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Ancella Bickley

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RELEASE FORM

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I, Ancella R. Bickley, do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program (archives or organization) the tape recordings and transcripts of my interviews on May 20, 1997.

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Lynda Ann Ewen
(Agent of Receiving Organization)

Ancella R. Bickley
(Donor)

5/20/97
(Date)

It's Tuesday, May 20th, 1997. My name is Crystal Lunsford, along with my class, which consists of Dr. Lynda Ann Ewen, Dr. Dolores Johnson, Beth Jarvey Upton, Rachel Luther, Serena Structure and Tamara Martin, which all will be participants in the interview. We are conducting this interview with Dr. Ancella Bickley, which will be used for our project, <u>The Contributions of African-American Women in West Virginia</u>. This project is connected with the Oral History Project at Marshall University. This interview will focus on the existence of Dr. Bickley as a black Appalachian woman and the contributions that she has made to her race, gender and region. Dr. Bickley, do you understand that these tapes will be archived and used for public use?

Yes, I do.

We can start at the beginning with some background information, such as the date and location of your birth.

I was born here in Huntington, on 28th Street, as a matter of fact, in a house that's still standing there, on July 4th, 1930.

Okay. And the relationship that you had with your family?

What do you mean?

Such as your family as a child, your family life and your parents and siblings.

Well, my mother is Jamaican, my father was born here in Huntington, also. His father was a slave who, at the end of the Civil War, crossed the mountains from Franklin County, Virginia, following the railroad [inaudible]...to work. And we lived in the home with my grandfather's widow, and it was sort of a family compound in those days. My uncle lived next door and my aunt lived in the house with us, so I had three brothers, a grandmother, a mother and father, aunts and uncles, all together in my early years.

And do you have any childhood memories that you'd like to share with us?

Oh, I have many childhood memories. When I was growing up on 28th Street in the early years, I guess until I was about eight years old, I don't know whether now that area was zoned within the city or not. We had a big lot. And we had cows, or a cow. I can remember

churning and my grandmother milking the cow. We had chickens, I can remember a hog and then they killed the hog. And those are experiences that many of my colleagues, my school mates, didn't have. Because ours was sort of that country experience still, while theirs was more city-based than ours. But lots of memories of that kind. One of the things that I think about, I've always loved books. And when I was a very little girl, I wanted to read Uncle Tom's Cabin, and I was ill and was in the hospital and my father went down to the, I think it was the Frederick Bookstore in downtown Huntington, and ordered the book for me. And I remember I used to watch for my dad to come to the hospital, because the sun would go down and I knew when the sun hit a certain point on the house, that I could see him coming. And he bought that book for me. And I think I may still have it around somewhere. But that was a very precious moment in my life. Wonderful memories.

What about your education experience as a child?

I had an aunt who taught school. And she took me to school with her from the time that I was very young. I don't really remember when I began going with her. I heard stories later from some of the other young people in Huntington at that time, who were in her

class, who used to tell me that she allowed me to lie down on my stomach in the front of the classroom and read. Now, that is a very difficult thing to believe because my aunt was a very, very stern woman, and a very stern teacher. But evidently, she was very indulgent with me. But by the time I was five, I guess they decided that they might as well enroll me, because I was going anyway. And so, they enrolled me in school when I was five years old. And I had a wonderful first grade teacher. Her name was Mrs. Mae D. Brown. And she was a wonderful, nurturing woman for me, at least. I think about that a lot. I probably, this is an adult interpretation of a child with experience. But I suspected that when I went to school at five, I still had a lot of baby in me and a lot of growing up to do. And Mrs. Brown would allow me to come into her classroom while the other children were out on the playground. I sat in the classroom with Mrs. Brown and she always had something that I could do; I could color or I could cut or I could look at picture books or something. And I believe she was providing for me, some of that kind of growing up space that I had missed by going out so early from home to go to school. So I went to what was then Barnett School, which doesn't exist in Huntington any more. At that time, it was on the corner of Eighth Avenue and what you now call Hal Greer Boulevard, but in those days we called it Sixteenth

Street. From there we went to from first through the sixth grade there. And that was before the days of kindergarten, so I had no kindergarten experience. But from the first through the sixth, I was at Barnett. Then we went to Douglass High, which was down on Tenth Avenue about two blocks away from there. And I went to Douglass from seven through twelve. By that time my mother and father had moved from the family home place on Twenty-Eighth Street, and we lived on again, what was known as Sixteenth Street, now Hal Greer Boulevard and Ninth Avenue during my high school years. And when I graduated from high school, I enrolled at West Virginia State College, and went to West Virginia State College, graduating with a Bachelor's degree, a Bachelor's of Arts degree, in English. And I believe I integrated Marshall. I think that was I was the first full-time black student at Marshall University in 1951. I was a graduate student. See, many people think that integration came about only in 1954, but I was here three years before 1954. I came under what was probably a legal decision. Gaines vs. Missouri. Mr. Gaines attempted to be admitted to law school in Missouri, and was denied access, and sued and finally won the right to enter law school, though I don't believe he ever did. But the West Virginia State Teachers Association requested an attorney general's opinion of that case, when some of

their members attempted to get admitted to an extension course that Marshall University was having in I believe it was in Logan County. And there was an attorney here in Huntington, Attorney Ambrose, who was the attorney who took, or requested that decision from the state attorney general. And he interpreted to say that if there was no opportunity for graduate education for black people at any of the state schools, then the state of West Virginia was either required to open those schools to black students or to provide education for them somehow. And in many cases, black graduate students were given financial subsidies so that they could go out of state to school. I chose to enroll at Marshall. And so, in January, 1951, I became a full time graduate student at Marshall, and I think that was the first ever.... Many of the people who had enrolled previously in the extension courses, have may have taken a single course. But I think I was the first person to take a full, to become a full-time student here.

What were the differences within your education between being in a school that was segregated and then being integrated?

Well, by that time, I was a graduate student, and I had had a wonderful social experience, as well as a

wonderful educational experience at West Virginia State College. When I was a graduate student here, I was living at home with my family. And I guess I wasn't looking for the kind of social interaction that many younger people would have had, would have been looking for at that time. I was really wonderfully well-treated when I came here. I was very much welcomed by my classmates, by my teachers. I had absolutely no problems and no complaints about those, those first days here.

Did, just to go back to your childhood for a minute, did you have any particular aspirations as a child, any particular goals?

No. And I still don't! [laughter] Well, I don't know, I may have changed a little bit. Still waiting to find out what I'm going to do when I grow up. No, I really didn't. And I often think about that. I have kind of stumbled through life and perhaps you think that perhaps you ***are*** *being guided in ways that you really don't, you don't know, don't understand. But no, I had no career aims when I was in high school. When I went to college, for some reason I thought that I would go into medicine. Now, ask me why, I don't have the vaguest notion. Except I had read, there were some novels called about a student nurse, who's name was*

Cherry Aimes. And I had read the Cherry Aimes student nurse and a bunch of other things of that ilk. And so I thought that I wanted to go to medical school. And I've had a pretty good experience with science in high school. But high school science and college science were NOT the same thing! And when I got into a chemistry glass and they gave me a little vial of something and said, "This is your [inaudible]...find out what it is," I kind of decided I had made a wrong decision. And I had no calling for medicine anyway. And it was certainly not anything that I had a driving ambition; it was accident. And I suppose I went into English accidentally, as well, as I look back on it. I had no real reasons or real understanding of why I chose that as an area of concentration. I'm pleased that I did. But I don't know why. I'm sorry that I didn't have more direction, because I think I may have [inaudible].....

What led you to become a professor? Because you taught at West Virginia State.

Accident, again. My husband was a career military man, and he got assigned to West Virginia University. I had completed a master's in English here at Marshall, and had done some teaching before we came back to West Virginia, on the high school level. And I had taught adult education through the Army. But I had no

thought, again, of being a college professor. And one evening while we were at West Virginia University, we went to a dinner party and my table companion was the dean of the College of Liberal Arts at West Virginia University. And he, we talked and he found out that I had a master's in English and he said, "Do you want a job?" And I hadn't thought about getting a job. And he said, "Well, why don't you come and see me?" And of course, I did not go. And in a few days, a week or so, he called and I went down for an interview, and he hired me to teach English at West Virginia University. So I had, I had taught in Maryland before we came back to West Virginia on the high school level. And I found that teaching high school, the kind of preparation that I had, and this had been a long time ago, the kind of preparation that I had in English Literature, did not give me the skills that I felt that I needed to teach high school students, who even thirty years ago could not read. So I thought after I taught for a year or so at West Virginia University, I thought I should take advantage of being on a university campus to begin to do some background work that would prepare me to go back into the public school classroom. Because I thought that that was what my profession was at that time, that I would be a public school teacher until I retired. So I left, I quit teaching and went into the doctoral program. I really didn't go into the doctoral

program, I went in to take an advance certificate and again, this is all accidental. I was going to take an advance certificate in education preparing me to go back into the public school, because my husband was going to be stationed at West Virginia University for three years and I guess by this time, we were two years into the assignment. And I thought at the end of that time, he would be re-assigned and since I was a camp follower, I would be re-assigned with him. So I started taking courses. I quit teaching, began taking graduate courses toward an advance certificate. And I sat down and looked at the catalog one day and I thought, "Well, there really isn't a great deal of difference between the advance certificate and a doctorate. Maybe instead of going towards an advance certificate, I should try for a doctorate." So I enrolled in an doctoral program instead. And I finished all of the course work just about the time he was to be re-assigned. Except this was during the 60s and they were a little bit afraid that the black students were going to revolt at West Virginia University. And by that time, my husband had very good rapport with the students. In fact, he may have been the advisor to the black student organization at that time. So though he had no intentions of getting out of the Army at that time, he was invited to get out of the Army and to stay in an administrative position at West Virginia

University. And we talked it over and he decided to do that. And I had, by that time, finished my coursework and had to do my dissertation. So I went back to teaching at West Virginia University. And after a couple of years, they looked at the staff at West Virginia State College and saw that a number of the black professors who had been there a long time, professors there were retiring. And they were very anxious to try to maintain a component of black faculty. So they invited my husband and me to come back down to West Virginia State College as faculty. He would take an administrative position and I would become a faculty member. So we, again, talked it over, thought about it for awhile, and decided that we would do that. So we resigned at West Virginia University and came down to West Virginia State College, and had been in the area [inaudible].

