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Mill Valley Library Association

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Mill Valley, California

DANIEL A. COLLINS

An Interview Conducted By
Carl M. Mosher

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Daniel A. Collins, D.D.S.

Born January 11, 1916 in Darlington, South Carolina.

Resident of Mill Valley since 1952.

Interviewed May 1973 at the home of Carl Mosher, 535 Summit Avenue, Mill Valley.

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DANIEL A. COLLINS, DDS

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Introduction

In the 1960's TIME magazine chose what it considered to be the hundred most outstanding blacks in the United States. One of them was a resident of Mill Valley -- Dr. Daniel A. Collins.

A well-known dentist, Dr. Collins is also an Executive Vice President of the publishing firm of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. For many years he was a lecturer and researcher in the College of Dentistry at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco. He is the author of a textbook on dental care. He was the first black person on the California State Board of Public Health, resigning to accept appointment to the State Board of Education -- again the first black to serve. He is, above all, a warm human being.

Dan Collins was born in the Deep South. He and his wife moved to San Francisco in 1942 and to Mill Valley ten years later -- not without inflaming racial controversy. They came here to give their sons "the opportunity of an equal education, a chance to join the Boy Scouts, and room to run and play." One of these sons is now an architect, another attends Harvard Law School, a third is a physician.

The effect of Mill Valley on this dynamic family (and its impact on the city) is an account well worth preserving. This personal capsule is a part of that unusual story.

DANIEL A. COLLINS

Carl Mosher

This is May 28, 1973. I'm visiting with Dr. Daniel A. Collins. Dr. Collins, one of the Bay Area's best-known dentists, is a teacher, lecturer, author and generally first-class citizen.

Dan, first of all I'm curious to know what the "A" stands for.

Dan Collins

It's for Andrew. My father's first name was Andrew. I don't know where the Daniel came from. My mother and father have both passed on, and I don't know where it came from.

Mr. Mosher

I'd like to know where and when you were born and something about your family.

Dr. Collins

I was born in 1916 in Darlington, South Carolina. I was the second child of my father's third marriage and my mother's second marriage. My father's two wives died. He had no issue from the first marriage but a son from the second. My mother's first husband died just before a child was born, and that was the only issue from that marriage. So I had two older half-brothers -- one from my father's side and one from my mother's side. Then I had a sister who was a whole sister. She was seven years older than I. The half-brother on my mother's side was 11 years older and the half-brother on my father's side about 13 years older than I. I know very little about either of them.

Mr. Mosher

Are they still living?

Dr. Collins

No, they're all dead. I'm the only person living in my immediate family. My mother, father, sister and two brothers are dead.

My father was born in 1869 into a family in Marion, South Carolina. He was the oldest of nine children. I found it difficult all my life to believe my father was accurate, but he persisted in saying that he had had only two weeks of education. He read newspapers avidly, and I wish my penmanship were half as good as his! He developed eventually into a contractor, having worked in hotels and on railroads. He worked as a drayman; he had horses and mules and hauled timber and tobacco and cotton and other types of commodities in the south. He was in the timber business for awhile, getting telephone poles out of the swamps for the power companies -- juniper poles, which you don't see now. Juniper is part of the redwood family, really, but it grew in South Carolina. He also became a house-mover, so he was a man of great talent and tremendous ingenuity. I think if he had had the opportunity, he would have been one of America's great minds.

Mr. Mosher

He obviously made enough to send you to school, and you've had a lot of education.

Dr. Collins

His oldest son, my half-brother, was in college during the First World War -- Savannah State College in Georgia. He left there to join the army. He was mechanically minded, very good with automobiles, and he became chauffeur for a general. After the war he didn't go back to college but spent his life in and out of New York. He finally died in about 1926 or '27.

The half-brother from my mother's first marriage -- and by the way, that's an interesting story. My mother met her first husband in a little school called Allen University. It's an African Methodist-Episcopal college in Columbia, South Carolina. She had gone to college there in the 80's and 90's and met her first husband, who was a teacher at that school, a Mr. Turnage. She and Mr. Turnage married, and a few years later this boy was born.

As an interesting sidelight, my sister went to the same college and married one of her professors.

Coming back to the second brother, he finished high school at age 13 and Fisk University summa cum laude at age 17. At age 20 he finished Harvard Law College, the third or fourth person in his class. This was in 1927. He died in 1962.

Mr. Mosher

What had been his career in the meantime?

Dr. Collins

He was a lawyer in and out of Oklahoma and South Carolina, frustrated to no end. That's a whole story by itself. He was a very mixed-up, brilliant young man who found it very difficult to accept the realities of racial prejudice in his time. This was different from the racial prejudice in my time. I have a much easier world to deal with. He had a much more complicated and irascible world to deal with, an immovable world. No matter how brilliant he was and how much of a scholar he was, it didn't make any difference -- he was black. So he would much rather do without than to have that kind of talent.

My sister finished Allen University and attended the Atlanta School of Social Work. I don't know whether she got her Master's in social work or not. She died in 1942.

All my brothers and sisters were supported in our educational desires as long as we wanted to go to school. Most of us learned how to help ourselves, to work in the summer and get jobs at school, because our parents were not wealthy.

Mr. Mosher

Where did you go to high school?

Dr. Collins

In Darlington, South Carolina.

Mr. Mosher

Did you go on to college immediately?

Dr. Collins

Yes, I went on to Paine College in Augusta, Georgia.

I'm presently chairman of the Board of Trustees of that college. Have been for the last three years.

Mr. Mosher

Were you doing premed work there?

Dr. Collins

I was "going to college"! I liked science and mathematics. It just so happened that I had a chemistry major and a physics minor. In fact I had a double major in chemistry and physics and a minor in mathematics, just because it was my particular interest. But I had no motivation, no big inner direction as to where I was going in life. I was just going to college.

After I finished college in 1936 I stayed out of school for a year and worked for my dad. Then I decided I didn't want to make a career doing that, so I applied for dental school.

