

Marshall University

## Marshall Digital Scholar

---

0064: Marshall University Oral History  
Collection

Digitized Manuscript Collections

---

1997

### Oral History Interview: Helaine Rotgin

Helaine Rotgin

Follow this and additional works at: [https://mds.marshall.edu/oral\\_history](https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Marshall University Special Collections, OH64-643, Huntington, WV.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Manuscript Collections at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in 0064: Marshall University Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact [zhangj@marshall.edu](mailto:zhangj@marshall.edu).

# RELEASE FORM

## Deed of Gift to the Public Domain

I, Helaine Rotgin, do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University the tape recordings and transcripts of my interview(s) on x 9/15/97.

I authorize the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their Oral History Program.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

Gina Kates x Helaine Rotgin  
 (Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program) (Donor)

X 1/3/00  
 (Date)

ORAL HISTORY LOG

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Helaine Botgin

MSO#: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

RELEASE FORM STATUS:

DATE OF INITIAL RELEASE FORM: 9/15/97

RELEASE FORM STATUS:  OPEN  OPEN AFTER REVIEW

CLOSED UNTIL \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE LETTER WAS SENT REGARDING REVIEW/RELEASE: \_\_\_\_\_

WITH TRANSCRIPT

WITHOUT TRANSCRIPT

NOTES ON FOLLOWUP (NOTE DATE & SPECIFY ACTIVITY):

8/25/00 - LA Ewon reviewed  
8/28/00 - chgs. made -- reprinted copy to  
library c copy of tape. gk

**LG:** Okay. My name is Lucille Gore, and I'm a student at Marshall University, in the Oral History of Appalachia Program. And I'm interviewing today the, for the archives of the Camp Virgil Tate. I want you to understand that this is for public listening and today's date is September the 15<sup>th</sup>, 1997, and we'll be talking with Helaine Rotgin about her experiences as far as the legislature was concerned about Camp Washington-Carver.

**HR:** You mentioned Virgil Tate. Does that have anything to do with it? Okay.

**LG:** I meant Washington Carver.

**HR:** Washington Carver. Well, I was a member of the legislature and it was in 1977. And I had a phone call, an urgent phone call, from Bill Lonesome, who was big time black lawyer in town, and a close personal friend of my father's. And also from Ancella Bickley. I don't know if she was vice-president of West Virginia State College at that point or not. And they were scared to death because they knew that there was a bill in the legislature that was calling for, having the Washington Carver camp property in Fayette County, which adjoins Babcock State Park, incorporated by law into state park system of the Natural Resources. Supposedly to make a big and better Babcock State Park. And they were frantic, because that property had been owned and was owned by West Virginia State College. And it had been given to them, sold to them for five dollars in 1939 by Catherine and Charles Middleburg, a white Jewish couple in Charleston. And they had sold it for five dollars. I believe there were 383 precious acres. I truthfully had not heard anything about any of this when I got the call. But Adam Toney, who was a legislator, who knew a lot more about process than I did, was also called. And the two of us were able to get the bill called off at second reading and

referred back for a public hearing. And I don't remember much about the public hearing. I do remember that the president of State College didn't make as tremendous plea for it as we hoped. But at any rate, somehow the bill did not pass that year. Well, after it was over, Ancella and I think it was a man by the name of Kennedy who was in charge of the properties and things at West Virginia State College, a white young man—I think he's still down there. He's not so young any more. And we drove up there. And for the first time, I saw this lucious property with this magnificent chestnut lodge, which is now of course, on the historical register. Okay. We also found a swimming pool which was in disrepair, and we also found some other buiildings, they were to the back and to the right of the chestnut lodge. The administration building, as you entered, was in good condition, it seemed. We found out while we were there, I hate to report this, but we found out that whoever the caretaker must have been at that point, evidently wasn't watching very closely. Because a lumber man from Meadowbridge had been lumbering off of that property for a long period of time. And West Virginia State didn't know anything about it. They should have gotten money for it. Well, when we left that day , we went down to Babcock State Park and I saw the tall man, who was the superintendent of that park, and was trying to find out what their needs were. And he said, all they needed was really space to add some more cabin hookups. I mean, you know, little trailer hookups. So anyway, the following year, I wasn't in the legislature. And they did get a bill passed that turned that property over. You see, the Board of Trustees-, Board of Regents is trustee for all the things for all the West Virginia colleges. And that bill turned over the trusteeship, or sent it in with the

Department of Culture and History, which really had only opened in 1976, I think. It was a very new building at that point. And that building had taken my family home on Quarrier Street. So I'm right in the corner, left-hand corner of the stage when I go back up there. And my favorite tree was there. At any rate, I'm trying to think what I wanted to tell you about that. They, it was turned over to the Department of Culture and History, and I believe that it specified that most of the offerings was to go toward black heritage. Because that camp, that five dollars had paid to develop a black 4-H camp, because there was none. That was the purpose of Mr. Middleburg's contribution. After that bill passed, I was no longer in the legislature. And I got in the habit of attending the Board of Regents meetings, to monitor, to see what was going to be going on. And I remember at one meeting, because it hit the newspaper afterwards, I took pictures of the whole property when we were up there. And I brought them and gave them to the members of the Board of Regents. And in the body of the whole discussion, I must have said, because I was quoted, "I'm aghast that none of you have ever been up there to see this precious piece of property that you're responsible for. And after the meeting, Russell Issacs came up to me and said, "I'm aghast, Laine, that you've never been to see Shepherd College." And I said, "Well, I'm not a trustee at Shepherd College." At any rate, I used to go and watch to see what was cooking. At that time, even when the bill was being worked on, the bill was always incorrect. It never had the hyphen between the Washington and Carver. And I was always correcting that. So that they began to understand that it was not just George Washington Carver, but it was Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. So now everything goes

