



Interview with **Louis McDuffie**

Date: June 21, 1989

Interviewer: Madison Davis Lacy, Jr.

Camera Rolls: 1121-1123

Sound Rolls: 154-155

Team: A

Interview gathered as part of ***Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s***. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #1121]

[sound roll #154]

00:00:16:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it please.

[slate]

00:00:18:00

Interviewer:

OK. All right. Just talk to me a little bit. You were, you said about nine or ten years old when Arthur was, was born. Do you remember when he entered your household? You had a fairly large family, too, didn't you?

00:00:32:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, it was five kids. And I don't remember exactly what year exactly that was. But, but I'm a little nervous. You know? [laughs]

Interviewer:

OK. Let's just start over again. Just—

Louis McDuffie:

OK. What you're asking me, what year was he born in?

00:00:57:00

Interviewer:

No, I wanna know do you remember specifically when, you said you were nine or ten years old, when he actually entered the household, when he was, when he was a baby. Do you remember when he was a baby?

00:01:07:00

Louis McDuffie:

Yeah, I can pretty much remember him when he was a baby, yes. Yeah.

00:01:13:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about it.

00:01:15:00

Louis McDuffie:

[laughs]

00:01:17:00

Interviewer:

How did, how did you and your other brothers and sisters react to this new, new person in the house?

00:01:21:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, there was, I was the only brother. And of course I was the oldest. And there was a sister older than me. And when he came along, being the, the other boy or the second boy,

everybody in the house just loved him to death. You know? And they were just crazy about him.

00:01:42:00

Interviewer:

As southerners, you guys gave each other nicknames. Why did you call Arthur, Bubba?

00:01:48:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, I guess [laughs] it's just a southern tradition or whatever that, about—

00:01:55:00

Interviewer:

Try and start by putting that, my question into your answer. Like, Well, you know, it's southern tradition to get a nickname, so we called him Bubba, you know, just ask a nickname. Go ahead.

00:02:05:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, like I was [laughs]—

00:02:07:00

Interviewer:

That's OK. Take your time.

00:02:08:00

Louis McDuffie:

It's, it's a southern tradition, you know, to, for anybody pretty much to have a nickname. And we thought Bubba was a good one for him. And of course mine was Big Pa. [laughs] And the—I hope I'm doing OK [laughs]. You just got me, I'm a little nervous here. But...

Interviewer:

Well, let's stop for a second.

00:02:36:00

Louis McDuffie:

OK.

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:02:37:00

Interviewer:

OK?

00:02:38:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK. Crystal, can you turn up the [inaudible]—

00:02:45:00

Interviewer:

Very informal, man. This is not—

Camera crew member #1:

—just a little bit, please?

Interviewer:

—none of the things that we do. I sat across—

Camera crew member #2:

Bring it up [unintelligible]

Interviewer:

—from Jesse Jackson about three months or so go.

Camera crew member #3:

Was it three months ago?

Louis McDuffie:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

And—

Camera crew member #1:

OK, that's fine.

Camera crew member #2:

Is it?

Camera crew member #1:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

You know, he likes to be very presidential.

Louis McDuffie:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

Brother came down, great conversation [inaudible]. So, we used it in the film. It was really very, very nice.

Louis McDuffie:

Yeah.

00:03:03:00

Interviewer:

Yeah.

[cut]

00:03:07:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

[unintelligible]

[slate]

00:03:11:00

Interviewer:

Give—

Camera crew member #3:

Let me, let me see the slate.

Interviewer:

[coughs] give me, give me again that story about, about the southern nicknames and Bubba. I said why did you call him Bubba, and you—go ahead.

00:03:24:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, if I can remember, all, most all southern kids or whatever, even their mothers and fathers, whatever, they had, like, nicknames. And it was just a, pretty much a southern tradition. And we came up with the nickname Bubba for Arthur, and it just seemed to fit him, well, very good. And that's the one we gave him. [laughs]

00:03:54:00

Interviewer:

Was there, were you, he was your younger brother. Did you look out for him when he was a kid? Do you remember any incident where you had to look out for Bubba when he was a kid?

