

# **SANKOFA INTERGENERATIONAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT PILOT REPORT**



An Initiative of the National Association of Black Storytellers, Inc.

Mother Mary Carter Smith, Ancestor, Co-Founder

Mama Linda Goss, Co-Founder

Karen "Queen Nur" Abdul-Malik, President

Legacy Committee - Janice Curtis Greene, Chair

Members:

Jocelyn Dabney

Cheryl Hinton

Arthurette Martin

Sponsored by the Griots' Circle of Maryland, Inc and  
Growing Griots Literacy Learning Program

Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project - Stage I Team

Growing Griots:

Mariah Grier	Darius Joyner	Jada Anderson	Kendell Stokes
Malachi Ross-Jones		Taja Stokes	Tabitha Blakston

Elders:

Gwen Marable	June McAbee	James McAbee	Victoria Smith
Joan Stevenson	Fellisco Keeling	John "Kinderman" Taylor	

Growing Griots Mentors:

Bunjo Butler	Eslyn Hinmon	Gail Harrison	Janet Jones
Deborah Pierce-Fakunle		Van Epps	William Starke
Janice Curtis Greene			

## **Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project - SIHOP**

### **I. The Beginning**

#### **Legacy Committee:**

In January 2015 Karen Abdul Malik, Queen Nur, was elected President of the National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS). Under Queen Nur's leadership the Legacy Committee was established. As stated in the Legacy Committee Template the Legacy Committee was established pursuant to a conversation between co-founder, Linda Goss and the President to ensure the voices of our founders, Mother Mary Carter Smith and Mama Linda Goss, elders and ancestors are preserved and to create and generate community program models that forward the mission of the organization and eternalize the legacy of our Founders.

The objectives of the Legacy Committee are to raise awareness of Black storytelling as a tool to address community issues; increase involvement of community in storytelling projects; coordinate storytelling projects that fall outside the realm of NABS' National Programs and create community program models that can be replicated by affiliates.

The Legacy Committee established the Annual NABS Mother Mary Carter Smith Day, a NABS celebration of our Ancestor Co-Founder Mother Mary Carter Smith, the Annual NABS Founders' Month in August and the annual celebration of the birthday of Co-Founder Linda Goss to coincide with our Founders' Month Celebration.

Janice Curtis Greene "volunteered" to chair the Legacy Committee. The President introduced the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project to the committee to have youth interview elders to extract their wisdom and to remind elders of their importance and worth to the future of NABS and the African American community. Thus the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project began.

#### **Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project (SIOHP)**

Definition:

SIOHP pursues the answers to 4 questions: 1) What African American historical stories of survival & victory do we need to tell to help our youth survive these troubling times? 2) What stories does the world need to hear to increase awareness of the problem of racism? 3) What stories must be told and documented to facilitate dialogue & transformation and 4). How can Interviews and Documentation aid in learning about Historical African American Heroes/She-ros

Goals:

- Share stories of overcoming, survival and victory
- Generate intergenerational dialogue on racism
- Collectively create and tell stories that embrace a transformative vision

- Collect and Record oral histories and transformative stories that are available to the public
- Hold community forums (East and West Baltimore) to share collected and created stories with diverse audiences (police, other ethnic groups, gov agencies)
- Build Stronger African American Communities by designing and implementing replicable community-based models that uses applied storytelling to engage collective visioning.

#### Outcomes of Stage I:

- Students learned the history of the wax figures in the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum
- Documentation of elder's stories of racism, social justice and how they survived was created
- Intergenerational dialogue on survival skills was opened
- Peer/mentor relationships were established
- SIOHP "How to Guide" and Interview audio files have been posted on NABS web-site

### The Story of SIOHP

#### II. First Attempt

The first iteration of the project was to hold sessions between students of the Growing Griots Literacy Learning Program (GGLLP) with Seniors from the Woodlawn Senior Center (WSC).

The first session of the SIOHP was held on Tuesday, April 7, 2015 at the Woodlawn Senior Center; 2120 Gwynn Oak Avenue, Woodlawn, MD 21207 from 12:00 PM until 2:00 PM. Most of the youth from the GGLLP were either back in school or were unable to attend. Mariah Grier was the only GGLLP student to participate; however, Maria Gray-Bowie, WSC Director, had put out flyers in advance and several of the WSC members thought the program would be advantageous and brought their grandchildren. There were six (6) students in attendance. There were three scheduled WSC speakers, Mr. Charles Matthews (retired Physics & Chemistry teacher), Ms. Shirleen Adams (retired Federal Employee) and Mr. Robert Cooper (retired Educator and retire Lieutenant Colonel from the US Military). Other members of the WSC added their comments as the conversation warranted. Janice Curtis Greene served as moderator.

During the session the adults told of their history and how they got where they are today. Mr. Matthews and Mr. Copper had been raised in Mississippi and Alabama, respectively and told of the racism they faced. They encouraged the students to never give up on their dreams and to always conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen because how you act will determine how you will be treated. Ms. Adams told her story of early employment at the Social Security

Administration and stressed the importance of proper work etiquette. Mr. Matthews and Mr. Cooper actually performed some role play. The students were given opportunities to ask questions and express their concerns about growing up in this current racist and sometime violent society. Mariah Grier told her story about being stalked by a young man at her school and how it affected her sleep, grades and overall state of mind. Even after reporting the incidents to the school administrators nothing was done until her grandmother paid the school a visit and demanded that Mariah be protected and the situation addressed. Another young man, Joseph Davis expressed a desire to join the US Marines and is already in a Junior ROTC program at Milford Mill Academy. Mr. Cooper took a special interest and told Joseph to make sure that he earns at least an undergraduate degree before entering the military and may want to consider the Naval Academy or West Point which would mean keeping his grades up.

The session ended with each student standing and telling what they got out of the session. We all sat down and had lunch together prepared by Ms. Delores Douglass retired educator and newspaper publisher.

#### Pros:

- Ms. Gray-Bowie, one of the few African American Senior Center Directors in Baltimore County was able to receive recognition for sponsoring a senior/youth peer program in her center.
- Some of the members of the WSC bought their grandchildren to the session. Two of those students later entered the GGLLP.
- For the one Growing Griot, Mariah Grier, who did participate it was a good learning experience
- This session was the first step in SIOHP and we were able to get a start

#### Cons:

- Scheduling - The center closes at 3:00 PM Monday through Friday and is not open on Saturday. The Growing Griots students are only available for this project on Saturdays 11:00 am through 2:00 PM.
- Transportation - Most of the students from the GGLLP live in the city and are not near the Center. The many of the seniors live in Woodlawn and cannot or are unwilling to come to the Library on Saturdays.
- Perception - The WSC Director, Ms. Gray-Bowie, suggested that a library would be a better location for the sessions as students may have a negative feeling about coming to a "Senior Center". The WSC is located in Baltimore County and the closet library is the Baltimore County Woodlawn Library. The Walbrook Library is in Baltimore City under the direction of the Enoch Pratt Library System

## Conclusion:

A more controlled environment needed to be established.

## Second Attempt:

After the April 11, 2015 uprising in Baltimore City following the death of Freddie Gray SIOHP took a different turn as a part of the Baltimore Healing Process. After a meeting with Maryland Non-Profit and other Baltimore community activist SIOHP was reshaped. NABS entered into partnerships with several Baltimore City non-profit organizations active in the Baltimore Recovery initiative one of whom was the Rosemont Neighborhood Improvement Association (RNIA) based in the same community as the Walbrook Library where the GGLLP meets. The Library's Director is Bunjo Butler.

Janice Curtis started the relationship by volunteering her services as a storyteller at the RNIA Back-to-School event in August 2015. In September NABS member President, Queen Nur, and members, Deborah Pierce-Fakunle, David Fakunle and Janice Curtis Greene attended the September 2015 RNIA meeting and presented the plan to work with the Rosemont Community.

This plan included training GGLLP students to work with elder members of the Rosemont Community to provide a storied view of the Rosemont Community from:

- the past - through the memories of seniors;
- the present - through the eyes of seniors, young adults and teens and
- the future - through shared hopes and dreams of Rosemont residents.

Community building projects that engage applied storytelling and collective visioning strategies would be used to address the injustice plaguing Baltimore and other cities across America.

## Pros:

- The National Storytelling Network (NSN) Grant Application provided a template for attempts to secure funding from other sources.

## Cons:

- Attempt to secure funding for this iteration of SIOHP through the NSN, Brimstone Grant was unsuccessful
- After attending one meeting Rev. Mosley, the Director of RNIA, failed to follow through with providing local students for the GGLLP and recording equipment for SIOHP.
- Communication with leaders of RNIA ceased

## Conclusion:

For the SIOHP Stage I a smaller more controlled environment was necessary. Although the GGLLP supplied the youth and the Walbrook Library was the obvious site; the problem arose with providing senior interview subjects, funding and narrowing the focus of the interviews. For the seniors and funding we turned to the Griots' Circle of Maryland, Inc, a NABS Affiliate. For narrowing the focus we turned to an expert in Oral Histories Professor Ruth Hill.

### III. New Approach

- Participants - An invitation was sent to all Griots' Circle members age 80 and above explaining SIOHP and asking if they would be willing to participate and be interviewed by GGLLP students. We received 8 positive replies.
- Meet and Greet - A Luncheon was held for GGLLP students and parents and seniors interview subjects. At this luncheon Janice Greene explained SIOHP description, objectives, purpose and method. Introductions were made and the students and Griots' Circle mentors provided entertainment and served the elders. This luncheon was held during the regular GGLLP session time in the Walbrook Library giving SIOHP participants an opportunity to begin establishing relationships.
- Training - NABS Member and Elder, Ruth Hill, Oral History Coordinator at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University's Schlesinger Library was commissioned to design and conduct an oral History workshop for the GGLLP in Baltimore. On January 16, 2016 Sister Ruth Hill came to Baltimore to hold a one day workshop for GGLLP Students and mentors and Griots' Circle Elders and Board members. Sister Ruth designed a session based on the definition of SIOHP and suggested that we conduct history style interviews with a focus on life as African Americans growing up in America surviving the struggle for 80 plus years. At the training Sister Ruth showed a video of an interview being conducted, pointed out some do's and don'ts and suggested equipment. The training ended with mock interviews and a Q&A period.
- Funding - Bunjo Butler and Janice Curtis Greene prepared a proposal breaking down the cost to implement the pilot SIOHP. The proposal clearly stated that SIOHP was a NABS initiative and the Griots' Circle as a NABS affiliate would be the sponsors of the pilot. The vote was unanimous that the Griots' Circle would fund: the Luncheon, Ruth Hill's Workshop (fees and travel), equipment and transcription of the interviews.
- Developing Interview Questions - Using the information provided at Prof. Hill's workshop GGLLP students worked with the mentors developing a script of questions. This method was used so students were actively involved with the interview development process. The questions were broken down into categories: Growing Up; Education; Role of the Church; Adult Life; Reflections; African American Timeline - Questions about

how each interviewee was affected by significant events in African American History. All of the Elders were given copies of the questions prior to the interview.

#### IV. Conducting Interviews:

- Scheduling - A schedule was established so that each of the eight GGLLP students would have an opportunity to conduct an interview
- Assigning Tasks - Each interview had the following:
  1. interviewer (GGLLP student)
  2. interviewee (Griots' Circle Elder)
  3. recording technician (GGLLP student)
  4. GGLLP mentor, videographer (GGLLP mentor)
  5. observers (GGLLP student and mentor)
- Release Forms - Every elder was required to sign a release form so that their recorded and/or videoed interview could be used for non-commercial educational and promotional and programmatic purposes.
- Lunch - On interview days GGLLP Mentors provided extra food for all participants
- Video - GGLLP Mentors used their own equipment to video tape each interview. Eight (8) were taped but the sound was muffled on two (2) of the eight (8). Some of the videos were shown at the GGLLP culminating event.
- Space - Since a quiet environment was necessary, Mr. Butler arranged for the use of the computer training room at the Walbrook Library and the meeting room where GGLLP sessions are held. This was at an inconvenience to the library as the training room could not be used during the interviews and there was noise in the library itself over which we had no control.
- Transcription - Initially an inexpensive online transcription service was used for one test interview. After reviewing the transcript with Professor Hill it was obvious that English was not the transcriber's first language and there were spelling and punctuation errors. Prof. Hill suggested a transcription company which she uses which was more expensive; however, the transcripts were impeccable.
- Each elder was given a certificate and a gift bag that included Bother Blue books donated by Sister Ruth Hill. The other items were donated by GGLLP Mentors. Each Elder was also given a thank you letter.
- Miscellaneous
  1. "Do Not Disturb" signs were posted on the doors of the interview rooms
  2. "Pause" and "Speak Louder" signs were made to use during the interviews



3. A cover was hung over the window of the computer room used for interviews to eliminate distractions
- V. Budget/Funding - \$5878.49 (This project was completely funded by the Griots' Circle of MD and with private donations from members.)
- Professor Ruth Hill: \$1341.30
    1. Fee - \$700.00
    2. Train - \$320.20
    3. Hotel - \$321.10
  - Luncheon: \$159.77
  - Equipment: \$2,584.62
    1. 2 Zoom H5 Recorders @ \$286.19 = \$572.32
    2. 2 Tripods for Recorders @ \$35.99 = \$71.98
    3. 2 sets of Noise Reducing Headphones @ \$38.68 = \$77.36
    4. SD Cards \$40.98
    5. Batteries \$29.18
  - Transcription - \$1792.80
  - Funding Private donations totaling \$750.00 were received and the 2016 Griots' Circle Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC) Grant of \$2000.00 was used. The Griots' Circle voted to use MSCA Grant for 2017 of \$2500.00 to continue SIOHP funding.

Pros:

- Problems aside the first stage of the SIOHP pilot was completed.
- The youth learned about the struggles that real people faced and overcame.
- The Seniors were happy to have someone to take an interest in their lives and listen to their stories.
- The first stage of the SIOHP can be replicated by other affiliates

Cons:

- In all the haste to get the project squeezed into the GGLLP curriculum and completed debriefing sessions were never held before the GGLLP year ended.
- In an effort to get all students involved too many interview sessions were scheduled.
- The length of interview sessions was underestimated. Some ran very long and some mentors cut off the interview instead of letting the elder continue.

- There is no guarantee that the students from the 2015/2016 GGLLP will return for the 2016 - 2017 session making retraining necessary.

Conclusions:

- SIOHP must become a regular part of the GGLLP curriculum
- Since the equipment is already purchased that expense does not have to be repeated
- Ways to expand SIOHP must be explored
- Ways to have the elders interview the students must be explored
- Follow-up questions for students and elders need to be developed
- A less expensive transcription service needs to be found
- Fewer interview sessions need to be scheduled
- Lowering the cost is crucial
- NABS needs to assist in attaining funding through grant development
- Ways to broaden Legacy Committee participation in the project need to be established

VI. Next Steps:

- SIOHP has been permanently added to the GGLLP curriculum
- GGLLP 2016 - 2017 students need to be trained by mentors on taking oral Histories
- The possibility of narrowing the scope of the interview to specific periods such as the Civil Rights Movement can be explored
- The GGLLP has been approached by the Seniors at Broadmead Retirement Community in Maryland about conducting Interviews with some of their residents. Broadmead is willing to supply transportation to bring the seniors to the Walbrook Library.
- Funding outside of the Griots' Circle need to be explored: Grants, Endowments, etc.
- Maryland Non-Profits will be contacted to explore funding opportunities and establish connections with Baltimore community based organizations
- The second stage of the SIOHP needs to be implemented. This stage includes using oral histories to present assets to a wider and diverse community group using the oral histories to inspire participants to identify more community assets and conducting a collective visioning session

## **Interviewer Script use for Stage I of SIOHP**

Introductions:

Interviewer: My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am \_\_\_\_ years old

It is : Date

We are at the Walbrook Branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library

It is: Time

Purpose: This is an Interview for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project

which is an initiative of the National Association of Black Storytellers and sponsored by the Griots' Circle of Maryland

Please tell me your full name.

What would you like me to call you?

Before we begin the formal interview, (call the person by name), I would like to thank you for volunteering to be interviewed as part of this project. It means a lot to me and the other students. (You can go off script and thank in your own words)

Please make your answers to the point and relevant to the question asked. If I interrupt you at any time please understand that I am not being rude, but the additional information that you are sharing may be the answer to a question that will be asked later in the interview

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### **Identifying Information**

When were you born?

Where do you currently live?

The categories that will be covered in this interview are:

Growing Up; Education; Role of the Church; Adult Life; Reflections; African American Timeline - Questions about how significant events in African American History affected your life

If you need to take a break or if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer anytime during the interview, please feel free to let me know.

## Growing Up

Where were you born?

Did you grow up there?

What was your neighborhood like?

Was it an integrated neighborhood?

What were your parents' names?

What kind of work did they do?

Were you raised by your parents?

Do you have any brothers and sisters?

What are their names?

Where do you fall in the order?

As children did you get along with your brothers and sisters?

Do you have a favorite brother or sister?

Tell me about him/her.

Are your brothers and sisters still alive?

Do they live near you?

How often do you get to see them?

Did you have a favorite toy or game?

What was it?

Did you take part in any organized sports?

Please tell me the sport and your level of participation.

Who were your best friends?

What were they like?

Did you go to their house or did they come to yours?

Did you have a nickname?

What was it?

How did you get it?

If you had chores what were they?

Did your family have a television/describe it?

When did they get it?

When could you watch it?

What kinds of shows did you watch?

Did your family have a car?

If yes, what kind and describe it?

Did you take trips in the car?

Did your family have meals together?

How did you celebrate birthdays and holidays?

What did people call African Americans when you were growing up?

What was it like for African Americans in the city where you grew up?

Did you or your family experience racism or segregation?

Please give me one example.

How did this affect you as a child?

How did it affect you as an adult?

How did your family survive racism/segregation?

What did you want to be when you grew up?

Did you fulfill that dream?

Did you have a role model growing up?

Who was it?

What is your favorite memory of your family?

What is your favorite memory of your community?

Do you remember any great stories or legends about your town?

## **Education**

If you attended more than one school at any level please tell me about each school and why you changed schools.

The following questions relate to your Elementary, Middle or Junior High School experiences:

Were you able to attend school?

What were the name sof your schools?

Were they public or private?

Where were they located?

What did your schools look like?

Did girls and boys attend the same school?

Did you enjoy school?

Were you able to go to school for what we now call a regular school year?

Were the grades separated?

Were the teachers good teachers?

Were your schools integrated?

If so, what was the ratio of the races of students?

What was the racial makeup of the teachers?

How did the teachers treat the students?

Did you have books?

What was the condition of the books?

Were your classmates friendly?

Did you and your classmates live in the same community?

Did you have any special friends in school?

Did you study together?

How would your classmates remember you?

Do you still keep in contact with any of your classmates?

All of the following questions relate to your High School experience .

Were you able to attend High School?

What was the name of your High School?

Was it public or private?

Where was it located?

What did your High School look like?

Did girls and boys go to school together?

Did you enjoy going to High School?

Were you able to go to school for what we now call a regular school year?

What subjects were you taught?

Were you able to have electives?

Were you able to take college prep courses?

Did you plan to attend college after High School?

Did you take Home Economics, Business or Trade courses?

Were the classes/subjects taught by different teachers?

Were the teachers good teachers?

Was your High School integrated?

If so, what was the ratio of the races of students?

What was the racial makeup of the teachers?

How did the teachers treat the students?

Did you have books?

What was the condition of the books?

Did you take part in any organized sports, clubs or activities?

Please tell me the sport and your level of participation.

Were your classmates friendly?

Did you and your classmates live in the same community?

Did you have any special friends in High School?

Did you study together?

How would your classmates remember you from High School?

Do you still keep in contact with any of your classmates from High School?

The following questions relate to your Jr. College, College or University experience:

Were you able to attend a college or university?

What was the name?

Where was it located?

What did it look like?

Did you go straight from High School to College?

If not, why? How many years were in that gap?

What did you do during that gap?

Did you live on Campus?

Was it an Historically Black College or University?

Did you join a Fraternity or Sorority?

If so, what was it?

Do you feel belonging to a Fraternity/Sorority affected your college experience?

If yes, how?

What was the racial makeup of your college?

What was the racial makeup of the teachers?

How did the teachers treat the students?

How did the students treat you?

What was your major?

Did you graduate?

If yes, what was your degree?

If no, why didn't you graduate?

Post Graduate Studies



Did you attain any additional degrees?

Where did you attain that degree(s)?

What degree(s) did you attain?

Was it difficult?

Did you work or raise a family while going to school?

### **Role of Church**

These questions will not ask about any personal beliefs. They are only to get information about the church's role in your life, if any.

Did you attend church as a child?

If so, what was the name of the church?

What was the denomination?

Where was it located?

Did your family attend services together?

Was your church segregated?

What part did church play in your life as a child/teenager?

Is the church still an active part of your life?

In what ministries or activities do you engage?

What role did/does your church in particular play in the your Community?

What role did/does your church in particular play in the Civil Rights Movement?

### **Adult Life**

Have you ever been married? (If no skip the questions about spouses)

(If yes) Are you currently married?

(If not currently married) Only if it is not too personal or painful can you explain why ?

(If currently married) What is your spouse's name?

How did you meet your spouse?

How long have you been married?

What kind of work does your spouse do or has done?

Do you have any children?

If so, what are their names, gender and ages?

Do you have any grandchildren? How many?

Do you have any great-grandchildren? How many?

Are you currently employed?

What kind of work do you do?

If you are not currently employed, what kind of work have you done in your lifetime?

Were you in the military?

In what branch did you serve?

What rank did you attain?

Did you serve during war or peace time?

Was the military segregated when you served?

How were "Negro" soldiers treated differently?

Please tell me one story or memory about your service in the military.

Were you active in the Civil Rights Movement?

If so, please explain your activities?

What are your favorite activities or hobbies?

Please relate your favorite family story?

### **Reflections**

What was the happiest moment of your life?

Who was/is the most influential person in your life?

Can you tell me about him or her?

What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in life?

What are some of the most important lessons you have taught your children?

What are the proudest moments in your life?

Did you accomplish all you had hoped ?

Is there anything that you did not accomplish in your life that you would like to accomplish now?

If you could would there be anything in your life you would go back and change?

Do you feel you are leaving a legacy?

What would that legacy be and for whom are you leaving that legacy?

### **African American Timeline**

I will relate some milestones in African American History. If applicable, please tell me how you felt when they happened.

1931 - The arrest of the Scottsboro Nine in Alabama

1947 - Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier in Major League Baseball

1948 - President Truman "officially" integrates the U.S. Armed services

1954 - Brown vs. the Board of Education making segregation in schools unconstitutional

1955 - Rosa Parks' arrest for defying bus segregation laws in Montgomery, Alabama

1957 - Little Rock Nine integrate Central High School in Arkansas

1960 - Woolworth sit-in by Greensboro Four in North Carolina

1962 - James Meredith integrates University of Mississippi

1963 - March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

1964 - Civil Rights Act passed

1964 - Sidney Poitier became first Negro to win Best Actor Oscar

1967 - Thurgood Marshall appointed first Negro on Supreme Court

1968 - Dr. Martin Luther King assassinated

2001 - Colin Powell appointed First African American Secretary of State

2002 - Halle Berry and Denzel Washington Best Actor and Actress Oscars making it the first time African Americans win both categories in the same year

2008 - Barack Obama elected the first African American President of the United States

2012 - Barack Obama re-elected as President of the United States

Is there anything you would like to add that was not covered in this interview?

Again, I thank you for your participation in the pilot of the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project. (You can go off script and that in your own words)

**The Next Section contains the Transcripts of all eight**  
**SIOHP Interviews conducted by the Growing Griots**  
**Literacy Learning Program Students and Elders from the**  
**Griots' Circle of Maryland, Inc.**

**SIOHP Interview #1 Elder Edna Ruff and Youth Jada Anderson**

CREW: Yeah. Count to ten backwards so we can get a sound check. Nice and loud.

JADA ANDERSON: Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.

CREW: You have to stay at that level. Mama Ruff, if you could count to ten, either way you want to count, up or down.

EDNA RUFF: I guess I'll do down. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

CREW: I'm going to move the microphone closer to Mama Ruff. You're going to have to speak just a little bit louder, but this will pick you up -- which means you have to speak louder, because your microphone is farther away from you.

JA: OK.

CREW: All right? Is it recording now? Because I can't see. You can [just?] start.

JA: OK. My name is Jada Anderson, and I am 13 years old.

CREW: Slow down, baby.

JA: Today is May 14<sup>th</sup>, [00:01:00] 2016. We are at the Walbrook branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. It is 11:30, 11:40. This is an interview for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project, which is an initiative of the National Association of Black Storytellers and sponsored by the Griot Circle of Maryland. Please tell me your full name.

ER: My name is Edna Adeline Ruff.

JA: What would you like me to call you?

ER: Mrs. Ruff.

JA: OK. Before we begin the formal interview, Mrs. Ruff, I would like to thank you for volunteering to be interviewed as part of this project. It means a lot to me and the other students. I thank you for allowing me to learn about your life story.

Please make your answers to the point and relevant to the question asked. If I interrupt you at any time, please understand that I am not being rude, but the additional information that you are sharing may be the answer to a question that will be asked later in the interview.

[00:02:00] OK. Where were you born?

ER: I was born in Harford County in Maryland.

JA: Where do you currently live?

ER: I live in [Laurel?], Maryland, now.

JA: OK. The category that we will be covering in this interview are growing up, education, role of the church, adult life, reflections, African American timeline, questions about how significant events in African American history affected your life. If you need to take a break or if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer at any time during the interview, please feel free to let me know.

What was your neighborhood like?

ER: Well, I grew up on a farm, so it was just like country.

JA: OK. Was it an integrated neighborhood?

ER: Yes, it was integrated, but there was only two other -- only one other African American person [00:03:00] that lived close enough to walk to.

JA: What were your parents' names?

ER: My father was W. Stanley Gover, and my mother was Edna Adeline Gover.

JA: What kind of work did they do?

ER: My father was a -- my father was a farmer. My mother was a schoolteacher until she got married. And at that time, women could not teach after they were married, so when she got married, she stopped teaching and was a housewife after that.

JA: OK. Were you raised by your parents?

ER: Yes, by my parents. And my parents raised me, although my father's mother lived with me, or lived with us, I should say.

JA: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

ER: Have one brother, one sister.

JA: What are their names?

ER: My brother is named [00:04:00] William Gover; my sister, who is deceased, is named Martha [Bradford?].

JA: Where do you fall in that order?

ER: I'm the oldest of the three of us.

JA: As children, did you get along with your brothers and sister?

ER: Yes, we got along. We teased each other, but we got along.

JA: Do you have a favorite?

ER: No favorite brother and sister, since I only had one of each.

JA: (laughter) Can you tell me about your brother and your sister?

ER: Well, my bro-- my sister is deceased for the last four or five -- oh, it's been ten years, almost. And my brother lives on the place where -- lives where we grew up at. At he was a farmer for a while, and then he worked at Sparrows Point. He's retired now.

JA: OK. How often do you get to see your brother?

ER: Well, [00:05:00] we always meet up for Christmas and other holidays, but I see him fairly often, whenever there's something at his church or something at my church or something going on in the family. We see each other.

JA: Growing up, did you have a favorite toy or game?

ER: When we were growing up, we used to play house. Had dolls, and particularly in the summertime, we would set up a house and play house with our dolls.

JA: OK. Did you take part in any organized sports?

ER: No.

JA: OK. Who were your best friends?

ER: I had a best friend in church and I had a best friend in the -- when I was in high school, growing up and high school.

JA: What were their names?

ER: The one in church was named [Florence Barn?], and the other one is named Elizabeth Harris -- both who are deceased at this time. [00:06:00]

JA: Growing up, did you go to their house or did they come to your house?

ER: When you were in the country, like, in -- you know, we were too far apart to go to each other's houses. Parents were working all the time, and you would have had to walk, so no, we didn't.

JA: Did you have a nickname growing up?

ER: No.

JA: If you had chores, what were they?

ER: Well, we used to have to go and get the cows out of the farm -- out of the pasture to bring them to be milked. And we had the problem with dusting and helping with the housework on weekends.

JA: Did your family have a television?

ER: Nobody did, no.

JA: OK. Did your family have a car?

ER: Yes. We had a car.

JA: What kind?

ER: The car was -- well, the [stock?] car was a make of [00:07:00] car that they don't make any more now.

JA: Did you ever take trips in your car?

ER: Well, we considered it a trip when we went from my -- from where we lived to Baltimore. We said we took trips out.

JA: OK. Did your family eat meals together?

ER: Yes, we used to eat together.

JA: How did you celebrate birthdays and holidays?

ER: I don't really celebrating birthdays in particular. And holidays, either my grandmother's twin brother joined us for dinner or we went to his house for dinner, so.

JA: While you were growing up, what did they call African American people?

ER: We were colored then. We were called colored people.

JA: What was it like for African Americans growing up on a farm where you grew up?

ER: What was it like? It wasn't any different. I don't know what you say. We used to [00:08:00] have a regular day, all day.

JA: OK. Did you or your family experience racism or segregation?

ER: Yes, we were segregated. Didn't talk about racism, but I guess it was around too.

JA: Could you give me an example of the segregation?



ER: Well, I lived about a mile from a school, but it was a white school, and we walked three miles to go to school when we were in elementary school. And each person -- you know, each race did their own thing, separated from each other. Like going to church, having picnics and things like that.

JA: How did this make you feel as a child?

ER: I just accepted it. I didn't -- nobody made a whole big deal about it; you just accepted it.

JA: How did it make you feel as an adult?

ER: Well, it made you -- when you stopped and think about it, you'd think about how foolish [00:09:00] everybody was for doing this kind of thing.

JA: How did your family deal with the segregation/

ER: Well, we just went on and did things on our own. We didn't let it bother us as much as we could.

JA: What did you want to be when you grew up?

ER: I wanted to be a nurse.

JA: Did you fulfill that dream?

ER: Yes, I was a nurse.

JA: Did you have a role model growing up?

ER: My parents were my role models.

JA: Why were they your role models?

ER: By the way they lived and the way they did things, my parents were involved in church and in other things. The way they treated each other and treated us made them role models -- they were kind to me. My father was devoted to his mother and kind to my mother. [00:10:00] So.

JA: What is your favorite memory of your family?

ER: My favorite? I would say Christmas, when we would get together with my uncle.

JA: What is your favorite memory of living on a farm?

ER: Oh, the fun we had. We used to chase chickens and go on out in the garden to pick up [fruit?] and other things like that, just like farm life is.

JA: Do you remember any great stories or legends about your farm?

ER: Only that my farm had -- my grandfather had bought the farm; it had been in our family for a while.

JA: If you attended more than one school at any level, please tell me about each school and why you changed schools. The following questions relate to your elementary, middle, or junior high school experiences. Were you able to attend school?

ER: Yes, I did.

JA: [00:11:00] What were the names of your schools?

ER: I went to Fairview Elementary School, Frederick Douglass High School.

JA: Were they public or private schools?

ER: They were public schools.

JA: Where were they both located?

ER: Fairview School was in Harford County. That's the school I walked three miles to. And Douglas was in Baltimore City. And I went to that high school because there wasn't any high school for colored children close enough for me -- to my -- where I lived, with (inaudible).

JA: What did your schools look like?

ER: Fairview was a one-room school from grades one through seven, and it had a pot stove in the middle of it to keep warm in the winter. We had to get water from one of the neighbors [00:12:00] that lived nearby. And other than that it was just an ordinary school, with desks and chairs and the teacher's desk. Had blackboards. At Christmastime they would decorate the blackboards.

JA: What did Frederick Douglass High School look like?

ER: Well, Frederick Douglass is one of the oldest -- it's a historical building now -- was a two-story building with the halls and rooms on each side. Large rooms. With tables and chairs -- I mean, desks and chairs.

JA: Did girls and boys attend the same school?

ER: Yes, we did.

JA: Did you enjoy school growing up?

ER: Yes, I did. I -- we used to have a lot of fun, even in one grade school when we were doing all that walking, well, we enjoyed it.

JA: Were you able to go to school for what we now call a “regular” school year?

ER: Yes, we did. [00:13:00] We went -- in the wintertime, there were times when it was too cold or too stormy to go to school, and we were home for -- we missed a lot of elementary school. But high school, I went every day.

JA: Were the grades separated?

ER: Yes. Well, in high school they were. In elementary school -- they were separated according to whereabouts in the building -- in the school room you sat, but...

JA: Were your teachers good teachers?

ER: I felt like they were. I liked my teachers. They didn't mistreat the people in the school, I didn't think.

JA: Were your schools integrated?

ER: No, they were not.

JA: What were the racial makeup of your teachers?

ER: They were all African American teachers in both high school and elementary school.

JA: Did your teachers treat you well? [00:14:00]

ER: I felt like they did.

JA: Did you have books?

ER: Yes, we had books in the school.

JA: What were the conditions of the books?

ER: My -- I don't know. I'm trying to think.

CREW:(laughter)

ER: I remember that the teachers taught us to take care of books -- we had to cover our books with -- we'd use brown paper to cover our books and took care of them. They probably were not the newest books that they have. I just don't remember.

JA: Were your classmates friendly?

ER: Yes, my classmates were friendly.

JA: Did you live near any of your classmates?

ER: Not too far from any of them.

JA: Did you have any special friends in school?

ER: I had a special friend in elementary school and a different special friend in high school.

JA: Did you study together?

ER: No, we were [00:15:00] -- no, we didn't study together. In elementary school, you were too far away from each other to go to study. And in high school, because of our living conditions, we didn't study together here.

JA: How do you think your classmates will remember you?

ER: As a quiet person, not very much other than that.

JA: Do you still keep in contact with any of your classmates?

ER: I am in contact with my high school -- but I'm in contact with my high school classmates, and I think some of my elementary school, high classmates, too.

JA: Good. All of the following questions relate to your high school experience. What subjects were you taught?

ER: English, arithmetic, ma-- history, science -- so let me see, [00:16:00] I wrote that down. Music, art -- let's see. We had gym, we had science, we had music, we had home economics and art.

JA: Were you able to have electives?

ER: No. If I had I wouldn't have had to have taken gym.

(multiple people's laughter)

JA: Were you able to take college preparatory courses?

ER: No, I didn't, personally. I think some people did.

JA: Did you plan to attend college after high school?

ER: Well, no, not the plan to attend college -- I planned to go to nursing training after.

JA: Were your classes or subjects taught by different teachers?

ER: In elementary school we only had one teacher for all seven grades, [00:17:00] but in high school we had a different teacher for each grade. Or each -- not each grade. We had a different teacher for each subject.

JA: The following questions relate to your junior college, college, or university experiences. Were you able to attend a college or a university?

ER: I went to nursing school, and it wasn't considered a college. It was, I guess, a trade school. I've never seen an interview where they really left a place for that.

JA: What was the name of your nurse training high school?

ER: Provident Hospital, in Baltimore, Maryland.

JA: What did it look like?

ER: Ah, a four-story building with the men's -- the -- it had the emergency room on the first floor. It had a men's surgical ward [00:18:00] on the first floor, and the surgical ward was a large room, which -- I think it had about 10 patients in it.

CREW: Excuse me, Mama Ruff, if you could just speak up a little louder, just a little bit. I know you're a quiet person, but just a little louder.

ER: And the other floors, there was a women's ward on the second floor and a men's ward on the third floor. And some of the wards had private rooms, or semi-private rooms; the operating room on the fourth floor, the children's room -- children's ward and the OB-GYN was upstairs, too. It was pretty much like all hospitals are.

JA: Did you go straight from high school to nursing school?

ER: Yes, I did.

JA: What did you do --

ER: What?

JA: -- at nursing school?

ER: What did I do? Took -- (laughter) [00:19:00] Besides having classes where you learned about all the teach-- the -- you learned about all the medicine, you know, different illnesses. You also took care of patients -- you did active work of taking care of -- making -- learning how to make beds with patients in them, how to get them in and out of the bed. The practical things of nursing.

JA: What was the racial makeup of your nursing school?

ER: Nursing school was Af-- colored, African American. All -- everybody, all the patients, all the doctors.

JA: How did your fellow nurses treat you?

ER: Well, I guess it depends on whether you were a graduate nurse or a student nurse. The students were friendly [00:20:00] with each other. The graduates, we felt like, were hard on us when they were trying to teach us to learn things.

JA: Did you attain any additional degrees?

ER: No, I did not.

JA: Did you work or raise a family while in nursing school?

ER: No. You did not -- nobody was married who went to nursing school. Had children.

JA: These questions will not ask about any personal beliefs; they are only to get information about the church's role in your life, if any. Did you attend church as a child?

ER: Yes, we went to church. There were two churches on our -- our pastor had two churches. So the one Sunday he had church at eleven o'clock; the other Sunday he would have church at eight o'clock at night. But --

JA: What was the name of your church?

ER: Fairview AME Church.

JA: Where [00:21:00] was your church located?

ER: It was located in Forest Hill, Maryland.

JA: Did you and your family attend services together?

ER: Yes, we all went together.

JA: Was your church segregated?

ER: Yes, it was. There were other white churches nobody went, and the black -- white churches, and, you know, the black -- the colored people didn't go to white churches. The white churches didn't come to us.

JA: What part did church play in your life as a child?

ER: Well, we were active in church. They had -- just -- children's day, where you learned the [poem?] and learned to speak. They had Easter; you learned to speak so that -- to me, it gave you a chance of learning how to stand in front of people and talk. Of course, you had a poem that you learned, and you stood and (inaudible) poem you learned.

JA: Were you on any ministries in church?

ER: Now, or as a child?

JA: As a child. [00:22:00]

ER: No, not as a child.

JA: What role did the church play in your community?

ER: Well, in elementary -- in my early life, it was kind of the center of your community; most things that went on went on around or to the church.

JA: What role did your church in particular play in the civil rights movement?

ER: I would say it was supportive to the ci-- but not really very active.

JA: Have you ever been married?

ER: Yes, I have.

JA: Are you currently married?

ER: My husband's deceased.

JA: What was your husband's name?

ER: Earl Ruff.

JA: How did you meet your husband?

ER: We'll skip that. (laughter)

JA: [00:23:00] How long were you and your husband married?

ER: We were married for 37 years.

JA: What kind of work did your husband do?

ER: He was a truck driver. He drove for a lumber company, delivered lumber and whatnot.

JA: Do you have any children?

ER: I have five children.

JA: What are their names?

ER: Earl Jr., Martha, William, Helen, and Stanley.

JA: How old are they?

ER: The oldest one is over 60 -- all of them are over 60 years old.

JA: Do you have any grandchildren?

ER: I have 12 grandchildren.

JA: OK. Do you have any great-grandchildren?

ER: I have five great-grandchildren.

JA: OK. Are you currently employed?

ER: No, I'm not.

JA: OK. If you are not currently employed, what kind of work have you done in your lifetime?

ER: I was a nurse [00:24:00] in one place or another all my life -- my working life.

JA: Were you ever in the military?

ER: No, I was not.

JA: Were you active in the civil rights movement?

ER: Just support -- I don't know that I was really very active. I was supportive, but when they had the March on Washington I was president of the Friends of the Library, and we had a march with the children, with the boys, on that particular day.

JA: What are your favorite activities or hobbies?

ER: I do quilting and sewing.

JA: What is your favorite family story?

ER: Well, I guess I tell this one on my father. My son took the car one evening [00:25:00] to take his girlfriend out, and the car stopped and he couldn't get it home. When my father -- when my husband woke up in the morning, he looked out the window and didn't see a car, and complained that the boy hadn't brought the car home. And he felt like he wasn't home. And I -- we woke up during the middle of the night, hadn't heard him come in, so I got up and went and looked, checked his bed to see if he was there, so he was there. I always tell my husband he was more interested in the car than he was in his son. (laughter)

JA: What was the happiest moment of your life?

ER: I guess during my married life I was happy.

JA: Who was or is the most influential person in your life?

ER: My parents were the most influential person in my life.



JA: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned?

ER: Well, I guess one [00:26:00] -- you should be honest with everybody, and you learn to try to do well at what you're doing; be consistent. If you're working, go to work on time, and every day, although you may want to take some days off, you should be considerate of your employer when you're doing that, and the other people.

JA: What are some of the most important lessons you have taught your children?

ER: Try to be honest. Take care of themselves and not expect other people to take care.

JA: What are the proudest moments in your life?

ER: Oh, I don't know. One, I can -- can I just say when I finished nursing training was a proud moment?

JA: Did you accomplish all that you hoped to?

ER: Yes, I have. Then a lot of the things I never dreamed of doing.

JA: [00:27:00] If you could, would there be anything in your life that you would go back and change?

ER: No, I don't think there's anything I want to change in my life.

JA: Do you feel that you are leaving a legacy?

ER: I said no, but the other people have said yes. (laughter)

JA: What would that legacy be, and for whom are you leaving that legacy?

ER: Well, I guess one of the legacies is that the family history, our family histories, is interesting. My great-grandfather was a free man; my great-grandmother was a slave. And when they got married, he had to work to get -- for her freedom. And before he had worked a length of time, I don't know how many years, they had at least two children, and the third child was born and the master [00:28:00] said that he would give him to her -- to them because she was a skinny person and wouldn't live. That lady lived to be 97 years old.

JA: I will relate some milestones in African American history. If applicable, please tell me how you felt when they happened. In 1931, the arrest of the Scottsboro Nine in Alabama.

ER: I didn't hear anything about it, so.

JA: In 1947, Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier in major league baseball.

ER: I was at the hos-- at Provident Hospital at the time, when he hit a home run during the World Series. And you could hear all the neighborhood shouting and being happy about it.

JA: In 1948, President Truman officially integrates the US Armed Services.

ER: That didn't bother me. That isn't -- you know.

JA: In 1954, [00:29:00] Brown vs the Board of Education, making segregation in schools unconstitutional.

ER: Well, it meant that my children had a much more -- broader opportunities to go to schools, and a lot of children went to college because of that. You know, they gave scholarships to children to get them -- to integrate the colleges.

JA: In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for defying bus segregation laws in Montgomery, Alabama.

ER: Well, that led up to a lot of different things in the African American communities. I don't know that they did anything (inaudible), but I followed it on the news and whatnot.

JA: In 1957, Little Rock Nine integrate Central High School in Arkansas.

ER: I wasn't involved in it in any way. I read it and followed it on the news.

JA: [00:30:00] In 1960, Woolworth sit-in by Greensboro Four in North Carolina.

ER: That didn't affect me, really.

JA: In 1962, James Meredith integrates University of Mississippi.

ER: We thought he was a -- well, personally, I thought it was a grand [joke?] when a man stood in the door and said he wasn't going to let any Negroes come into that school, but he had to, and so...

JA: Nineteen-sixty-three, March on Washington for jobs and freedom.

ER: I didn't go to the March on Washington, but my mother-in-law lived in Harford County, and for some reason we came out to Harford County that day and crossed over 95 when the people were going back, and you could see bus after busload of them going up, [00:31:00] back to [the north?], which gave you a thrill, really, just to see all those people traveling and know that they had all been to Washington.

JA: In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed.

ER: That made a lot of difference in a lot of people's lives; I can't think of anything really personally.

JA: In 1964, Sidney Poitier became first Negro to win the Best Actor Oscar.

ER: We were proud of him.

JA: In 1967, Thurgood Marshall appointed the first Negro on the Supreme Court.

ER: You were very proud of that, too.

JA: In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated.

ER: Well, that affected me in the fact that my children were in high school and junior high school, and I had to go to work and leave them at home, and schools were closed and you were afraid [00:32:00] that they were going to get into something. And one of the staff members were very kind to bring me home before, you know, really almost before my day of duty was up, though it kind of hit you personally. The other time -- other thing is that you -- that -- pulled out the National Guard and set up camps for the soldiers down in South Baltimore. And even though I had lived through World War II, it was the closest I ever really came to feeling what war must be like if it was being fought on your -- in your country, in the city where you were.

JA: In 2001, Colin Powell appointed the first African American Secretary of State.

ER: I was very proud of that.

JA: In 2002, Halle Berry and Denzel Washington were Best Actor and Actress Oscars, making it the first time African Americans won both categories [00:33:00] in the same year.

ER: That was a very proud thing to have happen, too.

JA: In 2008, Barack Obama was elected the first African American President of the United States.

ER: Something that I never thought would happen, so I'm very happy for him, for the people.

JA: In 2012, Barack Obama was reelected as President of the United States.

ER: We're still surprised that it all happened again.

JA: Is there anything that you would like to add that was not covered in this interview?

ER: I can't think of anything, really.

JA: OK. Again, I thank you for your presentation in the pilot of the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project.

ER: You're quite welcome. Glad I could -- hope it helps your project some.

JA: Thank you.

CREW: Do the mentors have any additional questions? [00:34:00]

F: I have a question. Why women couldn't work after they got married. Couldn't teach after they got married.

ER: I don't know why, but [whenever you see?] the crazy things that they had -- it was -- you know, women were more -- I have found out over the years that women were more segregated than you think they were, because that wasn't just for black women, that was for white women and all. So that the white women were a whole lot more put down than we ever think about it.

F: And I guess that comes with -- I heard somebody say recently that women were considered property anyway during that time, and -- because they couldn't even do things like have their name on owning real estate and those kinds of things --

ER: Yeah, that's what --

F: -- I guess it's, like, a spinoff of that, you know.

ER: Yeah, that's what I think it was.

F: Yeah, yeah. Oh, OK.

F1: And --

F2: Or maybe they thought they would be have -- they would have to take maternity leave if they got married.

F: Yeah, (inaudible).

F2: They would have to take off to have children.

F: But I still think [00:35:00] that's all-around sexism. Around sexism, anyway.

F3: Yeah.

F4: So Mrs. Ruff, how much did your father pay for the farm, your grandfather? Do you know, back then --

ER: I have no idea.

F4: No idea? And do you still have the farm?

ER: My part --

F4: [It's part that's?] in your family?

ER: Yeah, my brother lives on the farm. He's always lived there all his life.

F4: OK, so there's still farm there? They, like, have chicken and vegetables --?

ER: Well, my brother doesn't --

F4: Do nothing, OK.

ER: -- doesn't -- but then my brother is 80 years old.

F4: OK. OK. (laughter) So (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

F2: That's nice. Very interesting. Very interesting.

CREW: You have more questions, Janet?

JANET: Did you state your age?

F4: What's your birthday? Your age?

JANET: Yeah.

ER: I don't know what you're saying.

JA: Your birthday.

F4: Your birthday and your age.

ER: My birthday? I'm 93, if that helps.

F4: Yes. Yes.

F: And as -- where did you work when you became a nurse? Did you work at any of the local hospitals here in Baltimore, or where did you work in? [00:36:00]

ER: I worked in Provident. When I became a nurse, the only place that black folks, black nurses could work was Provident Hospital and in public health. And that's -- you'd be doing private duty. So the year that I came out of school, somebody decided it was time to put black nurses in other hospitals. And since City Hospital was a city-owned hospital, they could force them to do it, so they did force them, so nice and kind, to put us on the tubercular ward.

F: Oh. Because Provident was the only place you could go to for nurses' training, right?

ER: Yeah, at --

F: At the time.

ER: -- in Baltimore.

F: Yeah, in Baltimore. Yeah. That's a [vast?] history about Provident Hospital. Very interesting.

CREW: Now, this is in the interview, is there anything else -- [00:37:00] Mama Ruff, I definitely wanted to be in this room --

ER: (laughter)

CREW:-- for your interview. And I love Gwen, but you are such an icon to me, in the Griot Circle and the National Association of Black Storytellers. And maybe some of you don't know, but the first year when we started the Growing Griots Literacy Learning Program, Mama Ruff came every week. She came --

F: That's right.

CREW:-- every week to help mentor the young people. So this program itself owes a lot to Mama Edna Ruff. And she is a role model to me. She is an inspiration. Somebody says "Some of the people that inspire you," and one of the people I would name would be Mother Edna Ruff.

ER: But you know, I learned things -- it was the young man in that program that year that taught me how to use a computer. (laughter) He knew how to do it; I didn't. And so you learn -- you gain [00:38:00] a lot from being in your --

CREW:I know that's right.

JANET: If you had some encouraging words for this --

JA: Speak louder, Janet.

JANET: If you had some encouraging words for our youth for what they've been in the program --

ER: Well, one would be to go to school as much as you can. There's a lot of things that you learn in school that you don't think about. And the other thing is to be self-respecting and not to fight and cuss and do all those kind of things. And try to pick up the best -- because one of our things that I think happens is that we integrated and we decided that we didn't have anything that was worth keeping, and so we haven't keep it.

F: Mm.

F4: Mm-hmm. Uh-huh.

ER: And we have picked up a lot of the worst things that other people -- we have a lot of people who have gone and done just like the President, but there are a lot of people who could have done much better if they had [00:39:00] really felt like it. With, you know, with their attitude.