Were you very active in the civil rights movement? And what organizations or activities did you participate in?

No, I was not active at all during the civil rights movement. Because I was a camp follower in those days.

What...what is a camp follower?

[laughingly] Camp follower…my husband was in the service, and as he was moved about from Army post to Army post, our children and I went along with him. And in the early 60s we were in Germany and came back to the United States. We were always kind of isolated on an Army post, which kept us sort of apart from the regular civilian population, insolated in many respects. At that time, we were probably at Ford Mead, which is about halfway between Washington and Baltimore. And an Army post is very much self-contained. You have schools, you have movies, you have churches, you have bowling allies, you have what is the equivalent to a grocery store and the equivalent of a department store. And so you really don't have to leave the Army post to do anything, unless you simply want to do it. And so you became a very insular self-contained community. And that's pretty much where we found ourselves in those years. And when we came back to West Virginia and went to West Virginia University at the tail end of much of the civil rights activity. I did serve about ten years, with the state Human Rights Commission. But again, that was in the latter part of the 60s and early 70s. By that time, much of the most intense action of the civil rights movement [inaudible-fading out]….

Okay. When you first went to West Virginia State, with what experience did you have? This was what, at the end of the 60s? Or early 70s?

Do you mean when I went as a student or when I went as a teacher?

Uhm...

Both? Well, when I went to West Virginia State College as a student, it was just at the end of World War II. We were on a campus that had been pretty much built for, I suppose, a thousand, maybe twelve hundred students. And we had that great bulge of returning veterans and their families and many, many young people. So there were probably two thousand students there, full-time students at the time I was there. Every system was crowded. My room, which was a very small dormitory room, I had four roommates; there were five of us—two bunk beds and a single bed in that room. We stood in line for just about everything. Going into the dining...in those days for us, the dining rooms were not in the dormitories. They were the dining hall, we all had to go to the same place to eat. And that was very crowded. But I remember that now as a wonderful experience, as do many people who went to West Virginia State College

at that period. A lot of things that I remember most was what we called being in freshman probation, which lasted from the time that you began college. In those days you began about after Labor Day generally, until homecoming. All the freshmen were forced to wear what we called dog tags. Which was great punishment. You had, on that you wore a sign on your back, which had your name on it and your hometown. Think about that now. It was great punishment then. But do you know, I understand the psychology of it now. It was a wonderful way for us to all get acquainted. You knew, somebody knew your name and you knew theirs. There were many activities that we had to do together. For example, I just attended the funeral of Dr. William Wallace, who was for twenty years, the president of West Virginia State College. And as a part of the funeral service they sang the alma mater. You could always tell the old timers at West Virginia State College because they stand and hold hands and began to sway as they sing that song, whatever the event is, even at a funeral we're tempted to do it. New people there don't know the song. Some people mouth the words, but they certainly don't have the cadence and the swing that we all did. But the freshman orientation or the freshman probation was run by the athletes who banded together in an organization they called the W Club. And they were

the ones who told us what we were supposed to do and we were really at the beck and call of any upper classmen at that time. But one of the things that I remember, is that every day after dinner, we met at the, what was the administration building, but we all called it the A building. And we had to walk down the campus, picking up paper, cleaning up the campus as we walked. And then at the end, we stopped, stood in a circle and sang the alma mater. It was a wonderful kind of ritual now, but it was painful for me, because I was very shy, not accustomed to any kind of public performance sort of thing, such as we were constantly called upon to do because the upper classmen could make you do anything. Press dresses, whatever it was, go on errands, that they asked you to do. So, we, I think about those days, the spring prom season, the fraternities and sororities, some of the rituals, some of the kinds of things that we did. They did a lot of singing; I think that was probably true generally in the black community because there was a lot of singing. And some of the fellows particularly in the fraternity, had marvelous voices and they all had beautiful songs. And after they had a fraternity meeting, they used to gather at night out on the campus and sing. And I can remember hanging out the window—course, they were very, very strict on girls in those days—but I can remember hanging out the window, listening to those

fellows sing and there were points where one of them would stop and take a solo part, and we'd hear this wonderful voice wafting over the campus; just absolutely wonderful. One of the other things a lot of us remember is that West Virginia State College had a very strong ROTC tradition. And they had a very excellent band. And on Friday afternoons the ROTC would assemble in full uniform, the band would assemble in full uniform and they would parade out on the campus and there was a cannon in the middle of the campus and they would go through all the presenting arms and things military people do and at a specific time in that ceremony they would fire the cannon. So there were all those wonderful kinds of, I guess, rituals and ceremonies that were part of our being there. And there was a sort of a…there was a friendship and kind of a, almost one big family sort of atmosphere, back there. I remember when the snow came, that they built snow forts and you would get snowballs passing back and forth, up and down the campus. And the art students would sculpt out of snow, not just an ordinary snow man, but a wonderful big sculpture. Some really wonderful memories about that time, in addition to, I think the quality of education that we were getting. Because at that time black teachers didn't have opportunities to teach in white institutions across the country. So we had wonderful

professors with degrees from Harvard and Yale, from Columbia, from UCLA, probably I think this has been established…one of the best, if not **the** *best faculty in the state of West Virginia at that time. Because there was this national pool from which the faculty was drawn. And so I have really great experiences there. And I just saw a couple of months ago my freshman roommate; I see her frequently. We've known each fifty years now and we're still speaking to each other. So that's something to be said. But so…we have friends still from those early West Virginia State College days, that we'll see, still hear from regularly. By the time we came back to work at West Virginia State College, of course, the institution had changed. It was no longer a residential institution—it was largely commuter institution, and largely white. And a few of the rituals that I remembered continued. Perhaps in fraternities and sororities largely. But beyond that, not much that I knew was still there. It, it just was completely a different place, both in appearance and probably in outlook [inaudible-reply fading out]*

Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW 1

INTERVIEW 2

When you were talking about your experiences at West Virginia State, you spoke about your alma mater, do you remember it?

Of course.

Could...would you sing it?

Oh, no! [laughing] No, no.

Would you just give us a little, I mean, say a little bit of it to...?

"West Virginia's Praise will sing, [inaudible]...will ring, as we gaily march along, we'll sing a song, alma mater, how we love her." I haven't...[inaudible]...recording around some where. Which might be interesting to use [inaudible-fading out]

And you were speaking about the big changes that you saw when you returned back to West Virginia State to teach. What...I mean, there were a lot of differences? Or...? What was the time difference between when you were a student and when you came back?

Twenty years, about twenty years. And yet, the campus had expanded. Where there used to be a very confined, smaller area, they had built two or three new buildings. By the time that I came back they had moved some others. And I think maybe one had been torn down. [inaudible]...changed. What used to be a dormitory had become an office building. So there were changes that had been occasioned by the changing population, the different needs, the administrative needs that had surfaced since we had been there. So yes, there had been many changes.

What activities or organizations did you become involved in when you taught at West Virginia State?

I don't think that I was really involved very much in organizations at all. I only taught, when I came back to West Virginia State College, I only taught for one semester. And then I was invited to take an administrative position and so, I did that. And for the next fifteen years I was in administration. Which meant that here was something for which I had not prepared. And so I had to pay a great deal of attention at that time, to learning how to be a college administrator. Because it had not been a part of my experience, nor

ambition. So there was a whole new way of relating to the work, the faculty, to students, that I had to learn to do. There's a big difference between managing my own checkbook and working with a college budget. There were administrative reports and letters and interactions with the public that I had now to undertake, that consumed pretty much my time and my creative energy. I think that probably the only organization, external institution in which I was associated at that time, was the state Human Rights Commission. I continued to be with the commission for a few years. And then I became a part of the what was newly formed then, Humanities Council of West Virginia, which was really, the transformational experience [inaudible]….

What did the Humanities Council do?

Promote humanities education in the public in the state of West Virginia. And I was with the Humanities Council for eight years. And though that official association ended a long time ago, I have continued to be involved with them and their programs since that time. So it happened a whole door for a whole new [inaudible]…for me, that I had not been tied into before that….

Were there ever any conflicts between your roles as...as a wife and that of an employee...[inaudible]...do you have children?

Yes, I do have two children. And of course there were conflicts. There always are. [chuckling] Well, I can remember when my younger daughter was about eight or nine years old, I suppose, and we were living at Fort Meade. And the house in which we were living had been constructed as a sort of a fire-safe house, all of the door frames and what-not, were metal. And I was teaching in Annapolis, which was about twenty-five miles from where we lived. And so I had this long drive back and forth, and I had bus duty, for Heaven sake. I had to go either earlier to be there when the youngsters came in, in the morning. So we were all up hurriedly getting dressed to get out to go to school one morning, when she was standing too close to this metal door frame and turned around suddenly and banged her mouth into the door frame and cracked off the corner of her tooth. Here she is with this piece of tooth in her hand, weeping and moaning, and I have twenty-five miles to go to work and my husband and I had this BIG argument about who was going to take her to the dentist. He kept saying if he was in the military, his time was not his own, and I kept saying, "But I have to go twenty-five miles while you can get off for an hour

and a half and take her to the dentist while for me it will take a whole day. I don't have a substitute, I have to go to work. [chuckling lightly] So we had this BIG argument and finally, I won, and I went to work and he took her to the dentist. So there are always those kinds of conflicts when you have multiple obligations. I can remember being up at five o'clock in the morning baking cupcakes for my daughter to take to school, or being a girl scout leader and they expected me to sleep in the woods. I like being outdoors, but I like warmth and I like indoor toilets. There are certain things about Girl Scouts that I just could not deal with very easily! So there are all those kinds of things that you have to do, and thinking about what is best for your family. But because we had those years in the military, we were a very close family unit, and military people, I think in those days—I don't know how they are now—but in those days they were a very special breed. Because we were all away from home, we were all away from our families. Children do have measles, you do have the men would leave and go to the field as we would call it. Which would have been a maneuver, which might have taken them away in place from a week to six months and you never really knew. And so there you were, in many cases, in a strange place, with children with all kinds of things that were demanding your attention, having to figure out how to cope with

them. So I've had a lot of that, and juggling the job and family, which was just another part of that. But I have been fortunate in having a good family and both my children and my husband were very cooperative and supportive of things that I have done in my life. And so it has made it easier to deal with. [inaudible] [chuckles]

What constraints did you see on yourself as a woman during...during your experiences?

