a \$100,000? And I said, well, that is the way he refers to them, and I suppose he just decided that they would make a difference with me because they didn't want to get tangled. Anyway, it was a great value... what he did.

I continued to work for my husband and with him, until he was elected a judge. And then I opened my own office, where I stayed until very recently when I was invited by this firm to come over...in fact, I was going home to retire. Mr. Atkinson heard that I was and he came to see me and asked me would I come over as of counsel. Now people ask me ... what is of counsel. And I say, when you are old enough to be able to give young men advice.

I had a great deal of illness in my life following the birth of my children. Incidentally, I worried about getting married too early or we might have children. But I did not have a pregnancy until I had been married about eight years. And then I lost my first baby, a premature, at less than six months. I lost the second one, a terrible experience, at a little over six months, and I went back to try again. And I had my first born, to live; Mary, was born in 1934, although I was married

in 1923. She only weighed about five pounds, and then lost, and went to 4 - 8. But with good attention, she survived. And then I had one other daughter, and incidentally, each one of these pregnancies was a female. So when the last one was delivered, I was very, very ill. In fact, the doctor told my husband, ... I guess, Mr. Alexander, you know your wife cannot live. Raymond said, he thought the elevator would fall from under him. I had gone into labor, and then stopped and they had to do a Caesarian, and that is a most serious thing to happen. The nurse asked me for the name of the baby, and I said Rae Pace Alexander. And my husband came in and he told me what the nurse had said. And I told him...yes, that's the name. He said...now, you know that Sadie and Sarah are family names for generations in your family. Don't you want to name that baby for your grandmother or for yourself? I said no, this is as close as I can come to giving you a son. And this is the end of the road, because I was three months in the hospital after the birth.

Now my daughters both went to the Putney School in Putney, Vermont. And the older one, when she finished Putney, went to Barnard College, as you know, the women's side of Columbia University. My younger daughter also went to the Putney School, Putney, Vermont, and to Boston University. She has now completed all of the didactic work for her doctor's degree at Penn and is working on her thesis.

I have two grandchildren who are the children of my daughter, Mary, and her husband, Colonel Melvin F. Brown, who is now assigned to the Pentagon. Rae is married to Dr. Thomas K. Minter, who is deputy commissioner for secondary and primary education for the Department of Education in Washington, D.C. I am fortunate to have two grandchildren and maybe we might have another...we can never tell. And that both of my girls have well satisfied their parents by completing their education, and by making good wives, I hope...and I believe they have done.

My husband distinguished himself, and if you read the statement I made previously, you'll notice that I think he did more than that. He proved to be a wonderful husband. We were fortunate in having companionship for fifty-two years, less six days. We went to work together, we went home together, we talked together, we lived together. And having our children around us was a great happiness for both of us. I enjoyed the opportunity to give this brief story of my life.

I have failed to state my activities in the community; there's one experience that I think I should mention. I received a telephone call one day from Philandro Nash. He was a personal man to President Truman, especially in Negro affairs. So he told me that the President was going to appoint citizens to a committee to study the status of Negroes in the United States

and asked would I serve. And I told him yes. Well, I had never heard of him, and I didn't even tell my husband that I'd received it. You get a lot of foolish calls on the telephone. I thought this is someone who's pulling my leg. Maybe three months later, I got a call from the White House that I had been appointed to the Truman Committee on Civil Rights, which was a great experience. In fact, I would say that Mr. Truman deserves much more credit for what he did than I believe he's gotten. For fifteen private citizens to be appointed by the President of the United States to study the status of civil rights in the nation, and to make a report critical of the government, or not critical, and to have this report printed by the Government Printing Office, they printed over a 100,000 and they all were absorbed in one day...and Mr. Truman permitted additional printing to be printed. That this should happen in a nation such as ours is a rare thing. It is a great nation of which the people can say what is bad. And that is what we were permitted to do.

My experience on the committee proved interesting. One thing was, we first met at the White House. And we had lunch there. So I asked the question, now where are we going to meet, and where are we going to eat? Mr. Wilson, who was president of General Electric at that time, said, we're going to eat here in the White House. And I said, well, where are we going to sleep? Oh we'll sleep in a hotel. To my amazement, he really didn't believe the situation was as bad as it was in Washington.

Not until John Carey, you remember John Carey, labor man, said Sadie's right...she's right... we can't eat here all the time. And I said, no I don't want to seek protection by eating in the White House and I'm not going to ask my friends in Washington to give me a place to sleep, as I had to do this time. I'm happy to serve my government, but I'll only do it if my government will serve me. Now all these hotels here..the White House has only to ask, and it will be done.