F4: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. I know that's right. Because I often think that integration didn't help us much. I think it kind of destroyed us a lot, because prior to integration we provided all of the services that we needed in our own communities.

ER: Yeah.

F4: But with integration, you know, those kind of institutions that we had began to vanish. And we've [called?] into what they allow -- as deep as they allow us to be even now, because it's not really integration, it's just --

ER: No.

F4: "You can come here, but we still want to treat you bad," OK, that kind of stuff. So I always say, I don't think that was the best thing for us, because in our communities during integration, you could live near teachers and doctors and nurses and --

ER: Yeah.

F4: -- and people of that caliber. Now, in our communities, you don't -- when we succeed, we leave, OK? We leave, so you --

ER: But that's, that's not them.

F4: Yeah, that's what I'm saying.

ER: Right.

F: Mm-hmm.

F4: We succeed, [00:40:00] we leave, so it's a catch-22.

CREW: It's not integration -- I call -- it's not integration, it's toleration.

F4: Yeah. OK? Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's not.

ER: Oh yeah.

CREW: Do you have any closing words for us, Mother Ruff?

ER: Hmm?

CREW: Any closing words for us, Mother Ruff.

ER: No, I don't have any other closing words.

F4: Well, we thank you.

ALL LISTENERS: Thank you.

ER: You're welcome.

F4: Thank you so much. Yeah.

END OF AUDIO FILE

**SIOHP Interview #2 Elder June McAbee and Youth Malachi Ross Jones**

MALACHI ROSS JONES: My name is Malachi Ross Jones, and I am 14 years old. Today is April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016. We are at the Walbrook Branch of Enoch Pratt Library. It is 11:25. This is an interview for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project, which is an initiative of the National Association of Black Storytellers, and supported by the Griot Circle of Maryland. Please tell me your full name.

JUNE McABEE: My name is June Madden McAbee.

MRJ: What would you like to call me -- I mean, you?

JM: What would you like me to -- what do I like -- [00:01:00] would I like for you to call me?

MRJ: Yes.

JM: Nana. That's my storytelling name.

MRJ: Before we begin the formal interview, Nana, I would like to thank you for interviewing -- for volunteering to be interviewed as part of this project. It means a lot to me and the rest -- and the other students.

JM: I'm happy to have been chosen.

MRJ: Please make your answers on the point and relevant to the questions asked. If I interrupt you, please, at any time, please understand that I am not being rude, but the additional information that you are sharing may not be the answer to the question that will be asked later in the interview. When were you born?

JM: When, or where?

MRJ: Where. [00:02:00]

JM: Where? In New Jersey, Avenel, New Jersey.

MRJ: What is your current city?

JM: What is my current what?

MRJ: C--

JM: What is my current what?



MRJ: City. I mean, [life?].

JM: Laurel -- where I live now?

MRJ: Yes.

JM: Laurel, Maryland.

MRJ: The categories that will be covered in this interview are growing up, education, role of the church, adult life, reflection, African American timeline, questions about how significant events of African American history affect your life. If you need to take a break, or if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer any time during this interview, please let me know.

JM: I shall.

MRJ: Where were -- [00:03:00] where were you born?

JM: I was born in a town, Avenel, New Jersey.

MRJ: Did you grow up there?

JM: No. No. I moved.

MRJ: What was your neighborhood like?

JM: In which place? (laughter) In New Jersey where I was born, or where I went to live?

MRJ: Where you went to live.

JM: I went to live in a place called Newark, New Jersey. And that's a very busy city.

MRJ: Was it an integrated neighborhood?

JM: Yes, it was.

MRJ: What were your parents' name?

JM: My father's name was John Madden, and my mother's name was Florence Madden.

MRJ: [00:04:00] What kind of work did they do?

JM: Well, my mother was a homemaker, and my father was a chauffeur for a com-- a family.

MRJ: Were you raised by your parents?

JM: I was raised by my father. I left -- my father and mother separated when I was 10, and I went to live with my father.

MRJ: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

JM: I had two sisters and three brothers.

MRJ: What were their names?

JM: Well, my sister's oldest sister's name was Ruth. My middle sister's name was Gladys, and I was the third sis-- daughter. My brother's name was John Madden, [00:05:00] Jr. And my next brother's name was Edwin, and my youngest brother's name was Phillip.

MRJ: As children, did you get along with your brothers and sisters?

JM: Yes, sometimes. (laughter)

MRJ: Do you have a favorite brother or sister?

JM: My favorite brother is Phillip Madden, and he lives in California now.

MRJ: Do you have a f-- tell me about him.

JM: About my favorite brother?

MRJ: Yes, please.

JM: He's my youngest brother, and he's the only living brother that I -- brother or sister that I have. And he lives in California. He was younger than I, and we -- since he was younger than I, he was the one that I was associated with more.

MRJ: [00:06:00] Do you live near him?

JM: No.

MRJ: How often do you get to see them?

JM: At least once a year. He either comes to see me, or I'll go to see him, but we talk often on the phone.

MRJ: Did you have a favorite toy or game?

JM: Hide and go seek. (laughter)

MRJ: What was it?

JM: Hide and go seek. (laughter)

MRJ: (inaudible) Did you take part in any organization or sport?

JM: No.

MRJ: Who were your best friends?

JM: My best friend, girlfriend, name was -- do you mean girl or fellow, boy, or what?

MRJ: Just --

JM: My best friend. I have a best friend whose name is Sonya Fowler. [00:07:00]

MRJ: What were they like?

JM: Well, she likes the same things that I like, and we belong to the same church. But now she has moved, to Texas.

MRJ: Did you go over to their house, or did they come to yours?

JM: Both. We went to each other's houses.

MRJ: Do you have a nickname?

JM: Yes. Do you want to know it?

MRJ: Yes, please.

JM: Junie is my nickname.

MRJ: How did you get it?

JM: Oh, somebody called me -- started calling me that, and everybody else called me that that was -- that I used to go around with.

MRJ: If you had chores, what were they?

JM: Well, [00:08:00] let me see. What kind of chores did I have? It's hard to remember way back then. Well I always had to clean the bathroom, and I had to make my own bed, sometimes take out the trash.

MRJ: Did your family have a television?

JM: Not at first, no. We didn't get a television until a long time ago, when they came out. I was there before -- (laughter) I was there when they didn't have television.

MRJ: When did they get it?

JM: I can't remember the year.

MRJ: When could you watch it?

JM: I could only watch it after I've done all my homework.

MRJ: What kind of shows did you watch? [00:09:00]

JM: *I Love Lucy*. (laughter) I don't guess you remember that, do you?

MRJ: No.

JM: Lucille Ball.

MRJ: Did your family have a car?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: What kind, and describe it?

JM: Oh, it was a big car. I think it was a Ford.

MRJ: Did you take trips in the car?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Did your family have meals together?

JM: Most of the time.

MRJ: How did you celebrate holidays and birthdays?

JM: With a party.

MRJ: What did people call African Americans when you were growing up?

JM: Negroes.

MRJ: What was it like for African Americans in the city where you grew up?

JM: Well, there was a little discrimination. [00:10:00] We went -- when we went to school, sometimes you had to sit in the back of the room.

MRJ: Did you or your family experience racism or segregation?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Please give me one example.

JM: Well, I want to know, when I was a child or when I grew up? Which one do you want to know?

MRJ: Either one's fine.

JM: Well, let's see. When I was a child, they usually would seat you in the back of the room, and sometimes the white children would not play with us. So when I -- but I did have white friends, but some of them were not, I don't know -- it wasn't too bad.

MRJ: [00:11:00] What did you do when you grew up?

JM: Would you ask that question again, what?

MRJ: What did you want to do -- be when you grew up?

JM: Oh, I thought I was going to be a teacher.

MRJ: Did you fulfill the dream?

JM: Oh yes. (laughter)

MRJ: Did you have a role model growing up?

JM: No, not really.

MRJ: What was your favorite memory of your family?

JM: When we would get together out in the backyard. That's when I was living in New Jersey. We would -- we had a large backyard, and every holiday, we would set up tables. And there were only five houses on our street. And all of the people in the houses would bring food, and [00:12:00] we would have a big celebration of our own.

MRJ: What was your favorite memory of your community?

JM: Well, when I was little, there, when I was younger and living in New Jersey, in -- it was a mixed community. And the people were nice to us, and we were nice to them.

MRJ: DO you remember any great stories or legend about your town?

JM: No.

MRJ: If you attended more than one school at any level, please tell me about each school, and why you changed schools. The following question relates to your elementary, middle or junior high school experiences. Were you able to attend school?

JM: [00:13:00] Well, I think when I moved to DC, I went to Cardozo High School. And my favorite thing -- before I had attended mixed schools, when I moved to Washington, DC, the schools were segregated, which meant all the blacks would go to black schools. And I thought that was very fascinating, because when I went to Cardozo High School, they had a very, very good football team. And sometimes we would be dismissed from school to attend, because our team at Cardozo was really good, and they let us go early, and we could go to the games. That was very good, and very fascinating to me. And they had school colors and all that. And we wore them when we went to the games.

MRJ: What were the name of your schools?

JM: Well, Cardozo High School, when I went to -- [00:14:00] came to Washington to live. That was the first school I attended. And then I went to college, Miner Teachers College, because I decided -- I thought once, I was going to -- one time I was going to be a secretary, but I worked as a secretary for one summer. You know, they used to give us summer jobs, and I hated it. (laughter) So I decided, well, maybe I'll be a teacher instead, because I don't like all that shorthand and stuff.

MRJ: Were they public or private?

JM: Was what public or private?

MRJ: Your schools.

JM: No, public.

MRJ: Were they -- where were they located?

JM: Well, when I went to -- when I came to Washington, I went immediately to Cardozo High School, and it was Northwest DC.

MRJ: Where did -- what did your school look like?

JM: Average school. I don't know. [00:15:00] I guess it was just an average-looking school. It was very large and had lots of classrooms and things of that sort.

MRJ: Are g-- did girls and boys attend the same school?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Did you enjoy school?

JM: Yes, I did.

MRJ: Were you able to go to school for what we now call regular school year?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Were your grades separated?

JM: What do you mean?

MRJ: Gra-- were your grades separated?

JM: You mean, how separated?

MRJ: Eight, seven, six, five --

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Were your teachers good teachers?

JM: Very good.

MRJ: Were your schools integrated?

JM: Yes, they were.

MRJ: What was the ratio of students?

JM: Oh, well, let's see. The high school, I'm thinking about DC high school. [00:16:00] They were integrated, yeah. But when I got to Washington, the schools were segregated again. In New Jersey, they were integrated, but in Washington, they were segregated, and I went to a black high school.

MRJ: What was the racial makeup of the teachers?

JM: Ask me that again.

MRJ: What was the racial makeup of the teachers?

JM: Well, we had -- you mean the men -- like, how many men teachers and women teachers?  
No, oh the kids -- the children?

MRJ: Like, were the teachers black or --

JM: Oh, the black -- well, in the black schools, most of the [00:17:00] teachers were black.  
We didn't have very many whites in there.

MRJ: OK. How did your teachers treat the students?

JM: OK.

MRJ: Did they have books?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: What was the condition of the books?

JM: Well, they weren't all always new. Sometimes we used used books.

MRJ: Did -- were your classmates friendly.

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Did you or your classmates live in the same community?

JM: Not necessarily.

MRJ: Did you have any special friends in school?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Did you [00:18:00] study together?

JM: Sometimes.

MRJ: How would your classmates remember you?

JM: I don't understand what you mean by that. What do you mean, how would they --

MRJ: If they were to see you again, how would they --

JM: React?



MRJ: Not react, but, when you see somebody, and they like, “Oh, that’s the kid who always run around in school.” How, something like that.

JM: I don’t quite understand that question. (gap in audio) Still have friends -- oh, OK. I still have friends from junior high and high school that I keep in touch with, [00:19:00] and I call them. They have families, and they live different places, but I have a few friends that I still keep in touch with. And if I saw them [to get day?], we’d hug each other, and talk about our families, and things of that sort.

MRJ: All of the following questions relate to your household experience. Were you able to attend high school?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: The following questions relate to your junior college, college, or university experience. Where were you able to attend college --

M: Were you.

MRJ: -- or university?

JM: I went to Miner Teachers College, which was a small teachers college in Washington, DC.

MRJ: What did it look like?

JM: Well, it didn’t look like the regular college. It was small, [00:20:00] but adequate, I guess. It was on the campus near Howard, and we went over on the campus a lot, and they came over to our school.

MRJ: Did you go straight from high school to college?

JM: Yes, I did.

MRJ: What did you do -- do you live -- did you live on campus?

JM: No, there was no campus for Miner Teachers College.

MRJ: Was it a historical black college or university?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Did you join a --

JM: Sorority?

MRJ: Yes.

JM: No, I did not.

MRJ: If so, what was -- do you feel -- did you feel belong -- what was the racial makeup of your college?

JM: It was predominately black.

MRJ: What was the racial makeup of your professors?

JM: Predominately black.

MRJ: How did the teachers react to the students?

JM: Very well.

MRJ: How did the students treat you?

JM: How did they teach me?

MRJ: Students treat you.

JM: Fine. We got along.

MRJ: What were your majors?

JM: Elementary education.

MRJ: What -- did you graduate?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Did you -- (inaudible) [00:22:00] any additional degrees?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: OK. Where did you attend -- what did you attain that degree?

\_: Pause.

(gap in audio)

MRJ: Did you work or raise a family while going to school?

JM: Yes.

(gap in audio)

MRJ: These questions will not ask any -- will not about any person's belief. These are only to get information about the church role in your life, if any. Did you attend church as a child?

JM: Oh yes. [00:23:00]

MRJ: If so, what was the name of the church?

JM: Mount Joy Baptist Church in DC.

MRJ: What was the denomination?

JM: Baptist.

MRJ: Did your family attend services together?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Was your church segregated?

JM: No. Oh, yes. I'm sorry. Yes. It was segregated.

MRJ: What part did church play in your life as a child or teenager?

JM: Well, I sang in the choir, I was an usher, and a great -- so it played a great part in my life.

MRJ: Is the church still an active part in your life?

JM: Oh yes.

MRJ: And what ministries or activities did you engage in [now?]?

JM: Now, I'm a Sunday school teacher, I sing in the choir.

MRJ: [00:24:00] What role did your church particularly play in your community?

JM: Well, they -- it's a very caring church. They have a nursery, they have a daycare center. They have a shelter for women, things of that sort.

MRJ: What role did your church and particularly play in the civil rights movement?

JM: Well, people marched in the marches that we had, and things of that sort, if that's what you're -- if that's what you're asking, right? OK. And we joined the agencies and things like that, that have to do with civil rights.

MRJ: [00:25:00] Have you ever been married?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Are you currently married?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: Only if it's not too personal to -- or painful, can you explain why -- oh, OK. What is your spouse name?

JM: James.

MRJ: How did you meet your spouse?

JM: At church.

MRJ: How long have you been married?

JM: Sixty-five years.

MRJ: What kind of work does your spouse do, or have done?

JM: He was a shipbuilder in the government. And now he's retired, and we have a travel agency.

MRJ: Do you have any children?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: What are their names, gender, and age?

JM: OK. My oldest daughter -- I have three children. My oldest daughter is 60 years old. My son, Brian, [00:26:00] is the next one, and he's going to -- he's 59, and then I have another son, Tracy, who is 50. And he's -- works with -- as a -- oh, I didn't say Tra-- Brian is the one that is -- who does -- (inaudible). He works with -- well, he used to have -- he used to have a store. He does a lot of work with people, and selling houses, and things of that sort. And Tracy is 50, and Tracy is a boy, a young man, and he works with [00:27:00] people to find them properties, and things of that sort.

MRJ: Do you have any grandchildren?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: How many?

JM: Four.

MRJ: Do you have any great-grandchildren?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: How many?

JM: Let's see. Four.

MRJ: Are you currently -- what kind of work do you -- if you're not currently employed, what kind of work have you done in your lifetime?

JM: I was a teacher for 29 years, and I retired from that. And now, I have a travel agency.

MRJ: Were you in the military?

JM: No. [00:28:00]

MRJ: Were you -- what are your favorite activities or hobbies?

JM: I like to read. I play the piano. I like to sing. And I like to travel.

MRJ: Please relate your family -- your favorite family story.

JM: My favorite family story? This question again.

MRJ: Please relate your favorite family story.

JM: I have written a book, and it's called *It's Cold Down Here*. And it's about two boys who were -- [00:29:00] who lived with a family, their family. And one day, the mom said, "OK, remember to come straight home when you get here, because this is the day that you go over to your friend's house to play, and I want you to come home first." So they said, "OK, we'll be home." So they came home from school, said, "Mom, we're here." She says, "OK, go upstairs and make your bed, change your clothes, and you can go on over to Aaron's house." So they said, "OK." So they went upstairs, and she said, "Also, you have to take the trash out." So they went upstairs, changed their clothes, because in those days, people used to change clothes before

they went out to play, you know? They would change for their school clothes to their play clothes. So they went on upstairs and changed their clothes, made their bed, took out the trash, and said, "OK, Mom, we're ready." She says, "Another thing. You must get home before it gets dark." And they said, "All right, Mom." So they went on out, Bobby and Billy. [00:30:00] Those were their names. Bobby and Billy went on out, down the street to play -- down to -- they were going to Johnny's house. So they walked and walked and walked until they go to Johnny's house. So they got to Johnny's house, and Johnny's -- and knocked on the door, (knocking sound) and the mother said, "Oh hi, Bobby and Billy. Johnny's outside playing." No, he's not outside playing, he's going to play out -- "He will play with you after he finishes raking the leaves and putting them out." So they said, "Well, we'll go out and help him." So they said, "Hey, Johnny, how you doing?" Said, "Oh, fine, fine." Says, "We'll help you finish the leaves." So they helped him. He helped them, Bobby and Billy helped Johnny put the leaves on the curb. So then they said, "I brought my football." And Bobby said, "I brought my football." He says, "Fine, fine, fine. We can play now." So they were playing, and they were having so much fun, and they were catching the football and running and everything. And before you know it, [00:31:00] it had gotten what? Dark. And Bobby said, "Uh-oh, we were supposed to get home before it got dark." So he said, "Well, we'll take --" so they said, "Let's take a shortcut through the graveyard." And Bobby was the youngest, he said, "I don't want to go in a graveyard." Says, "Nothing can hurt you in the graveyard. They're all dead." He said, "Yeah." "And they can't hurt you." He said, "Well, I'm afraid. I'm afraid of the dead." Said, "Nobody's going to rise up or anything, so let's go." SO they went walking through the graveyard, and looking around and looking around. And they came to this big, big hole. And Billy said, "Wonder what's down there in that hole." Said, "Well, you're so afraid. Why do you want to see what's down in the hole?" Says, "Well, you know, let's go over to the hole." So they went over there, and said -- Billy said, "Hello down there, are you all right?" And the voice said, [00:32:00] "It's cold down here." So Bobby said, "Uh-oh, somebody's down there." So he said, "Well, if he's down there, maybe we could pull him up." So he said, "Listen, we'll pull you up. We'll put this rope down there, and we'll pull you up. Put your hands on it, and we'll pull you up. Do you understand?" And the voice said, "It's cold down here." So they said, "Oh, he doesn't understand, so let's put it down." So they put the rope down, and he said, "OK, grab hold of the rope." And he pulled the rope up, and there, a pair of green shoes." And he said, "Wait a

minute, what are these -- what's this doing?" So he put the green shoes down there, he said, "Listen, don't put any more clothes on there, put your hands on there. Are you all right?" And he said, "It's cold down here." So they said, "Well, mm." So they said, "Well, we're putting the rope down there, and you grab hold of the rope here." So they pulled up again, [00:33:00] and this time it was a pair of pants, green pants. So they put the green pants over there, said, "Look, don't you understand anything? I said put your hands -- put your hands on it, we'll pull you up. Are you OK?" And he said, "It's cold down here." So they pulled the rope up again, and here's a green shirt, put the green shirt over here. He said, "Don't you -- this guy don't understand anything." So he said, "Well, this is the last time we're going to put it down there. If you don't come up now, you're going to have to stay down there, buddy, because we're not going to pull -- keep pulling clothes up." So put it down there again, and this time, he pulled, and he pulled, and up jumps this little guy. And he says, "Ooh, thanks [and by golly?] forgetting me out. It's getting cold down there." So he went over and he put on his pants and his shirt and his shoes, and he says, "What are you?" So he said, "Don't you recognize what I am? I'm a leprechaun." [00:34:00] And he said, "Oh, OK." So he says, "I was on my way home from the end of the rainbow, and I have a bag of gold." And he dips his -- puts under -- lifts his hat, and there's this bag of gold. And he said, "I want to thank you for getting me out, because it was so cold down there. Now I can go on home." So he said, "But before I go, I'm going to give you a coin," and he put it in his pocket. Bobby put it in his pocket, and just like that, he was gone. And he said, "Mm, wait until we get home and tell Mom about that." So he ran all the way home, and he said -- and Mom was standing at the door. She wasn't very happy, because they were late. So said, "Where have you been?" Said, "Well, Mom, we got to tell you about it." Said, "No, your dad's in there eating dinner, and you were supposed to be here on time, and you weren't on time. So get in there, wash your hands, and get to the table." So they washed their hands and got -- went on in there. And they said, "Hi, Dad." [00:35:00] And Dad wasn't looking very happy, you know? So said, "Well, where have you been?" Said, "Dad, we got to tell you all about it." Said, "Yeah, let's say grace first and eat." So they -- after they finished eating, said, "All right, tell me about it." Said, "Well, Dad, see, we went over to Jason's house to play -- Johnny's house to play, and we were just having so much fun we forgot all about it, about the time. And when we looked up, it was dark. So we took a shortcut through the gra--" He said, "What? A shortcut where?" Said, "Through the graveyard, Dad, because that was the fastest way to get home." He

said, "I don't even go in the graveyard at night. Now what you doing in there?" Said, "Well, Dad, we were trying to get home." So he said, "OK, OK. And so what happened?" So he said, "Well, we went -- when we went in the graveyard, we saw this open grave, and we just looked in it, and we started asking the guy, you know -- we told him we'd pull him up if he put his hands down. You know, we'd get the rope and we'd pull him up." [00:36:00] So he says, "So what happened?" Said, "Well, the first time," they told him all how they put his shoes up and his jacket up. And he said, "Finally, when we pulled him up, it turned out to be a leprechaun." And he said, "You expect me to believe that? There are no leprechauns anywhere." Said, "Dad, we can prove it. We have a coin." So he went in his pocket to get the coin, the coin wasn't there. So Dad said, "Hey, what you trying to pull here?" Said, "No, no, no, don't -- Dad, it really was a leprechaun." So he said, "I don't believe your story, because you don't even have anything to prove it." And just then, there was a knock on the window, and here's this leprechaun with a coin in his hand. He said, "You looking for this? I couldn't give it to you. I couldn't let you keep it, because it came right back to me, but I want you to know, it was cold down there. Thanks for getting me out." And disappeared. And Dad said, "Well, [00:37:00] it really was a leprechaun." And Mom said, "Sure was, we saw him." So he said, "Well, we'll never walk through the graveyard again, Dad. We've learned our lesson." So he said, "No, because strange things happen at night in the graveyard." And that was the end of the story. Was that OK? (laughter)

MRJ: What was the happiest moment in your life?

JM: When I got married.

MRJ: Who was or still is the most influential person in your life?

JM: I guess my father was, because I lived with him most my life, my growing up life.

MRJ: Can you tell me about him?

JM: He was a very, very interesting man. [00:38:00] He was a deacon in a church, and he used to go to conventions. And when my -- when I went to live with my father, there were two of us left in the family, my brother and I. And my mother said to me, "Do you want to go with me or your father?" And my father said, "If you go with me, we will travel all over the world." And that sounded good to me, I was 10 years old at that time. And so I said, "Well, I'll go with



you.” And my brother stayed with my mother. And we did travel. He always -- when we moved around, he always tried to move to a place where there was an older woman who could watch me, and we -- I always had my own bedroom. And we did travel to many places, because he used to go to the conventions with the ushers and things, and he’d always take me. And he always found a place for me to stay, and I met many people, and I met -- went many places, and he married a couple of times. And [00:39:00] he was a very important person at the church. He was a deacon, and he was always had a lot of people around. And he was -- he taught me a lot of things. So I think he was the most influential person.

MRJ: What are some of the most important lessons you’ve learned in your life?

JM: To be truthful, to treat people right. You know, and to always be helpful. And I enjoy teaching, because I enjoy telling the children things like that. At the end of the day, in my classroom, we used to have a time when I’d bring all the children up and put them on the floor, and we’d sing songs and talk about how the day went, and things [00:40:00] like that. And so I think that’s about it.

MRJ: What is the most important lesson that you’ve taught your children?

JM: To be truthful and to always treat people right. And to always do your best.

MRJ: What are the proudest moments in your life?

JM: Proudest moments? I think the proudest moment is when I saw my children graduate from high school, and the ones that got married, getting married, and going to their weddings.

MRJ: Did you accomplish all that you hope?

JM: As much as I could. (laughter) I’ve accomplished a lot of things.

MRJ: Is there anything that you did [00:41:00] not accomplish in your life that you would like to accomplish now?

JM: Not that I can remember. (laughter)

MRJ: If you can, would there be anything in your life you would go back and change?

JM: No.

MRJ: Did you feel you leave a legacy?

JM: Yes.

MRJ: What would the legacy be, or for whom are you leaving that legacy?

JM: I think for my children and grandchildren, how to live a good life, how to treat people right. Always be truthful, do your best, and whatever you decide to do, make it be a good thing.

MRJ: I will relate some milestones in African American history. If a co-- if it -- if [00:42:00] -- [elicable?], please --

JM: Say it.

MRJ: If applicable, please tell me how you feel when this happened. The arrest of [Scott Boro Non in?] -- Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier in Major League Baseball.

JM: I felt great about it. I was very proud of him.

MRJ: President Truman officially integrates the US Army Services.

JM: I thought that was a good move on his part.

MRJ: *Brown vs. the Board of Education* making segregated schools uncontinua-- [00:43:00]  
(gap in audio)

JM: President Truman.

MRJ: *Brown vs. the Board of Education* making segregational -- segregated in schools unconstitutional.

JM: I thought that was a good move on his part.

MRJ: Rosa Parks arrested for defying bus segregated laws in Montgomery, Alabama.

JM: I thought it was very unfair.

MRJ: Little Rock Nine integrates Central High School in Arkansas.

JM: I thought they were very, very brave to go through that.

MRJ: Woolworth sits-in Greensboro for -- [00:44:00] in North Carolina.

JM: Would you repeat that?

MRJ: Woolworth sits-in by Greensboro Four in North Carolina.

JM: I thought they were very brave to do that.

MRJ: James Meredith integrates University of Mississippi.

JM: Well, James Meredith was very smart, and a good person to do that, and I thought he was very brave.

MRJ: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

JM: Oh, I thought that was wonderful. I participated in that.

MRJ: Civil Rights Act passed.

JM: Wonderful. Long overdue.

MRJ: Sidney Poitier [*sic*] becomes first Negro to win [00:45:00] Best Actor Oscar.

JM: He was great. And I thought that he -- that was a milestone for us, because no one else had ever received that.

MRJ: Thurgood Marshall appointed first Negro on Supreme Court.

JM: That was -- Thurgood Marshall was a very important person, and I think what he did was wonderful while he was there.

MRJ: Dr. Martin Luther King assassinated.

JM: That was a very important day in most of our lives, because Martin Luther King was so good, and he was trying to do so much. And when he was assassinated, I think the whole world, almost the whole world, that knew about him, was very sad.

MRJ: Colin Powell appointed first [00:46:00] African American Secretary of State.

JM: He was very good at what he did, and I think he was -- that was a very important move in his life.

MRJ: Halle Berry and Denzel Washington, Best Actor and Actress Oscar meet in this -- making it the first time African Americans both won cat-- wins both categories in the same year.

JM: I was very proud of both of them.

MRJ: Barack Obama elected the first African American president in the United States.

JM: Everybody said hallelujah. (laughter) And he has been a very good president.

MRJ: Barack Obama reelected as first president of the United States.

JM: Very good. Everybody was happy.

MRJ: Is there anything you would like to add that would not -- that was not covered in this interview?

JM: No, I think it was a very long interview. [00:47:00] (laughter) And you asked quite a few questions. (laughter)

MRJ: Again, I thank you for participating in the pilot of the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project.

JM: You're welcome.

END OF AUDIO FILE

### **SIOHP Interview #3 Elder Stevenson and Youth Tabitha Blackston**

CREW: Only pause it. Don't stop it.

TABITHA BLACKSTON: My name is Tabitha Blackston, and I'm 17 years old. Today's date is April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016. We are at the Walbrook branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. This is an interview for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project, which is an initiative of the National Association of the Black Storytellers and sponsored by the Griot Circle of Maryland. Please tell me your full name.

JOAN STEVENSON: Joan Maxine Simmons Stevenson.

TB: What would you like me to call you?

JS: Miss Joan.

TB: OK, Miss Joan.

JS: (laughter)

TB: Before we begin the formal interview, I would like to thank you for volunteering to be interviewed as part of this project. It means a lot [00:01:00] to me and the other students.

JS: You're welcome.

TB: Please make your answers to the point and relevant to the question asked. If I interrupt you at any time, please understand that I am not being rude, but the additional information that you are sharing may be the answer to a question that I will ask later in the interview. When were you born?

JS: January the 11<sup>th</sup>, 1933.

TB: Where do you currently live?

JS: Baltimore County. [coughs] Excuse me.

TB: The categories that will be covered in this interview are growing up, education, role of the church, adult life, reflections, African American timeline, questions about how significant events in African American history affected your life. If you need to take a

break or if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer at any time [00:02:00] during the interview, please feel free to let me know.

JS: I will.

TB: What was your neighborhood like?

JS: My neighborhood was a middle-class black neighborhood in east Baltimore, when I moved to Baltimore. Prior to that I lived in West Virginia. My father was a coal miner and my mother was a housewife, and so we lived in what was called company housing.

TB: What were your parents' names?

JS: My mom was Delia, D-E-L-I-A, [Nowden?] and my father was Johnny Philip Simmons, Jr. No, I'm sorry, that's my brother. Senior.

TB: What kind of work did they do?

JS: In West Virginia, my father was a coal miner. [00:03:00] [coughs] Excuse me, I've got something in my throat. And my mother was a housewife. When we moved to Baltimore, my father worked at Continental Can Company, and my mother was a housewife.

TB: Were you raised by your parents?

JS: Ah, part of the time, yes.

TB: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

JS: I had one brother, and he is now deceased. His name was Johnny Simmons, Jr.

TB: As children, did you get along with your brother?

JS: Sometimes. (laughter)

TB: Can you tell me about him?

JS: Yes, he was handsome, tall, six foot one, slim, smart, erudite, traveled all over the world, worked at many, many jobs, left school -- high school, [00:04:00] because it wasn't fitting his needs. Took several jobs and came back, took his GED, went to Morgan and graduated with honors from Morgan State College at that time.

TB: Did you have a favorite toy or game?

JS: Yes. My favorite was paper dolls. I didn't have many dolls, but they sold in the store paper dolls of famous movie stars, like Shirley Temple, who you might have heard of, OK? Sonja Henie, she was an ice-skating star, and some others. But they sold for about five cents a book, and you could press the body out and then you could press the different clothing out, and you could change the clothing on my paper dolls. (laughter)

TB: Did you take part in any organized sports?

JS: [05:00] We're talking about in high school now? Or is this still --

TB: Just in your childhood?

JS: Yes, I was a member of the girls' basketball team, and I was also [clears throat] -- excuse me -- in gymnastics. Back in those days, the Girl Scout, I mean, the girls' basketball, they did not play the full floor. Guards could only travel from back to the center line, and then you had to pass the ball to the other basketball players, and they were the ones who scored the goals.

TB: Who were your best friends?

JS: My best friends were and still is -- still are Sedonia Merritt, whom I met in junior high school, Dorothy Stern, whom I met in the third grade [00:06:00] in elementary school, [Vernice Grays?], who died two years ago -- I met her in the third grade. And then my high school members that I met, and we were in the same class from the 7<sup>th</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, so they became most of my good friends in school -- and of course I had friends in the neighborhood; we played softball and we played on the front porch and on the front steps. So some of those friends, many of them are deceased, but many of them are still alive.

TB: What were they like?

JS: My friends were lots of fun. We liked to do things. We were in the Girl Scouts, and so we went on trips, we made crafts and things in the Girl Scout meeting, told you we played basketball, so we stayed after school and played basketball. Then we all walked home. I had [00:07:00] the farthest to walk. Most of my friends live downhill from my house; I lived on East Biddle Street. So from Dunbar High School -- Senior High School, Junior/Senior High School, it was called then -- we would walk up the hill, and at certain

corners certain people would say “See you tomorrow,” and they’d go off and go to their house, which might be four or five blocks away from the main street we were on. And there was a park -- a square, on Madison Avenue and Caroline Street. At that time, it had a fish pond in the middle of it, and then somehow the fish disappeared; I don’t know where they went to -- maybe it’s when blacks moved into the neighborhood. And so in the afternoon, one of our favorite things was to run around the side of the fish pond. You know, it was like a tag kind of thing. And then I would go to the next block [00:08:00] and I would go to my house. And then one other girl lived four blocks up. So we liked to do things, we liked to go places. And I was an adventuresome child, and I’m still an adventuresome adult. (laughter)

TB: Did you have a nickname?

JS: Yes. They called me Little Cookie. My mother’s name was Delia, but everybody called her Cookie. And so my friends, being smart-alecky, they would, when my mother wasn’t listening or when nobody could hear, they would say “Here comes Little Cookie.” (laughter) And sometimes they called me Reds, because I had reddish hair and a reddish skin tone when I was younger. And one year I went to Bay Breeze, which was a girls’ camp in Anne Arundel County. And there, my best friend, she was named [00:09:00] Salome, and I used to call her Salami and she called me Cinnamon Buns, since my name was Simmons. (laughter)

TB: If you had chores, what were they?

JS: Did I have chores? Did --

TB: Yes. Did you have chores?

JS: Oh, yes, I did. Everybody I knew had chores. Nobody were slackers back in those days. We had a coal furnace before we had an oil furnace, so I sometimes had to help my brother go down, take the ashes and set them out on the curb, and someone would come along -- they’d pick them up just like they do your garbage and trash. But my main chore was, I had to scrub the steps every day with scouring powder and a scrub brush. But it was fun, because everybody was doing it, so we were talking. And my other chore was, there was only one bathtub in a three-story house, so everybody used



that same bathtub. [00:10:00] So it was my chore every day to clean the bathtub, and to wipe down the steps from the third floor to the first floor, before I went to school.

(laughter)

TB: Did your family have a television? Describe it.

JS: Early on, no. You know what we did? A couple of neighbors who had televisions, they would lift -- the kids would lift the shade up and we would go stand at their window and look at the TV through the window. (laughter) But we eventually got a TV, but I have never really been a TV person, so I didn't miss, you know, having TV then. It was OK, but I was out in the street running around, you know, playing games, doing things.

TB: When did you get it?

JS: Oh, God, I don't even remember when we got it. It was a long time after TV came before we could get it. [00:11:00] Because my father worked the night shift, and he did not make a lot of money, but we preferred having a car to TV. So in my neighborhood, we were one of the first families that had one car, and then we had two cars. So a lot of my friends liked it that I had a car. (laughter)

TB: What kinds of shows did you watch?

JS: When I finally could look at it, Milton Berle -- I used to like him. He was crazy. (laughter) And there was a show, something about Texaco, and they would have all these different acts, like they might have a dog act for five minutes, then they would have a comedian, you know, for another four to five minutes, that kind of thing. So I liked variety.

TB: You said that your family had a car. What kind was it, and can you describe it?

JS: It was [00:12:00] a black Chevy, four-door, and it was real simple. In fact, if you saw it, you would say it was retro. (laughter) (inaudible) Because it had none of the whistles and bells that cars have today. But back in the day, to have a car, that was unusual, you know, in the neighborhood. There were a few families that had cars. We had a Chevy. Some of the people in the neighborhood who worked at Sparrows Point, because they paid pretty good money back then [to the men?], they had Buick

Dynaflows. And the Dynaflow was the kind of car that when you stepped on the gas, everybody in the neighborhood knew that you were moving, because it made a real loud noise, and we were excited, you know, just to stand and watch Mr. Henry [Warr?] drive his car down the street. [00:13:00]

TB: Did you take trips in the car?

JS: Yes. We went to Brownsville, Pennsylvania; my father had a sister who lived there. We drove to North Carolina -- that was the first time that I met some of my aunts, because they didn't travel, and we had not -- I had not seen them, and my father had not seen them since he left home as a young man. And a couple of times we went to New York and New Jersey. And many times we would go to Continental Cans' picnic, which was held every summer. They would have a picnic for all their employees. There were only two beaches, either Carr's Beach or Sparrow's Beach, and that's where we went. And that was a lot of fun. I have a picture of me -- I meant to bring it to show to you; I'll bring it later -- in my bathing suit. (laughter) And I made the Afro. (laughter) [00:14:00]

TB: Did your family have meals together?

JS: Yes. That was normal. Everybody, at a certain time on the street, you could tell that it was dinnertime. You know, kids would be going -- they would go in the house, sometimes your mother would come to the door and wave you in, or sometimes she would just call you, but everybody on our street, you know, basically stopped, because when you came home, you could kind of have a little free rein. And then you had dinner, and then you had to clean up, and you had to get your clothes ready for school the next day. And then, as it started getting evening again, then you could go back out on the steps and to the end of the block and maybe to the other end of the block, but that was about it in the evening time. In the daytime sometimes, on Saturdays, we would go up to the playground and play baseball, softball.

TB: How did you celebrate birthdays?

JS: You know, [00:15:00] in my family, birthdays were not really celebrated much. I didn't start celebrating birthdays a lot that I can remember until I was about 16 years old. I remember everybody in school was talking about their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, so I wanted to

have it, but back in the day, some people who lived down the hill did not want to walk up the hill. (laughter) Because it was like an eight- or ten-block walk. So I don't remember doing much on birthdays. My mother would make a cake sometimes. My favorite was a pound cake that she made with butter oozing out of it. But birthdays were kind of simple back in -- when I was younger. Now, as I got older, I got more flamboyant. (laughter)

TB: What did people call African Americans when you were growing up?

JS: To be polite they said "Negroes," but they said "nigras." They called them "nigger." [00:16:00] And they called them a lot of other terms that were derogatory.

TB: What was it like for African Americans in the city where you grew up?

JS: Where I grew up first until I was five or six years old, that was in West Virginia -- it was hard. If you know anything about being a coal miner, if -- you might want to look it up -- it's a hard, coal -- it's a hard, dirty job. You go deep down in the mines, and many times my uncle and my father, they would leave in the morning with clean clothes on; when they came out of the mine in the afternoon and they were walking up this road going back home, you couldn't tell white from black, you couldn't tell who was who, because they were all covered with the soot and the dirt from the mines. And then when we moved to Baltimore, my father worked at Continental Can. [00:17:00] And he was a very proud man. I often think about it -- even though he was on the custodial staff, my father went in dressed like he was going to an office job every day. He loved clothes, so I know where I got it from. (laughter) So he would dress. He would always leave for work an hour and a half before he was due there. And then he would change his clothes, and then as the plant started shutting down for the day, because they would shut down, like, about five o'clock, then from 3:00 to 11:00 he would work on the night shift, cleaning up the plant. He would wash himself, put his clothes back on, and then he would drive himself home.

TB: Did you or your family experience racism or segregation?

JS: I don't remember any overt racism, but I do remember segregation. When you'd go into the stores, for example [00:18:00] -- Hochschild's, O'Neil's, Stewart's -- you could not try on any clothes. You couldn't put a hat on your head to see if it fit; you had

to buy it and take it, you know, with you. And in many cases there were some stores that would not wait on you -- you would go in, but they would ignore you. And my mother had a heavy bust, so at that time the only store that catered to women like that was Lane Bryant. It's been around a long time. So my mother, though, was a smart woman. What she did was, she wrote me a note, sent me down to Lane Bryant, and I went in like I was her maid, and I bought her the size bra that she needed. Because they did not sell them in regular -- you know, in the other stores.

TB: How did this affect you as a child?

JS: It let me know [00:19:00] that I wanted to get an education, I wanted to do something that I thought would not have me be beholden, you know, to people based solely on my color or based solely on where I lived. And it also made me more aware that it was important that I finish high school; my father preached it day and night, but as I got older and saw all the things that were happening in the stores and in the schools around me, I knew that I needed to get an education. And he didn't say "Get a high school education," which was unusual, because that's what most parents were saying. My father said, "I want you to go to college and be a teacher like your Aunt Eloise," who lived in Brownsville, Pennsylvania.

TB: How did your family survive racism or segregation?

JS: You know, back in the day, [00:20:00] anything that you wanted to buy, anything you wanted -- that you needed, you could find in the black community. If you wanted a musician, for example, to play at your daughter's wedding, there was somebody, maybe at church or something, who would have a little band. If you needed a meal catered, there were black caterers; they didn't kind of advertise in the black community, but you would know who they were. Their business was basically with white businesses, but they would do catering for black families also. So what it showed you was that there was a resilience and there was ability within the black community to get what we needed. So in a way, the community was a little insular, because many boys and girls -- I found this even more so when I started teaching -- [00:21:00] there were some children I taught who had never been with, let's say, within a radius of maybe 10 blocks outside of their home. They knew nothing about downtown Baltimore, they knew nothing about west Baltimore

or south Baltimore -- they knew about it because we taught it in school, but they had never physically, actually seen it. And this is why, when I became a teacher, I took my children on field trips. I took my children to the Washington Monument, and we actually walked those steps, down in Mount Vernon Square -- do you know where I'm talking about? OK, we walked those steps, teacher and children, all the way to the top and down. We taught about the city of Baltimore, so we would go and visit certain parts of Baltimore, so that -- I knew that there was a wider world out there, because it had already been shown to me. [00:22:00] And many -- much of it had been shown to me because I had a cousin, Mary Carter Smith, who was one of the founders of the Griot Circle and the National Association of Black Storytellers. She was a teacher, and so she was always teaching me, showing me things, handing me a book, saying "Have you read this? Do you know this author?" And I hadn't, in many cases. Sometimes I had. But I had people around me who were constantly teaching me. And the teachers I had in school, many of them, they were the best teachers in the world. Now, I know that's not really true, but for us, even though it was an all-colored high school, even though it was small by most standards, we had teachers who did things with us, who tried to make sure that we read widely. They made sure [00:23:00] that we discussed current events in school. They had things in our school and at Douglass, because we would sometimes exchange events with Douglass High School -- one of my most memorable was, I took Latin in high school. If you were in what was called the academic course, you either had to take Latin or some other foreign language. I took Latin, and they had a Latin class also at Douglass. So one day, we had a toga party. You know, the dress that the Romans used to wear, it looks like a bedsheet, almost? So that's what we did. We went to our houses and we got bedsheets, and we draped them around our shoulders and wore them a whole day. We invited the Latin Club at Douglass, and they spent the day with us, visiting in our classes, but especially in our Latin classes. [00:24:00] So when they came in, we had a few Latin phrases that we would share with them, and then, of course, we were able to give them a tour of our school, because most -- like I said, most children back in that day did not go from the East Side to the West Side easily. Most people stayed within their neighborhoods, but not me. (laughter)

TB: What did you want to be when you grew up?

JS: Oh -- (laughter) When do you grow up? What do you mean? You mean when I was little? When I --

TB: Yeah, what --

JS: Well, when I was --

CREW: Excuse me. Yeah, I told her already. She know I already told her that too. (laughter)

F: That's right.

JS: And I was looking at --

M: Tell them. Tell them [you're ready?].

JS: -- your name, but I would --

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

JS: You know it's a -- (inaudible) Let me get to my (inaudible) [papers flipping] tell you all the things I had down. I had so much. (laughter)

TB: [00:25:00] How did you celebrate holidays?

JS: Well, I'm thinking, back in the day, people didn't have as many holidays as you all have now -- you know that. We didn't have all of these special days. We had Christmas, which was very special, but in most cases it was simple. We went to church, generally. We had church service. And at church, they would usually give you a small paper box with a little cord on it -- you might have even seen it in some -- in, like, some retro stores. But it was filled with hard candy. And that was usually the gift that was given out to the children. And you went home, and you might have maybe two or three toys. You would usually have some fresh fruit, like apples and oranges -- that was kind of special. Tangerines [00:26:00] were a little big, I loved those, and pomegranates. I loved pomegranates, so generally we had those. And, of course, the food. I mean, back in the day I had one aunt who lived around the corner, another aunt who lived around another corner, a cousin who lived around the other corner, and all this was in a five-block radius. And after we left church, generally we would go to one house and, you know, eat something there. Then we would go to the next house and eat something else

there. Then we would go to the other house -- but you had to eat every place that you went.

CREW:           Pause that, Steve. We haven't --

TB:     What did you want to be when you grew up?

JS:     Well, from the time I was fairly young, when I lived with my cousin, Mary Carter Smith -- she was a teacher, and so I got to help her mark papers. [00:27:00] This was back in the day where you had only a few papers; you didn't have as many papers as you have in high school and junior high school and senior high school like you do today. There were no mimeograph machines, there was no ditto machine. There was no copier. So there was a process, and I don't want to go into a whole lot of detail, whereby you made copies for you children's class work. And I would help her make these copies. I'll explain all of that to you later, after this, but I don't want to take up the whole thing -- the whole interview with that. But I did that for her; sometimes I would just put the papers together in a certain order for her, so she would have them ready when she'd walk in front of her class. So I was in training to be a teacher from the time I was about nine or ten [00:28:00] years old. And there were teachers who lived in my neighborhood. My music teacher lived around the corner; I would see her walking to school. There was a doctor who lived across the street from me. There was a police captain -- he was one of the first black police captains in Baltimore City. He lived across the street from me. So I had a lot of possibilities, but because she was closest to me and I was involved with her, I wanted to be like her. And so I wanted to be, first of all, a teacher. And of course I wanted to have a club, because most young women back in the day belonged to some kind of social club. And so I wanted to be in a social club, because that meant that you might go out and have an activity. You would get a chance to dress up. You might get your picture in the *Afro*, [00:29:00] if the *Afro* was there and they would take your picture. So it was, like, a little social life, and because I was around people who were doing things and were in that social life, I wanted to really be a part of that. But then later it changed. I went to charm class at Chick Webb Center in east Baltimore, when they built it. Before that we didn't have a recreation center in east Baltimore, but they had an Olympic-size swimming pool, so I learned to swim. They had classes, and I took

my first charm class when I was in high school. Blew my mind. First of all, I learned modern dancing. I learned how to walk. I learned how to sit. I learned how to apply makeup. So then my whole thing changed. I wanted to be the first black model. (laughter) And so I was [00:30:00] in training for that -- even though I was going to high school and then to college, that was really what I wanted to do. So I started working with Pauline Brooks. She was a lady who ran a premier dress shop in three or four locations in west Baltimore. But she also had models. And so the models would go to churches, to schools, to American Legions and places like that where black groups and black social activities were held, and so I started modeling with her when I was in high school. So I was aiming for being the first black model. And then in the meantime, I had to change those plans. First of all, my father said, "You've got to graduate from college." So that became, like, paramount, even though I was still doing some of those things and trying to get out of college. [00:31:00]

And then, also, I fell in love. I think I was in love all along, but I really fell in love, and I wanted to get married. And my father said, "You cannot get married until you finish college." So I had to go through all that -- by the time I finished college, then -- I wanted to be a model, but I didn't want to leave George here in Baltimore by himself. I wanted to be wherever he was. So I decided that maybe I wouldn't make a model -- I wouldn't do that. But luckily, Pauline Brooks still did fashion shows even after I graduated from college. So I was modeling until maybe 1960, 1965.

TB: So you fulfilled all your dreams?

JS: Of course not all of them. You gotta always have something to strive for. You've got to always have a dream that's a little ahead of you, so you can keep on stepping and stepping a little higher. [00:32:00]

TB: Did you have a role model growing up?

JS: I had several. My teachers, several of them -- I told you I was at Dunbar Senior, Junior/Senior High School. And back in the day, teachers were like models. They came to school spiffy. The men always wore ties -- bow ties, many of them were wearing at that time. They wore suits or a nice-looking sport jacket. The women always were very nicely dressed. So I had all of these role models in my school. I had them when I went



to Chick Webb Center, even though they were not dressed for -- in that type; they were in the sports attire, because they were teaching me swimming, they were doing the other things. And then at my church, I had [00:33:00] all of these women who always looked so beautiful when they came to church. And the men too. And of course the boys and the girls, you had to have on your tie, you had to have your shiny black patent-leather shoes that you put Vaseline on every week so that they would shine. And you would take a cloth and then, after you put the Vaseline on them, you would shine them up so they'd be shining. Then you would always have a nice little dress that you wore on Sunday, and as soon as you got in the house, after you'd visited all the relatives, you took that dress off. (laughter) You hung that dress up, and you didn't get in that dress again unless there was something real special going on. Because back in the day, I had Sunday clothes -- and when I say Sunday clothes, I might have had two dresses. And I had a cape -- I remember it was navy blue. [00:34:00] And I had navy blue tam that I used to wear down on the side, oh, I thought I was tough. (laughter) And I had -- my brother had -- at that time boys were still wearing short pants. He hated them. He had on little short pants; then later he graduated to knickers. You know what knickers are?