Well, that's really difficult for me because as a black female, I never had a question about whether I was going to work or not. I was ***always*** *going to work. I mean, I've worked since I was twelve years old. That was not a decision for me. The social milieu in which I existed, I think, was always very supportive of personal development on the part of women. I just...I didn't have that kind of constraint saying 'you are not supposed to do that.' And I grew up with a bunch of brothers. So, I was accustomed to riding a bicycle, boy's bike, standing up on the seat and hiking and climbing trees. So I just didn't feel that there were things that I shouldn't do. Now I look back over it, and I understand the gender-shaping that was occurring, in spite of that. I didn't know it then. So there probably were constraints that I didn't understand. I'm sure my*

choice of profession might have been different if I had been…. And I didn't make a choice of profession, let me put it like that…I fell into a profession. If I had been white and if I had been male I might have done things with my life that I didn't do, I was shaped to do, but didn't know how, if that makes any sense to you.

Do you feel…and so, do you feel a stronger connection to your race than you do your gender?

Oh, absolutely! Absolutely, I'm black first, yes, no question about it. No question about it.

Okay, you mentioned that you worked since you were twelve. What various things did you do?

Well, when I was twelve years old I worked as a domestic. I washed dishes and washed walls and put clothes on the line.

Was that here in Huntington?

Here in Huntington, yes. I babysat, I guess that was all that was available. And then I worked at the Sylvania Plant in Huntington for awhile. Which was probably the only non-domestic job that I ever had.

What kind of plant?

Sylvania…it was a plant that was making…I never really was quite sure what we were making. There were electrical devices, light bulbs, no, I don't think there were light bulbs. At the time I was there it was in the post-World War II years and we were probably doing devices, electronic or electrical devices that were going to be part of the war effort somewhere. But I never saw it. I have a little thing with wires on it and I put little sleeves down and welded it and I passed it on to somebody else, and it was, it was an assembly line. It was hard, you know, the problem with the assembly line, you don't see the finished product. The only thing that you know is your own little part in it. And what that thing is that peeks out at the other end, I had no idea. And how it was going to be used. And of course, I wasn't very inquisitive in those days either. So, I didn't even ask.

As a child, what rules did the community church, other organizations, have in shaping your experiences?

Well, some of my early memories of the church were of people coming to our house because we had a big yard for church parties. And I can remember the [inaudible]…I must have been a tiny child, the lanterns

that they hung for the church parties. And I believe that they used to make apple butter probably as a fund-raising project in the church, and I remember the quilting frames that they used to set up in the house, and I think that they ladies from the church would come and they would help to make quilts. And I remember some of the early ministers and their families who would visit from time to time. Then more active church experience that I had, was after our family moved from 28th Street to 16th Street. And the teacher that I told you about, Miss Mae Brown, was a very active member of the 16th Street Baptist Church, and so I followed Mrs. Brown to 16th Street Church. And the church in those days was a very, very much a part of the community. Sixteenth Street Church had a playground, there was vacation bible school during the summer. There was a choir called the Little Jewels, and I have no voice at all but I sang with the Little Jewels as a, as a kid. And there used to be I guess, two or three, two services at least on Sunday and then there was a, what they called first the BYPU, which was the Baptist Young People's Union, I believe that met at night. And there were always activities for holidays, there were Halloween parties with the judging of costumes. And there were Easter Sunrise services and Christmas programs. And I think now that children were taught to be on stage, we were taught to, not to be on stage, a certain sort of

presence, a sort of a dramatic delivery, because we all had parts in those Christmas programs. I can see the angels and we were wrapped in sheets for angels and we were, the fellows were always the Three Wise Men wearing their bathrobes to be the Three Wise Men. And we all had a little two-line part or so, we would be up on Easter Sunday for Sunrise Services, doing our little parts in our little plays. And the same thing for Christmas. So the church was a very, very active part of our lives in those days. And extending beyond a religious message, there was a, there was sort of a feeling of community that was engendered by being a part of the church at that time. And people, part of that is we all lived within probably a ten-block radius of one another. And you walked back and forth to school and church, and so you were very respectful of your elders because you had to speak. I can remember, if I was out of humor and didn't want to speak to people, I went down the alley. Because I knew that if I walked down the street and didn't speak, I would be in deep trouble. And so I could hide by going down the allies by not having to speak to people and the story wouldn't get back home about my being rude or discourteous or so. So there were very important parts…and I must say here, too, that the school also played a similar role in our lives. We were very closely tied into school in those days. You went to graduation, not because you

had a child who had a child that was graduating necessarily—you went to graduation because everybody went to graduation; that was a part of what you did in the community. When there was a play or any kind of program at the school, they never had to worry about an audience, because the community was the audience. And I can remember noticing when I went back to West Virginia State College to work, how the audience behavior of the students had changed. When I was a student at West Virginia State College, we had what we called Chapel, in those days. And we went probably three times a week. We went on Sunday evenings, we went on Wednesday, which I'm sure was a sort of a transformation of prayer meeting, which was traditionally on Wednesday, but we went to Chapel on Wednesday's and we went again on Friday. Now the Chapel was a sort of a convocation. Sometimes there were national and I won't say world-class speakers who were brought in. At other times campus organizations at West Virginia State College, had responsibility for the Chapel program. For example, if you were a member of a fraternity or a sorority and your organization had a founders day, then you would be responsible for a program for founders day. So we learned a sort of polite listening, questioning, being quiet-behavior, which was sort of an extension from the kind of thing that we had had in our

community through our church and our school. And when I came back to West Virginia State College, I was amazed, first of all, you had had these wonderful programs and getting the students to come was very difficult. You could only get them there almost if you made it a requirement, a class requirement. And in the last years that I was there, their lives were cut up into fifty minute segments and I don't care if the good Lord himself was up presenting the Beatitudes or whatever, at ten minutes to the hour, the students would get up and leave! And that sort of thing was unheard of when I was growing up, church services, which weren't cut up into fifty minute segments in those days either. If you went to church, you might have spent the day there. And you didn't dare leave until it ended because you'd get backhanded by somebody if you did. Maybe your mother and maybe a neighbor, I mean, who know. But so, there were changes, yes.

Why do you feel the school and churches roles has changed? And if so, its not such a good community effort now and what do you feel the affects are?

Well, I think there is a loss of community. Part…it may have been inevitable, given lifestyle, given transportation patterns, which broke up communities

and took people at distances, television. I mean, there are lots of diversions that are available to people now, that were not available at the time I was growing up, that interfered with the kind of behavior that I'm talking about. So there was that closeness. And it was a different…it was a different time. There was a different relationship to the word, I believe, than there is now. See I'm just two generations away from slavery. Many people even my age, are three, maybe four. But my grandfather was a slave and I lived in a house with his wife and his son and daughters. So I'm very, very much tuned into that. My grandfather couldn't' read, well, he read, they taught him enough so he could spell out a few words from his bible and from his lodge book. But for those people, the word, both the spoken word and the written word was very important. I think almost in a mystical sense, it was important. And I believe that we have lost that kind of connection now. And that makes, made a difference in the way we responded to, to the church, to the way we responded to a convocation, even, it was difficult for, for us perhaps, even though. My husband and I often talked about the kind of people who came through West Virginia State College, [inaudible]…. But people, Lansing Hughes, people that I now know, were of national and lasting importance. I didn't understand that, but that didn't stop us from sitting there, because we had to. We had

really no choices. It wasn't simply because we wanted to do these things either. But we had been trained differently, our expectations were different, our obedience factor was higher. When we were told to do something, we did it. And often unquestioned.

What projects have you been involved with lately?

Many projects. I just completed a few months ago, something I called "Our Mt. Vernons", which was sort of a cut-n-paste job of information that I drew from applications of sites in the National Register. And that was very interesting thing I learned a lot, from simply doing it and from reading the material. I'm currently engaged with Dr. Rita Wicks-Nelson in a project of interviewing black female retired teachers in West Virginia. And we hope to move with that this summer. I'm engaged with a project for developing a reunion of faculty, not faculty, but staff and former campers, at Washington Carver Camp which was a black 4-H camp in Fayette County in West Virginia. I'm involved with a project to try to bring together some men who were a part of the civilian conservation corps, black, in West Virginia in the 1930s and the 1940s. I am writing a play. [chuckling] I have started a novel. I have a series of short stories that I am working on. I just finished an article for Goldenseal that I called

[inaudible]...which is about three men with West Virginia connections and were [inaudible]...and it kind of goes on and on.

Overall, what are you trying to contribute or trying to do with your projects?

I don't know. I suppose its that.... I think that black people in West Virginia have contributed a lot to the development of this state, that they have, under some very severe pressures, lived full and rich lives, and have with in a really masterful way, met all kinds of challenges and have triumphed. And I suppose what I want to leave behind me, is the memory of some of those people, people that I have either known personally or have learned about in stories other people have told me, or have read about somewhere along the way. And I just want to put together whatever I can in whatever time that I have, information about those people.

Okay.

END OF TAPE 2

Tell us about your knowledge and relationship with the so-called father of black history, Carter G. Woodson.

Well, I don't really have a relationship with him—my husband does! Carter Woodson and my husband's grandmother were brothers and sisters. And he has memories of him from his youth and from his coming to visit and what-not. I simply know about him from an academic point of view. I never met him personally.

