

Interviewee: Thomas Pinckney Rutledge Rivers

Place of interview: 43 East Bay Street (Charleston, S.C.)

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Interviewer: Anne Blessing, on behalf of Historic Charleston Foundation

Videographer: Leigh Moring, Historic Charleston Foundation

Transcriber: Brockington & Associates

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BEGIN INTERVIEW

Blessing: This is Anne Blessing on August 9th, 2017, Charleston, South Carolina conducting an oral interview with Tommy Rivers. Can you give us your full name and date of birth?

Rivers: Thomas Pinckney Rutledge Rivers July 23, 1934.

AB: Tommy can you tell us about where you grew up?

TR: I grew up in downtown Charleston. First living... for the first six years of my life, I grew up on Gibbes Street, number 28 Gibbes Street. When my grandmother died when I was six, my father... I'm sorry about that . . . When my grandfather died when I was six, my father decided that he needed to move in with my grandmother, and so we moved from 28 Gibbes Street to 7 Orange Street. We found out very quickly that two women can't live in the same house together. And that's where I grew up, and oh, four or five years later my grandmother died. We stayed in that house and that's where I grew up.

AB: Can you tell us about your parents and your brother?

TR: My parents. My father was in uh... he was 31 when he married my mother who was 18. She was Miss Ashley Hall. She is a very lovely young lady back before I knew her, and still was. He was a Captain in the field artillery getting the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism [in World War I], which is just under the Medal of Honor. There are papers written about him that said he should have gotten the Medal of Honor for how he performed, but they gave him the DSC. He became a lawyer and practiced in Charleston for the rest of his life. My mother was a... I guess he would call her a housewife, and she volunteered for all sorts of stuff, and she was president of the Junior League of Charleston. I had a brother who is two years older than me, Buist Jr., and he and I grew up at Orange Street in the same room and both of us. As we got older we went to grade school in Charleston. Then as we got to the ninth grade, most people in our age group from downtown Charleston were sent off to school. And when I was 14, I went to Episcopal High School as did my brother and the people before us. And it was always when people got sent off to high school in those days, it was always sort of a grand exit. Everybody had a lady friend there a little bit, but you know it was just dating back in those days. And the train station was right up here on East Bay across from the Cigar Factory. And all these young ladies would come up to the station when we would get on the train to go to Alexandria, Virginia. Then, they would race up to Moncks Corner and so they could say hello again before everybody went off. And that's how I started off after being here.

AB: Tell us your parents' names and a little bit about your family in Charleston.

TR: My Father's name was George Lamb Buist Rivers. My mother's name was Ethel Pinckney Rutledge Rivers. My fathers' father was Moultrie Rutledge Rivers, and he was a lawyer and Eliza Buist Rivers was my grandmother. My mother's family uh... my grandfather was Thomas Pinckney Rutledge. Just as an aside, when I was born, I was named Thomas Rutledge Rivers. As I got to be a little bit older, I said I want my grandfather's full name. So, my father had to go down to court to get Pinckney inserted into my name so I would have my grandfather's full name. My father was born in Charleston and raised in Charleston. My mother was born in McClellanville and she had quite an upbringing. As she... and her father was Thomas Pinckney Rutledge. Her mother was Ethel... Ethel... oh lord, I can't remember her name, but anyway we called her "Munna," and we called him "Big Daddy" because he was about 6' 4" and weighed about 240 pounds.

The black people in the McClellanville area called him the strongest man in the world. Because at Hampton Plantation, they had a Delco motor on the back of a mule and wagon that the fellows couldn't lift up and take it off. My grandfather asked for a rope. He put it around his neck. [Then], he leaned over the motor [and] they tied under it. He stood up, walked the motor off and moved it where it needed to be. So, he was known as the strongest man in the world. He became Police Chief down here. He got struck by lightning twice and he survived. He was a wonderful man. He was my mentor about hunting and fishing aside from my father.

AB: So, you grew up hunting in McClellanville and...

TR: McClellanville.

Archibald Rutledge, the poet laureate of South Carolina, was my great uncle and there is a wonderful story about that. When we first started hunting there with my mother, my brother, my grandfather, and my father. Archibald Rutledge had a plaque on his wall with little deer horns [that said] "killed by Archibald Rutledge age 11". Well guess what? In a couple more Sundays, I shot my first buck at age 9. The next week when we went back, Archibald Rutledge had changed it. He said, "killed by Archibald Rutledge at age 9". He wouldn't let me outdo him.

AB: Can you tell us about growing up on Orange Street?

TR: Yeah.

AB: What the neighborhood was like?

TR: The neighborhood was great. It was a very safe place. In those days, you could with your neighbors... uh... the children that were there we would come and go as we pleased. We wouldn't go in the front door but you could go in anybody's back door anytime and the door was always open to you. Mothers gave us food and whatever we needed, and we played together. We played ball in there. We had a great big yard in our yard and we could play ball in the yard. And downtown was very safe where if we ever needed to go anywhere, you always rode your bicycle because we had one car and daddy used that. Most of the time he just walked to work on Broad Street to his law office. But we had wonderful times, we had different... uh... the people who lived on the other side of... on the east side of Meeting Street. They had their little ball game people, [and] we always played against them. The people that were south of Meeting Street, we challenged them all the time. There was 4 or 5 kids that lived down here that played together, and four or five up there. We had little ball games played against each other all the time. Had

wonderful times. Anyway, just a wonderful safe place to live and we didn't worry about anything. We didn't know any better. And we could come and go as we pleased.