Actually, I had been offered a doctorate program in physical chemistry at the University of Indiana. My professor in chemistry was a graduate of the University of Indiana, and he maneuvered the offer of a doctorate program in physical chemistry beginning in the fall of '37. But in those days, Carl, there was nothing for a black man to do but to teach in one of the black colleges for \$2,000 or \$3,000 a year. I could make more money working with my dad as a contractor.

Mr. Mosher

Or playing in an orchestra.

Dr. Collins

Or even hopping bells or working on a railroad. I just didn't look forward to that; it didn't make sense to me. So I arbitrarily turned that down and worked for my dad a year. Finally I decided I didn't want to do that forever. There were a lot of drawbacks in that profession. He was a house-mover at the time. He moved all over the state, for weeks at a time. For an older man with a family already reared it was all right, but for a young man going into raising a family it didn't make sense.

Mr. Mosher

Let's get out of the sequence of your personal story

for a minute. You say in 1937 there were limits on what you could do. Shall I infer from that that you think a lot of new fields have opened up for black people? You see interesting progress? It seems so to me, but I just want your view.

Dr. Collins

Oh yes, yes. I don't want to leave the impression that all is peaches and cream and that the millennium has arrived. There are still very prejudiced institutions, prejudiced individuals and prejudiced sociopolitical systems. But there are enough open individuals, open systems and open political and social institutions that a black person well-educated in almost any field can now find useful and rewarding experience.

One of my sons is a physician. One is going into city planning. One is an architect. When I was a kid -- a black architect? You'd send him to an insane asylum because he was crazy!

Mr. Mosher

Just this morning I noticed in the San Francisco Chronicle a picture and story about a black decorator. He said that actually at this moment in history he finds it an advantage to be black. That's a new twist, isn't it?

Dr. Collins

At this point in time it behooves all young blacks to take care of business. You have to take an opportunity when it comes. The fact that I did not have opportunities when I was young (and other blacks didn't either) had nothing in the world to do with my personal ability to do or not do, to achieve or not achieve. It had to do with the tenor of the times, and I read it in a certain kind of way. It behooves young blacks at this time to take advantage of this (in some quarters) problack operation. Yes, in some quarters today it's better to be black than white. In applying to some colleges, a black student with the same record and potential as a white student may have a better chance of getting into a better university, because the better universities are trying to catch up with the times and change their image of resisting black involvement.

Mr. Mosher

They're trying to redress a balance. They've been out of balance for centuries.

Dr. Collins

This is reasonably true in most cases. It's beginning to taper off at this point, however. It's an extremely mixed-up thing at this time. I can give you one example in my own family. I can talk about this particular experience because it happened in my family and I know all the details.

Chuck, our third son, is a very good student. He's not a straight-A student, but he's a well-rounded student, an honor student, president of the Honor Society at Williams. He spent a year with Doxiades in Athens, Greece studying city planning, and he has been admitted to Harvard Law School. He's going this year, the fall of '73. Right now he's finishing a Master's at M.I.T. in city planning. He took 15 courses, and he made 15 A's. But he can't get into Boalt Hall¹ because he isn't poor enough! He's not on welfare. Boalt will take 30 minority students this year, but they must be on welfare or have a police record or have some kind of socioeconomic disadvantage. The general applicant like Chuck, who is competitive, can't get in.

Mr. Mosher

How about a comparable white student with his same academic background? Would he have the same problem getting in?

Dr. Collins

No problem! Well actually, there is always a problem getting into Boalt Hall. Boalt has 3,000 or 4,000 applications, and they take maybe 250 or 300 students. So there is a problem getting into Boalt Hall. But Chuck's problem getting into Boalt is that he has to compete with the white boys. And although he was president of the Honor Society at Williams, a very fine college, he was not Phi Beta Kappa. His first year or so, coming from California public schools and going into New England colleges, he stumbled a little bit. He had a difficult first year. But his last three years, and particularly his last two years, were exceptional -- or very good. But he couldn't pull up the deficits from just getting by during his first year. So he's not Phi

¹University of California School of Law, Berkeley.

Beta Kappa, and if someone measures his college achievement with white kids who have Phi Beta Kappas and straight A's -- four points -- he'd have a difficult time matching them. But if anybody looks at the boy's achievement in highly competitive educational environments (for instance, Doxiades in Athens and M.I.T.), you can see he would make a fine student.

Another problem is that he didn't score very high on his law aptitude test. This is a common problem among black students, among minority students. The tests that have been developed by various professional schools are artificial barriers to begin with -- artificial barriers to screen white students who apply, so that they may choose what seems to be the cream of the crop. These tests do not apply accurately or even semiaccurately to black students. If a black student or a Mexican-American student or an Indian student happens to score high on a law aptitude test or a medical aptitude test, he will do well in school, there is no doubt about it. But the fact that he does not score high is no indication that he can't do the work and do it well -- or exceptionally.

There's no simple explanation for any part of the racial problem. You have to look at the circumstances you're dealing with at that time.

Mr. Mosher

As a matter of fact, nobody at Harvard or other places is actually setting this up in an effort to exclude anybody. It just flows out of the system, out of the past, don't you think?

Dr. Collins

From my point of view, Carl, these tests are set up to exclude. Not to exclude blacks but to exclude everybody in the society who is not an extremely high achiever, who doesn't come from a very advantaged family. As I say, any black or Chinese or Mexican-American or native American who scores high on the test will do well at the universities. But the fact that he does not score well on the aptitude test is no indication that he can't do the work. These tests are developed to really skim the cream off the white population. It depends on the kind of family exposure -- for example, the family discussing Shakespeare. A lot of black kids with brilliant minds have never even read Shakespeare. Shakespeare isn't critical to their lives or to their future.

Mr. Mosher

They also have different nomenclature. A different scheduling and type of thought goes on in their culture.

Dr. Collins

Absolutely. Different emphases. As I say, there are limited spots in fine graduate schools -- in what they call the New England schools or Stanford -- these schools can afford to practice exclusionary behavior. They can say, "We want only the very cream of white kids. We don't want a mix of white kids. We only want those kids who not only have what we call high-achieving minds but who have adjusted those minds to accept the philosophies of the system." A dissident white kid coming up to these tests won't pass either, unless he lies. A kid who disagrees with the system can only score high on these tests if he's willing to compromise his position on a lot of items in order to pass the test.