What was your role in bringing the Carter G. Woodson statue to Huntington and why is this important to you?

Well, my actual role was, in the doing of it, was miniscule. But some years ago, at First Baptist Church, I suppose it was about fifteen years ago now—they had an activity, I've forgotten whether it was a black history celebration…it may have been. And they invited some of us down to speak, who had grown up in Huntington but now were living elsewhere. Frank Cleckley was there, I can't remember who the other people were there. But Bobby Nelson was in attendance. And it was shortly after the Sixteenth Street name had been changed to Hal Greer Boulevard. Now you have to know that I have a

constitutional opposition to sports, so anything I have to say about sports, you have to take with a grain of salt, okay? But I have always been upset about the choice of heroes for us, as black people. I'm not sure that simply because one achieves a certain kind of notoriety by being a public person that one ought to be considered a hero. And when the street was named for Hal Greer, I commented at that meeting, "We also had a long term association with Carter Woodson in Huntington. Carter Woodson came here as a young man, he graduated from Douglass High School, he came back and was principal of Douglass High School, his family lived in Huntington—not all of them, but his mother and father are buried out in Spring Hill Cemetery, he had very close relatives here. And throughout his career was in and out of Huntington visiting his family and what-not, and I thought if we were to choose a hero for our young people, my question was…why would we not choose a scholar? Why do we always have to choose our heroes from sports figures? And Bobby Nelson, who was the mayor, was sitting with us during that meeting. So Bobby Nelson, then, left that meeting and a short time later he caused the Carter G. Woodson Foundation, as it later came to be called, to come into being. He agreed that Carter Woodson was a man who was worthy of Huntington has his adopted home, of being

recognized by this adopted city. And so he put together that committee which labored a long time in order to raise money to build that statue and to develop other activities that they thought were worthy of following, or that did follow, the same kind of academic interests that Carter Woodson would have championed, whether it was publication or scholarship or providing scholarships for young people, or so. So, I perhaps had an involvement in that initial meeting, but on the long-term, the credit goes to the people here in the city who brought that into being.

You mentioned that you were working on plays and short stories. What are the subject matters of these?

Well, somewhere in the conversation earlier, somebody talked about the uses, maybe it was Susan, to which Oral History could be put. Well, I have found in moving about the state and talking with people, is that there are wonderful stories that people tell me or that I read about. For example, one of the stories that I have written is called <u>On This Rock</u>. And I wrote that story based upon an incident which is reported in the history of the First Baptist Church of Charleston. They wanted to do some repairs on that church. I believe they wanted to build a new church. I think that's what it

was. They wanted to build a new church. The old church was situated at the end of a dead-end street, and the city of Charleston was thinking at that time, that they might continue that street through to the next [inaudible]. So they would not issue them a building permit. So the people of the church built their church anyway, but they built the church under the guise of doing repairs on the old church. They built a new church. They built it around the outside. Well, I sort of turned that around and had them build a church on the inside. And the people who saw it thought they were simply doing repairs. And at the end they removed this structure and they had a totally new church. So the things that I write about are based upon people or incidents in West Virginia, that I had met. Another of the things that I had wrote, I was telling you about my grandmother a few minutes ago, who was, who was married to the slave, Anderson Radford. My grandmother's family came from just across the river in Ohio. My grandmother was the child of [inaudible]...now that means they were freed slaves. They came, part of the family came from North Carolina and part of the family came from Virginia. They were all on both sides, on the other side of the river about 1850. Because that was, in those days, this was slave territory, that was free territory. The oral history of the family is that they were sent into the Ohio

Valley as free people because they were the children of a slave owner in the south who sent them to Ohio to be free. And you must know that that story is told over and over and over again in every black family. It did indeed happen. Well I was doing some research the year that I was down here at Marshall, I was doing some research about families in the valley, and I could trace my family only to a certain point. And when you're black, that happens. You get to the point where you get slavery and it's just awfully hard to get beyond that, because slaves were not named in the census records. They were counted for purposes of taxation and for voting privileges for the slave masters. But you might have had black male or some, or Muletto male or Muletto child or black child. And that's all that you had, you have a number. So when I was doing this, this research on my family and I got to a point where I couldn't find historical information beyond that point, and maybe I could have, if I had really scraped hard enough, but I didn't. I got to a point that I just got frustrated a little bit. So I then wrote a monologue, because I felt that I can go historically to a certain point, and from that point on I will do it creatively. And so I imagined what happened beyond that point. And I wrote a monologue that I don't talk a great deal about, but my husband thinks it's the best thing I've ever written. It is of a woman who comes to the banks of

the Ohio River with her children, and she is waiting to cross the river because she knows that freedom is on the other side of the river. And she sort of remembers how she got to this point and why she is there and what she is going to do. So the things that I write are based upon these, these people that I have met or that I had imagined, things that could have happened. And when you write, characters take on a life of their own. And they move you in directions that you don't know that you're going to move in. You may start out writing one thing and end up totally somewhere else. Because that's where the characters want to go and as a writer, you're simply the conduit, you go wherever they tell you to go. But my things were all regional. And mostly, not always, but mostly, about women. If you want to be bored with one after awhile, I'll read you something. I just happen to bring one with me. [laughter]

You had mentioned that as a child you went to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Is there any connection between that and the Scott Community Center? What was the time...what was the years or the time you spent there?

I can't...I can't tell you about the connection at all. I don't know that. I had not looked at that. I went to

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church because that's where Miss Brown went, who was my first grade teacher. Actually, as an adult I went back to First Baptist Church and it was at First Baptist that I was baptized. I lived down the street from Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, so it was within easy walking distance, and there was this active program, youth program, that drew me there. But beyond that I really can't tell you a great deal.

You also mentioned, when you were talking about West Virginia State, about renaissance people, such as Langston Hughes and Paul Roberts.

Paul Rosen?

Uh-huh. And did they ever come to the school, or did they have any connection to this area, or...?

That would have been a lot of people of that ilk who came in and out of West Virginia State College during it's entire time. John W. Davis, who was the president of that college for thirty-odd years was a marvelous educator, politician and was well-connected. And if you look at some of the, of the faculty rosters of West Virginia State College, you will find the names of people who gained educational prominence or political

prominence in years after. So it was a place where there were just lots of intellectual things happening. One of the men who was a long-time faculty member at West Virginia State College, was a man who's name was Mathis, who was a writer, who was a part [inaudible]…. So yes, there would have been connections with lots of those people.

Were there any certain people, historical people, or just people in your life in general, who served as a role model or had any impact on your life?

Oh, yes, there were many. I've already mentioned Mrs. Brown. Another would have been Miss Myra Fairfax, who was a teacher of English at Douglass and it may have been Miss Fairfax who caused me, subliminally, not consciously, to go into English as a major myself. She was my homeroom teacher, so I was with her from the time I was in the seventh grade through the twelfth grade and continued to see her whenever I would come back to Huntington after that. And her sister was one of the dormitory matrons at West Virginia State College, so she was often visiting her there, and so I would see her from time to time. But she was both physically beautiful, she was a brilliant woman, she was a librarian and I have always had this great love affair with books. So she was very

important to me. There was another woman. Her name was McDaniels. And during the summer, they used to open the library down at Barnett School, so you could come in and out and read and borrow the books. And I was always a sort of introverted, withdrawn sort of child, again because I lived in books with words and what-not. And I can remember spending hours and hours in that library with Miss McDaniels, reading during the summer. [inaudible] Remember the Oz? Not just the Wizard of Oz. They don't know that there was just a whole wrath of those books. So I spent a lot of time reading with her. Then, the third person I think who had a great influence on me, was a man who's name was Frederick Layner. Dr. Layner was an Austrian Jew, who got out of Germany just at the beginning of the Holocaust. Dr. John W. Davidson, whom I mentioned a moment ago, met Dr. Layner I believe, and recruited him and he came to West Virginia State College as one of the first white teachers. He taught German and I took German and in those days, teachers had sort of student assistants, and so I became his student assistant. And I used to go over to his apartment and grade papers for him, or with him. And he talked with me about scholarship, he talked with me about traveling in Europe. He talked about the kinds of things that he was doing, and he was always translating or writing or doing something.

And so he inspired me greatly, as a scholar. There was another faculty member at West Virginia State College, a Dr. Agnes Brawley who was one of my English teachers who got her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in English. And in those days, the program in English as were many of the programs at West Virginia State College, was very, very rigorous. It was patterned after a doctoral program, in the sense that we had to be admitted to the program after our sophomore year, in the way that as a doctoral student you are admitted to candidacy. We had to take comprehensive examinations, both oral and written, in order to graduate. And I had to write and defend a senior essay before all of the staff of the Department of English. My senior essay was on Daniel DeFoe. And when I now see that Maw Flanders and things of that sort, are being made into movies, I had to read and do all them on original paper when I was graduating from college. And Dr. Brawley was my advisor for my senior essay. And on Saturday morning, we went up to, to the administration building and [inaudible]…English faculty. Now, you're got Ph.D. from Harvard, you've got Ph.D. from Yale, we've got Ph.D. from Columbia, we've got Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. This was the English faculty. For which I am defending my senior essay. Thank God for Dr. Brawley because she kind of brought me through that. So yes, there were

some people who had been important influences in my life.

What were your experiences at Douglass High School?

