

Name: Snook Wesson
March 29, 1993 Interview
Transcribed By Seasonal Ranger Benjamin Franks
Summer 2008

I: stands for interviewer

I#: stands for asst. interviewer

SW: stands for Snook Wesson

Words which are not clearly understood may appear in brackets []

March 29, 1993

10:30am Fordyce Visitor Center Conference Room

I: Ranger Toni Cooper

I: Mr. Wesson, in which bathhouse or bathhouses did you work in?

SW: I worked at the Quapaw Bathhouse, The Majestic, and the Downtowner.

I: Ok. And what occupation did you work?

SW: I messaged at the Arlington... I mean the Downtowner, and a bathing attendant at Arlington (Quapaw) and Majestic...37 years.

I: Could you tell us how you got started in the Bathhouse Industry?

SW: Well my [fore parents] parents worked before I did, and that was [whole?] when a youngster come on and they would give him a job in the bathhouse. My dad worked there at the Quapaw for 40 years and when he passed on I took over.

I#: So it helped to be related [to and attendant]?

SW: MmmHm family, somebody appointed you when they... they do like anything else, when you a little boy they start [showing] you the bathhouse. Come up and look and see how I do it, see how I do it, 'cause one of these days you'll be doing it. Ha Ha

I: Could you tell what an average day like your routine if you were a bath attendant what would you do?

SW: Well the first thing you do, you get up in the morning and you get there about 6 o'clock and get your towels and sheets and everything and then you take your shower and get ready to start work. You start work at seven o'clock in the morning. You have an hour and a half off for lunch, come back at 1:30 and work till 4 everyday except Sunday. Six days a week.

I: I heard you say take a shower. The employees take a shower?

SW: Everyday. We had to take a shower everyday before we started to work.

I#: At all the bathhouses that you worked?

SW: All the ones that I worked at.

I: Were physicals required for? [bath attendants]

SW: That's right, that's right

I: How often did you take a physical?

SW: Uh, once a month.

I: Once a month. What were they checking for?

SW: Checking for your [nails], your health, any kind of disease, [venereal] disease anything like that. You had to take that.

I: Right.

SW: If you didn't take that, you couldn't work.

I#: No excuses for not coming to work?

SW: No excuses. Rain, shine, sleet, or snow you had to go. 'Cus see the people that stay in the hotel; they didn't have to come out of their room.

I: Right

SW: See they used to didn't bathe nowhere, but unless they got a room there. Then people came in bathe at...ha ha. The funniest thing is that a lot of people that came to Hot Springs way back would go to one of these roomin' houses, get 'em a bath, take a bath in the roomin' house. Man, you would see them on the streets one day like but so-and-so bathhouse ...How long it been here? Oh, I didn't come up to your bathhouse yet I take a bath at Ms. So-and-so house. What you [get] down there? He said well I got a room down there and board so I used her tub. He was really sincere that this Hot Springs water was in the [house] in those places a long time ago. See they used to rent a room and they'd give you a place to take a bath at where they stay at. Well they thought it was the Hot Springs water.

I#: But that wasn't Hot Springs water? ... That was city water.

SW: No sir! City water, but they didn't know any better.

I: So could the managers have been tricking them?

SW: No no! The manager wouldn't...he just tell 'em that they need to ask 'em. One time I had a man who bathed down there and he come in and said "Snook I didn't come up to see this year." I said "Why?" He said "Well I bathed down there where I was stayin' at." I said "[Bathe], while you stay here?" He said "I was stayin' up on Park out on Quapaw and [past] somewhere." He said "The lady had a big tub there and I was gettin' room and board, and I just take my baths there. And I'm gonna leave tomorrow. Let me ask, Did ya'll have [?] Honest to God. And he really was sincere. He wasn't kiddin'.

I: Did many bathers return here year after year and after year?

SW: Year after year bathers have been comin' there. I've seen 'em all come there.

I: They ask for Mr. Wesson.

SW: That's right. All of them ask for Snooky. I've had 'em the young, old, the big, the cripple, I've seen a many one come through there in 37 years.