in with a hyphen. Now, I've been up there, I went up there for the dedication. And Norman Fagen was Culture and History. And a friend of mine went up with me, and we were the only three whites at that dedication. And Ahmed Williams gave a wonderful, wonderful report. And he got all finished, and I went up to him and I said, "Dr. Williams," and he was also a close friend of my father, Lawrence Kaufman. I said, "Didn't you forget something very important, that Charles and Catherine Middleburg had given that to West Virginia State for a black 4-H camp?" He said, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I got carried away. I got so spontaneous. It was all in my notes and I completely forgot it." Well, it turned out to be a lot more important. Because at the end of the evening, he made a big do about the correction, which meant a lot more than if he just mentioned it in passing. Now, I've been very impressed by it. I've not gotten up there. I've seen a lot of weekend things that have sounded wonderful. But I'm not so great about driving home at night. That night we came home there was an accident on the road, and we were held up a long time. And it was very, very frightening over on Route 60. But it was a very, a very interesting evening. And I'm glad that they called me. But I do think you need to find Adam Toney. I think he's in Fayetteville or Ohio-, Oak Hill. And he became a sheriff afterwards. But he would probably be able to tell you even more.

**LAE:** Is it alright, Helaine, if I ask you some questions about the (HR: Sure) civil rights movement.

**HR:** Sure, if I can answer it.

**LAE:** There was a coalition, as I understand it, there was a coalition organized that

was a mixture of the black community, Jewish community and labor. And it was in reaction to the sort of conservatism of the existing black leadership at the time. Now, this is Homer Davis's perception. And he said you were part of that grouping. It was affiliated with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. (HR: I don't remember that) But you called it something else. It was. . .

**HR:** If it was associated with them, I didn't realize that at that time.

**LAE:** There was the Human Relations. . .

**HR:** The Kanawha Valley Council on Human Relations.

**LAE:** Would you share with us your reminiscence of how that organization came into being?

**HR:** Yeah, I will. But I don't remember too much about it. We, there was an inner-faith meeting and they, I did not attend. I was out of town on something else. And someone who had been involved in the famous desegregation lawsuit was here speaking, and spoke to the inner-faith group. And out of that, what you're talking about, developed. We ended up forming a Kanawha Valley Council on Human Relations. And there're just a few things that I remember. I don't remember if Homer was at the beginning of it, and Jack Wilks, the minister of the Baptist Temple came in later. Because he was very active with it. And unfortunate, he's not living. I don't know how much his wife would remember. Jane Wilks lives up at Edgewood Summit if you want to try to talk to her. At any rate, I just reminisce about some of the things that happened. One thing I do remember, Rose Jean Kaufman, Paul Kaufman's wife, was very, very active with the group. And she came in livid one morning when we had a, we were having a meeting.



It seems a young boy who had been on the swim team at Charleston High School, a young black boy, came home from college. And he went down to the Y on Capitol Street to go swimming. And he couldn't get in. And she was positively furious. So we ended up calling the president of the board, who at that time was a member of the Temple-Bob Garner-and board of the YM, and told him, and he said, "Well, we've been working on that." And the essence of what he was told was, well, you better work pretty fast, because if you don't, it's gonna hit the newspapers. Well, they worked pretty fast. So that got taken care of. Another thing that I remember was, that we were passing out the anti-defamation posters. You know, it's funny to be remembering this, because I'd forgotten it. These marvelous posters that the anti-defamation league had put out. And uh, a number of us were putting them into stores. And we had an entre from the Mayor's office. Gosh, I don't remember who the mayor was. Branch Rickey came to speak at a meeting, that you'll try to find out at that time, about a public meeting. And the mayor's office, we had a letter from the mayor that we had permission to do that. And the area that I got, I was so dumb I didn't know what was happening. The area that they gave me was the Diamond Department Store, Montgomery Ward, the Daniel Boone, the YMCA, all the places that nobody wanted to take, because they knew they couldn't get 'em in there. The Kanawha Valley Bank. And I just sashayed in like I didn't know the difference. And when I went into the Kanawha Valley Bank, I ran, I spoke to a Joe Jefferds, who sat next to me at Family Service board meetings. So I knew him, he was one of the vice-presidents. And he said, "Sure, we'll put the poster on the front and the side." I went into McCormick

Jewelers, sure, they'd put 'em in. I went into the Diamond Department Store, and that was during the period of time that Bill, oh, I've forgotten his name. I was so mad at him. He was head of the Diamond Department Store, he was head of it. And he pulled out his file drawer and he said, "I've only had two or three people," that was at the time of which they were refusing to serve blacks at the counter and upstairs at the cafeteria. And I was talking to him about that. And he said, "I've only had a few, few customers who's closed their accounts." Well, years later, I saw him and he had done something and I saw him in front of one of the showrooms, and I had said to him, "I'm sure you're sleeping a lot better tonight." This was a year or so later. But when I went to the, Montgomery Ward, it was the same thing. The Daniel Boone was the same thing. And it was just sort of a rejection. Well, when I went back, I didn't find out until the following month, when I went back. And I was told by Joe Jefferds that, no, it would not be allowed to be put back up. Well, Joe ended up, strangely enough, this was probably the catalyst for what became of his life. He resigned from the Kanawha Valley Bank, he went into the Episcopal ministry, and he became an Episcopal minister up in Wheeling. And I talked to him once after he retired, in Myrtle Beach, after his wife had died. And my children happened by their home in Loudon Heights when they moved up to Wheeling. Now, I'm trying to think if I can remember anything else horrible. Oh, there was, at City Council, there was a housing ordinance that was being introduced. And we owned the Jean's Dress Shop at that time. And Monday night we were open and only my husband and I were in the store. And the parade was going to be going down Capitol Street. And I wanted to go so bad, and my husband was always so