Mr. Mosher

I can remember years ago in Kansas, where I lived, we had a Polish community, we had a Mennonite community, and so on, and they didn't do very well. For the very same reason -- the home was so different...

Dr. Collins

The tests were not designed to serve these communities. They were designed to serve the major Anglo-Saxon-Jewish community. Jewish kids do extremely well on tests, because they're very literary.

Mr. Mosher

And for centuries they've been oriented in this direction.

Dr. Collins

Absolutely. These kids have no trouble scoring very high on tests.

Mr. Mosher

Getting back to your dental school, where did you go?

Dr. Collins

I went to the dental school at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee.

Mr. Mosher

And you graduated from there in what year?

Dr. Collins

In 1941. Then I spent a year at the Guggenheim Dental Clinic for children in New York City, training in children's dentistry. Then I came to the University of California and spent three years full-time in research and graduate training for a Master's degree in dentistry, then part-time in practice and part-time in research until 1960 when I resigned from the university and began full-time practice.

Mr. Mosher

You mean you were at Cal during World War II and then continuously right up to '60?

Dr. Collins

From October 1942 until June 1945 I was full-time at the university. After '45 I was half-time.

Mr. Mosher

What were you teaching?

Dr. Collins

I was teaching in a field called "dental medicine," which is the medical aspect of dental diseases -- oral pathology, dental medicine and research.

Mr. Mosher

And you weren't in private practice at all during that period?

Dr. Collins

I practiced at night and on weekends in a friend's office to make enough money to support my family. My salary then was \$175 a month. That wasn't much money.

The thing about the army is another ball of wax. It's just like the Watergate affair -- if you pick up the end of the thread it just keeps unwinding! I was excused from military service to teach at the University of California. This is one case where racial prejudice worked in my behalf. I was registered with my home Selective Service Board in

Darlington, South Carolina. I'm convinced that the whites who were on that board would rather see me in California hidden away than to see me get a commission in the U. S. Army in 1942!

That's one part of the story. The other part is that many of the professors at the university were reserve officers; when the Second World War broke out they were taken away from the university staff. The dean was happy to have anybody he could get to teach so he requested my presence as essential to the university, and my local board was happy to grant the deferment. I was doing some research in nutrition at that time under federal contracts for Dr. Becks in Berkeley who was on my thesis committee, so it was called essential research on nutrition. There were all kinds of reasons why the system at that time worked in my behalf. I didn't have to go to the army, and in exchange for that I got three years of graduate training.

Mr. Mosher

What year did you move to Mill Valley?

Dr. Collins

In 1952.

Mr. Mosher

And when did you come to California?

Dr. Collins

We came in 1942, to San Francisco. We rented a house from a lady (a white lady, by the way) who lived upstairs and rented the lower part to us. She was a grand old lady. She died about four months ago, must have been 90-some-odd years old -- a really great woman, a human and personal individual. She didn't wave any flags or belong to anything, but she had a very high personal commitment to fairness and equality. In about 1944 or '45 she sold her home to us. By 1945 I had begun to practice half-time.

So we lived in San Francisco for ten years, from 1942 to '52, then we came over here.

Mr. Mosher

How did you happen to move to Marin County?

Dr. Collins

Along in the early fifties my wife and I decided for a number of reasons that we didn't want our kids to grow up in a central city. I have great compassion for the central city, great concern, and will do anything I can to help alleviate or ameliorate its problems. But I don't recommend the central city as a growing-up place for a child, any kind of a child. It has nothing to do with racial groups, it just has to do with the city. It's a miserable place to raise a child -- unless one is wealthy and can afford to have a country home or estate in Peru or Mexico or the Sierra where the kid can get out of the city for the summers and break away from the peer demands of the central city.

Mr. Mosher

This is a pretty well-recognized phenomenon now. You were a little avant garde in 1952.

Dr. Collins

I guess so. Our kids were coming into the house using language and behavior patterns that my wife and I didn't think were proper for kids of that age, and we decided we'd get out of San Francisco.

Mr. Mosher

That had risk, too.

Dr. Collins

In 1952 it had great risk. There are certain comforts living in the Fillmore District. We were around our friends, and it was a very comfortable community for my wife and myself. But we decided we didn't want our kids to grow up in any core city, so we began to cast around in various communities -- down the peninsula or maybe Marin County. We knew nothing about Marin County, a little more about the peninsula. We had some friends down there. We shopped down the peninsula and didn't find anything that we particularly liked in land or houses.

I'm a want-ad freak. I look at want ads in South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee -- wherever they're in the English language, I look at want ads -- old things for sale. One Sunday morning I was lying in bed, reading the want ads on houses for sale. Dereath was in the kitchen, and I called to her and said, "How would you like to have

a house with a 20-foot window that overlooks San Francisco Bay?"

"Fine," she said. "Go ahead and buy it." That's the way she ribbed me. If I'd read a want ad to her, she'd say, "Go ahead and buy five."

Later that day Dr. Rodney Pain, a dentist and former student of mine at the university who had become an associate in my office, came over to our house. His wife was in the hospital giving birth to their third child, and Dereath had invited him and his two sons over to have dinner with us. Rodney was born in Scotland, lived for awhile in China, and then came to California when he was about 13 or 14 and lived in San Diego. He went through the college and university system and through dental school. He's a free soul, one of the few free souls I know. Long before it became popular to be an independent thinker, he was. He never wore a tie, for instance, even when he graduated.

Anyway, Rodney brought his two kids over for dinner. He drove one of those engineer-type, carry-all station wagons that seated nine or ten people. After dinner we loaded our four kids, his two kids and the three of us in his wagon and headed over here to look at a lot that I had also seen advertised in the newspaper, a lot up behind Tamalpais High School. These lots were just opening up in 1952. I didn't particularly like the neighborhood. The house I would have had to build on the lot would have been out of place in that particular neighborhood. So we came down the hill, back into Mill Valley and were driving out of town when Dereath said, "What about the house you were talking about this morning?"