It's another story, but my father was very rigid. He came through the war and he was a very rigid man about doing the right thing. Well, I called him one day when I was 13. You could get your driver's license when you are 14 back then. When I was 13 I said "Dad, I would like for Thomas," who was my next-door neighbor, "to drive us to the to the Faulk Restaurant. For a quarter you can get the biggest plate of french fries you ever saw in your life."

So, he said, "sure son, take the car."

I got in the 41 Chrysler in the front seat, Thomas in the backseat, and at Orange Street, at

7 Orange there was a little place where you could drive up on the sidewalk closer to the wall out of the way of the sidewalk. That's where we always parked the car up out of the way. [We,] got in the car and drove down to the corner of Orange Street and Broad. And guess who was walking home from the office? And I looked over there, there's my father. And me 13 years old driving his car and I said, "you want a ride?" he never said a word, [but] got in the car. I went around the block, drove up on the sidewalk, [and] handed him the keys. He knew he didn't have to say anything. So, of course I never tried that again. Ha-Ha. You talk about being caught red handed; that was it, that was it! But we had a wonderful time growing up downtown It was just nice.

AB: What were the boundaries where are you wandered on your bikes?

TR: We... the only place we used to go about [was] Broad Street. Interesting enough, that during the war, in those times, we got a quarter allowance a week, and on the corner of Queen and King Street was a Greek store called Critikos. And Critikos, the word would come out... you couldn't buy a bubble gum anymore during the war. Because of the fact they needed that for the rubber and tires and everything. But the word would get out that Critikos had Bubblegum. So, we'd get on our bicycles and we'd fly up there with our quarter. He would let you buy five pieces of bubble gum for five cents, but you [also] had to buy four candy bars for a nickel apiece. So you had to spend your whole quarter and that was the only way to get the bubble gum. That was the only way that we would go outside [our part of town]. That wasn't really a boundary but there just wasn't any need to [go anywhere]. [The] East Bay playground was here, that we all grew up in, you know, and Moultrie playground was over there, so we didn't have to go anywhere to have a good time. The horse lot was there [note-large lot south of Broad Street between Chisolm and Ashley]. We played all over that growing up, and so we didn't just venture anywhere, there wasn't any need to. If you went somewhere, your mother, you know... you carpool everywhere now, and we never got to carpool anywhere to play this or play that or go anywhere. We did it all in the same area.

AB: What about grocery shopping, any kind of shopping where you...

TR: Grocery shopping was right down here. [On] Water Street. And [at] Water Street and Meeting Street [there] was a Lance grocery, and that as a walk-in store, one story. That's where mother knew them all. She'd walk down there, buy our groceries, and walk back home. I'd go with her. On the corner of Tradd and Meeting was Pete's. And Pete's was a little walk in place, a

general store, that you could buy anything you that you wanted. And we used to do some kind of... not real bad things but, as you walked out the front door of Pete's, he had the paper bags, people don't do that anymore, they [stores] had these little small paper bags, [and] a bigger paper bag in stacks and a little wire crate. We'd go in and buy a candy bar or something and distract Pete, while one of us took two or three of the little small paper bags. [Be] 'cause, what we would do is we would fill those up halfway with sand and wrap them up. Then we would sneak down onto South Battery and throw them at the buses. [We were] just being devils, you know, nothing bad. And that's what we did. . . that was Pete's and Mr. Burbage's store, which of course is now on Broad Street. [Then it], was on the corner of Counsel and Tradd. And Mr. Burbage gave candy to everybody back in those days. [We] kids, we would go in and Mr. Burbage would give you something and that's just what we would do. And there was a young man who had polio, and he walked with crutches. His mother hung a sign around his neck [that said] please don't give him candy. [Be] 'cause he would go into Burbage's everyday and he would feel sorry for him and give him [some candy].

And we had a great time. it was it was easy life was easy. No tourists around. People that you knew, everybody knew everybody so to speak; and it was a wonderful way to grow up. Because we had good schools, and we weren't challenged with anything, we had sports. We had outdoors activities; downtown was great.

AB: Tell us about your grade school.

TR: I went first to... there was a... it wasn't really a kindergarten, I'm not sure exactly what it was. But, on the corner of Rutledge Avenue and South Battery there was a... I guess you'd call it a preschool now, whatever. I don't know what it was called then, but I would go there. And, I can remember pulling the little rug out of the little cubby hole, so we lay down in the middle of the day and pretend to rest. Then from first grade to third, I went to Miss Watts, Miss Watts School on Broad Street. Then from there, I went to Charleston Day, and from Charleston Day, I went to Mr. Gaud, which was down here on the corner of Tradd and East Bay. And, that was a one room school. There were two classes in there, and whoever was reciting at the time, sat up in the front of the school and we'd sit in the back. It was a one room, had a little small bathroom, and if you needed to go to the bathroom, you had to raise four fingers and he would allow you to go to the bathroom. And, that's the way he taught. And then as we reached the eighth grade, then, at least our family, applied to Episcopal High School, where both my brother and I went after we left Charleston.