TB: No.

JS: Knickers are the pants that you see sometimes in old-time movies that have, like, a band around the leg that boys, young boys would wear back in the 1920s and the '30s and the '40s. That's the kind of pants he wore. And then you didn't graduate into long pants until you were maybe a little bit older. But he hated all of those short pants -- the knickers, he wanted to get into long pants. But when I came home from school every day, I had to take off my school clothes, I had to hang them up, I had to take off my school shoes, I had to put them [00:35:00] away, and then I could get into my clothes that I would do my chores in, and the clothes that I would play in. And guess what? None of them were pants. Young ladies did not wear pants back in the '40s and the '50s. We did everything in dresses, or a little skirt and maybe a blouse, but most of the time it was dresses.

TB: What is your favorite memory of your family?

JS: My favorite memory of my family is sitting down with my parents, looking at some of the old pictures that they took when they were younger. Because, you know, when you look at your parents, you only see Mom and Dad. You don't see jazzy people. So I'm looking at my mother and I'm just thinking, "Wonder what she looked like." And luckily, she had, and my father had, taken a few pictures when they lived in West Virginia and Kentucky. And my brother and I were in the picture also. My mother, I told you, was a buxom lady. Heavy, not fat, but kind of buxom. She had on, I'll never forget it, this gorgeous polka-dot dress, looking good. My father had on his suit, and he wanted a pic-- because we didn't have a lot of pictures, but we spent hours looking at them, trying to find out what was going on and where they were. It looked like they were at a baseball field, you know, the kind that you see in the old-time movies? Wasn't covered like Oriole Stadium, it wasn't fancy; it looked like it was rusty. But my father had on a suit and a tie, but the most important thing about it -- he had on what they call a boater straw. A boater straw is the straw hat that is the hard straw, [00:37:00] that has the brim around it, and has the -- what is this? -- the crown that sits up. You don't see men wearing those today, but back in the day men used to wear them, and my father was a dapper dresser. You know what dapper is?

TB: No.

JS: Guess. If I say he was a dapper dresser.

TB: He dressed really nicely?

JS: There you go. Yes, that's right. (laughter) So we would look at the few pictures they had showing me what they looked like when they were young -- because I just couldn't imagine them ever being young and, you know, doing things that I was doing at that age. So back in the day, it was real -- we liked to do kind of simple things, but one of my favorites was going to the movies on Saturday. After we had done our chores, on Saturday at the Dunbar movie, [00:38:00] you could get in for five cents and you could stay all day long. They would show a Western, they would show a serial, they would show a couple cartoons, and then they would show the full-length feature film. And so during the week I would collect bottles and take them back -- they used to give you a nickel for it or a penny, depending, and I would save my few little cents. There was no

such thing in my house as an allowance, back in the day. We didn't -- I did all that work for nothing. (laughter) But my mother said, "That's the rent you pay for living in this house. You have to help take care of the house."

So we would go to the movies, and there was a fellow in the movie, he was like the sergeant-at-arms. If you made too much noise, he'd come and tap you on the shoulder. If you made too -- got too rambunctious, he would tell you to sit down. If you ran -- you know, sometimes some boy might get excited because Wild Bill Elliott [00:39:00] was up there shooting, and he was knocking people in the head and throwing them over his shoulder, and if you'd get -- he would go up to them and put them back in his seat. And I think to myself today -- most parents and most people would say, "Don't touch my son, don't do this," but back in those days, people were doing what they thought would help you to be acceptable, and also not to be obnoxious to all the people around you. But we would spend all day at the movies and then we would go home. So that was one of the highlights of my Saturdays, because that was a day I didn't have to go to school, didn't have to go to church, and I did my chores early and then we had free time.

TB: What is your favorite memory of your community?

JS: My community was a very tight-knit community. Even though back in the day you didn't go in and out of people's houses, [00:40:00] you know, like I see many people today, I -- but yet I knew all of my neighbors within, let's say, a four-, five-block radius, because I had aunts who lived on one street, I had a cousin who lived on the other street. But back in the day, you didn't go into people's houses unless you were invited, and that didn't happen very often -- people, unless they were having something special and you were invited. You also didn't go places that you were not supposed to go. You know, you didn't know -- I told you I went to the movies on Saturdays. I didn't go to the movies the rest of the week, because that was a no-no. That was not what I was supposed to be doing on Monday through Friday, or on Sunday. And so the community looked after you. I knew most of the people in the neighborhood; they knew [00:41:00] who I was. If they thought you were doing something that was wrong, they said, "Joan, stop that or I'm going to tell your mother." And most cases, you stopped. You might do it as

soon as you got out of eyesight or earshot, but you would still be respectful. You'd say "Yes, Miss Pearl," or "Yes, Mr. John," and you would stop. Because you were taught to be respectful, you know, to all of your elders at that time.

TB: Do you remember any great stories or legends about your town?

JS: About Baltimore? I know a couple, but -- (laughter) right, I forgot to -- I was going to look up one, but maybe I'll share it with you another time, OK?

TB: OK. If you attend -- if you attended any more than one school at any level, please tell me about each school and why you changed schools.

JS: Well, I started in Fairmont, West Virginia, where I was born. And then my mother moved and father moved to Baltimore, [00:42:00] so then that's why I came to Baltimore. I did -- I didn't go -- in West Virginia they didn't have kindergarten, so I remember going to the first grade, but it was a wide-open room like this, and there were five or six grades in that same room. The first-graders might be sitting at the table up there, might have been ten or twelve kids, maybe ten or twelve here. [It may have been enough?], but it might be first, second, and third grade in the same room. I remember that when I went to school I could already read. So I remember that when -- the one year and a half that I was there, I was helping people in first and second grade with their reading, because they would say, "Come on up, Joan, and show them how to read," and I'd, you know, point out words, that kind of stuff. It was real simple, but I had learned that from my parents.

And then I came to Baltimore and I went to Dunbar Elementary School.

[00:43:00] And then I went to Dunbar Junior High/Senior High School, which was one building, and it's still located downtown, on Caroline Street. Any of you from the east side? None of you from the east side. Oh, OK. It's on the east side, near Johns Hopkins Hospital. It's still there, but now it is a middle school.

And then when I left there I grad-- I went from the third grade through the twelfth grade within a radius of about half a mile. There were all these schools located in this quadrangle. Elementary school, then my junior/senior high school, from seventh grade through twelfth grade, and when I graduated from there, then I went to Coppin State

College, which trained elementary school teachers for Baltimore City. It's now Coppin State University, [00:44:00] and I graduated from Coppin State College in 1954.

Graduated from Dunbar in February 1950. Back in the day they used to have two graduation dates. You would either graduate in February or in June. And I came out in February, but I could not enter Coppin until September. So from the time that I graduated in February until I could enter Coppin, I worked as a nanny or an au pair for one of my former teachers. I helped her to take care of her three boys for those months until I was able to enter college.

TB: The following questions relate to your elementary, middle, or junior high school experiences. Were your elementary or middle schools public or private?

JS: [00:45:00] They were all public.

TB: Where were they located?

JS: One was in West Virginia and one was in Baltimore.

TB: Did you have books?

JS: Yes. Yes, we had books.

TB: What was the condition of the books?

JS: Most of them were very old. They had come from Poly and Western. Now, on the inside of the book, you have a place where you can write the name and you can tell what year and you can tell, sometimes, the person's name. And most of the books that we received had already been used by other high schools at that time. At that time, Poly was really the only high school -- it was a technical high school, [00:46:00] and it was all white at that time. It was located on North Avenue. You know where the school building is on North Avenue, North and Calvert Street? OK, that's the old Poly High School. You would see boys outside with their surveying equipment -- of course, only boys at that time. It was not a, you know, a coed school. And then Western was the girls' school, but they were located downtown, and eventually they moved to where they are now, off of Cold Spring Lane. But they were all inside of Baltimore City, you know, back when I was in high school and college.

TB: How would your classmates remember you?

JS: They would remember me as outgoing, fearsome, always wanting to do something new and different. [00:47:00] And many of them I still keep in touch with, even today.

TB: What subjects were you taught?

JS: In high school it -- in junior high school, it was -- and high school, it was basically subjects like math, science, geography, history. I guess you've heard -- in schools they don't use this word, but they used it back in the time when I was in school -- they had what they called "tracks." So if you were planning to go to college, then you were placed in the academic track, which meant that there were certain subjects that you had to take because they expected you to go to college and you needed those for college entrance. If you were going into maybe working in a business, like working in a machine shop or something like that, then you might take the technical course, and your courses would be different. [00:48:00] It might -- it would include things like math and that, but you didn't get as much of what we would call the academic subjects. And then they had a commercial course. Commercial course was for those people who were expected to be secretaries or clerks or work in some capacity as a receptionist and that kind of thing. So I was -- and the way you got placed into each of these tracks was based on your test scores and your grades that you had maintained. So I was in an academic course. There were five girls and 18 or 19 boys. And those were some of the subjects I mentioned that we had. And in addition to that we took geometry; most other tracks did not have to take geometry. And I also had started the beginning of calculus, and then [00:49:00] we didn't have enough people to continue it, so they dropped that, so I never did finish a course in calculus.

TB: Were you able to have electives?

JS: Yes, all the girls had cooking -- this was in maybe junior high school and high school. You had a course in cooking, you had a course in dressmaking, and the boys went to classes, like, in woodwork -- they might make pencil holders, and, you know, other things like that for gifts, or small tables, and they also went to metal shop. But at that time, no girls were allowed in the metal or woodworking shop, and no boys were

allowed in the cooking. And you know that's different today. Most chefs now today are males. (laughter)

TB: In college, did you live on campus?

JS: No. When I went to Coppin State University, it was a college -- there were no dorms there. So it was what we called a day school. [00:50:00] I rode the bus every day from my house, 21, up to Coppin. It was located on the third floor of an elementary school for two years. And then for my last two years they moved to the building which was torn down. There was one single building on West/North Avenue. You know where Coppin is?

TB: Yeah.

JS: OK. That's where I finished. But by the time -- excuse me -- by the time I finished they had torn down the one building and they had built a couple of other buildings. Let me say this as an aside. I was just there yesterday for the investiture of the first black female president of Coppin State University. I was so proud of her. So if you see it in the news or you see anything about it, I'm going to bring something so you all can read about it. I would like to take you all up to Coppin one day just go through [00:52:00] -- have you ever been on Coppin's campus and been to some of the buildings?

TB: Yes. Yes.

JS: OK. Would you like to go? If you think you'd like to go?

TB: Sure.

JS: OK. Well, we'll talk and see if we can't go up there and spend a day on the campus. They have the most wonderful gymnasium -- you know that they have been famous in basketball. But it was just a wonderful experience yesterday to see this young woman -- who has her doctorate, of course, because in most cases you cannot be a college president without a doctorate -- and she's from Nashville, Tennessee, and this is her first presidency. So I'm wishing her all the luck in the world, but I'm so elated that she's a female. (laughter)

F: Oh, yes.

JS: Maybe things will get done now.

F: (laughter) Yes.

JS: Sorry.

TB: These questions will not ask about any personal beliefs; they are only to get information about the church's role in your life, if any.

Did you attend -- [00:52:00] uh, what was the denomination of your church?

JS: OK, when I started out, when I told you I had to go to church every Sunday -- I was a young child, so I went where my aunt took me, and that was to Church of God, which is a Pentecostal Church. So that's where I grew up. That's where I learned most of the hymns that I know today, most of the Bible verses that I remember -- that was where I got my initial training. However, the Pentecostal Church -- I stayed in there until I was about 20-some years old, just before I was getting ready to get married. And one of the things that they did not believe in at that time was that boys and girls should swim together. And I wanted to learn how to swim. So at that time, I was old enough, I asked my, you know, my parents if I could make my own decision. So I changed my church affiliation, and I now go [00:53:00] to Douglass Memorial Community Church, where I've been ever since then. But before I joined there, I went to -- I know 15 or 20 churches, trying to find what I thought spoke to my heart. And at that time I told somebody the day I went, I did not plan to join the church. I was just going for service. And I was sitting in the service, and the preacher was preaching, the music -- oh, the music of the church was beautiful, and I was sitting in my seat. The next thing I looked up, it was like an out-of-body experience. I was up at the front of the church. Somebody said, "You got up and ran up to the front of the church." Because that's what happens sometimes when you hear some things that affect you -- you don't know why or how it's affecting you. So like I said, I didn't go to join, but I did join, and I've been there, so I've raised my two boys in that church, and I've been active in the church and in the community, [00:54:00] even though I don't live in that community, but I've been active in that community ever since.

TB: What role did the church in particular play in your community?



JS: Well, if you have been looking at the news when we were having the riots, and if you have looked at some of the town meetings they've had, we've had several of those at our church. My minister is Yeary, at -- Reverend Todd Yeary, and so he's been on the line a lot of times when you see the ministers marching with arms interlocked, you know, during the rides -- he was there. And many times we have opened our church for things like civil rights leaders, back in the day, even before he became the minister there. When SNCC came to town we opened our doors. They had a film festival and we opened our doors. [00:55:00] And whenever we can be a part of the community in that area -- and in fact, we started the first store, which was a free will store. We gathered clothing and items from our parishioners and friends, and then on those days, people could come in and they could get any of the things that they needed from our store.

TB: Have you ever been married?

JS: Yes, I have, to the man I told you about that I fell in love with. (laughter) His name was George Stevenson, and he and I were married, and we have two -- we have -- we have two boys. One of my boys is deceased; he died in 2002. But my other son, Doug, is still alive, and I love him to death. And I love the one who died. And now that I'm thinking about it I'm probably going to tear up, but I'm OK. I'm OK.

TB: How did you meet your spouse?

JS: [00:56:00] I met him at Dunbar Junior/Senior High School. He was on the football team. He was on the basketball team. (laughter) He was a handsome specimen. (laughter) And so when the basketball team would play -- and football, really, was his main sport -- when they would play, of course, we would go to the games, and we would root them on. But when they would go out of town, my girlfriends and I, my mother would let me stay down at the school until the bus would bring them back from their games, which was late in the evening for a young lady back in the '50s to be out. But we would sit on the steps, and we would sing, [singing] "Since I fell for you." (laughter) We would be singing, and waiting for them to come back, waiting -- because, you know, back in the day [00:57:00] there was no social media, and most of us didn't even have telephones, so if you had a telephone you had a party line, and children didn't use phones. They were for the parents to use, the phones. So we had to sit there and wait

until they came back, so they could tell -- so that we could tell when the bus would come down Caroline Street: if they were singing and sounded happy, we knew they had won. If they were quiet, we knew that they had lost the game. But didn't matter. We were there to root them on and all of that. And for a while I served as a cheerleader, also, yeah.

But I married him, we had two children, and we lived with my parents when I first got married. My parents, I told you, had this three-story house, so they renovated the second floor and that was my apartment. (laughter) And then after we had gotten some money saved and, you know, some other things, we were going to buy a house, [00:58:00] but -- and this is an aside -- but at that time there was a monastery on the end of my block, on -- this is East Biddle Street. And a monastery, back in the day -- there are not too many inside the city, but it was a cloistered building for Catholic nuns, which means that you can't see them; they had a huge wall that was about eight feet tall. We knew they were in there but we never saw them. But they had a little box inside the door where you could go in and you could talk to them, and if you would put some money in the slot, then they would send you down a little card, you know, maybe with one of the saints on it, because it was a Catholic order. And we had planned to stay there until we had saved enough money to buy a house. About that time, the city came along with eminent domain. Have you ever heard that word? OK.

TB: I have.

JS: You -- and with that, [00:59:00] they decided, because the Catholic nunnery wanted to sell its property, and they were ready to move out of the city. Then they took the rest of the property in that whole square block by eminent domain. And what it means is they sent a letter to my parents saying, "You have until a certain date, and at that date you must vacate the premises." And they have us an offer of -- not me, because at that time it wasn't my property. They gave us an offer and told you what they would offer you for your property. Of course, my parents were quite upset, because they'd planned to retire there, you know, and stay there for the rest of their lives, probably. But my brother and I -- I told you we were adventuresome. I said one day, "I'm going down there and check." We decided that the offer they made to us was not a reasonable offer.

So we said, [01:00:00] “Well, we’ll wait and hear what the second offer is going to be.” They made the second offer, which was a little higher. See, what we’d found out is that those who capitulated early, they got them out at the lowest price. Then they had another price, but we found out they also had another price. So we were waiting for the third price, and someone said to us, “Well, you might -- you’re going to have to go down and testify before city council. And my friends said, “You’re going down there?” I said, “Yes.” I told you, my brother was -- I was bold, but he was even bolder than I was. So we went and spoke before the city council. It didn’t change the dynamics; they still took it by eminent domain. But it was just powerful to sit in front of all of these white males, because there weren’t any females on the city council at that time, and tell them how much this property meant to my parents, how much it meant to us, and why we didn’t want to move. [01:01:00] But what it did was, it got us a few extra dollars for my parents so that they could buy another house. And at that time, we moved into our house -- my husband and I bought a new house, and then my parents moved into another house.

One other aside; let me tell you this. When I got married, and we were going to buy the house, everything was coming to my house, and it said, “Donald G. Stevenson and Wife.” Do you know back in the day, they did not even put the wife’s name on water bills, household bills, anything? The wife was considered chattel, in effect. Everything was based on your husband’s salary, and his name was on everything. It took quite a few years before that was changed, and I bought two houses since then, and only by the time we got the third house were we [01:02:00] able to get a house that had my name and his name. Because before that, I was only listed as “and Wife.” So you can see we have come a long way where single women can go out and buy a house, you know, based on their income. But of course they had much better income than I had.

By the way, did I tell you that when I started my first job as a teacher, I made \$3,200 a year? And I only worked and got paid for 10 months out of the year, and I got paid once a month. (laughter) Just thought I’d tell you how much money I made back in the day. Wasn’t that rich? (laughter)

TB: Were you active in the civil rights movement?

JS: No, I wasn’t. I was busy raising children. (laughter)

TB: What are your favorite activities or hobbies?

JS: My favorite hobby is traveling. [01:03:00] I love to go places in the United States, outside the United States. I've been to China, I've been to -- where have I also, have I been? I've lived in Japan for a year as an exchange teacher. I have been to -- golly day, where else have I been? (laughter) Oh. Of course, it all just -- when I -- this is what happens when you're 83 years old. Stuff just leaves you, but then it comes back.

CREW: You went to Egypt.

JS: Oh, thank you. I went to Egypt and I went to Ghana, in Africa, so I've been there. That's all I can think of now. I'll tell you some more -- when I think of it, I'm going to tell you whether you're ready for it or not. (laughter)

TB: Please relate your favorite family story.

JS: I had an aunt, and you know how most black families have [01:04:00] nicknames for their relatives, OK? And my aunt, her name was Sally Lou Coleman, but we called her [Teedy?]. I don't know how we got that out of Sally Lou Coleman. And Rogers called her "Teet," but I never did call her that. But anyway, she -- my cousin Mary Carter Smith would always talk about the gorgeous clothes she wore. My mother and my aunt, these two, they liked clothes. So my aunt had this long, flowing hair that came down to here, and I thought for years that that was her hair, because she was a very private person. (laughter) And one day my brother and I walked in unexpectedly. (laughter) And her wig was -- [01:05:00] because they didn't have wig stands back in the day, or at least she didn't have one. Her wig was sitting on something on -- they had dressers -- let me explain. The dresser was about this wide, so it had, like, two nightstands on each end, and then it went down, and then there was another place in between here. If you look at old furniture in the '40s -- '30s, '40s, and '50s, this is what most bedroom sets and dining room sets looked like. So we walked into the bedroom and she did not know we were coming in; she did not have her wig on. (laughter) She was busy struggling, trying -- and then finally she just gave up, you know. Because my brother was in there then, and you know how little children -- he was a year-and-some younger than me. And of course I had sense enough not to say anything. And my brother looked at her and said, "You look like a hairy gorilla." (laughter) [01:06:00] And my aunt was fit

to be tied, and my mother was so embarrassed. But after she got herself together, she got the wig. And then she explained to us what happened. She said, you know, that in our family, on that side of the family, many of the women lost their hair. It's called alopecia. But we didn't know about that back in the day. But to think about it, that she had, first of all, the wherewithal to know where to get a wig, that was first. And then secondly, that she had the money to even buy a wig. Because I told you, it wasn't a little teeny wig. It was -- because, you know, back in the day, women did not wear short hair, basically. So she had long hair, it was waved, and it looked very nice on her. And if we had not seen her like that, we never would have known -- and if she had known [01:07:00] we were coming in, we would never have seen her like that. (laughter)

But that was -- we were so embarrassed at first, but she got over it, and we got over it too. And she forgave my brother for saying -- making that comment. (laughter) You know how children are; they say what they're thinking. And he was young and just came on out. (laughter)

TB: What was the happiest moment of your life?

JS: The happiest moment of my life was my marriage, when I married my first husband. We'll go into that another visit. (laughter) When I married my husband. I told you, I fell in love with him when I was in high school. I -- really, I made myself get out of college so that I could get married. When I started teaching, the supervisor would come and observe you teaching, and then she would write up whether you had done a good job, or whether you need -- certain points [01:08:00] you need to work on, sort of like when your teacher gives you a critique when you might have made a speech in class, and she'll say, "You did this well." And so the supervisor would come in and watch you. And when my supervisor came to watch me teach my first lesson, I taught at 119 on Gilmore Street, down the street from Regal Laundry. And she said when she came in, "You were supposed to have a reading corner, you were supposed to have a science corner, you were supposed to have a little corner with books and things like that." She said, "And Joan had, in her book corner, nothing but *Bride* magazines. (laughter) I -- well, see, what happened was -- and I was so embarrassed, because I wanted -- you know, you don't know how important it was to have a good write-up. It meant you had a job,

that's what it meant -- that you could keep your job. But she was a very nice lady. Her name was Stevenson; I wasn't a Stevenson then, [01:09:00] but I was going to be a Stevenson. I think she took pity, understanding that I was a young girl, just a couple months out of college; that I was so excited, I forgot to put out my children's books that morning. Because when you go -- back in the day when I taught, you had to have your room set up in a certain way. You had to have -- all of your work had to be on the board. You had to have the reading assignment for Group One. You had the reading assignment for Group Two. This is why I had to get to work two hours early. You had a reading assignment for Group Three. You had a math assignment for Group One. You had a math assignment for Group Two. You had a math assignment for Group Three. And then, on the other board, or if you were in an old building like I was, you didn't have any more board space, so after lunch you had to teach social studies and science, so you would have to erase all of that work for that day [01:10:00] and then put up your board work for the next day. And then later on they started using chart paper, so you could use that. So it was really important when our supervisor was coming in, because you wanted to get a good grade, you wanted to get a good report, and you wanted to be made a tenured teacher. Tenured teacher meant that I was no longer on probation. So I was so glad when she sat down and talked to me and said, "I would just suggest that you put other books inside your library corner the next time." (laughter) And of course, I did.

But back in the day, they would also even look at the plants that you had in the window. Every window had to have a plant. The venetian blinds had to be all the same height, if they were up or down. There were so many things that you had to do that had nothing to do with teaching, but that was all a part of what you had to do back in the day to be a teacher. [01:11:00] And I was successful, thank the Lord. I made tenure after two years. Because some people didn't do it after two years. They had to go a third year and maybe a fourth year. And if you went that far, then probably they were not going to hire you again.

TB: Who was the most influential person in your life?

JS: I would say my mother and my father. Because in our -- in my house, they both wanted the best for both of their children. I told you, we were not a rich family, but they

tried to make sure that we had proper clothing. I remember that I wanted what was popular back in the day, a pea coat. And they came back into style again. And I don't know that my parents could really afford a pea coat, but every -- looked like every child in Dunbar had a pea coat. Blue, like the sailors used to wear -- back in the day, the sailors wore those coats. [01:12:00] And I wanted this coat, so for one Christmas I looked, and there was a pea coat under my Christmas tree. That was the happiest day of my life.

But my parents -- you know, they did things that they thought, first of all, would make us happy, but most of all, they wanted us to be prepared in the world that we were going out into, because it was a hard world back then. It was segregated. You never knew what you were going to be, you never knew what challenges you were going to face, but they wanted us to have the best education we possibly could have. And they always stress looking your best and looking professional, so that we were never slackers. So those two people, you know, set the standards high, and my brother and I, we always reached for those standards.

TB: What are some of the most important lessons [01:113:00] that you've learned in life?

JS: I know I wrote something down there. Where is that? What page is that on?  
(pause) Oh, OK. Oh, no, here it is. I thought I had written down something.

Some of the most important things. First of all, you have to know that there is a being that is greater than you and me. And, you know, it doesn't matter what name you call them. I'm not -- it doesn't have to be my Jesus and my Lord, but you have to know that there's someone controlling the universe and looking after you. And so I think that that's important, as you young people move away from home and you go do other things, you meet other people -- you've got to have something that you can hold onto that you [01:14:00] know, that you believe in, and that no matter what people say to you, no matter what they do to you, no matter how they treat you, no matter whether you're up or down, in or out, that you have a God that you can rely on.

And so I think that's one of the most important lessons. And then the other is, you've got to look out for your family. Family is important also. You've got to take care

of one another. You can't say what they're going to meet in the job, you can't say what's going to happen when they go to school, but if you give your children and your family and the people that you love all the love and all the help you can have in making them strong, no matter what they meet, no matter what obstacle they face, they might not overcome it, [01:15:00] but they'll at least try. They'll try to do their best.

And then the other thing is, I hope that you will try to find something, as I did, that you like doing. You know, you've got to get up and go to work every day after you get out of high school and college. You've got to have some kind of vocation. You've got to have a job in this day and time -- any day and time -- in order to have the things that you want out of life. And I hope that you will find something in your life that makes you want to get up out of bed, get your clothes on, and go to it. And come with -- and each day you come to it and you have something new and exciting to say, or you have something that you bring to that job that nobody else can bring but you. And so when you come in, people will say, "Oh, here's Joan," you know, or "Here's Tabitha." You know, and [01:16:00] they smile when they see you. So the most important lessons are -- to thine own self be true.

TB: What are some of the most important lessons that you have taught your children?

JS: Sometimes I wonder if they've learned anything that I've told them and tried to teach them. (laughter) You know, when you raise your children, you wonder. I tried to teach them, or tried to show them that education was important. So one child is a college graduate; the other one went to two-year -- he went two years in college, so they knew that that was important. I want them to -- I hope that they've learned that you have to be, not necessarily rich in money, but you've got to be rich in experiences and what you do so that you find pleasure [01:17:00] and it gives you joy, as I told you before. My youngest son, for example, has a degree in political science which he is not using, because he loves music. So he is putting all of his energies and his efforts toward that. He has a band called Doug and the Spades. And after I'm thinking that he's going to end up being -- running around the world, helping to solve all the problems on the international level, he's playing country-and-western music. My favorite kind of music.



(laughter) But it's what he loves to do, and I think that's what's going to bring him -- so I'm just happy that he's happy in what he's doing.

TB: What are the proudest moments in your life?

JS: The proudest moments in my life. One -- there are a couple. One was when I graduated, [01:18:00] the three times -- I graduated from high school, I graduated from college, and then I graduated from Johns Hopkins University with my master's. And my mother was there for two of them, but my father was still -- he was alive for the third one. And he said to me then, "I am so proud --" And my father didn't talk much. He was a quiet man. And he just -- he was standing there, and when I had this mortarboard on and I turned the tassel, you know, to the other side, he got the biggest grin on his face. So when my son graduated from Brown, and at Brown -- when he entered Brown University, which is up in Rhode Island, they have these huge gates that they only open twice a year. At the beginning of the year they open them inward, because you're coming into the college. [01:19:00] On the day of graduation, they open the doors outward, and then the students from the Brown University walk through the city of Providence and walk to the graduation. And my son was like, "Mom, cool it. Cool it." You know, I'm running down the street with the camera trying to catch him in every spot. (laughter) I'm yelling and waving, and he's ignoring me, just like with my other son. He played in Calvert Hall's marching band. I ran the -- my son and I ran 15 miles with the baby, because we were keeping up with him while he was playing, and we played every note with him, we sang every song, (laughter) and we waved every time, because I -- and I told them later, I said, "You don't understand that this is not for you. This is for me." Because whatever success they have, I have. [01:20:00]

TB: Did you accomplish all that you hoped?

JS: Of course not. I've got 1,000 things I want to do. I've got about 20 other places I want to see. But time and age is slowing me down, but I'm still going to get some of them in.

TB: If you could, would there be anything in your life you would go back and change?

JS: I guess when I was young and naïve, I would say yes, I would change something. But now that I'm older I would say no. But when I was younger, I had vitiligo. Do you know what vitiligo is? It's the skin condition -- I still have it; that's why I'm this -- that's why my skin does not tan. It's what Michael Jackson had. It's when your skin -- and you've probably seen people walking through the streets; their skin is splotched and it has different colors. Well, I looked like that [01:21:00] at one time. And when I was going through that, I know sometimes I prayed that the Lord would take it away or it wouldn't happen to me, and that, you know, I would wake up one morning and I would look just like I had looked before. And it did not happen immediately. It happened after a while. But what it taught me during those years that I was undergoing that change, from -- see that little brown spot up on my nose? That's probably the color that my skin would be if I did not have vitiligo. That -- during those years, I was raising a family, so I thanked the Lord that I had two children, but when I had the second one I examined him every day, because I thought he was going to get it. I thought it was catching. That was before I knew about it. And then the other thing was, I had a husband, so it meant that I wasn't out looking for someone, because that might have turned some young men off. I had a job, [01:22:00] and thank goodness I was good at what I did, so I didn't have any fear of losing that. But it was a difficult time in my life, because people at that time would sometimes point at you, they would look at you or they would stare, or you would know that they were talking about you. But I went through it, it made me stronger, and I think I'm just as beautiful as I ever was.

TB: Do you feel you are leaving a legacy?

JS: I do. I believe that the legacy I live -- that I am leaving is the lives that I've touched in some way. That they will remember some of the things I've said, some of the things I've done for them or the things they've done for me. And that their living will be better because we passed each other and the Lord allowed our lives to collide [01:23:00] and intertwine.

TB: For whom are you leaving that legacy?

JS: I'm leaving it for my son, but for anybody whom I've touched, including Tabitha.  
(laughter)

TB: I will relate some milestones in African American history. If applicable, please tell me how you felt when they happened. In 1931 --

JS: I wasn't born yet. That's all right. No problem.

TB: Sorry, sorry.

JS: That's all right.

TB: In 1947, Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier in major league baseball. How did this make you feel?

JS: Very proud. I had relatives who lived in New York, and, you know, you just -- it was just -- it was like, it was -- even though he wasn't a relative, you felt like you knew him. Any time somebody black was doing something, people would say, "Come on, look at so-and-so on TV," you know, or "Somebody's on the radio." It's not like today, where [01:24:00] they are prevalent everywhere. It was so unusual to see black people on television, or to hear them on radio, that most times, somebody would either say "Go look at it," or they would tell you about it, so you would try to look at it.

TB: In 1948, President Truman officially integrates the US Armed Services.

JS: OK, it made a difference because when my husband went into the service later, he was in the Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps was integrated by that time. But you had the draft. So when he went into the service, selective service they called it, he said they went in and they asked you, "Do you want to be in the Army or the Marines?" And knowing my husband, because he was -- he thought he was a tough so-and-so. (laughter) And the Marines made him prove it, so he joined the Marines then. In his platoon and his battalion, there were, I think, only about eight black marines. So they had -- the forces [01:05:00] were supposed to be integrated, but it took a long while for that to happen. And then in addition to that, my husband was among the first black firefighters in Baltimore City. So he lived through all -- I didn't live through it, but he lived through going to work, having somebody spit in the sink that they knew he had to use, refusing to sleep in the bunk beds where he had slept, you know, the night before, calling him names, all kinds of things like that. Because he was in that second or third class of black firemen.

TB: In 1954, Brown vs. the Board of Education, making segregation in schools unconstitutional.

JS: That was the year I started teaching, so you know that was a big deal. We thought we were all going to go out and the schools were going to be integrated immediately -- forget it. (laughter) That did not happen. It took maybe years -- [01:26:00] in fact, maybe 1960s; my son was born in '60 and I went back in '62 -- 1962, I was one of three black teachers who integrated Arlington Elementary School. Before that time, and this was -- you see how many years that is after '54? -- before they ever had any black teachers in many of the schools in Baltimore City.

TB: In 1955, Rosa Parks' arrest for defying bus segregation laws in Montgomery, Alabama.

JS: I'd heard about it, but I was raising a child -- that was the year that my son Donald was born. So you know I was busy doing other things. (laughter)

TB: In 1957, Little Rock Nine integrate Central High School in Arkansas [pron. "Arkansas"].

JS: OK. In Arkansas [pron. "Arkansaw"].

TB: Arkansas -- did I say Arkansas?

JS: Yeah, it -- the S sounds like a W.

TB: OK.

JS: [01:27:00] Or you don't hear -- they're silent, yeah. I happened -- I didn't know anybody in that group, but I heard about it. But I was not active in it myself. But later on, I did get a chance to meet the sister of one of the young men who was in the Central High Nine, yeah. And I've heard them speak on several occasions about that experience.

TB: In 1960, Woolworth sit-in by Greensboro Four in North Carolina.

JS: OK, again, I had my second child in 1960, so you know what I was busy doing, changing diapers. (laughter)

TB: In 1962, James Meredith integrates University of Mississippi.

JS: OK. That was interesting, because when I was in Coppin, we were thinking that when we graduated, I was going to get a chance to go out-of-state to get my master's degree. I told you I went [01:28:00] to Hopkins, and Hopkins is right on Charles Street. And the reason I was looking forward to it is because the state of Maryland, in order to keep blacks out of their higher institutions of learning, they were willing to pay millions of dollars for you to go out of state anyplace to get your master's. And they paid this money for many years, so I had people before me who went to -- in New York State. They went to Columbia. Some people went out west. So my friends and I were planning these trips we were going to take every weekend or every couple of weeks, and then when they desegregated schools, the state stopped paying the money. So then I had to start looking for schools in-state that I could afford, because at that time I was married and raising two children. So I ended up going to Hopkins, which was very expensive back then. Guess what? It cost \$25 a credit. [01:29:00] But I had to scrounge to find that \$25 a credit. But that -- [audio cuts out]

M: Keep going. It'll pick back up. (inaudible)

F: Oh, OK, so let's go. We only got four left, I think, here.

TB: In 1963, March on Washington for jobs and freedom.

JS: OK, I remember looking at it on TV, you know, with the kids, and I was teaching still, and (inaudible) the school, because I ended up becoming a vice-principal and then a principal of the elementary school. And then in addition, I worked for the State Department of Education, which meant I traveled all over the state of Maryland, visiting schools to make sure they were meeting certain standards if they were getting federal funds. So many of these events, I would go in classrooms to make sure that children were getting the information, or that they were -- it was being integrated into the curriculum that we were writing at that time. [01:30:00]

TB: In 1964, the Civil Rights Act passed.

JS: I was there. I was here, but I was not actively involved in it.

TB: In 1964, Sidney Poitier became first Negro to win the Best Actor Oscar.

JS: I was excited because I thought he was one of the most handsome men. (laughter)  
And he spoke with an accent, so you know young women -- we thought that was very nice. (laughter) Until I found he married a white lady. (laughter)

M: Yeah, [he gonna always do it?].

JS: Excuse me, that's not good. But anyway. Now it's more -- I can accept it a little bit more. Then it was harder for us. OK, sorry.

TB: In 1967, Thurgood Marshall appointed first Negro on the Supreme Court.

JS: Oh, I mean, I was so happy, because first of all, he was from Baltimore. And, you know, he had grown up in west Baltimore, around -- right down here [01:31:00] on Division -- Druid Hill Avenue, he grew up in that area. So it was -- I didn't know him, didn't even know his family, but you felt real good because it was a part of your history, and you could touch the places where he had lived.

TB: In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King assassinated.

JS: I remember that -- the riots that occurred. Most of them were not in my neighborhood; they weren't even near me, but I remember my cousin Mary Carter Smith, she wrote a poem, and I'm going to find that poem and share it with you when I see you again. Because there was a Sears-Roebuck on North and Caroline Street, it had this huge plate-glass window. And they broke -- that window was broken. And she wrote this poem, and it says something about "You can hear the glass breaking, you can hear the sirens going, you can see the flames," and it was just so sad. It -- [01:32:00] the riots that we had last year, it reminded me of that same experience.

TB: In 2001, Colin Powell appointed first African American Secretary of State.

JS: During the time that he was in that job, I guess I looked at everything he did, everything he said -- I read his first book. He wrote a couple of books, but I didn't read the other one. But I did read the first one. And I was always curious, especially with the war that Bush took us into, why he had agreed to go into that war. But it seems that it was based on the surveillance that he got, and that was why he went along with Bush. But I felt that, you know, he made a mistake in going along with him on that. But that was me. I'm no Army man. But at the same time, it was wonderful when you saw them

sitting around the table, to see this handsome man [01:33:00] with all these war ribbons and battle ribbons on his chest, sitting up there with all of those men. Because that's not a sight that we usually got to see.

TB: In 2002, Halle Berry and Denzel Washington, Best Actor and Actress Oscars, making it the first time African Americans win both categories in the same year.

JS: I was excited, I was glad, I was happy. But I was a little disappointed for the pictures they got it for. But I wasn't the only one. In talking to my friends, we felt that, you know, that was not one -- but the point was, it didn't matter whether I wanted it for that picture or not. I was just glad that they got the Oscar. But they had done so much better work that I thought they should have been rewarded for. But maybe the Academy felt guilty, felt convicted, and so they said, "We've got to give some act-- black actors, you know, some awards."

TB: [01:34:00] In 2008, Barack Obama elected the first African American President of the United States.

JS: And we can put 2012 it's the same thing, right?

TB: Yes, and reelected.

JS: (laughter) Right. OK. I was ecstatic. I never in my wildest imagination thought that I would ever see a black man elected as President of the United States. I can remember seeing the crowds on TV, and people crying. I mean, just tears of joy and sadness, thinking about all that had happened and all that we had gone through. And I know we were seeing him as the great black savior, and we know that he has not been everything that everybody wanted him to be, but you can't take away the fact that he has been elected twice, and that he has served in that position. And I just want him to get out and be safe, and for his family to be safe [01:35:00] and not be harmed.

TB: Is there anything that you would like to add that was not covered in this interview?

JS: No, I think not. I have a lot but I know we've gone way over time, so I'm going to stop. We'll just have to come in and chat with you one day.

TB: Good.

JS: When you look at your questions, you say “Maybe I should have asked this,” or “I want to know something” -- but thank you for interviewing me. I’ve enjoyed it.

TB: I thank you for your presentation in the pilot of the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project.

JS: And I thank you, and I thank you.

F: Thank you, Ms. Joan.

F1: Thank you, Ms. Joan.

M: Thank you, Ms. Joan. All right. [applause]

END OF AUDIO FILE



**SIOHP Interview #4 Elder John Taylor and Youth Jada Anderson**

JADA ANDERSON: [00:00:00] OK. My name is Jada Anderson, and I am 13 years old. Today is May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016. We are at the Walbrook Branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. It is 1:23 p.m. This is an interview for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project, which is an initiative of the National Association of Black Storytellers and sponsored by the Griots' Circle of Maryland. Please tell me your full name.

JOHN TAYLOR: My full name is John Leroy Taylor, but I call it John (inaudible) Taylor, not Leroy.

JA: What would you like me to call you?

JT: Kinderman. That's my stage name.

JA: Before we begin the formal interview, Kinderman, I would like to thank you for volunteering to be interviewed as part of this project. It means a lot to me and the other students. Please make your answers to the point [00:01:00] and relevant to the question asked. If I interrupt you at any time, please understand that I am not being rude but that additional information you are sharing may be the answer to a question that will be asked later in the interview.

JT: Thank you, Jada, because I'm always interested in having the experience with the youth.

JA: Thank you. When were you born?

JT: April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1936.

JA: Where do you currently live?

JT: I live in Columbia, Maryland, but I was born in Baltimore.

JA: The categories that will be covered in this interview are growing up, education, role of the church, adult life, reflections, African American timeline, and questions about how significant events in African American history affected your life. If you need to take a break or if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer at any time during the interview, please feel free to let me know.

JT: OK, thank you.

JA: You're welcome. [00:02:00] Where were you born?

JT: Baltimore, Maryland, at John -- no, at Provident Hospital in Baltimore?

JA: Did you grow up here?

JT: Yes, from a baby up until 1972, and then I moved from Baltimore to Columbia, Maryland.

JA: What was your neighborhood like?

JT: Very interesting, because my parents picked Lanvale Street in [Arlington?], and right around my neighborhood there were six churches, Methodist, [Holy Roller?], Baptist, and another Pentecostal church, so we were surrounded by churches, and there was a park right in front of me called Lafayette Park.

JA: Was your neighborhood integrated?

JT: No, it was sort of like middle-class -- we would say middle-class blacks at that time, but it wasn't integrated.

JA: What were your parents' names?

JT: John Taylor [00:03:00] and Blanche Taylor.

JA: What kind of work did your parents do?

JT: My mother was a hairdresser by day, and she was at night a dancer. My father was a waiter and a cook.

JA: Were you raised by your parents?

JT: Yes, yes, yes.

JA: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

JT: One brother. His name was [Randolph?] Taylor. He's four years older than I am.

JA: OK. As children, did you get along with your brother?

JT: Sort of, yeah, because we were separated. I was four years younger than he, and he had his own crowd, and I had my own crowd. My kids were the neighborhood kids, and his friends were in surrounding areas, but they were older.

JA: Can you tell me about your brother?

JT: Well, my brother, he went to Morgan College and became a scientist. And as a scientist, he worked 21 years with the Department of Naval Research. [00:04:00] When he graduated, he decided to just be a playboy, and the doctor told him he had cancer and he was going to die soon, so he decided to go around the world. So he's been around 21 countries, and then he finally came up -- he's living in Florida six months and lives up here six months.

JA: How often do you get to see your brother?

JT: Well, I visit him once a year, but we talk every week. Every week, we talk about something. He calls himself "squeezing out" life in Florida.

JA: Growing up, did you have a favorite toy or game?

JT: I had a train, a wind-up train, that was one of my favorite toys. But then, later on, I had something I had liked. I had an erector set. You build up things with objects you screw together, and you make a -- it's called an erector set.

JA: [00:05:00] Did you take part in any organized sports?

JT: Not really. I was always the last one, and they would say, "You take John," and they'd say, "You take John," so I never felt wanted in sports types of things. But in the afternoon of school, like in high school, they would have the football team or the basketball team, and I would sneak to the dance team, and I danced and danced, because I didn't want to be called a sissy. (laughs)

JA: OK. Who were your best friends growing up?

JT: (inaudible). They lived down in the basement with the caretaker of the house. The janitor of the house had three children, (inaudible), and so, because I lived on the third floor of that apartment, we'd go down, and we just played, played, played, played. Yeah.

JA: What were they like?

JT: Like children. (laughter) They were [00:06:00] no different than anyone else, except [Tuda?] didn't talk until he was about, I'll say, eight years old. He would just be

so quiet, but he was my friend because we'd go around and do things. I had a machine gun. We'd shoot and play that type of thing, but Tuda didn't talk.

JA: Did you have a nickname?

JT: My brother, when they ask him, "What's your brother's name?" my name was John. He said, "Shawn." They said, "Why do you say Shawn?" So people now call me Shawn instead of John.

JA: OK. How did you get that nickname?

JT: Because he couldn't pronounce it strong enough. He would say, "What's your baby brother's name?" He'd say, "Shawn, Shawn." And so, now, some people will call me Shawn, Shawn, Shawnie, and my brother still calls me Shawn.

JA: Did you have any chores?

JT: Choice?

JA: Chores.

JT: Oh, no, not when I was young. My brother, that's what he was jealous for, because he was the oldest person, and he could do things, but I just [00:07:00] hung around. ]

JA: Did your family have a television?

JT: Not at first. When we did get one, we got a black and white one, a small one. And to make it look like color, we would put that colored paper between it and look at it, and then it would be technicolor. So that's been a long time. Most of our entertainment was radio. But when we finally got it, it was a small one, but people said, "We got a color television." So they had this paper you put in between the -- like, the top was blue and all of that, but it was crazy.

JA: (laughs) When did your family get the TV?

JT: Oh, it must have been two or three years after TV came out, so we didn't have it long. But then, when we moved up to another level, we got a TV, a regular TV, 12 inches.

JA: When were you allowed to watch TV?

JT: Anytime we wanted to, because one thing my parents -- my father worked all the time, so there was no governing of that. [00:08:00] And my mother was a hairdresser, and she was not home, so we had a babysitter coming there. And they didn't have a TV, so, you know, I was young enough to just enjoy television -- I mean radio, the stories that we heard then.

JA: What kinds of shows did you watch?

JT: I watched -- on television?

JA: Yes.

JT: I liked dance shows, like shows about the army and about -- what do you call that -- the westerns and that type of thing. My favorite show was watching dance shows and entertainment shows.

JA: Did your family have a car?

JT: We had a '47 Hudson, [big old?] Hudson. And when I finally got my license, my father gave me that Hudson when I first got my license, and I kept that until I started working and I bought my own car.

JA: What did the car look like?

JT: It was big and bulky [00:09:00] and huge. (laughs) But it worked. It worked. It was beautiful as far as I was concerned.

JA: Did you take trips in the car?

JT: Well, to Washington. That's basically the longest I went until I got my own car. I mean, I've had 10 cars since then, but that first car was the Hudson. I might go to Washington and come back, but that was it.

JA: Did your family have meals together?

JT: My father and mother would have it together on Sundays, because he didn't work on Sundays. But then, all of a sudden, he started working on Sundays, and that kind of

split the family from eating. We'd eat at different times. But my father, when he was not working on Sundays, we'd all meet together.

JA: How did you celebrate birthdays and holidays?

JT: Birthday cake, singing "Happy Birthday," and we wouldn't have a big crowd, but we just had the close family together, my brother and his wife and his daughter -- [00:10:00] he had two daughters -- and myself. We would celebrate birthdays.

JA: What did people call African Americans when you were growing up?

JT: Negros. That was a very interesting time, but we were called Negros, and then later on [they said?] -- we were called black. "No, don't call them black. Call them African Americans." But my time was called Negros, and some people were called negresses, and that was a term they called -- when they were talking about Negros, they called them negresses.

JA: What was it like for African Americans in the city where you grew up?

JT: Baltimore was fine. But every summer, they would send us down south, and it was very interesting, because we could get in the train in Baltimore, but when we got to Washington we had to get off the coach and go into the back of the train section, and the white people had all the space. And sometimes, we'd get on the train, and some people who didn't have room would have to stand up or sit [00:11:00] in the aisles of the train going down to Virginia.

JA: Did you or your family experience racism or segregation?

JT: That was the biggest thing in Virginia and North Carolina, because there were water fountains that said, "White Only," "Black Only." When we'd go to the movies, we couldn't sit down. We had to go up, way up in the balcony, and look like that at the movies. The fountain was the same thing. You'd drink at a white fountain, a black fountain. When I was 15, I was working in Ocean City. The white people had the area from the boardwalk up to 15<sup>th</sup> Street. We wouldn't swim in that area. We couldn't walk on the sand. We had to go up to 125<sup>th</sup> Street to swim, where there were no lifeguards, no nothing, no anything, but we could not -- it's interesting, because we could not go in front of the hotels. So at night -- I was, like, a busboy (inaudible) -- I would put a towel over

my head and [00:12:00] twist it and put it back, and I became Omar from India. (laughter) It was crazy, because the white kids loved me, and I would go, “(inaudible), we’re going to have a ceremony on the [island?]. We’re going to throw the girls in the water, and (inaudible). My father is from India, and I’m here at Johns Hopkins University.” I got on the sand, and it was the summertime, in September before school opened. The police came. They would try to arrest me. I had to sneak out the back door, run down, get on a bus, and go home. But that was my experience with Omar from India.

JA: OK. How did that affect you as a child?