I really was chicken. I didn't want to come up and talk to the people who had the house. I'd been rejected so much, for apartments and what-not, being black in the society of 1942. I wasn't particularly excited about confronting the woman and asking about her damned house. It's just that... I wanted to get out of the city, but to have someone treat you differently because you're black or Jewish or something is the type of hurt that one doesn't relish. You don't look forward to being denied something because of things you had nothing to do with. So I was a little hesitant about seeing her. I could go look at the lot because it was empty and there was no confrontation with anybody. But Dereath said, "How about that house?" and Rodney said, "Yes, how about that house?"

I called the woman, Mrs. Faltin, and she said, "Sure, come right up." We'd walked over the other property, and our clothes were dusty and dirty. The kids were three years old -- four, five, six -- just a bunch of dirty, snotty-nosed kids. We were all dressed in jeans. So we drove up to this lady's house at 700 Summit Avenue and began to pile out of this truck-station wagon. She came up to Rodney and said, "Oh, I guess you're Dr. Collins and want to see the house." Rodney, with his hard Scotch accent said, "No, I'm Dr. Pain; this is Dr. Collins." Mrs. Faltin's mouth dropped to her knees. She said, "Oh, I can't sell you this house." I've forgotten the dialogue, but Dr. Pain said, "Well, since we're up here, can't we look at it?" She said, "Oh yes, I'll show it to you."

Mr. Mosher

Was she an older, conservative-type woman? I don't know her.

Dr. Collins

She was a woman who was a careerist; she was a career buyer for a department store. She grew up in Oklahoma. She had come west and married a fellow named Faltin who had growing children. She had a real estate license. She would buy a house, live in it and fix it up and then sell it and take the profit and buy another house. She was a very clever woman.

The man of the house, Mr. Faltin, had a ceramic business; he manufactured ceramic tile. His big contract was for the Dolger Home business; he had a tremendous contract to manufacture tiles for them. She would get a house, and he would put a lot of left-over tile in it, special bakes and what-not. After two or three years she would sell it, and they would move to a bigger house. It was a nice little thing for them.

Anyway, she showed us the house. She was rather cold, and I could sympathize with her. Here were all these sloppy-looking kids running around. I know she felt like saying, "What in hell are you doing up here?" She was courteous, but chilly.

My wife liked the house very much. I liked it. Our kids liked it. They were running around outside, finding a place where they could have their dog, and so on.

Mrs. Faltin said again, "I'm sorry, but I can't sell you this house." You must remember this was 1952. The Supreme Court decision outlawing racially restrictive covenants had been handed down in 1949, so any restrictive covenants were legally unenforceable. My deed to the house (and I've kept it) still has this long dissertation on who can't buy the house. I could live in the house as a servant. I could own the house, but I couldn't live in it. Neither could an Oriental. It didn't say anything about Jews, but no Orientals or blacks.

Dr. Pain said, "Listen, I'll buy this house. Will you sell it to me?" Mrs. Faltin said, "Oh yes, I'll sell it to you. What you do with it is your own business." She was asking \$20,000. I said, "I want you to know that if Dr. Pain buys the house I will buy it from him. I just want you to know that. I don't want to deal dishonestly with anyone." She said, "If you want to do that, it's all right with me." So the next day I had my banker come over. He appraised the house, and he had \$20,000 available for her as soon as the deal could be closed.

We looked at the house on a Sunday. Thursday morning at 7 o'clock Mrs. Faltin called. She had, I guess, come face-to-face with her Armageddon, with her reality. I guess she and her husband had agonized over their behavior in not wanting to sell me the house. So she called and said, "Dr. Collins, my husband and I have called the university and called around, and we'd be delighted to sell you our house directly and get up on the housetop and shout about it."

She then called some of the people who live here on the hill, whose names I won't repeat for the record. By that time the sale was going through escrow as a direct sale. The news had hit the fan! I was being financed by a black bank, so the white banks couldn't stop it. She got her cash out, no second mortgages.

She had had Dereath and me over for lunch or dinner or something. By this time she had begun to get calls from some of the local real estate dealers, giving her a bad time. They were rather harsh with her for selling her property to a nigger. She said, "Why don't you come up and have lunch with Dr. and Mrs. Collins before you pass judgment on them?" They were too much cowards to do that. They would not confront either of us, but just began to

badger Mrs. Faltin. She said it made no difference to her. She liked us, she thought we were first-class citizens, and she was delighted to sell us her house. And so she did. We bought the house and moved in in a month or two. We were very happy with the occasion.

About a week before we moved in, I got a call from a Mr. Gene Heide, who was a real estate dealer in Mill Valley. His business was in front of the Mill Valley Food Mart. He called me and said, "Dr. Collins, I want to tell you, first of all, that I would welcome you to Mill Valley. If you want to come to Mill Valley, come ahead. But my other real estate associates have asked me to call and pass a message on to you."

Mr. Mosher

I wonder why they selected him.

Dr. Collins

I think because he was the most liberal of the group, and you could at least talk to him. He identified himself and said he was not selling the proposition but had promised to pass it on to me.

Mr. Mosher

He was a very nice guy, by the way.

Dr. Collins

Apparently so. I never met him, but I felt good about him because he said he was the bearer of this news, that he did not agree with the message but had agreed to make the offer to me.

The real estate people said this property had sort of been held off for future development and what-not, that it was prime property and that they would buy it. At this time we hadn't moved in, and they said if I would sell the property they would buy it back at a good profit. I told Mr. Heide I had taken a course in real estate and had a license. Although I'd never sold real estate in my life and didn't intend to sell it, I knew I'd be buying property and I took a course in college in the 40's for my own edification. I knew that at that time any profit you made from selling your home could be used to buy a new home and was not subject to tax. \$20,000 was a lot of money in those days, so I gave him a message. "Mr. Heide," I said, "I

appreciate your call. You tell your friends that I will sign an agreement that I will never come to Mill Valley, neither will my wife come to Mill Valley, neither will my kids ever come to Mill Valley as long as they are living in my household if you will pay me double the price I paid for the house. No bargaining. If you can't meet that, forget it. No counter offers." That was the last of the telephone calls.