scared that we'd get bricks thrown threw the windows. But at the last minute, I hooked on at the tail end of the parade and walked to the end of Capitol Street, scared to death. Now, Elizabeth Gilmore, it's a shame you didn't do this before. Elizabeth Gilmore was head of the Corps. And she told me afterwards that there was plenty to be scared of, because there was, there were people planning to bring Molotov cocktails. And somehow it didn't come about. Now, I'm trying to think what, the one incident that really made me understand how terrible this problem was. Paul Kaufman, Senator Paul Kaufman, asked me to represent him at an inner group meeting at the Daniel Boone Hotel. And Kyle Hazleton's wife—now Kyle Hazleton was the minister who was out front all the time in this, from the Baptist Temple. Very, very heroic man. His wife was heading this. And it was the inner group from the West Virginia Nurse's Association. And they had everybody there who had a stake. There were about six of us around. And the thing that really got me going was, when Elizabeth Gilmore was talking about her brilliant daughter, who was an engineer or something, had tremendous educational experience in, in Cincinnati, and had since got a wonderful job, that when she tried out to be a cheerleader, she was told that she couldn't because her black legs would spoil the line. And that's, that visual thing is what got me going. And I was there representing [name inaudible]. So [name inaudible] has always been the power of persuasion. It has not been active out in the field. It's been educational materials and all that. I don't know if this is helpful to you or not. But truthfully, those are the only things that I remembered. Except for the fact that I can give you some of the names of the people who were involved that I can remember. A lot of them have

passed away. June Chambers, Dr. John Chambers, who's now a real estate developer, she was on it. Lucille Penfetty, I believe would have something to tell you about it. Uh. . . well, Rose Jean Kaufman isn't living, of course. And Anne Williams was very involved. She's no longer here. I'm trying to think. . . (LAE: Do you remember. . . ) Was Barb Rodecker, Was Barb Rodecker [inaudible-static from microphone] was the last secretary, and just recently died. These were the people I was going to. . . . Oh, Josephine Rayford may have some reminiscences.

**LAE:** Do you remember any labor union participation, AFL-CIO?

**HR:** No, I don't.

**LAE:** Okay.

**HR:** If it was, I wasn't conscious of it.

**LAE:** Homer, at that time, was working for the post office, and was active in the union, and talked about the union coming in at the time. Of course, he was [inaudible] He felt very strongly that working in the federal government he had certain kinds of protection that local people did not have to be involved. He gave a very interesting tape.

**HR:** Mmm-hmm. Well, he would have known a lot more about it, because he was in it from the beginning. And my, oh, God, my leg, mine's out of context. You know, my involvement wasn't that shocking

**LAE:** Well, he seemed to think that you had been very important in that. Because he stressed that I should make sure to get you.

**HR:** I probably was. Because I kept yacking, you know, I kept yacking all the time. [LG

chuckles] And [inaudible] I was not familiar about the southern conference leadership conference in the beginning. And of course, now, wait a minute. What. . . I don't know. Did you get anything at all on the, in the defense of the constitution that [inaudible] who was very active with council?

**LAE:** [inaudible]

**HR:** I'll speak to it a little bit. All I remember, people from all different organizations met to plan this conference, which was a Friday night and all day Saturday.

**LAE:** Do you remember what year?

**HR:** No. But Frances Angel would. (LAE: Okay) 343-1126, I think is her number. A Mrs. Philip Angel up on Edgewood Drive. Cause she has archives and stuff of that. There was a tremendous brochure printed. A lot of planning went into it. We had, [inaudible name] was here. Uh, David Sepperstein from the Religious Action Center of Reformed Judaism was the keynote speaker. As a matter of fact, some people came in from Fort Ashby. I think Fred Werhammer was here. [inaudible name] A legislator from up in New Hampshire was here. Someone was here from Klan Watch. There were national figures here for that, it was held at the Heart of Town. And it was a marvelous, marvelous conference. But getting back to this, very active common cause members, and I didn't even belong then. From Fort Ashby, West Virginia, which is up near Cumberland [Maryland] heard about it. And they came to the conference. This is Bob and Carolyn Taft. And they were so thrilled. Particularly. . . David Sepperstein got to them and then went back home and they reorganized the Common Cause Board. Which is a very, very active group now still, and I'm on that. But we

used to have a lot of funding from them. And now there's very little funding coming out of National. And we used to be able to hire an executive and you can't do that any more. But those, those were people who were really taken by it. And, you know, I'm sure I have a copy some place in my, thousand boxes of memorabilia at home. But Frances may have a copy of the uh, you know, the program. You may want to put one of those in the archives.

**LAE:** Yes, no. That material is very important to be archived. (HR: Yeah) In your participate in all of these activities, I am sure that there was some people who were particularly sensitive of the fact that a woman was telling them what to do.

**HR:** That's never really bothered me that much, I tell you the truth.

**LAE:** But if the, if the women's movement at the same time was gaining momentum, how did you feel about the emergence of the women's movement and how did people who were working with, deal with the beginning leadership of women?

