

# **Sandy Jordan**

## **A Verbatim Transcription of an Oral Interview**

1306 West Eads Street  
Champaign, Illinois  
June 23, 1983

Interviewed by  
Melinda Roundtree  
Patrick Tyler

Champaign County Historical Archives  
Urbana, Illinois  
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## **Introduction**

This is an interview with Mr. Sandy Jordan, a retired custodian at Wiley Elementary School in Urbana. He has been in the Champaign area since 1926. He was born May 26, 1913, in Monticello, Georgia.

This interview was conducted on June 23, 1983, in the home of Mr. Jordan, 1306 West Eads, Urbana. The interviewers are Patrick D. Tyler and Melinda Roundtree, representing the Urbana Free Library Archives.

## **Sandy Jordan, Oral Interview**

### **SIDE A**

Sandy Jordan: [remarks joined in progress] . . . Monticello, Georgia.

Melinda Roundtree: When did you come to Champaign?

Sandy Jordan: I came to Champaign in 1926.

Melinda Roundtree: When you came to Champaign, were you alone or did you have family here?

Sandy Jordan: My brother was here. He has passed - Herman Jordan. He worked for the Big Four Shops. My mother and me came from Monticello, Georgia, and we've been here ever since.

Melinda Roundtree: What did you do when you came here? Did you work . . . ?

Sandy Jordan: I was six years old when I came here to Champaign, and I've been here ever since now.

Melinda Roundtree: Who were you living with when you came?

Sandy Jordan: I living with my mother. My mother is dead. Her name was Sally Jordan.

Melinda Roundtree: Could you tell us a little bit about when you got here? You know, you were six years old. Could you tell us a little bit about the years when you grew up, you know, what happened in Champaign?

Sandy Jordan: When I came here I was six years old. I went to Hays School down here not too far - combined with King School now. That big old building was Hays School. I went there, and when I went from there, I went to Thornburn. That was a junior high. That's on Springfield and Main.

Patrick Tyler: You know what year that was?

Sandy Jordan: I can't remember which year.

Patrick Tyler: That used to be a junior high? I never knew that.

Melinda Roundtree: Did you go to Urbana High?

Sandy Jordan: I went there for one year because I had to help my mother support living . . . I had to quit. I didn't go further than a freshman in high school.

Patrick Tyler: What year did you come here?

Sandy Jordan: What? I told you. It was in 1927, wasn't it?

Melinda Roundtree: 1926.

Sandy Jordan: Yes, 1926.

Melinda Roundtree: Where was your first job you had when you got here? I mean, as you grew older, what was your first job?

Sandy Jordan: Well, when I grew older I did yard work for anyone, but when I got old enough to get a good job, I worked up at Chanute Field. That was under Civil Service. I worked up there five years and then they laid us off. They said they going to lay all civilians off, and they had benefits for your retirements. And then they said . . . then I worked up there five years. After that, they said I wouldn't get my retirements until I was 65 years old, but after that they gave me my retirements. I was buying bonds up there. And I just took . . .

Melinda Roundtree: From there, where did you go? Did you . . . ?

Sandy Jordan: After they laid me off from Chanute Field, I worked here at a fraternity house for Al Tuxhorn, the State's Attorney of Champaign. His wife was running the house out there.

Melinda Roundtree: The state's attorney, is that what you said?

Sandy Jordan: Al Tuxhorn was the state's attorney, but I worked for his wife. His wife was running the house out here on Fourth and Fifth Street - it was a boys' house - after I left from Chanute Field.

Melinda Roundtree: What kind of work did you do?

Sandy Jordan: It was janitorial work in a boy's dormitory.

Melinda Roundtree: When you were working at Chanute Field, what kind of work did you do?

Sandy Jordan: Janitorial, get to be in the hangars, cleaning up, but I was special because I worked at a sorority house and this colonel's wife, she was the housemother there, and that's when she went to Chanute Field. She wrote me and said, "Do you want to come to Chanute and work? I can get you a job there." So I went there. I was working at the guest house up there. When the soldiers come in to see their wives, I was there at a desk down in the place. The soldiers couldn't go upstairs. I was there

to go up there, to call them to tell them that parents . . . And their parents could go up in rooms, when they had rooms there, but if the soldier come to see his wife, I had to go up and tell her to come down because soldiers wasn't allowed to go up there. But the parents would be up there living up there when they come see the soldier.

