

































CATES: And he'd come in by jet plane, would he?

THOMAS: I don't know what kind of plane he come in on He'd come in on a plane.

CATES: How long did it usually take him to come down from Washington?

THOMAS: About two, about two or three hours--

CATES: Two or three hours? But he--would you say that he liked living in Washington better than Winder or you think he liked maybe both living down here some--

THOMAS: I think he liked the both of them.

CATES: He liked both.

THOMAS: Oh, yes.

CATES: Did he eat grits? What did he eat for breakfast? Did he eat grits?

THOMAS: Well, whatever he wanted. Sometime grits and sometimes poached eggs and sometimes oatmeal.

CATES: Well, what did you generally fix him for breakfast? Or did he leave it up to you?

THOMAS: I would ask him and he'd tell me and I'd have it fixed. He say sometimes he wanted a poached egg and I'd fix it on toast with milk and sometimes he wanted scrambled eggs. Whatever he wanted fixed I'd fix it for him.

CATES: What time did he generally eat breakfast?

THOMAS: Well, he'd eat sometime around about 9:30 and sometimes 10:00 o'clock, you know, when you work so hard, he'd work so hard when he'd first get down here and he'd get up and stir around, most times it was about 9:30, when he ate.

CATES: And then when would he eat lunch?

THOMAS: Well, whenever I got it done and put it on the table arid called him.

CATES: What would he generally eat for lunch?

THOMAS: Well, whatever I fixed and I fixed peas and onions, that onion you called.

CATES: Onion casserole?

THOMAS: Casserole. Sometime I fixed that and sometime I'd cook a roast either or either fry country-fried steak. Whatever I cooked, he ate it; he didn't say a word. And I'll say it, he just one person that was pleased about his something to eat.

CATES: Well, now, if you fixed him a big lunch, would he eat left-overs for supper?

THOMAS: No, I fixed him something else at night. I wouldn't let him eat the same thing. No, sir. I wouldn't let him eat the same thing I fixed for dinner.

CATES: What time would he eat dinner at night, supper?

THOMAS: Well, sometimes he'd eat pretty early, sometimes he wouldn't. It's according to when I got over there and got it done.

CATES: And what time would he go to bed? You say he'd get up about 9:30 in the morning and eat breakfast--

THOMAS: Well, I don't know. Sometime he'd go to bed, I don't know, sometime he went to bed around about 9:30 or 10:00 o'clock, I reckon, I'd leave from over there. He'd be up when I leave. I couldn't tell you what time he--

CATES: So you'd come back over here by 10:00?

THOMAS: Well, I'd be mostly about 9:00. 9:00, something, sometime I stay--I wash the dishes, you see, and that would make it about 9:00.

CATES: Did you have a dishwasher?

THOMAS: Well, they had one and it played out and I never did--because I didn't care nothing about that dishwasher. Cause you had to wash the dishes to put them in there and then I'd just soon to wash them.

CATES: How about washing his clothes and ironing, did you do any of that?

THOMAS: No, sir. He sent out his clothes to the laundry.

CATES: Did he take starch in his shirts?

THOMAS: Well, he used to, He told me he used to tell me to tell them not to put it. They got to the place, they quit putting starch in his shirts. I guess it rubbed his neck, you know. They starch them so they'll be stiff why somebody even put a little bit in there, you know, because like your shirt's ironed, they wouldn't be too much but they'd be ironed slick, you know.

CATES: Well, now, in his later years, was he able to get around over there and go upstairs?

THOMAS: Oh, yes. He never did quit going upstairs.

CATES: You say he never did quit going upstairs?

THOMAS: No, sir, No, sir, he never did quit going upstairs.

CATES: Well, now, was he born in that house over there?

THOMAS: No, sir, I don't think so. I don't know what house he was born at, He born somewhere around here in Winder but I don't know what house it was. I heard them talking about it but I don't know. Some of the other family could tell you better than I could.

CATES: Well, now, you knew his father, did you not?

THOMAS: Oh, yes, sir, I knowed Mr. Judge.

CATES: What did you call him, Mr. Judge?

THOMAS: Yes, sir, I called him Mr. Judge. Yes, sir, that's what I called him. I was raised to call folks, you know, I wasn't raised to call anybody Judge or something like that. He had a good father too. His mother, oh, his mother was so good.