I saw myself at that time getting \$20,000 net profit, free of tax, and I could go somewhere else and buy a house. But they weren't that brave. They were just a bunch of bullshitters, a bunch of cowards looking for a sucker. They weren't willing to pay the price of their prejudice.

Mr. Mosher

The fact that they wouldn't sit down and meet you and talk to you in the first place showed...

Dr. Collins

That was too much to ask. Even when money was their god, they weren't prepared to pay that kind of price for their prejudice.

Mr. Mosher

It was probably a hard choice for them. I imagine this took a lot of agonizing.

Dr. Collins

For them? To do what?

Mr. Mosher

Not to give you the money. This attacked them in two places at once. It was probably a very tough choice. In fact, I know it was; I was around here at the time and got certain playback here and there.

Dr. Collins

I would have been very happy to take the \$20,000. It made sense to me. Mill Valley was not a place I particularly wanted to live. I would have searched somewhere else. With \$20,000 in my hand in those days I could have done a whole lot.

Mr. Mosher

There aren't too many places as close to the city, though, where you could get up high enough to have that view you were talking about.

Dr. Collins

I didn't come here because of the view! I came looking for a place where my kids could get out of the core city, where there were Boy Scout programs. On hindsight and retrospect, the kind of environment I was looking for probably existed only in a few areas in the country for black people. For instance, in Atlanta, Georgia there is a large group of blacks that have a lovely area. I would like to have moved into an area like that, but there was no such place in northern California for black people at that time. There was a fairly good area in Berkeley where blacks could live, but it wasn't what we were looking for. We wanted a place where our kids could run and play.

Maybe the kind of a community we were looking for would only be a white community. Black communities didn't have the opportunity to have Scout programs, for example. At that time there were very few black Scouting programs or Little League programs. I guess what I was looking for was an environment that could only be a white environment. But I wasn't looking for it because it was white; I was looking for it because it was an environment with good police protection, where there were activities for children -- I just took a hard chance that my kids could be involved. Fortunately all of these things did come to pass, though the Boy Scout program had a little problem. It took them two or three years to accept the kids.

Mr. Mosher

The community you spoke of in Atlanta was really a high-class ghetto in a sense, wasn't it, so they wouldn't have had those privileges?

Dr. Collins

Yes, you're right, it was a high-class ghetto, but it was an all-black community. Atlanta has always supported half a dozen black colleges.

Mr. Mosher

You'd have been much more comfortable there, much happier. But it wouldn't have given your children a chance to get integrated into the mainstream.

Dr. Collins

The kids would not have had this cross-cultural fertilization that they've had. It would have been an all-black environment, an all-black ghetto of upper-middle-class black people. But if it had been available in San Francisco, I would have moved there. As I say, I was never searching for friendships with white people. I wasn't rejecting them, either. I wasn't searching for a white environment -- I was searching for an environment that would provide certain things for my family. And in 1952 in the Bay Area this meant a white environment. We weren't afraid of white people. We don't dislike white people. We trusted we would find enough white people in this environment to make us comfortable. And of course that did come about.

Mr. Mosher

Practically speaking, you can't set these things up artificially anyway. They have to happen naturally or they don't mean anything.

Everything we do in life has a lot of unseen ramifications. The fallout from your moving to Mill Valley was, I'm sure, much greater than you ever knew. It brought on all kinds of confrontations, not only on this street (which is a very long street) but elsewhere in Mill Valley. Sociologically and as far as tolerance is concerned, it separated the men from the boys. Just like the woman you bought the house from. You gave her and her husband a lifetime of advance in one week. They went through tremendous pressure and a great growth period, which was marvelous for them. They've never been the same since. The point I'm making is that a lot of other people here haven't been the same since, believe it or not. This wasn't why you did it, but it was a great move.

Dr. Collins

I'd be curious to know something about that, Carl. I've been open with you because you're making this recording for historical purposes, and it ought to be as accurate and as free of bias as I can make it. I had feelings -- your family, for instance, and the Strawbridges; Pohlmann, the teacher at Tam High; Dr. Pemberton, and my nearest neighbor Robert Cain and his wife Priscilla. These were unusual people, and from the first day they made us feel welcome. There were no houses above us at that time, except for the big Lando estate. There was nothing else up here; everything

else has been built since. The Cains were our nearest neighbors, and they made us feel welcome the first day we moved in. We didn't know them from Adam. Priscilla came up to the house and said, "Mrs. Collins, I hear you have four children. I have a little nursery school down here. Why don't you let me keep your kids for three or four days while you're moving in?" The Pohlmanns brought jam and preserves one Sunday afternoon. Somebody else walked up and brought my wife some potted flowers. So there were a few people who overtly expressed welcome to us. The Welcome Wagon came. I don't know whether she knew where she was coming, but she came and went through her act and was very kind to my wife. No one was negative. No one personally called or confronted us with the negativity going on in the community. I must find that out from others telling me about it.

Mr. Mosher

It was going on sub rosa. It cemented some friendships and disrupted others. There was a kind of general realignment on the hill as a result of this. It was a great growth experience for everybody involved. It's one of the most important things you've done, in a sense -- and you didn't even know about it, at least to a large degree. I know it had a lot to do in our family, but that's another story.

Dr. Collins

That's the kind of story that ought to be told.

Mr. Mosher

As we talk to other people in this Oral History Project, we should touch on this. I can think of some interviews in which it would be particularly interesting. We should find out what they think now. It's interesting what people who are racially oriented think will happen when a black person comes into a community. First of all, they think others will follow. They think real estate values will go down. Well, it's more than 20 years, of course, and none of the things they were worried about have remotely occurred.

