

1 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
2 MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA

3
4
5 INTERVIEW OF

6 **JANE GORDON**

7 former Clerk of the Court

8 and

9 widow of the Honorable A. Pope Gordon
10 United States Bankruptcy Judge
11 of the United States District Court
12 for the Middle District of Alabama

13 as a part of the

14 ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

15 of the

16 U.S. DISTRICT COURT

17 MIDDLE DISTRICT OF ALABAMA
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22 Interviewed by Robert D. Segall

23 Montgomery, Alabama

24 January 11, 2017
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14 MR. SEGALL: We are here on January 11, 2017, to
 15 interview Mrs. Jane Gordon. The interview is being conducted as
 16 part of the oral history project of the United States District
 17 Court for the Middle District of Alabama, a court for which
 18 Mrs. Gordon served as Clerk for 12 years from 1971 until 1983.
 19 She was, in fact, the first female Clerk of the Court.

20 This interview of Mrs. Gordon is being conducted in the
 21 Judge Frank M. Johnson Jr. Library in the historic courthouse.
 22 I'm Bobby Segall, a lawyer who's practiced in the Middle
 23 District for many years, including during the time Mrs. Gordon
 24 was our very esteemed Clerk.

25 Now, Mrs. Gordon, I want to ask you primarily about

1 your time in the clerk's office for the Middle District Court.
2 But before that, let me cover a little bit of background.

3 MRS. GORDON: Okay.

4 MR. SEGALL: Can you please tell us where and when you
5 were born.

6 MRS. GORDON: Okay. I was born in a small town in
7 South Alabama, River Falls, in Covington County, on the banks of
8 the Conecuh River and on January 21, 1923.

9 MR. SEGALL: So your birthday is coming up in about ten
10 days from now.

11 MRS. GORDON: In about ten days.

12 MR. SEGALL: Okay. And what did your parents do?

13 MRS. GORDON: My father was employed by -- oh, my
14 goodness. What was the name? Wright Brothers & Dunn, who
15 operated a commissary for the Horseshoe Mill and Lumber Company
16 in River Falls. And my mother, who was the daughter of an
17 Escambia County legislator was -- had been a teacher. But she
18 decided that she didn't want to be a teacher anymore, so she
19 came to Montgomery and took a business course and was working
20 for the lumber company when she met my father.

21 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Tell us -- did you move around a
22 little bit? How long were you in River Falls?

23 MRS. GORDON: I lived there only until I -- I had just
24 turned six, I believe, in 1929, when this terrible flood came
25 along. It hit Elba worse than River Falls, but it was bad

1 enough in River Falls. It covered our house, anyway.

2 MR. SEGALL: Right.

3 MRS. GORDON: And we moved, then, to Wilcox County. My
4 father was the commissary manager for W. T. Smith Lumber Company
5 in the little mill town of Ruthven, Alabama. And five years --
6 I mean two years later, I think, we moved to the same job for
7 W. T. Smith in Monroeville.

8 MR. SEGALL: Okay. And where did you go to school?

9 MRS. GORDON: And I went -- and after we left there, we
10 went back to Covington County, Red Level, Alabama. And my
11 father owned property several miles out of town, and we had
12 already built a house there. So I graduated from Red Level High
13 School.

14 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Was that like farmland that you
15 grew up on in Red Level?

16 MRS. GORDON: We did farming in Red Level. Yes.

17 MR. SEGALL: Okay. I know -- well, then you went to
18 college. When did you go to college?

19 MRS. GORDON: Oh, I went to the University of Alabama.

20 MR. SEGALL: When did you go there?

21 MRS. GORDON: I was there -- I was a freshman in 1940,
22 17 -- I was 17 years old. And I had hardly ever been away from
23 home before.

24 MR. SEGALL: Did you meet --

25 MRS. GORDON: But I rode the bus all by myself to

1 Tuscaloosa. And the bus driver was very nice back in those
2 days. He even took my trunks into the dormitory and saw that I
3 had a -- had a place to live. And I fell in love with Alabama
4 that first day. Still love it.

5 MR. SEGALL: Did you meet anybody special who you also
6 loved?

7 MRS. GORDON: Oh, I later met my husband there.

8 MR. SEGALL: At Alabama?

9 MRS. GORDON: A. Pope Gordon. We married in 1943 while
10 we were still in school. He was just graduating. He had had
11 one year in law school, got his commerce degree, though, in
12 1943. And I was a junior, I believe, at -- well, I know I
13 was at that time.

14 MR. SEGALL: So -- so you got married in 1943?

15 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh. In 1943. And I had a baby the
16 first year of our marriage. And I dropped out of school during
17 the war until Pope came back, and then we both went back to
18 school.