**HR:** I never felt anything. The only thing is that when John Hutchinson was elected mayor, and he went in on Tuesday and I had an appointment with him on Friday. And uh, a lot of people knew that I knew him. And Carter Giltman called and she said she talked to him about whether they were going to do any beautification, for God's sake, let 'em do it in front of Werts Avenue and not any place else. Other people wanted the underpass on the west side. Other people wanted all sorts of things. And I brought all these things up to him. There were about eleven things on the agenda of what people had wanted me to talk to him about. And by cracky, less than a year, ten of the eleven things had been done. Were problems about [inaudible] at that point. Well, at the end

of the meeting he said to me, "Helaine, would you accept an appointment to the Charleston Human Rights Commission?" And I said to him, "Oh, John, I don't think Charlie would like that." And he said me, "I'm not asking Charlie, I'm asking you." That would, and I was then sixty years old. And that was a real turning point for my life. Because I started thinking to myself, how many things that I maybe would like to do, and I'm only on the fringe of. How would the family feel and how would this one feel and that's the point at which I really became independent. Well, Michael Allen, who is a lawyer here in town, was on the human rights commission. And uh, the minister from St. Mathews, oh, what's his name? Wonderful man. He's over in Summersville now. Oh, I can't remember his name. He was the chairman of the human rights commission. And I remember walking down the street once saying to Mike. . . well, one thing that struck me was, in the law, there's certain specifications of what they had to have. Well, I got appointed and I filled three categories. I was over sixty, I was Jewish and I was a woman. Now, that I, I sensed that. But I don't, it's never stopped me at all. Maybe because I have a big mouth and I'm not afraid to use it. And I like working with people. And I find now, I'm not heading any organizations any more. But I go to everything that I can. And I'm able to share what I hear with one place with six other places. And as a result, I'm, I'm PR. (LAE: You're a network) I'm a networker. Yeah, they didn't have those words then, I guess. But here at this nursing home here last week, the uh, we had a, an executive committee of the Job Corps, the Charleston Job Corps here. I had missed, I had been a bad girl the day my leg got injured. I had called them and them that if it rained I would come to the meeting. That's the first time in my life and I

had been on that for years, except I was out of town, that I ever missed one of those meetings. I'd also told homemakers that I'd come to the picnic if it rained. Well, I didn't get punished. I think the good Lord gave me the guts to for once say, "I'm going to put a priority on what I really want to do the most." So I'm going to try to hold on to that. So anyway, Mildfred Zigler came in here the other day. And he said, "We can't have that meeting. Why can't we have that meeting here?" Well, they had told me if I want to get a bridge game or do anything, they would make rooms available. I'm only free at night because I'm going to therapy twice a day. But we did have the job corps executive committee meeting here. It was 12 o'clock, it was lunch last Thursday. There were five staff members and seven executive committee members. And it included some very well known people in the community. Billie Williams, who had been very active with, wait a minute. . . she'd been very active with uh, oh, what's his name? Angus Peyton. . . Ivan Lee, Milfred Zigler, Bonnie Brown, going around the room, I'm trying to think. . . JoEllen Flagg, who recently retired from her big job at the library. And I did say Milfred Zigler. And Miles Cary, from the Public Service Commission. And we had a wonderful meeting. And this facility, Heartland was so pleased, they insisted on furnishing the drinks. Now our social action committee of Temple is going to meet here Thursday night and we'll go up into that room, too. So, you know, it's very nice that I'm able to still be involved. And also help Heartland. Because for people to see this beautiful, clean facility, with all the therapies, including a podiatrist, who comes in one day a week or on call if they really need him, and a beauty shop where hair cuts and you can get your hair washed. You know, they just



have everything, they have speech and they have respiratory therapy and they have uh, occupational and, and physical therapy. And those departments are marvelous.

**LAE:** I want you to go back, though, a little bit. (HR: Okay) I am curious as to if you could identify something in your life that sort of turned you on to social justice causes. You have always, and seems to me, been involved with social justice. Could you identify either historical events or personal events that you think made you more conscious than the average person, clearly?

**HR:** I don't remember. I was raised in a family where an example was set. I did not know until my father died. When he left a tremendous sum of \$25. It's been forty years. Twenty-five dollars was pretty good. The NAACP. . . I never knew that he was a charter member of the NAACP. I also do know that when I was little and older, that Daddy had a very good friend at West Virginia State College who was teaching business. And Daddy went down there and talked to them about retailing. And Mother does talk about driving the car down and being the only white woman on that campus. Now, you know, these things I think we never talked about it, but I saw it. I saw it. I saw my mother heading up a cookbook project, which I've just tried to put something in the bulletin—it'll come out in the bulletin next week. The American Jewish Archives is doing a whole section on cookbooks by reformed Jewish sisterhoods. And in the 1940's we had this big cookbook thing called *What's Cooking?* And I can't find mine. But the sale of those cookbooks enabled the sisterhood to purchase a Red Cross blood mobile that was sent to Cairo, Egypt. So, you know, I saw a lot of this. And then, when I got married, I was working at the Department of Public Assistance—I guess this was part of it. Because I was secretary to the social

service bureau chief. And I took notes of all the meetings when the representatives came in.

**LAE:** Okay, could you back up? What was your education?

**HR:** Oh, I uh, have a useless, it really isn't useless, but a degree in sociology which doesn't get you a job. Had I done any clinical work, I would have gotten a job.

**LG:** That is true. I will tell you that. [chuckling]

**HR:** Yeah. So. . . .

**LG:** It's like, look at this woman, she has a degree in sociology. [inaudible]

**HR:** Well, I tell you what got me through. I was wearing a boyfriend's Phi Beta Kappa key. And Alexander Michealjohn was very impressed by that. I opened my mouth once, the last day of the course, and I got an awfully good grade. And I know it was that Phi Beta Kappa key that didn't belong to me. [laughing] So, but at any rate, I do have an AB from the University of Wisconsin. And I ran for the legislature in 1974. And I didn't make it through the primary. And I guess I was disgusted, and I was going to do something, dog gone it. So I enrolled in the College of Graduate Studies. And who should be my teacher on my introduction to social work, whatever it was, but my daughter, Cookie Glasser. That was her year that she was teaching between when she worked for the Job Corps and when she came on as their director. And in her first meeting she said we were at University of Charleston. She said. . . .