I#: When they came in crippled, when they left after 18 or 20 baths or so were they still carrying the cane or the wheelchairs?

SW: Some of 'em...It's a mystery. Some of 'em leave there walkin' and some don't. See now, the main thing about taking these baths...you come down here and take 18 baths, used to be 21 baths, cut it down to 18 now. Well now you [at the end of the day] you go out partying and drinking all that alcohol. It don't do you any good. I'm being frank with ya. But if they come and take a bath, eat proper, get there rest and everything it'll do 'em a lot of good. I've seen people come here on crutches and leave walkin'. Then I've seen some of em' come in here walkin' and leavin' on crutches. That's the God's Truth. See this alcohol will not mix. This alcohol and this water will not mix. You can take this water coming out of the ground there, 130 something degrees hot, you can put your finger in it and it won't blister. But you dip it in some boiling water 110 it'll knock the skin off you. So don't ask me why 'cause its been that way all my life. This water will not blister you.

I: Where did most of the bathers come from? Travel?

SW: All over the United States and [farther]. I've had 'em from Asia, Africa, New York, Hawaii. And I mean you come back every year. People usually come here every year honey. They got there certain time. Those of 'em got business or workin'. They make their vacation so they can come to Hot Springs.

I#: What kind of rates did they pay when you first started working here?

SW: When I first started in the bathhouse it was a dollar and a half for a bathhouse.

That's what you did. Dollar and a half that was the choice was. But then the massage was usually 2 and a half, that's a message. Whether you wanted a uh... see they have two kinds they give you. If you want a double massage that's more. They rub you twenty minutes if you wanna double you get a 40 minutes that, that's called a double massage.

I#: How many people went for that type of massage?

SW: Lot of 'em take double. Lot of 'em take double. Most of the people come in and like, when I was workin' at the bathhouse the baseball players would come through here going to Florida, especially Mr. Bush out of St. Louis. He come through here and stay two or three days. Then they'd go on to Florida. But they, not all the ball players didn't take baths. Mostly, them youngsters 18, 20, 21 years old they want no bath they want to [paint] the town over. But most of the middle aged ball players that's up in the 20's and the 30's they takin' the baths and everything.

I#: They had some kinks to work out.

SW: Oh yeah.

I: That was another question I was gonna ask you. Have you ever bathed anybody famous or well known?

SW: Well now, you name 'em I've had 'em. I've had 'em all. The Cardinals, the Dodgers, some of the uh...lets see now I tell you who the main one we had. Mr. Cardinal, I mean Mr. Bush would bring most of his Cardinals down. That's when he had all that bunch. Stan Musial and all that bunch, they, they would come through here and stay one day and go one. But a lot of the ball players that had come here, they were sick they knees was bad [and] there legs. And no question about this. Now I used to think the same thing, but these will help you if you take it but it will not mix with alcohol, and that's what happened to a lot of people [who] come here to take the baths. Instead of takin' the baths they take the baths but they go out at the night and party and drink all night long and that alcohol and water will not mix. Now you try this.

I: What about any presidents? Have you ever bathed any presidents?

SW: I seen one. Roosevelt.

I: Franklin Roosevelt?

SW: Roosevelt. Yeah, he was in the crutches. But see this bath of hot water will not mix with nothin'. And I don't care how much you do or how much it rains or high the draft this water pumps that spring everyday, and it will not freeze.

I: Mr. Wesson are you still workin' in a bathhouse today?

SW: I work some. I'm up at the um, Arlington and I work two days a week. And that's enough. Two days.

I: Well does the heat in the bathhouse ever bother you?

SW: Never have

I: Never have?

SW: Well, it's never bothered me because I've been pretty active all my life.

I: Right

SW: See I'm 74 years old, and I've been pretty active all my life.

I: Mr. Wesson I hear that you was a baseball player yourself. Could you tell us the name of the team and how long you were in baseball?

SW: Well I was in baseball when the black negro leagues was goin on.