JT: I just had to get over it. I mean, I had to get over it. When I was seeing TV, I said, “Why are we like that?” because I thought we were supposed to be second class. And now, you know, it didn’t bother me, [00:13:00] and one thing my father taught me -- he was a waiter, and because he was a waiter he would bow to the white people, bow and give them service, and he would make big tips from that. And he waited all his life, and when his -- before he died -- because he worked every day except Monday, he would go to the racetrack and do the racetrack. But when he died, the white Jewish people showered my mother with gifts and things from the suburban country club, and I said things are (inaudible). My mother worked for a doctor at the veteran hospital. When she got sick, they took her in because she was a [days worker?] sometimes, and they put her in the veteran -- in a hospital for veterans. They gave her free service. They told me -- called me from school and said, “Your mother is going to die in three months.” My mother was so determined to die -- to live that she lasted nine months. And when she died, [00:14:00] the hospital took all the bills. And she worked for a lawyer in the afternoon sometimes -- (noise) whoa -- and they took over everything. They took over her bills and transferring the will into, you know -- possible things that normally we had to pay a lot of money. My mother was well taken care of. My father, because he said, “I don’t want to be sick long,” he said, “I wanted to die in my sleep.” And one night, I heard him, (coughing sound) and I said, “Wait, what’s going on?” I went to school. They called me and said, “Your father wants you to come home.” No, the neighbor said, “Come home.” I said, “Is it about my father?” He said, “Yeah.” He said, “Your father is dead.” And I had heard him that night. So my father said, “I don’t want to be alive. I want to die in my sleep.” He did that. My mother said she wanted to live long, and she

did longer than the doctor said, but that was my experience with them before the [00:15:00] end of their lives.

JA: How did your family survive racism and segregation?

JT: It didn't bother them, because my mother, she was a good hairdresser. She made a good living doing that. My father [got a lot of?] tips, and he showed me, you know, to have no animosity. He was just like that, and a servant. He was really a servant to people everywhere he went. Both times, when my mother and the father in the summertime would send us down south, they would go up to Asbury Park and work as a waitress and waiter, and they made a living there. But down south, I was suffering -- toilets, and we had to walk to the town three miles to get just [an environment?] because we lived on the farm. They had tobacco, and their hands got all black, and, you know, handling tobacco -- oh, it was horrible. It was horrible. I couldn't believe it. The toilets, you go in there, and there are snakes in the toilet in the outhouse. [00:16:00] To go and get some water, you had to go in the spring and dip in there, and there are little bugs going in there, but it was life. We didn't have -- we had no electricity. We had candles. Oh, horrible, horrible. Go ahead. (laughter)

JA: What did you want to be when you grew up?

JT: An entertainer. Eight years old, my mother had a little restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue one block from the Royal Theater, and at eight years old I was looking, and this man came out with a white tuxedo, white hair, white bowtie, sequins on there. And these 13 women are going, (heavy breathing) I couldn't believe it. They were kicking legs up and dancing. I said, "I want to do that. I want to do that." And you know, that came true, because when I got into dance and entertainment, I would have aerobics, and I would have these shows. I went back in our neighborhood and got all the girls together, and I was there dancing. And there was Cab Calloway. I saw [00:17:00] every act that you could think of that was black at the Royal Theater. It was called the Chitlin' Circuit. They started at television -- I mean in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington. It was called the Chitlin' Circuit, Circus, Circle, and that was my life, just theater, theater, theater. I'd come home, and I'd say, "A-ticket, a-tasket, a brown and yellow basket," because I saw



Donald Washington sing that. So I was just imitating what I had seen at the Royal Theater. That's what I wanted to be, an entertainer.

JA: Did you have a role model growing up?

JT: Yes. I was at Morgan College, and I was failing. And I met this man who came from traveling around the world with Katherine Dunham, all of that. He was 28 years old. I said, "Why did you come out of this theater going around the world?" He said, "A dancer's life is until he is about 32. [00:18:00] I'm 28, so I need to get a job that will last me the rest of my life." Of course, dancers don't live that long or don't dance that long, so he was in the art department, and I was failing the science department. He said, "I'll tell you what; if you join my dance group, I will get you through school," because I had an 0.9 average. (laughter)

I went. I said, "OK, I can't even draw a straight line." He said, "Come on in the art department, because everything is subjective." I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "You come in, and they can say, 'That looks good. That's blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.'" Well, you know, I think things are predestined. I got into the art department from my 0.9. I graduated with 3.6, and, you know, I couldn't do it, but all the people liked me. They helped me do my work for me, and I got all A's and B's at Morgan College.

JA: (laughs) What...

JT: [00:19:00] Do you need to pause? (laughter)

JA: OK. What is your favorite memory of your family?

JT: I think going to the circus, because once in a while we would go. It was so unusual, and I would always look at the sideshows, the man with all the tattoos, the half-woman half-man, the two-headed babies. (laughs) Those incredible things I looked at, and then riding the rides. I mean, once in a while, the circus, Barnum and Bailey's Circus, came, and that was so exciting to me. But anything else other than that, you know -- I enjoyed a lot of things, but that was my most favorite memory with my family. We would go there.

JA: What is your favorite memory of your community?

JT: Well, I was really liked, and we all had a good [job?]. [00:20:00] We lived right in front of the park, but just being there and with all those churches -- and I did experience (inaudible), because my parents were Baptists, and I went to the Baptists until they found out they didn't have a Sunday school. So I went to the Methodist church, got a job, and one of them said, "Are you working on Sunday?" He said, "Well, go to the Catholic school. They have mass all year round." And I went there for a long time, but I didn't understand what they were saying. You know, they would talk in Latin and all of that, and I was with Catholicism for years until I moved to Columbia. And the Catholics in Baltimore were different from the Catholics in Columbia. Columbia Catholics would do it like this. You'd sit down and (inaudible). They would go -- and I said, "Oh, no, this is not -- God is not here." So I stopped going to the Catholic church, and then I went into the world. And when I went into the world, I stayed in the world for a few years, [00:21:00] until God slapped me [sleep?], and I came back. I went back to my roots.

JA: Do you remember any great stories or legends about Baltimore?

JT: I'll tell you what I did like about Baltimore. We live in an area that was just rich with people. In the park, they would bring in vans and the pavilion there, and the neighborhood -- there was just no trouble. You didn't get fighting and violence. Everyone is really nice. We lived on the third floor of an apartment, and I enjoyed it. I just enjoyed the neighborhood, and there was no crime that I thought of or heard of until I -- my mother got a little snack -- a restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue. But Pennsylvania Avenue was of the new -- I mean, [00:22:00] people would walk in front of the doors, Christmastime, Thanksgiving time. It was just a lot of celebration. And as I got older, I understood that area with Pennsylvania Avenue was the highlight of blacks going there and enjoying themselves with shows and (inaudible) Johnson, who sang songs, and (inaudible) Castle, and all the movies were right there, the 1500 block, 1600 block, 1400, so I enjoyed that. I started selling papers there for about maybe six months. "Hey, Afro-American, Afro-American, Afro," and one night I got robbed, and they took all my money and my papers, and I never went back to selling papers anymore.

JA: If you attended more than one school at any level, please tell me about each school and why you changed schools. The following questions relate to your elementary, middle, or junior high school experiences. Were you able to attend school?

JT: Yeah. My mother wanted me to go to 111, but they didn't have a kindergarten, [00:23:00] so I had to go to 112. At 111, you stayed with one teacher a whole year, but at 112 you would go to different teachers at different grade levels and different subjects, so 112 was really nice. Next door to that, they had a factory that made potato chips and cakes, and you had -- for two cents, you would buy a bag of crumbs called crumbs. We would buy that, and I'd buy crumbs. And there was a little girl that I kind of liked when I was going to elementary school, and I'd buy her some crumbs or get the little potato chips and walk her home. She was smart, so they skipped her, and I was left behind a little bit. So the next semester when I -- the next year, I saw her. I said, "Can I walk you home?" She said -- so she said, "OK." So I would throw a penny on her steps when I got to her house, two or three cents, and she'd go, (makes a noise) and kick the pennies [00:24:00] off the step. That crushed me, and I never walked with her anymore. But that's an experience -- I just remember that she took my pennies and just kicked them off the floor in the elementary school.

Middle school, the greatest thing that happened to me -- and I knew I wasn't -- I guess teachers talked about people. I needed self-esteem, and one of the teachers, I think it was the math teacher, made me the safety patrol -- captain of the safety patrol, and, oh, was I the safety patrol. It was just so wonderful that little old me, who wasn't nobody, became the safety patrol person of all the safety patrol. We had to check and make sure they were there. So that was my middle school thing. High school, I was just a weakling, small and skinny. And I remember this so much. We'd go to Druid Hill Park to play, and this time they would flip coins for who was on your side. So they'd go flip, [00:25:00] and you get the first choice. He'd go, "This one, this one, this one," and I was the last one. They said, "Take [junior?]," and they said, "No, you take him." That just destroyed me. I was destroyed, my self-esteem. They didn't want me, nobody. (laughter) But [it didn't occur?] to me. The memory is still here. The memory is still

here. "No, you take him." "No, you take him." Oh, God is good though. (laughter) I'm telling you, merciful, grace. Go ahead.

JA: What were the names of your schools?

JT: One-hundred-and-twelve, 137, Douglass High School, Morgan, and then I went to a master's at the Maryland Institute of Art.

JA: Were your schools public or private?

JT: Public.

JA: Where were they located?

JT: Baltimore, Francis Street, [00:26:00] 137 -- 112 was up there by the market. What do you call that market? What is that market? Lexington Market.

F: Lexington Market.

JT: Lexington Market. Then, I went to 137 by Druid Hill Park, and then I went to Douglass, but Douglass first was on [Curry?] Street, but then the white people gave it to us, and we went up to the (inaudible) area. We had the first year with them at (inaudible), and then I went from there to Morgan College, and then I went to the Maryland Institute of Art.

JT: What did your schools look like?

JA: They were nice, you know. We always had hand-me-downs. We didn't get a brand-new school. We had the hand-me-downs. The white people went -- the white girls' school was downtown. They went up to the (inaudible) section, and then, when they left, we got it up there, and that was it, you know. They didn't integrate it either at that time.

JT: Did girls and boys attend the same school?

JA: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

JT: Did you enjoy school?

JA: Hmm?

JT: Did you enjoy school?

JA: Oh, [00:27:00] yes and no. I think what happened to me, they had -- the seniors graduated, and they had a party. They had a talent show, and I entered the talent show with these two girls, and I did this dance called “[Slaughter?] on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue,” where this girl came out -- I had one girl on my side, and this other girl who used to go with me came to me, and she had a knife, and she stabbed this other girl. And this other girl and I was on the floor crying, crawling to her, and she’s crawling. The music is fantastic. I made this dramatic (inaudible), and then I won a contest, \$25 for that. That was a senior contest. When I got that \$25, I told my mother and father, “I’m going to go to New York. I’m going to New York.” They said, “Well, yeah, you can, but let’s get a little more education.” “I don’t need an education. I’m a dancer. I won \$25.” My father said, “OK, if you go to New York, you can take care of yourself, but if you’re in school I’m going to support you.” [00:28:00] I got my little \$25, went up to New York City to this audition. The audition went around the corner, down the corner, down here, down there, down there. I was in line for two hours trying to get this audition because I could dance. I got in there. I remember they had 10 of us at a time. They said, “Number 467, dance.” (inaudible). When I finished that little audition, the man said, “One, two, good evening (inaudible). Get out.” I came back home with my tail between my legs. I realized I didn’t know. I didn’t know that dance is something -- each phase of it. I just -- because I did a little dance on stage and won \$25, that wasn’t dancing. People train for years to get in there. I learned. I learned. For a long time, I learned that. But when I came back, I took African dance. I took jazz. I took classical dance. I took everything and got a little sense of what dance was, [00:29:00] but that was my experience in schools and learning. I mean, it taught me.

JA: Were you able to go to school for what we now call a regular school year?

JT: Yeah.

JA: Were your grades separated?

JT: What do you mean, grades separated?

JA: Like, the grades had different classes.

JT: Yeah, that was the same thing. Yeah, different teachers too.

JA: Were your teachers good teachers?

JT: All except one. All except one. I'll tell you the story that brings me tears in my eyes. I was in fourth grade, and this teacher -- I won't know her name. She's probably dead now, but she was my favorite teacher. She had jewelry all here. She had skunk hair with white on one side and the other stuff, and she smelled good, and when she walked, ching, ching, ching, and I loved Ms. [Shephard?]. Oh, I loved her. She was so -- punk rock we would call her now. So the last day of third grade, punk rock, she said, "I'm losing [00:30:00] all of you this year. I love you. I'm going to see you again this year, but when I call your name, you get in line up here and get in line here." So they went on down to call the boys names. My name was Taylor, so she said, "John Taylor, you get in the middle," and I said, "Oh, this is fabulous. She's giving me a special, special --" she called the girls. She said, "Esther Lee," I remember the names, "you get in the middle with John Taylor." I stood there, and I go, "Why, she ain't all that special. She's plain Jane." Ms. Shephard said, "OK, all of you boys, you pass. All you girls, you pass. John Taylor, you and Esther fail. Good evening. I'll see you all next September."

It was devastating. I walked home down -- I cried home, got home to my mother and said -- [00:31:00] I said, "Mom, I failed. I failed," cried all that day, that night. And I said, "What did it mean, fail?" She said, "You had a lot of colds. You stayed home." And Ms. Shephard called me at the last conference and said, "We have two (inaudible). He's not mature enough now, and he's too active. We can do one of two things: hold him back or give him drugs." My mother said, "Uh-uh, no drugs for him. Give me something to hold me down." She said, "Hold him back." I said, "Well, why didn't you tell me that?" She said, "Ms. Shephard did it her way. She wanted to make a point on you."

But I think it was because she was just -- she couldn't discipline me because I was all over the place, (inaudible) all of that. She said, "I'll fix him. I'll put him right in the middle, and everybody will laugh at him." Oh, it was horrible. But now, I say it's good, because the next year I wanted to be liked. I became the class clown, dancing and

jumping and screaming and [00:32:00] all, because I didn't want them to know that I failed, because failing means something is wrong with me. So I was the class clown. They all liked me, and that was the [past?]. That was the teacher that just did -- I think she did the wrong thing.

JA: Were your schools integrated?

JT: No.

JA: What was the racial makeup of your teachers?

JT: Black.

JA: How did the teachers treat the students?

JT: Wonderful, except Ms. Shephard. (laughter)

JA: Did you have books?

JT: Huh?

JA: Did you have books?

JT: Not that many. You know, we had [assignments?]. And another thing I did, my father was a waiter, and we had this teacher that loved to eat. And my father worked at a restaurant and would have crab cakes and imperial crab. He was sitting here with crab cakes and imperial crab, [00:33:00] and she just loved me. She just -- because I fed her. They're all dead now, I know, but that was my experience with teachers. My father thought by bribing them they would be nice to me, but it's just interesting to look back at my life at how things were predestined that made me who I am now.

JA: What were the conditions of the books?

JT: They were OK. You know, there was nothing new, but we didn't evaluate the books according to how new they are. But I didn't know that was -- we were just given books, and we would read. And I always remember I loved this teacher that came in and told stories. She would read and tell stories like that. I used to sit there and just listen to her, because I loved storytelling. It's amazing that I do it now, but I liked her telling stories. That was one of my favorite subjects besides dancing, physical education.

JA: Were your classmates friendly?

JT: Oh, yeah. I only had one fight [00:34:00] in my whole experience. I had this girl I liked, and this boy liked the same girl, so he would take spitball and go and hit the back of my head. And I would be (inaudible), and he would throw those spitballs. I took the spitball and threw it at him. He said, "Ms. Jones, John Taylor threw a spitball at me." She said, "Go down to Ms. [Clark's?] room." Ms. Clark had a stick like this, brought me back into the classroom, and said, "Don't you throw spitballs in my class." The next day, I couldn't even walk, right in the middle of my leg. That was an experience, the first experience, you know, with fighting I had at the time, but he lied and said, "Ms. Jones, John Taylor threw a spitball at me." She said, "Go down to Ms. Clark's room." We knew that, because Ms. Clark would stand outside and make sure you'd stay in line with this big thick stick. I had good memories of that.

JA: [00:35:00] Did you and your classmates live in the same community?

JT: My class, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, mostly on Lanvale Street, Arlington, that went to the same school. And another thing was that the vocational school was right up there by that park, too, Lafayette Square.

JA: Did you have any special friends in school?

JT: Yeah. You know, I was treated -- yeah, I remember the special ones now, but that's like 60, 70 years ago. I was -- you know, they liked me. We had no problem except for that boy who threw spitballs at me.

JA: How do you think your classmates would remember you?

JT: Well, you know, it's funny, because we still have class reunion. And when I was graduating in [art?], they said, "You'll be the most likely to succeed, John Taylor, as an art teacher. You'll never be a teacher, get a job." And I was the first to get a job as an art teacher. And then, I used [00:36:00] to be very messy with my work. They said, "You're the epitome of mess," those things that my friends said about me. They were saying it in kindness, but they got to my head, and I just said -- I wanted to achieve. I want them to stop saying that. Now, at the class reunion, they say, "Oh, I knew you'd



make it. I know you --" but they told me I would never make it, so that kind of helped me build -- mercy, mercy and favor. Go ahead.

JA: Do you still keep in contact with any of your classmates?

JT: One woman is at my church. She graduated with me, and her husband graduated, in 1955, and I still see her every Sunday, but that's the only one in my classroom that I still contact. Now, when we get to reunion, it's less and less and less. We had about 55 [00:37:00] that graduated in the class of '55, February of '55, and now it's down to about 17 out of the 55 people still alive. We had the survey, and when they check them off, we'd check off, "Dead, dead, dead."

JA: All of the following questions relate to your high school experience. What was the name of your high school?

JT: Douglass High School.

JA: Where was it located?

JT: On Gwynn Falls Parkway. Is that -- by (inaudible), what's that road?

F: Gwynns Falls.

JT: Gwynns Falls Parkway.

JA: What subjects were you taught?

JT: Art. I mean, I was on -- what do you call it when you're a professional, going to be a doctor or a lawyer? What was that?

F: College prep.

JA: Were you able to have electives?

JT: Have what?

JA: Have electives.

JT: Yes, but I didn't know what electives were. I just went to school. [00:38:00] We didn't have that elective idea until I got to college, because at college my brother gave me my schedule, because I had no idea of what he was going to give me. But he gave me physics, chemistry, college algebra, French, and physical education and ROTC. I failed

French, (inaudible), physics, everything except I got an A in physical education because of dancing and movement. But everything else I failed, and that's when they sent a letter to my parents saying, "Your son needs a 2.0 average. He only got 0.9. If he doesn't get something better than that, he's going to just, you know --" drop me from college, Morgan. That was my devastating time, but that's called mercy. I was given mercy.

JA: Did you plan to attend college after high school?

JT: No. [00:39:00] I was going to go to New York and be a dancer.

JA: Did you take home economics, business, or trade courses?

JT: No.

JA: Were the classes or subjects taught by different teachers?

JT: Yes. You're talking about college, right?

JA: High school.

JT: High school, yes.

JA: The following questions relate to your junior college, college, or university experiences. Were you able to attend a college or university?

JT: Yes.

JA: What was the name?

JT: I tried to -- I went to Morgan College, and then I went to, like I said, the Maryland Institute of Art.

JA: Did you go straight from high school to college?

JT: Yes. I first tried to get into the University of Maryland, [00:40:00] but they didn't take blacks then. So they said that I could take (inaudible) place except the University of Maryland, and they would pay for it, so I just ended up in, you know, Morgan.

JA: Did you live on campus?

JT: No.

JA: Did you join a fraternity?

JT: No. They ain't going to beat me. (laughs)

JA: What was the racial makeup of your college?

JT: Black, black, black. (laughter) Except at Maryland Institute of Art, it was white, white, white. And as a matter of fact, they told me -- they said, "You're lucky, because we don't have too many black students here at the University of Maryland." And my first class, which was at the University of Maryland, was -- what do you call it -- watercolor. The first night, I took watercolor up. The teacher came there. They said, "Where did you go to school to learn artwork?" I said, [00:41:00] "Morgan." They said, "Were you (inaudible) there?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "You're not going to pass my class. You'd better get out of here now." First day, first night. I got up, and, to show you how mercy is, I got up to change my -- I was just -- I didn't know what to do. I knew I couldn't draw and paint and sculpt like they wanted me to, but these (inaudible) did it. You know, I went up to the registrar to change it, and this man said, "Aren't you John Taylor?" I said, "Yeah." "You're the dancer." I said, "Yeah." He said, "What are you here for?" I said, "I want to take the courses." He said, "Oh, I teach jewelry." I said, "You do?" He said, "How many hours do you need?" I said, "I need 30 hours." "How many (inaudible)?" I said, "Four." He said, "Take my course, and I'll give you six credits." I said, "OK. I'll sign up for six credits." I got six credits, [00:42:00] so he helped me do all of my jewelry. Mercy, favor, favor, mercy. Go ahead.

JA: How did the teachers treat the students at your college?

JT: Oh, wonderful, you know. I, because I entertained, they loved me. Everybody loved entertainment, and I wasn't in conflict. I wasn't negative except when I got to college. I mean, I took -- I got 30 hours at the Maryland Institute of Art, and the (inaudible) I was a token to a lot of the teachers there. I had a history teacher that was just nasty. He just talked, talked, talked. He had a broken leg -- talked, talked, talked. At the end, he said, "You didn't learn nothing in my class," but it so happened that a teacher, a white teacher at Morgan, came to the University of Maryland and said, "Come in my class in history." I took his class in history. He gave me a grade, [00:43:00] a passing grade. So you know, you have ups and downs, but the devil never sleeps. Hello.

JA: When you graduated, what was your degree?

JT: BA -- no, BS at Morgan and an MFA at Maryland Institute of Art.

JA: What do they stand for?

JT: Maryland -- MFA, BS, bachelor of science, master's of fine arts, MFA.

JA: Did you obtain any additional degrees?

JT: No, but I've done a lot of work teaching in colleges all over the country, working with children, how they're working with children.

JA: Did you work while you were going to school?

JT: Yes. When I was going to school, I worked, like, at the school. I'd wash dishes and help with cleaning up at these restaurants up at 30 -- [00:44:00] what do you call them -- Johns Hopkins Hospital. They had a lot of senior buildings that I worked in washing dishes and all.

JA: These questions will not ask about any personal beliefs. They are only to get information about the church's role in your life, if any. Did you attend church as a child?

JT: Yes. The first school, I was two years old. I was in Metropolitan -- or three years old -- Metropolitan on Lanvale Street, that section by the parkway. I lived one block down, because I could walk down to that. Then, my parents were Baptists, so when I graduated from sixth grade, my brother started to going to Shiloh Baptist Church where -- my parents were members of it. And one Sunday, the man said, "Do we have any visitors here?" And my brother and I raised our hands. He said, "Next week, you'll be baptized," so they baptized us in the Shiloh Baptist Church. [00:45:00] But then, when I got a job on Sundays, my mother said, "You never miss a Sunday." So I said, "Well, I'm working on Sunday." She said, "Well, go to the Catholics on," what do you call it, "Saturdays." And late in the afternoon on Saturday -- they had mass all day and all night as a Catholic. So one day, I just got into trouble, and I prayed to get out of that. God sent a Catholic angel for me, and I got out of that. But then, like I said, when I found out that the Catholics in Maryland, Baltimore, were different than (inaudible), I got into Buddhism. "Nam myōhō rengo kyō. Nam myōhō rengo kyō. Nam myōhō --" and I was chanting. That was a Buddhist thing, and that was (inaudible) and all of that. And then, finally, I got [disco king?], and I didn't need God. And then, God said, "I'll fix you. I'll stop

disco.” And I had no disco. (laughs) And I went through a change with that [00:46:00] area and aerobics, and then finally I got with [Wolftrap?], and I came back to the church. So I’ve been around.

JA: Did you and your family attend services together?

JT: Not together. My father -- first, my mother sent us to Sunday school, and she sent us to, you know, the next church, the Baptists, but I was always searching, searching. And then, when I found God, I was back to the Baptists, and, you know, I just found him. I found him.

F: So which (inaudible) did you find him in?

JT: Back to my church -- Columbia Baptist Fellowship, Baptists, Southern Baptists too.

F: OK. I hear you.

JT: Integrated.

JA: What part did church play in your life as a child?

JT: Sunday school was the stories about Jesus and his -- but I didn’t understand that until [00:47:00] after I got into trouble, and I screamed. And he said, “All right. I’ll take it this time, but you better not do it anymore.” (laughs) I mean, that’s what it is, because at first it was fire and brimstone. All I heard about was fire and brimstone. “If you do this, you’re going to roast like a rotisserie chicken,” and I believed that for a long time, you know, that God was evil, and every evil you did you’re going to get paid for that and on a level down, down, down. But then, I found that God is love, just pure love, regardless of what you do, when you do it, how you do it. He still loves you. See, I said that. Call the police. (laughter)

JA: Is the church still an active part of your life?

JT: Oh, yeah. I have two churches. I have a Baptist church and a Pentecostal church. I call -- one is “gas” and the other one is “hot (inaudible).” And I go to the first one -- I go to Sunday school first. Then, I go to the service second, and then I run out to my Pentecostal church, and they have [00:48:00] a Bible study after that. Just fill it -- fill me

up. I'm not perfect, but I get the Word. I need the Word. I need the Word. Greatest is He is in me that is in the world. Hello, [see?].

JA: What role did your church in particular play in your community?

JT: Very active. You know, they go out and try to get people to come in. We have dinner on Wednesday. We send out materials. They're getting ready to go on the internet, trying to get people -- I'm working mainly with the children there because I'm thinking of ideas of stories and just (inaudible) Bible study, and I'm active with teaching kids songs. It's just like I do in my regular job. And it's interesting, because I've been to about a hundred different churches all over the United States, and each of them is trying to -- some of them are very successful. Our church is not as strong in getting youth in as possible. They're trying to do that now, get more youth involved [00:49:00] in the services. We have Wednesday night, and they invite people from the middle school for free lunch, free dinner, and we've got about 12 boys and two girls from the neighborhood that come down every Wednesday to eat.

JA: What role did your church in particular play in the Civil Rights Movement?

JT: Well, not -- Southern Baptists weren't that active. They were kind of on their own. They didn't want blacks in the southern area, but, you know, they're coming around now. That's why we stopped calling it a church. We call it a fellowship. We have Columbia Baptist Fellowship, because they were -- Southern Baptist are still -- I'm interested in looking at the night show called "Hate in America" at eight o'clock, how some groups just hate and still hate, and how we've got to just work on getting them to, you know, understand our religion. They're trying to put everyone together, and it's not going to happen. Everybody is going to believe everything together. [00:50:00] But my church is very active. We have four or five ministers now, and this one is dynamic. He just teaches the Word and has all kinds of groups, and he's got a good closing, a good [crowd?]. The congregation is pretty good.

JA: Have you ever been married?

JT: No, I had the chance, but it fell. It failed. (laughs) It fell through. Then, I felt like I wasn't to be getting married. It never was my thing. But I had a lot of trying to get

me (inaudible) disco king and aerobics and all. They just threw themselves, trying to get a husband. (laughs)

F: Move closer to the table.

F: Move closer to the table.

F: Move closer so I can get you in the shot.

JA: Do you have any children?

JT: No, but I raised three boys. They were 13, 14, and 16. Their mother was [00:51:00] thrown out by her sister, and one of the boys used to cut my lawn. So she said, "My boyfriend and I need a place. Would you take care of one of my sons until our apartment is ready?" I said, "What do you mean, take care of him?" She said, "I want him to be registered in Howard County and not in the school system, so we're going into a motel," which was \$75 a night. I said, "Wait a minute. I have a house in Baltimore City," the second room was empty. So she said, "Oh, we appreciate that. We'll pay you for that." So she said, "Well, [Donny?], you stay at John's house, and I'll take care, and I'll pay for your clothes." The next weekend, she said, "Listen, Mr. Taylor, I had forgotten to tell you I have two more boys, 14 and 17. And you know, I've got to get them registered in Howard County, and I don't have residency here in Baltimore City." [00:52:00] She said, "Would you just carry them and get them registered at your address?" I said, "OK." The next week, she had to go to the hospital, manic depressive, suicidal. She kept -- I kept those boys for seven years. When she got out, finally she got herself together. I said, "You take these boys." One just came back three weeks ago. He's 55. The other one is 57, (inaudible), and the other one lives up in Jersey. I know the experience of family. I've been in court. I've been out of court. I've been in the hospital. I've been to mental (inaudible), so I know. I know it, and I thank God I didn't have them on my own. (laughs)

JA: What were their names?

JT: Should I say Donny, Michael, and [Darren?].

JA: Are you currently employed?

JT: Self-employed.

JA: What kind of work do you do?

JT: For the children, making songs. I'm [00:53:00] (inaudible) call a master artist for the Wolftrap Foundation. I go into schools and daycares and teach parents how to use music, movement, and drama, and teach the kids through song, movement, dance, puppetry, storytelling.

JA: Were you ever in the military?

JT: No. I was going to step on the bus to go to Korea, and the Spirit said, "Get off. Don't go on that bus." I didn't get on, and 16 of those people are dead in Korea. Favor.

JA: Were you active in the Civil Rights Movement?

JT: In a sense, because I made up this game -- well, it's not a game. It's a story about the hall of fame, people who have -- were in the Civil Rights Movement. I made up songs and dances and (inaudible) to teach our people that we do count, too, and we are -- the famous [00:54:00] Afro-American people during the time of the Civil War and up to the present.

JA: What are your favorite activities or hobbies?

JT: Dance, dance, dance. I used to love Monopoly, but then, when I grew up older, my hobbies are going to see dance companies and teaching ballroom dancing sometimes and Afro-Cuban -- I can't do it now at 80. I could teach ballroom dance because it doesn't take as much dance, but jazz and African dance takes a lot of energy now, so I just stick with ballroom. Some people call me up for private lessons for getting married. Their parents or children will be getting married, and they want to learn how to do the waltz, so those things are easy right now.

JA: What is your favorite family story?

JT: My most favorite story is about how my parents would go --

F: Pause.

(break in audio)



JA: Family story.

JT: My father got off [00:55:00] once a week, for one week in a year to go hunting. So every time he would go hunting, he would bring back all these animals to eat. And so, we dared not say, "I don't like that." He'd put it on the table, and he said, "That's muskrat. That's squirrel. That's rabbit." Well, we ate it, you know. We didn't know different, and the only thing I hated was New Year's Eve -- New Year's Day, because we had black-eyed peas and a hog's head. And that head was on the table, his eyes looking at you, and we had to eat the hog's head with the chitlins and the hog maws. We just ate it. I hated eating New Year's Day a hog's head on that -- you'd pull out the eyes and the -- uh, we had to eat it, [00:56:00] and you dared not say you didn't like it. My brother's story is -- to go like that when he was raised by his grandmother, and my grandmother let him up from the country at 5:00 back with the family, and brother said he got to the table. He went, "Uh!" And then, once (inaudible) the food, my father took him back in the back room and whooped the living devil out of him. He came back to the table and (inaudible). He tells that story today about how the devil -- he said, all of a sudden, his grandmother (inaudible) who spoiled him, and my father, this big giant, came in there and whooped his tail for his acting up at the table. Never had no problem. My father told me, eleven o'clock, he said, "If you don't come in here by eleven o'clock, 11:01, your clothes will be outside the door." I'd know I was late. [00:57:00] So I'm saying those are the stories that I remember. My father said, "Don't do this or that."

The last story of my father, my brother, we were always arguing about, "He's got more soda than I have." My father would say, "OK." That time, it was 17 cents for a tall bottle. My father said, "Here's 17 cents for you and 17 cents for you, and you go and get the soda you like." I said, "(inaudible)," and I'm drinking. "Uh-uh! That's not finished." My stomach is sticking out, and my brother is saying, "I can't --" my father whooped us to death. "Don't you ever fight over soda or anything anymore." I never did. So those are my stories that I remember: the hog's head, the beatings, and, "Don't come in at 11:02, because your clothes will be outside." I didn't test him.

JA: What was the happiest moment of your life? [00:58:00]

JT: Well, later, when I got all of these -- the biggest one was surprising me when I got the first Emmy, and that -- you know, that was really an achievement. I never thought I would get an Emmy, but I wanted one. And when that was held, it was in Washington, \$100 a table and \$25, tuxedo, limousine coming there, and they said, "And the winner of the children's television show is Kinderman!" I said, "Ah!" I ran up there, ran up there, and she said, "He's excited, isn't he?" It was the highlight of, you know -- you know what an Emmy is. It's television excellence. So I got two, three of them there. That was the highest highlight. But then, other than that, I think the experience of church to me now is much more high and more valuable to me, [00:59:00] being able to express and to understand and learn about what life is all about. But it's my purpose. I found my purpose. Maybe -- see, I love dancing and all of that, but I found my purpose as being Kinderman in 1985, so that's '85, '95, 105, now, we're at 116, about 15 years of learning and understanding what the purpose of life is, and 90 percent of the people don't get that experience. They think it's about themselves, but it's not about yourself. You know, it's about the spiritual level of life.

JA: Who is the most influential person in your life?

JT: Jesus. That's who I can really say if you look at it as a spiritual experience. I mean, I love a lot of people. I meet a lot of nice people. I did things for the president and governor. So they don't influence me as much as the Word now, [01:00:00] to me. You know, you can -- I'm 80 years old now, so I'm closer to much more understanding, like wisdom. And I enjoy every moment, every second, every day, every hour that I'm alive to express myself.

F: Amen.

JA: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in your life?

JT: About my purpose. My purpose is to glorify God and to help children and help parents, and just everything is about glorifying Him, not me, and not the experiences I had. But that's the most important thing I learn, and I spent a lot of time thinking about the Word and listening to the Word and sharing the Word.

JA: Did you accomplish all that you hoped to?

JT: Yes, I think so. Yeah, hey.

JA: If you could, would there be anything in your life [01:01:00] you would like to go back and change?

JT: Yes, there are some things I have said or done that I would go back -- but, you know, it's called forgiveness, and that, to me, is important. I can't tell you all the unnecessary, negative things that happened, but there have been a lot of things that I would, if I could go back, I would change.

JA: Do you feel that you are leaving a legacy?

JT: I hope so. Friends, friends, one, two, three, all [God?] friends are here with me. Call him.

JA: What would that legacy, and for whom are you leaving that legacy?

JT: For the children, teaching them that there's -- right is right, and wrong is wrong, and both of them don't get along. If you're right and never wrong, Jesus Christ will make you strong. Right on. Right on. Right on. Scene.

JA: I will relate some milestones in [01:02:00] African American history. If applicable, please tell me how you felt when they happened.

JT: Now, give me the understand of what you're saying.

JA: It's a list of African American moments that happened in history, and you can just tell me how you felt about each one.

JT: Oh, I felt -- a lot of prayer is needed, you know, to kind of continue working and sharing with each other.

JA: I have to read them.

JT: OK, go ahead. Read them.

JA: In 1947, Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier in Major League baseball.

JT: Yay!

JA: In 1948, President Truman officially integrates the US Armed Services.

JT: Yay.

JA: In 1954, Brown v. the Board of Education makes segregation in schools unconstitutional.

JT: Call the police.

JA: In 1955, Rosa Parks' arrest for defying bus segregation laws in Montgomery, Alabama. [01:03:00]

JT: Wonderful. These things were just a gift. These people were gifts.

JA: In 1957, Little Rock Nine integrates Central High School in Arkansas.

JT: Great, great, wonderful.

JA: In 1960, Woolworth's sit-in by Greensboro Four in North Carolina.

JT: Award them. Give them awards.

JA: In 1962, James Meredith integrates the University of Mississippi.

JT: Flawless. Wonderful.

JA: In 1963, the March on Washington for jobs and freedom.

JT: Hello, see, call the police. Yes.

JA: In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed.

JT: Yes, great, wonderful.

JA: In 1964, Sidney Poitier became the first negro to win the Best Actor Oscar.

JT: Excellent. Gift.

JA: In 1967, Thurgood Marshall was appointed the first negro on the Supreme Court.

JT: Isn't that nice? Great. Wonderful. [01:04:00]

JA: In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated.

JT: Horrible, horrible, but it worked -- all things work together.

JA: In 2001, Colin Powell was appointed the first African American Secretary of State.

JT: It was about time.

JA: In 2002, Halle Berry and Denzel Washington received the Best Actor and Actress Oscars, making it the first time African Americans won both categories in the same year.

JT: Excellent. Excellent.

JA: In 2008, Barack Obama was elected the first African American president of the United States.

JT: (cheering)

JA: In 2012, Barack Obama was reelected as the president of the United States.

JT: See. I said that.

JA: Is there anything that you would like to add that was not covered in this interview?

JT: No, I think you covered a lot, and I thank you. You were wonderful.

JA: Thank you. Thank you.

JT: I'm going to give you a raise. [01:05:00]

F: Any [presenters?] have a question?

F: Yes. How did you get the name "Kinderman"?

JT: I was in New York City at a workshop with these kids. So at Wolfrap, they always have you introduce yourself to the children. So Billy B. was there, and [Valerie?] was there, and they introduced themselves. When they got to me, I said, "I'm Kinderman." Everyone was saying, "I thought you said Kinderman." I said, "Yeah. You know Batman? You know Spiderman? Now, you know Kinderman, and you won't forget that." And I said to myself, "I'm not going to use 'John Taylor' no more until it's all across the country." And I was in San Diego getting on a plane, and a man said, "Hey, Kinderman is here. Kinderman." And that's what -- it just stuck, Kinderman, Batman, Spiderman. So I'm Kinderman.

F: OK. And can you name some dance shows that you watched [01:06:00] back in the day that influenced you?

JT: I think Gene Kelly, because he's my favorite, dancing in the rain, and all the -- what's the other man? Not Gene Kelly as much as (inaudible) --

F: Fred Astaire.

JT: -- Fred Astaire. I just watched those shows. I loved those shows, dance shows, and I liked black African dance, things like -- there were shows that Katherine Dunham would make, and they came to the Royal Theater. I didn't like tap dancers as much as I liked modern dance and jazz dance and the dances in these shows, dance, dance, dance. And then, when I got involved in dance, I just -- I was more appreciative and understanding of dance.

F: OK. And you had mentioned that your mother was a day worker, and I'm not sure if some of our students understand what that is, so can you explain what a day worker was?

JT: OK. My mother did hair. Then, on the weekends or -- she was a waitress. She'd go there, and to get tips [01:07:00] she would do acrobatic dances. She would take her leg and put it back behind her neck, and she did this. She'd put the legs -- stand the legs up high. People used to be amazed. And then, one day, not being a trained dancer, she (inaudible) her act by splitting her legs, you know, doing a -- bam! Tore all of her ligaments in her leg. The doctor said, "Don't dance no more." So my mother got pregnant with me. My mother told me -- she said, "I would every day say, 'Dance, [baby?], dance.'" And I'd be boom, boom, boom in the womb. And so then, our mother said -- when she had -- when I was conceived -- not conceived, but when I was being birthed, the doctor said, "This baby came out dancing." My mother told me she would sing and move with me in the womb, so obviously there was a connection there with me and my mother and dance. So she was an acrobatic dancer. That's how she got extra tips. [01:08:00]

F: What's a day worker? A day worker.

JT: Oh, cleaning houses, cleaning houses. She got -- when she got older, she would go there and clean the house. And I remember one time it was raining, and my mother just got out of the house and started walking to catch a bus because she was scared of

driving. She never learned to drive. So she would get on the bus and go to this doctor's office, and, I mean, I think it was [planned?] that she got a doctor and worked at a lawyer's office. And on her last days, the doctor took care of her, didn't charge her anything, and the lawyer took care of -- gave her clothes. They would always be giving my mother clothes and things like that, so that's a day's worker, yeah.

F: Yeah, OK. So you would say that dancing is your passion right now?

JT: Oh, yeah. More so --

F: Like, so entertaining?

JT: I think [01:09:00] teaching, teaching more so than dance or performing anymore. I can't keep my legs up like that, but I found that there's so much need for learning how to teach your children, and I said right now, more so than teaching them gospel, teaching them that is more so than just entertainment or showing them that they can do this breakdance and all of that that has no meaning. So right now, I'm teaching using, "Hello, everybody, it's a brand-new day. It's time to give thanks in a very special way. Just clap, (inaudible), clap, say it from your heart. Giving thanks every day is how we start. We thank Him for the Earth. We'll thank Him for the sky. We'll thank Him for the teachers who help us survive. We'll thank Him for our friends and our families too. We thank Him for our health and the things we can do. We're thankful all day. We're thankful all night. We're thankful that all things turn out all right." And that's Romans 28. [01:10:00] You see? So I'm doing all my movements, all of my things like, "When I say red, put your hands on your head." [Religion says?], "When I say read, God is not dead. When I say black, God is coming back. When I say blue, God loves you. When I saw brown, God is all around." So I'm taking scriptures and working it into movement.

F: OK.

JT: See, I said that.

F: I know.

F: OK. And you said you received three Emmys.

JT: Yeah.

F: You named one of the Emmys. What were the other two Emmys for?

JT: Same thing, the television show, yeah.

F: Same thing for the television show, *Kinderman*? OK.

JT: Each year, they -- Best Actor, Best Singer, Best Dancer.

F: *The Kinderman Show*.

F: OK. No, I know he got it for *Kinderman*, but as an actor.

JT: Yeah.

F: OK. And would you say that Jesus is the center of the life (inaudible) impacted you?

JT: Oh, hello. But see, I didn't know that until he really made an appearance, not visually, but hearing and listening. I have a godson now who -- he's just turned 18, and he -- I take him [01:11:00] to school sometimes from his place. But he came, and he said, "Godfather, I'm in trouble." I said, "What happened?" "I got robbed." I said, "What do you mean you got robbed?" Is that [thing?] on?

F: Is that thing still on?

F: Mm-hmm.

F: Oh.

JT: And come to the circumstances, he got himself robbed because he was doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. And I said this to everybody, "For every positive action, there's an equal opposite positive reaction. For every negative action, there's an equal and opposite negative action." So we all have choices. We choose your actions that are going to happen to you. That's what I'm finding more. So if you make a -- even a thought has energy. Your words have energy. So when you talked to kids or talk to people, your energy is impacting their spirit, and your spirit is impacting their spirit. So you've got to be careful what you say.

F: OK. What's something that you would like to say [01:12:00] to our youth in the program watching you, hearing you, (inaudible)?



JT: I would say that they need to get into a spiritual relationship other than a me relationship or a [world?] relationship, because somehow, you get on that spiritual level, and by listening to the Word, sharing the Word, understanding the Word, and that is up to parents or guardians to talk to them about that, but they don't do that. I was doing a workshop in Washington, and the parents and the children come there, and they don't want you to say gender. "Don't say him or her. Let them all come up. They want them to find their own spiritual direction as they get older, but don't try to influence it right now." And that's just crazy. He said, "Don't mention girl, boy. Don't (inaudible) pretty and nice with anybody [01:13:00] else except -- you know, let the parents -- let the child learn on his own when he gets older and choose later on." So if you don't learn that foundation now, you're just lost.

F: Wow.

F: Is there anything you would like to say, Kinderman?

JT: About what?

F: About the interview.

JT: Flawless. Wonderful. I love this.

F: OK. (laughs)

JT: It's a really rewarding experience to have somebody interested and leave something to the kids on film.

F: And we would like to thank you very much for taking your time.

JT: Oh, you're just saying it. Say it again.

F: We would like to thank you Kinderman, for taking your time to come be a part of this --

F: Yes. And we love you.

JT: Thank you.

F: -- with our young people.

JT: Thank you.

F: We appreciate you.

F: You know we do.

JT: Did I do OK?

F: Yes, you did. You did wonderful.

F: You did wond-- it was flawless.

F: Call the police. Call the police.

JT: (laughter) Thank you so much.

F: Thank you so much, Kinderman.

F: Thank you so much.

END OF AUDIO FILE

**SIOHP Interview #5 Elder Victoria Smith and Youth Mariah Grier**

MARIAH GRIER: [00:00:00] My name is Mariah Grier. I am 16 years old. Today is April 30, 2016. We are at the Walbrook Branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. It is --

F: One-twenty-five.

MG: One-twenty-five --

F: It's p.m.

MG: -- p.m. This is an interview for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral Project, which is an --

F: Initiative.

MG: -- initiative of the National Association of Black Storytellers, and sponsored by the Griot Circle of Maryland. Please tell me your full name.

VICTORIA SMITH: My full name is Victoria [Lee?] Lancaster Smith.

MG: [00:01:00] What would you like me to call you?

VS: Well, everybody calls me Aunt Vicky or Grandma Vicky.

MG: OK.

VS: (laughs) So, whatever.

MG: Before we begin the formal interview, Mama Vicky, I would like to thank you for volunteering -- I would like to thank you for volunteering to be in the interview as a part of this project. It means a lot to me and the other students. Please make sure -- please make your answers to the point and relevant to the questions asked. If I interrupt you at any time, please understand I'm not being rude, but the additional information that you are sharing may be the answer to another question that will be asked later in the interview. When were you born?

VS: I was born on March 25<sup>th</sup> in 1931, and in Baltimore, Maryland, on Madison Avenue.  
[00:02:00] But my mother moved us to Catonsville a little bit later, and then back to Baltimore later.

MG: Where do you currently live?

VS: Right now, I live at the -- 201 Warren Avenue. That's on Federal Hill, where the actual hill is. (laughter) There's a street on the side called Warren, and that's where I am right now.

MG: The categories that will be covered in this interview are growing up, education, role of the church, adult life, reflections, African-American timeline, questions about how significant events in African-American history affected your life. If you need to take a break or if you -- if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer at any time during the interview, please feel free to let me know. [00:03:00] Where were you born?

VS: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, as I said, on Madison Avenue. And then, later, we moved to Catonsville, while I was a baby. I do not remember when we moved. I just know that we moved to Catonsville. But we moved back to Baltimore when I was in the second grade.

MG: What was your neighborhood like?

VS: My neighborhood -- actually, I lived in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, so everybody around in my neighborhood were black people. I could walk you right now exactly where the perimeter of my neighborhood was. And the -- so that would be in Northwest Baltimore, to the midsection. It took up the whole section.

MG: What were your parents' names?

VS: [00:04:00] My mother's name was Margaret Lancaster, and my father was Turner Lancaster. His father actually, on his birth certificate, wrote "doctor" because he was a fam-- from a family of 12 children. And the father in their family, many years ago, wanted each one to be educated. So he thought that my father should be the doctor. So on his birth certificate is written "Doctor Turner Lancaster." But he was not a doctor. (laughter)

MG: What kind of work did your mother do?

VS: My mother was a maid, and she had been a maid, apparently, all of her life. But she worked, and that's how we managed to live and have food and be able to have a house, because of her work.

MG: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

VS: [00:05:00] Yes. (laughs) My mother had 10 pregnancies, and six living children. And so, my brothers and sisters were the other -- the five -- other five that remained from the six living children.

MG: What were their names, and how old were they?

VS: I had -- the oldest sister was Elizabeth, and she died at the age of around 65, with breast cancer. The second was a brother. His name was Turner. And he was in the service, in the military, in 19-- in the World War II. The third was my sister, Margaret. She and I were extremely close. I was the next person, Victoria. We were close. And then, my mother had another ch-- Charles, my brother. And another baby, Paula Lancaster, my sister. There are three of us left now.

MG: [00:06:00] As a child, did you get along with your brothers and sisters?

VS: Yes, we did. I was very close to my sister, Margaret, because we were two years apart. So, very often, there would be so much noise in the house that people would ask my mother if she had company, and it would be just the two of us playing with our dolls and on the floor, whatever, playing with our toys.

MG: Do you have a favorite sister or brother?

VS: My favorite sister -- bro-- my favorite, actually, was my sister, Margaret, because we were so very, very close.

MG: Can you tell me about Margaret?

VS: Yes. Margaret -- our family was -- in order to explain my sister, Margaret, I have to say that my mother was a very light-skinned woman. My father was a very dark-skinned man. This was very important in the '30s and back there. So, half of the children were -- we were all different colors. I was the darkest one in the family, so I tell this because [00:07:00] I was considered very ugly because I was dark. Margaret was considered very pretty because she was light. But we got along beautifully because everybody felt sorry for me. (laughter)

F: Excuse me. Mother Victoria, you said that -- you told -- we know that your mother did. What did your father do?

VS: Oh, my father was -- worked as a farmer. He worked at a place called [Gunnery?] Sanatorium, which was actually near Glen Burnie. At that time, white people who had mental illnesses did not go to the same hospitals -- mental institutions -- with black people. Many of them who had money went to private institutions. My father worked for one, and in that place, these would be wealthier white people. And then they would -- they would have their food -- everything was right there on their land. So my father did the farming on the land. He actually took care of the [00:08:00] vehicles that they had to drive their patients back and forth. This was white people's mental-illness homes, years ago -- private homes.

MG: Do you live near your brothers and sisters?

VS: Did I...? I'm sorry.

MG: Do you live near them?

VS: Yes, my brother's -- lives in Baltimore, Northwest. My sister -- the youngest -- is in a nursing home in the Catonsville area. And that's the three of us left. And she has been in a nursing home for many years.

