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Gladyce K. Nunn

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ORAL HISTORY

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Date February 23, 1974

Gladys K. Nunn
(Signature - Interviewee)

Oceana, W. Va.
Address

Date Feb 23, 1974

Donald Joe Woodhouse
(Signature - Witness)



DJW: This is Joe Woolwine and I am interviewing Miss Gladyce Nunn who is a retired school teacher who has taught in the counties of Wyoming and Logan County for 43 years. Today's date is February 23, 1974. This is tape 1, side 1. Gladyce, you want to tell us a little bit about where you grew up and a little bit about your family and all?

GKN: Well I grew up mostly in Wyoming County and received my high school education, graduated from high school at Oceana High School and I was the family of five girls, uh, they all, well not all of them but two of them was school teachers also, and uh, I received my college education, and uh, Concord College at Athens and Marshall University in Huntington. I started teaching when I was 18. I've had 43 years, I'm experienced mostly in Wyoming County schools, 30 years here and 13 years, I'm sorry I got that backwards. 30 years in Logan County, 13 in Wyoming County. I retired in '71 since that time I have been doing substitute work and I have thoroughly enjoyed my years of teaching, most of it, of course every job has it's dull moments sometimes.

DJW: Gladyce, what's been the biggest change that you've seen in education since you've been in education?

GKN: Well Joe, I think the biggest change that I've noticed in education is consolidation in schools and the beginning of my teaching career I taught in a two room school, the first year, uh, the next two years I spent in one room school and I had the first through the eight grades. Of course having all eight grades, you couldn't do justice really to the curriculum that you would have liked to have carried out in your work. However, the one room school did have it's advantage, the enrollment, enrollment was small and you had more time to give to the individual child which is very important but since consolidation they have been able to enlarge and enrich the curriculum which has kept pace, of course with progress.

DJW: How about the quality of teachers, uh, as compared

with the past and the present? Are they more qualified, do you feel or less qualified?

GKN: Well naturally they are more qualified. They have to be in order to teach the curriculum that is now taught in the schools. Uh, you could finish high school and even back when I started teaching I think there was some who hadn't finished high school that could get a certificate. Uh, of course, they are really too young at that age to teach children who are almost as old as they were and the education that the present day teachers have received enables the pupils to gain much more from their school work.

DJW: Do you think there is more interest in the students toward education now than there was in the past or less or what change have you seen in the students?

GKN: That's a little bit difficult to answer. Uh, there is more interest, more varied interest, however it's much harder to hold a child's attention these days. Back when I first started teaching there was no television in homes and practically all the children had to do was get the homework and well, for a child, pretty soon after dark they didn't have many outside interests. There were few radios so books and what was in books really meant more to them than they do now. Their interests are so varied at the present, they have so much more experience with practically everything and their quest for knowledge leads them to different fields and if they don't like to read, which alot of them do not, it's rather hard to hold their interest in school work.

DJW: What about, uh, parents? How have they changed as far as their interest for their kids and as compared to the past and now? How have they changed? Are they more interested in their students attending school or . . .

GKN: Well actually from my viewpoint, it seems to me that there has been a bigger change in the parents than

there have in the children.

DJW: How's that?

GKN: Well so many mothers these days work outside the homes and they send their children to school, uh, to learn of course, however, it's regretful to say that a few send them to school to get them out of the house and have a good babysitter for the day. These things too, are due to changes sometimes which have occurred which are beyond their control, and uh, parents are more permissive these days.

DJW: Was there a P.T.A. then? There was no P.T.A. when you first started, was there?

GKN: Well no there was no such thing as P.T.A. but you had such few children in school those days that, uh, you quite often contacted the parents more than you do now when you have your P.T.A. meetings.

DJW: You said when you taught in a one room school there was all eight grades in one room. How did you break that up?

GKN: Well the older children sometimes would help the younger ones, and uh, while you were having one class the others would be reading books mostly, if they had books. When I started teaching we built up a small library, the children seemed very eager to get hold of the books to read them.

DJW: For you, how has it changed as a teacher going from one school and then into consolidation? How has it changed for you?