I: Okay

SW: I played with the Clowns. I played with the Birmingham Black Barons, New York Black Yankees, [?] then I left there and went Minnesota to a white club. [?] Minnesota where you see the pictures for. We didn't make the money honey. We made... I made 10,000 a year which was a lot of money. Now a kid wouldn't even talk to you for 10,000 dollars. I'm being frank with you. I'm just telling you how it is. He says "sign this contract and we'll give you 10[thousand]," he says, "what is that a bonus?" "naw that's the salary. Eh uh. We got ten thousand dollars a year. That's for six months playin'. That's get the leave from the bathhouse. Go play ball six months for ten thousand dollars. And back in those days that was a lot of money.

I: You right.

SW: But now a kid won't talk to you for ten thousand dollars.

I: Well that brings me back to bathhouse again. Now did you have to go to school to become [an attendant] there?

SW: We have to go school, have to school and you have to take a physical every month.

I: Where did you attend school at? Was it here in Hot Springs?

SW: Hot Springs, yeah. Hot Springs. Langston High School and Woodland School in South Hot Springs. But you have to take examinations and be examined every month. You miss one month, the man would lay you off for a month. Because he's afraid you been out.

I: Mr. Wesson how did working at the Quapaw differ from working at the Arlington or the Majestic?

SW: Well you see at the Arlington the biggest majority of people stay at the hotels now.

I: Okay.

SW: They sleep, come right down with their robe [and] pajamas on. But if their bathing at the Quapaw, when I first started, everybody came in with their clothes on. And they had to dress and undress and dress again, undress again. So but now, at the hotels its better, they can come right down with just shorts on or robe and take their bath and go back upstairs and lay down, but they can't eat and take those baths it'll make them sick.

I: You worked at the Quapaw. There's a hot spring in the basement of the Quapaw.

SW: That's right. Hot spring [in the] basement down, right down there.

I: Did you give tours down there?

SW: Oh no. We had a certain boys. Special people that guide for show. They got paid for being sight seers. That's what we called 'em.

I#: Sight Seers.

SW: That's what they was. Sight seers. They got a salary for bringing people, showing them through the bathhouse.

I#: What type of tips did you get as a uh...?

SW: Bath attendant?

I#: Bath attendant.

SW: Well, if you got four, five dollars that's a big tip then, back in those days. But now, it's out of sight honey.

I: What's the largest tip that you ever received?

SW: A hundred dollars.

I: That's good

SW: A hundred dollars.

I#: Do you remember the individual?

SW: Yes. I tell you what happened. This hundred dollars we received was counted on the [?] 'cause it was uh (cough) a person who didn't know they were really in Hot Springs at the time. And he'd come in late every day, but he gave all the boys that wait on 'em a hundred dollars a day. He stayed two days.

I: When did you start receiving pay by the hour? You get paid by the hour now don't you?

SW: Oh you paid by the hour [percent?] They guarantee you so much a day.

I: Oh!

SW: They guarantee you so much a day, but mostly I think It's fifteen, twelve or fifteen, you make your salary. See now when I work at the Arlington Hotel, if you bathed twenty people, bathed and... if you bathe, pack, and shower twenty people that's a hundred dollars. See back in those days they only paid you around, say if you had a hundred people...you'd only make a hundred dollars salary. So they only paid a dollar and a half for a bath.

I: Did the black people have their own bathhouse?

SW: They had their own bathhouse.

I: Could you name those bathhouses?

SW: They had the Pythian and the Baptist Building.

I: Ok

I#: Did you take these baths?

SW: Oh yeah! Oh yeah

I#: Daily?

SW: Daily. Everyday. I'm not kickin'. I'm 74 years old and I can run, fish, hunt and go anywhere I wanna go. I'd hadn't seen a doctor in 25 years.

I: That's, that's great. One more question about the blacks. When were they allowed to bathe in these bathhouses on the row? Do you remember?