Good, but I was an indifferent student at Douglass. I'm president of the procrastinator's club! [laughing lightly] So I probably would have done better at Douglass if I had been a little bit less than [inaudible] the way that I was, staying up the night before studying for an exam [inaudible]...turn in the next day. I think I had a reasonable experience at Douglass. Times were different then and our expectations were different. And I suppose, at that time, if we graduated from high school at all, we were to have been considered very fortunate in the times. Many of our parents had not had the opportunity to go beyond grade school at all. So, my experiences were good. I was at Douglass during the war years. We had, as I had mentioned earlier, a close-knot community. I had good friends, I had a [inaudible]..-turning father who did not allow me than a few paces away from home. So, there were lots of things that I did not get an opportunity to participate in. I remember, the night that I was graduating from high school, County Baise or somebody like that was playing at a dance, a public dance downtown. I had

planned to go but I did not tell my father that I was going. We were just all, after graduation, going to go out and do something. Now, he was willing to tolerate that. But somehow between the time I got home after graduation and got myself ready to go, and the time that I was supposed to go, he found out, and where I was going. Now, I suppose one of my brothers told him. So, but they probably didn't think that I should be there, either, but they didn't have the authority to stop me. And certainly my father did. But at any rate, he stopped me, and I never, and I often thing about that and often regretted I never got to go hear Count Baise as I would have done, had my father not interfered at that point. But I think mine was a reasonably good experience in high school.

Are you still involved, today, in the church? And in what areas?

No, I am not.

What factors do you think contributed to your desire to want to like, to become involved in projects, like in Oral History and....?

I think, last night Dr. Ewen was talking with me about what you all were doing. And she was saying that your

project would be multidimensional, including photographs of things, not just conversations. Which made me stop and start thinking about what my past really was. And I began to think that, I believe I wrote when I was in high school for our school yearbook. I think I wrote my class history or class prophecy or something like that they used to do. Now, I had said over and over again I had no calling and no real ambition and I just kind of stumbled along. It may be, however, that one is directed more than one thinks that one is, all right? And it may be that I, my involvement was something that was going to be in spite of myself. But I told you that I grew up in the home of stories about my grandfather, who was a slave. My grandfather was dead before I was born. But he was a living presence in our home, because we talked about him. I also grew up at a time when history, the history that was taught to us in school, was very white. And…and it was also very male. But particularly it was very white. And it has taken me a very long time to understand or to recognize the difference between what was true and what I was being told. I came to understand that history was a matter of choice. That the decisions about what to be included and what was excluded were decisions that somebody made. And that the history of my grandfather, the slave, which had been excluded were as true as the stories of

Washington crossing the Delaware, or Abraham Lincoln walking five miles to return two cents…that all of us have learned about. And somebody decided that what had happened to my grandfather was not important, and should not be told. I suppose, I always knew that in the back of my head, but I didn't know what to do about it or how to do anything about it. [inaudible]…in the 70s as many of us my age encountered the Alex Haley's <u>Roots</u>. And I can remember hearing Alex Haley talk about what he had done and how he had done it and what had inspired it. And I thought about the stories that he talked of hearing his relatives talk about in Henning, Tennessee, and that they weren't so different from the stories that I heard my family talk about on 28th Street in Huntington. But because I was involved in this academic career and was working pretty hard, trying to learn what to do as a college administrator, I really had little time to pursue any of that. And I must say…again, now this is hindsight and as my husband always says, "hindsight's 20/20 vision." I look back on those years and I recognize that I probably should never have been a college administrator. I probably should always have been a faculty member, where I would have had the opportunity to pursue my academic interests uninhibited and unfettered by the need to do other things. In the 1970s, these two ladies that you were

hearing, Louise Anderson and Doris Payne, along with a fellow, Drewey Jenkins and Mrs. Lucille Meadows, who recently died, from Fayette County, came to me and said that they wanted to do something with the history of the West Virginia State Teachers Association. Which was the Black Teachers Association that existed in the state from the 1890s to the 1950s. And the NEA was making an effort, or they were pushing the NEA, however it was, to recapture the history of all these black state teachers organizations. So they asked me if I would do the history of that organization. By that time the organization had been out of business for maybe twenty, twenty-five years. But there still a number of people, such as Mrs. Garrison, still living, who had been an active part that association. So I thought about it for awhile and decided that I would do it. And that was a real task. Because Miss Fairfax, who had been the secretary of the organization, was deceased by that time. Nobody in her family could find any of the records that she had kept, any of the minutes, nothing. It was absolutely gone. Mr. Dickinson, who had been the president down at Bluefield State College, had been the historian of the organization and had collected over the years, a number of papers. But there had been an explosion in his office down at Bluefield State, and everything that he collected, had

been destroyed. So we came into the writing of this history of this organization with nothing, nothing! So these ladies put out the call and they gathered in programs of meetings, they had an annual meeting. They had put out a little journal from time to time, but sporadically, and there weren't many around, but they gathered what they could find on those. They provided me with a list of names of people who had been members. And we traipsed around and interviewed these people who had been members of the organization and drew what we could of information about this. At this point I was dismayed to find that the organization had only been out of business twenty years, but so much of the information had evaporated in that short period of time. But that the oral history was invaluable. In the book I began it with something that Miss Garrison [Memphis Tennessee Garrison] said, where she talked about where they would stay when they would go into a community to hold their annual meeting. What you may not know is that black people didn't have hotels…and were not welcome at the white hotels. So she said, "We stayed with each other, and stayed with ministers." And she said, "Somebody would tell you in one community, 'When you get into that community, you go and see brother so and so, and you tell him that I sent you.'" And this person would kind of take them in and keep them

overnight or so for those meetings. So I learned through that long and painful process, that oral history was essential in trying to put together the story of people who's history had either been systematically or accidentally destroyed, and that we would have to rely on it and that it was fleeting, because if we didn't go about interviewing, many of those people, they would be gone, and the information that they had with them, would be lost along with them. And so I began to get involved, at that point, only slowly and accidentally, with oral history. And then somewhere, I supposed, in the 1980s, the West Virginia Women's Commission did a book called <u>Missing Chapters In History</u>,--don't know if you know that book. But one of the essays done by Dr. Deutsch here at Marshall, was on Ann Kaplan Clagg, who was a poet and a playwright. I read the essay and I knew some of her relatives in Charleston. So I went to them and said, "Gee, I read this essay about Ann Kaplan. I'd like to read her plays." And her cousin, I think it was, said to me, that her plays had never been published. And I thought, never been published? Well, we need to figure out how we can publish these plays. So I went to the Humanities Council and said, "Will you give me some money to publish these plays?" And they said, "We don't pay for publication. But we're getting so many requests from about the state, about black history. Maybe we can

work out a deal with you." This was Dr. Dowery. "We will, if you'll do a project, a black history project, in the state, we'll tie this, the publication of this document into that black history project and we'll publish the plays." And so we did that, and I got involved through the Humanities Foundation and those plays, into what has become a kind of all-consuming passion on black history in West Virginia, and [inaudible]…on oral history because it's, it's just so important in trying [inaudible]

END OF TAPE 3

….what are the greatest obstacles you've ever had to overcome? Due to your race, gender and in this region?

Well, I really feel that I had a blessed life. I'm my biggest enemy. And part of that is conditioning. From the society I didn't even know was happening to me, but nevertheless was there. But I have a basic insecurity that makes me…it doesn't always stop me but it makes me doubt myself a great deal. And so I go through a lot of personal agony when I'm going to do anything. And sometimes it stops me. And I…if…I think that's been my biggest obstacle. I think that I could have [inaudible]…procrastinate. If I didn't do that, if I were better disciplined…. But those are

internal things, externally induced but internal I think is where my problem lies. I can't blame society. I can blame society in saying that if it had not been for the society, I wouldn't be the way I am. But that's a poor excuse. Convenient but poor.

Do you have an experiences of discrimination because of you being a black woman? Like actual...?

Well, of course, I do, of course, I do. Many. Perhaps the…see, my husband often says when he was growing up here in Huntington, he never knew that he was poor, because everybody else was poor too. And he couldn't get a job during the summer, but that suited him fine, because he could play all summer as a child. So he didn't bewail that. But when I was growing up, I wanted two things. I wanted to have a job that I didn't have to wear a uniform, because everybody that I knew, except for the school teachers, everybody else that went to work almost, worked either as a domestic or in some kind of service job. If they were lucky they got to run the elevator downtown, or they worked in.... Here at Marshall I can remember, as a small child, my mother worked in this building, used to come in the side door that goes down to where the AB print shop is on the side, there was a cafeteria there. She worked

first as a maid making beds in the dormitory, and then as a dishwasher down in the cafeteria. And on Sunday's, when there was less work sometimes, I would come down and stay with her while she worked. For, for many years, that was our only contact with Marshall, that as people did the laboring jobs here at the institution. So it is hard for any black person of my generation not to have grown up with, without being scarred by race questions. My upbringing was different, a little bit different as a small child, because I lived on 28th Street. I lived in an area where there might have been fifteen black families. My next-door neighbors were white. I played with white kids when I was growing up. The family across the street was white, but that was 'Aunt Kate', who was across the street. Her name was Kate Gould, so Dr. Gould and I often…she was his 'Aunt Kate', too. She was really his 'Aunt Kate', but she was my 'Aunt Kate' because she told us to call her 'Aunt Kate'. And my family had been in that same spot. Now we've got the oldest deed in the community. They've been there for over a hundred years. At that point, they had been there for thirty or forty years. So we had long, deep roots. I did not live down here in this area. My association was up there. And, though we moved down here later, my formative years were different. And that made me, I think, a bit screwed up in the head a little bit, too. But I wanted, as

I started earlier to say, I wanted a job that I didn't have to wear a uniform to go to. And I wanted, I never wanted to go to a fancy restaurant, I wanted to go to a drugstore or the dime store and sit up at the counter and eat. Because that's what I saw. I never saw anybody go into a fancy restaurant outside the movies or so. But that's what I say when I went downtown. I saw white people sitting at a drugstore counter, eating, or in the dime stores there used to be lunch counters. And I saw them sitting at a lunch counter. And so I wanted to do some of those kinds of things, as well. So I felt that kind of discrimination. The Orpheum Theatre, it's not the Orpheum any more. What is that theater? It's above 10th Street on 4th Avenue.

The Camelot?

The Camelot. No up the block.

The Cinema?