19 MR. SEGALL: And that baby was Carol?

20 MRS. GORDON: Pardon?

21 MR. SEGALL: That baby was --

22 MRS. GORDON: That baby was Carol.

23 MR. SEGALL: Okay. That's your daughter who happens to
24 be with us today; right?

25 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

1 MR. SEGALL: And Pope went off during the war.

2 MRS. GORDON: Oh, yes. He served for 19 months in --
3 overseas --

4 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

5 MRS. GORDON: -- and came back and went to -- he
6 finished his law school. And I worked for a while. I had
7 worked in the Dean of Women's Office all the time I was in
8 school, and Ms. Harris gave me another job when I came back.
9 And so I helped to support the family. What was it they said?
10 I was getting my PHT degree, my Putting Hubbies Through degree.

11 MR. SEGALL: (Laughter)

12 MRS. GORDON: But Mr. Gordon, Pope's father, didn't
13 think it right for me to have to work while he was in school.
14 So he paid me as much as the university was paying me to work
15 for them. And I reentered school, got my degree in a quarter, I
16 think.

17 MR. SEGALL: Do you remember --

18 MRS. GORDON: So I've always thanked him for that.

19 MR. SEGALL: Do you remember what year you graduated?

20 MRS. GORDON: Oh, yes. My degree is 1948. I believe I
21 actually finished the work in maybe midterm in '47.

22 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

23 MRS. GORDON: But it was '48, the date.

24 MR. SEGALL: You mentioned that your husband was Pope
25 Gordon.

1 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh.

2 MR. SEGALL: Just as an aside, Pope Gordon became a
3 United States bankruptcy judge; is that correct?

4 MRS. GORDON: Yes, he did.

5 MR. SEGALL: And when did he become judge?

6 MRS. GORDON: He became a judge in 1985, I believe.

7 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

8 MRS. GORDON: Yes. That's right.

9 MR. SEGALL: And, in fact, did you know he was
10 interviewed for this same project that you're being interviewed
11 for I believe in --

12 MRS. GORDON: I do know that he was interviewed for it.
13 In fact, I think he -- I think I heard -- saw it.

14 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Good. Oakley Melton, his good
15 friend, did it.

16 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh.

17 MR. SEGALL: After you finished college, what
18 employment did you have before you went with the clerk's office?

19 MRS. GORDON: Oh. I worked for the VA hospital and
20 then part -- and part of the time for the VA regional office for
21 about, oh, maybe five years after we came to Montgomery. And
22 then I had another baby.

23 MR. SEGALL: That was Pope Jr.

24 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh.

25 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Did you -- did you work after you

1 had Pope, or did you take time off?

2 MRS. GORDON: I did. I did work for a while -- well,
3 no. I waited until he was four years old to start back to work.
4 And then I worked -- went back to the VA for a very short time,
5 later was in the United States Attorney's Office for maybe a
6 year and a half or two years before I went to the Court.

7 MR. SEGALL: How did it happen that you went with the
8 United States Attorney's Office?

9 MRS. GORDON: Mr. Grimm, who was the finance director
10 for the VA regional office, was my boss. And I think he played
11 dominoes with Hartwell Davis, who was the United States
12 Attorney. And he -- Mr. Davis had a vacancy in his office, and
13 Mr. Grimm recommended me. And I was hired and worked there.

14 MR. SEGALL: All right. And when you -- that's the
15 United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of
16 Alabama --

17 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

18 MR. SEGALL: -- correct?

19 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

20 MR. SEGALL: So you were in this courthouse --

21 MRS. GORDON: In this building. Yes.

22 MR. SEGALL: -- that we're sitting in right now.

23 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

24 MR. SEGALL: And did you do secretarial work? What
25 kind of work did you do?

1 MRS. GORDON: Yes. I did secretarial work.

2 MR. SEGALL: And is there any particular lawyer who you
3 worked for?

4 MRS. GORDON: Yes. I worked for Ira De Ment, who later
5 became a federal judge in this district.

6 MR. SEGALL: Well, and before he became federal judge,
7 he was United States Attorney; right?

8 MRS. GORDON: Yeah. I believe he -- he was an
9 assistant United States attorney. I don't -- yes. He was
10 actually United States Attorney a while, wasn't he? Yes.

11 MR. SEGALL: Actually, during the time when you first
12 became Clerk, wasn't he -- I think he was U.S. Attorney at that
13 time.

14 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh. I think so too.

15 MR. SEGALL: How was he to work for?

16 MRS. GORDON: Oh, he was -- he was fine. He was a nice
17 young man. He was very young at the time.

18 MR. SEGALL: Right.

19 MRS. GORDON: And -- but he was smart. And he was easy
20 to work for.

21 MR. SEGALL: You enjoyed working with him.

22 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

23 MR. SEGALL: Well, how did it happen that you went from
24 the United States Attorney's Office to the clerk's office?

25 MRS. GORDON: Well, one day Ms. Cosper, Judge Johnson's

1 secretary, came and told me the Judge would like to talk with
2 me. And he offered me a job.