GKN: Well really going from a one room school to a school in which you only taught one grade actually made you feel as if you might be loafing on the job, but uh, you could give much more time, of course, to the subjects in one grade than you could if you had to teach all grades at one time and have all your subjects in one day which as I look back now, I

don't see how I ever did it or how any teacher ever did that.

DJW: Uh, what role, well was there a principal then? Did you have a principal over the whole school?

GKN: Well each school had it's own principal of course if you were in a one room school you were it. You were the principal, the faculty, and all of it. But ever the two room schools, one teacher was the principal.

DJW: Well how has the principal's role changed as you see?

GKN: Well most principals now are non-teaching principals. They do the supervision of the faculty, the different activities of the school, take care of the finances, bookkeeping and try to keep everything running smoothly, which is a difficult job, of course in a large school and if the school is a very large one there should be a non-teaching principal, I think.

DJW: How is public education changed as far as serving the retarded, slow learner and so forth?

GKN: Well there has been more progress, I suppose, along that line than any other. Uh, back in the past when a child didn't learn the teachers weren't confident to help the child because they hadn't had the training of that. The public has also become more sensibly educated to the fact someone is just not just crazy. There's a reason for it and where they use to label the person crazy, now they realize they are mentally ill, maybe only temporarily and they try to get to the background to the cause of that whether it's a social cause, whether it's a physical cause and teachers now have been trained along that line and the public has also been trained, maybe without realizing they were changing their attitudes and much advancement has been done along those lines which is a wonderful thing. Schools now have special education rooms where the slow learner can get the advantages of the average child, uh, where the slightly retarded child can get alot of individual attention

and sometimes that turns out to be what the child really needs is love and attention which maybe for some reason he hasn't gotten up to that time.

DJW: How has grouping students changed? I mean, you got your slow learners, fast learners, and you got your in between, does that aid in helping the children or hinder or what?

GKN: Well in the last several years that has given me the mental impression of a teeter totter or pendulum. It swings first in one direction and then swings in the other. It seems that as yet the educators haven't firmly decided which is best, to group an entire room according to it's level of ability or to mix the children. I think the trend at the present time is to have a mixed group, thereby, hoping that the child who may be socially maladjusted or maybe a little bit mentally slow will profit by the experiences of the other children and too, they don't have the stigma attached to being in the dumb room. Sometimes it's the children themselves who label it. Even though you don't say the fast group, the middle group or the slow group, most of the children know, they are smart enough to know what group they're classified in. In the last several years, particularly the place in which I taught, they quit grouping them like that so the trend seems to be moving toward a mixed group more than a classified group.

DJW: They didn't have mixed groups when you first started teaching? I mean, they didn't divide the class up like that?

GKN: No, it seems to me that within the last thirteen or fourteen years, well in fact when I came back to Wyoming County in '61 was the first place I remember teaching where they had a special education room. So it was evidently in the late '50's or early '60's when they started that, particularly in this area.

DJW: Uh, where was the location of the first school you taught?

GKN: Beg your pardon.

DJW: Location of the first school you taught in?

GKN: First school I taught? Was in Jesse, West Virginia, Wyoming County. Two room school . . .

DJW: Where was it located? I mean, how far would the students have to come to get to the classes?

GKN: Oh, I had students that year who walked, I'd say, four miles each day. In those days there was no such thing as school buses. In fact, I had finished high school myself, I think, before I ever saw a school bus running in this area.

DJW: What did they ride?

GKN: Beg your pardon.

DJW: They had cars didn't they? Not that many but . . .

GKN: They had cars, yes, but the roads were in such bad condition that, uh, in the winter time they were impassable and too there were few people in the community who had cars.

DJW: Was it mostly in coal mining, in this I mean was that the original reason most people when you started were most of them coal miners?

GKN: Well in this part of Wyoming County at that time, the Ritter Lumber Company was the, oh, I guess the money making thing for the people here and a bit later they begin to open up mines, the Kopperston Mine, the mine at Lynco and people moved into here for that purpose, so for that reason the population, us say, has grown well here in Oceana where I live now, I'd say it's increased a thousand times or a thousand percent.