MG: How often do you see them?

VS: Well, my brother and I talk often on the phone, and I have another relative who takes me very often to see my sister in the nursing home. In fact, we went Sunday before last, we went to see her. I don't get there often because I don't drive. I'm 85. (laughter)

MG: Did you have a favorite toy or game that you used to play?

VS: We were -- played -- [00:09:00] actually, I did a -- my favorite thing was going to the library. (laughter) So I spent -- so I spent a lot of time at the library. And because -- I never really learned to skate, but we used to be able to play dodge ball, and we used to be able to play outside. And we would play -- I don't know if you ever heard of jacks, but jacks we would play -- is a toy that they had a long time ago. You threw a ball up, and you'd try to catch -- pick up all of the jacks. That's what we played a lot. Now, I loved playing jacks. (laughs)

MG: And did you take part in any organized sports?

VS: Not really, because for some reason, I didn't grow very much as a child. I was very small, so I never got chosen for teams of sports or anything, because I was very small. But in high school, they did teach us about [00:10:00] basketball, and I was able to play that. So, nobody ever chose me for anything because (laughs) I looked -- when I was about 10 or 11 years old, I looked like I was 5 years old. (laughter) I was very short, all my life, which I am now.

MG: Who were your best friends?

VS: My bests friends were four people. One was [Lorraine Johnson?]. Another one -- the other two were cousins, and they lived in Arbutus, and Lorraine lived in town. And we were like four, all the way through high school. We were pretty close friends. And then, another friend joined us, [Phyllis?], in high school. So those were my friends at the time. We were considered very backward, but those were my friends.

MG: What were they like?

VS: Well, (laughs) the two that lived in Arbutus had parents who were -- had already -- you know, were educated. [00:11:00] And I think -- I can't remember what the mothers and fathers did. We, apparently -- and I didn't know that -- were very poor. But I didn't know we were poor, because I got 50 cents to go to dancing class every Saturday, so I had no idea we were poor. So, those friends -- the two that lived in Arbutus -- lived very well. My friend -- other friend did not. But we were -- we didn't really go around telling each other who was poor and who wasn't poor. We just managed.

MG: Hm, interesting. Did you go to their house, or did they come to yours?

VS: They would -- I would go to Lorraine's house a lot, and very often I went to Arbutus to visit my friends. In fact, we were able to stay overnight. They had a house that was big enough for her to have pajama parties or have her friends over, so we could stay there. And then, the other ones were in -- were in town. And [00:12:00] when they came to visit, actually, my friends came -- liked my mother. So they would ask me, "Let's go [to your home?] so we can see Miss Margaret." They called my mother Miss Margaret. So, they would -- they would come visit me just to talk -- sit and talk with my mother,

because my mother would talk to them, and they liked that. So, that was how we really... She was the one who was really the popular one. (laughter)

MG: If you had a chores, what were they?

VS: Well, actually, I think most of them -- a couple of them were dolls. Because there were no black dolls at the time, so all of the dolls that were sold in the '30s were dolls -- white dolls. So there was a corner -- and right across from Lexington Market there was a store called Brager's, and they had -- Brager-Eisenberg. They had the toys, so every year we'd get a doll. And then we'd, you know, (inaudible) [00:13:00] that old doll and take up the new doll. And so, the dolls were very (inaudible) because we also had toys of sewing sets -- a little box with everything in it for sewing. And so, you could sew clothes for your dolls. So, I liked that because it had to do with fashion and clothing and things like that. So my favorite toy was the sewing set (laughs) and the dolls.

MG: Did your family have a television?

VS: We had no television at first, because they hadn't been in-- they probably were invented, but families did not have televisions. Later on in life, we had a television. No, I should not say that. We did not have a television. I didn't have a television until I got married. We had no television, uh-uh.

MG: When you did get a television, what did you watch?

VS: [00:14:00] I don't recall that television being on that much. (laughs) And I have to think. There were a few old programs that came on that we wouldn't even admit to these days. And I remember being able to watch one. It was called -- you will not believe this. It was called *It Pays to Be Ignorant*. Now, what the person would do is, they would kind of have these people lined up. You will not hear about this program now because nobody would admit that there was a program like that. But they would line up a few people every week on the program, and they would ask them a question. If the person managed through the whole 10 or 15 minutes not to answer that question, they got money. It was very unusual. (laughter) And it was called *It Pays to Be Ignorant*. You will not believe that. Nobody is going to admit the program was on. And it was back in the '30s. [00:15:00] But that was the program. And people would manage -- it would be



interesting -- the people would manage to ask all sorts of questions -- or answer all sorts of things without answering the question. So, if you were clever enough not to answer the question, you got paid. (laughter)

F: Mama Victoria, excuse me. I know you gave the names of your sisters, but did you have a nickname?

VS: Yes, actually, it was Tora. Because my sisters and brothers could not say Victoria when they were very young -- when they were -- my sister was three years old, or two years old, when I was born. So they couldn't say -- so she called me Tora. And everybody called me Tora. And I guess you would spell it T-O-R-A or something. I have no idea. But I know I was Tora. (laughs)

MG: Did your family have a car?

VS: [00:16:00] Let's put it -- no, we did not have a car at first, but later on we were able -- because my father worked at this place, Gunnery Sanatorium, which was near Glen Burnie, as I mentioned, they had to drive -- the mental place where they had the white people had cars. So they would allow them to drive -- the people who worked there could take that car, so he could take that car home and drive it back to work if he wanted to. So he was able to drive. Many people had no cars, so they were not able to drive.

MG: Did your family take trips in the car, or was it just for his job?

VS: We never had really trips in the car, except he would take us to get ice cream. I remember that. We'd be able to drive and get ice cream and something on Sunday. But the trips came through the schools, which gave you field trips in Baltimore. So they would take you to [00:17:00] Washington, DC, and other places. And that was the travel, because most people had no cars.

MG: Did your family have meals together?

VS: Yes, we did. We had meals together. My mother -- when I said she was a maid, she was also a cook. So she was a cook, and a laundress, and did everything for very wealthy white people. So we would have -- she -- like, on Thanksgiving, she would have to go and fix the whole meal for the white people that she worked for, and then come home and have a meal with her family. So she would be calling on the phone saying, "Did you put

the turkey in? Did you check the turkey?" And she would be telling us different things like that. And then, when we came home, she -- we would -- when she came home, we would eat together. So we did have meals together.

MG: How did your family celebrate birthdays and holidays?

VS: Actually, [00:18:00] she would bake a cake, not even from the box then, but from scratch. So, she would bake a cake. Each person got a cake on their birthday. I don't recall if we had ice cream or birthday part-- and I never had a birthday party, really, for myself, until I was 80 years old.

F: Mama Victoria, explain backing from scratch. What's baking from scratch?

VS: Baking from scratch is when you get a bowl out, and you get the flour, and you take the egg, and milk, and whatever else you're going to put, stir it up. There was no mixer. Stir it up, and then prepare the pans and put it in an old-fashioned oven. And the ovens we had, we had a stove that was wood-burning in the kitchen. So you put wood in the stove, and you heated up the oven, and then you could put the -- then you could bake. It was a big process, believe me. (laughter) Just for the birthday.

MG: What did people call African Americans when you were growing up?

VS: Oh, well, [00:19:00] actually, if you want to know the truth, they called them -- if we weren't listening, they called us spooks. They called us niggers. And they called... Now, what they did is, they changed names. We became black people, and we became Negro people, we became colored people. And when one of my friends, who was white, years later asked me what to call -- "what should I call you?" because the names kept changing. I said, "Call me whatever you call me when I'm not listening." So that meant some of those names that she had -- she looked at me like I was crazy, but I was. So those were names that changed, and we didn't become African Americans till much, much later, around -- we really started calling each other African Americans in the late '80s and the '90s and whatnot. But before that, we were -- we were Negroes or colored people or any of those names [00:20:00] like that.

MG: What was it like for you as an African American in your city where you grew up?

VS: In the city, was it...

MG: In the city that you grew up in.

VS: Oh, actually, it was very -- it was really very different. The reason that we left -- my mother left Catonsville was because they had no kindergarten for black kids then, anyway. But you only could go to the first, I think, to the sixth. It was -- it went through eight then. Six or the eighth grade. And there was no high school for black people. So the reason that she moved us all back into Baltimore was so we could go to school. If a person wanted to go to school, to go to high school, they would often take the number of someone who lived in Baltimore City, otherwise you had to pay. So you could pretend this was your aunt or somebody, and get the address, and live in that person's home in Baltimore and go to school. And they only had three schools. [00:21:00] Three high schools.

MG: Did you and your family experience segregation, or racism?

VS: Yes. It was complete segregation, that so I could walk you in the area where we lived, in the place where we were, it was complete segregation all the way through. I never went to a school -- I never sat next to a white person until I went back to school years and years later in Michigan. And that was after I was married and had kids. Before that, we always -- I had never had a black -- a white teacher, I never had white students sit next to me.

MG: Let's see. How did it affect you as a child?

VS: Well, it's very interesting, because as I said, when we first moved back to Baltimore, [00:22:00] I was in School Number 100, which was on Mount Street, which is in the area, Sandtown-Winchester area. But I went to school at Mount Street. I never figured out or know the answer why, but I was transferred to 119, which was 119, which was Gilmore and Mosher Street in the third -- in the fourth grade. And as -- well, what happened is the teacher told my mother that they could skip me -- they called it skipping then -- skip the fourth -- I think it was skipping the third grade or skip the fourth grade. And my mother thought it would not be a good idea, because she felt that everybody would be older. So they didn't let me skip, but I think I was about nine, maybe nine years old then, nine or 10. And so then they transferred me to 119, but I never knew. I don't know to this day why I was transferred out of School 100. Because then, they [00:23:00] had classes they

called demonstration classes. I'll make it real quick, but a demonstration class was when a teacher would have your -- on one day a week. Like Monday, she would have everybody come by, come back to school. You sat in a seat, and one teacher taught you how to re--

(break in audio)

F: Go ahead.

VS: Continue?

F: Yes.

VS: OK. So all the young people, young people who wanted to become teachers in Baltimore, some of them were chosen. They would sit around the room, and they would watch one teacher who was very good at teaching reading, and they would observe that. And so this was called a demonstration class, and this is what they had at School Number 100 some years ago, so that if you found a teacher who was excellent at being able to teach young people to read, then that teacher would be in charge of the demonstration class, and all of these people in college would, as I said, [00:24:00] was still around, and watch her teach, and learn how she taught children. Well, I was about eight years old, I think, when I was in that class, in one of those classes.

MG: How did segregation and racism affect you as an adult?

VS: As an adult, it made me really understand, because when you have this complete segregation, when you're eight or nine years old -- and I was nine when I was thinking about this -- you had to kind of manage to deal with this somehow. So if I couldn't go to, you know, the bathrooms, all the signs were up, everything. I decided that they could tell me where I could go and where I couldn't and where I couldn't eat, and things like that, but they could never get my brain. Because you couldn't take my brain. I mean, I may not be able to go to your bathroom, I may not be able to eat in your lunchroom, I may [00:25:00] not be able to drink at your water fountain, but you couldn't take my brain. So when I was nine years old, that's what I was thinking, and that's when I thought that,

how the segregation affected me, I thought there must be something wrong with these people. Because when they called me ugly because I was black, I thought, well, I didn't send an invitation to be born. So if you don't understand where I came from, something must be wrong with you. But I didn't know to put it in perspective. That was just the thinking of a nine-year-old. Must be something wrong with you, because I'm here. So that's how it affected me. So that kind of lasted throughout my life, gave me strength.

MG: What did you want to be when you grew up?

VS: Oh, when I grew up, I wanted to dance. I wanted to go to New York and dance, because I had learned about ballet. I learned about [00:26:00] ballet from those old-fashioned radios. We didn't have television, so we sit on the floor looking to the radio at the Hippodrome Theatre, which is right there on Eutaw Street. At the time, blacks were not allowed to go there, but every Saturday morning, they had, I guess, well, what would you call it? A talent show, I guess. They would have a talent contest. So on the radio, they would be describing these children -- it was for children -- who came to the Hippodrome to be a part of this talent show. So I would sit on the floor, listening, and they would describe, and (inaudible) -- apparently, they had, girls were doing ballet, toe dancing, whatever. And they would describe it. So you sit there, you didn't have a picture, and you'd figure out what they really looked like, and they described the shoes, the pink toed shoes, and I thought, "I want to do that." So at the church that we went to, [00:27:00] they found the teacher for the young -- the girls who wanted to, and they taught ballet. So I told you that because that's why all through school, I wanted to be a dancer.

MG: Did you fulfill your dream?

VS: Well, here's -- when I got to the eleventh and twelfth grade, we had excellent guidance counselor. It was Douglass High School. Excellent guidance counselor. And she would look at your grades, she knew the children in school, she knew everybody that she had to take care of. She looked at your grades, and you might tell her that you wanted to be -- whatever you said you wanted to be. She would look there and see what you were really good at. Then she would suggest, in a nice way, have you ever thought of this or that? At the time, most black women were what we call stenographers, they had jobs like that, or they, you know, worked as nurses. Anyway, she looked at the paper and said --

apparently, she saw that the biology was [00:28:00] good, or something. I don't know. But she told me, "Have you ever thought about being a nurse?" "No, ma'am. I never thought." She said, "If I were you, I would look at that." So that's what I decided to become, a registered nurse.

F: (inaudible) What's a stenographer? You said --

VS: Oh, a stenographer is a secretary. [It was a grand?] name they used to give to a secretary. You just sit there and type. And if you could type -- if you could type 80 words a minute, you got a job immediately. But whatever you got, you know, 60 words a minute, 50 words a minute, whatever, you got a job. And that's what a stenographer do, but office. You couldn't be the office manager, and you couldn't be the boss, you couldn't be anybody, but you could sit there and do the typing. And go get the coffee, or the donuts, or whatever they wanted.

MG: Did you have a role model growing up? And if so, who was it?

VS: I had this role model, [00:29:00] Alexandra Danilova, because she was a great Russian ballet dancer. So when they put her on my -- when they went down the list to ask me about things in high school, what I wanted to do, they changed it to Marian Anderson, which was fine with me. Because by that time, I was changing my mind, and wanting to be, you know -- I was finding out who I was.

MG: Well, what is your favorite family memory?

VS: My favorite family?

MG: Memory.

VS: Oh, wow. I think many of my memories have to do with -- with my mother, because I just admired my mother so much. I worshipped her, because when I was very young, she was always telling me, "Lift your head up, and be proud of your little black self." And so that's my memory to this day.

MG: What is your favorite memory of your -- of your [00:30:00] community?

VS: My community now, or then?

MG: Then.

VS: Then? Oh, I lived on -- there was a little tiny street called Lauretta Avenue, which is over in that same area. And my memories of that street were scrubbing those stone, those steps. We love to scrub those steps. They were marble, white marble steps that you see around the city. If you see some now, the old ones, they're the ones that were there a long time. If you see other kind of steps, they're new, and it's renovated housing. But the old marble steps were the ones, you get the scrub bucket and the cleanser and everything, [scrubs this?], we loved it. That was my great memory, scrubbing those steps. I guess because once you scrubbed them, they were clean, and I liked everything to be nice and clean.

MG: Do you remember any great stories [00:31:00] or legends about your town?

VS: About Baltimore at the time? I -- I can say that since, after Pearl Harbor, then World War II started, and I was 11 years old then. I was 10 years old when it got started, 11 when things were going on. And the great memories I have are the moving of the soldiers through the town. They would transport them right on Monroe Street, and huge trucks. They would be transferring them, apparently to Fort Meade for getting them ready to go overseas. So you could go up to the corner on Monroe Street and pay something along there, and stand, and watch these long caravans or whatever you call them, trucks or soldiers going by, and we'd like to go there and wave at them, you know, as they were leaving, because they were going for -- I don't know if they were leaving the country at the time, or most of them -- I think some of them might have been getting ready to leave the country.

MG: [00:32:00] All of the following questions relate to your high school experience. I already know you were able to attend high school. What was the name of your high school?

VS: The name of my high school was Douglass High School. The three high schools were Carver Vocational School, Dunbar on the East Side, and Douglass on the West Side. And those were the only three schools for blacks at the time.

MG: Was your school public or private?

VS: It was public school. All three of those schools are public school. I loved this school, and I loved it because of the music teacher, and that's where Cab Calloway came from,

and some of those people that you hear about now who no longer -- they went to Douglass High School, and were taught music by a teacher whose name was Llewellyn Wilson. And if you cross a little street in Baltimore, just before the East Side, it says Wilson Street, that was named after Llewellyn Wilson, [00:33:00] the music teacher at Douglass High School. He taught us about opera, and to this day, I love opera, because he taught us. He actually planned and had an opera. He had it at Douglass High School. He started it when we were in eleventh grade. It was given when we were in the twelfth grade, at the end of that, and the parents are so happy to see their children singing and dancing and whatnot onstage. Until the next year, he decided to give the second opera, which was Faust. This would have been 1949; 1948 was the first one, 1949 was the second one. And he died about October of that next year. So they didn't give any more.

MG: Can you describe what your school looked like?

VS: Well, Douglass, at the time, I thought was in very good shape. It was a wonderful, wonderful school. [00:34:00] I can't say exactly what, you know, compare it with others, because it was always clean, the lockers were always done, the gym was always nice. So our school, we were very proud of our school.

MG: Did your school have boys and girls that attended.

VS: Yes. Boys and girls.

MG: Did you enjoy going to high school?

VS: Oh, I loved it. I loved it, because when we got to the eleventh, the twelfth grade, if you were doing all right in school, then you could be -- take a special course, which is journalism. So we didn't have to do any more of the regular subject, could do journalism. The only unple-- the thing that might have been -- bothered me then is, I love physics. It got to the point where I just loved physics. But the teacher said, "You know, you girls are going to be getting married when you go, and you're going to have families. So the physics is not going to do you that much good." And so we were rather discouraged from physics, but I remember loving physics [00:35:00] and science. I loved that. And astronomy.



F: (inaudible) Mama Victoria, you named Carver and Douglass and the other school. Were those names -- did they have any significance for the name of the schools?

VS: Well, Carver -- George Washington Carver, was named that. And Frederick Douglass was Douglass High School. And the Dunbar was for Paul Laurence Dunbar. So each school was named after a black person. So we had those people up in front of us all the time, those pictures of those three people were in the schools all the time. And you'd better know who they were.

MG: Were you able to go to school for what we call a regular school year now, then?

VS: Now, you say?

MG: A regular school year now, were you able to go to school that long?

VS: Oh, the school year. Yes. But we never had a day -- we never had snow days. You just went to school every day. So that meant if they -- [00:36:00] I don't know what the ruling was. If it was 180 days, or whatever it is, you went all those days. You never had a day -- we never had a day. You would have a half a day on either Good Friday or the day before. You had a half a day, and I think you had -- you might have had Easter Monday. But otherwise, you didn't -- but you did get one holiday. Big day. And that was George Washington's birthday on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. There was no general thing, it was George Washington. So just before George Washington's birthday, all the stores had cherry trees in them, and cherries you could buy, and toys, because George Washington cut down the cherry tree and told the truth. So that was the story we had all the way through school -- I got [so tired of it?] -- all the way through there, and that was the only day you had off. Lincoln's birthday you did not celebrate, and you did not have [00:37:00] a black history -- Carter G. Woodson had not -- you know, was just getting organized with the Black History Week. And so Black History Day. So you really didn't have those things in the '30s. They came along -- he was doing those things then.

MG: What were the subjects that you were taught.

VS: We had chemistry. Schools in the South, I found out, did not have chemistry, so when those kids came, transferred up to schools in Maryland, that was chemistry for the first time. So we would try to, you know, help them out. But you had chemistry, you had

biology, you had civics. I don't know if they teach civics, but civics is learning about the municipality, I guess, you live in. And so if I can just say very quickly here, this was a civics teacher who asked us, did we know what a gentleman's agreement was? And we all looked at her blankly and said no. She told us a gentleman's agreement was that [00:38:00] no white man should ever go to jail for killing a black man. It is not written anywhere, you cannot challenge it because that's a gentleman's agreement. And I remember the civics teacher telling us, so those kinds of things they were telling you, teaching you then when you were there. And we were young and kind of passed through. But I do remember that, when she said that. And then, 40, 50, 60 years later, I see that what she said was true. You know it now with Freddie Gray, and everybody else.

MG: Were you able to have electives?

VS: That's a good question. We went every day. I remember getting -- my mother getting -- I guess I was every day, and we were, because I remember getting the perfect attendance certificates each year [00:39:00] in June. If you get -- went to school every day, you got a perfect attendance, so that -- and I remember -- I don't remember ever being at home, so I never -- I never had a sick day.

MG: Were you able to take college prep courses?

VS: No, we did not have college prep courses. Not at all at that time.

MG: Did you plan to attend college after high school?

VS: Yes. Which, it's a very interesting question, because after the guidance counselor told me about nursing, then I began to look at that. But there was no high school in Baltimore, Maryland that would take a black girl to become a nurse, except for Providence. Now, Providence Hospital was a three-story building [at 1<sup>st</sup> on Division Street?]. We couldn't -- and they took black patients, because you couldn't -- they didn't want to take you in [00:40:00] a white hospital, so they had this little hospital. They began a training program for nurses, but they didn't have a lot of equipment at the time. So a minister told my mother, "Why don't you send her to my school?" Which was Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina. So that's where I went to go to the nursing school. And that was the college, because you went for three years in summers,

but you had all kinds of -- you know, biology and things like that. Thirteen subjects we had to take. So if you wanted to go back to school to get a full rounded degree, you had to back and take what they call the "Englishes." That was literature and other things, because at nursing school, you strictly only had sciences.

F: And when you were in high school -- excuse me -- did you have electives?

VS: Oh, that was the question, I'm sorry. We had -- the electives was -- in the twelfth grade, if you made all of the subjects, you could take journalism. [00:41:00] That was about the only elective that you had that you could take then, at the time. So you chose journalism, or you took the other regular classes, and journalism was extra, so --

MG: Did you take -- well, did you take home economics, business, or trade courses?

VS: You had to have home economics. The boys had shop, the girls had home economics. And you learned everything about everything in home economics. We -- we enjoyed it, because you could, you know, move around, and they were teaching you to do things. You learned how to cook, you learned how to clean, you learned all that. I have no idea if they're still teaching home economics now like we had. But anyway --

MG: Well, they teach it, but it's not called home economics anymore. It's --

VS: Thank you. (laughter)

MG: -- it's, like, kind of split up into UPI and -- there's another course that teaches you cooking, which is, like, health and nutrients [00:42:00] and all this stuff.

VS: Do you have shop? Did the girls have -- boys -- it was just for boys when I went to school. Boys had shop, and the girls had home ec. But there was no crossing between the two.

F: And what's shop, Mama Victoria?

VS: Oh, shop was woodworking, was learning how to make things, I guess in repair. [You'll have to do things?] in the home, and that kind of thing. That was shop.

MG: We do have shop now, it's -- but they, at my school specifically, Milford Mill Academy, they only offer it as a course for people to take any technology or business course, because that's typically what they go into afterwards. So --

VS: Thank you. OK.

MG: Were the classes or subjects taught by different teachers?

VS: Yes. We had different teachers in high school. Your homeroom teacher was your teacher then, but she wasn't teaching the subject. You had to change classes [00:43:00] every hour, 60 minutes or whatever, I mean, 70 -- whatever it was, you would change classes often.

MG: Were the teachers good teachers?

VS: They were wonderful, that I remember. Very good, except the sewing teacher was just part of home ec. She was very good, but if you didn't make those stitches right, the basic stitches, she would have you pull them all out. I know. You pulled it all out, and start over again. So I remember Mrs. Page. (laughter) But she was -- she was good. I appreciate what she taught, because you would remember, never forget.

MG: What was the racial makeup of your teachers?

VS: All my teachers were black. So when we looked at the teacher, we knew we could be the principal, we could be the teacher, we could do all these things, because everybody else was black.

MG: How did the teachers treat the students?

VS: They treated you very well, except [00:44:00] it was in the psyche when you were very young that if you were lighter skinned, you sat in the front of -- I didn't know this until last 15 or 20 years -- you sat in the front seat, in the second or third seat. My sister, who I mentioned, was lighter, sat in the second seat. And to this day, before she died, she remembered the girl in the first seat whose name was Mary Margaret [Stuart?]. She sat in the first seat, my sister sat in the second seat. I always sat way over in the room. I thought it was because my last name was Lancaster. I didn't know that they sat you according to [custom?], but they did. We were actually -- in elementary school, because it was thought that if you were light, it was a higher grade for you. It may not be -- you know, you remember hearing "If you're white, you're all right, if you're brown, stick around, if you're black, stick back." Well, those people actually lived that.

MG: Oh, that's (inaudible).

VS: That's the way it was. That's the truth. [00:45:00] I'm telling you how it was in the '30s.

MG: Did you have books in your school, and what were the conditions?

VS: Yeah. We had books. Many of our books were sent over. I surmised this later; Western High School was a white school, so sometimes, when the books were finished there, they would send them over to us. The things I'm telling you now are not things that you would have -- know about, because they're not written anywhere. It's just that if you lived them, you know them. So some of our books were sent over from there. I don't often know if we got brand new books, but we did get some books to -- we did have books, and we did have a library at the school. And most of us went out to the libraries, to the Pratt Library, and we went to the neighborhood library, which was the one on Highland -- Hollins Street. [00:46:00] I think Hollins. Yeah, Hollins, where the Hollins Market is. That's where the library was, where my sister and I would want. So most of the books, we went to the library, and then, you know, took them, borrowed them. We got library cards, and we used those. You know, at school, the teacher would give you the reading list, and she would tell you what you had to pick up at the library. So a lot of our books came from that, rather than the school having its own books.

MG: Did you take part in any clubs, sports, or activities in high school?

VS: I think every club they had, we joined. But not the sports. But that would be, like, the drama club, and this or that, and opera. And they had clubs like that in school. And we had some clubs that dealt with history, but they didn't call them history clubs, necessarily. So we had -- yes, we did have different clubs. Not as many as the choices these days for [00:47:00] kids to have, but we did have some extracurricular kinds of things that you could do. I was not in any sports, because as I said, I couldn't do very much. I like reading, so I think that was probably my big escape was reading a lot, and I think that's why I spent so much time in the library. Because since I wasn't often chosen for sports, I could do that. Which didn't bother me, because I loved to read.

MG: Did you -- well, were your classmates friendly?

VS: Yes. We were -- our classmates were very friendly. We had been -- we didn't really have a lot of bullying, at least the girls didn't. We didn't know about that, because back

in elementary school, they had taught us, there were some orphans who used to come in Catonsville to the public school, and they taught us that these kids may not have mommies or daddies, so we were not to make fun of them or laugh at them. We would just share things [00:48:00] with them, so it was pushed into our heads younger that you didn't make fun of people. They called it mocking, M-O-C-K-I-N-G. You didn't mock people, because that was not good. So I never heard -- even though I was small and sometimes called "shrimp" because I was so, you know, little. We didn't really -- everybody -- we got along pretty well in high school, as far as that's concerned.

MG: Did your classmates live in the same community as you?

VS: Yes. Most of the -- they all lived in the same con-- no one came from outside of the area. They're all from areas close. That's why I did not understand being transferred way over to 119, which I don't understand to this day, from School 100, because that was within walking distance. And 119 Gilmore Mosher was a good over -- they were all in Sandtown-Winchester area. But it was a good distance from where I lived, so I had to -- we had to -- I had to walk alone in the cold. [00:49:00] And you didn't ask me this, but I -- I got to tell you that, very quickly -- and I told some people in the Griot Circle that -- that that's where the people set the dog on me, because I was walking alone. And if you know my height now -- and I'm not very tall -- you can imagine what it was like when I was 11 years old. And they set a dog on me, and they sat on the steps and laughed at the dog chasing me.

MG: Can you --

VS: They were white.

MG: Can you tell the story of them setting the dog off on you?

VS: Well, what it was, is we used to like to stay after school and wash the blackboards, because that was a privilege. So my girlfriends, my sister, that all -- you know, everybody had gone home, and I was coming home by myself. So I was walking in the street that I still remember called [Kirby Lane to get to Laurretta Avenue. And I was walking down that street, and all of these white people were sitting on the steps. It was on the stone steps. (inaudible) maybe one or two kids. All the rest were adults. They

had a dog there, [00:50:00] and as I walked by -- we didn't have backpacks we had book bags then. So you had your book bags. So as I was walking by, one of them told the dog, "Sic her!" That meant the dog can -- and the dog came after me, and I was so frightened, I was so scared. If I had been older, I probably would have fallen and the dog would have bit me. But by being younger, I was able -- so I just took my book bag, and I was just hitting back at that dog. And oh, I was so scared, and when I got home, of course, my clothes were all ruffled and whatnot. And I remember telling my -- told my mother about it, and she said -- I remember her saying, "Consider the source." And I didn't know what that meant at the time, but now I know what she meant. These were people who hated you, so whatever you did when they saw you. And that has remained in my brain -- it left my mind for a while, and at the Griot Circle after the Freddie Gray business, the president gave us [00:51:00] an opportunity to talk around the room. And I talked, and I remembered that story, and I cried. This is just a year ago. I cried, but the crying apparently got it out, because apparently over the years, it had stayed in my brain, but I no longer think about it. And when I had to think about it again, now, it's gone. So that's what being black can sometimes do to our minds when they push these things in you. They remain there.

(break in audio)

MG: I don't know where to go (inaudible). Do you still keep in contact with any of your classmates from high school?

VS: Yes. The last one, many of our classmates are, to be honest, are dying out now, because it's been 60 years. But the one classmate I remained [00:52:00] in touch with was Phyllis Green, and she died in 2009, but I know her family. And the others I kept with up until about three years ago. I'm not sure, the ones who live in Arbutus, where they might be at now.

MG: The following questions relate to your junior college or college experience, universities. So were you able to attend college or university?

VS: Yes, I did go to Saint Agnes School of Nursing, and we had our classes. Some of the classes took place on the campus of Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh, North Carolina. So I did have the experience. You said did I have -- what were they?

MG: The next would be what was the name, and where were they located?

VS: The students?

MG: The colleges.

VS: Oh, the college, as I said, was in Raleigh, North Carolina, and it was in Saint Augustine's College, [00:53:00] and Saint Agnes School of Nursing was a part of that, and so I went to school. The part of the campus that was the nursing school was a hospital, and then the other part of the campus was the academic parts. And it was just separated by grass and trees.

MG: Did you go from high school straight to college?

VS: Yes, I graduated from Douglass High School in 1949, June in September of 1949, into nursing school. I had to take a test. This is aside, but in January of 1949, I had to go to Johns Hopkins University and take a test. To this day, I have no idea why, I only know that when I got there, I know that my mother was very concerned about, I could clean and clean clothes and look this way and look that way, and I thought, why is she going on like that? And then in January, I took a streetcar. I think we had them. Anyway, I got out to Johns, [00:54:00] to the university. I went into this classroom to take this test. It was all day long, and I was the only black person there, and nobody talked to me the whole day. One white boy told me where the restroom was. Otherwise, nobody said a word. The proctor just passed out tests, we'd fill out the form, pass them back in. And I passed -- gave him, you know, did the test all day long, and then I left. Never order soup, if everybody's watching, you're in the cafeteria, because I was the only black person in -- at the place. Then I went back home. I was 17, I went back. I have never been told why I was sent there to take that test, what happened. I just don't know to this day. I know I feel like I grew up that day.

MG: Excuse me. Mama Victoria, you just said the statement, "Never order soup." What were you --



VS: Because -- [00:55:00] (laughter) because if everybody's staring at me, you're -- you can become awfully nervous with soup. (laughter) There's many a slip, they used to say, between the cup and the lip. (laughter) That was something they said a long time ago.

MG: Did you live on campus?

VS: Yes. We had -- there was a nursing home, and we lived -- the students lived in the nursing home, and there was the residents, doctors from -- what's the hospital in Tennessee that teaches black students? I think it's in Tennessee. They were students -- anyway, there was -- the nursing home was there, and we lived in the nursing home, and the residents and the externs and the interns who were going to become doctors lived in the other area. They were all men that lived there mostly. If there was one woman, she lived in the nursing home with us. There was a wall between us, so you could not go. [00:56:00] They could see you if you walked into the (inaudible) quarters, because there was no door there, except it was on the hospital side. In other words, there was no mingling, if you understand, you know, mingling between male and female. You had to stay on your side, and they had to stay on their side. Meharry. That's the school I'm thinking of, Meharry Medical School. Their students came to Saint Agnes for training, and their doctors taught us in nursing school.

MG: Was it a historical black college?

(break in audio)

MG: Was it a historical black college or university?

VS: It was definitely a historical black college. The white doctors could train -- could come into the nursing school and work on the black patients, but the black patients could not go to the white hospital, which was called Rex, R-E-X. They had one black hospital in Raleigh. Now, they've been dissolved and integrated, and then they'll only have Saint Agnes. But at the time, the white doctors came over, and they could be as mean as they wanted to. I still remember the times when if you handed them the stetho-- a hemostat in the wrong way, they could throw it on the floor and (inaudible). Now, I was very short,

so I had a stool in the operating room, and I stepped on my stool. But Dr. Lawrence -- I still remember his name -- was a white doctor who came to the black hospitals, and he could be extremely mean to the people in the black hospital.

MG: Did you join any fraternities or soror-- did you join a sorority?

VS: Yeah. Later on, when I got to [00:58:00] other school, and I went to one of my first jobs was in Toledo, Ohio. And I wrote three places, and they were opening up a new hospital in Toledo, Ohio, so I became the first black nurse at this hospital in Toledo, Ohio. I will not go into how I was treated, but I was there. OK, so at that time, there were five black nurses in the whole city of Toledo. I made the sixth one when I came. So in the mail, I got a little duck. (laughter) Shape of a duck, and I opened it up, and it was from the Delta Sigma Theta sorority, and they were inviting me to join because all of their people were teachers, and so the nurse came to town, they wanted to branch out. So I was invited to them, so then I did go ahead and join because they asked me.

F: Excuse me, Mama Victoria, I know you said that you didn't really want to say. Can you just tell us how you were treated? Maybe one or two instances?

VS: I'll just give you maybe one or two [00:59:00] little statements. You were always made to feel that you were below the white people. So in order to get you to feel that you were below them -- and these were the higher -- they would do these little things. And one of the little things they did is they would stand on one side of the hall and the other side of the hall. Now, the two people would be talking to each other. You either had to walk between them or walk around them, so it meant these are little things, da-da-da. It meant that you walk way around on the side of them so that you can walk between to let you know that you have to walk on the outside of us. You cannot walk in the center of the hall. Little tiny things. In the cafeteria, when they would have watermelon, they would say, "Oh, Victoria, we have watermelon today," because they wanted to make you feel that you -- black people only like watermelon. They did this to the point where I said, "I don't like watermelon," so they'd leave me alone. But I loved watermelon, it's one of the best [01:00:00] fruits you could ever eat and contains all kinds of vitamins. It can be a meal in itself. But that was -- those were some of the things. The other things were saying sometimes, nigger -- like, at the cafeteria, one of the nurses said, "Those niggers

are something,” and then somebody said -- you know, because they couldn’t see me because I was short. And so then she -- (laughter) she, you know, apologized. “Oh, I’m sorry if I said something that you --” So we had all of those little bitty things to go through. There are more, but I won’t go into those. (laughter)

F: Thank you.

MG: So you graduated college, correct?

VS: Yes, I graduated from college in 1952.

MG: What degree did you receive?

VS: At the time, you had to take a state board, and then you became -- you were a graduate nurse. You took state board. When you passed state board, you become a registered nurse. So I took the state board, and, you know, had to take it. [01:01:00]

MG: Did you attend -- did you receive any additional degrees?

VS: Yes. When I went to Toledo, Ohio, we went back to school. And so I went back and got a bachelor of science, and then I decided to stay in the school while I was there, and I got a master of science. And then they gave some subjects which they call 700 numbers then toward a PhD, and then I decided that I didn’t really want that. I wanted to leave and travel. So I didn’t take it.

MG: These questions I’ll be asking you are about your personal -- not to ask about your personal beliefs, but just to know what church was in your life. Did you attend church as a child? Did you -- did you work and raise a family while going to school?

VS: When I went back to school, yes. I waited -- I got married, we had the two -- one child, [01:02:00] and then -- well, (inaudible) between it, because I moved back there. But then I went back to school when the two children were, like, in their teen -- young teens, because I felt that I no longer needed to be hovering over them, so I went back to school then. They were, like, 13, 14, somewhere along that line.

MG: Did you attend church as a child?

VS: As a child, I did attend church. We attended -- the Episcopal Church on Lafayette Square that’s still there now, St. James Episcopal Church. My mother sent us there because this

church had all these people who were doctors and lawyers and teachers, and she wanted us to get this. So we had to walk and go to St. James. And I'm telling you saying that, because that's why we went to St. James, so we could get this feeling of being -- of wanting to be educated.

MG: What was the denomination?

VS: It [01:03:00] -- they were Episcopalians.

MG: Episcopalian?

VS: And that was, like, from the English, you know, side, England, Episcopalians.

MG: Was your church segregated?

VS: Yes. No white people went to the church, but many light-skinned black people went to the church, because those were the people who were given a lot of the education in the beginning. They had the educational opportunities, so a lot of the people in the church were lighter skinned. Because back in the '30s and '40s -- especially the '30s -- the lighter skinned person was brought in before the darker skinned person. That's how they divided us.

MG: What part did church play in your life as a child?

VS: Well, I couldn't sing, but I sang on the choir. But the choir -- my (inaudible) was nice. She let us all sing. She was the music teacher. And so I sang on the choir the whole time I was there, and I still remember the songs. [01:04:00] But I'm not a singer, I couldn't sing then, can't sing now. Oh, and one other thing I should mention that the church had. The church had all kinds of teen programs, so you didn't have to run out in the street for things. There was even a bowling alley at St. James, and we had teen dances, and they had structured your whole teenage life. So you were always within that church. So I can thank the churches for that, even though no matter what I believe now, I have to thank them for the part they played.

MG: Is church still an active part of your life?

VS: I didn't bring my pillow, but I go now to Victoria's Church of the Open Road of the Latter Day Saints of Self Improvement. Now, don't try to write all of that down. That

means I go for a long walk on Sunday. (laughter) But I go to weddings, and funerals, and anything else the church has to offer. I started to bring my pillow. A lady kept asking me, "What did [01:05:00] you say?" And I repeated it over and over again. You guys know Julia [Hammett?]. She made a pillow that has all the way around it, "Victoria's Church of the Open Road of the Latter Day Saints of Self Improvement." Latter Day Saints, because that was amusing to me. I didn't know what a Latter Day Saint was.

MG: What role did your church -- did your church play in the civil rights movement?

VS: At the time, you might say that they were the winds of change. So the changes didn't really come about until later. So I was able to play a part in the civil rights movement once we left the church. The best thing the church did was to teach us how to be good human beings. But it didn't get into the other part until I got into that after I left. Through the marches and stuff, because then I got married, and we'd take the kids, we can stroll along the marches.

MG: The following questions are on your adult life. So [01:06:00] how did you meet your spouse?

VS: I met him when I got to Toledo, Ohio, and I decided that I was going back to school. And so when I went back to the University of Toledo, he was at the school. And because of this Delta thing, they have all these dancers and stuff. And so I was invited to one, and somebody said, "She's got to go all the way over on the East Side, because she lives over there." And they asked [I think?] give me a ride. And that started our romance.

MG: How long have you been married?

VS: Well, I was married for 23 years before my husband died.

MG: What kind of work does -- what kind of work did your spouse do?

VS: Well, he worked for the state of Michigan. And he was in drivers -- the driver's license -- you know how they have different divisions in the states, the driver's licensing, this division, other division? And he worked [01:07:00] under the Secretary of State, and that was the driver -- in the driver's license division.

MG: What are your children's names, gender, and age?

VS: We have two children. We had two children. Victor Charles Smith is the oldest child, my first child. Carl Thomas Smith is my second child. They were given my husband's names, and my husband gave them -- the older boy my name. So his name is Victor, my name is Victoria. So --

MG: Do you have any grandchildren? If so, how many?

VS: The youngest child had two children. And so those are my only two grandchildren. They are Maya and [Zafi?]. And could I add something here? (laughter) My youngest now is 17 years old. She graduated -- she graduates in June, so I'm going to Boston, see the graduation. And I just found out last week that she's been accepted at Harvard. I didn't -- so I was going to go around [01:08:00] saying -- I jumped up and down at first, but they said she danced all around the house in Boston, but I said I wasn't going to tell anybody, because I wasn't -- because wherever you go to school, it's good. So we are not Harvard. Our family does not have Harvard money, but they will give -- I think she will get a grant. So if all goes well, she will go in September, and she'll graduate in June.

MG: Are you currently employed?

VS: No, I worked at -- I just volunteered at the American Red Cross and at schools, so I don't have to work at the hospital anymore.

MG: What kind of work had -- what kind of work have you done in your lifetime?

VS: Well, I'll make that very short. In nursing, it's a lucrative field, so I've worked in every part. All parts are clinics, the hospitals, nursing homes. Every three years, I'd probably try something different. Even in Detroit, there's -- the auto manufacturers, they gave workshops and we could go [01:09:00] and help out there.

MG: Were you in the military?

VS: I was in the Peace Corps.

MG: What rank did you --

VS: Well, I was in -- I was in the Peace Corps, so I -- so I was in Costa Rica for two and a half years, then I wanted to go to Africa, so Africa for a year and a half. So the Peace Corps assignment is a different thing, because it's too long a story. (laughter)

MG: Was the military segregated when you served?

VS: When I was in the United States Peace Corps, it was not segregated. This was after the '60s. This was -- I really wasn't in there until I -- didn't join until I was 58 years old.  
(laughter)

F: Mama Victoria, can you just explain what the Peace Corps is?

VS: Oh, the Peace Corps is an organization, something that we -- we probably don't know, [01:10:00] but there was a black man -- I've been trying to get more information on him, (inaudible) what his name was -- Robinson. He had an idea years and years ago -- this was before they did the Peace Corps -- of letting people, black kids, young people, go to Africa, work for a couple years, but you had to pay for it yourself. There was a couple of white people at some of the meetings that he had, and one (inaudible) that I got to meet, and she suggested to -- with Sargent Shriver that -- and Kennedy that they started Peace Corps, and that's how the Peace Corps got started. It was to be invited into another country to work for two years.

MG: How were Negro soldiers treated differently?

VS: Well, I guess that by not being actually the military, then I don't know. I know that there's a big history of that separate, because they were mistreated. My husband was in the service, he was the first black paratrooper. And my brother [01:11:00] was in the service, and he was part of the Red Ball Express. And from them, I learned that they were still segregated in the military.

MG: Were you active in the civil rights movement?

VS: Yes. We were living in California then, so when they would have the marches, you guys would be marching back here in the South, then they would be marching in Los Angeles, so we would put the babies in the stroller and the other [boy?], and we would march. Every march that you guys had here, we had marches there, only they had marches every weekend. So we'd get in the car and drive down Los Angeles to the main street, park the car, get out, and we'd do our marches. So we were part -- and my husband was a part of the lunch counter sit-ins in Cincinnati, Ohio.

MG: What are your favorite hobbies or activities?

VS: I love to read.

MG: Please --

VS: And dance.

MG: Please relay your favorite family story.

VS: Well, I won't [01:12:00] take up a lot of time. I guess my -- my favorite family -- my favorite stories really are going to to that library, because I just love -- that was just my -- spending time, and at the Pratt Library on the big main branch, they have a fish pond in the back. And you go in the side door, and in the side door on Fridays, they would tell stories. You'd sit on the floor, and they'd tell stories. And I loved that.

MG: Excuse me. Mama Victoria, do you still dance? I know you said you loved dancing. Do you still dance?

VS: I have until recently. (laughter) At the -- at the festival, the last festival, the last festival we had, and I danced then.

MG: What was the happiest moment in -- of your life?

VS: My life has been -- if I could write down (inaudible), it's been really happy. Everything happened at the right time. I thought I would die early, because I was a sickly child. That's why I was so [01:13:00] [thought?]. But I lived for a long time, so the happiest moments in my life have really been these -- especially these later years, when the children are grown, and they take care of the grandchildren, and I don't have to worry about who's feeding anybody, educating anybody. So this actually -- I was 85 a month ago, March 25<sup>th</sup>. This is actually the happiest part of my life, because I don't have to worry about a thing. Don't have to do any more of those tests (laughter) that I had -- you never want to have to take a state board.

MG: Who was the most influential person in your life?

VS: I think my husband was -- was one of the most -- my mother, my mother first and then my husband. They were influential in my life, because they both taught me a lot. He taught me -- my mother especially.

MG: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in life?



VS: The most important lesson I learned is do not hate. Otherwise, [01:14:00] you need to learn how to get along with people you hate. Now, if you don't hate anybody, you don't have a problem. So the problems I learned -- the biggest thing I learned in life is the problems -- not to take on other people's problems within yourself, so you don't become depressed and [hard up?], and somebody said -- because it's really not your problem. If somebody hates you and you don't hate them, it's not your problem, it's their problem. And it's as simple as that.

MG: What are some of the most important lessons you taught your children?

VS: I taught my children to try and l-- to love everyone. But if I had to do it over, I would tell them that everyone will not love you, you but you must, you know, give to the world, because they had friends of all races, but I think it's just now that they understand, you know, situations that are happening to them, because I was busy trying to tell them which way to go, and make sure -- [01:15:00] and that's why I'm happy now, because they both are OK.

F: OK. Just a second.

(break in audio)

VS: The lessons that I learned from my mom was when she was telling me when I was very small, be proud of your little black self, because before, folks could call you nigger and it didn't matter, because they'd roll down car window and yell out "nigger," but you couldn't run after the car. So that got to the point where it didn't matter. But the words - - the things that upset many people when we were younger were black, because they made you think you were at the bottom of the ladder if you were black. So if you were "Oh, black so-and-so," Mary Carter Smith and I used to talk, and they used to call her "Old Black Mary," and we could talk, because they -- you know, the black thing was the biggest thing. So my mother, by teaching me, "Be proud of your little black self" made me not worry about it. And I thought, that's your problem. It's not mine. But, so she taught me that. She also taught me how to -- I a lot of things. Now, I did a lot of work [01:16:00] in the family, and I think that might have had to do with the fact that I was black. But I did a lot of the work in my house, but I learned how to work, and I had to learn how to get along. And she taught me those things, how to get along with others,

communication and that. From my husband, I really learned how to work -- really work closely with Caucasian people, because she had to work with them by working for the state, and being a driver's license. So all these people, the people that gave the best jobs were white people. So he had to work with those people. He became an investigator later on in that particular job. So he taught me a lot about how to get along with people on these other levels, which I had not had before.

MG: What are the proudest moments in your life?

VS: Now? (laughter) My proudest moments are when [01:17:00] you guys interviewing me. That's one of my proud moments, because I think, well, if they think I'm worthwhile that they can ask questions and listen to me, that's good. Because your family doesn't always listen. (laughter)

MG: What did you accomplish -- did you accomplish all that you hoped?

VS: Yes. I -- I feel like I accomplished a lot, because three things in life that -- three decisions I made, number one was to become a nurse, number two was to marry the man I married, number three was to join the Peace Corps. So those were big accomplishments, because in the Peace Corps, I could go around the world helping people. And if you recall, the people dying in Rwanda, and I was in the Peace Corps then. I was sent to Northern Tanzania, and I spent five months in the refugee camp. So when I look at television now and I see those immigrants, those were the people we had to take care of. The Doctors Without Borders worked around there, and the United Nations High Commission of Refugees worked, the American Red Cross worked. [01:18:00] They were all in that refugee camp. I was only supposed to stay for 10 weeks, but it ended up five months, so that's another story.

MG: Did you accomplish everything -- I asked you that. Is there anything that you wish to accomplish now?

VS: No, I really don't have a bucket list, because I have climbed the Leaning Tower of Pisa, I have gone to Machu Picchu, I have seen the White Cliffs of Dover, I've gone down in a gondola, and I'm not going to mention all the other stuff. So I don't really -- so I can be very happy and peaceful.

MG: Do you wish to go back and change anything?

VS: No. Not really. The only thing I would change is to tell -- tell the kids that you got a lot of folk who still feel like they were treating me in the '30s.

MG: Do you feel you are leaving a legacy?

VS: I do now, because [01:19:00] I will leave with Miss Green or you, the latest -- what has just been printed, and the legacy was I tried an experiment with myself. And it's written up, and the printers just gave it back to me, and I brought one copy today. So I'll give it to you. And so I feel like that that will be the legacy. The other -- I've written another book. But, and the third -- the first thing I wrote is in the -- the Library of Congress? No, that's where Mary Carter Smith, the Library of Congress. The other one is somewhere in Washington. They took it. I had to write something from the Peace Corps, so, and that was a booklet on community health. So those are the legacies.