SW: No they... Well, No I don't even remember when exactly when but they bathed at the Baptist Building because a lot of the ball players, Jackie Robinson, all them came down they would go down to the Pythian or the Baptist Building. Mostly all the leadin' fighters and boxers and wrasslers and jockeys and things they had two or three black jockeys riding in those days. Well they stay there in the Baptist Building.

I: Did you ever give any mercury rubs?

SW: No, but I've seen it done.

I: You've seen it done?

SW: Mmmhmm. My uncle P.C. [Tweedle, or Tweeden?] used to give a massage. I mean a mercury rub.

I#: You wanna tell us how its done?

SW: Well yeah I've seen him do it. They take this mercury as a liquid like, uh oil. It's real black. They take it and put on rubber glove and they rub it in your skin. They just put it on there and keep rubbin' till it goes in your skin, but that was mostly for people that

come in take mercury baths [in those days?] They didn't have real doctors like we had. They take it mostly for the venereal disease. That's what they taking it for.

I#: Right.

SW: And they didn't want everybody to know that they was taking mercury rubs see. And that's why they made us take a physical examination. If you come up with something wrong with ya you, your gone.

I: Right

SW: Yeah, and Mr. Bolton was strict with that. He'd tell ya , "I'm gonna put you in my back pocket for a while." Hahaha

I: He was the inspector right?

SW: Oh he was tough!

I: Do uh, they come in and inspect? What would happen if they found something wrong?

SW: Put your clothes on. That's all they'd tell us.

I: Do they come in and inspect the bathhouses like they used to?

SW: No. No, but they used to come in and inspect if your tubs were dirty or check the cabinet with the steam in it or run the water on them 105 or 110. See they only give a bath in 98 to 100-101. You can snatch a little too, but they'd come in there and inspect them and Mr. Bolton would come in, pull that thermometer up, he got in that water. Now a lot of 'em can take a bath 105, 110. It's just like in [?] But he catch you give that he'd say, "Get your clothes on." Well Mr. Bolton he was... No you supposed to go back and check that tub every so often to see because a lot of 'em will steal that water.

I#: Oh, ok.

SW: They get in the tub and lay down.

I#: Did they turn the spigot out?

SW: This is how this turn the spigot out. The other says, "I want another cup of water."

So you give 'em a cup. Then after you be in the back you know all the games see, so you'll go back and stand and watch him. He'll take the cup and put it under the water. He's layin' down. But he's not getting any water now he just got the cup down there and he'll let it run all in there. You come back maybe 5 or ten [minutes] and stick your hand in there WHEW! "Is this water hot to you?" "No I had just had a couple of drinks." I says "Now look I was staying right there watching you" I say "Now the next time you do that I don' t bathe you no more." Now Mr. Bolton was strict about that he'd give us [priveledge?] If we'd call him and say "Now look this man here will not leave his water like I make it." That's right.

I: Mr. Wesson do you think the government should come around more to inspect the bathhouses?

SW: Sure, sure, sure. Sure they should come around. But they used to come every...look he'd come this morning and might come back again this afternoon, Mr. Bolton would.

I: Did he call you before he came?

SW: NO, no!

I#: Unannounced

SW: No, unannounced. Never would call.

I#: But you think that they should come back?

SW: I think they should come back. Well a lot of the bathhouses are not up to par. Those steam cabinets are raggedy and...gosh!

I#: They should bring these old, raggedy bathhouses up to par?

SW: Sure! They should bring 'em. That's right. They should bring them up to par. That's right.

I: So, Mr. Wesson why do you think the bathhouses has declined over the years?

SW: Well, you see a lot of the young people they think this water's a gimmick. And they really don't believe this water'll do anything to 'em. They really don't believe it. They say, "Now why in the world" but you know what people'll do down here. They'll come down here and take this water in the jug and carry it back to there hometown and sell them, sell that water.

I: Which is against the law.

SW: Now the government restrict that. You cannot. I can give you a car load of this water but if I charge you one nickel I'm going to a federal penitentiary.

I: That's right.