CATES: Well, tell me a little something about his mother.

THOMAS: Oh, she was just, she was just good. Oh, I don't know. I know that she was good to me.

CATES: Would you say Senator Russell was more like his father or more like his mother?

THOMAS: He was more like Mrs--he was more like Mrs. Russell, I think. Now some folks may say he like his father but he had, you know, he had more ways like Mrs. Russell. He favored Mrs. Russell. At time I'd tell him, "I believe, Mr. R.B., you so like your mama."

CATES: And he'd agree with you?

THOMAS: Yes. He said he was sort of like Mrs. Russell at times.

CATES: Would that please him?

THOMAS: Yes, sir. He was nice, he was a good man. That's all I can say.

CATES: Well, tell me something about his father.

THOMAS: I don't know anything about his father.

CATES: Don't know anything about his father?

THOMAS: No, sir, I didn't, you know, talk with him much about anything. I didn't know him like I did Mr. R.B. I know about Mr. R.B. I know he was good. I can tell anybody that.

CATES: Did he, what church did he go to?

THOMAS: I don't know. I can't name the church he went to.

CATES: Did he go here in Winder?

THOMAS: Yes, he went to Winder to church, went to one out yonder too they said. You know, I wasn't, I can't tell you about where he went out yonder in Washington but when he was up here in Winder.

CATES: Did he teach Sunday school or was he active in Sunday school?

THOMAS: No, he wouldn't get there for no Sunday school. He went to church.

CATES: He wouldn't?

THOMAS: I guess he went to Sunday school enough when he was little, I reckon.

CATES: He was a Methodist, was he not?

THOMAS: Yes, sir, I think he was a Methodist. I think, now, I ain't going to be for sure.

CATES: Was he an elder in the church?

THOMAS: I couldn't tell you. All I know he just went. Oh, I'm sorry.

CATES: That's all right. That's OK. Is this your other daughter?

THOMAS: Yes, sir.

CATES: How are you doing?

GIRL: Fine.

CATES: I'm just talking to your mother here about Senator Russell and I don't know if she told you I was coming down here today and we are going to put some of the things that she tells us over at the University of Georgia over at the Russell Memorial so historians and researchers in the future will know something about the personal aspect of Senator Russell. So that's what we are doing right now. Have you got anything you'd like to say about the Senator?

GIRL: No, no.

CATES: No?

THOMAS: She just, they just went over there to see him.

CATES: They just went over there to see him occasionally?

THOMAS: Yes, sir.

CATES: Did they ever work over there helping you clean the table or anything?

THOMAS: No, sir. They never did work over there.

CATES: Well, how long has your family lived in Winder?

THOMAS: I been here pretty good while. I don't know how many years I been here.

CATES: Were you born here?

THOMAS: I was born down here at Statham.

CATES: Statham?

THOMAS: Yes. My family, my daddy and mother are dead. My mama died when I was 5 1/2 years old.

CATES: And they worked for the Russell's, did they?

THOMAS: No.

CATES: They did not?

THOMAS: We were staying at Pendergrass when my mama died and we didn't move back from Pendergrass down here until my daddy did. I married down here.

CATES: Did your husband work for the Russell's?

THOMAS: Yes, he worked for Mr. William Russell when he was farming, you know. Mr. William used to farm way years ago.

CATES: Did he work for him up until his death or is he dead?

THOMAS: Oh--

CATES: Your husband?

THOMAS: No, sir, he didn't work for Mr. William until he died but, you know, he farmed a lot with him and worked the crops for him and my husband was working up here at a plant when he died.

CATES: Well, do you, did you, you'd say that you really liked working for Senator Russell, didn't you?

THOMAS: Yes.

CATES: What did you like most about working for him?

THOMAS: Well, I liked everything because he never did, he never did say nothing to me, I mean he never did say nothing. Whatever I done, it was all right.

CATES: Did he ever praise you for doing a good job?

THOMAS: Oh, yes, he used to tell me, "Sho was good," when I cooked meals for him. "Sho was good." Yes, he praised me. I, you know, he never, you know, he didn't know nothing about cooking, cleaning, or nothing. Look like it pleased him everything I done.

