

SK: Today is February 10, 2005. This is Stacey Klingler interviewing James Miles at the Putnam County Museum. All righty. I see that you brought some... Hopefully that will keep working. Or maybe it won't. Try that again. That should get us going. All righty. So you brought some pictures with you. Do you want to talk about those first?

JM: Yeah, please.

SK: All righty. Which one would you like to start out with?

JM: I'll start out with these. This is my father's brother's children, Eunice Miles. And these are his children. You know, it just... It gets you sometimes when you look at these pictures and all... They're dead. Now this was Uncle Eunice's son, Fay. And Fay disappeared. And they did everything they could to locate him. He'd never been found.

SK: Was that here in Greencastle?

JM: Uh-huh.

SK: Wow.

JM: This is Fay. And this is Sister Elizabeth.

SK: Elizabeth.

JM: And this is his sister. They called her Ruthie. But her name was Estelle, Ruth Estelle.

SK: Ruth Estelle.

JM: Now this is so...

SK: And was this taken in Greencastle, do you think?

JM: Yes. Uh-huh. Because he cooked, Uncle Eunice cooked at the Phi Psi house for over 30 years.

SK: 30 years? About when would that have been?

JM: I know he was cooking there when I was in high school, when I was growing up.

SK: So would that have been...

JM: We moved into that house where we are in 1932.

SK: So he definitely was cooking there in the 30s and 40s.

JM: Uh-huh. See it was different then. All the houses had black cooks. The sororities and fraternity houses. Now this picture was given to me, given to Francis, my sister. And most of these people I don't know. And you know there used to be a Chestnut Street?

SK: Yes, I just learned about that yesterday from Charlotte Churchill.

JM: This is taken on Chestnut Street.

SK: Oh, okay.

JM: This is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins.

SK: Okay. Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins. And they lived there on Chestnut Street. Are they still around Greencastle or their descendants?

JM: They're dead.

SK: And would this be like a family photo probably in front of their house or was this a church photo?

JM: No, this was not a family photo because I know some of the people and their families weren't that big.

SK: So do you have any idea what kind of group it might have been that would have been gathered?

JM: It was a church group.

SK: A church group of some sort.

JM: Yes.

SK: Any idea what church that might have been?

JM: Well, it could either be the Methodist Church or the Baptist Church. Now some of these people I think they belong to both churches.

SK: Okay.

JM: Now here's one that was taken at the Methodist Church. And I don't know what year it was.

SK: Now that one I think we have actually from Charlotte Kyle.

JM: Uh-huh.

SK: She said the Sunday school class there.

JM: Uh-huh. And here's some pictures. But we don't know at this time whether there were blacks in the schools or not. Because there was a black school there.

SK: Now that was quite a while back, right? I think on Hannah Street is where I've heard about it being. Though nobody knows where on Hannah Street it was.

JM: Yeah. Now these are just pictures of the schools. And they have black students in them.

SK: Oh, neat.

JM: We got the names on some of them. This was the first ward. First grade, 1911.

SK: Okay. And do you have any idea which school this one might have been?

JM: No, I don't. No.

SK: This one's new.

JM: It could have been. I don't know. I don't know if these are the same students or not.

SK: Yeah, hard to say. But this one you said is first ward.

JM: Yeah. Now they've got something on the back that says. They've got the names of the students.

SK: Now do you have any idea where these photos, the original photos are?

JM: Uh, no. I don't know where they were taken. All I know is they were taken here.

SK: 1911. They don't look very happy, do they? They're all kind of grim, grim photos. So, all right. We've got those two school photos.

JM: And this is the baseball team. I don't know what year it was. And there's a black person there on that.

SK: High school baseball team. Neat

JM: I almost fell out of my chair when I found this. I didn't even know we had it. This is a picture of my family. But all I remember is my mother and father and myself. I was born 11 years later.

SK: Now, your parents' names, your father was?

JM: Frank. Frank Morrow.

SK: And your mother?

JM: Her name was Louise Dickens from North Carolina.

SK: So this picture is before they would have come to Greencastle?

JM: That was taken in Greencastle.

SK: Oh, it was?