SW: Because this belongs to the government. A lot of people do come down here in their trucks and carry it back hometown, buy a little plastic jar and sell it. Two dollars, two dollars a gallon. They don't even know these baths won't do you no good if your not gonna take em right. Now you look and common sense will teach anybody. I've got rheumatism, arthritis, heart trouble. They'll come in here says "well do you have anything I should know?" "No, No" "Well we'd like to know 'cause we, we understand. Now he's got a heart trouble, you understand, he won't tell you that when you ask him. "No I ain't got it" But if the man come in the hot tub we put his water at 85-90, 91, but he's gonna tell you to put it up on him at 103. But you put him in there on that hot...he'll start breathin and jumpin and buggin his eyes. You go, "What's wrong?" (he says) "Well I, I have a little heart trouble I just said I don't have a real heart trouble. But he wants that water. But they'll steal the water hotter and the government don't like to give them a bath at 106-110.

I: Can you think of any dramatic cases of healings that you've witnessed yourself?

SW: Yes sir!

I: Would you like to share it with us?

SW: I had a man come here from uh...Mr. Bush brought him here, Gussy Bush brought him here. He was in bad shape. He came here and take 28 baths and left walkin'. I never forget that man, because I didn't believe it myself. He come in here he had crutches, he had a stroke or something. But he came in to take the baths. He didn't drink (alcohol), he didn't eat a lot, he didn't go out at night. He came to take baths, and that man left walkin'.

I: Now Mr. Wesson you talk about drinking a lot. There were gambling houses...gambling was going on.

SW: Gambling going on the street never closed. They was open 24hours.

I#: Sundays also?

SW: Sundays, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, anyday. This time was just light Chicago (or) New York like a gangster town. They did everything, as long as they were doing this to the big shots they did what they want to.

I: Did a lot of gangsters come in and take the thermal baths?

SW: They'd come in and take baths and you'd never know who they were till they get back in the room and they'd tell ya. But you can tell 'em. If a one come into me and get in the tub and lay in the tub, and he keep (Snook motions with his eyes looking around) you know?

I: Keep watching?

SW: You know there's something wrong. He's running from somebody. Because when he come in...when you be in the bathhouse, I was there 37 years and you'll see a lot of people. He'd lay down in that tub, [?], ain't nothing wrong with him. Ain't nothing wrong with him. His muscle not sore. But if he's in that tub then (Snook looks around)

I#: Looking all around?

SW: Uh, is there a door over there? No it ain't over there. ...Well when you been around long you know there's something wrong with him. He's hiding or something you know? They picked up Capone when he left from here.

I: They picked him up?

SW: He was here those two days and uh, he left and (they) picked him up before he got back to Chicago. He was right up there at the Arlington Hotel

I#: Would some of them go to the Arlington because that was a private hotel rather than come over here to the Fordyce or the Quapaw?

SW: No, no they all got the same rules and regulations. Don't let nobody kid you about it. Every bathhouse in town has got the same rules and regulations. They must abide by them. But some of them like you said they bootleg it, they get by with it, but you're supposed to have 'em all under government supervision. Something go wrong with that man. I've never seen him up there at the bathhouse in last two years looking by. No kidding!

I: No inspector?

SW: No! Mr. Bolton would be there, he might come back today and walk through there and look. To question around. He goin off. You say, "well I made it by." Next morning, 7'oclock he's having you get there. Ha ha. The next day. Yeah that's the way it is.

I: Did many people come in with doctor prescriptions?

SW: Well, they have. A lot of them come in with doctor prescriptions, but this is what they're doing they come in with it and like "you, you're a doctor?" "A re you going to Hot Springs?" "yeah" "Well I'm gonna write a little thing, you got heart trouble I want the water at a certain thing" but instead you won't tell me that you just come in like you're on the streets. So I put you in the water. Average person we put in the water anywhere from 100 to 102. He'll come in there and now the doctor might tell him "Don't take the water over 85 or 90." He won't tell us. He got hear trouble. So that's what happened.

I: The town was really booming Mr. Wesson. Do you have any friends that used to work in those night clubs like the Southern Club?