AB: And after Episcopal?

TR: After Episcopal High School, I went to Davidson [College], and after Davidson, then I entered Medical school. [I] went four years to get my degree, [and] had a year of internship at the Medical University, four years of residency, then I went in the Army for two years. And then in 1968, I came back and started practicing Obstetrics & Gynecology. I was the first man back in town in a very, very, long time. And I was very blessed because we got busy in a hurry.

AB: Can you talk a little bit about the medical field and how it's changed and Roper Hospital and what you've seen?

TR: Yeah, it's... back then things were a lot simpler. We would do complete exams on ladies when they would come in the office. And you would write very little in the chart because you knew you had done it. And you would say... the blood pressure and all that was taken by the nurse. And you would write PE which meant physical and you would write WNL, within normal limits. Well, you knew and the patient knew that you had checked their body, from head to toe. And, you wrote pelvic exam, WNL, within normal limits, paps one a year, and that took about as much space on the chart. Now they have to... they can't do that. They have to type it on the computer, you know, and all this stuff. And, they just... and the people that make these rules for all the physicians now, they're not physicians, they're politicians. It's... it's really a headache for physicians. And reimbursement is so bad for physicians now that they have to stay in the office. They have to do their relative value units for so much, for so long, and your internist now, it's so sad, because the internist now, doesn't come to see you in the hospital anymore. They have the hospitalist in the hospital to take care of you when you come in. So, that sort of personal thing that you had with your physician before, it's sad, because is gone. The physician doesn't have time to do what you and I are doing right now, looking at each other and talking. He's busy on the computer, putting down all the things that you say, and doing this, and not looking at you and paying attention. He's paying attention... you get good care; [the] care is excellent. The care that you get in the hospital is excellent, but the personal type of care. That's missing, and that's sad, it really is. [The] nurses, they don't take time to sit on the bed and talk to you anymore. Because it's so busy outside putting everything in the computer. They'll come in and they're very good, excellent at what they do. One of my girls, Elizabeth, is a neonatal intensive care nurse, but they...they're... it's not that you don't get good care, that has nothing to do with it. It's the personal part of medicine [that] is gone and it has to, because of the fact that what they want is numbers. [Be] 'cause that's the only way they're going to make it.

AB: What do you remember about doctors and medicine in Charleston, when you were growing up?

TR: When I was growing up there were very few doctors in medicine, and my physician when I was a young boy was Dr. Joe [Joseph] Waring. He was a pediatrician, and my mother took me to him when, if we ever got sick. I have very fond recollections, not really fond at the time mind you [know] . . . [once] I had fallen and cut my knee, and he told me that it would hurt worse to put the Novocain in there than it would just to put the three stitches in. So my mother laid across me while he put three stitches in. Ha Ha! He was a wonderful man though, and he would come to the house if you needed. People did house calls back then. And it was just an incredible time, it really was.

AB: Where was his office?

TR: His office was on Rutledge Avenue and you just go in. And you know, just a simple, a simple thing not all the computerization as I call it.

AB: Well, who were the doctors that were delivering the babies?

TR: There were a lot of general practitioners who would deliver babies. My uncle was an obstetrician gynecologist. Dr. Arthuro was... Just an aside from that, my father, who was a lawyer, told my brother and I: he said "I don't mind what you do, but whatever you do, what you want to do, is be your own boss and then nobody can fire you."

So, my brother became a lawyer, and back in those days, and I became a doctor. And basically, when you went back into practice back then in medicine, you shook hands and you said . . . they said, "welcome to the practice." You shook hands and they, by word of mouth, they said "you will be getting 1% of the gross per month until you get to 33 months then you become a full partner."

[I said] "Thank you very much." That's it. But now it's a stack of papers like this you know. It's changed. It's all whether that's good or bad I don't know. I mean, it's just everything has become so commercial. And when you go to a doctor's office, you're not a patient anymore, you're a client and it's sad.

AB: What kind of changes have you seen in Roper? You started...

TR: I started... when I started at Roper, things weren't quite as busy. There weren't so many people around. They weren't so many positions around. Now there's more of everything, and the demand for more information on the charts and that sort of stuff. It's . . . it's really created havoc for physicians, and especially the older physicians like myself that were coming along. I escaped just before all the computerization and records having to be the way they are in this day in time. As a matter of fact, one of my grandsons is... he follows the physicians in the emergency room and types for them; he's a scribe. And that's what you have to have because you can't... they can take better care of patients by talking to them and hands-on with them without having to worry about all this other paperwork stuff. And that's the way it is; and that's the way it is everywhere.

AB: So, when you started you joined your uncle or when you first practiced?

TR: When I started my... I was supposed to go into practice with my uncle in 1966, but he had a cardiac arrest and died subsequently. Thereafter in 1966. But then I was to go into practice with the three of them: Dr. Richard Sosnowski, Dr. James Wilson, [and my uncle]. But my uncle died, and I went in the army. And they were a two-man practice, and then it was known to the three of us, that when I got out of the army, I could come into practice with them. Well, just an aside to that, I love to hunt and fish August 15th is the first day of deer season. They said... I got out of the army at the end of July. They said take two weeks. We want you in the office on August 15th. I said no. I'll come in on August 16th. So, that's how I started my work.