3 MR. SEGALL: "The Judge" being Judge --

4 MRS. GORDON: Judge Frank M. Johnson Jr. Yes.

5 MR. SEGALL: Whose library we're in right now.

6 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

7 MR. SEGALL: And for whom this courthouse is named.

8 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

9 MR. SEGALL: And his secretary was who, Helen Cospers?
10 Is that who came to you?

11 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

12 MR. SEGALL: Yeah. And were you and Ms. Cospers
13 friends?

14 MRS. GORDON: We were friends, yes.

15 MR. SEGALL: Okay. And so did she say the Judge wanted
16 to see you or --

17 MRS. GORDON: Yes. And she didn't tell me what he
18 wanted to see me about.

19 MR. SEGALL: And so --

20 MRS. GORDON: But he offered me the job of deputy
21 clerk. Yes.

22 MR. SEGALL: You went into his office.

23 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

24 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Had you known him?

25 MRS. GORDON: I had met him, but I can't say I really

1 knew him, and did know his -- his people, his father and mother,
2 slightly.

3 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

4 MRS. GORDON: And his sister -- one of his sisters.

5 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Do you recall what year that was
6 when you first came to the clerk's office?

7 MRS. GORDON: To the -- it was either 1962 or -- I
8 think it was '62, because when I retired, I thought, well, I've
9 worked for the clerk's office for 21 years. So it must have
10 been '62.

11 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Who was the Clerk at the time you
12 joined the clerk's office?

13 MRS. GORDON: Robert C. Dobson.

14 MR. SEGALL: And when did he become the Clerk?

15 MRS. GORDON: I think he became the Clerk at the same
16 time the Judge became a judge.

17 MR. SEGALL: All right.

18 MRS. GORDON: I think he was appointed by Judge
19 Johnson, but I'm not sure about that.

20 MR. SEGALL: Okay. But did the Judge or the judges in
21 the district select the Clerk? How does -- how did the Clerk
22 get selected generally? Do you -- do you know that?

23 MRS. GORDON: How did what, now?

24 MR. SEGALL: How does a Clerk get chosen? How does a
25 person get chosen to be Clerk?

1 MRS. GORDON: Oh, I have no -- I think they just had
2 the power to appoint the Clerk, and they chose. That's all --

3 MR. SEGALL: The judges did.

4 MRS. GORDON: The judges did.

5 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

6 MRS. GORDON: And -- or the chief judge did. And, of
7 course, there was only one in this district at the time.

8 MR. SEGALL: Okay. And how would you describe
9 Mr. Dobbins? How was he to work with?

10 MRS. GORDON: Dobson.

11 MR. SEGALL: Dobson.

12 MRS. GORDON: Yeah. He was a fine, upstanding man,
13 very well-spoken, popular with people. He could smooth things
14 over and make you feel good. He was a good public servant and a
15 good person to meet when you first came to the Court.

16 MR. SEGALL: Okay. When you first joined the clerk's
17 office, how many people worked in the clerk's office?

18 MRS. GORDON: Five.

19 MR. SEGALL: Five people. You were the fifth?

20 MRS. GORDON: No. I was the fifth --

21 MR. SEGALL: Right.

22 MRS. GORDON: -- when I came on.

23 MR. SEGALL: And what positions did those five people
24 cover?

25 MRS. GORDON: There was the Clerk. There was a chief

1 deputy clerk. There was a courtroom deputy who also handled the
2 criminal docketings and keeping up with that side of the Court.
3 Then there was a civil one who handled the civil filings and
4 also one who handled the bankruptcy filings. In those days, the
5 bankruptcy court -- file -- cases were filed in the district
6 court clerk's office and referred to the bankruptcy court. And
7 that was the job I got when I first started to work for the
8 clerk's office.

9 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Do you recall -- before the time
10 you became the Clerk, did the clerk's office hire an
11 African-American person?

12 MRS. GORDON: Before I came?

13 MR. SEGALL: No. Before you became the Clerk.

14 MRS. GORDON: Oh, yes. Marie was hired. Marie Thurman
15 was hired in 1966.

16 MR. SEGALL: Okay. And how did it -- and she was the
17 very first African-American hired in the clerk's office?

18 MRS. GORDON: Yes. So far as I know.

19 MR. SEGALL: Right. Whose decision was that? Whose
20 decision was it to hire Ms. Thurman?

21 MRS. GORDON: Whose decision? I -- I was not in on
22 that (laughter). But I'm sure -- I think that the Judge himself
23 and Mr. Dobson conferred upon it.

24 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

25 MRS. GORDON: And probably that was the way it worked.

1 MR. SEGALL: And during the 1960s, were other
2 African-Americans hired like in the bankruptcy court, in the
3 probation office?

4 MRS. GORDON: They were. There was one in the -- I
5 believe the one came to the bankruptcy court first, and then
6 later there was one in the probation office.

7 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Before you actually became Clerk --
8 and I'm going to say you were in the clerk's office before you
9 became Clerk from 1962 to 1971 --

10 MRS. GORDON: Right.

11 MR. SEGALL: -- is that correct? Are there any cases
12 during that period of time that stand out in your mind?

13 MRS. GORDON: Oh, my goodness. There were a whole lot
14 of them. You know, most of the -- most of the big civil rights
15 cases were filed before I became Clerk. And --

16 MR. SEGALL: Selma-to-Montgomery March?

17 MRS. GORDON: There were so many of them, the school
18 cases and the -- the voting cases and all of them.

19 MR. SEGALL: Including the Montgomery -- the --

20 MRS. GORDON: To Selma March.

21 MR. SEGALL: Right.

22 MRS. GORDON: Selma-to-Montgomery March. Yes.

23 MR. SEGALL: Yeah. During that time, were people in
24 the clerk's office -- were there threats that were received in
25 the clerk's office or in the Judge's office?