MG: African American timeline. I will relate some milestones in African American history. If applicable, please tell me how you felt [01:20:00] when they happened. In 1947, Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier in the Major Leagues.

VS: We just loved him. (laughter) We just -- we held him, we were shouting and jumping about. We loved him. That's all I can say there is, we loved him.

MG: Nineteen forty-eight, President Truman officially integrates the United -- the US Army Service.

VS: That was not -- what year?

MG: Nineteen forty-eight.

VS: Yeah, I was -- I was glad of that, because my husband has just finished as a paratrooper, and my brother had just come back from World War II.

MG: Nineteen-fifty-four, *Brown vs. the Board of Education* makes segregation in schools unconstitutional.

VS: That just meant to me that unless you change these people's minds, they were still doing the same thing, even though it was legal. You know, we went to school, and I was going

to Toledo University, [01:21:00] and that was my first time sitting next to a white person. But the minds had not changed yet.

MG: Nineteen-fifty-five, Rosa Parks arrested for defying bus segregation laws in Montgomery, Alabama.

VS: Yeah. And I won't repeat that, but I told you guys the story. I took a blood pressure. (laughter) I was able to take -- that's another story, they know that.

MG: Nineteen fifty-seven, Little Rock Nine integrate Central High School in Arkansas.

VS: Yeah. I was reading about it, but I was having my first child, 1957. (laughter) So I was busy in the hospital. Or busy with the new baby.

MG: Nineteen-sixty, Woolworth sit-in by Greensboro Four in North Carolina.

VS: Yeah, well, my husband had been a part of the lunch counter sit-ins, as I said, in Cincinnati. And then [01:22:00] they moved them into other areas in the South, so he had been a part of that. And what -- then that was the year of nineteen --

MG: Nineteen-sixty.

VS: Yeah, 1960. And I was also having my second child then. So those were -- so I was busy.

F: Mama Victoria, I know you skirted over Rosa Parks. You said that you took her blood pressure. Can you just --

VS: Well, I don't know if you have enough time.

F: Pause for a minute.

(break in audio)

MG: Nineteen-sixty-two, James Meredith integrates University of Mississippi.

VS: I felt very happy to have that happen. I was sorry what happened to him later, but I was happy -- for my feeling, I was happy that he was able to do this.

MG: Nineteen-sixty-three, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

VS: Yeah. I was glad to march in Los Angeles in recognition of that, what you guys were doing [01:23:00] back in Washington, DC. So we marched in Los Angeles.

MG: Nineteen-sixty-four, Civil Rights Act passed.

VS: Yeah. Well, I was glad that they finally got to that.

MG: Nineteen-sixty-four, Sidney --

F: Poitier.

F: Poitier

MG: -- Poitier became first Negro to win Best Actor Oscar.

VS: My feeling on that was it's about time.

MG: Nineteen-sixty-seven, Thurgood Marshall appointed first Negro on Supreme Court.

VS: I was glad to hear that, because his cousin -- and he went to St. James Church, I mentioned. So I felt like he was a member of the large black family. So we were all happy at the church when he became -- when he had that honor.

MG: Nineteen-sixty-eight, Dr. Martin Luther King [01:24:00] assassinated.

VS: Yeah. I was in the riots in Detroit from beginning to end, so that says what happened after his death. I was sorry they did that, because -- well, we were all sorry, because of the riots. And people were killed in Detroit riots.

MG: Two-thousand-one, Colin Powell appointed first African American Secretary of State.

VS: Well, I thought I would wait to see what he had to say.

MG: Two-thousand-two, Halle Berry and Denzel Washington, Best Actor and Actress Oscar, making it the first time African Americans won both -- won in both categories in the same year.

VS: Yeah. I felt that the -- they deserved it, and also, it was time. They really -- so I was happy about that.

MG: Two thousand eight, Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States.

VS: Well, I felt I can die any time now, because he's become the pre-- I've seen the first black president. [01:25:00] But I also felt that I hope people remember that it does not change the minds of those people yet, but let him be there. And I'm very proud of him and very happy. And I sent them the book. OK.

MG: Two-thousand-twelve, Barack Obama reelected as president of the United States.

VS: Yeah. I think that's when I sent the family the book. I sent then one of the first books I read, and they answered back that it was received by constituents, and that it would be kept. So he has it.

MG: Is there anything you would like to add that was not in this interview?

VS: I think you guys have been extremely thorough. (laughter) And I've told -- and some of the other little things, you know, parts of other parts of the stories are OK, because you got to the main things. So I was happy to be able to get it all out.

MG: [01:26:00] I would like to thank you for allowing me to interview you, and letting me into your life, and telling me all these amazing things so that I can continue sharing your story.

VS: Thank you, and she was my roommate. (laughter) And she wanted something, so I was happy to have her be the person who interviewed me. So I'm very happy to be able to tell it, and I'm happy that people listened to everything, because it was long, but you listened. And I'm also happy that you guys had food. I didn't think you were going to have food, and I didn't think I was going to get a gift. (laughter) OK, thank you.  
(applause)

F: Thank you. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MARIAH GRIER: Can you go back and share your experience that you had with Rosa Parks?

VICTORIA SMITH: OK. Incidentally, after Rosa Parks was on the bus, and all of those things that happened in Birmingham, she got, apparently, many threatening letters, which we didn't see, but apparently they were quite vicious. She had a brother who lived in Detroit, Michigan. The brother thought his sister should leave Alabama and come to Detroit and live, because he was concerned about

her life, because of these letters she was getting. So she moved up to Detroit. They put her in a senior citizen residence on the corner of Woodward Avenue. And she stayed there. I was working for the American Red Cross at the time, and I'm a retiree of the American Red Cross. So at the time, she -- they had us take blood pressures. And we would do -- [00:01:00] go around and do blood pressure screening at different places. So one of the places that we were sent to was to the senior citizens residence where she lived. So there was a person doing the recording, who had her clipboard, and she was writing the names as she came up. So the people standing in line, all the people who are going to take -- have their blood pressure taken in line, in the place. So as they came up, she sat them in the chair. And when I told the story, I brought the blood pressure cuff with me that day. And so, and had the person sit in the chair so they could see how this was. So she sat down in the chair. I put the blood pressure cuff on her left arm and put the stethoscope in to take her blood pressure. The lady with the clipboard said, "This is Rosa Parks." It didn't hit me until -- I kept on wrapping the blood pressure cuff, and then she said, "This is Rosa Parks." And I said, "You're Rosa Parks?" And she said, "Yes, I am." [00:02:00] I became nervous. But I was so amazed at the strength. So I put the cuff on, I took her blood pressure. And then I told her, I said, "I am honored. I feel honored to be able to take your blood pressure." And she just smiled. That moment, I knew why she was chosen as the person to ride the bus, because she was chosen to do that. They had a couple of other people that came first that could have been criticized if they had taken [them forth?]. One was a girl who was pregnant and already had a baby, and they figured they'd make that natural and put her down for that. But Rosa Parks fit the person that they wanted. And the reason that I knew that she fit that is because when I took that blood pressure, she was calm. She did not walk into that place and say, "I am Rosa Parks, and I'm going to stand in line." She stood in line like all the other people. She sat down like the other people, she sat down like the other people. She never said -- once said who she was. It was that lady with the clipboard who told me who she was. [00:03:00] And so after doing that, I remembered to this day her calmness. And the woman had inner strength. She wasn't much -- she was a bit taller than I am, but she wasn't all that much bigger. She's not a big person. But if she could -- I could see that if she could stand there and keep her ego intact the way she did, then I knew that that woman was well-chosen for that part. So that day, I thanked her very kindly for being able to allow me to even do that. And I went home and I will always remember meeting Rosa Parks and taking her blood pressure.

MG: Mama Victoria, what year was that?

VS: That would have been -- now, let's see. She rode that bus in '55, I think it was. So she didn't come to Detroit until a few years later, because [00:04:00] she was still living in Birmingham. And her brother moved her up to Detroit, it had to be at least four or five years after that. So that would have been

toward the end of probably getting into the -- it would have been much later than that. It was probably into the '60s, and what not. Maybe '65 or something like that, when she came up to Detroit to live. Now after a while, people in Detroit felt like she shouldn't have to be living in there, she should have a house. So they got together, and raised fund, and got her a house. The house actually was broken into and burglarized, but the person didn't know she was Rosa Parks. And if you remember, she died in Detroit. And I talked with her relatives who still live there, and that was one of the biggest funerals they said they had ever had. The whole city mourned her death. And as you know, she was the first woman to lie in state, so I feel honored just to be able to have taken her blood pressure.

MG: OK. [00:05:00]

VS: Thank you. OK.

VS: -- actually asked for volunteers from the peace -- well, somebody in Washington, DC said we should be doing --

MG: They who?

VS: Huh?

MG: They who?

VS: Oh, when -- when I say somebody in Washington, it was people that were in -- I was overseas then. And Bill Clinton was the president at the time, so I don't know if people from the Peace Corps came to him, or people from outside went to the people -- some authorities. But -- because I was not in the country. But we were -- it was explained to us that the United States should be doing something for these people being killed. And first, it was like 20,000, and then it was 30,000. It got up to almost 100,000 people. The people being killed were the Tutus. [*sic*] The Hutus were killing the Tutus. Now, the story behind that is not known, but what happened [00:06:00] is this fellow, the [emperor?], Leopold II was a guy from Scotland. [*sic*] He came into Africa in that part of the country. He came there to buy the oil -- Africa is rich, as you know, in oil and gold and nickel, things like that. He came and worked there with -- brought his money and his mines, built mines, and the Africans worked in the mines. But during the time -- and this is the story that is not told -- during the time that he was there, people began to see how much money he was making and able to send back to Scotland. So what they did is they were getting upset with him, this man from -- European man who comes into the country, sets up mines, they work in the mines, they're not getting anything. They're still, you know, starving or whatever. To keep them from getting upset with them, here's how he did it. They're very good at this, these white people. What he did was he took the Hutus and Tutsis [00:07:00] -- the Tutsis were cattle people. They run with the cattle. The Hutus were people who did farming. So he gave the Tutus the good jobs, and let the



Hutus be the ones that serve the Tutsis. So pretty soon, they got angry with each other. They didn't get angry with the white man, because they didn't realize what he was doing, so they got angry with each other. And so when their president, who was a Hutu, was in a plane, the plane was blown up or something, he died. So when he did, they said the Tutsis must have killed him, so they started killing each other. And when they started killing each other, neighbors started killing neighbors. When they started killing each other, then people realized, you know, that -- well, in this country, we were hearing when it was, like, 20,000. When it got to be 50,000, they were showing the dead and whatnot. So what happened is the Hutus were escaping. So Rwanda and Burundi fit like this, Rwanda at the top, Burundi [00:08:00] at the bottom here. And so what they -- and Tanzania is, like, here, right beside that. So what they did north of that is they sent the people up. They were crossing, I think the [Tanganyika?] River or one of those rivers, they would cross. And then they opened up a refugee camp for those Tutsis way in the middle of the mountains. And then that was where these people were escaping to. So that camp was for the Tutsis. So they kept it quiet, and they had to hide it down, the mountains were, like, here, and it was hidden back there. So by the time that some people in Washington said -- people said "We should be doing something," they said take the people who, in the second year of the Peace Corps -- they were ready to come back to United States. They would already have had the experience of living with people in other countries. Send them to the refugee camp. So what they did is send [a letter?] around to all the American Peace Corps volunteers, and then said, "Can you give 10 weeks to go to the refugee camp and be there? [00:09:00] And we want to send, I think --" well, they said -- they said three or four weeks, actually, and they wanted to send 10 people. So I said, "Oh, well, I can get back home to the United States, because I've been trying to get home for a year, get home." So I signed up to go. Well, they didn't say anything for a long time. Then after a while, a message -- I called the headquarters in Lilongwe in Africa, and said, "Are you all still -- do you still want these people to go to the refugee camp?" And they said they were discussing it. So after a while, they sent a message down to the place where I was, which a place called Zomba, Z-O-M-B-A. They sent a messenger down, message down there, and say, "Get Victoria Smith, you have a person in your place whose name is Victoria Smith. She's a registered nurse. Send -- have her --" this was on a Thursday. Monday, have her be in Dar es Salaam, which is in Northern Tanzania. So they sent -- the first time [00:10:00] I ever (inaudible). They sent a volunteer with me, and she was not to leave me until I got on the plane. So she put me on the plane, they flew me -- my kids don't even know all these details. They flew me to Dar es Salaam, which is in East Tanzania -- I mean, East -- she's in -- it's in East -- yeah, Eastern -- Northeastern Tanzania. So I got there, they gave me papers and whatnot. And when I got there, they found out instead of 10 people, they only had three of us. And then we went to -- we had to go to the director of nurses in the long way -- not the director of nurses, director in the Peace Corps, director. She was a woman. So she sat down, meet

down in the office, and she gave me a briefing of where I was going. And that's why what I'm telling you about the (inaudible) and the man setting up, she told me. And so then she said, "Now, I know you were planning to go back to United States. We're going to call your children." So they call my oldest son, they left a message. They call my [00:11:00] youngest son, and he apparently was there, and he must have said, "But is my mother there? Is she there?" And so she gave me the phone, she said, "Tell your son that you're standing in the office." But I couldn't tell him what I was doing, that was still kind of a secret. So I told him that I would be a little bit -- at least three more weeks before I could come home. Then that's when they sent me on to Dar es Salaam. When I got to Dar es Salaam, they checked the papers, and there were three of us. I was a registered nurse, and there was agriculture -- forestry, they called it, but it was a fancy name for agriculture, he was going to help plant seeds. And the other one was water and sanitation, he was going to check the water. So they put three of us on the plane. Now, the reason the director told me it took so long is because it got down to two people when it came to me; one who could speak French fluently, and she was in an Eastern African country, Western African country she was in, and she was a nurse. She was a Caucasian nurse, and it got down to me. The reason [00:12:00] they chose me is they had to choose between a person who could speak French fluently, and a person who had experience and was older. They unfortunately went with the experience. So I got there to go. OK, so when I got to Dar es Salaam, they put me on the plane. That's why I wasn't telling all this in there, because it would take a while. They flew me over to a place called [Moanga?]. That's when I found out that the Lake Victoria, Lake Victoria I think it is in there, the largest lake in Africa has waves on it. And you get on the ship, and it took all night to cross it. And then they flew us up to a small city on the other side. And then they put in a Land Rover, they call it. And I think, if I remember correctly -- because some of it I blocked out -- they put me under a -- covered me with what they used as a skirt, because we had to go through rebel territory. I have not told people all this. So we [00:13:00] got to the rebel territory -- they got me to this camp, because this camp is way in the middle of the mountains. Then I got to this camp, and then they -- after they put me in there, I stayed there for a while. I was replacing a nurse from Alabama, so I was getting it from all ends. She had not grown up apparently with white people, so she gave me a terrible time. And they brought me in because I had this master's of science, and she was just helping out. So they put me over her. When you put somebody over somebody like that, the person under you is not going to be happy. So she was not happy. So when they came to check on me, I said, there were two -- three nurses. I said nurse number one hates nurse number two. Nurse number two hated nurse number one. Nurse number one and two hated the doctor, [who was from Thailand?]. And I told him all of this, and I said, "So this is what you all dropped me in the middle of." And he said, "Well, Victoria, you can handle it." So there I stayed at that refugee camp, not for three weeks [00:14:00] but for five months, I lived in that refugee camp in Northern Tanzania. And as I said, most people don't know,

because I don't do -- unless they ask me, I don't tell them all of that. There's a lot to go through in a refugee camp. So when I look at television now and I see the people and the immigrants and the refugee camp, all of that [I've had?]. And as I said, the Doctors Without Borders are working around the UNHCR, the High Commission is there. And so they are helping out, too. And then the Red Cross and everybody is helping out, because they weren't all Peace Corps people. They were different people from these different organizations. So I stayed there and worked. That's part of the story, then after five months, I said -- they kept extending. I finally said I wanted to go home, I wanted to go back to the United States, I wanted to see my family, my children. I didn't think I'd ever see anyone ever again. And so I got -- I had -- I wanted to see Victoria Falls, because my name is Victoria. So I flew with another Peace Corps person back to [00:15:00] -- some people went to Kenya. They tell you to travel if you're in the Peace Corps where you are because you might not get back there again. And I went on to Victoria Falls. That's a long trip. Sixteen-hour bus ride, part of the way. And then I went to Victoria Falls, and I got to see the falls. Then I went on down to Johannesburg, stayed with people in Johannesburg, South Africa. And just -- that was when Mandela was just getting out of prison and getting -- they were going to choose him for president. And then I came -- I didn't go on down South Africa -- then I came home, and they were having a [ruggers thing?], world tournament, so I couldn't take a plane. So they finally got a plane for me to go. So I had to fly from South Africa -- longest flight I took -- all the way up through Africa to Paris. And then in Paris, I had given away all my clothes, so there I was in the fashion capital of the world, some old tennis shoes and whatever I had left. And then they flew me to Kennedy Airport in New York. [00:16:00] And I finally -- I hadn't been -- I'd been out of the country for two years. I wasn't even sure, and there were all these foreign people. They were East Indian people. But they had flown me into an international area. Then they took me over to the other side, and there my son met me with a dozen roses. And I thought, you don't know it, but your mom did worked hard for these roses. And then I got, you know, back, and he brought me back to Baltimore, just as the man was blowing out the place and, you know, killing the children on April the 19<sup>th</sup>, I think they blew up the place in -- you won't remember, somewhere along the line. They blew up -- Revenue, Internal Revenue Building or something in -- this was 1995, and so they wanted to know if I was going to go on there. And I said, no, I'm going home. And that's when I got to Baltimore, and, you know, and stayed here. That's only one story.

MG: One last thing. Can you tell her what you told me (inaudible) about how you fell in love with tea and cheese [00:17:00] after you came back from the Peace Corps?

VS: Fell in love with...

MG: Tea and cheese, because you didn't have it. You don't remember telling me that?

VS: Wait a minute, TNT?

F: Tea and cheese.

F: Tea and cheese, fell in love with tea and cheese.

VS: Oh, for cheese. Oh, oh. (laughter) (inaudible) because when I went back to -- because when I went back, I was in Niger. It's "Nai-ger" in English, "Ni-zher" in French. And we went to -- I was out of the Peace Corps then, but I went back to see this part of the country. And that's how I got the cheese -- so the goat cheese. They had goat cheese, and they had tea. Well, apparently, if you drink goat cheese and tea and you have nothing else but that, you get to feeling pretty good. Now, it does -- I've never drank anything, and I can't [00:18:00] drink because I will throw up or something. But apparently, it does the same thing for your brain that that does. So we kept eating that cheese, and drinking that tea. And then we were able to do all kinds of things. And I thought, from that day forth, I thought about goat cheese. So now every once in a while I go to Whole Foods, and say, "Do you guys --" and then [a niece?] was telling me how good it was. I said, "You guys got any goat cheese?" And I'd get goat cheese, but I don't drink it with tea. (laughter) So I mentioned the cheese, and to this day -- because you couldn't afford cheese in the Peace Corps, because they give you -- you have -- you live on the money for the country. So the money in the country might be 150 something whatever they call their money to your one dollar or something. So that means if they give you 500, that means that 300 may have to go for your rent, and you got 150 or 200 for your food, and the other things. And they have [PAC?] stores for the expats. That's the white people who live in the country, so they [00:19:00] can go -- or black people, if they're wealthy enough to live there. They can go to this [PAC?], these special stores. They could buy helmets, Band-Aids, and all the stuff they have in the United States. But you can't afford that, because you're living on the Peace Corps salary. So I couldn't afford cheese. So now somebody gives me cheese, I just give them a big hug. (laughter) Because I couldn't -- because now it means so much to me to have cheese. It means as much to me if I turn on the water and the water flows. So if I have food and the water -- and this [lady is?] sitting right next to you. Every time we have something here, she comes and makes sure I get some food. She doesn't know that story, but I appreciate that, and everybody here is so nice to me that I think -- feel like you guys are my family that I didn't have for so long. Now, there's other stories, but it would take too long to get to that.

F: We're going to have to have you back. (applause)

END OF AUDIO FILE

## **SIOHP Interview #6 Elder Jim McAbee and Kendell Stokes**

KENDELL STOKES: My name is Kendell Stokes and I am 15 years old. It is April the 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016. We are at the Walbrook Branch of Enoch Pratt Free Library. It is 11:32 a.m. This is an interview for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project, which is an initiative of the National Association of Black Storytellers and sponsored by the Griots' Circle of Maryland. Please tell me your full name.

JAMES MCABEE: James William McAbee.

KS: What would you like me to call you?

JM: [Dada?] Jim.

KS: OK, Daddy Jim. Before we begin the formal interview, I would like to thank you for volunteering to be interviewed as a part of this project. It means a lot to me and the other students. Please make your answers to the point and relevant to the question asked. [01:00] If I interrupt you at any time, please understand that I am not being rude. But the additional information you are sharing may be the answer to a question that will be asked later in the interview. When were you born?

JM: I was born May 16, 1929, in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

KS: Where do you currently live?

JM: I live in Laurel, Maryland.

KS: The categories that will be covered in this interview are growing up, education, role of the church, adult life, reflections, African American timeline, and questions about significant events in African American history and how they affected your life. If you need to take a break or if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer, anytime during this interview, please feel free to let me know. Where were you born?

JM: Spartanburg, [02:00] South Carolina.

KS: Did you grow up there?

JM: No.

KS: What was your neighborhood like?

JM: Well, it was a family type situation, cousins, nephews, nieces, and all of that, grandparents, the whole kit and caboodle. Only thing about this area where I was born, it was that I was just born there. And we moved back to Washington, DC, where I grew up.

KS: Was it an integrated neighborhood, when you were there?

JM: No.

KS: What were your parents' names?

JM: James and Elizabeth McAbee.

KS: What kind of work did they do?

JM: Well, he was a brick mason. And my mother was a homemaker.

KS: Were you raised by your parents?

JM: Yes.

KS: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

JM: I had. Well, being... Let me see. There's six of us that was born. I was [03:00] the fifth of that set. Four of them have gone on to glory now. Just two of us are living, my brother and myself, so just two of us that's still around and living, at this time.

KS: What are their names?

JM: Well, the first name was Elmira -- Elma. They was a set of twins. The third one was Jenny. The fourth one was Ada. Then me and my brother, Carl.

KS: As children, did you get along with your brothers and sisters?

JM: Very much so, had a good relationship.

KS: Did you have a favored brother or sister?

JM: Not really. We all were chummies together. We were -- no favorites. We was all one...

KS: One big grou--

JM: Yes, one group.

KS: Do the living -- do the ones that are still alive -- do they live near you?

JM: No.

KS: How often do you get to [04:00] see them?

JM: Oh, I would say about, oh, every month or so, about once a month, something like that. Mm-hmm.

KS: Did you have any favorite toys or games?

JM: Oh, yes! I had a whole lot of games. We had basketball. We had football, baseball, all of that, coming up. So. WE enjoyed all the sports.

KS: Did you take any part in any organized sports?

JM: No. I was kind of anemic at the time, so... (laughter) I wasn't too strong, to play basketball. Oh, I had a love o-- I participated in a lot of those things but... At those times, I couldn't qualify, because of my weight and all those kind of things.

KS: Did you have any best friends?

JM: Oh, yes! I had ver-- a whole lot of best friends.

KS: What were they like?

JM: They -- well, that's like family, in a sense, you know. We all got along well. We had school together and those kind of things.

KS: Did you go to their house or did they [05:00] come to yours?

JM: We shared both. I went to theirs. They came to mine.

KS: Did you have a nickname?

JM: Oh, yeah. Nickname is Brett --

KS: Brett.

JM: -- short for brother. (laughs)

KS: How did you get it?

JM: Well, it was handed down by my sisters and brothers -- I mean, by my sisters. Because my brother wasn't born, at that time, so... My sisters gave me the name.

KS: Did you have any chores? If so, what were they?

JM: No, I didn't have any chores. I didn't have any idea of what it was going to be like. So I didn't even care about that.

(laughter)

KS: Did your family have a television?

(break in audio)

F1: And then, you know, go back to your chores question.

KS: Where did you grow up?

JM: I grew up in Washington, DC.

KS: Did you have any chores?

JM: Oh, yes, [06:00] like taking out the trash and going and getting coal for the furnace, those kind of things.

KS: Did your family have a television?

JM: Yes, we had a television, when they first came out, back in 1948.

KS: When could you watch it?

JM: Well, we'd watch it after school, after we did our homework and all that. Got to do our chores and go to do a thing and it was allowed to sit down and watch TV with the family.

KS: What kind of shows did you guys watch?

JM: Well, there wasn't that many of them. They had about four TV stations at that time. And we watched mostly variety shows, like *Show of Shows*, *The Jackie Gleason Show*, those kind of things, a few cartoons that was on at the time. It wasn't too many.

KS: Did your family have a car?

JM: No.

KS: Did your family have meals together?

JM: Yes, every day and every Sunday, mainly. Sundays [07:00] was our biggest day.



KS: How did you celebrate birthdays and holidays?

JM: We had parties.

KS: What did people call African Americans, when you were growing up?

JM: Colored and negroes.

KS: What was it like for African Americans, in the city where you grew up?

JM: Well, it was somewhat segregated, in a sense. But we got along fine. We was happy people, at that time. Even though we had this tight fist around us, we really got along well. But we didn't have the best of jobs. But just, we survived.

KS: Did you or your family experience racism or segregation?

JM: Oh, yes! Because back in those days, we had to sit in the back of the bus, streetcars, those kind of things. And we couldn't go into theaters with them. We had our own special theaters and those kind of things. A lot of the stores, we couldn't shop in, like Garfinkel's and... A whole lot of other little stores down in DC we couldn't [08:00] shop in.

F2: Do-- I don't want be on camera. (laughs) OK. Go ahead.

KS: How did this affect you, as a child?

JM: Well, it didn't affect me as a child. It affected m-- adults, who had to go to do all the shopping and buying, making the purchases. One of the reasons is that... We had stores to buy our clothes and things, which of a cheaper nature. Now the stores that we're referring to were like the big stores, where all the big white people came and shopped, like the governors and the president and their families and the mayor. And we couldn't go there to shop. (coughs)

KS: How did your family survive racism or segregation?

JM: We survived it. Because that was the only way to go. [09:00] And we couldn't do anything about it, at that time, until the laws were changed.

KS: What did you want to be when you grew up?

JM: An architect.

KS: Did you fulfill this dream?

JM: Yes, I did.

KS: Did you have a role model, growing up?

JM: Yes.

KS: Who was it?

JM: Well, it was -- one was a musician. Duke Ellington was one of them. And then I had some other musicians who I liked. And then there were some other people, like sports figures, I liked also.

KS: What is your favorite memory with your family?

JM: Well, favorite was our church gatherings -- was our main thing.

KS: What is your favorite memory of your community?

JM: Well -- our community -- well, we had a lot of what back in those days they call house-rent parties. This is where people of a poor nature couldn't pay their rent. So you'd -- we'd get together. We have a big party -- or a [10:00] house-rent party, that's to say. And that would bring in a little --

KS: Money.

JM: -- money for them to pay their bills. So that's how we got along in those kind of communities, back then.

KS: D--

F1: But excuse me. When they gave the parties, did the people come with extra money or -- just for that purpose? How did you get the money?

JM: Well, they had little coins and things, that they wanted to spend. Like we -- they had beer and stuff like that. We'd charge about 10 cents, a little bottle of beer, things like that.

F1: Oh. OK.

JM: And for the meals, we'd charge about 25 cents for a plate of food, which go--

F1: Oh, OK. Then once you got all the money together --

JM: Yes.

F1: -- you gave it to the person who needed --

JM: Gave the person who needed the money, yes.

F1: -- to pay the rent.

JM: Right. Mm-hmm. So it went around in full circle. Like this week was my week, next week was that persons, we -- and those kind of things.

KS: Do you remember any great stories or legends about your town?

JM: Yes. There were some stories like Thurgood Marshall, when he came [11:00] on the scene. He was in DC. And he was working with a firm that was very known to me. Because I -- when I got to be an adult, they serviced my church and other properties that we was working with. An adult, at that time.

KS: If you attended more than one school at any level, please tell me about each school and why you changed schools.

JM: OK, now, like I said, I had a dream of being an architect. This meant I had to have mathematics, I had to have science, these kind of things. OK. As a -- going up, I went through Armstrong High School, in Washington, DC, where I had architectural drawing at that time. So I went there. And then my parents decided to move to Cincinnati. So we went to Cincinnati to finish -- up in Cincinnati for my schooling. Then we came back [12:00] to DC. (laughs) And after school, then I got a job. I started out in a dry cleaning place. And so it was called New Jersey Cleaners. (coughs) Excuse me. And this gave me the incentive to go further into my education. So I got my education through this job. Because I had income to come to pay for my schooling. And then, after I got on the jobs -- I got on-the-job training, which sent me to Maryland University. I went to Illinois Institute of Technology, in Chicago. And so, when I came back, then I became a full-time dr-- so naval architect. A naval architect was not building house. It was building ships and boats and those kind of things. And that was my career.

KS: The following questions relate to your elementary, middle, or junior high school experiences. Were you able to [13:00] attend schools?

JM: Yes.

KS: What were the name of your schools?

JM: Well, my elementary school was Banneker, and DC. And my middle school was Shaw Junior High School. And then I went to Armstrong High School. And from there, I went to college, from that point, various colleges. I had studies at American University, Maryland University, in Chicago, and then back into DC.

KS: Were they public or private?

JM: Oh, they were private schools. Colleges, you mean?

KS: Yes.

JM: They were --

KS: Well, all sch--

JM: -- the elementary schools were public. And the colleges was private.

KS: What did your schools look like?

JM: Well, like today's schools. They're still the same. There was no -- (laughter) there's no difference.

KS: Did girls and boys attend the same school?

JM: Yes.

KS: Did you enjoy your school experience?

JM: Oh, yes, very much. We had very good [14:00] teachers. Before integration came in, we had some of the best African American teachers you want to find. And they were loving and they was -- they spent a lot of time with us. And we learned quite a bit through them.

KS: Were you able to go to school for what we now call a regular school year?

JM: Yes!

KS: Were the grades separated?

JM: No. I mean, when we separated, what do you mean?

KS: I mean separated as -- by like sixth and seventh and eighth grade and...

JM: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm. They were all graduated, all the way up from first through senior high school.

KS: Were the teachers good teachers?

JM: Yes, very good teachers.

KS: Were your schools integrated?

JM: Not at the time. My schools weren't integrated.

KS: [15:00] What was the racial makeup of the teachers?

JM: All African American.

KS: How did the teachers treat the students?

JM: Very good.

KS: Did you have any books?

JM: Yes. They -- even though they were secondhand, we had books.

KS: Were your classmates friendly?

JM: Yes.

KS: Did you and your classmates live in the same community?

JM: Yes, we did.

KS: Did you have any special friends in school?

JM: Oh, yes, very special. Girls and boys was good friends.

KS: Did you study together?

JM: No, we didn't stay together. We just lived in the same neighborhood. But we didn't stay together.

KS: Study -- like study.

JM: Yes.

KS: OK. Did you still keep in contact with any of your classmates?

JM: No, not at this time.

KS: All [16:00] of the following questions relate to your high school experience.  
Where was your high school located?

JM: It was located in Washington, DC, on O Street, First and O Street, Northwest.

KS: What did your high school look like?

JM: Well, it looked like a -- it was sort of a -- outside, was this color, like in this room here. It wasn't a red-brick building like some other schools are. And it was -- had a parking lot behind it for all your teachers to park their cars. And some of the students who drive cars, they could park their cars there. And the school, we had about three levels, all the school's. And my level was on the third level but -- the education I needed. They had architects on the third floor. And a lot of our students, who received scholarships to various colleges, from Armstrong... [17:00] Some went to Cornell, and New York, places like that. We had very good teachers, that instructed us very well. So that's how we learned our trade and our careers, through the black -- and African American teachers.

KS: Did you enjoy going to high school?

JM: Oh, yes, very much so.

KS: What subjects were you taught?

JM: We were taught English -- mostly basic... We had English, we had math, we had science, and a few other little subject that they threw in.

KS: Were you able to have electives?

JM: Only when I got to college.

KS: Were you able to take college prep courses?

JM: Yes.

KS: Did you plan to attend college after high school?

JM: Yes, very much so. I had to.

KS: Did you take home economics, [18:00] business, or trade courses?

JM: Trade -- and business.

KS: Were the classes/subjects taught by different teachers?

JM: Yes.

KS: Did you have any books, in high school?

JM: Yes.

KS: Did you take part in any organized sport or clubs activities, in high school?

JM: Only clubs. I didn't take in any sports activity. Like I said earlier on, I wasn't physical enough to be on any sports team. In high school, we did have a ROTC type of situation. We had military type uniforms. And we had drills and those kind of things.

KS: The following questions relate to your junior college, college, or university experience. What was the name of [19:00] your college?

JM: The college was American, Maryland, Illinois Institute of Technology, in Chicago.

KS: What did it look like?

JM: Well, it was basically like any college, really. It's not any different, and what you see around here, at Morgan or those kind of schools, all look about the same. They had the type of a [dome?] type situation. So.

KS: Did you live on campus?

JM: No.

KS: Was it an historically black college or university?

JM: Well, it was both, actually. Because when I went to Chicago, it's much -- integrated out there than it was in this area.

KS: Did you join a fraternity or a sorority?

JM: No. I didn't join any of those.

KS: [20:00] Do you feel belonging to a fraternity/sor-- what was the racial makeup of your college?

JM: It was all -- it was integrated, in Chicago.

KS: What was the racial makeup of the teachers?

JM: They was all integrated, as well.

KS: How did the teachers treat the students?

JM: Very well.

KS: Did you attain any additional degrees?

JM: No.

KS: Did you work or raise a family, while going through school?

JM: No.

KS: These questions will not ask about any personal beliefs. They are only to get information about the church's role in your life, if any. Did you attend church as a child?

JM: Yes.

KS: [21:00] What was the name of your church?

JM: John Wesley A.M.E. Zion, in Washington, DC.

KS: What was the denomination?

JM: The denomination was Methodist.

KS: Where was it located?

JM: Fourteenth and Corcoran Street, Northwest DC.

KS: Did your family attend services together?

JM: Yes.

KS: Was your church segregated?

JM: Yes.

KS: What part did the church play in your life, as a child/teenager?



JM: Well, the spiritual upbringing that a family needed.

KS: Is the church still an active part of your life?

JM: No -- this church. But the church, in -- oh -- is part of my active life now.

KS: What ministries or activities did you engage in?

JM: Well, back as a child, [22:00] only with Sunday school. The Methodist church was my family's church. And after I left there, then I went down to DC, and Southeast DC, to Mount Joy Baptist Church. That's where I met my wife. And so I joined that church. And by time, in that church, I became a trustee.

KS: What role did your church play in the civil rights movement?

JM: Well, we worked with the Martin Luther King group and... And Martin Luther King had a whole lot of things. He visited a lot of the churches. And we had all kind of programs with him.

F1: Excuse me. You wa-- would you explain to him what a trustee is?

JM: Yes. A trustee was that we handled all the financial business of the church, the properties, and all [23:00] that kind of thing. We banked all the finance money that was collected.

KS: What is your spouse's name? What is your spouse's name?

JM: June.

KS: How long have you been married?

JM: Sixty-five years.

KS: What kind of work does your spouse do or has done?

JM: She was a schoolteacher.

KS: Do you have any children?

JM: Yes.

KS: What are their names, gender, and ages?

JM: We have Lynn, which is a girl -- female. I have Brian and Tracy, which are my male sons. I have three children, total.

KS: Do you have any grandchildren?

JM: Yes.

KS: How many do you have?

JM: Six.

KS: Do you have any great grandchildren?

JM: Yes.

KS: [24:00] How many?

JM: Six.

F: (laughs)

KS: Are you currently employed?

JM: I'm retired now.

KS: Were you in the military?

JM: Yes.

KS: In what branch did you serve?

JM: US Army, two years, 1951 to 1953.

KS: What rank did you attain?

JM: Well, corporal. Was a temporary rank. My permanent -- pr-- rank was PFC. As a -- that's what I was discharged as, a PFC.

F1: When you retired, what did you retire from?

JM: Retired from the Naval -- David Taylor Model Basin, which was a Naval facility, in Carderock, Maryland. That's where I did all my naval architecture work. That was my career. And that's where I retired from.

KS: Did you serve during war- or peacetime?

JM: [25:00] I was -- during the Korean War, when I served.

KS: Was the military segregated, when you served?

JM: When I joined? Yes, it was segregated.

KS: How were Negro soldiers treated differently?

JM: It was treated differently because we had our own facilities and all. And then, in 1953 or -54, when Harry Truman got in, then everything was integrated. And so the military, at that time, was not segregated and... I was always treated fairly and equally. Got our promotions and all that, without any questions or any doubts.

KS: What is your favorite story from being in the military?

JM: Well, my favorite story was to be... I was a company clerk, at the time. And I (laughs) wanted to go overseas. So I was having all the morning reports. And, of course, I put the names over -- was [26:00] to be shipped overseas. I would always put my name in. But somehow, when the report comes back, your name's redlined. So I couldn't go overseas.

KS: (laughs)

JM: I didn't go overseas at all, during my career in the military.

KS: Were you active in the civil rights movement?

JM: Yes.

KS: Please explain what activities you were in.

JM: I was -- like I said, we did a lot of the marches and all that, with the... In our circles, we went down to the Walk on Washington, back then, in '63, when Martin Luther King made his historical speech. And so we did a whole lot. And we had a lot of Martin Luther King's materials that we sold, those kind of things, for the campaigns that they were going through.

KS: What we-- what are your favorite activities or hobbies?

JM: Well, I have a -- I used to have a railroad -- [27:00] railroad trains. And I gave all of that to my sons. So they all have them now. And I have collected model cars, from nineteen -- I would say 1898 up until this present time. So I still have my hobbies going.

KS: Please relate your favorite family story.

JM: Family story? Well, my family favorite story is (laughs) when my kids were young. And we had a lot of ministers -- minister friends. And so had one in New Jersey we visited, mostly, I would say about three times a year. And so my middle child, Brian, was very vocal. And he would ask a lot of questions, out of order, I would always say. (laughs) So we got to the minister's. He was playing the piano for us, a lot of spiritual music. And then my son blurts out, "Can you play boogie-woogie?" (laughter) So that was one of the favorite stories that [28:00] my family shared.

KS: What was your...?

F1: What was the answer?

JM: Huh?

F1: What was the answer?

JM: He just laughed at --

F1: Oh.

JM: -- you know, what he was doing.

KS: What was the happiest moment of your life?

JM: Well, when all my children were born. That's -- we were happy, each time.

KS: Who was or is the most influential person in your life?

JM: My wife.

M1: (laughs)

KS: Can you tell me about her?

JM: Well, she has a lot of smarts. And she really kept me in line. And so we worked a whole of things together. What was hers was mine and what's mine was hers. And we had no division in things. And we shared everything together.

KS: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in life?

JM: Well, that's hard to say. So many things. [29:00] In growing up, you know, I had my spiritual background. And then, as I went on through life, I met other people. And we got along very well. And so, yeah, I went on. And the new friends I met, I shared with them how to get weddings together, those kind of things, and shared a whole lot of family activities together.

KS: What are some of the most important lessons you have taught your children?

JM: Well, I taught them how to be proper adults when they grow up. And the main thing was to teach them how to get careers. And I'm very proud of their activities now, because they've fulfilled my dream. They all are professional people at this time. My daughter, she's in medicine now. And she's director of her department, and hospital in DC -- I mean, in Silver Spring. [30:00] And my oldest son, he's in real estate. And he got his own business. And my youngest son is -- he's in same type of business too but a little different than my other son. So they're doing very well in their careers now. They have their own businesses.

KS: What are the --

JM: My daughter's at Holy Cross Hospital, in DC -- I mean, in Silver Spring, Maryland.

KS: -- what are the proudest moments in your life?

JM: The proudest? When I first got marrie--

KS: Did you accomplish all you have hoped for? Did you accomplish all you have hoped for?

JM: No. I'm still alive yet and I haven't fulfill all of everything yet. So. I'm still working, on that end.

KS: If you could, would there be anything in your life you would go back and change?

JM: No, I don't think I would go back and change. Because as [31:00] life moved on, things evolved around everything that was changing. And so everything was changed for

the good. And we just fell right in line with all the new changes and moved on with our lives.

KS: Do you feel you are leaving a legacy?

JM: Yes!

KS: What would that legacy be and for whom are you leaving that -- f--

JM: Well, I have three children. And all of it will be left to them, everything I've gained in life. Everything I have owned, they would divide among them after I demise.

KS: I will relate some milestones in African American history. If applicable, please tell me how you felt, when they happened.

F1: Before we go to the next part, could you tell me, back when you were coming up, did skin color make a difference, even though you were all...?

JM: Oh, yes, it did.

F1: Can you talk about that?

JM: Yes. Just like it is in the [32:00] islands. It's a caste system. The fair-skinned people are always put up to the front and the darker skins always were toward the back of things. In other words, the lighter-skinned folks got the best jobs. Put it that way.

KS: Nineteen thirty-one. The arrest of Scottsboro nine in Alabama.

JM: Well, that was before my time, actually. I was only about one and a half years old at that time. So I have no comments on that matter. (laughs)

KS: Nineteen forty-seven. Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier in major-league baseball.

JM: Oh, that was a very exciting time then. Because when Branch Rickey brought Jackie Robinson to the scene, he suffered quite a bit. The people in Philadelphia and St. Louis gave him the worst time of his career. But the thing about it now is I'm sorry to say that Philadelphia has offered an apology, [33:00] after all these years, to his family. [I?] said, "It's too late. He's dead!" and all this. And then, the family, well, I guess -- I don't know how they're accepting it. But, you know, to me, it's a hard pill to swallow.

That's what he went through at that time. But it was a glorious time that he fell into the major leagues. Because it gave us the incentive that there's room for us to bring more players in, more African American players.

KS: Nineteen forty-eight. President Truman officially integrates the US armed services.

JM: Yes.

KS: Nineteen fifty-four. *Brown versus the Board of Education*, making segregation in schools unconstitutional.

JM: That was a very enjoyable year too. Because in a sense, it hurt the black teachers, because a lot of them figure, once integration was set in, they would lose their jobs. Well, some [34:00] did and some didn't. You take like down in Virginia, there were some schools that never did integrate, until later on. And a lot of those schools were closed down. And so a lot of blacks were put out. They had to get other type jobs.

KS: Nineteen fifty-five. Rosa Parks's arrest for defying bus segregation laws, in Montgomery, Alabama.

JM: That was a sympathetic move on her part. Because here was a woman who worked hard all day long. And she worked long hours. And she was tired. And I don't blame her for sitting in that seat. And I would have sat down myself. And even though she went to prison, for a short time... But, you know, I still applauded her for doing that.

KS: Nineteen fifty-seven. Little Rock Nine integrate Central High School, in Arkansas.

JM: Mm-hmm. Yes. That was a nice [35:00] moment too. And course, Governor Faubus, at that time, tried to block the entrance of those students -- from going in. But yet, still, President Eisenhower sent the National Guard in. And they were allowed to go to school.

KS: Nineteen sixty. Woolworth sit-in by Greensboro Four, in North Carolina.

JM: Well, that was a sit-in moment there. And the fellows, they got a roughed up a little bit too. And so we boycotted some of those stores, up in our area, during that time.

And so it somewhat enlightened that movement to integrate down in North Carolina. There was a group called SNCC, at the time, you know, the youngsters from the colleges, Goldsboro, North Carolina, those schools down in that area. And they got together and... They really [36:00] got things moving in that area down South.

KS: Nineteen sixty-two. James Meredith integrates University of Mississippi.

JM: Yeah, that was another momentous moment too. And I'm sorry to say that he was shot at by one of those segregationists in the South. And still, he won out. And he was able to continue his education there.

KS: Nineteen sixty-three. March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

JM: Yes. It helped me, in a lot of senses, too. Because back in those days, jobs weren't that easy to find. And by them marching on DC like they did, a lot of things opened up, for people to get decent jobs.

KS: Nineteen sixty-four. Civil Rights Act passed.

JM: Yes. That was a wonderful moment too, by... Martin Luther King got with [37:00] President Johnson. And they had a little fireside chat about things and got it to pass.

KS: Nineteen sixty-four. Sidney Poitier becomes first Negro to win Best Actor Oscar.

JM: Yeah. That was a nice movie, *Lilies of the Field*. And... Of course, I've seen other movies that (laughs) I thought was better than that. But still, he got it for that movie. Yeah. That was a nice time.

KS: Nineteen sixty-seven. Thurgood Marshall appointed first Negro on Supreme Court.

JM: Well, that was a move that the government made. But I hated to see him go there, because he was a powerful man with our movement. And so going to the Supreme Court -- so what -- moved him out of the scene of being with us. And by being with Supreme Court, he was just a part of that system there. But it was a good move. But still, we missed him.

KS: Nineteen sixty-eight. [38:00] Dr. Martin Luther King assassinated.



JM: Yes. That was a terrible moment. A lot of things happened that was unnecessary. They burned up the buildings in DC area, from mostly black neighborhoods. The white stores were not touched. Only the black businesses was burned out. And a lot of places where blacks lived were burned out. And so it was a time that we hated to see. But yet still, it happened. And regretted it, ever since.

KS: Two thousand and one. Colin Powell appointed first African American secretary of state.

JM: That was a great move, a great move. It shows that blacks were ready to go into high positions, causing them to [springboard?].

KS: Two thousand two. Halle Berry and Denzel Washington, Best Actor and Actress Oscars, making it the first [39:00] time African Americans win both categories in the same year.

JM: Yes. Very good move. Mm-hmm.

KS: Two thousand and eight. Barack Obama elected the first African American president of the United States.

JM: That was the greatest move ever, that voters ever made, electing an African American, black man as president of the United States, for two terms. And he's still going strong -- even though he did not get the support from Congress, like he should have gotten. Yet still, he's my favorite.

KS: Is there anything you would like to add, that was not covered in this interview?

JM: Well, it's -- well, (laughs) it'll take all day for me to cover everything.

F1: (laughs)

JM: But, yes, yeah, it was nice doing this. And I enjoyed working with you on these questions and whatnot. And I hope that what I've said and answered for you is beneficial.

F1: I have a question, [40:00] just for the interview. What was SNCC?

JM: SNCC?

F1: Mm-hmm.

JM: It was a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Commission -- association, whatever, mm-hmm, nonviolent. In other words, the kids would go into these places and sit at the counters or whatnot, say, "I want --" so on and so on, j-- "Well, we don't serve this type of person." He said, "Well, we don't eat those kind of person." (laughs) So that's --

M1: [Understood?].

JM: -- how that came about. Leaving out the N-word.

(laughter)

KS: Again, I thank you for your participation in the pilot of the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project. Thank you, so much, for your...

JM: It was my pleasure.

F1: Tell...

F3: I wanted to ask a question. You said that Duke Ellington was your role model or idol. I want to... And he's a musician. I wanted to know if you played a specific instrument.

JM: Because he played the kind of music that I really enjoyed.

F3: Oh.

JM: And so it was -- back in those -- it was [41:00] the Big Band Area, back the-- in those days. And we didn't have such thing as the small combos later on, when Nat King Cole came on the scene. And then the type of music he played was from opera on down to jazz. And they covered a whole lot. And actually, it brought a lot of people into the music business. He was one of the forerunners of a lot of our best known musicians.

F1: Off camera, I have a question. Because our young people like to dress in a certain way. How do young people dress, when they were in high school? How did young people dress in high school?

JM: Well, in high school, we dressed very nattily like. We weren't too sharp or too overdressed, anything. We didn't have to wear uniforms at that time, like they -- some of

the schools have to do now. But back in those days, we had certain ties -- we went to school. And [42:00] so that was one of the things that the black school had put on us, to respect the teachers and ourselves, by dressing up like... And the girls had skirts on, below the knees, and those kind of things.

M1: Never pants.

JM: Yes.

F1: Thank you, again. Stop?

(break in audio)

JM: Blacks are not going to Glen Echo. African American kids couldn't go there. We had a couple or rides out there, several years ago -- I mean, way back then. The kids were not there. And they couldn't get in and sort of rioted, threw rocks at people's homes, those kind of things.

F1: What is Glen Echo?

JM: Glen Echo?

F1: Mm.

JM: It's in the lower part of Bethesda, Maryland.

F1: What is it?

JM: This is a commu-- was a --

F1: Amusement...

JM: -- amusement park, right. That's what it is, amusement park. So we had our own, [43:00] back this way, but yet, still, they wanted to go out to Glen Echo. (laughs) But... So what they had, he'd had James Strates Shows that come in and had some other -- Ringling Brothers -- they would come in -- and had circuses and all that kind of thing, in the black communities. So it was a lot to... I know you're wondering about those times. But I'm glad you all had to come up like you are today. Because you got all integration. You got everything out there for you. You got schools opened up for you. And I'd like to suggest one thing. Don't plan for a job. Plan for a career. Anybody can get a job.