Dr. Collins

Speaking of that, after we had been here about ten years, the Fair Housing Programs began to spring up over the country. A few people in Marin County began to spearhead a Marin County Fair Housing group. They asked me if

I would serve on the board. I said, "I will support you, I will endorse you, I'll be an advisor for you, but I just cannot come to your meetings." As a black person, you find you spend yourself going to meetings and having to expose yourself to white people who are trying to grapple with their problem of accepting you and seeing that you are a human being, that you don't smell bad, that you can carry responsibility, that you're respectable, and so on. Going through that shock over and over again is like going through a wringer. It isn't that you don't want to be involved in seeing a person who is a racist begin to shed some of these liabilities and become a human being -- it takes something out of you to go through it over and over again.

So I told them, "The activity you're engaged in is good, and I think it ought to be stated. It is particularly good for the white community. But I can advise you that you will not get any black response. Black people don't want to move to the country. They just came into the city from the country, and they're not interested in moving back to some remote area. They love San Francisco! They love to be around each other. They're not secure enough to want to move out of their community. They don't feel welcome. Maybe I'm calloused enough not to care much about people who don't want to welcome me. I just stay away from them, and if they don't bother me I won't bother them. But I'm like a rattlesnake; if you bother me, then I'll fight you with all that I have. But I'm not looking for friendships, and neither are they. You're going to find it most difficult."

Anyway, after a number of years of working on this (and you might remember this; maybe you were a part of it), a thousand Marin County people listed their names in an ad, saying they'd be glad to sell their houses to blacks. There were a number of real estate people willing to negotiate these things in good faith and not as a ripoff. And not one black person called!

The point is, I think it was great for the county to get themselves on the record. But what white people don't understand, and many of the black liberals don't understand, is that... I think this is unfortunate from an idealistic point of view, but from a realistic point of view, black people are no more comfortable around white people than white people are around black people. Black people dislike white people as much as white people dislike black people.

Mr. Mosher

And mostly for the same reasons.

Dr. Collins

For the same kind of stupid reasons on both sides! I say "stupid," but I mean the same kind of reality reasons on both sides. I think they're stupid. I think they're wasteful of human energy, human love and human kindness. But I think we tend to repel each other.

Marin City is a good example of this. If the blacks in Marin City were aggressively interested in getting out of Marin City, as I was aggressively interested in getting out of San Francisco, they could have dispersed that community long ago. Some of them did move out, but most of them are comfortable there and just don't want to disperse themselves. After 25 or 30 years, they still find comfort in staying in this little...

Mr. Mosher

I notice the rank and file have a tendency to do that. Usually when you find a black person in a new housing project -- let's say in Terra Linda or Novato or Mill Valley -- it's almost invariably someone who is a well-known athlete or entertainer or on TV or someone of that sort. The rank and file don't seem to...

Dr. Collins

It's usually somebody who is way above, in terms of communities like Terra Linda, which I would call Middle America. The blacks who live there are usually much higher achievers in whatever they're doing than their white neighbors.

Mr. Mosher

They can afford, in many ways, to take chances that the average black person can't.

Dr. Collins

They have the personal strength. When the average black person moves into an average white neighborhood, he immediately has his ego uptight. He needs to have good control over it. He will lose his mind if he allows the negativity to get to him. Because some people are negative. There were one or two experiences in Mill Valley that were unfortunate, but they were minor compared to

the over-all experience. I think I would have had that same portion of nasty people if I had moved into that black community in Atlanta, Georgia. There are some people who don't like children. They will harrass children no matter whose they are. As a black person, I guess I'm just conditioned to believe that you don't dislike my children because you don't like children -- you dislike my children because they're black!

Mr. Mosher

It's surprising how few black people have moved into Mill Valley over the years. I know of some interracial marriages, but in the 26 years that I've lived here I think only two black families have moved in. What is the reason for that?

Dr. Collins

Well, for one thing it's expensive.

Mr. Mosher

But there are a lot of professional people and people in the media who could afford it.

Dr. Collins

Mill Valley just hasn't whetted their appetite. You have to recognize, Carl, that San Francisco is one of the finest cities in the world. You can travel the world over, and you won't find many places as attractive, as interesting and as cosmopolitan and exciting as San Francisco. So when you move to Mill Valley from San Francisco, you're really difficult to satisfy. San Francisco is a fine city. Now that it is open to minority groups -- I would say in the last 20 years -- blacks can buy anywhere in San Francisco they have the money to buy, and there are some lovely places in San Francisco. Chinese no longer all live in Chinatown, you know, and the Japanese no longer live in what used to be called Japantown. They're scattered all over town, although there are concentrations here and there.

Mr. Mosher

You know what people generally say, when we're talking to them and ask why they came to Mill Valley. They always mention the beauty, the atmosphere, the feel of the place, that it seems to have more than its portion of high-class

people, that it's nice to live around good neighbors, etc. I think all those things are true to a degree, although I don't suppose these are things you would see immediately. The fact that the hills are covered with trees and there's a charming shopping area is nice, but that wouldn't be an overwhelming reason -- to you -- for moving to the area.

Dr. Collins

To me those were side benefits. There was a fantastic amount of luck in the decision to move to Mill Valley. There was no big motivation. I was just lying in bed one morning reading the want ads. I wasn't looking for specific items. I wanted a place where the kids could have horses. I wasn't looking for a place that had the highest income of any county in the state (or certainly second or third highest in the state) or the highest level of education of any county in the state -- I think we have 14 grades. Marin County is one of the exclusive counties in America, certainly in California. Most especially the artistic and social atmosphere is one that's... But these had nothing in the world to do with my decision. These were side benefits that accrued later on.

My wife grew up in a small town, a college town in West Virginia. She lived in New York with me only about six months and about ten years in San Francisco. The rest of her life had always been in this kind of an environment. The only reason we haven't moved back to the city at this point, I think, is that she enjoys the seclusion of a small town.

Mr. Mosher

She apparently hasn't suffered any rebuffs that have bothered her.

Dr. Collins

Dereath has never reported to me any negativity directed at her. In fact, if anything it's just the opposite. She has always felt that there were some people who are indifferent, which is perfectly all right. In my world, if a person does me no harm it's a kind of plus for me! If you're indifferent to me, you're off my worry list.