00:04:04:00

Yes, I, especially when we first moved from Georgia to Miami when he was attending school. You know, I had heard so many stories about the kids in Florida and whatever, and I always had a, a, not a fear, but I always wanted to be protective for him or whatever. And like when he would get out of school or whatever, I would kinda stand around on the corner and make sure he got home safely, and nobody bothered him or anything like that. And that kind of stuff, you know.

00:04:40:00

Interviewer:

Did he ever, did he, did he ever say anything about his, his, his first crush on a girl? Do you remember anything like that?

00:04:47:00

Louis McDuffie:

Yes, I do. I remember I think it was his first girlfriend, a very pretty girl. Her name was Dolores Hayes. And she was a majorette. And of course like I say he was in the band. And I think he was a band leader. And I think that was his, she was his first girlfriend. And he was very, had a big crush on her. And he was supposed to marry her from what I understand, but something happened, and they didn't get married. I think he even went away in the marines or whatever. But they didn't get married.

00:05:34:00

Interviewer:

You said he was a musician. He actually loved them horns, didn't he?

Louis McDuffie:

Yes, he did.

Interviewer:

Tell me about that.

00:05:40:00

Louis McDuffie:

I remember Arthur as really loving music. I mean all type, all, you know, phases and whatever. And he, even in school, he played about five different instruments. I can't name all

the ones he played, but I do know he played five instruments. And he, all types of records, and albums, and everything. I mean he was a collector on that type of stuff. And every time I went to his house, I could hear either a horn blowing or a record playing. One, one or the other. And he was just really into his music.

00:06:23:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember when he said he was going into the marines?

00:06:27:00

Louis McDuffie:

No, I don't remember when he said he was going into there, when he said he was going into the marines. All I knew, one day he popped up, and he told me, he says, Brother, I'm going to the marines. And I says, Are you kidding? You know, are you kidding me? And he says, No, I'm going. And I didn't even know he had went down and enlisted or whatever. And so it was time for him to go, and he was for real. And I think that was one of my proudest moments of him, when he, the first time he came home, and he was dressed in his marine uniform. And he was, you know, he really looks well in that. And he, he was very good at what he did in the marines. Because he would always get like, you know, awards and this kind of stuff, you know, for doing good in the service and stuff. And I, I really admired him, and I really felt good when I first saw him in his uniform the first time he came home. And—

00:07:36:00

Interviewer:

Yeah. Now, when he, shortly after he came home, didn't you and he have an experience where you were working together for a while? Tell me about that.

00:07:45:00

Louis McDuffie:

Yes, this was long after he had gotten out of the marines. When he first got out of the marines, I think he married the, the lady that he, you know, the mother of his kids. And he, he was gonna join the—by the way, when he was in the marines, he was an MP in the marines or what they call a cross country chaser or whatever, when the guys go AWOL or whatever. He'd go, and get them, and bring them back, and whatever. And he was kinda interested in police work or whatever. Because when he got out of the marines, he applied for Dade County to be a, uniformed, you know, patrolman. And for some reason, I don't think they, they called him fast enough or whatever. But anyhow, he took a job with UPS. And he worked for UPS for a while, and then the UPS company, they had a layoff, which they had