1 MRS. GORDON: I did not feel threatened.

2 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

3 MRS. GORDON: But I sometimes felt ostracized by people
4 I'd known for a long time (laughter).

5 MR. SEGALL: Because of Judge Johnson's decisions?

6 MRS. GORDON: Yes. Yes.

7 MR. SEGALL: Describe that a little bit.

8 MRS. GORDON: Oh, well, for instance, now, this -- this
9 is just -- well, I had a -- I know I worked with children in my
10 church. And there were other people, of course, in the same
11 department with me. And one Sunday I found out that one of the
12 women was not there. And the leader said, "Well, you know, she
13 just got so upset about this Selma March business and all that
14 that she just -- she's just not coming back anymore." And I
15 think it was because of me, because I was in the class. Of
16 course, that was just what I thought. That might not have been
17 correct. But --

18 MR. SEGALL: Did it bother you?

19 MRS. GORDON: -- that's the way it was (laughter).

20 MR. SEGALL: Yeah. Did it bother you?

21 MRS. GORDON: Not too much. I mean, I felt badly about
22 her not coming to church anymore (laughter).

23 MR. SEGALL: During the period before you became the
24 Clerk, did you have an occasion to actually work in Judge
25 Johnson's office?

1 MRS. GORDON: Yes, I did. I helped Ms. Cospers quite a
2 lot. And for one period of time, several weeks she was out.
3 And I stayed in his office as his secretary during that time.

4 MR. SEGALL: She was ill?

5 MRS. GORDON: I don't know what -- I just don't
6 remember why. She may have had some family problems. I just
7 don't know.

8 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

9 MRS. GORDON: Don't remember.

10 MR. SEGALL: Did you get to know Judge Johnson better
11 during that period?

12 MRS. GORDON: I did. I did.

13 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Well, what were the circumstances
14 that led to your being named the Clerk of the Court?

15 MRS. GORDON: I don't know (laughter).

16 MR. SEGALL: (Laughter)

17 MRS. GORDON: I suppose the Judge must have thought I
18 had been doing a good job. And -- and I -- but I was stunned
19 when he offered it to me.

20 MR. SEGALL: Do you remember the occasion that actually
21 happened?

22 MRS. GORDON: Yes, I do. I really do.

23 MR. SEGALL: Tell -- tell us what happened.

24 MRS. GORDON: Well, I just -- he called me in one day,
25 and he just told me that Mr. Dobson was going to be retiring.

1 And he just said -- I thought he was talking about one of the
2 men in the office that he was going to give the job to. He
3 said, "Would it suit you all right?" And I said, "Sure." And
4 then he -- I thought he was offering -- maybe offering me at
5 that time chief deputy clerk. I had no idea he was offering me
6 the clerkship. He said, "No, I'm talking about you for Clerk."

7 MR. SEGALL: What did you say?

8 MRS. GORDON: I don't think I was able to say anything
9 for a while.

10 MR. SEGALL: (Laughter)

11 MRS. GORDON: (Laughter) But I said, "Well, I guess
12 so. I'll try."

13 MR. SEGALL: Did you feel ready to be Clerk at that
14 time?

15 MRS. GORDON: No, I did not.

16 MR. SEGALL: It was hard to say "no" to Judge Johnson.

17 MRS. GORDON: It was. It was. And, of course, I was
18 extremely flattered and -- oh, my goodness. I was just
19 overcome. But anyway, I worked on it. Did my best.

20 MR. SEGALL: And -- and did very, very well --

21 MRS. GORDON: Well --

22 MR. SEGALL: -- as we all know.

23 MRS. GORDON: -- I'll tell you. The Judge was a hard
24 taskmaster, but he was hard on himself too. He worked very,
25 very hard. Came to work at 7:30 in the morning. And all of us

1 who worked for him really were just inspired by him.

2 MR. SEGALL: He was well regarded by the people in the
3 clerk's office?

4 MRS. GORDON: Oh, yes, he certainly was.

5 MR. SEGALL: Held in awe?

6 MRS. GORDON: We were all in awe of him until we got to
7 know him better.

8 MR. SEGALL: Right. Right. Well, let me ask you this.
9 You were the first woman named Clerk of the Middle District of
10 Alabama Court; correct?

11 MRS. GORDON: Yes. So far as I know.

12 MR. SEGALL: Well, I think that's true.

13 MRS. GORDON: I think -- I think that's true. I've
14 looked at the history, the prior history.

15 MR. SEGALL: Right. And, in fact, do you know of any
16 woman who was Clerk of any district court in the Fifth Circuit
17 before you were named?