DJW: How about in Logan? How many, well you know, when you was in Logan, how many student did you have from the first through the eighth grade, all combined?

GKN: You mean how many consolidated schools in Logan County when I went there?

DJW: No. You say you taught one through the eighth in Logan?

GKN: No, that was here in Wyoming.

DJW: Oh, what was in Logan then?

GKN: Well one year in Logan County I taught one through eight and that was a one room school, in fact a log school building they built in that year. I started late because they didn't have the building finished and they didn't have the old pot-bellied stove up there from the Boards office yet. Excuse me, I had only fourteen children in school.

DJW: One through the eighth?

GKN: Well I didn't have any eighth graders. I had two seventh graders, the rest of them was in the first six grades.

DJW: Down at, was that at Mallory?

GKN: No, that was not at Mallory. You might be interested in the fact too that, uh, my mode of transportation that year was mule back.

DJW: I never knew that.

GKN: That was, uh, oh, about half between Man and Logan. You could get a car, if you had one, up the road, up the hollow, but the family I boarded with had a wagon and the first few trips I made up there I went in wagon then I found out that there was a shorter route across the mountain over to Flister Block above Omar by mule train, however, that was a very enjoyable year of teaching. The children were interested in school, they hadn't had a school in several years before that, and they were very proud to have one again. So I spent one year there and after that, I think they had about two or three more years of school there. Well the roads improved then until they could get out to other schools.

DJW: What was the population then of that area?

GKN: Population of that area?

DJW: Yeah.

GKN: Oh, I think there was six or seven families up in there at that time, however, now they have a coal mine up there and I imagine the place has grown up alot.

DJW: What did they base it on, the location of schools then? I mean, did they just base it on if a teacher just happened to be there then they set up a school or did they requisition a teacher from the Board of Education or what, how did they get the school started in there?

GKN: I don't know how many years that school had been down there. Were they out a building or teacher or anything several years, I think. So evidently this man who had the most children of school age kept after the Board of Education, maybe with the help of a neighbor or two of his, until they finally got a building erected there and secured a teacher. It was quite an experience for me, of course, I had taught one room schools before but, uh, never in that remote a place.

DJW: Uh, as far as Board of Education, how has it changed as far as you're concerned? For the good or worse?

GKN: When I first started teaching Joe, the county was divided into districts and well I don't believe Wyoming County was, well it was, divided into districts but they had a county superintendent and I don't remember about the board members. Whether they had different board members for each district or whether they had just certain members for the whole county, but then when I went to Logan County they had a county superintendent and I suppose an assistant but they also had trustees. Each district had it's trustees which would be equivalent to a member of Board of Education. I think three to each district perhaps.

DJW: What were their requirements? You have to have a degree or what to be on the board?

GKN: No, just a certain amount of popularity among your neighbors. Pull, I guess in that certain district and I don't know really whether they were appointed by the Board of Education, I mean the county superintendent, or whether they were elected from that particular district or appointed by somebody.

DJW: How has the pay changed for teachers?

GKN: This will be the question of the interview. The first year I taught I don't know whether I ever told you this before or not.

DJW: No.

GKN: Well you're going to laugh. My salary was \$65.00 a month. The next year I got a little raise, I got \$67.50. The third year I got \$70.00 . . .

DJW: A month?

GKN: A month, but at the end of the year I had a little money in the bank, believe it or not. Of course, with the increase in living, cost of living with continued education which teachers had to have, they naturally had to have increases in salary to meet the demand of aggressive education, so this salary I made when I retired was, oh, a number of 100%'s more than when I first started teaching.

DJW: What was the pay based on? They base it on, oh, number of years experience or whether you had a degree or not or what?

GKN: Well it was the kind of certificate you had and when I started out teaching, I took a teachers examination. If you finish high school, take a teachers examination and then you were issued a certificate and I started on a second class certificate. I hadn't had agriculture and West Virginia History which was required in this state. I finished my

elementary school work in the state of Virginia and first year of high then we moved to West Virginia and since I hadn't had those two subjects, I had quite a few questions on them, oh, agriculture and West Virginia History. I missed the first class certificate by a few points. I imagine if you had a first class certificate back then you would probably have got as much as \$75.00 to \$80.00 a month for your salary.