**END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 1 - SIDE 2**

**HR:** . . . my mother. Wait a second. There were three things she said in this classroom.

And the woman sitting next to me, who was the director then of the Hu-, of the Charleston Human Rights Commission, turned to me and she said, "I wonder who her mother is." [laughing] I mean, we never told her until the end of the semester. Cookie tells me that I didn't uh, that I got an incomplete. But I'm still putting it on Who's Who in American Politics I got twelve hours credit. But I, I used to go down to, Virginia Meyers had me come down and speak to one of her classes on political stuff. She got criticized a heck of a lot because I talked about political process, and I was a member of the legislature at that time and she was treading a fine line.

**LAE:** What years were you in the legislature?

**HR:** Just '77, '78. But I was really very successful. I, I was able to get the waste authority bill, which had been languishing for years through. And that had been, well, you asked me what influenced me. When I got married, I didn't want to join the sisterhood. So my mother joined the sisterhood for me. And my first experience was very shocking. Because I was married in a suit, in a camel and gray suit with a silk top. And we had gotten it some place very fancy. And the president of the sisterhood had the same suit on when I went to that meeting. Oh, I was ready to cry my eyes out. At any rate, I didn't get tremendously involved until well, let me see. We've had inner faith. This is what I guess threw it in. The first inner faith meeting, Pamela Gardner and Eve Casdon, who was our Rabbi's wife, and Reba Cowen decided to have what would become an inner faith luncheon. And since then we've never missed. I think we're on our 42<sup>nd</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup> year. I'm not sure. I think Betty Beason would be the one you'd one to call if you wanted to find out about that. At any rate, Mrs. [name inaudible] was the president of United Church

Women or whatever they called it then. And she was the speaker. And it was held at Temple Israel, in our recreation room, which was right upstairs, right across from the senical house. A doctor by the name of Ira A. Morris has just opened up a practice called Health Quest, and he is indeed in our education building at this point. That's where I got the inner faith bug. And I've been tremendously active in the inner faith program. now. And of course, the inner faith thing grew out of the Kanawha Valley Council of Human Relations, too. And I don't when that resolved. But at any rate, they, you know, we do, they've had continuously for years and years and years and years. And when they had that first one at the temple, they held their breath—they didn't know if anybody else was going to invite them the next year. Now, we serve 225 people in that room. It was so crowded the Fire Marshal would have never approved it. But, you know, we've. . .we've. . .it's gotten smaller and larger. There was a very successful one this year. The Catholic church was involved in it. And I'm trying to think what year. . . it was in the beginning, it was just church women and the temple. Then we spread out and a couple of us, Sally O'Ferrell, who's Jewish, I mean, Catholic—we got the Catholics involved. And then we tried to get the uh, the Christian Scientists. But they can't be involved. They have no leadership, no lay leadership, and no spokesman and no sisterhood, no nothing like that. So they couldn't be involved. But gradually, you know, we brought in the uh, Islam people used to come and attend the meetings. Now they are officially in. And they hosted one I think a few years ago. I think it's their turn again this year. So they're five people turning. And you know, we've had

But anyway . . . .

**LAE:** We've concentrated mainly on the civil rights movement, in terms of opening up the system for African Americans. What has been your experience with anti-Semitism? And was there any point in all of this, that the community had to respond to anti-Semitism?

**HR:** No, not that I remember. Not that I remember. But I do remember there was a group out of was it George Cutheridge, out of St. Albans. They used to drop these flyers down anti-Semitic flyers. And truthfully, the response to the Jewish community was that stick their heads in the sand and pretend like it isn't there. But I don't remember any overt things. Now, I'm trying to think. . . there was one point. Oh, oh, oh, oh. I don't remember what year this was. But the tremendous influence on me has been my relationship on commission on social action of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Their leader has been a close personal friend of mine. I think we're celebrating our 40-, 42<sup>nd</sup> year of friendship. A very dynamic man. Albert [name inaudible] And one of his things in his books was *The Crisis of Ecology*, and I use that religious expression of it, which led to the recycling program, which was organized and lasted for about sixteen years. But that began really has a religiously motivated project, calling for people to realize their, their responsibility towards stewardship and preserving the land for the future. At any rate, I was very active with the Council of Jewish Women, and a young woman by the name of Karen Mann was president. And [inaudible name] Angel had been past president. And it seems that the county commission put up a nativity scene on the county commission property. And we did not protest it. But we decided to go, well, before the next year, to talk to them about that being against the law. And the law, there had been something that had just passed had ruled that that was un-, that that wasn't permissible. So we quietly

went and talked to them. And I don't want to do it, but I've got to do it. Black was on it, Dewey Koons, who was the head of the credit bureau. And as we explained it, Dewey spoke up and he said, "The women are perfectly right. We should not do this." Well, we went away from there and I was so pleased. Because I figured with persuasion, with sensible quiet talk we had solved a problem. And I went right to the phone booth. I was leaving for, I was leaving for New York for a meeting the next day. And I called Al to tell him,. His advice as to how we should handle it was what we should do and it had been so successful. I got on the train, I went to New York. By the time I got there, my husband had called me. All Hell had broken loose. All the things that he had been concerned about with my involvement. It seems that Kelly Castleberry went to the paper and talked about it. Jewish Women Protest. It brought so much stuff out in the newspapers. And even Jewish merchants, shame on 'em, you know, went all to pieces, went all to pieces over it. It ended up with Karen [name inaudible] because she was a converted Jew, got Hell. You know, here she's doing all this. And one letter to the editor said Peggy Lewis, who's my cousin's wife who was Catholic and who had never, had never converted but was very active with the council and with the sisterhood. One letter wrote, "Mrs. Lewis should go back to Israel where she belongs." Well, Mrs. Lewis was a Catholic from Huntington, West Virginia. But I mean, that caused a Hell of a lot of commotion. And the Jewish people, some of the Jewish people, turned on those of us who went. How could we dare represent them. Now, that was a long time ago. But the next year it went up in the YMCA, and Jack [inaudible]

**LAE:** Yes, on private property. (HR: Mmm-hmm)

**LG:** Well, when was this?

**HR:** 19, I can tell you exactly, 1975.

**LG:** Because I can remember that Jewish. . .I'm thinking, I can remember seeing it at the county office commission. It was on Virginia Street. I remember seeing it.