But go to school. If your parents can't send you to school, get you some kind of a job that can pay enough to send you to school. And once you get your career outlines, go for it. And... Because and so, a lot of these -- [44:00] a place where you could get decent jobs for your careers, they will further your education. Because mine was furthered, when I got my job -- my career. And the learning is wonderful, and the teaching. And they all -- they're just wonderful. You get to travel. And so... I went to Chicago twice -- schools out there, twice. And so one was in programming tools. This -- back in those days, when computers first came out, your first computer was as big as this room. (laughter) Now you got an iPad. So back then, you had to learn a whole lot about those kind of computers. And as the years grew on, things got smaller and smaller and smaller. And so get an education. Get your careers. And when you're going to plan for a family, don't live above your means. [45:00] It's good advice, I think. (laughs)

KS: It's amazing advice.

F1: I turned it off. Once you started talking, I turned it back on.

(break in audio)

F1: -- went to college. And you went to college up north. Did you go up north...? Because a lot of times, in the South, they wouldn't allow you to go in the South. So they would pay for you to go to school somewhere up...

JM: No, no, no. The reason that the schools were selected -- because these are the schools that the -- these [offices?] had under their wing.

F1: Oh, OK.

JM: OK.

F1: OK.

JM: Just like, the Model Basin I work with, the Navy department, we had Michigan State, Michigan University, Caltech, in California, Drexel, in Philadelphia, those kind of schools.

F1: OK, OK.

JM: So those are the schools we've had to opt to go to.

F1: Oh, OK. OK.

JM: Mm-hmm. So we had n-- even if -- went south, it'd been the same.

F1: Mm-hmm. OK.

JM: You wouldn't have had no problem.

F1: Oh, OK. [Thank you?]. Every time we start, somethi--

(break in audio)

JM: -- by getting a decent job, under your career, is that you're making good money. You want to buy a... Once you want to get married, you want to get a home and automobiles, these kind of things. And it's going to be nice that you just go up to a place and say, "I want to get this. I want to get this," and had no problems at all.

KS: Because you got money. (laughs)

JM: You got money, see. So that's why careers are so important. And so that's how I geared my kids to be career-oriented, instead of just getting a job. That's... I had a job and (laughs) it wasn't that much -- pay enough. I say, "I got to get out of this." (laughter) So then I got my career. And then things started opening up. I mean, I've had two homes. No, I've actually had three homes, you know? And my last one, I paid cash for.

F1: Whh! Mm! Mm!

JM: D-- (laughter) [47:00] So it's a whole lot of opportunities out there for you. So grab it. You know. Don't sh-- don't think that, because you're African American, that everybody in the world is against you. No, no, no. You got to open the doors. Don't close the door on yourself. [Oh?], say, "I can do this. I can do this. I can do this." Keep it in front of... Don't be dissuaded or, you know, let someone say, "You can't do this." And... Because I say it to a lot of people. Even whites were telling each other, "You can't do this." I said, "Yes, you can do this. You can, if -- put forth the effort and a whole lot of things you can do." So every year -- every three years, I get a new car.

KS: How many cars do you have?

JM: Oh, oh. Since 1990, I've been having Hondas. (laughter) I love the Hondas. So I get one about every three years. Mm-hmm. So my wife has got a new car.

KS: [48:00] Expensive living.

JM: And a family structure's wonderful. You know, get your family together. And if you're going to get married, love your wife, love your children. Give them the respect that you want them to give to you. And it'd be a wonderful thing. Because my kids... I mean, like I want to take them out for dinner. "No! We're going to pay for your dinner." (laughs) See? So I can't treat them. They want to treat me all the time. So. That's one of the respect that you want to have with your family. Love them. And give them spiritual life, as well. If they want to sing in a choir, let them sing in a choir. If they want to be an usher in the church, let them usher. But let them have a church life. It means a lot.

F1: OK. Now I'm going to cry, back here.

END OF AUDIO FILE

**SIOHP Interview #7 Elder Fellisco Keeling and Malachi Ross Jones**

F1: That's right, it's going to start counting down, but it's in a separate folder so it won't overlay anything.

MALACHI ROSS JONES: My name is Malachi Ross Jones. I am 14 years old. Today is...

F1: Saturday, May the 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

MRJ: We are at the Walbrook branch of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. The time is...

F1: Three o'clock p.m.

MRJ: This interview is for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project, which is an --

F1: Initiative.

MRJ: -- initiative of the National Association of Black Storytellers, and is sponsored by the Griots' Circle of Maryland. Please tell me your full name.

FELLISCO KEELING: Fellisco Edwards Keeling.

MRJ: What would you like me to call you?

FK: [00:01:00] You can call me Mama Fellisco.

MRJ: Before we --

FK: (laughter) That's a whole lot.

MRJ: Before we begin the formal interview, Mama Fellisco, I would like to thank you for volunteering to be interviewed as part of this project. It means a lot to me and the other students. Please make your answers to the point and relative to the questions asked. If I interrupt you at any time, please understand that I am not being rude, but the additional information that you are sharing may be the answer to the question that I'm about to ask later in the interview. Where were you born?

FK: Charlottesville, Virginia.

MRJ: Where do you currently live?

FK: I live here in Baltimore.

MRJ: The categories that were -- [00:02:00] that will be covered in this interview are: growing up; education; role of the church; adult life; reflection; African American timeline; questions about how significant events in African American history reflect your life. If you need to take a break, and if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer at any time during the interview, please feel free to let me know.

FK: OK.

MRJ: When were you born?

FK: I was born January 26, 1937, as I said, in Charlottesville, Virginia, the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. (laughter) OK, go on.

MRJ: Did you grow up there?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: What was your neighborhood like?

FK: It was an all-black neighborhood. [00:03:00] On the street that I lived -- I lived on a street called Dice Street, and everyone who lived on Dice Street was a black person. So we had houses with yards all the way around the houses. They were good-sized houses.

MRJ: Was it an integrated neighborhood?

FK: No.

MRJ: What were your parents' names?

FK: My father's name was Douglas Edwards. My mother's name was Virginia Hardy Edwards.

MRJ: What kind of work did they do?

FK: My dad was an insurance agent. He was head of the insurance -- it was called the Southern Aid Life Insurance Company, and it was headquarters -- quartered in Richmond, Virginia, and he was head of the Charlottesville division of that insurance [00:04:00] company.



MRJ: Were you raised by your parents?

FK: Yes. Oh, I forgot to tell you: my mother was a hairdresser. But yes, I was raised by both my parents.

MRJ: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

FK: No.

MRJ: Did you have a favorite [toy?] or game?

FK: I was thinking about that. No, not really. I enjoyed my dolls, you know, all girly things. I always loved music. When I was really little I loved country music. (laughter) But I've always loved music, and I always loved the opera on Saturday afternoons. The Metropolitan Opera would come on, and I just thought that was the most wonderful thing. I wanted to go. I did finally get to go see one.

MRJ: Did you take part in any organized sport?

FK: [00:05:00] No, I didn't.

MRJ: Who were your best friends?

FK: My best friends in elementary school was a girl named Doris and another girl named Amanda, and then, as I got older, my schoolmates were -- best friends were [Minyan?], Juanita, and Barbara, and the four of us were ace buddies.

MRJ: What were they like?

FK: Just fun. We enjoyed each other. We each were very different, and we complemented each other. And the best thing: Barbara had her mother -- Barbara's mother and father had a car, and Barbara could drive when we were in high school, (laughter) so we were kind of very special people, because many people in our school did not have a car.

MRJ: [00:06:00] Did they come to your house or did you go to theirs?

FK: We went to each other's houses.

MRJ: Did you have a nickname?

FK: No, I didn't.

MRJ: If you had chores, what were they?

FK: I had to wash the dishes, and dust, sweep the steps, and dust the railing, things like that, make the beds.

MRJ: Did you have a TV?

FK: No.

MRJ: Did your family have a car?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: What --

FK: A 1932 Buick, (laughter) and I still think of it fondly. We would go -- take trips to Richmond, Virginia to see my daddy's sisters and my cousins.

MRJ: What did your family -- did your family have meals together?

FK: [00:07:00] Yes.

MRJ: How did you celebrate birthdays and holidays?

FK: We celebrated them together. My family was small, because it was just my mom, dad, and me, but my mother would always take in people, and there was one girl that she took in when the girl was about five. I was about six or seven. And so she was very much like a sister to me.

MRJ: What did people call African Americans when you were growing up?

FK: Negroes and colored.

MRJ: What was it like for African Americans in the city where you grew up?

FK: It's different to look back on it and see what was going on at that time, but going through it is a whole different thing. [00:08:00] Going through it is just ordinary, dry long so. It's just the thing -- life, because it was what everybody was expected -- you did what was expected of you.

MRJ: Did you or your family experience racism or segregation?

FK: Yes, very definitely.

MRJ: Please give me one example.

FK: Well, (laughter) there are quite a few. The -- you lived being very careful about what you do, what you say, and who you say it to. When we were on a bus one day, my mother was taking us to see a friend of hers, lived up near the University of Virginia, which is in Charlottesville, [00:09:00] Virginia, Mr. Jefferson [Chambers?]. And when we got there, we were on the bus going toward this place, and the driver was so mean-looking. My mother needed some help about when to get off the bus. And what happened was my mother realized she could not ask this bus driver for any help. So we got off the bus at a stop that was -- made us have to walk quite a distance in order to get to her friend's house. But it was very real, and very scary, so much so I still remember it, and I'm almost 80 years old, and I still remember it. It was a time to -- you had to be careful who you said what to. [00:10:00] We could've been put off the bus at any place, and we had no recourse. You didn't have -- you couldn't get a lawyer and say, you know, "I wasn't treated right." There was no recourse.

MRJ: How did it affect you as a child?

FK: I really didn't have that much interaction with anyone who was of another race, and therefore most of the people that I interacted with were black, so therefore I wasn't as affected, I guess, as I would be if I had been in an integrated situation where people really didn't like black people. I knew that in Charlottesville that [00:11:00] there were white people who really did not want to have anything to do with black people, and that thought black people should only be there to clean their houses, work at the university hospital, or clean for the University of Virginia students who lived on campus at the university hospital. The other black people were teachers in our school, and doctors, and we had two under-- black undertakers.

MRJ: How did it affect you as an adult?

FK: Hmm. I look back on it now, and it makes my life full. I have reason to understand that although things are not as they should be right now, as far as I'm concerned, [00:12:00] I would not want to go back to that. I would not have the recourse that I have now. Now I know I can go to the courts and get some kind of justice, but

back then I couldn't. But I have that history, and I value the fact that I've lived through so much history.

MRJ: How did you and your family survive racism and segregation?

FK: (laughter) We just did. I don't know how to answer that. We just did. It was a way of life, and so therefore you lived as best you could with what you had. And because within the black community we had just about everything we really needed -- we would go to the theater downtown. We lived in a small city, about 25,000 people, [00:13:00] and I guess maybe about 3,000 of those were black people, and back then, of course, we were called colored. But we couldn't drink out of the white water fountains. We could not go into the movie... Let's see. There was no black movie for us. We had to share the movie with the white people, but we were either -- we were upstairs in the balcony, and the white people were downstairs. So, of course, I always wanted to know what was so special about downstairs. Once I -- you know, things were integrated, I went to another city and went and sat downstairs, I realized I enjoyed being in the balcony 'cause I didn't have to stick my head up in the air to see the screen, but... But anyhow, that's the way it was. When you went into a store, a clothing store, you couldn't try on hats. Certain stores, you [00:14:00] could try on shoes and clothes.

MRJ: What did you want to be when you grew up?

FK: I wanted to be a singer.

MRJ: Did you fulfill that dream?

FK: I majored in vocal music education, and got my degree in that when... But once I got out of college, I started teaching elementary school, because I was in education, so therefore I had the education credits. So I started elementary school, and then I did that for 15 years, different places, and then went on to the Enoch Pratt Free Library, and was a children's services librarian for 27 years, and then I retired.

MRJ: Did you have a role model growing up?

FK: I'd say my mother was my [00:15:00] role model. My mom and my dad. They were both role models.

MRJ: What is your favorite memory of your family?

FK: When you're growing up in a family that is loving and caring, you have memories that are just wholesome and wonderful, and so there are many things that make you feel good about the fact that you lived there in that house with your mom and dad, and I just loved living at 320 Dice Street, and that house is no longer there, so therefore it's all in my memory now. The house was torn down after I sold it.

MRJ: What is your favorite memory of your community?

FK: The [00:16:00] people in the community supported each other and cared for each other. Of course, there were people who were good, bad, you know, like in -- humans. People were human. But we still cared for each other, and we -- (laughter) being a small community, everybody knew everybody's business, and so therefore you felt supported. You knew you were supported. I couldn't go anywhere without knowing that I had to do the right thing or my mother and dad were going to find out about it. There was no sneaking around doing anything, nowhere, so... I guess it's a feeling of support and care.

MRJ: Do you remember any great stories or legends about your town?

FK: The... The main thing about Charlottesville was the fact that it is a college town, [00:17:00] really, and many of the teachers... I know we have -- we'll get to this later, but many of the people came to the university... The university was all white, and at the time when I was growing up only white males, white... There were no females at the University of Virginia. So what would happen, they would come to the university, and the people who were married, those young women who had -- were putting their husbands through University of Virginia, would teach in the white schools. In my school were all black, so we'll talk about it another time. But that is [00:18:00] part of what Charlottesville was all about. Also, my grandfather was pastor of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church for a long time, for almost 30 years, and he was one of the first pastors of this church, and now there is a section of Charlottesville that's named for him, so I'm kind of proud of that.

MRJ: If you attended more than one school at any level, please let me -- tell me about each school and why you changed schools. The following questions relate to elementary, middle, and junior high school experiences. Were you able to attend school?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Were they -- what were the names of your school?

FK: I went to elementary school, and [00:19:00] that went through seventh grade, and then eighth grade started high school. The elementary school was called Jefferson Elementary School. The high school was called Jackson P. Burley. It was a public school.

MRJ: Where were they located?

FK: In Charlottesville, Virginia. I would say it was about, oh, seven or eight blocks from my house.

MRJ: What were your schools like -- look like?

FK: My school was a big, brick building. (laughter) Tongue twister! And it had many classrooms. When I first started, there were -- the elementary school was a smaller [00:20:00] building, and then there was a bigger building beside it that was the high school, but when I was in elementary school, this was still a big, brick building, and we would have assemblies in the morning, and all the people -- all -- and it was all black -- the people would -- all the students would come together and have an assembly. We would sing patriotic songs. And that's the reason I know all of the Army, Navy, Marines songs and all of those things. And it was fun.

MRJ: Did boys and girls attend the same school?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Did you enjoy schools?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Were you able to go to school for what we now call a regular school year?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Were your grades separated?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Were the teachers good teachers?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: [00:21:00] Were your schools integrated?

FK: No.

MRJ: What was the ratio makeup of your teachers?

FK: All black, or all colored. Back then it was called all colored.

MRJ: What did the teachers treat -- how did the teachers treat the students?

FK: They were good teachers, and they taught us. They understood what young black children needed, and they gave that. And some were very nurturing to -- especially to some of the young people who were very poor, maybe didn't have the proper clothes, or didn't have the proper shoes. They would make sure that somehow that person got some shoes, that person got a shirt, whatever. So it wasn't just teaching ABC's [00:22:00] in elementary school, I'm talking, and they were nurturing. But they also were teachers who were very well educated. They were educated to be teachers, and they knew their subjects, and they knew what they were doing.

MRJ: Did you have books?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: What were the [contents?] of the books?

FK: The condition of the books was very good, 'cause my parents had to buy the books. At that... (laughter) Yeah, at -- in our city, we didn't have books by the -- you know, the City didn't just give us the books. We had to buy our own books. So I bought books. I had new books. But they did have some books that the white school had used, and you could get [00:23:00] used books. And -- but most of the books that I saw were in pretty good condition.

MRJ: Were your classmates friendly?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Did you or -- did you and your classmates live in the same community?

FK: Yes. For elementary school, we're still talking? There's a difference in high.

MRJ: Did you have any special friends in school?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Did you study together?

FK: In school, yes, but when I went home, no. We didn't go home together in elementary school.

MRJ: How would your classmates remember you?

FK: (laughter) Hopefully fondly. That's all I could say. Hopefully.

MRJ: Do you still keep in contact with any of your classmates?

FK: Some, yes. Some still live in Charlottesville, [00:24:00] and although I don't go very often, I still keep up with who's where.

MRJ: All the following questions relate to your high school experience. What did your high school... What were the subjects you were taught?

FK: I was taught English literature, math, science, music, gym, history, French, all those things that you find in high school. We had just about everything. I had a good science teacher. She was fun. She was also my Girl Scout leader, taught me how to make a [line?] fire, so we could go out in the woods to make a fire and make s'mores that were delicious. (laughter) And what does that have to do with high school? Nothing, but it was fun. [00:25:00] But she was good. She was an excellent teacher, and that had to do with segregation. The black teachers could not teach in the white schools, so therefore all of my teachers were black, but they had come from a college that had taught them well, so they knew what they were doing. And so they taught the subjects well, and they knew the students. The classes weren't so big that the teachers didn't know each student and probably know everything about them, because it was a relatively small town, although in my graduating class in high school I think there were, like, a hundred students graduating. So, you know, although it's not a big school, it was pretty big.

MRJ: [00:26:00] Were you able to take electives?



FK: I had choices, like I didn't go to the art classes. I took music instead. I took French instead of, I think, Spanish I think was the other option, you know, things like that.

MRJ: Were you able to take college prep courses?

FK: No.

MRJ: Did you plan to attend college after high school?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Did you take home economics, business, or trade courses?

FK: I took typing, or maybe typing took me. (laughter) Sorry about that.

MRJ: Were the classes -- were the classes, subjects taught by different teachers?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Were the teachers [00:27:00] good teachers?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Was the high school integrated?

FK: No.

MRJ: Were the teachers...

FK: The teachers were all black.

MRJ: Right. How did the teachers treat the students?

FK: Caring. Like I said, they knew their business. And many of them had master's degrees.

MRJ: Were your classmates friendly?

FK: Yes.

F1: Did you ask the question about organized sports, clubs?

MRJ: Yeah, it was in the beginning. She said no.

FK: Well, that was in elementary school. When I was in high school -- excuse me -- I didn't actually participate in sports. I was tall for a child, for a girl. I was 5'7 ½" in high school, [00:28:00] and that was tall for high school at that time. And I wanted to get on the basketball team, and they wanted me there because I was tall. I was taller than just about anyone else on the team, but I was not coordinated at all, and I was very timid. But I was determined to get on that team, and so I got on, simply because I was tall, not because I was good. But mostly what I did was music. I was in the choir in music.

MRJ: The following questions are related to your jun-- the following questions relate to your junior college, college, or university experiences. Were you able to attend college or university?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: What was the name?

FK: Virginia State College. It's now Virginia State University, [00:29:00] in Petersburg, Virginia.

MRJ: What did it look like?

FK: Oh, there were many brick buildings. It was a campus, and actually I met my husband on that campus. Yes. [Good one?]. (laughter)

MRJ: Did you go straight from high school to college?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Did -- what did you do during that gap?

F1: No.

FK: I didn't have a gap.

F1: She went --

FK: I went straight from high school to college.

F1: I know you're tired.

FK: That's OK. (laughter)

F1: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

FK: But I did live on campus, and it is a historically black college in Virginia, and that was that. But I didn't join a fraternity or sorority, and had many friends [00:30:00] who were in fraternities and sororities, but I never did belong to one.

MRJ: What was the racial makeup of your college?

FK: It was all black. And I real-- I didn't realize until, oh, I guess maybe my junior or senior year that I was missing something by not knowing anything about other people -- other peoples, I should say. I didn't know anything about how an Italian American family reacted and acted, interacted. I didn't know anything about the Jewish family. And I realized I was missing something by -- every -- all of my education experience was black.

MRJ: What was the racial makeup of your college teachers?

FK: All black.

MRJ: [00:31:00] How did the teachers treat the college students?

FK: They understood what black students were going to have to deal with when they got out into the working world, and so that's what they were trying to prepare us for, to... Integration was just beginning at that time. We're talking from 1953 to 1957, when I graduated. I graduated from high school in 1953 and went straight into college that September. But the teachers understood that, and tried to prepare us for the working world, and for the newly integrated world, which was not really integrated.

MRJ: [00:32:00] How did the students treat you?

FK: That was fine. [We had things?], good friends.

MRJ: What was your major?

FK: Vocal music education.

MRJ: Did you graduate?

FK: Yes, yes, I did. I had a Bachelor of Science degree.

MRJ: Did you attend --

F1: Attain.

MRJ: -- attain any additional degrees? (inaudible) --

FK: I didn't actually get degrees, no. I did a lot of further study. I went to colleges like the University of Maryland, Baltimore County campus, or University of Virginia, taking courses at different colleges, and so I did a lot of further study, but I never got another degree.

MRJ: These questions I will ask you -- [00:33:00] ask about aren't about any personal beliefs. They are only to get information about the role of the church in your life, if any.

FK: OK.

MRJ: Did you attend church as a child?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: What was the name of your church?

FK: Mt. Zion Baptist Church. It was Baptist. That was the denomination.

MRJ: Where was it located?

FK: Charlottesville, Virginia.

MRJ: Did your family attend services together?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: Was your church segregated?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: What part did church play in your life as a child/teenager?

FK: A major part of my life. It was an integral part of my life. My -- I said earlier my grandfather was the pastor of that church. [00:34:00] This was before I was born, but he was an important person in that church for so many years, so everybody there knew my family, and that was on my mother's side. And she was born there, in Charlottesville, and it was important to be a member of that particular church. I always felt good being a member of that church. It felt like home. That's where I learned that Jesus was my personal savior, and that was so important to me. And I was baptized when I was eight years old, and at that time, when I was baptized, although I was very young, I knew

exactly what I was doing and what it meant, and it's meant that for all my life. I still [00:35:00] remember the feeling of being baptized. We had -- the church was a good-sized church, and the choir was up high, and underneath the choir, where the choir sat, was the place where the pool was, and so the choir -- of course, they were bored, so the choir sat there most of the time, but when it came to time for baptizing, they would take all the chairs out and lift up the boards that were there, and then fill the pool with water, and that's where we were baptized. I didn't go down to the river. I don't know about any rivers. (laughter) We didn't have any rivers in Charlottesville.

MRJ: Is the church still an active part in your life?

FK: [00:36:00] Yes.

MRJ: In what ministries or activities are you engaging?

FK: I've stopped doing as much as I used to, but I was always in the choir. I went through Sunday school, of course, as a child, and as an adult I taught Sunday school, and went to missionary school, BYPU, Baptist Training Union, at night on Sundays. So Sunday was full of church. (laughter)

F1: (inaudible)?

FK: Baptist -- oh, the Baptist Training Union was BTU. Baptist Young People -- BY... Baptist Young People Union.

F1: OK.

FK: (laughter) And it was at night. That was always nighttime. Then they changed it to BTU, to [00:37:00] Baptist Training Union.

MRJ: What role does the church in particular play in your community?

FK: I go to St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church now, and it's a very integrated church, and it's very close to my home, which is very nice. I don't have to go very far to get to church, because the backyard of that church hits up against the backyard of my house, of my yard, so I really could walk to church. I still drive. (laughter) You didn't hear that one. But anyhow, the church -- the reason I first went to that church was because of the music. They had a great organist, and a really good choir, and my

husband and I have loved [00:38:00] music all our lives, so therefore having a church that has great music is important.

MRJ: What role did your church in particular play in the Civil Rights Movement?

FK: This church -- I didn't belong during that time, but this church had a big role to play. They had people from this church -- and at that time it was mostly all white, but many people from that church, including the pastor of that church, went down South in buses and cars, and actually did -- they walked the walk. They didn't just talk the talk. They actually went down and participated in the struggle of the people down South, or that the people down South were going through. And [00:39:00] I admired that, because although I was old enough to do it, I was too chicken. That was scary, to have people... You didn't have any protection at all. You had to go down on faith, because of what you believed, and so many people were hurt and killed. So these were -- the white people at that church -- I wasn't around at that time, but I know about it, because it is talked about.

MRJ: Are you currently married?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: What's your spouse's name?

FK: His name is Willis Eugene Keeling.

MRJ: [00:40:00] How did you meet your spouse?

FK: At college. He was walking on the street with his best friend. They were both tall and very handsome. (laughter) And I have a story about it. But anyhow, that's where I first met him.

F1: Tell us.

FK: He -- I went to that college for four years in Petersburg, Virginia. My husband lived in Norfolk, Virginia, and there was a college there -- at that time it was called a junior college, and it only went for two years. So he went his first two years in Norfolk at the junior college, and then came up to Petersburg to do his last two years for senior college, and that's where I met him during that -- when he came up to do his last two years. And he was in music, like I was, except his was voc-- I mean, [00:41:00] mine

was vocal music education; his was instrumental music education. He played the trombone, and just about every other instrument. But the thing I loved hearing him play the most was the organ. But he played piano, organ, and just about all the instruments. He was good.

F1: [Prince?].

FK: He was good at it, yes. (laughter) Don't tell him that, please, no. I have to tell you that story. Not here, definitely.

MRJ: How long have you been married?

FK: Fifty-eight years. (laughter) Longer than your mother's been born, uh-huh!

MRJ: What kind of work does your spouse do or has done?

FK: He was head of the Fine Arts Department at Catonsville's Community College. He dealt with all the music there, you know, hired teachers, taught music education classes, all kinds of things like that. [00:42:00] And Catonsville Community College is now the Community Colleges of Baltimore County at Catonsville. That's the official name. Yeah. (laughter) But it's a beautiful campus, and if you ever get a chance to go, you should. It is up on a hill. At one time it was part of the Underground Railroad. That means sometimes the people who had been enslaved and were trying to get away from the atrocities of slavery, and trying to move through Baltimore to go north, part of the houses, the old mansion there, had part there that they would keep the people who were running away overnight or for a day or two, feed them and make sure they had [00:43:00] clothes or shoes or whatever, and send them on off.

MRJ: Do you have any children?

FK: Yes.

MRJ: What are their names?

FK: My firstborn, Kenneth, died a few years ago, but he was in his fifties. He was 55. I have two boys, (laughter) two men. They are Willis Eugene III and Thomas Courtney Keeling. And they're all in their fifties.

MRJ: Do you have any grandchildren?

FK: One, Katrina. And I have to tell you, Katrina works for the Municipal Employees Credit Union, but -- I'm so proud -- she is -- plays flute in the Ravens band, [00:44:00] and I love that. (laughter)

MRJ: Do you have any grandchildren?

FK: That one, the -- Katrina, that...

MRJ: I meant great-grandchildren.

FK: No, no great-grandchildren.

F1: I know you're tired.

FK: Yeah.

F1: (inaudible).

FK: Definitely.

MRJ: Are you currently employed?

FK: I'm a retired librarian. I used to work here in this building sometime, as a children's services librarian. But before I became a children's services librarian, with the Enoch Pratt Library, I was an elementary school teacher, and I taught school for 15 years.

MRJ: Were you in the military?

FK: Never, no.

MRJ: Were you active in the Civil Rights Movement?

FK: No.

MRJ: What was the happiest moment of your life?

FK: (laughter) [00:45:00] I guess June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1957, when I got married.

MRJ: Who is the most influential person in your life?

FK: I would say my mom and dad. And they were a loving, caring couple who thought that they were not going to have children, and my mother was 52 -- my mother was 42 years old when she had me. And so I was so precious and spoiled to death. I didn't know it at the time, (laughter) but now that I look back on it I realize I was, and I



wonder how people managed to even live with me. But yeah, they were very influential. My father taught me how to be a lady, how to laugh, [00:46:00] how to sit, how to smile, all of those things.

MRJ: What were the most important lessons you taught your kids, children?

FK: To love God, and to care about those people around them, but first to care for themselves, to make sure that they were good, strong human beings.

MRJ: What was the most -- the p-- the --

FK: Proudest?

MRJ: Yeah, proudest moment in your life?

FK: Seeing the first black President of the United States, just looking at the television and grinning, and not being able to [00:47:00] get the grin off my face, 'cause I had no idea I would live to see that.

F1: Did you...?

MRJ: Did you accomplish all you hoped?

FK: No. I've done so many things in my life that I really wanted to do, but I still haven't done everything. I wanted to see the Grand Canyon and I haven't seen it, except from an airplane, and that was not really seeing it, you know. I glanced down and then it was gone, and that didn't make sense. So I would love to see some of the state parks around. Old Faithful, I'd like to see that geyser. The Painted Rocks, the Mount Rushmore.

MRJ: Mount Rushmore.

FK: I haven't seen any of those things. I'd love to see them in the United States, but --

MRJ: Niagara Falls.

FK: -- I was so blessed to go to -- [00:48:00] first to London, my first trip across the --

MRJ: Seas.

FK: -- yeah, the Atlantic Ocean. I also got to go to Ghana, West Africa, and that was a rejuvenating spiritual experience that I wish all people could have, but especially all of

the black people in the United States. I wish they could have a chance to go to other countries, but especially to Ghana. Ghana is a very special place, and if you could only pick one country in Africa to go to, between that and Egypt it's kind of hard, but it's -- they speak English there, so that helps you to get around the place. But it has so much to offer. I also got a chance to go to Egypt, [00:49:00] and see that all through Catonsville Community College, actually. And I went to England and Paris, France, and to other countries, Italy, and just to go to Rome and see the Vatican. It was just a blessing to be able to go to Prague and see the old, old buildings and streets and bridges, and all of the statues that they had on the bridges, and to watch all the painters along -- on the s-- they were situated on the bridge, people painting, making paintings, drawings or either caricatures of people. It (laughter) was really something, but I think [00:50:00] I fell in love with Greece. I would love to live there, but I'd never be able to speak the language. So I believe if you go to another country, especially if you're going to live there, you need to learn the language. And I just don't think I can ever learn Greek. I -- all I know is the Greek alphabet. I do know that one, that much, but that's about it. (laughter) But it was the most magnificent voyage. I took a cruise through the Greek Isles, and of course being a storyteller I enjoyed the Greek myths, and so therefore the gods and goddesses of all the Greek myths, I knew about them, and so when I went to Athena's Temple, they talked about Zeus and all the ruins, and they... At the time when I went to Greece they were getting ready for the Olympics. [00:51:00] They were going to have the Olympics there. And I looked at the place where they were supposed to be having events, and it just looked like a big dirt pile. I said, how...? This was in, like, April when I went, and the Olympics was going to be either late July or August. I said -- I couldn't figure out how they were going to get this ready, but they did. They had a beautiful Olympic Games there later on. But the Greek Isles were something very special to see and to experience, and to actually take a cruise on the boat to go through the different places: Turkey, and I got to buy a rug from -- in Turkey when I was there. And so, of course, that had to do with [00:52:00] the *Arabian Nights*. I thought about my rug being... I still pretend my rug (laughter) is a flying carpet, but it's not, unless I just don't know the right words to say. But anyhow, the experience of going to other countries is something that I

wish for you and everyone, just if you can possibly go. It makes you appreciate the United States.

MRJ: If you could go back and change anything, would you?

FK: No. I thought about it. Of course, you know, there are things that you know you did wrong that (laughter) you wish [you'd done away?], but then I wouldn't be what I am today, and I don't know what it would've been. [00:53:00] But the thing I would like to have done was to be able to ask my family more questions so I would know my family history more. I know quite a bit of things that happened, some quite interesting, but I'd like to know more about my mother and my father's family.

MRJ: Do you feel you are leaving a legacy?

FK: I looked at that question, and that's hard to say. It seems that there were some things that I did during my lifetime that did influence other people, and so I would say that has happened. I don't know whether it's called a legacy or not, but I've lived long enough to have interacted with many people, so some of them I've influenced, [00:54:00] and I'm proud of that.

MRJ: I will relate some milestones in African American history, and if afflip--

F1: Applicable.

MRJ: -- afflipa--

M1: Applicable.

F1: They're P's, not F's. I know you're tired. Say, "If they apply."

MRJ: If they apply.

FK: (laughter) Yes. Please tell you?

MRJ: Please tell me how you felt when they happened. Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in the Major League Baseball.

FK: I was so proud of that, because baseball was, of course, the sport, the American -- the all-American sport, and to have at last a black man come in and do what he did... Some young people don't know how hard that was for him. [00:55:00] He had to go

through all kinds of racist activities and actions, and yet he was able to hold his head high and make everyone proud, not just black people, but everybody had to be proud of him --

MRJ: Of something.

FK: -- and the way he accomplished things. And plus, he had the natural ability to do a great job, too. President Truman, when he integrated the United States Armed Services, I don't remember too much about that. Of course it was a great thing, because my dad was in the Signal Corps in World War I, and he was pretty proud of that, because although it was an all-black unit, there weren't that many Signal Corps [00:56:00] groups, I guess you should say, in World War I. And so I have a picture of him in his World War I uniform, and I realize what he had to go through, and so that integration was pretty important. *Brown v. The Board of Education*... I felt that it was something that really was needed, and I was really glad that it came about, but I knew that I hadn't done much to help with that. And of course I was proud of Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks was everybody's hero, and we knew what she had to go through in order to be on a bus, because I had been on a bus when I was told to get up and go to the back of the bus. I was coming from college, from [00:57:00] Petersburg, coming to Charlottesville, and it was late at night, very late, and it was pitch black dark, out in the middle of nowhere, and this white man got on the bus, and the bus driver just -- he mentioned, "Get up and move in the back." I mean, it wasn't said nicely, you know. "Get up and move." And I knew that I could not say no. There were plenty of seats behind me. So I got up and moved, and it was humiliating, and so therefore I knew a little of what Rosa had to go through. I didn't know much about the Little Rock Nine. I just knew it was an important thing that was going on. And I was so glad that there were so many black people who were willing to put their lives on the line, and for these young people [00:58:00] to put their lives on the line was really important. And of course we had the sitting -- sit-ins, not only in Woolworth's at Greensboro, but other places, too, and there were some pretty important sit-ins right here in Baltimore. But there weren't any in -- that I knew of in Petersburg or in Charlottesville, where I lived. James Meredith, when he went to the University of Mississippi was big news, because Mississippi was the epitome of the state that was known for being maybe the most racist, the most -- the... People who lived there lived in -- under such [00:59:00] horrendous conditions, and this was really important. But the

March on Washington was great. I saw it. I did watch that on television. And when President Johnson did that Civil Rights Act, yes, I was right there saying "Right on!" Sidney Poitier became the first black actor, and he was -- I was going to say similar to what Jackie Robinson went through, but he didn't have to go through as -- some of the blatant things that poor Jackie Robinson had to go through, but he was a first, and he was also someone we could be very proud of. But the way he held himself, the way he acted, what he did in his life, other than in acting, you didn't hear tabloid things about him, ugly things about him, so he was someone that [01:00:00] we could be proud of. And Thurgood Marshall was -- became the first negro on the Supreme Court, and that was great for me, although I didn't actually know Thurgood Marshall, but I knew one of his good buddies who had been in that Civil Rights action that Thurgood Marshall had gone through just before he became the -- on the Supreme Court. And his name was Robinson, and he lived in Richmond, Virginia, and he lived right near my father's sister. And I would go visit the sister. I used to play with the Robinson children, so, I don't know, I felt kind of close to Thurgood Marshall, although I really didn't know him. But, of course, Dr. Martin Luther King, I was teaching school [01:01:00] at the -- it was called Fairfield here in Baltimore. It was called Fairfield. I was teaching, and it was something. Everybody was just shocked. Colin Powell was great. Halle Berry and Denzel, mm, we were just proud of them. But, of course, the best was (laughter) Barack Obama becoming president, and then getting reelected, everybody holding a breath, make sure he was reelected, and that was just so wonderful, in spite of what people were saying that they weren't gonna let him get reelected. We did it anyhow. And he has been such an example for everyone. His family has been a great example. His girls have... I don't think they realize what an example they are to other not only young girls [01:02:00] but to --

MRJ: Schoolkids.

FK: -- you know, just to students and to young people, and to old people like me, too.

MRJ: Is there anything else you would like to add that was not covered in the interview?

FK: (laughter) I want to say thank you. This has been a long day for you, and I do appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

F1: There are two questions that didn't get asked. I know he was trying to go through there. What are your favorite activities or hobbies, Ms. Fellisco?

FK: Reading. I love to read. I read, read, read all the time. It's reading, and I still love music. I love listening to music. But mostly I read. And, of course, I tell stories.

F1: Yeah, you do. Do you have a favorite family story? Want to close us off --

FK: Yes.

F1: -- with a favorite family story?

FK: Yes. I want to [01:03:00] tell two quick ones. My father's mother was named Roberta, and when she was five years old -- was right at the end of the Civil War -- she lived in Richmond, Virginia. That's where the Civil War ended, really. And the Northern soldiers came in to Richmond, and they happened to have come down her street, and she had seen one of the rebel soldiers go hide in a neighbor's yard. And my mother directed the Union soldiers to where this other soldier was, and she's always been proud of that. (laughter) My grandmother was 94 when she died, but she was part Indian and part black. [01:04:00] But she married a man who came from Africa, actually. He must've been one of the last people to be brought over the Middle Passage, I would assume, but I did-- of course, I didn't know. This was all way before I was born. And that's the reason I was saying I wish I could talk to my mom and dad about some of the history there. All I remember they used to talk about is hair. His hair would only grow a certain amount, and then it wouldn't grow anymore. He never had to go to a barbershop. He always had a little afro, but it only grew to a certain amount. My grandmother, the woman he married could sit on her hair. She had a lot of Indian blood in her, and her hair was a lot of Indian. It was, you know, the two of them, [01:05:00] it was quite a combination, and I wish I knew more about them. My grandfather on my mother's side - - and this is the last one -- was a slave in Richmond, Virginia, and he was working for a white family right after the Civil War had freed the -- all the black people there. And he wanted to learn how to read, but the people there really didn't want black people to learn how to read, and he knew that. But he worked hard, and one day, on an ash heap -- now, back there they used to have coal to fuel their houses --

MRJ: Trains.

FK: -- and -- not trains, this was for the house. Coal was -- they had coal in the house, and they had coal stoves to heat the houses. Well, they would take the ashes [01:06:00] from the coal and just put them out in a big ash heap, so it was called ash -- the ashes the -- from the coal. Well, there was the ash heap, and my granddaddy saw this book there, and he knew he really wasn't supposed to have a book. This was right after the Civil War. And so he took the book and hid it in his person somewhere, you know, in his clothes. And he kept it for quite a while. And then he got up enough nerve to ask the white lady he was working for, asked the daughter to tell him about the book, and he showed her the book, and the daughter said it was a dictionary. And so he said, "Would you tell me what it is?" And he -- she told him, and then he said, "Well, will you show me some of the words?" And so she started showing him some of the words. And so he learned the words in the book, [01:07:00] and finally the lady of the house found out about it, and she said, "Well, I'll tell you what: I'm going to give you a Bible, and if you learn so much in the Bible I will help you to read." And so he did learn what it is she wanted him to learn from the Bible, and she helped him to read. From then on, he went to what is called [Hertz?] -- not [Hertz?] (inaudible) -- Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia. Back then it wasn't that; it was a place where people could learn to be pastors, preachers. And so he went there, and he learned. And then he became, I think, one of the first preachers at the Fourth Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, and [01:08:00] they still have plaques up about him. I don't know how long he was there, but he was there for a long time as the preacher. But that's where he learned to read, and that's where he learned his love of God and the Bible, in Richmond, Virginia. So that's a family story, and that's the end of that.

F1: I just thank you, and you can thank her in your own words. (laughter)

MRJ: Again, I thank you for your participation --

FK: Good, yes.

MRJ: -- in the plot of the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project, and I'd just like to say [all this thing?], it's been a long day, but I will personally thank you for

spending the time and giving me an actual understanding of what you had to go through, and how you can relate to other people.

FK: Thank you. Thank you very much. I appreciate it. And thank you.

F1: I'd like to thank you both for staying --

FK: Thank you.

F1: -- all three of you --

FK: Yes.

F1: -- for staying late. It's been a long day for all three of you --

FK: I know! I know.

F1: -- and I want to thank you for staying late, and --

MRJ: Stop --

END OF AUDIO FILE



**SIOHP Interview #8 Elder Gwen Marable and Youth Darius Joyner**

F: OK, it's starting to record. You may begin. And if you have to pause, hit this. Hitting that will stop it altogether. And I don't ever want it to stop because then the interview will be broken up. OK. Oh. Let's get started.

DARIUS JOYNER: How are you doing today?

F: She said you have to speak up.

DJ: How are you doing today?

GWEN MARABLE: I'm sorry, I didn't understand it.

DJ: How are you doing today?

GM: How am I doing today? Oh. Very well.

DJ: OK. My name is Darius and I am 15 years old. It is the 14<sup>th</sup>. We're at the Walbrook Branch of the -- what that say? Enoch Pratt Free Library. It is --

F: [00:01:00] Eleven fifty.

DJ: Eleven fifty. This is an interview for the Sankofa Intergenerational Oral History Project, which is an innovative of the National Association of Black Storytellers and sponsored by the Griots' Circle of Maryland. Please tell me your full name.

GM: Gwen Ann Marable.

DJ: What would you like me to call you?

GM: Mama Gwen.

DJ: Before we begin the formal interview, Mama Gwen, I would like to thank you for volunteering to be interviewed as part of this project. It means a lot to me and the other students. Please make your answers to the point and relevant to the question asked. If I interrupt you at any time, please understand that I am not being rude, but the additional information that you are sharing may be the answer to a question [00:02:00] that will be asked later in the interview.

GM: I want to thank you, Darius, for being my interviewer.

DJ: First question. Where were you born?

GM: I was born in Lima, Ohio.

DJ: Where do you currently live?

GM: And I currently live at Broadmead, which is a senior residential community in Cockeysville, Maryland, which is north of Baltimore City.

DJ: The categories that will be covered in this interview are growing up, education, role of the church, [00:03:00] adult life, reflections, African American timeline, question about how significant events in African American history affected your life. If you need to take a break or if I ask a question that you do not wish to answer any time during the interview, please feel free to let me know.

GM: I will. Thank you.

DJ: Did you grow up where you were born?

GM: No, I didn't. And that's because my father got a job in Cincinnati, Ohio. As soon as my mother and I were able to travel, he came and got us and took us to live in Cincinnati, Ohio. So that's where I grew up. [00:04:00] I grew up in Cincinnati.

DJ: What was your neighborhood like?

GM: My -- I lived in a lot of neighborhoods when I was growing up. And all of them were in a place called Walnut Hills which is a suburb of Cincinnati. It's not like downtown in Cincinnati. It's -- so the neighborhood was -- I lived in a house with a yard and there were neighbors that knew me and I knew them. There was a church next door. There was a church down the street. There was an elementary school down the street. And there were places that I could walk to like the drugstore and later on a hotel and [00:05:00] then as I grew up I could even walk into other neighborhoods where there were lots of other kinds of stores.

DJ: Was it an integrated neighborhood?

GM: No. It was segregated and yet there was one white man that lived in another place but owned a store in my block. So he was the man that was there every day except on Sunday all day long and in the evening. And he was part of the neighborhood. So I want to mention him because later on I'm going to tell you a story about him.

DJ: What were your parents' names?

GM: [00:06:00] My mother's name was Sophia [Lucille Wood?] Jones and my father's name was Elzie [Revollo?] Jones.

DJ: What kind of work did they do?

GM: My father was a -- first he was a sub on a mail truck. That was his first job down in Cincinnati. And then he became a mail carrier. And later when he retired he continued to work as a tester for the post office. My mother was finally a teacher in special ed but before that she was a practical nurse, which is like [00:07:00] not a full nurse, but like an assistant nurse. And before that she was a nursery school teacher. And before that she was a maid and a housekeeper. So she had a lot of jobs before she became a teacher. And so did my father really. He did a lot of things before he got a job with the post office.

DJ: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

GM: No, I was an only child. And my parents were old when they had me. My father was 40 and my mother was 30. So they were -- for that time [00:08:00] they were old to be parents because most parents were younger.

DJ: Did you have a favorite toy or game?

GM: The -- I think my favorite thing to play was house, with dolls. And my favorite thing to play with was -- were paper dolls, cutting out paper dolls, and pretending. Pretending with imaginary lives for the paper dolls. So as far as games are concerned, I didn't [00:09:00] really like games that much. We didn't have video games, so we had board games. My favorite board game was Chinese checkers. And outside my favorite game was hopscotch.

DJ: Did you take any part of organized sports?

GM: Yes, because I had to. I was in a school where we had to take part in sports. And I didn't particularly like sports. I wasn't particularly good at sports. But I did participate in sports.

DJ: [00:10:00] What is the sport?

GM: What sports?

DJ: Yes.

GM: Well, let's see. Soccer, field hockey, basketball, baseball, and tennis.

DJ: Who were your best friends?

GM: My best -- you mean growing up?

DJ: Yes.

GM: Well, my next-door neighbor, whose name was [Aldreta Samaria?], was one of my best friends. I had another best friend whose name was [Lynn Driscoll?]. [00:11:00] And then I had some other friends who were [Barbara Lou Cunningham?], Blanche Pryor, Ruth Johnson, [Peggy Chenault?], no, Peggy [Howard?], Chenault was her married name, Peggy Howard. We had a little gang of girlfriends. So all of those were my best friends. I didn't really consider anybody my best friend except for Lynn.

DJ: What were they like?

GM: What was what like?

DJ: What were your friends like?

GM: What were they like? What were they like? They were fun. [00:12:00] They did a lot of interesting things with me and we had parties together. We went on walks together. We were -- we joined clubs together. And so they -- you're asking me what were they like. They were mostly the same age, some of them were one year younger, and they just liked the same things that I liked. If I think of anything I'll add it later.

DJ: Did you go to their house or did they [00:13:00] come to yours?

GM: Both. I preferred going to their houses because being an only child, I loved to go to houses where there were other children, like most of my friends had sisters and brothers. So if I could have a choice, I would go to their house. We had a lot of overnights. We could go and spend the night. And I liked all my friends' mothers. So I enjoyed going and being with my friends in their house. And when they would come to my house I would like that, but not as much. Didn't seem like we had as much fun at my house.

DJ: Did you have a nickname?

GM: [00:14:00] I had -- my father called me Skipper. And when I was in high school I was in a play and my name in the play was Zip, so then everybody started calling me Zip. Those were my two nicknames while I was growing up.

DJ: How did you get the nickname Skipper?

GM: My father gave it to me. There was a cartoon with a little kid in it named Skipper, and for some reason I must have reminded him of that cartoon, so he started calling me Skipper.

DJ: If you had chores what were they?

GM: My main chore was washing the dishes, and I hated it, so I [00:15:00] made it last for about three hours, because I was doing everything I could do to not wash dishes. So besides that every Saturday I had to dust the furniture, everything that had a surface I had to dust upstairs and downstairs. I had to wash the steps going up and down. I had to sweep the porch, sweep the kitchen floor, and then I had to take care of all of my things. In those days -- you all are going to laugh at this. We had to wear white gloves on Sunday. So that was one of the things that I had to do was wash my white gloves. [00:16:00] I had to polish my shoes because at first my father did that, and then he taught me how to do it. And that meant -- in the summertime you wore white shoes, so you had to polish them with white polish. And I had to wash my bobby socks. We wore white socks. And they had to be clean. They could not be dirty. And they couldn't be put in the washing machine, they had to be washed by hand. So that was a chore. Had to make my bed. And sometimes help with dinner, like cut up, peel and cut up potatoes, string beans, cut carrots, do anything that was like preparation for dinner. [00:17:00] And I took care of some of the yard work, whatever my father told me to do I had to do. Raking leaves, picking up -- picking weeds, pulling weeds. That kind of thing outside. Take out the garbage.

DJ: Did your family have a television?

GM: When I was growing up we did not have a television. Nobody had a television. And then when people got televisions we would go visit them to watch usually the fights,

because that was the first thing that was -- fights and wrestling. [00:18:00] We listened to the radio a lot. Radio was like all day long. And one of the stories I like to tell is that a lot of people didn't have radios. So if you had a radio you put it in the window in the summertime so other people could hear it when they walked by. So there were times when -- for instance when the Joe Louis fight was on, it was a big fight that everybody wanted to hear. So all the radios in the neighborhood were in the window. And everybody in the street could hear the fight. Now television came and my parents did buy a TV, but I was already away. I was in college when they bought a TV. So I actually [00:19:00] watched TV in college before I watched it in my home, because we didn't have one.

DJ: Did your family have a car?