18 MRS. GORDON: When I first started working for the
19 clerk's office, Mr. Dobson talked frequently with a woman clerk
20 in one of the Mississippi districts. I think she was having
21 trouble. Her jury box had been challenged or something, and she
22 would call him and talk with him about it. Now, she's the only
23 one I know about.

24 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Did you realize the significance of
25 your being the first woman in the Middle District?

1 MRS. GORDON: I didn't -- I didn't really see any
2 significance to it, I don't think.

3 MR. SEGALL: You didn't think about it at that time.

4 MRS. GORDON: And, you know, in the county courts,
5 women have been clerks for a long time. And I just didn't think
6 about any -- its being significant --

7 MR. SEGALL: Right.

8 MRS. GORDON: -- in that way.

9 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Did the clerk's office change in
10 any way after you became Clerk?

11 MRS. GORDON: I don't know whether it changed any or
12 not. I did the best I could to see that the people in my office
13 did a good job, that they strove for perfection all the time,
14 and that they were friendly and helpful. I tried to make them
15 understand that they were here to serve the Court and to serve
16 the people who came into the Court. And I don't know whether I
17 succeeded very well or not, but I tried.

18 MR. SEGALL: Well, right before we started, I heard --
19 Judge Myron Thompson came in to say hello to you. And he said
20 you set the standard for clerks.

21 MRS. GORDON: Well, he is very kind. And I am so glad
22 that I have had the privilege of knowing him.

23 MR. SEGALL: Did the clerk's office increase in number,
24 the number of folks who worked in it?

25 MRS. GORDON: Did what?

1 MR. SEGALL: Did the clerk's office increase in size?

2 MRS. GORDON: Oh, yes, it did. It did. I think --
3 well, I really -- I think we had about ten when I retired.

4 MR. SEGALL: Okay. How about --

5 MRS. GORDON: And that was double the number we had
6 when I started.

7 MR. SEGALL: How about in technology?

8 MRS. GORDON: Well, you know, we had not -- we didn't
9 increase too much in -- technologically. We -- it was after I
10 left that they started automating all these things. And we had
11 really primitive equipment when I first started working here. I
12 may have mentioned to you that we had an old-fashioned
13 mimeograph machine. And it was electric, though. We didn't
14 have to turn it. But stencils had to be cut and then run off on
15 the mimeograph machine. And Ms. Cospers, when she worked here,
16 had an apron from Dale's Penthouse that she put on over her
17 dress so it wouldn't get messed up while she was working with
18 that old machine.

19 MR. SEGALL: And when you left, were you still copying
20 from a mimeograph machine?

21 MRS. GORDON: No. We had Xerox by then.

22 MR. SEGALL: Well, that's a pretty big advance.

23 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

24 VIDEOGRAPHER: One second, please.

25 (Brief interruption)

1 MR. SEGALL: Do you recall occasions -- when Judge
2 Johnson had all of these civil rights cases --

3 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh.

4 MR. SEGALL: -- there were a lot of them where he had
5 to have orders issued immediately, weren't there?

6 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

7 MR. SEGALL: And how did y'all -- did that put extra
8 demands on the clerk's office?

9 MRS. GORDON: Oh, it really did. I don't remember what
10 case this was, but we needed to get something out in a hurry.
11 And he had three of us in his office. He would dictate first to
12 Ms. Perry, who was his secretary at the time, and then he -- he
13 would send her to type what he had dictated. Then he'd call me
14 in and dictate to me for a while, and I'd type what I had done
15 and the other person too. And we got that order out piece by
16 piece.

17 MR. SEGALL: So y'all were rotating. He would dictate
18 to somebody --

19 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

20 MR. SEGALL: -- and then he'd say, "Go type"?

21 MRS. GORDON: Yeah.

22 MR. SEGALL: Somebody else would come in?

23 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

24 MR. SEGALL: He was pretty good at dictation.

25 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

1 MR. SEGALL: He would sometimes dictate complicated,
2 long orders?

3 MRS. GORDON: There were a lot of -- that one, I don't
4 think was long and complicated, but it was pretty long.

5 MR. SEGALL: Right. And then when you had to get an
6 order out, because it was like a preliminary injunction --

7 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

8 MR. SEGALL: -- or a temporary restraining order, y'all
9 had to get it out and copy it with a stencil?

10 MRS. GORDON: Yes. We had to get copies made somehow
11 or other.

12 MR. SEGALL: And that could be pretty demanding.

13 MRS. GORDON: Yeah, it was pretty demanding. But there
14 were -- we were able to -- especially after we got the Xerox, it
15 was no problem, really.

16 MR. SEGALL: How --

17 MRS. GORDON: We got used to --

18 MR. SEGALL: Oh, yeah.

19 MRS. GORDON: -- doing it, you know.

20 MR. SEGALL: That was like a miracle, wasn't it, the
21 Xerox machine?

22 MRS. GORDON: Yes, it really was. Of course, the first
23 time we used it I think the ink wasn't properly mixed or
24 whatever they did, and it came off later on. You couldn't read
25 the order.