JM: Okay. Francis was born in Greencastle. All of them were born in Greencastle except myself. Okay. I was born in Terre Haute. My mother was born in North Carolina. But my father and all the children were born in Greencastle.

SK: Okay. So your father was born in Greencastle. Do you know about when that would have been? When he was born?

JM: No, I shouldn't. We've got pictures and things. We were trying to start a bibliography. But that takes a lot of time.

SK: Yes.

JM: Later, we had a cousin and we didn't even know it. He called Washington, D.C. One of my cousins had a widow in Washington. So he called Crystal and wanted to know if she knew of any Miles. And she said, yes. She said, I have two cousins in Greencastle. So he wanted our telephone number. She told him, she said, I don't know you. She said, we'll do it like this. I'll call them and tell them what you want. And give them your number. And if they want to call you, they will. So we called and his name

is Arthur Thomas. And he lives in Ohio. And my mother raised his father and another brother. She would be talking about old man Thomas. They didn't get along at all. So that's how it all started. My grandfather was a free slave from Shelby County, Kentucky, and he was a brick mason.

SK: And what was his name?

JM: John Henry Miles.

SK: So this John Henry is named after him?

JM: Yeah. And I was named after one of the boys that my mother raised.

SK: Okay. And you said he was from Shelbyville, Kentucky?

JM: Uh huh, Shelby County. He was a twin. There are a lot of twins in the family. Except our family. But he was a twin. He had a twin sister. And he was a little boy. And they put him on the auction block. They sold the family. He never saw any of his family again.

SK: Wow. Wow. That's... I can't imagine what that must have been like. But you said he was freed at some point then and moved here to Greencastle?

JM: Yeah, he was freed when he came. Well first he came to Bloomington. And he stayed, I don't know how long. And then he went back to Shelby County. And then the next time he came, he came to Greencastle. And that's where he stayed.

SK: Do you know about when that would have been?

JM: It was in the 1880s. 1858 or something like that. I should have brought those letters. We have letters that tells all of that. Yeah.

SK: That would be kind of neat. We could make some copies of that so you could keep those originals. We wouldn't want to.

JM: Well, I can. We've got enough copies to give away.

SK: Oh, okay.

JM: So, I'll bring them.

SK: So your grandfather came here from Shelbyville. And then did he marry somebody here in Greencastle or did he come with his wife?

JM: No, he married.

Her name was, she was a Herring. That's how we are connected with the Herrings.

SK: How do you spell Herring?

JM: H-E-R-R-I-N-G.

SK: Okay.

JM: And his mother died. His wife died, I mean. And he remarried. Okay. He married Roxy's mother, Mary Florence Smith. Her father was a preacher. But you would never know it by the way she acted. She was mean. She couldn't stand up. And lived right across the street from him.

SK: And the Herring family, his first wife, do you know what her name was?

JM: No, I've got it. Now, this is my mother and her sister, Louise Miles and Elizabeth Miles.

SK: Okay. Louise and Elizabeth.

SK: And did they both live here in Greencastle?

JM: Yes.

SK: All their lives probably?

JM: We're getting more and more cousins every year it seems like. Because my mother, she was small. Her father was a doctor. My mother's father was a doctor. He was a Scotsman. He came from Scotland.

And evidently slavery wasn't his cup of tea. But he had all those children. He saw that they were all educated. And they wanted, they were like my mother, they wanted to come to Greencastle and visit. But she told them no. She said that they've got everything. And they were, they were educated. They were doctors and lawyers and school teachers and they all had good jobs.

SK: Where did they live?

JM: They lived in, well the ones that we know now, they're in Virginia, Richland, Virginia. But they lived in North Carolina.

SK: And you said he was a doctor, her father was a doctor.

JM: Yeah.

SK: And what was his...

JM: No, no, her grandfather. Her grandfather. Yeah, her father was the doctor's son.

SK: And her grandfather's name was, do you know?

JM: Not really. Okay. All I know his last name was Jenkins.

SK: Jenkins, okay. So he lived in North Carolina and she was born there.

JM: Yeah, she and her sister. And she had a brother. And he wanted to come to visit us. She told him no.