SW: Yeah, all they boys used work in the bathhouse at night (day) and work at the clubs at night 'cause that's where all the money was at.

I: Could you give me some names?

SW: ohh...

I: Do you remember their names?

SW: Uh, you know there used to be a policeman named L.C. Pettis.

I: L.C. Pettis?

SW: L.C. Pettis

I: Ok

SW: L.C. Pettis worked in the club and aw.. gobs of old-timers.

I#: What kind of work did they do at the club?

SW: Take care of the tables. Keep the... They found more money on the floors then they picked up on the tables, they would glad to get it. That was good job back in those days. Gamblers up there playing, they'd get drunk and drop fifty, a hundred dollars never pick it up. You win big, your hand in the cards. You can't put something in your hands.

I#: Ok, so they didn't work for the club, they...

SW: No they worked for club, they got a salary. That was their job. They call 'em sweepers. These boys was supposed to sweep up all the cigarette butts and [?] stuff like that and after a certain length of time say...four or five years later the boss man brought a gimmick to 'em. You can't stoop down and pick up nothing because Southern, Ohio them clubs they started getting these things with a latch you lock up. You'd have to sweep it up in that and go in the back sneak around and say "I'm going to the bathroom," go in and bring it back. Other than that he would make you dump everything in the garbage can, and he'd send somebody to come get the garbage can and take it out. You could, no, no you couldn't walk around and pick up money on the...no they didn't like (you) to pick up no money on the floor. Anything on the floor belongs to them. That was just a gimmick you know? Because everybody say "I'd come in and pick up 2,3 hundred dollars," I'm gonna say "I gotta go to the bathroom" see now and I take my bucket on with me, take the money and bring it back. Now that's the way they used to do it. They worked at those clubs there. They made a fortune at those clubs.

I#: Did they pay to work at the club?

SW: No, they always got a good job though.

I#: Ok

SW: They always got a good job. You know how they say, "look I wanna work here at the Southern I done worked at the Ohio."

I: So these bath attendants would work at the bathhouse in the daytime and go to the club at night?

SW: Go to the club at night, two jobs.

I: Two occupations

SW: And most all of them bought homes and nice cars. That's why they got on their feet. They didn't make that kind of money in the bathhouse.

I: You made nice money as a bath attendant right?

SW: Made nice money, but not like they did when they had the town wide open.

I: Do you have children?

SW: Me?

I: Uh huh.

SW: Oh yah.

I: How many children do you have?

SW: I got two

I: Two

SW: I got two girls

I#: What are they doing now?

SW: Well my daughter she sings. She's a night club singer over in Little Rock and all around, and then I got one that live in, uh, away from here. She works in the hospital. Then I got a little grandson that I adopted. I've had him since he was four years old and he's fourteen now. He gives me a headache though.

I: Well, Mr. Wesson do you have any photographs, do you have any photographs of bathhouses or you as a baseball player?

SW: Yeah. I'm gonna get you some. I got some pictures like this and a newspaper. I'd like to give you one.

I: And Mr. Wesson if you have any friends that have photographs or somebody that we haven't talked to would you please...?

SW: I tell you. Did you get Jimmy down here, Lemons?

I: Yeah, we've talked to Mr. Lemons.

SW: He's my cousin.

I: Oh, I didn't know that.

SW: His daddy and my daddy are half brothers.

I: Jimmy Lemons is the one that worked at the Majestic for 67 years.

SW: That's right, that's right.

I: Ok

SW: He's sick though now.

I: He say he bathed Al Capone.

SW: He did, he did, he did. He bathed Capone.

I#: Did your daughters ever work in the bathhouses?

SW: No, no. That was a tough day when they got grown, finished high school, and went to college. I sent them all to school and college and everything, I said "Look, don't think about coming back in this bathhouse." [?] she teaches school now at the high school now.

I#: But both of them went to college?

SW: Both of them went to college. Don't want no bathhouse. You'd be surprised at the bathhouse people that has made good money and bought homes. Most of these homes in the black neighborhood, this is where they made their money to buy with.