CATES: Did you ever see him get mad at anybody?

THOMAS: No, I didn't see him get mad at nobody.

CATES: Never did get mad with anybody, huh?

THOMAS: No, I never seen him mad with anybody. Same thing when I see'd him, same thing when he died.

CATES: When was the last time you saw him alive?

THOMAS: Oh, he was down here in November. He went back some time in November. I don't know what, I don't know what the day, I don't, I didn't even look. It was the, you know, it hadn't been about a month. He down here in November. But he went back, it was sometimes that month but I don't know what day of the month it was.

CATES: So he wasn't down here for Christmas then?

THOMAS: No, no, he wasn't down here at all for Christmas.

CATES: What was the last thing he said to you before he left? Do you remember his last words?

THOMAS: He never said nothing to me that day he left. He called me two weeks before Christmas, asked me how was everything--he always generally called me and asked me how was everything and all how all of them doing and I'd tell him. I told him everything was all right and all. And I told him I hadn't even decorated the house, well I hadn't decorated, I hadn't put up the

Christmas tree when he called me. It was about, I think it was two weeks before Christmas. And he was asking me how was everything and all. But I just knowed he was coming home. I had, I had that Christmas tree was so pretty.

CATES: You decorated it by yourself? Did you always decorate it? Every Christmas?

THOMAS: It was a--it was a bought Christmas tree but, see, I. decorated it, put some lights round it and all snow stuff, you know, and silver stuff. It was hanging down just like a--like it was a freeze-on, you see these freeze on trees.

CATES: Right.

THOMAS: And I had bought a blinking, one of them blinking stars sit right up on top of it, sho was pretty.

CATES: And he never did see that though, did he?

THOMAS: No, sir, he never did see it.

CATES: And you'd go out and just buy this and charge it to his account, would you?

THOMAS: No, his sister, you know.

CATES: She'd do it?

THOMAS: She bought, she helped me, I went, I just told her, she do it, she'd keep an account on it for him, this lady would bring it, she done it but I went up there with, her and told her--decorate it and got me some stuff up there to decorate it. He always happy but I wanted some more.

CATES: You really wanted to make it pretty this time?

THOMAS: I--it sho was pretty.

CATES: Well, you say he would call you about every two weeks then, is that right?

THOMAS: No, sir, he called me two weeks before Christmas and I talked with him.

CATES: Did you have a key to his house then and would you go over there while he was away?

THOMAS: Oh, yes, I'd go over there every morning about nine and look around.

CATES: Did, he send you a Christmas present last Christmas?

THOMAS: No, he didn't send me nothing this last, past Christmas. No, sir, he didn't send me nothing. I guess he might have forgotten.

CATES: Well, he may have been in the hospital. I'm not really sure when he went in the hospital then.

THOMAS: Might have forgot it. He might have forgot it. He might have just going give it to me when he come home. I guess he just, I don't know--

CATES: What would you say was the happiest time you were working for him? What period of time?

THOMAS: My happiest time?

CATES: Your happiest time, yes.

THOMAS: My happiest time was always when he'd be at home. I'll be glad, I be I was glad when he come home because I knowed. My happiest time was always, you know, I just been, I was just happy with him. If he left I was happy, if he come home I was happy. He was just a person, you just, you know, I just--I just had my work, what I cooked--what I cooked it was all right and what I done was all right. You know, some people, you work for them and you do what you do and they don't appreciate it and have something to say about it. But he never did say nothing about me, he never did say nothing about it. He was always bragging on my work.

CATES: Did you worry about him when he was in Washington and wasn't eating your cooking?

THOMAS: Yes, I thought about him a lot of times. I told him I thought about-- but he used to go out and eat but I guess after he got in. the hospital he couldn't eat what he want, I reckon, I don't know.

CATES: Did he have someone to cook for him up in Washington or do you know?

THOMAS: No, sir, I don't know, I don't know nothing about that.

CATES: Did you say he invited you to come up there and cook for him?

THOMAS: He asked me a time or two to go back with him and stay a while with him. And I told him, "Well, I'll go up there in a month." I just kept putting him off, I'd say, "I'll go next time. I'll go next time."

CATES: You never did go up there?

THOMAS: No, sir, but I was intending to go with him if he had a come home, had a lived to get back home and went back I was going up there.