Melinda Roundtree: This was at Chanute?

Sandy Jordan: That was when I was working up at Chanute.

Melinda Roundtree: You haven't been in the military or anything have you?

Sandy Jordan: No, I was. I went . . . I was married way before - you know when the war come, [the government] said all the young persons that just got draft - so I went up. I passed my physical. Then, I was still working up at Chanute. I was private Jordan up there. Three days he asked me did I want my furlough. I said I'd take my two weeks furlough. Three days I got a letter from the Army, said "You're deferred, because you would had been married way before these other young kids was getting married." And so, that's the reason I didn't go to service. I would liked to went. Maybe if I had went to service, maybe I wouldn't have came back. You can't tell.

Melinda Roundtree: They said because you were married?

Sandy Jordan: See now, you know when they started and I had been married way before, and then all those people said they gonna draft all the young boys, and they started getting married. See, those eighteen and nineteen, I had been married way before they was, see.

Patrick Tyler: So, what you are saying is that most of the boys got married so they wouldn't have to go?

Sandy Jordan: They took me anyway because I was in there, and after they found out I had been way married before that, they deferred me. But, I had passed; I was supposed to go in the Army.

Melinda Roundtree: How old were you at that time?

Sandy Jordan: Well. [Laughs.] I had to go that time. I estimate, I should have been around 20 or 28, something like that. I can't pinpoint my age.

Melinda Roundtree: How old were you when you got married?

Sandy Jordan: Well, I have to go look at my license, my marriage license. I can't remember. I say I must have been about 25 or 26, or something like that. It have been a long time. Let me go back and try to go back like that; that's been a long time.



I don't know unless I would look at my marriage license to tell when I did get married, and birth certificates, and all that.

Melinda Roundtree: What church do you belong to?

Sandy Jordan: Bethel A.M.E. Church. Bethel A.M.E. Church.

Melinda Roundtree: Is that the first church you went to, started going to, and you've been a member ever since?

Sandy Jordan: Yes.

Melinda Roundtree: Have you been to any other churches around?

Sandy Jordan: Oh, I go to all different churches here, but that's where I joined was Bethel A.M.E. Church.

Melinda Roundtree: Do you remember how old you were when you joined the church?

Sandy Jordan: I say I must have been about twelve years old, something like that. I can remember I joined it was they had revival. I guess you know how you feel if something hits you in your heart; you go up and say, "I want to join church," just like you have a feeling and something comes to you. It goes through your heart. Maybe

you have had your desires, and the man says, "Come on." You know when you open the doors of the church. Anything else?

Melinda Roundtree: You said your wife died, right?

Sandy Jordan: Yes.

Melinda Roundtree: How long were you all married?

Sandy Jordan: Well, I would say . . . I've had a silver wedding anniversary. That must be about fifty or something like that.

Melinda Roundtree: Now, you don't have any children?

Sandy Jordan: No, I don't.

Melinda Roundtree: Okay, you said you worked at Chanute, and then at a fraternity . . .

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Sandy Jordan: Well, I worked at the Champaign Country Club as a waiter there. And also that was between that and before I went to Chanute Field. I worked as a waiter at the Champaign Country Club.

Melinda Roundtree: Where did you go after that? Could you tell me just the different places that you've worked since you've been here, if you can remember most of them?

Sandy Jordan: Well, I can tell you. I worked at Champaign Country Club. I worked at the Moyer Club, and that's the Boy's Club. Then I worked up to Chanute Field. Then after I left Chanute Field, I went over here and worked at Wiley School, and that's where I retired from, Wiley School. That's the last job that I had.

Melinda Roundtree: And you were a janitor at Wiley School?

Sandy Jordan: Yes, custodian. I think they call it custodian. What else do you want?

[Laughs.]