1 MR. SEGALL: You -- you said that Judge Johnson was a
2 pretty demanding boss?

3 MRS. GORDON: Yes, he was.

4 MR. SEGALL: Did he ever acknowledge your good work?

5 MRS. GORDON: Oh, he did. You know, every now and then
6 he would be pleased with some -- the way I did some job he had
7 assigned to me. And he would say, "You done real good, Ms. G."

8 MR. SEGALL: That was --

9 MRS. GORDON: And that was high praise.

10 MR. SEGALL: (Laughter) You retired in 1983?

11 MRS. GORDON: Right.

12 MR. SEGALL: You were a young woman at that time. Why
13 did you retire?

14 MRS. GORDON: Oh, I was 60 years old.

15 MR. SEGALL: Like I said --

16 MRS. GORDON: And at that time, I had 30 years in -- of
17 federal service then and I had three grandchildren. And I
18 wanted time to spend with those grandchildren and time to
19 travel. It had been a very challenging, wonderful experience to
20 work for the Court. But I just thought it was time for me to
21 step aside and go to something else.

22 MR. SEGALL: Pressure-packed time, though. A lot of
23 stress --

24 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

25 MR. SEGALL: -- associated with working as the Clerk?

1 MRS. GORDON: Pardon?

2 MR. SEGALL: A lot of stress associated --

3 MRS. GORDON: There was stress at some times. A lot of
4 it. You're right.

5 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Is there -- are there any other
6 memories of stories that occur to you about Judge Johnson or
7 working in the clerk's office?

8 MRS. GORDON: Well, there is one that has always --
9 every time I think of it, I laugh. But during -- after the
10 Selma March, you may remember that there was a ceremony on the
11 capital grounds. And there was a platform, and Dr. King and
12 others were on it. And a lot of people were extremely angry
13 about the Selma March to start with. They were angry about
14 everything. And the Judge's office was just flooded with calls
15 from people.

16 And Walter Turner was the law clerk at that time, I
17 believe, and he was helping to answer the telephone. The
18 telephone rang and he answered it. And this angry woman said,
19 "What I want to know is why Judge Johnson isn't out on that
20 platform with Martin Luther King and those other black people."
21 And Walter said, "I don't think he was invited."

22 MR. SEGALL: (Laughter)

23 MRS. GORDON: But we had a lot of interesting
24 experiences like that.

25 MR. SEGALL: Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. was in our

1 courthouse, wasn't he?

2 MRS. GORDON: Oh, yes, he was. I never got to meet
3 him, but he was -- I've seen him in the hall.

4 MR. SEGALL: Was there a lot of security during that
5 period of time?

6 MRS. GORDON: There was a lot, but not as much as we
7 have these days --

8 MR. SEGALL: Right.

9 MRS. GORDON: -- on occasions like that.

10 MR. SEGALL: Right. How was Judge Johnson -- you know,
11 he was known as sort of a liberal judge --

12 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

13 MR. SEGALL: -- because he had -- really, because he
14 just enforced the civil rights laws.

15 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh.

16 MR. SEGALL: How was he personally?

17 MRS. GORDON: Personally, he was a great -- he was a
18 great person. He was aloof in a lot of ways and -- but he was
19 always courteous. And he was -- oh, he was witty and charming
20 with his friends and his associates. And he -- he was just --
21 and he was such an honorable man. He had so much integrity.
22 And he was always conscious of upholding the integrity of the
23 whole Court. And that made him a pretty hard taskmaster
24 sometimes, but he was certainly a good one. And things ran well
25 under his supervision.

1 MR. SEGALL: Well, how did -- did he expect any
2 particular -- I'm talking about his -- the conservative aspects
3 of his personality. Did he expect women to dress in any
4 particular way?

5 MRS. GORDON: Yes, he did. He expected them to dress
6 conservatively. And Dot -- as I told -- I told you earlier, I
7 think, Dot and I were a little concerned when women started
8 wearing slacks to work. And we thought we better ask the Judge
9 about it, how he felt about it, so we did. And he said he had
10 no objection if the girls in the clerk's office wanted to wear
11 pants to work, but he did not want his clerk or his secretary to
12 wear them. He wanted his clerk and his secretary to wear
13 skirts. So we did.

14 MR. SEGALL: Was that okay with you?

15 MRS. GORDON: It was fine with me (laughter).

16 MR. SEGALL: Did you mention it to Judge Gordon?

17 MRS. GORDON: I mentioned it to my husband, and he
18 laughed. And he said, "Well, anyway, he chose the two that
19 would look the worst in pants not to wear them."

20 MR. SEGALL: (Laughter) That was not true. He was
21 joking; right?

22 MRS. GORDON: Oh, he was definitely wrong about that
23 (laughter).

24 MR. SEGALL: Right. Right. You've said Dot. Dot is
25 Dot Perry; right?

1 MRS. GORDON: Yes. Dorothy Perry.

2 MR. SEGALL: Who became Judge Johnson's secretary after
3 Ms. Cospers?

4 MRS. GORDON: After Ms. Cospers left.

5 MR. SEGALL: They were there together for a year. Do
6 you remember that?

7 MRS. GORDON: Yes, they were.

8 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Now, Judge Johnson, while you were
9 the Clerk, was appointed to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals;
10 is that correct?