DJW: Did school run all year round then or just nine months or when?

GKN: No, if I remember correctly it was nine months or less and depended alot on how much the county had to allocate for educational purposes. Even after I taught school for a number of years, they'd run short of money and the school term would be cut short and then sometimes teachers would get their paychecks and there wouldn't be money to pay for them and some of the merchants would cash them and hold them for 10% discount.

DJW: How has change, the look as far as the public is concerned, looking at a teacher in the past? Did they view the teacher as someone on the lowest totem pole, high totem pole or how? And how has it changed as compared to today?

GKN: Well there has been a big change along that line too. I believe that in the past the general public probably respected the teacher and considered that a higher profession than they do at the present and I think there has been a bigger change in the attitudes of children toward the teacher than there has of the general public and parents. Years ago, of course, the child was supposed to be seen and not heard. They regarded the teacher as someone who should know everything and not think a fool. Most youngsters put the teacher on a pedestal and now children have had more outside interest, they been given more freedom, they are interested in many more things then they used to be, they look upon their teacher as a person who should know quite a bit but they are not afraid of the teachers like they used to be which I

think is a good thing because no teacher wants a child to be afraid of them. However, they don't seem to have quite the respect for the teacher they once had, why that is, I don't exactly know, of course some of them do.

DJW: How has the change for males and female teachers, was there any male teachers that taught before?

GKN: I had one elementary teacher, male teacher and men taught in high school then.

DJW: Men taught in high school then?

GKN: Beg your pardon?

DJW: Men taught in high school then?

GKN: But outside that one elementary teacher I had I can't remember men teaching all through the rest of the grades. They just didn't enter the profession then.

DJW: Lack of interest or the, what the society suspected of them as being a male?

GKN: Well perhaps the lack of interest, uh, they realized they couldn't make a living for a family on a teachers' salary and then too, in those days people had the idea that if a man taught school he was considered a sissy.

DJW: That's what I was thinking, the role society thought he should play.

GKN: Beg your pardon?

DJW: That's what I was thinking, the role society thought a man should play then. This will be continued on side two, tape one.

DJW: This is the beginning of side two, tape one. We were talking about male teachers and their roles in the past and in the future. Uh, do you see it as an advantage for a child to have a male or a female teachers, or what difference would it make?

GKN: Well I think when a child is smaller probably it should have a female teacher because they are particularly in the first three grades, they are getting adjusted to being away from home, away from their mother and women are a little bit more patient and understanding of small children. When they get in upper grades, particularly in high school, I think it might be an advantage to have a male teacher, quite a few male teacher, particularly when the youngsters are at the age where they are going through maybe a physical or emotional change. They sometimes get to the place they like to show off too much. Some of them and in cases like that male teachers can handle them better. Females might be a little more understanding but then when they reach that age, they don't seem to think that women could handle them as well as a male could.

DJW: They use to say that a teacher took on the role of a parent only in a school situation and were supposed to play the role of a parent, at least that's what I use to hear anyway. Uh, how much influence do you think a teacher has on a student and his outcome in life. Well I guess it would depend on a particular age that he got a particular teacher but you know what role, do you think, a teacher plays on the outcome on a students' life?

GKN: Well Joe, a really conscientious dedicated, interested teacher which I think most of them are, I believe would play a role of great importance in a child's life. Maybe you would be able to see the results, maybe it would take years for those results to manifest themselves. As much time as a teacher spends with a child, they are naturally bound to exert a certain amount of influence in their attitude and thinking. Uh, the moral attitude, the social attitudes, uh, maybe their ideas of themselves as a citizen, maybe even their religious beliefs to a certain extent, which of course a teacher shouldn't influence and they don't but they can, by their actions, show the child that there is a supreme being who knows all and will take care of all in due time. Of course when the child grows up, it's religious beliefs and it's denomination

should be its own choice.