I'll tell you one of my really rich experiences in Mill Valley. We moved here in August 1952. In the fall of '53 I went hunting and shot a deer. My wife was doing her shopping at the Mill Valley Market at that time, so I

took the deer in there and asked them to butcher it and hang it for me. Lee Johnson was running the shop at that time. He is an avid sportsman, an avid hunter. He respected the animal I brought in and respected my enthusiasm for hunting, so he invited me to join his duck club and also to go deer hunting with him. This had nothing in the world to do with race; Lee was a guy who related to me on the basis of hunting.

Lee Johnson is one of the exceptional people I've met in my life. He's not a person who's famous for any community activities or anything else, but I've never known a man that I've had more personal regard for. There was no need for me to relate to him except through hunting. When I went hunting with Lee at two o'clock or four o'clock in the morning, going to Canada, driving all night, or shooting geese out in some field when it's cold as hell, or hunting for ducks on an ice-covered pond, freezing all day, coming home and lying about how great the hunting was -- coming back to the apartment and washing up and drinking booze and cooking breakfast -- that's where our relationship was, and it was a very rich and a very good happening for me.

Mr. Mosher

One of the things I want to talk about are the honors you've had over the years. You have had at least one book published and innumerable magazine articles and lectures. But I think one of the big things were your years on the State Board of Education. Will you tell us how that came about?

Dr. Collins

I came to the university in 1942 and spent three years full-time. From 1945 to 1950 I was there half-time. After 1950 I began to play cops-and-robbers with the Armed Services about the Korean situation. I was prepared to go, but they were on-and-off about calling me. I was sort of in limbo for a couple of years. I was at the university just one day a week by then and practising the rest of the time. I was finally called into the Armed Services in 1956 and spent two years in the army. It was a sort of special-duty arrangement, and I got some extremely good educational and teaching experience.

When I came out in 1958 I went back to the university. I had corresponded with the dean of the dental school, trying to determine how I would shape the rest of my life

professionally. He wrote me some very nice letters, and I had made the decision to pursue an academic career -- to stay in teaching and research and go up the academic ladder. At that time I was an assistant professor and was ready to be made an associate professor. In terms of time in the university and experience and papers, post-doctorate degrees, specialty boards, etc., I was eligible for an associate professorship and tenure. From 1958 to 1960 I discovered that the university's dental college had never had a minority person as a professor in a tenured position -- only WASPs. No Jew, no Oriental, no black -- only Anglo-Saxon Protestants had ever made academic tenure in the dental school.

A friend of mine just ahead of me on this ladder of academic rank had been absolutely destroyed psychologically as a person because he was a Jew. I was just not prepared to sacrifice myself that way. He was economically rather secure, so it didn't make any difference to him, but I had not only my own feeling of pride and humanity, I had also to assure myself some kind of a reasonable future for my wife and four children. People who had been my underlings and students in my early years were now becoming my bosses, and I could no longer tolerate this.

I had been interested in politics since 1948, supporting Democratic candidates, including Pat Brown when he first ran for District Attorney in San Francisco, Harry Truman, and so on. At that time there were very few black people interested in politics -- and not many whites, really, as compared to now. The smaller political machinery at that time was more organized, and I was consistently involved with the Democratic party.

In 1960, as I say, I interpreted my future at the university to be negative, so after 18 years of university background I left and went into practice full-time. By then my kids were coming out of high school, getting ready to go to college. I had no retirement built up, no equities, so I began to concentrate my efforts on that kind of responsibility. The full-time practice of dentistry was not totally fulfilling for me. I was a scientist -- or so I thought. I had some emotional and mental time left over, and I began to spend more time in politics, more time in campaigns. I was very active in Pat Brown's election in 1960. When Pat was elected, he appointed me to serve on

¹Edmund G. Brown, Governor of California, 1960 - 1966.

the State Board of Public Health. I served a year and a half or two years there, and then a vacancy occurred on the State Board of Education. The governor called me one day and asked if I would serve. This was in 1962. So I resigned from the State Board of Public Health and was appointed to the State Board of Education. I finished out an unexpired term of a previous board member and served a full term of my own. By that time Ronald Reagan had been elected governor. He did not reappoint a single person on the board. All ten members were rotated off when their names came up for reappointment. My term ended in '68, and January '69 was my last board meeting. That was one of the great experiences of my life, sitting in that position of responsibility, seeing how the system works.

Mr. Mosher

What was the major issue during your time on the board?

Dr. Collins

School district reorganization, I would say. California had some 1,600 school districts, and we were trying to get them consolidated. That was a big over-all issue, trying to make the school districts more manageable -- moving towards the kind of district that Hawaii has. Hawaii is the only state in the union with a unified state system, which means that all the property in the state is taxed equally, and the revenue is divided equally among the children, no matter where they are. Here in California we have Emeryville, the richest district in the state, where you have \$270,000 or so of tax base behind each child. In Compton, California you have about \$4,000 of tax base behind each child. There's no way in the world you can provide those children with equal opportunities of education with that kind of tax base. We also tried to get districts to be more efficient by cutting out all the administrative procedures that go along with the single small district.

That was one of the major concerns. Another was the initiation in the educational establishment of aid to education. The federal government began to share some of its bounty with the states. The Compensatory Education Program brought some \$100 million or so into the state every year to enrich California education. It was a part of updating education for the minorities through the regulations and

rulings provided for in the Compensatory Education Act in the State of California and the federal government. This was the beginning of integration of the school system. We came onto a board that was primarily segregated philosophically. It is still actually segregated today but, at least in terms of admitted philosophical statements, the schools are striving for integration -- or at least an end to discrimination. I think there are many people who don't agree with that. We had to deal with the earlier steps, to philosophically and technically admit that California school districts were segregated and to work toward integrating the system.