11 MRS. GORDON: That is correct.

12 MR. SEGALL: And -- and I believe right around that
13 same time both Judge Thompson and Judge Truman Hobbs were
14 appointed to the Court.

15 MRS. GORDON: They were. Uh-huh.

16 MR. SEGALL: But who was the presiding judge?

17 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh.

18 MR. SEGALL: Who was the presiding Judge?

19 MRS. GORDON: Oh, Judge Varner would have been the
20 presiding judge after that. Yes.

21 MR. SEGALL: And do you remember when Judge Varner came
22 to the Court?

23 MRS. GORDON: He was appointed by Nixon, so it must
24 have been early seventies.

25 MR. SEGALL: Around the -- or shortly before you became

1 the Clerk; right?

2 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

3 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

4 MRS. GORDON: Yes. I was not Clerk of Court. Yes, I
5 was too. It was after I became Clerk.

6 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

7 MRS. GORDON: And --

8 MR. SEGALL: It was very close in time.

9 MRS. GORDON: Yes. Yes. And I don't know. I think in
10 the past, possibly -- the clerks usually offered their
11 resignation when the chief judge changed. But I had too much
12 time in that I didn't want to lose, and I didn't offer my
13 resignation. And Judge Varner never even mentioned it to me. I
14 was -- I've always appreciated that fact (laughter).

15 MR. SEGALL: (Laughter) Yeah. Okay. I think you've
16 told me that Judge Johnson ran a very efficient court.

17 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

18 MR. SEGALL: It was run very, very well.

19 MRS. GORDON: (Nods head)

20 MR. SEGALL: Was there another judge who worked in the
21 Middle District while you were in the clerk's office?

22 MRS. GORDON: Judge Pittman was here part-time. You
23 know, he -- his time was split between the Middle and Southern
24 Districts, but I don't remember exactly when that was. But it
25 didn't last very long. He very soon became assigned completely

1 to the Southern District.

2 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

3 MRS. GORDON: But let me see. Judge Varner came and
4 Judge Thompson. Yeah.

5 MR. SEGALL: When did you first meet Judge Thompson?

6 MRS. GORDON: When did I first meet him? I -- I think
7 I -- I met him maybe at a Bar Association reception for him when
8 he became judge. But, you know, I never knew him all that --
9 all that well.

10 MR. SEGALL: Okay. But didn't you say that -- I
11 thought --

12 MRS. GORDON: But I did know his parents.

13 MR. SEGALL: Oh, you knew his parents in Dothan?

14 MRS. GORDON: Uh-huh. His parents and his sister
15 Ellen. They went to the same church we did. I didn't know them
16 well, but I did know them.

17 (Brief interruption)

18 MR. SEGALL: So what I was asking you, Mrs. Gordon, is
19 when did you first know Judge Thompson?

20 MRS. GORDON: Oh, I'm sorry.

21 MR. SEGALL: No, that's all right.

22 MRS. GORDON: I'm sorry. Deaf as a post.

23 I met Judge Thompson when we were in court in Dothan
24 one time. And Eleanor Oakley, who was the magistrate in that
25 part of the district, invited me to go to the Bar Association

1 luncheon with her. And I met him at that Bar Association
2 luncheon. And I was impressed by him then. He was just a
3 lovely young man.

4 MR. SEGALL: This is before he was judge. He was a
5 lawyer in Dothan.

6 MRS. GORDON: Yes. This was -- he was a lawyer in
7 Dothan. I think he was just out of law school.

8 MR. SEGALL: Yes.

9 MRS. GORDON: And was a new member of the Dothan Bar.

10 MR. SEGALL: Okay. And then when he became judge, you
11 were very happy about that.

12 MRS. GORDON: Yes. Yes.

13 MR. SEGALL: And how was he to work with?

14 MRS. GORDON: Oh, he was great. He never -- he never
15 gave my office any problems at all.

16 MR. SEGALL: Okay. And how about Judge Hobbs? Had you
17 known him before he became judge?

18 MRS. GORDON: Was he what?

19 MR. SEGALL: Had you known Judge Hobbs before he became
20 judge?

21 MRS. GORDON: Oh, I had known him, you know, but only,
22 you know, just casually.

23 MR. SEGALL: Right. He --

24 MRS. GORDON: Judge Hobbs didn't give us any trouble
25 either.

1 MR. SEGALL: Okay.

2 MRS. GORDON: I don't think. I don't remember that he
3 did, anyway.

4 MR. SEGALL: Well, that may have been because of you.

5 MRS. GORDON: I don't know. I don't know about that.
6 But anyway, he was a very good person --

7 MR. SEGALL: Yes.

8 MRS. GORDON: -- to work with. He was an excellent
9 administrator, really.

10 MR. SEGALL: Who was, Judge Hobbs?

11 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

12 MR. SEGALL: Okay. Are there any other memories or any
13 other -- anything else you would like our viewers --

14 MRS. GORDON: Oh, my goodness. I just don't -- there
15 are so many, but they're all sort of a blur after all these
16 years.