The Cinema…oh, okay, that was the Orpheum Theatre when I was growing up. And the Orpheum Theatre sat blacks in the balcony. And I can remember, I was going to see a movie that was there, but you had to go in this little side door and down a long passageway and what-not, so there was always a kind of

embarrassment, of really feeling like a fifteenth class citizen when you darted in that little door and got tickets and went up and sat in the balcony behind the post, all the while trying to see the movie. So you, you didn't escape from it. But I think perhaps the bitterest experiences that I had, well, when my husband went into the service. And in those days, just after World War II, the military he was in started out as what they called anti-aircraft, and then they introduced missiles. And when they introduced missiles, they introduced the deployment system. This was a major city like Washington, D.C. Then they would establish all around Washington, D.C. like this. This is Washington. And all around Washington, [inaudible]….

She placed a cup in the center of the table and surrounded it with other objects.

Right. The center cup is Washington and these other objects were missile sites. And the theory was that the missiles would be there to protect, to intercept any incoming missiles or to protect this city from attack, even though that they thought there was likely to be Russian attack all over the United States. And so there was this whole series of military plans to protect the major cities. So one of these major cities was Norfolk, Virginia. Well, let's start back at Savannah, Georgia.

He went to Savannah, Georgia. He really went to a place that was called Camp Stewart, which was about forty or fifty miles from Savannah. And we couldn't find any place because of segregation, we couldn't find any place that was close to where he was stationed, to live. And so we lived in Savannah, which was fifty miles away. Now he was just getting started in the military. And one of the jobs that a young officer had to do, was to take [inaudible]…in the morning, which was at 5 o'clock. Now we are an hour away from the base where he has to be at 5 o'clock, which meant that he had to leave home at 4 to drive there to be there at 5. Now if you back that up, if he has to leave at 4, means that we have to get up about 3 in order for him to get dressed and get himself organized and to go there. So we left there and came up, now in the deployment of this military tactic, to Norfolk, Virginia, because Norfolk was a primary shipbuilding area. And so, as one of the protected cities, Norfolk was one that was ringed by these anti-aircraft sites. So we go to Norfolk, his battery, as they called the smaller unit, was stationed over on the Norfolk side, but Norfolk, you know, is on the bay. And Ft. Monroe was the headquarters for it. And in those days, they now have a tunnel, but in those days you had to take the ferry, which was about twenty minutes from his site over to Ft. Monroe, where all the headquarters was. Well, I came home from Savannah,

I had a small daughter at that time, about…she was about five or six months old. And I was going to go back down and stay with him at Norfolk. But we couldn't find a place to live. Now, where he was in Norfolk, they were surrounded by beach areas and this was in the winter time. You know what a beach area is like in the winter time, everything is empty! Okay? Apartments and rooms and houses. But not for black people. So there was no place there that we could live. So they had guest quarters over at Ft. Monroe. So I went over to live in the guest quarters while we were house hunting. The guest quarters for the white officers—Ft. Monroe is an old, it goes back to Civil War—beautiful, brick buildings, ivy covered, lovely place. The white guest quarters were these beautiful old brick buildings. You know what we were living in? We were living in what we called temporary quarters. We were in rooms with two army cots pushed together for a bed, with a bathroom somewhere down the hall. It was in February and I stayed there…. And the temporary quarters were kind of wooden buildings. I mean, they were one-story, wooden old converted barracks buildings. I stayed there for awhile and I thought, "I can't, I don't have to tolerate this with a baby. I am going to go home." So I came back. My mother and father were always generous. They always kept a house that was big enough that I could come

home and stay one day or one month or one year, and they tolerated me. So I came back home with my child, and stayed until somebody that we knew at West Virginia State College had a small four-room apartment, and the fellow was a traveling salesman. They had no children and his wife was alone much of the time. So they invited us to come and live with them in this four-room apartment. We had two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom…small. And a small living room, a tiny little place. But they shared that apartment with us. Now, coming from West Virginia, one thing was that you never, you could do in West Virginia, you could vote, and we didn't have to sit on the back of public transportation. Well, one day I got on the bus out in, we lived out in the county in Norfolk, and I was going into downtown Norfolk. This was the days when buses were segregated. So I got on the bus and I'm unaccustomed, first of all, to being segregated on the bus. But I sat in the back of the bus in the seat that was just in behind the back door. And there were seats up front, in front of me. But there were only single seats, not two seats together. So somewhere between the time I got on the bus at home, going into town, these two white women got on the bus. And they came and asked me to get up and give them my seat. Now, there are seats up front, but they wanted to sit together. And there were no two seats, I mean, there

weren't two seats, so they asked me to move. So I sat there for a moment thinking about this. Now, this is humiliation, par excellence, okay? I sat there for a moment thinking, "What shall I do?" I have no idea where I am, if they put me off this bus, because I knew where to get on the bus and where to get off! I didn't know anything in between. And probably didn't have money to pay the bus fair anyway, if I'd gotten off. And we were like, it was a like a long distance from the place that we were living into town. I mean, we're talking ten miles or so. So I sat there and thought for a moment and got up and gave them my seat. That was my most humiliating moment. So, you asked me about segregation and racism. Those early experiences, trying to deal with the military…. And uh, my husband took it better than I. When we left Norfolk, came up to Washington, he was in Maryland. And by that time, they had introduced the weapons with the nuclear warheads. He was in the first battery in the Washington defense area, that had a nuclear warhead. It was a VIP battery. Whenever they brought in foreign dignitaries, foreign military men, as they always did, they would be training officers from all around the world, and they would bring them in to see this site and the nuclear capability. The commander of that battery was transferred and my husband was second in command. He was the person who should have

stepped into the command of that battery. They took him in behind closed doors and said, "You know, we cannot make you the commander of this battery. It has nothing to do with your being qualified or so, but you're black, and we're bringing dignitaries from around the world to visit this site. Now we can't bring them to a site with a black man in control." They weren't saying black in those days—probably saying negro. So they moved him from that and put him in another position to get him out of there. So when we talk about what it's like, what I have experienced and things as a black person. Oh, sure, many times.

Just for some factual information, can we have your mother's and father's name, your husband's name and your children?

Okay, my mother was, my father was Willard Radford, my mother was Amelia Radford, my husband is Nelson Bickley, my children are Renee Bickley Hill, and Ancella Bickley Lighters.

Is Radford spelled R-a-d-f-o-r-d?

Yes.

Okay. And so is there anything else you would like to add?

No, I don't think so.

[Dr. Ewen and others talking in background]

I wanted to ask, since you are a writer, what others have influenced your writing?

I don't know that I can point to a single writer who has influenced my writing. I am very impressed with Toni Morrison, for example. I think she…she's a marvelous writer and I like her use of black material. But I think that there are some absolutely wonderful black writers who are writing now. I think that Lucille Clifton is just absolutely a wonderful writer. And there are, there are many others, Paul Marshall…I mean, there are many really fine writers now, and I don't think there is one…. In fact, what I do probably, I may dignify it by saying that it's writing. I don't really know what it is. And part of what I worry about sometimes, is who wants to read what I write. Then I kind of decided that's not important. I won't worry about that any more, because it is different, I think, from the things we see in other places, or things that have been published. And I sometimes feel that I would do myself an injustice by

measuring myself against some of those other people. So it may be best that I don't read anything that other people are writing, at least until I done what I want to do.

And another question that I had was, you mentioned the fact that you all were in Germany during the Civil Rights Movement. Was there any difference in the way they treated you, the Germans, to the way you are treated by citizens of the United States?

Yes, there was. Though I don't know what it's like now, I haven't been back to Germany since that time. And I suspect that race relations have deteriorated there just as they have every place else. But when I first went to Germany, we lived in a little town by the river. And they had only seen-, you must recognize that this is a small town, like maybe Barboursville or so. And many of those people live and die in those communities without ever going any place else. That pretty much…I mean, they may go into Frankfurt or someplace like that, to shop or do whatever, the next big town is then. But they seldom, a lot of the old people don't move far away from home. So we were oddities. There had only been black people in that community once before, and that was during World War II. They had had some

black soldiers who were prisoners there, up in the town square somewhere. And so when we came, they hadn't seen black people, many of them before. And so they were kind of entranced by us. We would go out walking sometimes, and they would stop and touch us, you know, people who had-, I had no idea who these people were. And talk to us and I guess they wanted to see whether or not the color was going to [chuckling] rub off or so. But I felt no unease at all. We lived with a German family. And they lived downstairs and we lived upstairs. We spoke a little of the language. There's a lot of difference between school book German and what they were speaking. But we manager. But we got along beautifully during that time. And I have a lot of really good memories of the time there. This was also true with our white colleagues. We were all Americans there. And I still hear…in fact, I have a white Godson, I still hear from the family. Not frequently, because once you come back and get pulled in other directions. But the military family was very close and very supportive. And so, yes, it was a good experience. Very good experience.

Would you actually say that, at that time, it was better for black people in Germany than here?

Well, but you see, when I went there, my experiences were very [inaudible]…in the United States. I had not traveled widely here. I'd never, and still haven't, lived in Chicago or Washington, and I don't know what life would be like in a black society in a big city. So I can't, I couldn't make, even then, those kinds of comparisons, because I hadn't had them. Even when in Savannah and Norfolk, I was going through these miserable racial experiences. I was surrounded by supportive, warm, loving black people. We had a school mate in Savannah—again, the West Virginia State College Tentacles, at that time, spread all over the country. And we had a school mate in Savannah who's family literally adopted us. And uh, I mean, on Sunday night they fed us and if I were in any kind of difficulty, though I was far from my own family, that family was there. The people that we lived with in Norfolk were school mates and wonderful, warm, supportive, beautiful, friendly people. And so there was this cocoon, this black cocoon. In fact, when we went to, I guess when we went to Savannah, was it Savannah? No, it was, later we were going to, to Texas. And in those days, as I said earlier when I was telling you about the teacher's association, you didn't just go out and travel as a black person. Because you never knew where you were going to sleep. So we learned all kinds of survival mechanisms traveling

across the country. I mean, we had camp stoves—we'd stop and cook on the side of the road. You had to figure out where to go to the bathroom. You had to figure out where you were going to sleep, if you were on a long trip. And it was as Mrs. Garrison said, in about the teachers, people would literally, it was like going by the underground railroad. Somebody in Greenville, South Carolina would say, "When you get to so and so, you go see so and so at this address and tell him that I sent you." And we would go there, and that person would either take us in to spend the night or tell us where we could go to spend the night or where we could eat or so. So you got hop-scotched all through the South and we went south. And I've never been really in the deep South. We drove south, crossed over to Texas. So we're going through Mississippi and what-not. And stopped at Vicksburg and places that I'd never been before. So it's difficult for me to say that the experience in Germany was better than…I certainly felt freer. And that's something, if there is anything that I hate about this moment, I hate being, not feeling free to travel. I hate…I have some friends in Lincoln County [West Virginia] and I want to go out to Lincoln County but I don't feel terribly free and comfortable about driving into Lincoln County. I think, "What will happen if I come back at night, if I have a flat tire, if I get lost…what am I going to do and

what are those folks going to do to me, wondering around Lincoln County". I hate that. I hate, and I never felt that when I was in Germany. I felt that I could, even though there was a language barrier, I felt that I could go anywhere I wanted to go and that I would be reasonably well received. And I haven't always felt that here in my own country, and certainly right here in the United States.