SK: Just because she thought they...

JM: They were, you know, they had so much. And when we did meet them, after she died, there were a couple of ladies who wrote Frances a letter and wanted to know if it would be okay if they came to visit. Frances said, of course. So they came and they knew more about, of course, the family than we did. And there was a lady that lived down the street, her name was Mona Wagner. Now, Mr. Wagner was a story in itself. But they went down to visit her and when they came back, they told Frances, she said, that lady is your cousin. And she said, she's part of the family. And she had a Bible. And they looked through the Bible and that confirmed it.

SK: Looked back on the generations.

JM: And we had some cousins called Herring that lived on the... where Charlene lives now. It's on the corner of Crown and Howard.

SK: Crown and Howard? Okay.

JM: And they were Herring. And they lost their sight. I don't know what caused it. But one of them was a mail carrier and he carried mail until he lost his sight. And he was Charles Herring. And they say he was a genius. I know one thing, he'd have you rolling on the floor when he start telling some of the tales.

SK: Good storyteller.

JM: Yeah, he was a good man. And he lost his sight. And I have a niece and a nephew. They lost their sight. And they were brother and sister.

Now Stanley died. But he was a character. I was out there. But there was a nephew of mine. And Frankie told me, he said, Uncle Jimmy, if you have to go anywhere, he said, you tell Stanley. I said, okay. And Stanley asked me where I wanted to go. And I told him. And he got in the car. And he told me to go so far and you turn here and you turn there. And he guided me right to the place I wanted to go.

SK: He knew. He knew.

JM: And his sister is also blind. She's the oldest one of the family. My brother Eugene had 11 children.

SK: Wow.

JM: Six girls and five boys. And the boys are all dead. They were alcoholics and they used dope and all that. And they're dead. But I have most of the family, that family, still in California.

SK: Okay. Eugene's children.

JM: I went out there. They had a family reunion and they kept telling me that, calling me and telling me that you've got to come out here. And I told them, I said, I'm not going anywhere. I said, I cannot stand packing and carrying a suitcase.

SK: All that travelling.

JM: So anyway, Frankie, my cousin, he sent me a round-trip ticket and said, you have no excuse not to come out here. He said, here's your ticket. I went out there and stayed seven days. And what I found out that it was mostly about me. Because I'm the only uncle that they had left.

SK: Okay. Now that's, is that Howard Eugene Miles that was their father?

JM: Yeah.

SK: Okay. But he went by Eugene. Uh-huh. Okay. And was this picture taken at your house?

JM: I think it must have been. It was taken at Greencastle because I'm the only one in the barn in Terre Haute. Okay. And my father had to, he worked with the Pennsylvania Railroad. And in order to keep his job, he had to move to Terre Haute with the family.

SK: Right.

JM: But I hadn't arrived yet. I was 11 years younger than my brother, my brother Marshall.

SK: Yeah. You were a bit of a surprise then?

JM: And the doctor told my mother that I wouldn't live through the night. And I'm looking at my 82nd birthday now.

SK: Guess he wasn't right on the button there.

JM: No.

SK: How about this picture here?

JM: Now that's the cousin, I mean that's the nephew of mine. You can see he lives in Grand Rapids. And Frankie called me the other night and said that they told him that they'll come out to San Francisco and they want to stay two weeks.

SK: Oh.

JM: Because Frankie and Floyd have the same father with different mothers.

SK: Okay.

SK: And are these just friends of his?

JM: No.

SK: Are those other family members?

JM: Now this is his mother, the one on the end. And she was a beautiful person.

SK: Oh.

JM: Her name was Odellis. They lived in Brazil. Now this was taken in Grand Rapids.

SK: Okay.

JM: And these two girls with her are her sisters. And the man was Dr. Jones. Yeah. I don't know where I got this picture. We've got so many pictures. It had to be in an album because it's got a little in the back.

SK: Okay.

JM: But.

SK: All righty. Were there any other pictures you wanted to talk about? Or you've got more.

JM: This is Frankie. And I think it was his birthday. And that's his wife and the two girls are his daughters. And his wife, she's a Mexican. And they were in Mexico when she became ill. And she's been like that for 15 years. And that's why she's so big that the doctors won't operate. They know what she has. They say it's a rare, I think, kidney disease. And I think she has cancer. But it's in remission.