So, as a result, we stayed at the Statler. The Statler asked if all of the members of the committee would stay there. And they agreed to do it although there were some who wanted to stay at more exclusive hotels, but they agreed to stay. One day I was going to lunch and I was to meet some members of the committee in the dining room. And as I entered, the head waiter put his hand up and he said...they're reserved. I said yes, I have a seat reserved right down there. Frank Roosevelt's down there, that's where I'm going. I have a seat reserved. No, you can't go there. And Mr. Wilson was behind me, and he said...oh, yes she can...come on, Mrs. Alexander, come down with me. And then he said to me when we sat down...You know, I know what you said at the first meeting. But if I hadn't seen this, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it.

Well, at least, I'll tell you one thing we did. We opened the hotels because after we had made our report, every time I wanted to go to Washington, I called Mr. Nash to tell him I was coming, and I needed a room. And that's the way I got a room. One day I was at the Washington Hotel and they wouldn't wait on me. They sent a colored girl who was a busgirl. And when I left, I gave her a dollar, but I put the dollar down where it couldn't be seen. But I didn't have any more trouble after I gave her that dollar, getting served.

I also served for twenty-five years on the National Board of the Urban League. I've served on the national board of the Committee for Christians and Jews, and I guess I should have made a list because it's quite long, but the names of the different organizations slip your mind. My secretary recently told me, the one who's now my secretary, Mrs. Alexander, it's the first time in my life that I ever worked for anyone who spent at least half, if not more of their time on things that have nothing to do with their business. So I said, Well, this is my business. My business is to serve my community as well as my clients.

So I lead a very busy life. I've just been put on the board of the PAL organization. I accepted because my husband was active in it and I thought he would want me to carry on the work that he had done.

(WMP: What organization was that?)

Police Athletic League. And then I've been in the Bar Association. I was president of the Philadelphia Bar Foundation for one term. I've enjoyed my work both in the community, in my home, and in my profession.

(WMP: Very good. Sadie, the first question that I want to put to you about the city, is...what had you done that Joe Clark selected you for membership on the Human Relations Commission, and later, I guess, on the City Charter Commission.)

What commission?

(WMP: Weren't you on the City Charter Commission?)

No, I went before them, but I was not a commissioner.

(WMP: Okay. Let's tell about the Human Relations Commission, then.)

I was an assistant city solicitor.....I was not a member of the City Charter Commission. I did however, work with Murray Shusterman to prepare a statement for the charter to provide for a commission on human relations. We were working as part of the Fellowship Commission. And as you know, Murray Shusterman was a drafter of much of the legislation for City Council. We presented to the commission the proposal...I presented the

proposal to the full commission. And they accepted it exactly as it had been prepared with the exception that they cut us down to seven commissioners, as I recall...it might have been five, but I don't know. It was the opinion of all of us who were concerned about this, that we, the commissioners not being paid, and they having to sit on the various cases, we would have to have more than six or seven commissioners in order to carry out the work on a volunteer basis. And the Charter Commission made the change and gave us nine. And other than that we got everything we asked for in the law. We didn't get all the money we asked for at that time, but there was hardly a year that we didn't get an increase in our budget.

Frank Loescher was executive director when we first came in. Frank was a very good-hearted man. He was a strong Quaker and he hoped that you could always settle everything by conciliation. And that wasn't possible. It wasn't in his type of mind and his whole life, to force people to do anything... they were to agree upon it...

(WMP: Frank was the first executive of the commission. You hired him, didn't you?)

Yes. He had been working on some little committee before we hired him. He'd been in this field. But anyway, we then got George Schirmer, who was a very strong executive. In the early years the mayor didn't pay any attention to what we were doing.

(WMP: Joe Clark.)

Joe Clark called us when he was in need. I remember when we were facing a race riot at Abbotsford, and Joe Clark sent for us to come in. He followed our advice as to what to do.

(WMP: I went out to that situation...it was very tense.)

Very tense, very tense. And he was with us and he attempted to get for us whatever we needed. Dick Dilworth did the same thing. And they didn't meddle in our cases. Then along we came with the Tate administration. At first Mayor Tate didn't bother us, but then it seemed as if he and Rizzo began to feel that maybe we were going too far on some of these cases. Particularly when we would send our investigators out to rent a house or an apartment. And they would find that there was a vacancy. And then, the person who had been there and had been told that the applicant had already been, and had been told that there was no vacancy, we sent an investigator and they'd got plenty of vacancies. And then we cite the owner or the rental agent to come in with his books and so forth...they would

complain, you see, and some of them were very important people in the community, making the complaint. And then the complaints started getting over to city hall and we began to feel the strings being drawn in.