CATES: So this last time you were going back up there?

THOMAS: Yes, if he had'a come home but you-know, he died.

CATES: Well, you wouldn't want to have left your family, would you?

THOMAS: Oh, they wouldn't have cared. I don't--they--I had--I had told them I may go back with Mr. R.B. when he come back. They said, "Well. That's all they said.

CATES: Who would you say was Senator Russell's closest friend?

THOMAS: Man, he had so many friends, I couldn't tell you. He just had so many friends I couldn't tell you. I think everybody.

CATES: Everybody was his friend.

THOMAS: That knowed him.

CATES: He was a real friendly man?

THOMAS: Yes. He sure was.

CATES: And he never complained?

THOMAS: No, he didn't complain.

CATES: Did he have a favorite story or did he tell jokes much? Did he ever tell you a joke? No?

THOMAS: No, he never did tell me a joke. I never did hear him tell no joke much.

CATES: You said he read a lot---excuse me, go ahead.

THOMAS: He never did tell no jokes much. I didn't hear him. He might have told other people, but I didn't hear him. He always--he always read the paper most of the time, you know.

CATES: Well--

THOMAS: Books, like that. I guess he had to be a senator like he was. That man, he had a good education. He had a lot of sense, didn't he?

CATES: He sure did from what I understand reading in the paper.

THOMAS: Least he had--he couldn't have been a senator like he was.

CATES: You know, some people have book sense but they don't have common sense. But he had common sense.

THOMAS: Good constitution. He had good constitution. And I know I couldn't have done it, carrying on what he carried on, everything in Washington.

CATES: Did--was he ever worried, could you tell? I meant, you know, when you are around somebody you can tell if they are worried or not. He never seemed to be worried?

THOMAS: He never did look like he was worried. He never did look like he was worried.

CATES: Did he have trouble sleeping ever?

THOMAS: He would sleep. No, he ain't somebody couldn't sleep.

CATES: Modine, would you mind telling me what your age is?

THOMAS: Well, I'm fifty-four years old.

CATES: Fifty-four years old and you've got how many children, did you say?

THOMAS: I got two girls and two boys.

CATES: And one boy that is deceased?

THOMAS: I had five.

CATES: You had five. And how many grandchildren do you have?

THOMAS: Let me see. Two, three, three girls and one boy, that's four. I got six grandchildren.

CATES: Six grandchildren? They all live in this area, do they?

THOMAS: No, there's two of them in Atlanta.

CATES: Do you think the world is a better place in which to live because of Senator Russell and his position in the Senate?

THOMAS: Well, I don't know. I don't know about how it going to come out now. I don't know how the Senate is going to come out up there in Washington now. He kept down a whole lot of stuff for them. Everybody knowed that. What he did was, I don't know, he just had a lot of sense, all I can tell you, he just had a lot of sense.

CATES: Well, now, we might just, you know, call this interview to a close unless you think of something else that you might like to tell me about the Senator that would help future historians, you know, these researchers that are going to be coming to the University of Georgia in the future, they are going to be taking these interviews and reading them and looking at them in i hopes to get a clearer insight into the personality of Senator Russell. Can you think of anything else you might want to say about the Senator?

THOMAS: No, no sir. I can't think of nothing else.

CATES: In the thirty-one years that you worked for him, any humorous thing that happened? Any unusual thing that happened to him that you have first-hand knowledge of?

THOMAS: I can't think of nothing. No, I can't think of nothing else. That's all I--all I know. He just was good, all I tell anybody that.

CATES: He was good and he was easy to please.

THOMAS: Sho was.

CATES: Never did complain. And you are going to miss him?

THOMAS: Yes.

CATES: You miss him already?

THOMAS: I miss him now.

CATES: You really hate to go over there into the house, huh?

THOMAS: You just think about it. I think about my boy what's gone sometimes.

CATES: You just have to drive those thoughts out of your mind, huh?

THOMAS: Yes--

CATES: And keep going on, huh?

THOMAS: Yes.

CATES: Well, Modine, thank you very much and if you happen to think of anything else, I'll be glad to come back down here and talk to you about it and I really appreciate your time.

THOMAS: Yes. If I think of anything I'll let you know.