Patrick Tyler: Could you tell us a little bit about some of your jobs, like how it was working at the Champaign Country Club.

Sandy Jordan: Nice.

Patrick Tyler: Could you tell us a little bit about the people back then?

Sandy Jordan: I was the head waiter there. I had to respect the peoples, to serve them. Some was nasty to me, but I had to give them service. Just like I ordered, you know, when you had your pads, and what they wanted to order. I had five womens

one day. They asked me what you have. I gave them the menu, and all them took a sign what - then when I brought their dinner out, one said, "I didn't order this." I said, "Well, I can go get it back to you lady." And one of the ladies said, "You did order it." They took up for me. She said, "I didn't." And the lady said, "Yes, you did." You see, what she ordered, maybe the other stuff looked better. And I said, "It's no trouble lady. I can change it; if I made a mistake, I can take it back."

See, I'm a waiter; I have to take what the customer do or else they go tell the manager. You got to take, because the public you waiting on them. Whatever they want to do or say, you have to take it or swallow it. So, I said, "Lady, it's not hard. I can go and change the order. I can say I made the mistake." But, the other ladies took up for me and said, "You're wrong. We saw you you said what you wanted." You see, what she ordered maybe didn't look as good as the others, see. That's life. If you working out in public, you got to take what they say. If you got a job, you want a job, you gonna have to take what they give you.

I got where, when I left from the club, I told the lady I'd give her two weeks' notice. I done give her two weeks' notice. I said, "I ain't giving you no more." The day that I was getting ready to leave, [His employer] "Well, you can't leave." I said, "I gave you two weeks' notice." [His employer] "The dining room is full." I said, "I don't care, woman. I gave you two weeks' notice." I left, then I caught a bus, and one of the members saw me and said, "You working today Sandy?" I said, "No, I quit." "Why did you quit?" I said, "I gave the lady two weeks' notice, and then she said I couldn't quit." [The phone rings, and the tape is turned off.] For that see, and the lady told me, she said, "Don't you never put your foot back in this country club." I said, "You don't have

to tell me that." So, I went to Ohio. I got a job from Cleveland, Ohio, to Buffalo, New York, working on a boat as a waiter. From then during the winter, see, it closed down. Me and my wife came back from in Chicago, and I couldn't get no job there, and I came back. And that's when I got the job out here at the sorority house, I mean, fraternity house. Then the lady said there's one big football game, when I was back in. Called me. I said, "Ain't nothing, I remember what you said." I wouldn't take the job. She said, "I'll give you more than the others." I said, "You can't bribe me. I don't wanna come. I don't need to come." I said, "You told me not to put my foot back in here. I don't care what you give me. I wouldn't come back there." And I didn't go.

Melinda Roundtree: When you was working at the country club, was it mostly for white people, or . . . ?

Sandy Jordan: It was mostly for white people, yes.

Melinda Roundtree: But, any blacks come, I mean . . .

Sandy Jordan: Not unless they was some well-to-do people, like a doctor, because they couldn't afford it, and they didn't go.

Melinda Roundtree: Did they eat together or did have separate places?

Sandy Jordan: No, see, I'm telling you, colored couldn't go there because that was private for whites.

Melinda Roundtree: Oh, they didn't have any colored?

Sandy Jordan: No, they had colored just working there. You know here in Champaign, you couldn't eat in no restaurant. If you went to the movies they'd put you down on the lower floor, next up on - right up in there where you couldn't see no picture. And if you was riding a bus from different places, like, you leave from here to Champaign, you go down South. On these stops you gonna have to go back and eat out the kitchen. You couldn't eat in no - just like the bus stop now, you can go anywhere, but then you couldn't.