called him back to work. But at that point, he had got, he had went to work for an insurance company. And he, he got interested in insurance, and he would always stop by, and, you know, he says, Hey, man, come on over, and, you know, work with me. He said, You'll make a lot of money selling insurance, you know? And I said, Forget it, man. I says, You know, that's not for me. So, anyhow probably about a year or two later, he really talked me into it. And I took a, a leave of absence from the company that I worked for, and I went over to, to work with him in the insurance. And after I was there a short while, I knew right then it wasn't for me. I didn't like it because canvassing or going out, you know, cold turkey or, you know, you gotta go to somebody's house at night after lunch or after their dinner, you know, to, you know, try and sell a policy or whatever. And I was a little bit lack on some of the appointments and stuff. And I remember one morning, I went in, and I was supposed to see a, a customer. And I didn't go. And he came out, and I think [laughs] he was watching me when I pulled into, when I drove up in the parking lot. And as I entered the office, he bust out of his office, and he says, Mr. McDuffie, I wanna see you in my office. So, I says, OK, I'll be right there. And he says, Now. And I says, Well, you know, what's happening? You know? *So, I went in, and he says, Were you supposed to see Mrs. So and So? And I said, Yeah. And he said, Why didn't you? I said, Well, I forgot it. And he says, Well, I'm gonna tell you one thing. I'm gonna look over it this time, but don't let it happen again. And I mean he was down to the point. And after that was all over, I proceeded to do my work, and he came out, and he patted me on the shoulder. And he says, Now, you know, I had to do that. He said, Because, you know, we can be brothers in the street, but we got a job to do here. And, I mean, he was just right to the point with it.* [laughs] And shortly after that, I—not that I had any bad feelings or anything toward him or, or working with him. I think from that experience, it just probably just made me a better person because later on, I, you know, I got in management. And if you have a job to do, you gotta do it. You know,—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Louis McDuffie:

—it doesn't matter whose feet you step on, you know.

00:11:42:00

Interviewer:

All right, let's stop down now then 'cause we're roll out. Excellent. Thank you very much.

[cut]

[camera roll #1122]

00:11:48:00

Camera crew member #3:

Speed.

Camera crew member #4:

Yeah.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:11:52:00

Interviewer:

Mr. McDuffie used to tell, told me once that you guys used to rough house a lot and play a lot. And he could really handle—tell, tell me how, tell me some, something like that.

00:12:00:00

Louis McDuffie:

Yeah. Especially after he got out of the marines, you know, we used to kid around a lot. He was, he had all kinda medals for firearms and stuff like that. And I always thought I was a good shot, but he was even better expert and whatever. And it just went from one extreme to the other. We would kid around, start wrestling or whatever, or boxing and stuff like that. And he would always, you know, come out on the top. You know? And I thought by me being the oldest and, and then bigger than him that I could handle him. You know? But it was not true, man. That guy, he was just like a [laughs], a, a slippery rag or something, you know? You just couldn't hold him, you know? And, but as far as, you know, getting upset or getting mad even if he, you know, threw me down or something like that and, you know, we never let it go beyond the point of just what it meant, you know? Just a friendly kidding around or whatever. Just, but those are some of the, the good times that we had together. And I really, you know, enjoyed those times with him.

00:13:25:00

Interviewer:

All right. Now tell me when and how, as you were telling me on the porch, how you heard of the accident and the incident.

00:13:33:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well as I, I was at work that morning. And in fact he had been here that Saturday. And he was riding his bike. And I was outside washing my car, and he was just kidding around. He kinda revved the bike up a little bit, and he just kicked dirt all over my car. You know, one of his little stunts, you know. And he went up the street, and he came back. And at that point, I told him, I says, You know, you better slow that bike down. It's like that, you know. So, that was that Saturday evening. And then that Sunday or early that Monday morning, that's when I heard about the accident that he had had. And how I heard about it was somebody that worked at the hospital where he was, they knew him. And they knew that his wife worked there, or she used to work at the hospital. But I don't, she wasn't working there at that time. And some of the people at the hospital felt that somebody needed to know, or they should get in touch with us because where they had him in ward D down in the jail part in the hospital. And somebody remembered that he had a brother who worked for a paint company, which is the company that I worked for. It's not far from the hospital. So, they called and told me that he had been in a bad accident on his motorcycle. And naturally I left work to go to the hospital to, you know, see how bad he was hurt or whatever. And I could not get in to see him or couldn't get any information or anything. And I was, you know, just really trying to get in there to see what's, what had happened. And I couldn't get in anywhere. So, finally they just kinda told me I had to leave from, from that section. So, I went back to work. And later on that day, somebody called me from the, I think it was the sheriff's department that, and told me the same thing, that he had been in an accident. And I asked what kinda accident, and they said he got hurt real bad on his bike. And the person that I was talking to on the phone, I was trying to get some information from them, which they would not give me any. You know, they was, just said that they called to let me know that he had been an accident and where he was. And of course all the time they had him listed or labeled as a John Doe, you know, as a, that he didn't, nobody, he didn't have anybody or anything. So, by that afternoon, we went back to the hospital, and I think they had realized that this man did have family, and he wasn't the type of person that they had labeled him as. And at that point, he was transferred into the main part of the hospital where he was getting better treatments. And, but anyhow, he, when they put him into the main part of the hospital, he, he just, you know, I, when I really heard about the extent of his illness and every, I mean his injury, you know, I just, I just couldn't bear to go in there to see him. And some of the other family members, they went into the room where he was. And, you know, they would come out sobbing or whatever. And, and I knew it was pretty bad, and I just couldn't bear to go in there, you know? But eventually I just had to face it. But at that particular moment, I just couldn't. And a couple of days after that, the hospital called and told us to get the family together and come out there. And that was, that was the end of it. And it's just a real, you know, sad thing. And I, you know, [laugh] I just, I just can't imagine anything happening like that to, to a person, you know? But it really did.