Mr. Mosher

During this period you had a rather extraordinary example of homo sapiens -- Dr. Max Rafferty.¹

Dr. Collins

I don't know what to say about Max. He was an unusual character, a very Machiavellian guy. He was elected during a Democratic sweep. He was a loner, out by himself -- a right-wing Republican running the schools under a liberal Democratic government. So from his point of view he had an uphill battle. Thank goodness, from my point of view, there was enough support in the legislature and in the statehouse and on the State Board of Education to override Max's exploitation of the school system. Max was never interested in being Superintendent of Education. Max wanted to be governor or United States Senator. This was a political stepping-stone for him. He was doing all the things political that he could possibly do. He had no commitment to anything, really.

Mr. Mosher

He fascinated me in some ways, although I didn't know him. He was a coach at one time, probably a P.E. major in school. Yet he was a kind of egghead in a sense. A strange man, with both qualities.

Dr. Collins

Max was an unusual person. His abilities shouldn't be underestimated. I've been surprised that he hasn't

¹State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1963 - 1971.

made more noise in Alabama. I guess it's because you can't out-do Wallace. I expected to see Max on the ticket with Wallace, or running for state senator or something. I don't know what is happening in his life. You don't see anything about him any more.

He had certain capabilities. I just don't think he was committed to anything. I think he could be a radical anarchist as easily as he could be an ultra-^vconservative, exploitive Republican. I think Kuchel^v was one of our great Senators. The Democrats never made any serious attempt to unseat Kuchel, but Max unseated him in the Republican primary fight. So the Republicans lost a seat in the Senate because of Max's personal ego-maniacal tendencies.

Mr. Mosher

Well, I hope he languishes down there and we never hear from him again.

I'd be particularly interested in hearing your comments on Mill Valley schools. Mill Valley has quite a reputation for experimental education in the elementary schools.

Dr. Collins

I don't think I can say much about it. I haven't been familiar with what Mill Valley has done in the last two or three years, except from hearsay or what I read in the newspapers. I would say that Mill Valley is one of the aggressive -- I don't want to use the word "progressive," because that immediately throws it into another kind of semantic lingo -- but I think it is one of the intelligent, aggressive, innovative school systems, one of the best in the state.

Actually, California's education leaves a lot to be desired in terms of -- I don't know what it is, but there are a lot of states whose students seem to do better, at least in scholastic achievements. It is felt that California's students are better able to live with each other, that they have a better social adjustment. This could be because of our cosmopolitan nature. At a very early age, kids live close to kids who are different from them.

^vThomas H. Kuchel, U. S. Senator, 1953 - 1969.

They're not quite as isolated as New England kids, where there aren't as many Orientals and blacks. They're nearly all pure-bred Plymouth-Rockers back there.

From what I've been able to observe, as a parent in the system and while I was on the State Board of Education, the Mill Valley School District is one of the finest in the state.

Mr. Mosher

I notice in a recent survey, the elementary students in California tested out very badly, by and large, in spite of all the money we've spent on education. One of the conjectures was that the training in basic skills, mathematics, English and things like that haven't really been up to snuff. Do you think this is true?

Dr. Collins

From my point of view, the educational system in California (as well as most other states in the union) is based on a series of laws that are totally antiquated. It's sort of like our tax system. It has grown like Topsy, so to speak, helter-skelter, wherever the pressures were at any one time. It was designed for an agrarian society -- for instance, going to school nine months out of the year. It has responded to the social impact in our country. Our country is a great "democratic" country. This means that everybody must be educated for college, and this leads to mediocrity. In educating 50 million kids for college, we do a poor job of educating them to read, write and figure.

In every other school system in the western world, a kid has to compete. Some of them are elitist, you have to come from a certain kind of family, which is unfortunate. But in most of the western world a kid has to compete. If he doesn't show some interest in wanting to be educated by the time he finishes grammar school, he goes into a trade or something else. If he wants to go on to college and has achieved and has conditioned himself, then he has the chance.

In most systems it is a privilege to go college. Here it is a requirement. And it becomes a burden to a big system. It's difficult to equally educate a kid from a deprived home. This has nothing in the world to do with

race at this point -- it could be a deprived, pure-bred mountaineer out of the hills of Kentucky, probably the purest-bred Anglo-Saxon in the country, inbred since they came over on the Mayflower; they've refused to intermingle with other parts. It's difficult to provide an equal educational system that functions for that child and the child from Mill Valley. Yet we try to do that. Our system is one of equality. That's a very complicated thing to do. It ends up not serving anybody very well.

Over the years we've been subject to pressures from various "in" groups -- the Physical Education people wanting to sell equipment. As you know, I'm a physical-fitness nut and have a real appreciation for keeping one's body in good shape, but I think the amount of influence physical education has in our California school system is askew -- in reference to the influence of the humanities, for instance, where you teach students how to live together. What's the good of a great, beautiful body if we're stupid when it comes to living with each other? I would prefer, in a child of mine, for him to have a weak body and a good emotional stability and mind. If I had to make a choice, I would prefer a person who was physically defective or incompetent but who was spiritually and emotionally competent -- rather than the big brute who understands nothing about humanity.

We have different pressures coming into the society. Sputnik comes in, so all of a sudden we're going to make all kids scientists. It's a hell of a thing to turn 50 million kids into scientists! Yet we measure kids on the basis of making them all college-prep. In fact, any kid who isn't college-prep is considered something short of human. He may decide he doesn't want to go to college, he wants to be a craftsman. What's wrong with that? I'm vocationally trained. For four years in post-bachelor training, I was trained to be a skilled craftsman! I'm trained as a dentist. I've got a job, a tool, a particular skill I've learned, and I can make a living anywhere in this country. What's wrong with that, as compared to a guy who has a Ph.D. in the humanities or in philosophy?

Physicians, dentists and lawyers are lumped with the academicians, but it really isn't true. We're craftsmen, we're tradesmen. We've been smart enough to pick a particular skill at the college or university level, but we're really nothing but highly trained vocational people.

Yet people continue to polarize vocational training on a racial basis. They think vocational training is only for minority students. It's a great problem in education today.

Mr. Mosher

Dan, I appreciate your taking the time to put your story on record. It's something that needs to be told.

Dr. Collins

I'm happy to do it, Carl, and I hope I've been of some help.