17 But as I say, it was just a very challenging, wonderful
18 job. And I -- I think that I grew being a part of the work of
19 the Court. And I was certainly always proud to be the Clerk.

20 MR. SEGALL: Well, thank you very much, Jane. And as
21 Judge Thompson said earlier today, and I think as I mentioned,
22 you've always been held in the highest regard by the Court and
23 the lawyers. And as Judge Thompson said, you set the standard
24 of all of our clerks to come.

25 MRS. GORDON: Well, thank you so much.

1 MR. SEGALL: And thank you very much for being here
2 today.

3 MRS. GORDON: Well, thank you so much for having me.
4 And I'll say what the bailiff says to close court. God save
5 these United States and this Honorable Court.

6 MR. SEGALL: Thank you, ma'am.

7 (Judge Myron Thompson, Clerk Debra P. Hackett, and Chief
8 Deputy Clerk Trey Granger present)

9 MRS. GORDON: Oh, for goodness sake. Oh, I'm so glad
10 to see you.

11 JUDGE THOMPSON: I wanted to do this, and I did it.

12 MRS. GORDON: Oh, thank you.

13 JUDGE THOMPSON: I'm so happy you came.

14 MRS. GORDON: Oh, it makes tears come into my eyes
15 (laughter).

16 JUDGE THOMPSON: (Laughter) This is --

17 MRS. GORDON: I've know him since --

18 JUDGE THOMPSON: Since I started.

19 MRS. GORDON: -- he was a young lawyer --

20 JUDGE THOMPSON: Yeah.

21 MRS. GORDON: -- just out of law school --

22 JUDGE THOMPSON: That's true.

23 MRS. GORDON: -- practicing in Dothan.

24 JUDGE THOMPSON: That's true. This is a big day for
25 me.

1 MRS. GORDON: And he's just been such a great judge.

2 JUDGE THOMPSON: This is a joy to me. Wonderful.

3 I'm -- I'm so happy --

4 MRS. GORDON: And how are the boys?

5 JUDGE THOMPSON: You're making me cry (laughter).

6 MRS. GORDON: (Laughter)

7 JUDGE THOMPSON: Well, this is wonderful. This is
8 absolutely --

9 Bobby, thank you so much.

10 MR. SEGALL: Judge, sure.

11 JUDGE THOMPSON: This is -- this is -- you're a big
12 part of our court.

13 MRS. GORDON: Well, thank you.

14 JUDGE THOMPSON: And -- you know, and I just -- you
15 need to be a part of it forever. And this is -- this is our
16 effort to do that.

17 MRS. GORDON: Well, thank you so much.

18 JUDGE THOMPSON: Uh-huh. And you set a standard for
19 our clerk that has -- we're trying to match it, and I think
20 Debbie does a good job.

21 (Laughter)

22 MRS. GORDON: Oh, I appreciate it so much. And --

23 JUDGE THOMPSON: But -- and it was such a pleasure to
24 work with you too.

25 MRS. GORDON: Thank you.

1 JUDGE THOMPSON: Thank you. Well, I'm going to let you
2 give your interview now.

3 MRS. GORDON: Okay.

4 JUDGE THOMPSON: And Bobby, again, thank you so much.

5 MR. SEGALL: Sure. Absolutely.

6 JUDGE THOMPSON: Okay.

7 MRS. GORDON: Thank you so much.

8 JUDGE THOMPSON: Okay.

9 MRS. GORDON: And it's just so great to see you.

10 And --

11 JUDGE THOMPSON: Yes.

12 MRS. GORDON: -- best regards to Ann.

13 JUDGE THOMPSON: I will. I will. I'll tell her that I
14 saw you.

15 DEPUTY CLERK GRANGER: And Judge, we had a birthday
16 cake. Mrs. Gordon has got a birthday coming up in a week.

17 JUDGE THOMPSON: I hear you have a birthday coming up
18 in a week.

19 MRS. GORDON: Yes.

20 JUDGE THOMPSON: Oh, that's wonderful. Okay.

21 Thanks, Bobby. Take care, now.

22 MRS. GORDON: Thank you.

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REPORTERS' CERTIFICATE

We, Risa L. Entrekin and Patricia G. Starkie,
Registered Diplomat Reporters and Official Court Reporters for
the United States District Court for the Middle District of
Alabama, do hereby certify that the foregoing 31 pages contain a
true and correct transcript of the interview of Jane Gordon in
the City of Montgomery, Alabama, on January 11, 2017.

In testimony whereof, we hereunto set our hand this
26th day of April, 2018.

/s/ Patricia G. Starkie
PATRICIA G. STARKIE, RDR, CRR
Official Court Reporter

/s/ Risa L. Entrekin
RISA L. ENTREKIN, RDR, CRR
Official Court Reporter