00:18:32:00

Interviewer:

Stop down.

[cut]

00:18:37:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:18:40:00

Interviewer:

Tell me how you, you and your family followed the trial.

00:18:42:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, we followed just about every inch of it because we found out that the trial was gonna be moved to Tampa because they said that that type of trial, they, they didn't think that the people that were involved could get a fair trial here. So, they moved it up to Tampa. And at that point, I had my views about what probably would have happened, you know, what was going to happen since they moved the trial, you know? And when the trial started in Tampa, we, we were there. We were there every day at the trial. And I remember we were in the trial, we were in court that Friday. And we, they finished real late, and they came back that Saturday morning to continue and possibly come with the verdict or whatever. And that night, we, we went back to the hotel rooms. And I would say to my wife, I says, Well, you know, after listening at the whole trial—I was trying to see who was the real guilty ones or whatever. Because after listening at the trial, I felt that maybe some had played more than others. And this is what I was doing in my mind. I was just trying to—in fact, I had it weeded out or I had it lined out to three. And we, so we went back to the hotel room that night. That's what I, you know, went to bed with that night on my mind. I was telling my wife, I says, Well, if they don't get all of them then the three of those guys are gonna get it just like that. So, we went to court that morning, and, which it was a short session, they was almost through. And then they—no, yeah, it was a short session. And then they went in to get the verdict. And the, and they came out. And, I mean, you're just sitting there. You know, you're tense. You're, you're on edge. You know, you're saying to yourself, Well, that guy, you know, well, if they let him go then we know he's gonna get it. And, and then when they, I think there was five of them were on trial. And when they said all five, they were not guilty, then, I mean, that's, really was a, a low blow as, as, you know, you could call it, you know? Because I was just so sure that somebody was gonna, you know, get, you know, get convicted for this, for this incident. But the emotions were flying real high in the courtroom

there. And everybody was just running to try to get to their cars and stuff because it was, something had started up in Tampa there. And of course it was me, my wife, and my sister in law, and my mother, and somebody else. And we were just trying to get to our car and get out of there because just alone the attitude of the people in Tampa, some of the restaurants that we would go in to eat, even the hotel that we were staying in, when we'd walk in the lobby, I mean, everybody, I mean, they knew us without even, you know, I mean, people in that town just, [laughs] they just knew us everywhere we went. We'd go to Burger King, they know us. We'd go to eat breakfast, they know us. And, I mean, they would just, and really I was afraid of the people in the town there because—

[roll out on camera roll]

[wild sound]

00:22:50:00

Interviewer:

OK, we got roll out on this one.

Camera crew member #3:

OK, I need to reload also.

Interviewer:

OK. We're gonna reload—

[cut]

[camera roll #1123]

[sound roll #155]

[wild sound]

00:22:58:00

Camera crew member #2:

Speed.

00:22:58:00

Camera crew member #3:

OK. Rolling.

Interviewer:

The next question is gonna be like a—

Camera crew member #1:

Rolling.