END OF TAPE 4 – BEGIN TAPE 5

[inaudible]...how did you feel [inaudible]...did you feel like it was a big loss to you?

Oh, I can tell you what I was thinking almost of not so much Malcolm X but certainly with Martin Luther King, and absolutely it was a big loss. Absolutely, no doubt about it.

Did you feel like their loss, especially Dr. Martin Luther King, that it really set back the progress that we were making at that time?

No, I don't think so, because I think he was in the throes of changing himself. And you never know what would have happened, had he lived where he would have gone, what direction he would have taken, very

clearly after Cicero and some of those other things that had happened, the whole civil rights movement was changing. And whether, what would have happened, had he lived, is just a matter of speculation. We don't really know. I guess I hadn't really thought about it being set back. I thought it was a terrible tragedy, something that should not have happened. And I feel the same way about Malcolm X—they were minds and [inaudible]...hearts that we should not have lost, should not have had to go on without. But again, sometimes you accept that things happen that way because they happened that way. Maybe that was what was intended, maybe that moved us in a direction, makes us face things that I think that he would begin to do, recognizing that the visible aspects of racism were being tackled, but the subtle, hard-core kinds of things were not yet visible and we hadn't worked-, and still haven't, worked out ways to deal with it.

Since you were involved in the civil rights movement, because I know [inaudible]...how do you feel since you weren't able to [inaudible]...part of that?

Well, you see, you have to...you're...you're putting the civil rights in, in a bracketed time frame, and a bracketed set of activities. I was not a person who was

carrying signs on the streets. But people served in different kinds of ways. And I think that's what you have to think about for yourself. That time, that…that consuming visible kind of activity is not there for you to do now. That doesn't mean that there isn't work for you to do. There is a great deal of work. And I think that the work that I have done and that I hope, if the good Lord's willing, I have a little time yet left to do, is a different kind of work. But again, people serve in different ways. And I think that what you, what you have to do is to look at what your part in this great human drama can be. And it may be, it may be in a different place and in a different way, a different time. I just think that the demons that we have to face change forms. And you have to wrestle that demon any way that you can, and that your contribution, you look at the past in order to chart the future. And that your contribution is yet to be made and may be made in a way that is a little bit different, but just as important as the past. That's it. So I wouldn't think that, that the work is all done. It is not…it is not. And they used to say in Sunday School, "Brighten the corner where you are." You may brighten your corner in a different way. You may write the great American novel, you may, I mean, there may be things that you will do that will make a significant contribution, not the same contribution, but a significant one.

When [inaudible]...thrilled with some accomplishment. Were there one or a few that stand out?

I suppose the thing that I'm proudest of, is that I had two wonderful daughters, and we have a good relationship. I love being with them and I think they enjoy being with me and we are friends. And I think that's...we've been able to make the transition from not just mother and daughter to friendship, and that doesn't always happen with parents. Sometimes you get fastened into those roles, and you never get out of them. And though I find myself creeping back into them, I mean, I do have the tendency to try to tell them what to do, recognizing, or forgetting that they're women in their own rights. But they're my chief consultants, they and my husband. And I suppose that we have been able to maintain that level of our relationship—it's probably the thing I'm proudest of.

Also I would like to know, do you have visions of the future, and what, where do you think [inaudible]...community support? Do you think youth today have the same concept of community

support? Where do you think they could go for...encouragement?

I bounce back and forth between being very despondent and being very encouraged. Last week I was driving back from somewhere. And I heard [inaudible]...at the National Press [inaudible]. And he was talking about sort of what all the frontiers of the future.... And the whole suggestion that there has to be a kind of a spiritual and humane sort of development for mankind. And that's, that's where the next struggles have to be. And I guess I have to feel sort of encouraged by that, to think there is hope. I certainly feel that there has to be a cultural revolution in the United States, that we're not ready to undertake yet. I believe that there are some very, very difficult times ahead. And how we will get through those times I don't know. I think that the cult of materialism in which we had been ensnared for the life of this country, has just about come to it's end. And that in order to change that, you have to change the mindset of human beings. And there are some people who will hang on to the old mindset with teeth and toenails, and moving them beyond that is going to be a, you talk about bloodshed, it's going to be a difficult, difficult move for, for people to make. Whether they'll...they'll certainly not make it in my lifetime. But I was listening again to

public radio and they were talking about the mineral deposits of the world and richest mineral deposits of the world are in Africa. And though they're battling with one another in Africa, steadily for awhile, but they're going through the throes of revolution just like any other country goes through. They're behind because of…we kept them that way. But whether or not they are going to willingly give up their mineral deposits to enlist the rest of the world in the next hundred years, I don't think so. And it's fine to tell folks not to cut down the rainforest so we can drive three cars and they can have an oxcart? I don't think so. So how you, how you get through the American mind, that your children are not going to be better off than you are, that everybody's not going to have fifteen cars and two swimming pools. I mean, it just is not in the long term. And when I say long term, I'm talking [inaudible]. I'm not talking about tomorrow, I'm talking about real long term. I just don't believe that that's going to happen. And I believe that in order to see us through that, that there will have to be major, major cultural changes. And I don't know how that's going to happen. I don't know, for example, how you can tell [inaudible]…about not having abortions when you use swimsuits to sell everything from toothpaste to sanitary napkins, practically. I mean…I went in the library. They had a poster in the library encouraging people to read and it had "Take a

book to bed," no, "take an author to bed." Now if that isn't…if that isn't a sexual message, I don't know what is. How can we use sex to sell everything and then say, "Oh, no, not abortion". That's wrong, just say no! How can we do that? I mean, if we're going to talk about this kind of behavior on this one side, it has to be all permeating. I mean, you've got to talk about it over here, too. You can't isolate these things. And that's what we tried to do in American Culture; he tried to compartmentalize things. And I just don't think that life can be compartmentalized. I think it slows one thing to another, one country to another more and more. And somehow [inaudible].

As far as school integration went, do you feel like the social [inaudible]…do you feel like the blacks may have lost anything from being integrated? Like [inaudible]…education and things like that?

Yes, but it's too easy to answer to say, "Yes, we lost by integration, and the problems we find are so [inaudible]…now are directly related to integration", that's too easy. There are other things that happened. I mean, the whole community movement. When I grew up, my father never owned an automobile. And I suspect that there are, half the families around us, never owned an automobile either. Which meant, and

the school bus went far from home. The community was small and close and supportive. Communities separated not just because of integration. We separated because of the automobile, we separated because of the change in employment patterns. We separated because of the change in marriage patterns. I mean, there's whole lots of things that caused communities to splinter. And once a community splintered, when I was a kid, the teachers passed back and forth in front of my house, going to work every day. They walked too, for the most part. They may have, some had cars, but many of them walked. And so, there was that kind of communion you got; you went to the same churches and what-not. So you interacted with one another on many different levels, not just in school. But when you passed them on the street or they passed your house, or you ran into them in the grocery store or something, catching the bus together. You stood and talked while you waited for the bus. Those things don't happen. That's not related to integration. That was related to other kinds of changes that took place. So it seems to me that the question is, and again, as I said earlier, many of us had a kind of a reference for the word and for learning, that has been lost. We didn't have television, our attention span was different. Our inquisitive nature was kind of kept in check a little bit, because we didn't know what it was

like to have disposable income. The money that we had for the most part was used to take care of the necessities of life. So there were a lot…there are a lot of economic, cultural, social changes that have taken place that would have happened anyway, that were totally unrelated to integration. So the question is now, given that fact, those facts, and given that we are where we at this time, how do we build community, how do we…not necessarily restore, because I think that we have to stop looking backwards and bewailing the fact that something isn't here. But how do we figure out how to go on? How to instill values and concern among people? Now, what are the kinds of laws and rules and concern that we need to get us through these next years. I guess sometimes people think that schools don't function because the homes don't function. Well, so what else is new? If the ones don't function, don't sit around and bewail it—do something to take the children from wherever they are and move them. I get tired of hearing black students say, "Oh, because of segregation". Again, what else is new? I came up under a segregated…I can sit with my fingers in the air forever and say, "I can't do thus and so, because I am segregated against". What I say lets do, is find out how to get around it. And don't let it stop us, let's see where we need to go. So, I think we need a new [inaudible]….

[inaudible]...in the black communities, though, as far as the young people are concerned. Especially with real problems with drugs and [inaudible]....

Dr. Ewen: Dolores, I am supposed to have a meeting for CSEGA. Can I ask that two questions be answered? We've probably got about ten, fifteen minutes left on this last tape. I'm interested in going back to Jamaican mother. Because one of the things we're interested in, in this ethnicity stuff in Appalachia, is African Americans are usually [inaudible]. And I'd be interested, [inaudible], so I'd be interested a little bit in some of that ethnic analysis of your background. And secondly, any of the history that you have of the start of The Alliance for the Collection of Dissemination of Black History. And thank you very much. We've got this big meeting.