AB: Well, tell us about hunting and fishing, as a child where did you...

TR: My father , well I grew up on Sullivan's Island in the summers so I grew up with a fishing rod in my hand over there. And I fished a lot. I learned from my uncles how to cast a net, so I spent time in the creek. When we lived on Sullivan's Island in the summers, I lived over there before the Ben Sawyer Bridge was built, and we used to go the old river bridge there in Mount Pleasant. That's now sort of a walkway for people to go down and enjoy, but I learned how to row a boat. I was... [I] used to row from where the Ben Sawyer Bridge is now up to Goat Island and back, 'cause I was a bird egg collector back in those days. I used to fish. We had a wonderful black lady named Dah, I never knew her real name until later years, she was with us from age zero to me to age 21. I would catch the fish she would clean them. She would cook them for breakfast, and my father, before going to work from Sullivan's Island, Dah would cook the fish [and] put the whole fish on my father's plate, head on whiting. [We had] whiting, croaker, and

spot like. We'd have grits and fish for breakfast. But for my brother and myself, she would take the meat off the bones and lay it beside the fish so we wouldn't choke on a fish bone. We were so blessed. Man, it was just crazy; it was wonderful, wonderful. And hunting. My father took me on my first deer hunt when I was six, and he shot an 8-point buck and a 20lb gobbler on the first drive I ever went on in my life. So, I was hooked. Those days, I just got to go with him and hunted. [I] grew up hunting, grew up fishing, grew up collecting bird eggs, and watching birds.

My uncle Hugh Rutledge, my mother's brother, was an amateur taxidermist, and I have his equipment that he used to dissect birds and put them back together and that sort of stuff. My Uncle Tom Rutledge died at an early age of tuberculosis, so I didn't know him real well. I had an Aunt Alice **Seedling** [?], who was quite an outdoor person. And mother loved to fish, and we did that all the time on Sullivan's Island. I was so blessed. Man, it's ridiculous what a wonderful childhood we had. You couldn't ask any better. Sullivan's Island was [a place where] nobody was around. Few families own[ed] houses over there, and you'd go on the beach and you might see three or four people that you knew. But there's nobody. We rode horses. We had two horses, and we rode the horses swimming out there. [There is] nothing like being on a horse's back and feel them swim through the ocean. It was just wonderful, wonderful!

AB: So, did you keep a stable?

TR: [We] kept them in the stable, and we had somebody feed them for us in the winter time, but we'd go over on the weekends and feed them. There was a wonderful man over there that would feed him 5 days a week, and we do it on Saturday and Sunday, and ride them on the weekends when we were over there. But every Sunday morning we would have to get up, get on the horses for daddy. There were two of them, and we would ride to the far end of the Isle of Palms and back. It was [a] wonderful, long ride, and you could gallop on them on the beach. You could do anything because there wasn't anybody around. Where you might see might see one or two people here and there, but quite a change [today].

AB: Were there grocery stores on Sullivan's?

TR: No . . . Yes, there was. . . Sorry, there was Simmons Grocery. Yes, there was. It was called the Triangle grocery, which is probably about station 24. There is a church on the left about station 24, and the main road going out, and then the road forks right there. And that was the Triangle grocery. Right there. And that was Simmons. . . Simmons. . . I guess they called it. . . Well, it was called the Triangle grocery, but the Simmons' ran it. And they had Simmons' fish market on Ben Sawyer Boulevard over on the Mount Pleasant side later. But that's [Simmons Grocery] where mother shopped in the summer. I'd forgotten about that, but it's no longer there of course.

AB: Can you tell us about Dah- you were saying you found out her name later.

TR: I'm sorry, oh Dah-Mae Simmons was her name. And she was a short, wonderful lady. When I was growing up apparently, I was a bad boy and she called me "an unmanageable creature." Ha ha ha! When I was a little boy and she was there for us, she cooked; she cleaned. When my father built the house on Sullivan's Island in 1936, upstairs had three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a little, teeny back porch. Downstairs had a bedroom and a bathroom. Dare stayed there the whole summer. She came over. She stayed the whole summer. She cooked

breakfast and we called it dinner. [She] cooked dinner in the middle of the day. Then, we would eat peanut butter and jelly for supper or something like that, and Dah would go downstairs, do her thing and whatever she did. But that was her room. And she would go, and during the winter time she would live there on the upper part of the city. Probably . . . I remember where it was on the other side the cross town now. And she would catch the bus, and come down to us early in the morning. [She would] cook daddy's breakfast, and she would cook dinner. And then for supper we would be on our own.