Interviewer:

—spontaneous reaction to this community to that acquittal—

[picture resumes]

Interviewer:

—We wanna know what you thought and how you felt. And you represent the interest of the family a little bit, too.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:23:11:00

Interviewer:

After the acquittal, there was a spontaneous reaction to this decision of injustice. How did you feel about that? What did you think?

00:23:22:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, [sighs] as we were coming back from Tampa that, after the trial, [laughs] we, I had my aunt with me. And we were taking her home. And we didn't even realize what was happening other than, didn't even know what was going on. And we got off 95 onto 62nd Street and saw these fires and people running with furniture and all that kind of stuff. And didn't realize what was going on. And I had the radio on in the car, and they were telling us all the troubled areas and everything and not, you know, really paying any attention to the radio, I went and drove right down in there. And I got my car stoned, and I looked at my wife. And I says, What's happening? And she says, Get out of here! It's a riot! So, we made a turn, and we came back up, you know, out of that area. And I, I felt bad about all the burning, and the

fires, and all that kinda stuff, and all the looting and stuff. But the, the way the trial came out or the outcome of the trial, I, I'm still bitter about that. And of course I guess that's the way the system works. I guess they saw that these, you know, people should be acquitted. But I, you know, I'm still bitter about it.

00:24:59:00

Interviewer:

Yeah. Moving ahead in time now. And it's—take me to your brother's funeral. I even haven't seen photographs or pictures of it, footage of it. Paint me a picture. Here you have your favorite brother, war hero, marine, somebody you used to wrestle with. Tell me how it, how, how—what the funeral was like and what feelings you had.

00:25:25:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, at the funeral, it was, it was, first of all, it was a large funeral. He, he knew a lot of people, and it was a large funeral. We should have it in the, in the Dade County Auditorium other than the church that we, we had it at. Because most of the people couldn't get in. And he was, he was well liked by everybody. You know, people that he worked with, people that he worked for, the insurance company, and just people in general. And the, the funeral was a military type funeral. You know, the way they had the, the, the marines there, you know, as the pallbearers and stuff like that. And, and it was, it was a sad moment knowing, you know, that someone that you really cared for and been around, you know, for a long time, all his life, and, and knowing that he was gone. You know, that, not knowing so much that he was gone but the way it happened, and the results and everything from it really even made it more, more, made it harder rather. And like I say, he was very well liked by everybody.

00:26:59:00

Interviewer:

Given that he was well liked by everybody, if you wanted to put an image or picture in everyone's mind of how you would love your brother to, to be remembered, what would that image or picture, what would that—even an incident? What would that idea be?

00:27:13:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, I would like to see him, you know, the image of him as a man really [car horn] being successful in what he was doing. And, because when he got into the insurance business, he, he liked that very well. And that was his goal was to reach the top or wherever, as far as he could go in that. And that's what I would have really liked to see him accomplish, you know,

during his lifetime or whatever. And I think that would have really made him feel good and me, too.

00:28:00:00

Interviewer:

OK, we can cut here.

[cut]

00:28:06:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

[slate]

00:28:07:00

Interviewer:

You said you talked to his children about their father. What have you told them?

00:28:12:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, es-especially the, the younger ones that was, you know, real young when he was, you know, killed that really didn't know him that well, you know, or didn't understand or didn't, didn't have the, the opportunity to be with their father, and, you know, I've told them the type of man he was, and the type of father that he probably, you know, would have wanted to be for them. And some of his goals that, you know, he wanted to achieve in his lifetime. And they, they sit, and they listened very, you know, concerned, wanting to know, you know, these things about their father. And—

00:29:06:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember what you said?

00:29:08:00

Louis McDuffie:

Well, I've told them about, you know, the times that he was in the, in the band, and the instruments and stuff that he played. And especially his son. And when he was in the marines and stuff like that. And, and just, you know, what a swell guy he was. And his, his son, he, you know, he really likes to, to hear that coming from me about his father, you know?

00:29:37:00

Interviewer:

OK, we can cut here.

00:29:38:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

00:29:38:00

Interviewer:

Yep.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:29:41:00

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