GM: Yes. We had an old -- well, it wasn't old when we had it. But a Plymouth, which was an old car, meaning old brand. And it was a small car. It was gray. And we had it until World War II, when they started rationing gas. Then we couldn't keep it because my father didn't have the kind of job that -- where he could say, "I need this car for my work." So we had to sell the car. And after that we never got another car. [00:20:00] The streetcar ran right by our house. The number eight streetcar, which was a trolley car that had two electrical things that stuck up and went on an electrical line. And so we could walk right outside our house and catch the streetcar and go most places. You might have to walk once you got there, but you could go downtown especially, if you wanted to go shopping. There were other families who did have cars that we knew, and so we got picked up and taken places by various other people. There was a lot of that. So you might -- [00:21:00] if there was a party, somebody else's parents might come and pick you up. By the time you got there, the whole car would be filled with kids. Or if my mother had to go somewhere, her friend would come and pick her up. So there was a lot of helping that way.

DJ: Did your family have meals together?

GM: Yes. That was one really good thing that I look back on now, and I'm very thankful for that, because I think that's where I learned a lot. And not all of it was good. But we sat down and had dinner every night, and on Sunday we had a big Sunday dinner.

We had company that came to dinner on Sunday. [00:22:00] Sometimes we had company on like Friday night or maybe not Saturday night, but I can remember people coming on Friday night. And my family, meaning my mother and father and I, ate together whenever we did eat other meals. Like I ate breakfast in the morning with my mother, because she was home. On Saturday my father was home for lunch, and I would -- he would sit down and eat lunch with me. And on Sunday morning we ate breakfast together before we went to church. So there was a lot of eating meals together at the table. It [00:23:00] wasn't until long after I was in college that they got TV trays and began to eat meals -- at that time the TV was in the living room. So you would go in and sit down at the TV tray and look at TV while you ate. But most of the time we ate at the table.

DJ: How did you celebrate birthdays and holidays?

GM: Well, my birthday was on Christmas, so that was very big, because I was an only child. And everybody always feels sorry for me when I say my birthday was on Christmas, because they think I got left out. But I got [00:24:00] double everything. I didn't get a lot, but what I got, I got a Christmas gift and a birthday gift on that day from my parents. And Christmas was with a Christmas tree in the living room and presents. And up until I stopped believing in Santa Claus I would leave food out for Santa Claus and get up early in the morning and race downstairs to see what I got. After that I would be the one to go buy the Christmas tree, because I had a sled. And it seems to me in those days it was -- there was always snow at Christmas. And I would go to the store that -- where they sold the Christmas trees, pick out the Christmas tree -- we always had a little tree -- and bring it home. [00:25:00] So that was Christmas. Halloween was very big. Everybody in the neighborhood gave you candy. We had Halloween parties at school and in the neighborhood. Easter -- well, all the holidays that had to do with church were celebrated at church. So we had Easter, Children's Day, Armistice Day -- that's when you honored the servicemen. We had programs at church all the time. I can't even remember all of them. Is that somebody's phone? [00:26:00] Sorry.

DJ: What did people call African Americans when you were growing up?

GM: People called African Americans for the most part when I was growing up colored people. And then it was changed to Negroes. And then when Jesse Jackson came along, there were people who still stuck to that, while they got used to saying black and African American. Or Afro. They started out saying Afro-Americans and then this African Americans. But when I was growing up -- which would include all the time before Jesse Jackson, you were either [00:27:00] called colored or Negro. Now of course because there were people in the community, black people, and especially outside the community, white people, who did use the n-word either in a good way or a bad way. And of course there were some people who didn't even pronounce the n-word in the way it's spelled, but they would put their own little twist on it. So it could be nigger, it could be nigra. Sometimes little children were called -- oh, what was that word they used to -- [00:28:00] pickaninny. They would call little black children pickaninnies. I'm talking about in a bad way white people would call -- refer to black children. Zigaboos was another one. Now it's all coming back to me. Anyway that's what -- that answers your question.

DJ: What was it like for African Americans in the city where you grew up?

GM: In the city where I grew up there was segregation, except for in the schools. In the schools, by law, Ohio had always been integrated, and I don't know enough history to tell you how that happened. [00:29:00] So there were integrated schools. But if those schools became a neighborhood school, and the neighborhood was segregated, so then the whole school was segregated, meaning just black children went to that school. But if there were some white children who lived in the black neighborhood, they went to that, to the black school. It wasn't on purpose a black school, but it was segregated because of the segregated neighborhoods. So my experience was that I went to an integrated school because I went to a school that was outside of my neighborhood. And the way that happened is I started in that school because of the neighborhood where I lived, and then my parents moved to [00:30:00] another house, and in the new house they let me keep going to the integrated school. And I don't exactly know. I know there were other black children in that school from different neighborhoods. So I just don't know why that happened. But what it did do was give me the experience of growing up in a segregated neighborhood and a segregated community but going to an integrated school. And by



integrated I mean it was a predominantly white school. And the children were from all kinds of families. Meaning the white -- some of those white children were from Appalachia, which was the mountains to the south of Cincinnati, [00:31:00] Kentucky and Tennessee, so those children were very poor. They were poor white children. And they were worse off than the black people that lived in my community. There were some migrant children there, like there was one little girl in my class who was from Greece. Her name was Stamatia Stefanopoulos. And she was so poor that the teacher took up a collection of money to buy her a winter coat. Because when she came she had no winter coat, and it was bitterly cold. And we actually went home and asked our parents to give us a few coins to contribute to her coat. So anyway I knew a lot of the -- I knew all the black children. They were from my neighborhood or other neighborhoods that I knew. [00:32:00] But I did have some white friends in that school. And there were children in my class that I was friends with. So it was -- oh. I'm just talking about the school. Now in the city itself when I was growing up there was still segregation. You could not go to the movies. You could not go anywhere to eat. There was segregation on public transportation when I was real little. But then that changed. When I say public transportation, I told you the number eight streetcar went by my house. And then you could walk up and around the corner and catch a bus. And so those were segregated. And the [00:33:00] trains were segregated at Cincinnati, meaning when you took a train from New York to Cincinnati, it was integrated, when you got to Cincinnati, you had to get off the car that you were on and -- the car of the train -- and go sit in the colored car. So when I went to college I left from Cincinnati, but I was going to North Carolina. So when we got on the train in Cincinnati, we got on a segregated train. The train car that we got on -- there were five of us -- was segregated. And the dining car was segregated. So you weren't allowed to eat in the dining car at all. And because the colored [00:34:00] Pullman car -- men that worked in that particular car where we were just fell in love with us because we were going to college. So they said, "After the white folks eat, we're going to call you all into the dining room, and we're going to give you dinner," which is what they did. But meanwhile our mothers had packed us a lunch in a shoe box. Fried chicken, biscuits, anything that we could eat on the train, deviled eggs. And that's what we were supposed to eat until we got where we were going, which was Greensboro,

and that was south of the Mason-Dixon Line. So that meant that we had to ride in a segregated car. [00:35:00] Back to the city. There were a lot of places where you could go. You could go to the art museum. You could go to the parks. Except for the amusement park, which was Coney Island, which was segregated. Could not go there. OK, I'll probably remember some other places that you could and couldn't go. There were a lot of places we could go but we would be segregated when we got there. And there were certain nights that you could go. Black people could go to the Taft Auditorium on the night that black people could go. But all the other time it was just for white people. That kind of thing.

DJ: Did you or your family experience racism or segregation?

GM: Yes. [00:36:00] As I just finished telling you, there were -- it was just something that you grew up with. Knowing that you could do certain things and you could not do other things. But there was segregation in where you were going to live. You could only live in certain neighborhoods. There was certainly segregation with my parents. Like my father was an electrician but he couldn't join the white electricians' union, so he couldn't become a certified electrician. He did electric work for friends and neighbors, but he didn't have a license to do that, because in order to get a license you had to be a member of the union. And of course almost any job -- decent job that paid [00:37:00] decent wages was limited only to white people. So it was really big for a black man to get a job with the post office in those days. And there were a lot of college graduates that did that because once they graduated from college they couldn't -- unless they were a doctor or a lawyer or if they went into business for themselves, they could support themselves, but a lot of college graduates could not support themselves and their families, so they took whatever job they could. And that meant that a lot of them were doing -- they were chauffeurs and they worked in factories. All kinds of work that would be considered [00:38:00] work that you didn't do if you had a college education these days. Other segregation that I experienced personally was mostly in school. Oh. I went to an integrated high school. Junior and senior high school combined, six years. That high school had swimming class, where you learned to swim. The black kids were all put in one class on Friday, the last period of the day, so that after that over the weekend they could clean the pool and [00:39:00] fill it again with clean water, and then the white kids

would come in on Monday, and all week long they would have their classes. The year after I graduated, there was a whole group of people, black and white, who fought against that. And the pool was integrated. And there were so many things like that. Like I couldn't get -- I could be in a play, but I couldn't have a certain part, because that part might be a part that was only for a white girl. It would only be appropriate for a white girl. That ended in my senior year. I did get a part in a Shakespearean play that was a love interest. Meaning I was in a relationship with a guy who happened to be white. And [00:40:00] that was like a first-time thing. There were so many little racial slights. Oh. We ate in the cafeteria. We all ate -- all the black kids ate together. All the white kids ate together. All the Jewish kids ate together. I had a Jewish friend who was a rebel. She would ask me to eat lunch and we would pick out a table in the middle of the cafeteria and the two of us would eat out there all by ourselves. Because we couldn't eat at the black table, we couldn't eat at the Jewish table, and we couldn't eat at the white table. And so we were brave enough to just go have lunch occasionally. She is still a friend of mine to this day. [00:41:00] She lives in Michigan. So yeah. There were a lot of -- there was racism. You just lived with it. I could go on and on and on. But I --

F: Could you pause for just a minute? I want the other students to finish their interview.

DJ: What did you want to be when you grew up?

GM: I wanted to be an actress. I was crazy about the movies. And we actually had plays that came to Cincinnati from New York. And we did get to see plays on the night that the black people got to go to the theater. But the main thing is because it was segregated; [00:42:00] there was no place to go except for church. And the school had a stage. The school in my neighborhood had a stage. There were groups that gave plays. So I was always -- oh no. This is how it got started. YWCA. They had a segregated YWCA. The woman who was the director taught tap dancing. And so everybody went there to take tap dancing. And she would give plays. And because I got to play the part of a little girl when I was little and then later other parts, I fell in love with being on the stage. [00:43:00] My -- there was another woman in our community whose name was Ms. Lillian Foster. She was a retired social worker and she gave elocution lessons in her

house. So elocution lessons were when you would go and learn how to speak. And the way you learned to speak was to memorize poetry. And then you would be in programs reciting poetry. And that was something that I began to do because people would actually ask for me to come to their church program and recite. So the thing I want to tell you about this time is that her son was a saxophone player [00:44:00] and he was a little bit older than I was. So when I would go to her house to get my lesson he would be in another room playing his saxophone. And his name was Frank Foster. And he grew up to be a saxophone player and eventually took over Count Basie's orchestra. So he -- and he's no longer living. But he was somebody that I went to high school with and knew as a young person. And there were a lot of people that you knew because it was segregated. Everybody lived in the community. So there were a lot of people that got to be famous or did something special or important later on that you knew because that's who you went to church with or that's who you knew, [00:45:00] that's where you lived. Another example of that is -- oh. Just crossed my mind and now I've forgotten. That's all right. I'm getting off track anyway. So yeah, I wanted to be an actress. And the reason why I didn't keep going with it was because I fell in love, wanted to get married, and didn't pursue it. But that was another case also of segregation and racism, because I went to school -- I think that my friend has come. I just saw them. [00:46:00] This is what I want to tell you about that was really when I look back on it such an unusual childhood experience. Because of segregation, when the black musicians and other people would come to Cincinnati, they could not stay in the white hotels. So they had to stay with families in the city. So when I was a little girl one of my best friends was Mary Louise Ferguson. Her parents owned the Cotton Club, which was a nightclub that had various musicians playing in it when they would come to town. And they also owned the black taxicab company because you couldn't ride in the white taxis. So [00:47:00] they lived close enough for me to be able to walk down the hill to their house to go play with Mary Louise, who was also an only child. So because they owned the Cotton Club, they knew all the musicians. And one of the most famous musicians during the time that we were growing up was Count Basie, who lived in New York City, but he had a band that played all over the world really. And so when he would come to Cincinnati, he would stay with the Fergusons. So when I would go there to play, I could walk in the front door, and he

would be sitting at the piano in their living room playing the piano. And which was just a very wonderful experience to look back on. At the time I knew he was famous. And of course I [00:48:00] knew his music because you heard it on the radio. But I didn't -- I had no idea as a little girl really how meaningful that would be when I began to look back on it. So that's just one of the people. Another one was Duke Ellington that I met because then one black businessman built a black hotel and then all the musicians stayed in the black hotel when they would come. So if you were there for some reason you might get to meet a famous musician, which is what happened with Duke Ellington. And he was another famous musician of the time. I think that's enough of that. I could go on and on. But that's another good that came out of [00:49:00] segregation, was that you got to meet a lot of famous people. Or at least hear them.

DJ: Did you have a role model growing up?

GM: Yes. I had more than one. And I think the most important one was the woman I mentioned -- her name was Bobbie Fairfax -- who was the director of the YWCA, which was the colored YWCA. And she was also the director of the camp, the YWCA camp, which was where I went to camp in the summer. Again that camp was segregated. So the black girls went to the camp at the end of the year -- of the summer -- [00:50:00] and we would be there with -- Ms. Fairfax was the director. And then we had counselors. And I think because Ms. Fairfax was young -- she had just come out of college, West Virginia State College I think it was. And she was married. She didn't have any children. And I was her pet. That was the truth of it. She took me under her wing. She's the one that told me a lot of things that my mother didn't tell me. Like I remember once when she told me to wear deodorant. Because I was becoming a young woman. And my mother never told me to wear deodorant. But she did. There were -- [00:51:00] back in those days people were so closemouthed about a lot of things they didn't want to talk about. To meet somebody like her as I was growing up, I just wanted to be like Ms. Fairfax, I wanted to be with it, I didn't want to be old-fashioned. So I would say that she was one of my role models. I have a few more too. In fact my camp counselor, Ms. [Caldora Carter?], is the one who had gone to Bennett College. And she talked five of us into going to Bennett College. And because we just thought she was great, we all said, "OK, we're going to go." So that was another experience that we had because of being

segregated. [00:52:00] We had people -- black people that we looked up to and who taught us things and who were role models for us.

DJ: What is your favorite memory of your family?

GM: What is my favorite memory of my family? I would have to say being with them on picnics, happy family gatherings. [00:53:00] Like Christmas. And we used to go out in the country a lot together, just the three of us, or with other families. So that -- those were my happy memories of them. Mostly because they were more relaxed and they weren't being parents, they -- I can -- I could actually have fun with them.

DJ: What is your favorite memory of your community?

GM: I loved the fact that I could walk for blocks and blocks and say hello to everybody. On the porch. On the street. Everybody knew my name. [00:54:00] I felt safe. Even where it wasn't safe I felt safe, because I felt like there was always somebody around that would be watching out for me and all the children. There were just -- there was -- that was what I loved about that community.

DJ: Do you remember great stories or legends about your town?

GM: Yes. I think that growing up in Cincinnati was interesting because the -- Cincinnati was founded by Germans. It's built on seven hills. [00:55:00] And so for one thing, there's a lot of music. When I was growing up in public school, we had a lot of music. We were in choruses and we would all go down to Music Hall in May. We had the May Festival. And all the public schools would send children to sing together. And all of that was started by the German people that started Cincinnati. And the other thing they had was a lot of art. And they had an art museum. And they would -- the public schools would send us to the symphony and send us to the art museum. There was a conservatory like we have here in Baltimore where they'd grow plants inside so that [00:56:00] you could go there in the winter and see plants, and you would be able to walk around freely. You -- I think all of that happened because there were people in that city who cared about -- there were a lot of trees. That's the other thing. Lot of trees. They cared about what it looked like and what was free and open to the public. The great thing about the -- it's not a legend, it's the truth -- was that Cincinnati was free back during the

days when people were enslaved just across the river. So then we had all kinds of stories about escaped slaves coming [00:57:00] into Cincinnati. We had the woman that wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* lived in Cincinnati for a while. So we had her story because her house was still there. And there were just -- there was just a lot of stories that you would hear about people coming across the Ohio River, even trying to swim across the Ohio River, to freedom. So I grew up with all that. And it was very present in my life.

DJ: Who's Uncle Tom?

GM: Uncle Tom was a character in a book that was created by a white woman, Harriet Beecher [00:58:00] Stowe. And she named the book *Uncle Tom*. And Uncle Tom was an old black man. He was a character in the book. And it's sometimes used as a slang word to talk about a black man who is -- let's see. How shall I put it? Who is helping the white man. Somebody calls you an Uncle Tom, they mean that you might be black on the outside but you're not doing good for the black people.

DJ: [00:59:00] What did your schools look like?

GM: My school was very old and very beautiful. The elementary school I went to was redbrick and white. And it was very big and it sat up on a hill with green grass in the front and a lot of steps that you had to climb up to go in the front door. So we never used the front door. We went in the playground entrance. Behind school was a great big playground with swings and a baseball -- place to play baseball. It had a lot of windows. Then my junior and senior high school [01:00:00] sat up on a big hill also. I told you Cincinnati has a lot of hills. And it was -- it had a dome, like the dome of the Capitol Building in Washington. And under that dome was the library. So that was also a very beautiful building. In fact that building was in a movie. I can't remember the name of it now. These men were World War II veterans flying home. And they look out the window. They're up in an airplane and they look down at the high school and say something like oh, there's our old high school. So it was so big and spread out that they could do that aerial shot and still see it. It's a very unusual high school because [01:01:00] it's a public high school. You have to take a test when you're in sixth grade in any public school. If you pass the test you get to go there in seventh grade, and stay there all the way through until you graduate. In those days it was a classical high school, so in

seventh and eighth grade you had to take Latin. You had to take math courses. What else? You had to take another language. A classical high school meant that you had to take all the courses that were going to be required when you went to college to have had. [01:02:00] And you started them early. You started in seventh grade. Let's see. What did it look like? Talking about inside the school, pretty much like your schools now. Hallways, doors to the classrooms, lockers. An auditorium, cafeteria, nurse's office, library. The library could be in your classroom. We had books in the classroom. But you also had a library in the school where you would go [01:03:00] and get books out of the library. Or you could go to the public library. They had a gym. We had a gym. As I told you in the high school we had the swimming pool. And we had a lot of fields. My high school was on a big piece of property. So they had a hockey field, they had a tennis court, they had a soccer field, a football stadium, all that sport stuff outside. And that school, I just want to add this because I think it's good for people to know. That because the parents of that school and the [01:04:00] graduates of that school continue to give money, that school now has a rice field and other scientific and art and music additions, meaning separate buildings, because they wanted the children who go to that school to have as many experiences as they could have. And they've built -- they just keep building. And when you go back -- I go back for reunions -- they take you on a tour and you can't believe it, what they've done. So it was a good school. And the name of that school was -- is Walnut Hills High School. [01:05:00] Public high school.

DJ: Were your teachers good teachers?

GM: Yes. They were good. Some of them were racist and were very hard to get along with. But they were good. They did -- the only teacher that I can remember that I didn't think was good was my math teacher in elementary school who was a white man who used to throw erasers at us when they -- when he got upset with us. Because we weren't paying attention or learning the way he wanted us to. He would get [01:06:00] very red in the face. And I really -- I blame him for my not liking math to this day. But for the most part the teachers were really good. I learned a lot.

DJ: What was the ratio of the races of students in your school?



GM: The ratio of. I don't know. I'm not sure. [01:07:00] I just want to make sure that people understand that most of my experiences growing up because of segregation, but then because of integration, when I was integrated, I was always a minority. There were always more white people. Sometimes I was the only black. Sometimes I was one of a few. Like one of two or one of three. Or for instance when I was in college, I was also part of the situation where there was a minority of black students. Oh. I need to tell you that [01:08:00] I only went to Bennett College for two years, and then I transferred to Miami of Ohio, which was in Oxford, Ohio, which was an integrated state university. Ohio state university. So when I transferred I would say the ratio -- I don't know what the ratio was. But I know there were only about 38 of -- black students out of the whole school, hundreds and hundreds. And I don't know how many hundreds were going to Miami at that time. It was not as big as Ohio State. It was a small state school. But we were definitely the minority. And the makeup of the teachers, [01:09:00] we had all white teachers at that school. In all of the schools that I went to. I never had a black teacher until I went to Bennett College. Now when I was at Bennett, we had an integrated faculty because one of the interesting things about Bennett was that at the time that I was there, which was right after World War II, there were Jewish teachers who had been sent out of Germany because the Nazis did not want the Germans there. So they either sent them to concentration camps if they didn't escape, so some of the teachers escaped, [01:10:00] but when they came to the United States, they couldn't get jobs in the white schools, the white colleges. And so it ended up that a lot of German Jewish teachers started teaching in the black colleges. And Bennett is a historically black college. So I think they went to the historically black colleges. And they -- even though sometimes you could hardly understand them because of their accents, but they were really really good. And they were really dedicated. So besides the black teachers that -- and professors, some of them were full professors -- that we had at Bennett College, we also had these German Jewish teachers.

DJ: [01:11:00] Did you have books?

GM: Yes. We had books and we had good books. And that was because they were integrated schools. I'm not saying that in the all-black schools that happened to be all-black because they were in black neighborhoods that they had as good books. That's a

question I can ask some -- a couple of my friends that are still living. I never heard anybody complain about the condition of the books, that the black schools didn't get good books. And in fact we had a black library in the black elementary school in my neighborhood, and so that's where I went to the library [01:12:00] as a little girl. I could walk from my house to the library. So I was there like every day. And Ms. Finley, who was the librarian, was like my mother. She knew me as well as my mother knew me. And there were good books there. She gave me every good book to read. Even after I had read all the children's books she would pick out adult books that were suitable for me to read. And I never will forget. When they integrated the library, the public libraries in Cincinnati, and I went to the first -- for the first time to the integrated white library in the community where I lived, it was like a brand-new experience, because I had never been to a white library. [01:13:00] And the librarians in my high school were all white and I believe were extremely prejudiced, because I really felt that they never ever gave us the attention that they gave the white students. Like when we were doing research for papers. I just always had this feeling that they were not helping us. They did it because they had to, but that was it. So there was a lot of -- even though the teachers were good, and even though they were all good, because they may be prejudiced or even racist, they only went so far. And especially did I feel that at Miami of Ohio University. Those professors, many of them, were extremely racist. [01:14:00] The teachers that I had throughout the time I was at Bennett, I can't think of one teacher there who didn't treat you like their own child. That was the difference between going to a black college and an integrated school, college.

DJ: Were your classmates friendly?

GM: Yes. For the most part they were. I mean there were cliques. Meaning groups of kids that stuck together [01:15:00] or went -- were off together. We had a lot of wealthy students that attended the schools that I attended. But even though they might have come from more money, they were usually friendly. You found your own friends. So it kind of didn't matter. You hung out with the people that you liked. I don't remember the bullying that I hear about now. That's one thing. I remember -- but then on the other hand, it could have been happening and I wouldn't have known about it. Because I've often thought about that. Because we had some kids who didn't have any friends. And

then [01:16:00] looking back I would think hmm. Maybe they were being left out, and I didn't know about it, because I wasn't being left out. So that was my experience, that people were friendly.

DJ: Did you have any special friends in school?

GM: Yes. I had this one friend that I told you was a Jewish girl who came -- I was there in seventh and eighth grade. And she didn't come until the ninth grade. And the way we became friends was because we were seated alphabetically in our homeroom, so her last name started with an H, my last name started with a J. [01:17:00] So she sat in front of me and the first day she turned around and said, "Hi, my name is Emmy Lou Heiman. What's your name?" And I told her my name. And from then on we were friends. We just always would be together, when we were together, like in the homeroom. She had her Jewish friends. I had my black friends. But we were still friends outside of that group. And really a lot of her friends became my friends. And a lot of my friends became her friends. And we studied together. She would come to my house, I would go to her house. Not a lot. But that did happen, [01:18:00] when we got older especially. So my other special friends, yes, we studied together. My father got home from work early because he went to work at four o'clock in the morning, and he would get home early. So a lot of my friends who couldn't go home because there was nobody home would come to my house to be -- it was kind of like babysitting but it wasn't. So they would come to my house, we'd sit at the dining room table, do our homework. My father would fix us a snack. They loved my father. My father was a very -- he was older. And he was very popular with his nieces and nephews. And he was also very popular with my friends. They really loved him. So [01:19:00] I had classmates and friends, friends that went to other high schools, who would come after school, and we would study. Supposedly we were studying. And I still keep in touch with one friend who's still living. A lot of my friends and classmates have died. So I still keep in touch with one friend in Cincinnati who stayed in Cincinnati, who keeps me up to date with now unfortunately who's died, who was the last person that died. But she also is pretty active in the community. So she -- and in the high -- she went to the same high school. So she keeps me in touch with a lot of [01:20:00] what's going on in Cincinnati.

DJ: How would your classmates remember you?

GM: I think they would remember me as a pretty social person. I had friends. I did a lot of activities. I was very active. I don't think that they would remember me as being particularly smart, because I went to this school where people were [01:21:00] geniuses. But they -- I don't ever remember having a problem with anybody. So I think they would remember me pleasantly. Everybody always acts like they're glad to see me when I go home, so I'm assuming that it was OK.

DJ: In high school what subjects were you taught?

GM: I took all the basic subjects that you had to take. Math, English, language, foreign language was French. I told you I had to [01:22:00] take Latin. I stayed away from science classes. We had to take biology and botany. My extra classes were always either speech or drama or music, that kind of thing. History. We had to take history. I --

DJ: Were you able to take college prep courses?

GM: My whole high school was college preparatory high school. So in those days they didn't have college prep courses per se. Meaning if I had [01:23:00] gone to a regular high school, they didn't have any college prep courses. That's why they had this college preparatory school for kids who were wanting to go to college. And I really want to talk about the fact that back in the time that I was growing up, it was the end of the Depression that I went into elementary school, and then it was World War II when I was in junior high and high school. And the war ended in 1945. I graduated in 1950. So the world that I was born into changed drastically with World War II, meaning that [01:24:00] because of World War II after the soldiers came back, there were lots of changes. And one of the things that happened was that black people began to realize that they could go on to college. And you wanted your kids to go to college. So that is all we heard day and night. Study so you can get in college. Study so you can get a scholarship. And you heard it all over the place. You heard it at home, you heard it at church, you heard it in school. You heard it wherever there were people that came up from the South, where they couldn't -- where they didn't have good books to read. They had books that the white people had [01:25:00] torn up and were finished with. And they would say, "Don't be like me. Go to college." That's all we heard. So there was never any question

that you were not going to go to college. And the minute you graduated, it was like get a job so you could make some extra money. Because when you went to college you had to buy books, you had to buy your clothes, and all that. So it was very important, going to college. And if you couldn't afford to go, you went to night school. And that is at the University of Cincinnati where a lot of grown women and men went to night school to get their degree, and during the day they were working as maids, chauffeurs, doing whatever they could to make money to support their families. But they went to night school. So I grew [01:26:00] up with all of that around me. It was very important. You just didn't even think about not going to college.

DJ: Earlier you spoke of the Depression. What was the Depression?

GM: The Depression began in 1929 I believe when the stock market crashed and the banks didn't have any more money for people who had put their money in the bank. And people lost their jobs. And therefore the way of life, the way people used to live before that, at least they had work to do. They could feed their families. During the Depression, which started in the late '20s and went through almost to World War II, which was 1941, [01:27:00] so it was like the end of the '20s all the way through the '30s and maybe the first -- they were just beginning to get back on their feet when World War II started. So that whole time was when I was growing up. And so I grew up during the Depression. And the -- when you hear these days about the recession or that we're having a depression because people don't have jobs or there's a scarcity of money, then that's the way it used to be, only it was worse. I mean they actually had lines in the street where people, men especially, stood on line to get food. Women had to support their families [01:28:00] because the men could not get jobs. The -- I guess the biggest thing about the Depression was the scarcity of money, and so therefore you couldn't buy food and you couldn't find a place to live. A lot of men left home because they couldn't support their families. They had to go on the road, go to another city. When I was growing up there were men who were called tramps or hoboes who had left home because they couldn't support their families, and they had no money. And they used to get on a -- they would hop on a freight car in one city and ride free to another city. They would get off, try to find work. And they lived outside. There was a [01:29:00] place near where I lived that I had to pass every morning on my way to elementary school where these men lived in the

woods and cooked over a campfire. And that was like the scariest part of my walking to school was I had to pass by. And these were white men. These were -- I didn't see any black men in there. But there were plenty of black men that couldn't find jobs also. So that was a whole time period. It was like 10 years. And World War II actually helped everybody because then the factories had to start manufacturing airplanes and -- not tractors. What are the -- tanks. And men could join the army or the air force or the navy. And that gave them a way to make money. [01:30:00] So that's all part of the history that we lived through, like you all are living through a period of time that you'll look back on and you'll realize oh, for that period of time that's what was going on. Because it changes. It's about to change with the new president, big time. So looking at my experience, I do -- I can share with you that when I went to Bennett there were no sororities allowed at Bennett. And my mother was in a sorority, and so when I went to University of -- Miami University, [01:31:00] there still were no black sororities, so my mother wanted me to become an AKA because she was an AKA. So my senior year I had to take a bus from Oxford, Ohio to University of Cincinnati to be in a sorority. And that was like a very interesting experience in that I was doing my student teaching on campus, still taking classes, and going to Cincinnati to go through all the initiation that I had to go through to become an AKA. I did live on campus at Bennett and I lived on campus at Miami. [01:32:00] At Bennett my first roommate was from Baltimore, Maryland. She said she belonged to a gang on the east side. Her father worked at the big place down on the shore. She used to say down the ocean. She taught me so much about Baltimore. I never dreamed that I would end up living in Baltimore. I never dreamed that she would die so young, she died very young. So many things I would want to ask her now. But she was my roommate actually two years because we chose to room. She was assigned to me the first year but the second year we chose. I was in her wedding, she was in my wedding. [Darnell King?] [01:33:00] was her name. And when I came to Baltimore to be in her wedding -- oh, I'm getting so off track. I was standing in this Baptist church that had no air conditioning. And the windows were open, it was so hot, it was in August. I looked down at my arm, and there was perspiration popping out. I had always read about perspiration popping out. I had never seen it. I experienced it. But Darnell was my first roommate, and then I went to Miami and roomed with a childhood

friend who's also now dead. And then I roomed by myself. And I roomed in a little wing where there were three white girls rooming together. They were all from Chicago. [01:34:00] One was Italian, meaning first-generation, one was Irish, and the other one was Polish. And we became a foursome. They were very liberal. They grew up in Chicago. They were -- we had a lot of fun together. I loved living in the dorm. Those were the best years of my life, my college years. So I started out wanting to be an actress. So when I went to Bennett I took drama as my minor, because they didn't have a major, and English as my major. Then when I transferred to Miami of Ohio, [01:35:00] and I wanted to continue my drama, the head of the department called me in and said, "Since you are a Negro, you will not be able to act in any plays, be a director, be a producer, be a stage manager. The only thing that we can let you do is work behind the scenes on a crew, stage crew." So I switched my minor to speech therapy, because I thought I would like helping people to speak. When I got into speech therapy, I found out you had to do a whole lot of science, physiology, and all that, which I'm not good at, because I couldn't remember everything. [01:36:00] So I switched then to having another major of elementary education as well as continuing my English major. And I ended up when I graduated with thousands of credits -- hours, they called them -- because I did all this changing from one thing to another. But I ended up with a major in English and a major in elementary education. And that was my -- pretty much what I did. And then I went to -- after I started teaching I went back to get my master's in the '70s at Adelphi University on Long Island. And that was while I was teaching. [01:37:00] I would go to night school and then summer school. I went to summer school for two summers to get my master's degree because that meant I could make more money. And I also learned more because by then I had been teaching a while, and I realized how much I did not know and how much more I wanted to know. So I continued getting my master's in education. And that was another school where I had -- I'm getting ahead of myself. But when I graduated from college I did not teach right away. I got married and moved to New York and lived on Long Island. And I decided I wanted to go to Adelphi University and get a degree in [01:38:00] dance, because I was also interested from when I was a little girl in dancing. And I went to the director. And he also told me, "You will not be able to do that here because number one, you're too old, and number two, we have

never had a black student in the dance department.” So under his breath he was saying like and you’re not going to be the first one. So I gave that up. But I did get vindicated because a friend of mine later wanted to go to get her degree in dance and didn’t have a car, and I drove her to the campus for her interview. She was accepted because by then we had had the ’70s and things had changed. [01:39:00] And she got her degree in dance and started her own dance company, moved to Baltimore, and had for 30 years the Eva Anderson Dance Company. So that’s how lives change as you move around and you meet people. It’s just amazing that you end up where you end up, knowing the people that you knew.

F: Did you dance?

GM: Hmm?

F: Did you dance?

GM: I danced with Eva. When I met her we were in a dance -- that’s how I met her. I met her in a dance class at our church. And she gave a program, and I danced with her in that program. So and I danced on TV in New York. I did a program in New York. But after that was -- my daughter came along [01:40:00] and she needed to take dance classes. So I had to stop taking dance classes because I couldn’t afford it. But that took me into yoga. And I did become a yoga teacher because of all that, because I couldn’t dance, so I did yoga. That was another school that I went to after I retired from teaching. So I got a divorce when my children were very young and started teaching. So I did raise a family while I was teaching. Not while I was going to school. Well, yes, while I was going to graduate school, I also raised children while I was teaching. But [01:41:00] yes, it was difficult, but I did it.

DJ: What was the -- excuse me. What was the name of your church as a child?

GM: My church?

DJ: Yes.

GM: I went to Brown Chapel AME Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Cincinnati, Ohio. But one of the things that we haven’t talked about yet is the fact that every summer I spent with my grandmother and my aunts and uncles in Lima, Ohio. And



there I went to Saint Paul AME Church because that was our family church. We had -- one of my cousins became a bishop in that church. And [01:42:00] I got married in the AME church. But -- and I also attended a lot of other churches, even as a teenager, because I sang in the choir. I would -- OK, I would go to the Episcopal church because they had a good choir, and my parents would let me. I would go sing sometimes with them. Or I would go right next door to Bethel Baptist Church because they had BYPU, which was their youth group, and I wanted to go to that. Because that's where all the boys were. I would go to Mount Zion Church, which was a Methodist -- straight Methodist, not African American Methodist. Why did I go there? [01:43:00] Because I was always in programs at that church. So I went to a lot of different churches growing up. But my home church where I went to Sunday school and my father and I went -- my mother didn't go to church. But my father and I. My father was very active in church. It was located right down the street from me. So I could just go there by myself anytime. And it was an all-black church. And everybody in the church took care of you and knew you. And you looked up to everybody in the church, until you really got to know them, and then you found out they were regular people just like everybody. Church is [01:44:00] still an active part of my life, even though I don't go to an AME church. I do go to church.

DJ: In what ministries or activities do you engage?

GM: Well, now I'm not doing anything in the church. There's a community outreach that I'm becoming a part of, but I haven't really taken that much part in it yet. Mostly because the church I'm going to now I just started going to this winter. And I found it because it's [01:45:00] close to me, and it's got a minister that I like. So I'm not as active in the church as I used to be when I was younger. And for a long time I didn't go to church at all.

DJ: What role did your church play in particular in the civil rights movement?

GM: I have no idea. Because during the civil rights movement I was living in Texas on an air force base because I was married to a man who was in the air force. [01:46:00] And we went to the base church. OK, I'm thinking back too far. So then we came back up and the church I was going to during civil rights did -- oh, I know. We registered.

This is what happened during civil rights. I was living on Long Island. And what we did was register people to vote, because people -- black people were afraid to vote, even in the North. Mainly because they had come up from the South where they weren't allowed to vote. They were threatened. They were scared to vote. I remember going to the houses of the [01:47:00] people that lived way over at the end of the community where I lived, talking them into going to vote, picking them up. We had cars that would go. We would take turns picking up people to take them to vote. We also set up a table outside of the supermarket so we could catch people as they were going in and get them to vote. So that was all going on during that time. I knew people who went down South to march. Some of the members of my husband's family would march with Dr. King. I went to hear Dr. King when he spoke [01:48:00] up in Harlem at a church that was close to where my aunt lived, so we went to hear him. I'm not coming up with any -- very many activities, because that was when I was busy being a young mother with young children. And I belonged -- oh. This was very interesting. During that time, civil rights, I belonged to a group of women who raised money to help the black teachers from the South who lost their jobs because of integration. The black children were integrated into the schools. But the black teachers were not integrated. They couldn't teach. So [01:49:00] they came up to New York City to go to Columbia University to get their further degree so that they could go other places to teach in the North. And we raised money for those teachers to help them while they were living in Harlem. And we had people helping us like Ruby Dee and her husband Ossie Davis. And Ruby Dee and Harry Belafonte. The three of them helped us by appearing. We didn't have to pay them. But they would come and perform so that we could raise money to give to these teachers. So there were a lot of things like -- little things going on like that [01:50:00] during that time. They were not church-related. I'm going to tell you. I don't know that -- see, I wasn't going to church during that time. So I don't really know how much the churches were doing. But I know that there were lots of people helping. Lots of other groups that were helping.

DJ: Are you currently married?

GM: No. I have been divorced for many many many many years. And I still have a good relationship with my children's father. He actually has relocated [01:51:00] to a

senior community in Maryland, so I do see him with my children on family -- at family gatherings. Like on Memorial Day we'll all be together because one of his other children will come with her little children. And all of us will come together and celebrate as a family.

DJ: If it's not too personal or painful, can you explain why?

GM: Why what?

DJ: Why were you -- why are you divorced?

GM: I do think that would be personal, a personal reason, in [01:52:00] that it involves another person. In other words it's not just an explanation of me, I would have to talk about my ex-husband. And I don't think that's fair to him.

DJ: Do you have any grandchildren?

GM: No. Unfortunately. The two little boys that are coming are the closest I have to grandchildren. In other words they are the children of another child of my ex-husband, who has treated me like her mother. So they're like my grandchildren, but they're not blood grandchildren. [01:53:00] I was actually -- this is an interesting situation. Her birth mother was not able to be with her when her children were born, so she asked me to come and be with her. So I've gone to Cincinnati two times for the birth of both of those little boys. So I really feel like their grandmother but I'm not their grandmother.

DJ: Are you currently employed?

GM: No. Thank goodness. I'm retired. I'm a retired teacher. And I've done some other kinds of work in my lifetime. But basically what I did was teach. [01:54:00] Here in Baltimore when I retired I did work for the United Way as a fundraiser. And I worked for -- I can't even remember. OK, so let's just leave it at that.

DJ: What was the happiest moment of your life?

GM: Well, I really can't pick out one happy moment. But the happiest moments are when I am with my children. Especially now that they are adults. So for instance last [01:55:00] time that we were all -- that the three of us were together was Christmas. And

that -- we were together for about three hours before everybody else came. And so that is the latest happiest moment. Just to be with them.

DJ: Who was the most influential person in your life?

GM: My daughter's godfather was my English teacher at Bennett College my freshman year and my sophomore year. And when I transferred I kept in touch with him. And then when I moved to New York and had my daughter [01:56:00] he had meanwhile started teaching at Brooklyn College. And I made him my daughter's godfather because I wanted to stay in touch with him and have him in my children's life. So his name was Hobart Jarrett. And he was really the most influential person in my life. He was an incredible human being to begin with. Teacher, and mentor, and just a person who influenced me a lot.

DJ: What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in your life?

GM: Never give up. [01:57:00] Trust in God. Wake up every morning and be thankful that you can breathe and all the other things that you can do. Keep learning. Learn something new every day. Keep being active. Keep being healthy. Do -- enjoy what you do. Whatever you do, enjoy it, and find out what it is you want to do, and do it. And be fully present with whatever you want to do. And be with your family and be with your friends as much as you can. Enjoy [01:58:00] being with people when you're with them. Don't take people for granted. Be with them as much as you can. And have no regrets. So when they're gone you have no regrets.

DJ: What are the -- what are some of the most important lessons you've taught your children?

GM: To persevere, to keep trying, keep doing whatever it is that you want to do. To be fully present with your life. [01:59:00] To not use escape methods to get out of your life or to get away from your life. To keep the presence of God in your life in one way or another. If you're not going to church at least read or give yourself spiritual food. Meditate. Pray. Let go of stress. If something is stressing you, let it go. And get back to what you can do. Ask yourself that question. What can I do? So that's -- those are some.

DJ: What are the proudest moments [02:00:00] of your life?

GM: When I am with -- well, I'll start with my children. Well, I'll start with myself. I am proud whenever I accomplish something that I thought I couldn't do. And then I'm proud when I see my children do something that I never thought of them being able to do. When I see other people that have been close to me, like they -- I've been close enough that I know what their struggle has been, and then I see them overcome whatever obstacle they had and achieve something. Or when I see [02:01:00] little children learn something new. I taught first grade for 21 years. So I got to see children learn to read, over and over and over. And you just have such a sense of pride when you have watched that child struggle to learn and then they do. So those are the proudest moments in my life.

DJ: Is there anything that you did not accomplish in your life that you would like to accomplish now?

GM: Accomplish. I have a lot of things that I'd like to do that I haven't done. To accomplish. [02:02:00] I would like to write a book. I'm a writer and I write a lot. But I would really like to write a book. I never thought about that until this minute. I would really like to write a book. That would be an accomplishment.

DJ: If you could, would there be anything in your life you would go back and change?

GM: I have often asked myself that question. And I would say I would go back and change a lot of things if I had known better. For instance, I would study more. Like I didn't realize when I was in school [02:03:00] how important it was to study. There were some things that came very easily to me, so I didn't have to study. I could just read something and remember it, or because I liked doing it I could do it. But subjects that were hard for me, I would give up. And I wouldn't study. And nobody really stood over me and said, "Look, you have got to spend time studying, or you're not going to learn this." And you can learn it. I -- that's what I didn't know. I didn't know that if you really really applied yourself that you could learn it. I thought that I just simply couldn't understand it. I'm talking about math now. So I just gave up. I didn't think that it was possible. So that's something I would change. [02:04:00] I would keep studying until I got it. And then I would go back and change the relationship that I had with my parents. But that's based on what I know now. And I don't think you can really -- you can't do

that. So I'm not going to -- I'm not even going to go there. I think that I would have asked them more questions. Found out more about how they grew up and how they felt. I would have shared more with them, and maybe they would have shared [02:05:00] more with me. So that I would go back and change.

DJ: Do you feel that you are leaving a legacy?

GM: What do you mean by legacy?

DJ: By legacy I mean do you feel like you are leaving something behind that someone will remember you by.

GM: OK. I know that I'm leaving a legacy for my children because they've told me. So they're going -- I know they're going to remember me by certain things that I've done. I'm living in a place where there are a lot of old people who have done a lot of really important things that [02:06:00] people will -- like a man just died who was an internationally known anthropologist. He's left a legacy of books that he's written and a whole generation, more than one generation, of people, anthropologists who have learned from him. So in that way I'm hoping that I'm leaving a legacy with all the people that I've ever taught. And sometimes you wonder. Because you never get to see people after they grow up you don't know how they remember you or what they remember that you taught. But sometimes you do. And when I do meet people that I've taught, [02:07:00] they'll tell me, "I'll always remember what you said," or, "I'll always remember." So to me that's a legacy. And that's what I'm aware of now.

DJ: I will read some milestones in African American history. If applicable, please tell me how you felt when they happened.

GM: Well, I remember when Jackie Robinson broke the color line and the whole baseball -- the change in the way people were able to participate in baseball. And what pride we had in all those baseball players. I remember when President Truman -- that was Jackie Robinson, 1947. Then in 1948 President Truman [02:08:00] integrated the United States armed forces -- armed services. And I really remember that because I was in high school and knew a lot of people that were in the service. In 1954 I was doing my student teaching when the *Brown versus Board of Education* making segregation in

schools unconstitutional, and I remember that because my critic teacher, who was a white woman, and all my students were white, said, "Step into the other room. I don't want you to hear this conversation that we are going to have about this." Because she knew that I was going to hear some things that were not things that I would like to hear. And so besides my own personal [02:09:00] celebration of that, that's what I remember about that. I remember Rosa Parks's arrest in 1955. The 1957 Little Rock Nine integrating the Central High School. All of those things were on TV. And I went to Little Rock High School and pretended that I was a high school student integrating that high school, with people throwing bottles and rocks, later. This is later in my life. And I felt like I never could have done that, I could not have done what they did. In 1960 Woolworth's sit-in. That I definitely remember because I was at Bennett College in Greensboro and I knew that we couldn't do anything. Nothing in Greensboro. [02:10:00] So that was very meaningful to me. And '62 when James Meredith integrated the University of Mississippi, that was unimaginable. I just couldn't believe that they were going to -- Mississippi was going to let black people go on that campus. Then in 1963 the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. We just were watching that on TV. And we knew some people that went on the march. And it was just mind-blowing that my world and our world was changing. Nineteen sixty-four, the Civil Rights Act was passed. And that definitely made a huge difference, because by then I was an adult, and I was beginning to experience affirmative action and all of the positives that came out of that. [02:11:00] In 1964 when Sidney Poitier became the first Negro to win the best actor Oscar, that was a biggie, because just the fact that he was even in a movie I remember was a big deal. Nineteen sixty-seven when Thurgood Marshall appointed -- was appointed the first Negro on the Supreme Court, that of course was just unimaginable. The Supreme Court. And we knew so much about Thurgood Marshall that it was just like a miracle. Then in 1968, when Dr. King was assassinated, that was unbelievable, but it was something that we all had to accept, and [02:12:00] even out of that came some good things that happened. Two thousand and one, Colin Powell was appointed the first African American secretary of state, and that was especially meaningful to me, because I am friends with his cousin. And I had known about the family and all that before he was appointed. So the fact that he was appointed was just incredible. Two thousand two,

Halle Berry and Denzel Washington best actor and actress Oscars, making it the first time African Americans win both categories in the same year. That of course was a huge -- it meant a lot because it was on television. A lot of young people [02:13:00] saw it and were impressed and began to realize that we were becoming a part of the mainstream. Two thousand eight, Barack Obama elected the first African American president of the United States. That was quite an unbelievable event that I'm still trying to digest. And the fact that then in 2012 he was reelected. A black man the head of the United States, and now a world leader. So I -- all of those landmarks were so unbelievable, after the childhood that I had growing up in segregation and not being [02:14:00] allowed to do so many things, that it's now a time when I realize that we've all lived through seeing black people make incredible advances. But there's more to be made.

DJ: Is there anything you would like to add that was not covered in this interview?

GM: The only thing I want to add briefly is that extended family meant a great deal to me because of being an only child. Those summers with my grandmother and aunts and uncles and cousins in Lima, Ohio gave me a sense of family that I would not have had, [02:15:00] although I had extended family in Cincinnati with my parents' friends. Just the fact that I -- and my mother's family actually, because I used to go see them too. So I was -- growing up, I was very close to all my cousins and aunts and uncles and felt nurtured by them. So I really wanted to add that because without them I would not be who I was, who I am and who I was. That's it.

F: I have a question before you close out. Because of your complexion did you sense that there was a --

GM: Oh Lord. You don't want another hour, do you?

F: Well, just was it --

GM: There was a difference in the way I was treated because I am light-skinned and have what is called [02:16:00] good hair, meaning that it can be straight at times. And not only that, but my father looked like a white man. He could have passed, chose not to. I was embarrassed when I was a preteen to be seen with my father, because I was afraid that people would make fun of my father, because he looked like a white man. That's



how bad it was. On the other hand, I grew up in a community where there were a lot of light-skinned people. And so there was like an intermingling. I did not feel the racial color prejudice, the color prejudice, that I have found in Baltimore since living here. I think it's -- there's a [02:17:00] different consciousness in the North. And I consider Baltimore a Southern city. There's a different way that people are brought up to believe the difference in color. I mean it's really an individual thing because it depends on your family. How they're going to tell you what's good and what's bad. On the other hand I've also had to have a problem with white people who did not know I was black, and said a lot of stuff, until I said, "Wait a minute, I'm an African American." Or with white people who didn't want me to be black. Well, you can't be black. You must be Italian. You must be Puerto Rican. How could you be black? Was your father a black man? Yes. And I haven't even gotten into Benjamin Banneker as a [02:18:00] black ancestor of mine. That really made me say, "Oh yeah, I'm black." So what can I tell you? Sorry.

DJ: Again I want to thank you for being here and giving us your time and participating in the study. I really learned a lot that I didn't know before. I just want to thank you for your time.

GM: I want to thank you. You were a good interviewer. You got a lot of stuff out of me that I had buried. So thank you so much.

F: I know you talked a lot about many many things. But I'm sorry you weren't able to tell them about Benjamin Banneker and his importance in your life and that's another story.

GM: Yeah, that's another interview, I've done that interview. [02:18:51]

END OF AUDIO FILE