When we first moved to Orange Street when I was 6, there was no kitchen in the big house. Orange Street had a back house which I don't know whether . . . I'm not sure it was a two-story building that had upstairs, was just an old two-bedroom not really a bedroom, but [it had] two rooms upstairs, two rooms downstairs. One [of the rooms] had a big fire place and an iron wood stove there. That's how Dare cooked our meals. You cooked your meals out there because the people in the house didn't want the house to smell like cooking. And you had outside the back door a dumbwaiter. You pull that up. That opened into the pantry upstairs in the house and that's how food got up to us to start with. And in one of the rooms just outside of the old coat pantry, there was a little closet that had another dumbwaiter in it. That you could send the food up to the second floor if you need it to. It was pretty interesting. And mother got that changed over finally. She couldn't stand that. So they put [in] a kitchen. They put the stove in and everything else upstairs. But when we were first there, Dare was cooking outside on the wood stove.

AB: What kind of things would she cook

TR: She . . . grits every morning of your life. She cooked a lot of fried food, vegetables. She taught me how to . . . as not out there [outside kitchen] but upstairs. When I was little and when the kitchen was upstairs, she taught me how to cook in that. She never measured anything. She's one of these people that just puts this, put that, put that, but it was always good. The best food you ever put in your mouth. And she would get me a little tiny pot, and I could dump the stuff in it and stir it up. And she would let me pretend that I turn[ed] the stove on and then she made me clean it after I was done. And to this day I love to cook and I'm the cleanup . . . I've been the cleanup person around my house and everybody else's. When I come to eat, then I clean up behind everybody. That's what I do and . . . but that's secondary to Dah. She was a . . . I went to her funeral and she was just a special, special person in our lives. And she loved us to death, and we loved her. She made \$10 a week, that's how much she got paid. And we had another person working with for us, a guy named Isaac Singleton, who was the former stevedore. But he was older then and he helped in the yard, cleaned up and did all sorts of stuff. And back in those days, before integration of course and that sort of stuff, black people and white people were totally separate. I used to go in the kitchen and eat with them, and I would get called on that. "You can't do that son." But I'd still do it. I still did it and I kept right on doing it. And they were just great people. And I mean they really were!

Isaac Singleton taught me how to lift up heavy stuff. He was a stevedore. And when he was younger, he could pick up a hundred pounds and [with] each hand and bite another hundred pounds and walk down the dock with it. He was incredibly strong man, but he knew how to do leverage and that sort of stuff. So, I learned a lot from him . . . wonderful fellow!

AB: What about accents, Charleston accents?

TR: Charleston accents... Charlestoneye. I really don't know where it came from but when we went off to high school they called us Gunk and Geechee. And that was the name for the Charlestoneye, the Geechee, and we do have some sort of inflection but I really don't know exactly where it came from. But I don't think it comes from Gullah. It's just like people up north talk different from people down here. But they used to tease us. Oh man, they did say "y'all don't know how to talk from down there." But that's just one of those things. It was the way we talk [and] still do.

AB: So as a child you didn't interact with people who spoke in different ways?

TR: No, not really, I mean we didn't hardly see anybody, you know I mean, you might see a few people here and there. Visitation and that sort of stuff: nobody came downtown. It was all local. This whole area was just totally local people. But now of course, I mean you don't know anybody walk out the front door and there's ten thousand people out there walking and doing. But nobody's here that used to be here. I say nobody. I meant you all are, but they're few and far between. If you go down East Bay now, the high battery, and try to find somebody you know you're not going to do that. And we knew where everybody lived. And there were a few people here and there that came to town, but not very often, not very often; [it's a] dramatic change.

AB: So, after school you played ball with the other kids can you tell us what the kids did around town?

TR: Well we play ball... we love . . . for the radio back then. . . Just as an aside of what we did. People. . . we'd be playing ball and then somebody would say, we didn't have watches or anything, but somehow, somebody knew what time it was. There were[not] any phones and all that sort of stuff. [At] 6 o' clock *The Lone Ranger* came on the radio. Man, people would pedal out of there and be on the way home (inaudible?). We'd listen to *The Lone Ranger* on the radio, *The Thin Man*, Mr. and Mrs. North, Beulah. Beulah was wonderful. Beulah was this black lady on the radio. And she had a boyfriend, and you would hear this on the radio. You'd hear knock, knock, knock, and she'd say "who's that?"

"This is Bill baby no pain, no strain; this is Bill talking." She let him in the door. You [would] hear all these wonderful things [on the] radio shows they had back then. And *Superman* and that sort of stuff. But if we weren't playing games, a lot of people skated. And my brother could skate, so my mother bought me a pair of skates when I was about five. I sat down on the edge of the curb to put on the skates. [While sitting there], my brother skated in front of me. He fell [and] broke his arm: right there in front of me. I took the skates off and never got back on them. Ha, ha. I wouldn't go. I absolutely refuse to get on the skates, [but I] rode my bike everywhere. Anyhow, but you know we didn't do a lot, there wasn't a heck of a lot to do. But we had a great time. I mean, we had sports. We could go outdoors. You could play with your friends; we could go to each other's houses. And it's just a wonderful way to grow up and we never considered ourselves being in any danger.

AB: What about the church?

TR: My father went to St Luke's and St Paul's, and we would go with him sometimes. Mother had us go to St Philip's, because [of] Sunday school and that sort of thing. So that's where we my brother and I grew up, at St Philip's. Like I say, every now and again we would get up and go to

St Luke's and St Paul's with daddy. But he would go early Sunday morning where they had the short communion service, very little, maybe a sermon, maybe not, no music, no nothing. But go, have your wine and your bread, praise the Lord, and get on with the rest of your day. Which, his day would be to go to Sullivan's Island or go down to Lionel Legg's place and ride the horses. That's what he would do 'cause he worked 5 days and then a half day Saturday. He was a... he worked very hard, and so Sunday was his day, kind of so to speak. And most of the time he was gone early in the morning, then he'd come home and do his thing whatever it was so.