I: And sent their children to college?

SW: It wasn't nothing, but you got a kid going to school, you could average a weeks work in the bathhouse way back...you could average anywhere from 100 to 300 dollars a week. And back in those days that was a lot of money. '39 and '40 that was a lot of money for bathing.

I#: Did most of the black people own their own houses?

SW: Most em, Most of 'em that worked in the bathhouse owned their own houses. That's how they bought it right there...working in the bathhouse.

I#: Bought it by working in the bathhouse.

SW: That was onliest job, the biggest job they had here was the bathhouses.

I# Sure

SW: See some of them worked at the bathhouses during the day and bell hop at night.

I#: How many people would work in the uh back bathing lets say in the Arlington?

SW: Well now, at the Arlington they usually have about 3 men bathing and 3 helpers. The helper didn't bathe. See, you'd bathe the man and send him out and he'd dry him off put a hot towel on him if he wanted a hot pack and give him a shower and let him go in the massage parlor. And the average bath hotel in this town, anywhere from two to three people work in there.

I: Mr. Wesson I have one more question. The attendants in the bathhouse, were they black? Were they white? Were they mixed?

SW: No most of them, the bath attendants all were black.

I: Black

SW: All the masseurs were white.

I: White

SW: Because the masseurs made all the money.

I: So that's why they had the better jobs.

SW: That's why they had...(the better jobs). See the masseurs made more money than we did in the bathhouse.

I: Oh

SW: If a man come in the bathhouse and take a bath or five baths or two baths. If he give you two dollars, he's gonna give the masseur five. If he give you ten, he's gonna give the masseur twenty. So, that's why most of all...I don't think they had a black masseur.

Logan's massage and uh Pucket, but that was after all the big stuff had got away.

I: And then you blacks were allowed to go to school to become masseurs.

SW: You had to go to school...

I#: And that's what you're doing now?

SW: I'm doing, yeah.

I#: You're a masseuse now.

SW: I'm a masseuse and a bath attendant.

I#: Right, so you have a license for both of them?

SW: Both of them. But see back in those days you had to have a license. That's how they got by with it. Because the government made you take examinations and don't think they had a lot of them that had to go home. They'd come down take, and they'd take a blood test and take in the arm like in the army. They say, "well get it down there, let me look at it." And if it wasn't just right he'd say, "You off, you off." Two months, a month...you had to go.

I#: So you had to behave yourself?

SW: That's right. That's right.

I#: In order to hold your job.

SW: Hold your job

I: I just thought of one more question Mr. Wesson and we'll let you go. I want to know, did you ever receive any presents or any gifts from the people that you bathed?

SW: Now when I tell you this you're gonna fall out. I can tell you, I got it. You know, Theotus Lemons, that's Jimmy's half brother, a man said..."you remember when you were doing the baths that last year, well what would you like me to send you?"

"Well, I'll send you this." The sent him a pair of mules.

I: Wow!

SW: A pair of mules! He told him he got a little farm, [and] from this big wealthy man say "well I sell mules, you meet them down at the train station." He had him shipped in here, two mules. They give me billy goats, rabbits, dogs, that's right, I brought a goat all the way from Malvern in a car. They give you everything in the bathhouse. Gifts

I#: They didn't give you the horses that win out here at Oaklawn did they?

SW: Yeah, a lot of them losers, but that's true in the bathhouses you make a day... they'll give it to you. Everything that eat, sleep, or can walk. Well just for instance there, you're a rich lady. You come down and take a bath and tell the lady, "What would you like to have?" [you say] "Oo I would sure love that fur coat you got on." She'll say, "well I'll send you one" They got a lot of gifts, lovely gifts. You know? People that got jewelry

shops will send you watches, rings, diamonds. I mean that's...he come in there half sick and everything and you make him feel good so you appreciate it. He know if he give you ten, twenty dollars you'll go out and spend it and blow it. But he'll give you something you can keep for a lifetime.

I: We sure do thank you!