DJW: That's been a big change too as far as in public system.

GKN: Yes, indeed it has. Use to be that the most teachers opened the school day with a prayer, perhaps a Bible reading and there have been arguments for and against. I wouldn't state an opinion either way, that's a person's own personal ideas, but there's been a big change that way. Use to be it was required that the children returned thanks at their meals that they ate at school. That isn't done anymore, I understand that it is permitted if the child wants to bow it's head, give silent thanks or silent prayer. But that as well as practically every other phase of social and academic life has seen a vast change in the public school system.

DJW: As far as vocational training, uh, when did that come into being as far as in this immediate area?

GKN: That, Joe, would be a hard question for me to answer because most of the time I taught one fourth grade at Logan, fourth grade, so I wouldn't have had too much knowledge of that but in thinking back, the best I can remember, I would say it was in the late 50's perhaps, that they began to have trade schools or vocational schools in counties that were financially able to afford them. And I feel that is one of the most progressive phases that has taken place in the last 10 or 12 years, and is beginning to become more important. We now in Wyoming County here have a vocational school under construction which I think is one of the greatest steps that the county has ever taken. It's my opinion that some children just are not interested in or what they might term as book learning. They don't like to read, even if they learn to read they don't like to read, they don't seem to be interested in quite a few school subjects. But with the vocational schools they might be interested in a certain thing and go ahead and excel in that. And children perhaps that are termed slow learners maybe they just like to work with their hands, and

of course the vocational schools, they could find out what particular field of work they're interested in most, and uh, perhaps go ahead, learn that and excel in it and become very independent and well adjusted citizens.

DJW: I want to change the subject around. In the past, well here in the past few years, I have noticed the change as far as teachers' rights, teachers banning together and seem to be the nucleus of education where as before I thought this, is what I had a picture of the teachers were down here, the principal, then the Board of Education and then the state where all the controllers, you know, and the teachers were just to carry out the orders. Now it seems that in the past four or five years I've noticed teachers that have banned together and even strike, won't teach, to get what they want. How has that changed as far as the power of the teacher, uh, in the past and now?

GKN: Well when I first started teaching and had a principal, I don't think I would have disagreed with the principal on anything he might have said and I'm quite sure that most other teachers felt the same way. The principal's ideas and his word was law. Uh, I think the principalship role has changed, oh, probably as much as a role of a father in the home. Fathers use to be the lord and master, what he said was it but with modern ideas the parents have come to realize more that, uh, the mother is just as important in the home as far as making decisions as the father is. Well I think the same thing applies to principalship, his word is not law or the last word at anything now, and I think he appreciates the fact that his teachers don't hold him in awe, I say this because most principals of larger schools are still male principals. Uh, teachers don't hold principals at awe as they once did. They consider him more as an advisor, a helper, and he realizes particularly in consolidated schools as they have now that's what his role exactly is, an advisor, a helper, rather than a critic and he has bigger responsibility, it's his job to keep the teachers working together with the principal, exchange their ideas to keep things running

smoothly that way.

DJW: Well what brought about the biggest changes as far as teachers and for, I don't know the quest of power, what and why the big gripe all of a sudden you know, or has it been a big gripe by teachers all along for higher increases in pay, like you said you started at \$60.00 some a month?

GKN: I believe perhaps that the change and attitudes as to what the teacher was suppose to represent. Years ago, teachers were suppose to be long faced and most teachers, I suppose, wore a bun or bind on the back of their neck and dressed very sedately, they weren't suppose to do anything to attract attention to yourself, either physically or with your behavior. They were suppose to be practically perfect, I imagine to the role they were playing. I think as time changed, peoples' ideas of what teachers should be like also changed. They began to realize they were part of community, they had outside interests, lives of their own to live outside of the school, they were allowed more freedom of this, more freedom of entertainment, outside activities and as a person began to emerge and become more of an individual. I think they got more independent and assertive of their ideas and I think perhaps that has lead up to teachers feeling that since they're doing their job they should have a say in the way it is done.