AB: What was the law profession like for him?

TR: It was a busy time and he liked it. He loved law. He was a good, an excellent lawyer. They had a big practice. It used to be Hagood, Rivers, and Young now the name is changed [Young, Clement, and Rivers]. And I used to go down go to his office and back in those days there was no air conditioning. And there was paperwork. You know in a lawyer's office is full of paperwork, to this day they had great big fans, you know, the ones that stand up there. Great big ones like that. And they had one, two, three, four secretaries and they had paper weights on everything because the fans had to be running, you know. They did shorthand in there and they would type up the shorthand and that sort of stuff.

AB: Where was his office?

TR: It was at 28 Broad Street, and he would walk to work in the summer. I mean in the winter, and the summer we were in Sullivan's Island. And they had a little shuttle service back then 'cause we had one car, an old 41 Chrysler, and . . . excuse me. . . And daddy... there was about four or five professional people. . . I don't know whether they were all lawyers or not. It was a Nash, long, kind of a van. It was van looking. Now, it had about six seats in it. [It would] take them to work in the morning and bring him home in the afternoon. It was really nice. So, a mother could drive somewhere if she needed to. She didn't drive much. She didn't need to.

AB: Do you remember hurricanes and storms?

TR: Yeah. Mother and Daddy, they never hardly went anywhere on trips. We didn't go on any trips anywhere as I recall, hardly. But in 1940, mother and daddy went to Niagara Falls, and that's when the 1940 storm came to Charleston. And my grandmother was... my grandfather was dead by then. . . my grandmother was staying with us on Sullivan's Island. And there was one police officer over there, a Mr. Brockington. And he would come by with a little bull horn and say... not an electric one, just a megaphone I guess just little megaphone "You have to leave the island, you have to leave the island." So, my grandmother didn't drive, she had a chauffeur and somehow, he was over there. We had two pet chickens and two horses. Well, we had to leave the horses there of course, and my grandmother wouldn't let us take Emma and whatever the chicken was, down with us. And we lived at Orange Street. And Orange Street, 7 Orange, is the second highest place in the city and is known for that forever. The Citadel was the only other higher place. So anyhow, we came to Orange Street, and all of our relatives, her relatives, my uncle and my aunt, they all came and parked at Orange Street. And the 1940 storm blew everything to pieces around here. We went back to Sullivan's Island. The horses were fine. The policeman that stayed over there said they were up to their chest in water but they survived. But no Emma. Emma was gone and the other chicken was gone. My brother and I, we cried and cried

‘cause they were gone. That was the big storm. And of course, Hugo was the next big one that came through. We had some small ones after that, but nothing big, nothing to concern it.

But weather is a funny thing. I remember walking on the beach and all of a sudden if the wind changes and it gets cool, you know bad weather is coming. And this storm came through and there were about 30 boats offshore fishing and none of them could come back into Charleston. They ended up going down to Beaufort and Savannah and then coming home, because of the big storm [that] came through. The other thing that was very interesting about living at Sullivan's Island, was that during the Second World War. You could look off the front porch and see the glow of the ships that were burning out there that the Germans had sunk. It was absolutely amazing. And the light bulbs that you had in your house coming down from the ceiling, they are all the light bulbs there weren't any chandeliers and all that. The bottom or the globe of the bulb had a silver seal around it, painted silver. And it shown light only to the ceiling. [That was so you could look from out on the beach and you couldn't see any lights. That was mandated. You had to have lights like that or else you couldn't turn them on at night. You couldn't turn on the light like that at night, ‘cause they didn't want the German submarines to be able to see what was going on.

And they had at the Jetties . . . I don't know whether you know this or not, they had a submarine net out there. At the Jetties, the north and the south [jetty] . . . these are huge spikes. . . there were about six spikes on this cable, and they're about this long. And they had this . . . it created a wall there. [There] was a guy that live[d] out on the Jetties in this little house that they built out there, a shack, that had a motor in it. He would let that thing down when our ships came through. So he would let the submarine nets down ‘cause the channel was there. That's the only place you could get in. Then when the ship would come in, he would pull the net back up so the U-boats couldn't come into Charleston Harbor, like they did when they used to go into... they had them go into Norfolk and those places. So, it was pretty fascinating. And they... these... that cable came all the way... the north Jetty is sunken all the way up to Sullivan's Island where you'd see rock down there. That cable came all the way across that sunken jetty. And there was a fella walking out on the rocks after the war. He fell and stuck right through his thigh. I can remember the guy being hung up on the dadgum thing out there; it was pretty crazy. And we had air raids warnings. And they would... they... Fort Moultrie had batteries that shot cannons, these huge guns. And there were two huge ones up at station 28. And when these guns would go off in the morning it would shake the house and rattle the windows. And another funny thing happened. We had Bell working for us when Dah was gone. She was reaching down one morning to plug in the toaster and just as she put that thing in... she never heard the guns go off before. . . just as she put that plug in the wall that gun went off and the whole house shook. She screamed, she thought she'd blown up the house. She was sitting in the middle of the floor screaming when they came running out to see what was wrong with her. So, that's what happened. It was a pretty remarkable time, especially seeing that glow of the ships that were being sunk off the coast.