Right down here in Effingham and they had a sign: "Nigger: Read, run, and after sundown you better be out of Effingham." And up in - going towards Chicago - Effingham is south, Chicago, that little town you get there - it was just as bad, too. After Martin Luther King straightened everything . . . When I went up to Chicago, I had done been in the Army. I went into a bar, and I come right back out, and some of the people said, "Did they put you out of the bar?" I said, "No. If they did, I was going in and tear it up." See, now that's the way they are, prejudiced. As you say, some white care for you, some don't, always gonna hate you. When I was working up at the Chanute Base, and another fellow was working there, and there was a Southern guy. He called this man a nigger and he beat him pretty near to death. [The white man said] "You're still a nigger. I'll always call you a nigger." And all the rest of them had to

pull this colored man off of him. He was bleeding, but [the man said] "You still a nigger." You understand me, if one hates you, they gonna always say that. You go through that.

Melinda Roundtree: Have you lived here always or have you . . . ?

Sandy Jordan: I told you . . .

Melinda Roundtree: I'm talking about in this house.

Sandy Jordan: Well, I lived with my mother until she died, and then I bought this house. Me and my wife lived here.

Melinda Roundtree: Oh, so you've been living here a long time.

Sandy Jordan: I've been living here ever since I been in Champaign. I left - my mother passed from there. There's a lot of young peoples don't know how the white people treated us. See now, you're young, and you know you want your rights. Them coming up you wouldn't have got your rights. You fought for your rights.

Patrick Tyler: Can you tell us what kind of rights that you had in Champaign-Urbana?

Sandy Jordan: Huh?

Patrick Tyler: Could you tell us what kind of rights you had or didn't have in Champaign-Urbana?

Sandy Jordan: Well, I told you, you couldn't go and eat in no restaurants, places, as a decent place like now. Just like now you can go into any restaurant if you're dressed proper. You can into any restaurant in here in town, anywhere you want to go, but you can't go in there like you drunk, and you go in there hollering. You go in there by yourself if you want to get you a dinner, or I'll go in there with a girlfriend of mine and reserve a dinner, I can go there. But you can't go in - like you go to some of these places cussing, drunk, and you got to be dressed proper and clean. You can go into any of these big restaurants here in town now, but at that time you couldn't, regardless if you was dressed. But now you can go in any place, if you got the money. Say, just like I was going to take you out for dinner. I say, "You wanna go out to a swell dinner place?" I call and tell them I want reservations for two, what time I'll be there. When I get there, when I come in [the host or hostess would say], "Mr. Jordan, here's your table." And we just walk in. But then you couldn't. A lot has changed.

Patrick Tyler: You mean some of the restaurants that you couldn't go in that was here?



Sandy Jordan: Any place, any of these big restaurants that - you couldn't go in them, none of them. But now, you can go in any place, if you're dressed right and you got the money and you can afford to go in there, you can go.

Melinda Roundtree: The ones that's here now you're talking about, or . . . ?

Sandy Jordan: Any of them.

Melinda Roundtree: Do you know the names, like the ones that, you know, at that time do you remember any names?

Sandy Jordan: Oh, I can't remember any names, because just like it is now when they got these fancy - you go to a place, The Treetop, and all that where you make a reservation. And if you gonna have a wedding, then at these big places they'll have you for there. It's different you see. When you was coming up, if you'd a been coming up when I was, I don't know if you'd been able to get an education, because they didn't care where you go to school. Now see, they got black and white going to school. They didn't care, you understand me. Lots of these young kids look and say, "You old man, you don't think you know nothing." I say, you should, you got a chance to go to school, go and get it! You got a good chance to go. I said I didn't have a chance to go. What they got now, the kids, they got a better opportunity. They better go, but some don't go. They want to get on the street, fight or rob. Maybe sometime I say it's some of the parents' fault. They look at the kids. But, they got a better opportunity to

go. That's why they should. And you know I'm right, because you got where you can go.

Now you see there are lots of Negroes working in banks. Negro wouldn't be working in no bank in that time, no. They are managers of some of these big chain stores, and all them things like that. Then, you couldn't get a job. They wouldn't hire you. You'd be qualified for it, but they wouldn't hire you. They wouldn't hire. You done went through college or school degree, they wouldn't hire you. And you had more qualifications than this white woman or white man hired you. And I have been in work when they hire somebody - have to show them the work, and then they want to try because I was over ahead of them, wanted to get me - and the man said no. You learned you that. You didn't know nothing, and you got a chance to go to work. All your mother kids - you know what I mean - you doing what is right, and keep it up . . .