DJW: You think teachers are underpaid?

GKN: Underpaid? Not really. Teachers make a good salary now. However, I think teachers should be paid 12 months of the year.

DJW: Even though they only teach nine?

GKN: Teach ten months. Because if they don't get any money for ten months they have to spread this salary over the months for which they get none, so they either should have an increase in pay to take care of that or be paid the year around. But as far as the monthly salary itself, I think it's adequate. Uh, I'm not speaking for myself,

I have no dependents, however, a male teacher who has a large family to support, I feel their pay is not sufficient.

DJW: As far as the aim of education, when you first started what was the difference in the aim of education then for children than it is today?

GKN: The name education, the word itself? Is that what you mean?

DJW: The aim.

GKN: Oh, the aim. I thought you said name.

DJW: What was the purpose of it then and what is the purpose of it now? Has it changed that much or . . .

GKN: Well the purpose of education, I think, when I started to school was to learn as much as you could of what you needed to know until you could at least as smart as the neighbors children were, but then women were suppose to get married and take a role of home, mother and homemaker. They didn't work outside of the home very much so really, I suppose that particularly a girl's education back in those days was just so she in the future plans could help plan her children, and uh, that she could carry on a conversation, things that her husband would be interested in. Maybe they would become clerks in stores, factories or something like that but now I think the aim of education is to produce an independent member of society, one who won't have to depend on somebody else to take care of them.

DJW: Even for the women?

GKN: Even for the women. Everyone these days is, well, expected to get a good education and, uh, the increase in the price of living has soared to the extent to the point where the woman was left in a position where she would have to rear her child, it seems that she needs the education now so she could take the role as the bread winner of the family in case something would happen to the father and husband to where he could no

longer be able to provide for them. And I think that is one thing that increased the interest of girls getting a good education.

DJW: In the past it wasn't a requirement that you have an education to get a job, was it?

GKN: Oh no, if you could get a job you would go out and get a job as soon as you were old enough to get a job.

DJW: When the change and where did it come about as far . . .

GKN: Well I think technology has brought it about. Just eighth graders or most high school graduates couldn't go out now and hold down alot of jobs that they might be able to get, if they had special training for it. So education now is almost a must, so many jobs now they ask the applicant if they, well I guess all of them now, if they are college graduates. Use to be if they were high school graduates, they thought they were well educated.

DJW: So your college degree is equivalent today of your high school degree of yesterday?

GKN: I feel like it is.

DJW: Well let me ask you one final question, unless you want to add something else. Where do you see education going? What direction do you see it moving now? Moving toward the vocational education, more toward the specialized education. Well let's say alot of people I've heard talk about we don't need these specific subjects such as English and so forth to get a degree in, well, to graduate from high school and go into college and to get a degree in Sociology. Where do you see it headed for? More specific fields, more specific areas or what or still stay in a general area the way it is now?

GKN: Are you referring to high school, college, or all the way through?

DJW: Well I'm referring to go through, from first grade all

the way through high school, I know that's a big change from first grade to high school but it's still a general area.

GKN: Well I have heard educators themselves express the opinion that it didn't make any difference how a child talked as long as it was able to express itself. In fact, this particular educator I have in mind said if his little boy wanted to say I ain't got no pencil, that was allright. I, uh, a little bit doubt that, though I think perhaps he was trying to get a laugh out of the assembly, he only got a rise out of me because I was always quite a stickler for good English but I can see where your question could arise why should you have all of those subjects all through elementary school, through high school, through college for which you will never have any need and frankly I think there's a lot of subjects required that shouldn't be made to take in order before you get a degree. I do think that you should have a good workable knowledge of English, being able to express yourself well, being able to write well enough to take care of your future needs, express yourself orally and in writing and I think if you're going to come in contact with so many people, so many different walks of life that you need a general, broad, smattering of a lot of subjects in order to be an interesting listener or be an interesting conversationalist and to enrich your own thought and ideas but I think if a student shows an aptitude where a certain thing, a certain subject that he should be allowed to go ahead and pursue that subject without being forced to take a lot of subjects which he would never have to use.