AB: Do you remember when the war ended?

TR: 1944 [actually August 14, 1945]. I remember when it started because we were sitting on the back porch at Orange Street [house], mother's daddy, Buist and I. And the Mouzon family lived across the street. Harold [Mouzon] was a friend of ours. He was a little bit older than us. And we were sitting out there Sunday, after church or something, and Harold came running in

the backyard and said, "I just want you all to know that Japan just bombed Pearl Harbor." I'll never forget it. December 7th, 1941, we were little people. Let's see, I guess I was 7.

AB: What about your father's... the details of his service?

TR: He was a lieutenant. He went in as a lieutenant and then he was a captain. And he became a captain in the field artillery. He was in the... what they call the Second Battle of Oman [Marne].¹ And that's when they had horses pulling the howitzers and the cannons that they shot back in those days. And it was all trench warfare, and they were somewhere at the Second Battle of Oman [Marne] and fighting one another. And a fella got his leg blown off, one of our people. . . a serviceman . . . got his leg blown off, out in the front. With the Germans returning the fire and everything, my father jumped up and ran out, put his belt around the guy's leg to stop the bleeding and dragged him back under fire, and saved his life. That's why he got his Distinguished Service Cross for way above beyond the call of duty. [B] 'cause he risked his life doing that. He stayed over there for, I don't know how long, I don't recall. And just like most people in those days, he didn't talk much about what he saw, what had happened.

The horses got gassed and they'd have to shoot them. They had their own gas mask but they [the horses] couldn't. That's when they [military] used the mustard gas to try to kill people, and do all that sort of stuff. But you'd have to get up, . . . he didn't like shooting horses when he had to do that. And he saw some bad stuff, but, like I said, he just never wanted to talk about it much. It was a rough time.

AB: What are some of the things that you kind of try to tell people when they mentioned things different about Charleston now from when you were growing up?

TR: Well, my growing up [was] such a peaceful time. And you know we could come and go as we pleased, you knew everybody, it was, [as] I say, you knew everybody, you knew people, you were very comfortable about where you went. You could ride your bike anywhere, and there were lots of things to do. But in this day and time, there's so many people here. I mean it's, I think it's ridiculous. I mean they keep building, building, building, building, building. And you elect these guys into office that try to keep things not in the status quo 'cause you have to have progress. But progress is not bringing more and more, and more and more people into town. I mean it's just crazy how they have allowed this, every time you look around, look what's happening. And if you look out your window in the afternoon, [do] you see anybody you know out there? All these hundreds of people that are going by! We're very blessed because we live on Linwood, and there are two houses on that street that face the street, ours and Frankie Rhett's on the corner. And the horse carriage is [does] come by. But we have a few tourists come by. But this side of town, my God, it's just in the city. I mean it's just I don't know when is enough, enough, you know?

AB: When do you feel like that changed?

TR: When? The last 20 years, I think! I mean it's just, its progressively gotten worse, and worse and worse. I think [Charleston] mayor Joe Riley did a good job of trying to hold on to things and keeping things kind of local. But it's just, I don't know, I don't know, but money talks

¹ Captain Rivers, then First Lt. Rivers was awarded the DSC during the fighting at Fismes, France, August 11, 1918 according to the newspaper article that described the event (Courtesy of Find-a-grave.com)

and that's where it is. That's why all these builders get to build and build and build, but where is the... why isn't there limitations? Why these people across the historic society can't do anything about it. They tried. Kitty Robinson is my dearest friend in the world. She and I just had so many times... delivered her baby girl, and some of her children and she's just a... she's an amazing woman. And I just love her to death. But they haven't been able to do anything about the craziness that's going on. And I think it's just... it's they're ruining . . . it's ruining the city it's not the pleasant, nice place it used to be. You try to drive up or walk up Eastbay towards Market Street you can't. You can, but it's just... it's ridiculous, I mean, people really coming in. That sounds like an old fuddy-duddy, but I'm not, you know. And it'll never go back the way it was, where everything is quiet and peaceful.

And... but it's just, its... as you watch the College of Charleston grow and the people, well. . . where students live uptown now, everybody would be terrified go to go up there, back in... a long time ago. Because that was a high crime district and now it's moved up a little bit further into North Charleston. Where they're shooting people all the time and it's just... it's just sad. I don't know, they just... you just don't know anybody downtown anymore. Yes, you do know a few. But basically speaking, it's become a tourist attraction. And that's good for some people. But I . . . I think as far as keeping things a little bit status quo, that's gone forever, It's sad; it's sad. Your children will never know what it was like to grow up in downtown Charleston, really, basically.

AB: I was wondering is it true that you sometimes delivered babies with a duck or a dove in your back pocket?