**HR:** Well, what happened with that. The reason I remember the 1975, and this is another one of my interests is Cabin Creek Quilts. I had known Jamie when he was a vista worker. And I had called, this was 1971, I called Louise Jarrard, who was the director of the West Virginia Commission on Aging or whatever it was called, and asked her if she could, I volunteered to be program chairman of the sisterhood. Because I couldn't understand why our attendance was going down and why there was disinterest. And of course, there's a lot of people going to work, a lot of people didn't keep help the way I did when my kids were really young. And uhm, I asked her if she could get Matt Martisans to come and put on a program for us. And that was the same year that we did the recycling program on recycling that turned out to be the catalyst for forming the whole citizens recycling council. But at any rate, she said, "Well, Helaine, there's a new struggling little cooperative, if you'd be willing to have them, it would really help them." So she made the arrangements and it was Cabin Creek Quilts. And they brought Millie, oh, I don't know what the name of the couple were who came and quilted. And they came at 11 o'clock and they set up and we invited the Huntington sisterhood over. And they didn't make much except aprons and little pinafores at that time and they were making pot holders and place mats and quilts. And they were selling these wonderful animals, these wonderful quilted animals. Which I didn't know at the time were made by Appalachian Arts and Crafts out of Parkersburg. And they

were selling them, they were either making fifty cents or a hundred a piece. They were the most appealing things of all. Well, that day was so exciting. But in the planning of it, Jamie [name inaudible] said to me, "Helaine, tell me, we've been to Glenco, Illinois and we have taken five quilting members. We've lived in people's homes there at that sisterhood." For ten years they had been having a uh, an antique show and they wanted something to jazz it up. And a member of theirs, I don't know who she knew here in Charleston, and through them, they worked in Glenco. And she said, "I can't believe that between Glenco, Illinois" and uh, by then they were up in Marmet, I guess, or up above there. (LAE: Cheylan) Cheylan. There wouldn't have been another sisterhood in between. Well, in the meantime, Kansas City had them out there. Well, I gave Jamie a load of these animals to take up. He was on his way to see his folks up in Massachusetts. And I said, "Stop by the National Federation of Temple Sisterhood and show these to Jane Evans. And I called that he was coming. Well, they bought almost all of them. And I never thought about it. He got back and he said, "Have they called you yet?" And I said, "No." He said, "Well, they want you to be on the program at their national biennial in New York in November." And this right the day after that thing. "And put on a program and try as a social action program, urge sisterhoods to invite people from this cooperative to come in and live with them." Certainly it broke every cultural, every educational, every, every division there could be getting to know each other. And when they had been in Glenco, Illinois, they had gotten them on the schools, they had gotten them into television and on the radio. And in Kansas City that had this big flyer up, that they were there. Well, what happened, I said, "Can I take some samples?" And they said, "No, you can't, because the



room's going to be used by something else in ten minutes." I said, "Well, can I take as much as I can carry?" "Yes." So I put pillow covers in and I put potholders in and I put some animals in. They made just a little bag out of that print material that they had up there. And I carried it over my shoulder. Well, what I did, I did it differently than the girl from Kansas City. I don't know how she did hers. But we were each speaking to about six hundred people. And I took out a potholders, and I said, "Now a hundred of these mean that a student in nursing school from out in the hollows is going to nursing school, hundreds of these place mats means that there's indoor plumbing." It was very graphic. We had so many people come up and offer one of them to come to them. And they went the whole circuit of reformed Jewish sisterhoods for ages. They couldn't go to Dallas and they couldn't go to California. But they were asked to come all over. So for a number of years they did that. And that was their first exposure to all over the place. Now they go to Dallas for three or four days. A number of years ago, I guess after I was out of the legislature and after we'd sold the store, because I literally gave it away because I ignored it so while I was in the legislature. I promised my husband I would take care of it. And

**LAE:** What store was that?

**HR:** Jean's Dress Shop on Quarrier Street. And I had, half of the store was Cabin Creek Quilts stuff on consignment, I had Faith workshop stuff, I had stuff from the Lutheran all of the senior groups brought stuff in. And my customers didn't know where they were. I mean, really it was an entirely different thing. However, we silently closed up my second year in the legislature. But [name inaudible] he wanted me to get elected. And he had me calling bingo numbers up in East Bank. Not telling them I was running, but "I'm getting

to know you” thing. And I had people over in Belle who invited me to meetings and everything else. But uh, it was really, it’s been a real experience with Cabin Creek Quilts. Because I know that I was in on the beginning. Then when they ran out of temples, they started going to the church circles. And the thing that really for us, and I realize, you know, it really killed my store. Because I had staked so much in Cabin Creek and I had gotten in the habit of going over to Gutherie Morrison Camel and having people going with me to pick out the fabrics they wanted to go in their quilts or their pillows, and had done a lot of stuff with them. When the parking building on Quarrier Street was finished, none of the stores had been rented underneath. And they went to the mayor and got permission to bring Cabin Creek Quilts in for four months, or two months before Christmas. Well, they started doing so well and they underpriced what I had. And if I needed to get something, aprons or something, I had trouble getting them. And it was then that I began to see how the non-profit and the government-supported non-profits is very hurtful to regular merchants. But I’m not sorry I did it. It’s one of the things that I am the most pleased about. I really am. And the friendship with Karen and Jamie. And I was honored by being asked to do the benediction when they honored, when they dedicated the building, the Henry Hale building. So that’s all.