(WMP: Did you have the power to subpoena them?)

Oh yes. Yes, we had the power. Then there was a lot of police brutality. When they took the police...what was the name of the board of investigation..we had a civilian board..

(WMP: Police Advisory Board.)

That's it. They decided that the police should police themselves. Well, that was just the end of it. When I left the office we'd had any number of complaints about police brutality. But, you could get a hearing before the police board and you'd never get a word as to what the results were. They wouldn't tell you anything.

Well, Mayor Tate then decided that he'd better get rid of me. And he told several people to tell me to resign. One of them was Austin Norris. So Austin told me and I said I hadn't done anything to resign and furthermore I know Mayor Tate well enough...why didn't he tell me...what have I done? What have I done? Mayor Tate spoke to my husband and my husband told him, Jim, I don't bother my wife with her activities. If she's wrong, you know what to do. Well, he then called me on the telephone and he said to me, I have tried every way to let you know I want you to resign. I said, I know...I got the message. Well, why don't you resign? I said, I want to know why I have to resign. Now we were coming to an election and I knew he wasn't going to fire me before an election. And I told them, now, you can fire me, but I'm not going to resign...unless you give me some reason, to know what I did was wrong. He hung up the telephone; he stopped speaking to Raymond. So after the election, I knew he was going to fire me then, so I resigned and Austin arranged a great big luncheon at the Warwick for me.

And Clarence Farmer came in. Interestingly enough, Clarence Farmer came in as executive director. He then had himself made chairman, and he had a council...he or the mayor ... council passed a resolution that he could be both executive director and chairman and his salary is that of any other commissioner, and he has an automobile. <sup>We didn't ever receive a penny.</sup> I served 15 years, and would pay for my lunch and everything...never thought of taking anything. Never thought of asking for it. But, I'll say this, we had a commission that was respected throughout the United States, when we were allowed to operate.

About the cases.

(WMP: What were some of the precedents-making cases?)

I don't know that they were precedent-making, other than that they did clean up a terrible situation. You probably don't realize

that when I came to the bar in 1927, there wasn't an office building in Philadelphia that would rent to a black person. When my husband came in 1921, he had to go to Broad and Lombard Streets and rent an office in what used to be a bank on the corner there. And he was so determined that he would not stay down there that he came up to Twelfth and Chesnut, which was then the Provident. They gave him a one-year lease, but the tenants objected to a black tenant, and they wouldn't renew it.

(WMP: What year was that?)

1921, '22. His lease was up in '23. I can remember it because I married in '23 and I thought when I came to our home, that nobody could put me out of there, but here he was with a flourishing business and no place to take it. He met one of his classmates on the street and told him this story and his concern. And the classmate got him on the corner, the north-west corner of Nineteenth and Chestnut, but it was an awful building. As a result, after the crash, I refer to the financial crash of 1929, we had exactly \$40,000 left. Raymond purchased the south-west corner of Nineteenth and Chestnut, used Yellin as contractor and Frank Hahn as architect and built the building that's still there so that he could have an office that was on Chestnut, or in the business section.

Shortly before this, I'm going ahead...they built the movie theatre at Nineteenth and Chestnut, on the southeast corner and they opened it by playing The Ten Commandments. There were two young women in Philadelphia, their maiden names were Chew. One of them was of brown skin, the other one so fair, you would say she was white. They went to get tickets and the white girl was the one who got <sup>the</sup> tickets....and she said... my sister is behind me....she went in, and they caught the brown skinned sister and pulled her aside and told her she couldn't go in. They were playing The Ten Commandments.

(WMP: What year was that?)

It was somewhere around '29. As a result, wherever my husband and I would go, to any public meeting and so forth, and we had a chance to speak, we would tell people...if you're denied the right to come into a movie theatre, if you are denied the right to eat in a restaurant, come to see us...we're not charging you anything. We only ask one thing. That you stick to the case until it's tried. If you have to come down four times, that's the way we want you to pay it.

Well, of the case of the old there at Nineteenth and Chestnut, we used to get John Doe warrants because we didn't know the manager's name. And we then had police wagons, with horses around here in 1929, and we would get the warrant, and then have them go pick up the man who's the manager.