TR: Oh, ha, ha, ha! That happened... well yes, yes, and no. Yes, I used to hunt... still hunt a lot. But one particular time . . . Dr. Bachman Smith was a pediatrician, and his son, Young Bachman, who has recently died, and Anne, we're having their first baby. And I was over on James Island hunting quail and got a call that Anne was in labor, in early labor. And I told them to go on to the hospital. So, when I came on to the hospital to check her and I had on my hunting coat, I was standing at the foot of the bed talking to Bachman and Anne, and Dr. Bachman Smith was right there. And when a quail dies it flutters and [imitates quail] like that and makes this fluttering noise. Well, I forgot about the quail in the back of my hunting coat. And I looked up at Anne and I thought, oh she's fine. She was in very early labor, thank goodness. And we chatted back and forth and all of a sudden, [imitates quail] that quail decides to die in the back of my hunting coat. And anyhow [it] is just one of those funny things. And I met a young man at Haddrell's Point in Mount Pleasant. I was coming in to set and he said, "Dr. Rivers?"

And I said "yes sir."

He said "you delivered me and my mother hadn't liked you since."

And I said, "what do you mean?"

And he said, "Well, you came in and your camouflage when you delivered me. I loved to hunt and fish ever since, and she's mad with you." So, I used to come in from all kinds of places and... I'd get there and be there on time. But I did show up a lot of times in... I showed up in my hip boots one day. Because at St Francis we had a huge rain. You could park behind St Francis, [and] I had my old car there, and I had a pair of hip boots in the back. The only way to get to

Roper [Hospital], because the water was so [that it] would have been waist deep on most people, but I could walk with those boots, so that's how I made rounds that day in my hip boots at Roper.

AB: How about [when] you were able to keep the Bridge from opening on Sullivan's? You know the number? Somebody told me one time that you called the bridge operator on Sullivan's.

TR: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I called the bridge operator. Yeah, well yeah, we did that. [I] had to call the bridge operator, you know. I was very lucky when we lived on Sullivan's Island in the summer. I would have lived over there all the time. You always had a traffic jam on Sundays... Saturdays or Sundays, and so when you would call in labor, I would leave and go in early, just, just in case. One time I had to get the policeman to take me to the head of the line, when the bridge was open. But that was only one time. I was really blessed, and oh man, it was just... those were sometimes, those were sometimes, wonderful, wonderful! I had a wonderful life during all that. It was great!

AB: Well is there anything else you want to share?

TR: I can't... I just, you know I think I've had a...just a very...been very blessed. And I'm blessed with a wonderful family. My wife Mary is the best thing to ever happen to me, besides the Lord. I found both of them at the same time, which is almost 40 years ago now. So, it's just very, very, special and I've been truly blessed. And well just one other little story about being a physician and how things were and how blessed I've been. And that is, when I was a sophomore medical student, you could... And old Roper was the only emergency room back then, and the interns were always busy, and you could go and work in the emergency room and suture minor things, like a cut on the back or leg or something like that. They [would] show you how to prep it, and sew it up, and you learn how to do that. Well, one time I was there in the middle of the night, and they had an automobile accident come in. There were two rooms that had a table, and each one had a little alcove with three exam tables. Well, the intern was very busy with the one nurse, with these two injured people. And a lady came in, in labor, and the physician said, "Tommy go check her." Well I've never done a pelvic exam. I didn't know anything what was going on. So, I went in check the lady. And she had the membrane bulging, so I went and explain that to the intern. He said, "take her upstairs," so I took her upstairs.

[I] woke up the physician that was on call, Dr. Tucker Laffitte, he was the chief resident and he said, "you can do it, the nurse will show you." and went back to sleep. I went back out in the hall, found the nurse, change[d] my clothes. And anybody can deliver a routine normal delivery, because that's the Lord's way of taking care of people and babies. It was a routine normal delivery in 1959. It's all over everything's fine. I go on about my business and then do this, do that. I'm in practice and I get ready to retire. So, I am doing only minor surgery. I have a patient who needs a DNC. She comes into the pre-op area, and in those days, I always prayed with my patients before I went back to it. I didn't say let us pray, I said "if you don't mind let's talk to the big man?" So, I did and the patient's mother was there with her. So, we did a little prayer thing, and the patient's mother said you know you delivered me at the Medical University in 1959. I said, "no ma'am I did not because I didn't do any deliveries at the Medical University in 1959." So, I went back, did the procedure, came back out and talked to the mother. [Now], my brain was working in the operating room. I said, "Ma'am, did you come into old Roper emergency room, and I took you upstairs, and I delivered you?"

She said, "Yes you did." So here I was getting ready to start my OBGYN practice, operating on the first person that I ever delivered. And you talk about being blessed. And it turns out I had delivered her children and didn't know that she was the first person, and me as a sophomore medical student, I delivered her. That's the end of my story.

AB: Do you know how many babies you delivered?

TR: 7000, easily, maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe, and I've been so blessed, because it's a miracle every time. It is a miracle, I mean, never got used to that. Always loved it, always look forward to it. And most of the time, thank goodness, it's a good experience, and boy was I blessed. It was a phenomenal, phenomenal ride, I mean, from growing up downtown here with my family and friends and being able to hunt and fish and have all this right here. You just have to be thankful. That's what it is because He's in charge, that's it.

END OF INTERVIEW