**LAE:** Okay. I had no idea you had connections to Cabin Creek Quilts.

**HR:** Mmm-hmm. Even when they were there with the water fall. With the water fall, yeah.

**LAE:** Anything else you can think of to ask? [question asked to LG]

**LG:** and I’ve known him for years. [inaudible]

**HR:** And I've known a lot of people for years and my friends, and I have no idea where they go to church.

**LAE:** Well, this is the thing about these oral history interviews. It's a different kind of conversation. It's a listening. And people can spin out a whole story, as opposed to just bits and pieces of conversation.

**HR:** Now, I don't remember what all we were doing when we were, when we were. . . I know. . . you've got to answer this. I don't know what we were doing and what all our great concerns were and what we were trying to do, to counteract the KK, when you and I and a number of people met at the church down in North Charleston.

**LAE:** Yes, that was. . . well, that's a, that's a part of that. . . we formed a coalition, an anti-klan coalition. Because what had happened was, the textbook protest had attracted the klan from around the country and they were coming in to this area. And we would, we felt it was more serious than a lot of people. It was the WVEA, and the community. And Bernard Holcombs from the NAACP. . .

**HR:** Oh, yes. Well, not only that, he was from Union Carbide.

**LAE:** And Union Carbide. Do you know that we wanted to do an interview on him. And by, I got around to calling to set up the appointment, and I got his daughter on the phone and she said, "Well, he could have talked to you a month ago. But he's had a stroke." And that's just, it shows that if you don't get these interviews, you know, when you think about it, if you put it off. . . .

**HR:** Do you think he's going to come back at all?

**LAE:** Well, I don't know. I haven't called. That was two or three. . . she said, you know,

they were anticipating several months for his recovery. So I was going to try maybe over Christmas to see. . . .

**HR:** Well, now there's an Opal Riley just on the other side of the store. And I know damn good and well that she is the Opal Riley. . . he was the when we worked with them and the St. Mark's youth group, picked up newspapers for recycling. And I tried to talk to her about it. And "No, that's not me." But it was. It positively was. And I thought maybe with so many of them, that with long-term memory being there, that she would remember that. But she didn't.

**LAE:** And if you remember, I ran for the Board of Education (**HR:** Mmm-hmm) in '79.

**HR:** Did you come close?

**LAE:** Well, there were seventeen candidates. There were two places open. And I came in third. And I took my what do you call . . . there's what, there's five regions on Kanawha County. And I carried . . . But I refused, I didn't want to be slated. I didn't want. .

**HR:** That's what happened with me. I wasn't part of the slates, which made it very hard to be elected. Now it wouldn't be as hard.

**LAE:** And so, I felt, but you know, Helaine, it's funny. My husband said I was like a dog chasing the car, what would I do if I caught it. Because I never thought I stood a chance. And I wanted to do it for education. You know, you go out and running for office, you know is [inaudible] . . . and here were the John Birchers and the Klan spreading all this garbage about the textbooks. And I read on a program of multicultural education, public employee bargaining rights, and labor education in the schools. And I felt I was doing a

lot of education. But I was really gaining support. And it caught the power of structure by surprise. And both of the newspapers, the day before the election, had lead editorials attacking me personally. They called me crazy. I mean, nobody went around and talked about those. That's not the way to run a campaign.

**HR:** Well, as a matter of fact, the collective bargaining issue is what kept me from being in the legislature now. I mean, it helped. I lost by very few votes, over a hundred votes. And Jennings Randolph had invited me to Washington to attend a wonderful, to Jennings Randolph, this was in 1978, during that time. And the dinner, the luncheon he invited me to, they were going to be naming the environmentalist of the year. And the heads of all the recycling organizations, the glass, the paper, the metal, were there. And I was hobnobbing with all the top people and there weren't very many. But he was so dear. He called on me to stand up. And he bragged about how the citizens recycling council, the volunteer recycling council, had recycled five million pounds of paper, glass and metal, or something like that, you know. It was really exciting. But the point is, four days before the primary I should have stayed home. But there was no way I was gonna stay home. But what had happened to me during the legislature. And my son said to me, "Mother, you should have known, Mom, you should have known better." The bill came up and I had, I was supported by labor. I think I got \$142, I was interviewed. And I had talked to and I had talked to Paul Coffman and a number of people about collective bargaining. And I thought I was comfortable with it. Well, all of a sudden, the bill was on second reading. And I don't know what it was calling for. It was calling for collective bargaining for something. And suddenly it occurred to me, because the night before I had had a call from

Mayor Leone. He was frantic. And I said, "You've called the wrong person. You better call Toney Shepherd or Martha Worley, because they've already, they firmly are against it. They're the people you need to talk to." Well, when it came time for the vote, I thought to myself, buddy, suddenly I had heard another side of your and I thought to myself, "My God, I'm not sure. You pass forever." And I should have been in the bathroom or there should have been a yellow button, and I voted against it. I was one of the few who voted against it at that point, that was the second reading. A newspaper article, The Courageous Mrs. Rotgin, I wasn't courageous at all. I was a yellow-bellied snake. I wasn't decided. And I went back to labor and I explained to them, I said, "I'm still on the fence. I know I'm sorry. But this is, this is what happened." Well, they did have me out on a hate sheet the morning of election, along with Toney Shepherd. Five thirty in the morning an enemy of labor. But labor has since wanted me very much to run again, you better believe.