SK: What's her name?

JM: Adele.

SK: Adele?

JM: Mm-hmm. Rivera.

SK: And they all live in Grand Rapids now?

JM: No, no, no. He's in California.

SK: Oh, he's in California.

JM: Yeah.

SK: And do you know who the other two women in the photo are?

JM: Those are Frankie's daughters.

SK: Okay.

JM: And I can't think of their names.

SK: Okay.

JM: The girl standing in the white, her name is Lydia Dawn. D-A-W-N. And that's her older sister sitting next to Frankie.

SK: Mm-hmm.

JM: And let me see her name. Alicia. I think Alicia Kay.

SK: Alicia Kay. Okay.

JM: Oh, this is one of the persons that my mother raised, helped raise, and they were crazy about.

SK: The little girl there?

JM: No, no. Over here. All I ever heard, I don't know what his real name was, they called him Preach.

SK: Preach.

JM: And he was a character. And I sent his son, Arthur Thomas, in Ohio. I sent him a picture of his father. And he called me back and he was crying like a baby.

SK: Yeah.

JM: He said, that's the only picture I have of my father.

SK: So he went by Preach, but was his last name Thomas then?

JM: Yes, he was Thomas. Preach Thomas. And his brother was, I was named after his brother, James Arthur Thomas.

SK: And do you have any idea who the woman in the photo is?

JM: No.

SK: Okay.

JM: I don't think it was his wife.

SK: Okay.

JM: That's all I can say.

SK: All righty. Yeah. Any other photos there?

JM: Well, this is, I don't know how this got in here, but anyway. Okay. That's the best friend I ever had.

SK: Oh, you were talking about him, the man who lives up in Chicago. And his daughter?

JM: His daughter, yeah.

SK: His daughter. Neat.

JM: I brought her home from the hospital.

SK: Oh, neat. We'll let you hold on to those then.

JM: Okay.

SK :So, can I ask you a couple questions about high school? Okay. Would that be okay? I know you were talking about your grandfather having come here as a freed slave and marrying Mary Florence Smith. And they had how many kids, probably?

JM: Let me see. They had, I know they had two girls. Roxy was one of them. And her sister was named Ruth. And they were just as different from day to night.

SK: I believe it. And then were there kids from the first marriage, from the Herring?

JM: No. And Roxy didn't have any children. But her sister had, let me see, two girls. And they were as different as day as from night. Marjorie, that was the youngest girl's name. And Elizabeth was the oldest girl's name. And I forget how many boys they had. But Elizabeth was as sweet as anybody you ever wanted to meet. Marjorie was a hellion.

JM: She got hot at me. See, I lived in Chicago for almost 50 years. And she wanted my address, Marjorie. And when I went over there, she started telling me what a strange family it was. That I don't even know anybody, you know, I don't know anybody but you and Helen and Francis. So I told her, I said, I have an album I can bring over here and you can see for yourself. And I'll tell you who they are. Well, I

went over there with the album and I don't know what was wrong with her. But she said, I don't have time to look at those pictures. I don't know them anyway. I said, okay, I'll tell you one thing. I said, you won't have to worry about me coming back. And she got angry. And her husband was blind. And he also became angry. And I told him, I said, I've been in Chicago almost 50 years. And I said, here you come getting in touch with me. And all you want me to do is spend money for affairs that you go to. And I told him, I said, I'm not going to do it. I said, you can get mad if you want to. I said, but I'm not going to do it. I said, I have friends. I have places to go. And I said, I was in Chicago all these years. And when you do get in touch with me, you want me to spend money and go to a lot of things that you go to.

And she got angry. And I told her, I said, I don't care whether you're angry or not. I said, I'm not a person that you can use. I said, so you're just going about your business and I'm going about mine.

SK: Wow. Mm-hmm. And did you ever see them again? That was it.

JM: No. But I, she died. And they had a, I guess it was remembrance. And I got a card or a letter. So I went to the church and I sat by myself. And her brother and his wife were there and.