Well, one day the manager came over to our office, and he his handkerchief, and he said, I surrender. And he went to my husband, and he said..my wife cannot stand this strain...because maybe today someone will come in say, what happened to him, and maybe somebody will come in tomorrow and maybe next week. But whoever would come, we'd get the warrant... even if we had to pay for it. And he said...my wife can't stand it..they can fire me..they can have the job. But I'm not going to do it. Then he gave us passes to use, which we never used because..we didn't use them because we didn't believe that anybody was going to get in as we got in.

Doug Stubbs, who was a graduate of Harvard Medical School, who passed the national boards number one in the United States, and his wife, who was John Turner's daughter, you remember John P. Turner, Board of Education member, and Charlotte West Strickland, whose father was the dean of the Medical School at Howard University, and Dr. Wilbur Strickland, whose father was also a physician in Philadelphia. They were in the theater down here at Twelfth and Market..I don't remember the name of that one.. And they were refused. I'll tell you<sup>of</sup> the character of the people...both of those girls were college graduates, well-trained, refined people. The husband's a fine physician.

Well, we would go around and that is how we finally broke up the segregation in the theatre. In the movies, they'd seat you upstairs in the balcony, but they wouldn't seat up downstairs.

And when we went to Stouffers on Chestnut Street, Marjorie Penney went, a girl named Davis, who was a colored girl, I can't think of the others<sup>who went</sup>...they put salt in the food. Now you don't have any precedent-making cases to record, but all you do have to say is...when I see colored people walking in the hotels, and when I see them in front row seats in the movies, I say to myself, this is what we did.

(WMP: Right. That's something to be proud of.)

Yes, this is what we did. Now, of course, I'll tell you another thing that I did. My sister-in-law, Virginia Alexander, was a physician. She had quite a fine practice. She was looking for an associate. As a result, she obtained another physician from the University of Illinois, whose name was Dr. Helen Dickens. Dr. Dickens came and lived in the home with my sister-in-law, and my father-in-law. And I observed her and I said to her, Helen, you're too smart to be carrying a bag the rest of your life. Go back to Penn, take your didactic year, get a specialty in whatever. Well, finally, it took me about five years to get her to do that. She called me one day after she'd made application and said...Sadie, you have too much ambition for me..they won't take me. I said, how do you know it? ...I got a letter; the letter says they won't take a colored student. I said, what stationery is that on? She said...it's on University stationery. I said, bring me that letter. I got the letter. I called President Gates and I told him. He asked me the same thing I'd asked

her. Is it on University stationery? Would you let me see that letter? I said, yes, I will. I sent it by messenger. He returned it. Then he called me and asked me to come out a certain day. I went out. He had the dean of the graduate school there, the vice-president in charge of all these deans, and he said to the dean of the graduate school who had signed this letter, ...do you have with you Dr. Dickens' application? He said...I do, sir. I'll never forget it, because he stood, all the time he was being interrogated by the president. Did she graduate from a school that is approved and would warrant her admission to our graduate school of medicine? She did, sir. She graduated from the University of Illinois Medical School.... Did she graduate with such distinction as to warrant her admission? .....She did, sir; she graduated with honors..... Whereupon the president turned to me and said, well, Mrs. Alexander, we don't have any problem. He said to the dean... you tell Mrs. Alexander when her friend should come to register. He said...I will send that information to Dr. Dickens.... He said, evidently you didn't understand my question. Will you answer it please?.... The dean then told me, and I said,...where, what's the room number, you know, to get it all straight, the time, everything. And he said he would also confirm it and I said ...thank you very much. We shook hands and I left.

As a result of that, the Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania would not elect me, and Helen, my friend, was elected very soon thereafter. And she went to every meeting to find out what was going to be said when my name came up. And they said I was a troublemaker.

(WMP: What are the Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania? I've never heard of them before. Is that an organization?)

Yes. They finally elected me just a short while ago.

(WMP: You have to have achieved in life to be that, I guess. It's an honorary thing?)

Yes, yes. It's women of distinction, supposed to be, who made some distinction in their lives. Dr. Dickens is now a full professor of gynecology and obstetrics at Penn. I don't <sup>think</sup> they know all this; these people out there don't know it. But, you see, when you do all these things, you're a troublemaker. And Raymond had a lot of trouble because he was a troublemaker.

(WMP: You told of yourself very well, Sadie, thank you very much.)

My pleasure.