**LG:** Okay. Toney Shepherd [inaudible]

**HR:** Yes, yes. Yes. Now, I'll tell you something else in the legislature. Talking about multicultural education, uh, Pat Hartman from Huntington and I were pressing for a bill about multicultural education. And it got on the second reading and I swear to God, nobody knew what in the Hell we were talking about." And after it didn't pass, after people had [inaudible] made jokes about it and everything, I got home that night and I thought, "My God, this legislature's exactly what we're talking about." (LG: They need. . .) Here are bigots and here are liberals and here at smart ones and here at dumb ones and here this one and that one, and we were a real micro [inaudible] of multiculturalism right

there. But at any rate, now so much has happened and the laws have been passed. And I remember Cookie was the featured speaker, my daughter, the first year that they had one of these big conferences. Now the county board has two things going. That have that character education program going. There was a big article about it the other day, with Trish Hatfield, I think is her name. And that sounds wonderful. And then there's another one that Charlene Byrd has joined with multicultural diversity. And I think she wants me to be on that. I don't know. I'd rather be on values. I'd rather be on nothing, I think.

**LG:** [inaudible]

**HR:** Well, this is what upset me really. It didn't upset me, because I've got plenty to do and I'm glad I don't have anything else. But you know, when the mayor appoints a big thing, I'm really sorry that I wasn't an appointee to something like that. Cause I think I had the background, you know.

**LAE:** Well, this new mayor is apparently . . . .

**LG:** I asked to be on that diversity. . . .

**HR:** I'm a very good friend of his, but I've never asked to be on anything.

**LG:** I asked to be on that diversity council when they were asking for more women. And I told my pastor, who is Dennis Johnson, and he went back but then they said they had enough people. So. . . .[inaudible]

**LAE:** Well, this has been wonderful.

**HR:** I'm honored.

**LAE:** Is there anything else that you would like to add before we. . . (HR: I don't know, we went pretty far away) finish out.

**HR:** I'm trying to think what other things. . . . Well, see, the difference, when I ran for the legislature, I don't know how many came in with an agenda. For one thing, I represented a tremendous group. There were, at that point, were very anxious to get recycling going, and the solid waste authority bill had been up there for years. We never knew what happened. But at the last minute it always got tabled or something happened. Something happened, we never knew. The other thing was a bill about subsidized adoption. The other issue was domestic violence. So I went up there with an agenda. But I had been for two different times, I had been chairman of the citizens welfare advisory council of Area 17. And we have gotten to be a real agitating force. And Leon Ginsburg really encouraged us. But when we got to the point where we were so good that we didn't bother to go through him, we went to the legislators, we went direct to the governor, and we were having great success and that's when our water got cut off. [laughing] That's when our water got cut off. But what happened on that solid waste authority thing, and I, that year, well, Darrell Holmes had been a sponsor. And he wasn't doing anything about it. And this year, John Kopp wanted me to be sponsor with him. Well, the speaker of the house, doesn't go out on a stump and do stuff, I found out. You know, they may be supporting stuff. But they won't be there to mother something. So I was there watching that darn thing. And the night before the election, it was, it was, I mean, before the end of the season, or two days before, it was on the agenda. And I was finished with my agriculture and natural resources and my education commitment. So I went to sit in on that. And you know, unless you're asked to speak, even if you're a delegate, it's unfortunate. Doggone if Gino Columbo didn't speak up when that bill. . . he said, "This is



a very important bill," and we hadn't even had a public hearing. I almost died. I had gone up to Clarksburg and had given testimony which had written for me. I didn't know what to say. And they, we testified. They had also had a big hearing. We also had had a big thing, a big open one in the house of delegates. And here this joker was doing that. He evidently was the one who was killing it all the time. Well, the uh, who was the chairman of the committee? Charles Polan. And he appointed a sub-committee. Sy Betner was suddenly the chairman of the sub-committee that there wasn't before. And Don Andrews, who now heads the political science-, not the political science, but the government part of the University of Charleston, was the person at, at the Department of Health, I guess it was. Or wherever it was. And he and I had been working together. And I called him and he actually gave me, overnight, the tape of that hearing to give to Sy Betner. And I wrote on 3 x 5 cards the points he was to make. Well, that bill, that bill went through, thank God. But it wouldn't have, it wouldn't have if at the right time, the right place. The other problem that we were having was one on what was it? Oh, there was a bill that I was not, you know, that Columbo sponsored trying to get county commissioners to get permission to spend funds, to invest funds into information and referral bureaus. And I got a call that there was some problem there, and that Walter, oh, from Clarksburg, was on it and I knew him real well through the. . . . He was the sponsor of the recycling bill, and it went with his name on it, thank God. I found out Gino Columbo didn't want that bill to pass, because it was going to show that Walter whatever his name was, had accomplished something in his eight years there and that's why Gino was killing it. He was going to run against him. Well, at any rate, I called him

to find out. And he uh, he said, well, what had happened, they were afraid there would be abortion counseling or whatever. And that was the problem. Well, anyway, I called and got it on the, on the rules committee. So I called, I ran into, that last morning, I ran into that young boy, Cusick, somebody from up, a good friend of mine. He used to come in and buy those animals for me for his children. And I said, "You're on the rules committee. Can you get this bill on to the agenda today?" This was the last day of the session. And he said, "Oh, I support it." And I said, "That's not what I'm asking you. I'm asking you to get it on the . . . . He got it on and that bill passed. And I told Gino, and he said, "Well, how come you went to [inaudible due to mic noises] And he was the leading democrat for Moore. So that's, that was interesting. There was another bill that passed that would never have gotten by. I had a call from someone that, it seems that when people died under suspicious circumstances, the body has to be checked here in Charleston, you know, by the medical examiner. Well, it seems that they pay the transportation from Martinsburg to Charleston and then the family gets a call, you send \$77 to get the body back." Someone called me. And this was the beginning, the first bill that passed my first year. It was a joke. Because I had no idea how bills passed. I really didn't. And Joe Albright wanted to be my co-sponsor when he heard about it. So what happens. . . . .

**END OF TAPE - END OF INTERVIEW**