[End Side A]

## **Sandy Jones, Oral Interview**

### **SIDE B**

Sandy Jordan: When I was down in Monticello, Georgia - that's before I came up here - my mother and all my uncles, and all them . . . Down in the South then they had where shareworkers - you had to go out to pick cotton and all like that. Rain, sleet, or shine, if you sick, you had to go, regardless. They had a white bossman riding a white stallion, riding around. So, my mother told me once what happened. It's a man. He didn't go to work.

Down South see, you open your door everyplace, and you kept your guns over top of your door. You didn't lock no doors. You lock doors here. People down there didn't steal, or rob, or do nothing. Well, this man, he didn't show up for work, he was sick. So, the foreman come, he said, "Joyce, why don't you come to work?" [Joyce replies] "I'm sick." [Foreman] "Sick or nothing, you're going to work." He said, "Well, wait Mr. Foreman now, until I get my clothes on." He reached up over top of the door where his gun, and blew this man head off. And all at once the poor peckerwood said, "Nigger done killed a white man. Nigger [laughs] done killed a white man."

And there was a rich man banker, took him and shipped him out away from there. And he named, said, "You better not touch the Jordans. You better not touch the Glovers and Jordans. You can search anybody's house but them." And my mother said she was standing up in the door - I was two years old - holding me up at the door. One white guy said, "I'm gonna come in here." She said, "You'll come over my dead body." And this man said, "Didn't that man tell you not to be bothering these

people there?" And he went away. Never did catch the man, because this white banker shipped him away.

Melinda Roundtree: It was a white man? Shipped the black man away?

Sandy Jordan: Yes, because when he killed this man, he killed him because he know he did it right. Never did catch him - come back up here in Cleveland, Ohio, somewhere.

Melinda Roundtree: And your father died when you was two?

Sandy Jordan: Two years old.

Melinda Roundtree: How did he die?

Sandy Jordan: I don't know. [Laughs.] I was two years old. How should I remember?

Melinda Roundtree: Your mother didn't tell you?

Sandy Jordan: No, I don't know. That's down South see, that's some of the stuff down there.

Patrick Tyler: But it was a lot different when you moved here though.

Sandy Jordan: Well, when you come here, you might as well say it. You couldn't go into no place like to eat, like I was telling you. Movies, you couldn't.

Melinda Roundtree: Was it worse down South?

Sandy Jordan: Oh, it was worse down South. Just like if you down South, if a white man wanted to go with you, well, they was to take you, and nothing could be said about it. Here you got the privilege of arresting a white man. And down South, if you didn't get off the streets for them they spit in your face - ain't nothing you could do. That's the reason a lot of these people from South are up here, knock some of these white people off the sidewalk, just for the spite of it. Just want to think they something, but that ain't gaining nothing by knocking them off. You should know yourself. You're in college? Well, you should know how things are, and how things are here now. I mean better than they used to be. You know Jackie Robinson broke in the door to play baseball, but he had to go through a hell of a way. "Nigger, I don't want you to play here." Called nigger. He took it, but he went on through. Now, like the St. Louis Cardinals, they was the last to get a black man to play on the team. But, now most all of these here baseball teams got most Negroes or sports. They come out. They're better than the average white. Just like basketball, and anything you see. The Negroes - just putting them through the move.

Melinda Roundtree: So the blacks have come a long way?

Sandy Jordan: Yes, through Martin Luther King, all the rest of them. That's my history that you know about me, and what I've knowed, and what peoples told me, and what I knowed just since I been living here. They treat me okay, and I try to treat them okay . . . That's all I can tell you.

[After the formal interview, the tape recorder remained turned on and Jordan, Roundtree and Tyler talked informally. Sandy Jordan listed his brothers and sister: Grady Jordan lives in Dayton, Ohio, with his wife, Virginia; Harry Jordan lives in Champaign; and Mary Grace lives in Urbana and is married to Taylor Thomas, who is a retired Urbana High School principal.]