Let me talk about the Alliance first. I was talking earlier about the Ann Flag book. At the first conference with the trade-off Humanities Council, that they would help me publish the Ann Flag plays and I would do a conference on black history. That first conference was dubbed in Charleston with Reverend Ron English at First Baptist Church. And Ken Blue came to the

conference, brought some students here at Marshall. And when the conference ended, Ken, okay dear, take care. Ken invited us to come down to Marshall to hold a second conference. And the conference has been here ever since. As, as we developed that conference, we began to think that we really needed some way in the state to come together as a group of people who were interested in black history. And just as we have said with Oral History, we found that our elders were dying and that people were disposing of things. When the old folks died, the young people come in, the first thing they want to do is get rid of mommy's junk, so they can get the house for themselves. And just as I had learned that to put together the history of the West Virginia State Teacher's Association, we had to rely on things that were in personal possessions, whether they were programs or pictures of memories or whatever. That we needed to begin to say to people, "Don't throw away your church histories, the fiftieth anniversary history, don't throw away the graduation program from Douglass High School from 1926, because it tells us who was in the graduating class. Don't throw away your kid's kindergarten teacher's name, valentine or something, until we get a chance to look at that. So we felt that it was important to save these things. We thought it was important to try to figure out how we could share this information, collect it, share it,

preserve it and share it, so that people.... There was some wonderful people who were coming to the conference from all out of state, the Panhandle, Wheeling, and so, we put together this organization with the long name, the Alliance. It was probably Ken who came up with that name. The...in fact, I think we had big arguments about what we were going to call it. But we thought it was important that we would say that we would collect, that we would preserve, that we would disseminate this information. And so we had a kind of a loose-net structure. We really didn't have secretaries and presidents and all of that, but we did come together maybe once or twice a year and talk about what we wanted to do, and to begin to collect and try to archive some of the material. We published one book, [inaudible]. What we found is that the papers that were being presented at the black history conference, which had become at that time, an annual affair, that there was some wonderful information that wasn't available anywhere else, that was being presented at those conferences. And what we wanted to do was to put out some publications, so that people would have, in hard copy form, the presentations or at least some of them that came out of those conferences, so they could then expand upon them, use them as teaching tools, or whatever. So we published one document that was proceeding from the

first two conferences and then Dr. Johnson has edited some of the other papers, and I suppose somewhere along the way we'll try to get those in print, so they'll be put in the [inaudible] to people. Now, my Jamaican mother. My name is Ancella. I'm named for my Jamaican grandmother, who was also Ancella. And my daughter is, also carries the name Ancella, so that there are three of us. My mother and my father met in Cuba. And my father had gone to Cuba, I guess he went about 1913 or so. And he stayed fifteen years and came back in 1928 and brought along with him, his Jamaican wife. We talk in, in black history about the [inaudible]…the dispersion of African people outside of Africa. So my part of the [inaudible]…was my dispersion or my mother's dispersion, her family, to Jamaica. Slavery ended in Jamaica about 1832 or so. So her immediate family were not slaves, probably her grandparents were. When I went to Jamaica, they lived in a little homestead in St. Ann's Parish in Jamaica. And one of my mother's sister's name was Maria Melvina. And she hated that name, Maria Melvina. But they called her Oney, because she was a first child who was born after her parents acquired their little homestead. And they called her Myoney. Because it was their own piece of ground. And Myone got shortened to Oney. So she was always Oney. [inaudible] So, there's isn't much else to say that my

parents met and married in Cuba and came to the United States in just…1928 when my father came back home. Just the time that the Depression hit. So they were out of work and very poor for a long time. Fortunately, his family had property on 28th Street, and so they always had a roof over their heads. So we didn't have a lot else. And it's funny, I was laughing not long ago. My mother taught us a prayer when we were kids. And she spoke with an accent. But when you are accustomed to an accent you don't recognize that it is in accent. So I never recognized that my mother had an accent. And she had…she didn't speak like in the Jamaican [inaudible]…but she did have a, certainly the Jamaican sing-song kind of accent. If you've ever heard Jamaican's talk, it's a very distinctive speech expression. But anyway, my mother taught us this little prayer, that was 'Gentle Jesus, meek and milk, look upon a little child, pity my simplicity, and suffer me to come to thee'. Well, she said, 'Simplicity', it sounded to us as if she was saying simple city. [chuckling] So I was listening to my niece's, one of my niece's children, saying their prayers some time ago, and he was saying this prayer. And he got to that and he said, 'Pity my simple city'! [laughing] And I knew immediately how he had learned the path that he had taken to learn that prayer. So one of the things that I'm writing, is called <u>My Simple City</u>. Because of my

mother and this prayer. But growing up in a…with a mother who is foreign, in a place where there aren't any foreigners, and it was difficult for her and it was certainly difficult for me, there was, in the black community when I grew up in Huntington, there was nobody who was not from this area. Either they were born in Huntington or they had migrated to Huntington, but they were all Americans. My mother was the only one who was not. Until during the war, they…they brought some Jamaicans over to the United States as field workers, because Americans were being drawn out of agriculture and into the war effort. So they used people from other countries to replace them. And so there was a fellow who's name was similar to mine…his name was Ancel Taylor, he was a Taylor, and he came from Jamaica. And he was the second Jamaican that I ever knew who came to Huntington. And he stayed here maybe a couple of years. But that also makes me think when we're talking about integration, I have a cousin, Oney's son, who was as brown as I am. And…but he had very straight hair. He came, he came to the United States as one of these agricultural workers during the war. This would have been about 1942, '43 or so. We took him downtown to the Keith Albee Theatre, it may have been the Keith Albee, one of those theaters or The Orpheum, stood across the street while he went over and bought a

ticket and went into the movie. He could do that. It wasn't a matter of being colored, because he was my color. He was as brown as I am. But he spoke with an accent. And there's a peculiarity in the United States, as long as you weren't an American black, you could do anything you wanted to do. So it wasn't a question of color. It was a question of their prejudice, I guess, against the American black people. So you had a question, I think?

[interviewer pausing for thought] Have we talked that much?

It was so far back now! [laughing]

Well, you were talking about...I was just thinking about the future of the black community...

Oh, okay.

....in this country and what's happening, you know, with all these problems they're having.

I don't know. I wish I had a crystal ball that could look into it and say that this is, what's going to happen. I just think that somewhere along the way that [inaudible] has to come into play, that we have to say,

"This far and no further. I'm not going to do that." And that means a matter of self-determination and self-will. I am not going to live my life this way. Therefore, I just won't do this. I just will not take drugs, I just will not handle guns, I just will not. And I don't know how we get to that point. But I think that's where it has to come. I remember hearing Micki Giovanni, she came to West Virginia State College while I was still working there. And somebody asked her about being a role model and she said, "I refuse to accept the designation ***role model****. Because that takes the pressure off of somebody else, for their behavior, for them controlling their own behavior and say that they do that because there wasn't anybody else." And her feeling was that as human beings and as black people, we have to take responsibility ourselves. And I can't blame somebody else because I do something. Somewhere along the way, I mean, I have to recognize all of the evils of society, that's true. But somewhere along the way I have to recognize that I am the final authority in my life. I have to make the decisions. And that's where we have to come to one day.*

One of the things that we discussed over lunch was the, the other women that we're studying too. What was it? Was it this strong centrality or some like, just like they had a compass inside them

that...that told them where to go and what to do. And...do you see a difference in, you know, self-esteem or inner guidance in youth today, than.... I mean, where did it come from?

I guess I'm going to say...women maybe look at the world differently. I don't know. I've had this discussion with Dr. Rita Wicks-Nelson and we haven't really come to an agreement. I think she totally disagrees with me. I hate to say this, but sometimes I feel that black women have kind of been the lynch pin of our race. And that when black women no longer perform the traditional roles, things fell apart. Does that mean that I'm being like Micki Giovanni says, we shouldn't be. That I put the responsibility for what happens to us on black women. I hate to do that. At the same time, I recognize that maybe the world isn't equal. Maybe there's certain kinds of things that we have to do. And maybe, just as they're talking about from the womb we begin to lead, train children. Maybe we have to start saying things to these kids early on. [inaudible]...the responsibility is maybe bigger than you are. I don't know. It's awful, isn't it, to say that women bear the responsibility for...for what the culture.... Maybe those women did. What I found, my daughter is doing her dissertation [inaudible]...between 1920 and 1955. And it's interesting to see that gender determination

and behaviors change from decade to decade. And there was a point where women, black women were not taking the primary leadership role. You would have found them president of the NAACP, but they were in the background. They were the 'behind the scenes' thinkers and planners and movers and shakers. Later on they began to take…..

END OF TAPE 5

END OF INTERVIEW WITH ANCELLA BICKLEY

It's Tuesday, May 20th, 1997. My name is Crystal Lunsford, along with my class, which consists of Dr. Lynda Ann Ewen, Dr. Dolores Johnson, Beth Jarvey Upton, Rachel Luther, Serena Structure and Tamara Martin, which all will be participants in the interview. We are conducting this interview with Dr. Ancella Bickley, which will be used for our project, The Contributions of African-American Women in West Virginia. This project is connected with the Oral History Project at Marshall University. This interview will focus on the existence of Dr. Bickley as a black Appalachian woman and the contributions that she has made to her race, gender and region. Dr. Bickley, do you understand that these tapes will be archived and used for public use?

Yes, I do.

We can start at the beginning with some background information, such as the date and location of your birth.

I was born here in Huntington, on 28th Street, as a matter of fact, in a house that's still standing there, on July 4th, 1930.

Okay. And the relationship that you had with your family?

What do you mean?

Such as your family as a child, your family life and your parents and siblings.

Well, my mother is Jamaican, my father was born here in Huntington, also. His father was a slave who, at the end of the Civil War, crossed the mountains from Franklin County, Virginia, following the railroad [inaudible]...to work. And we lived in the home with my grandfather's widow, and it was sort of a family compound in those days. My uncle lived next door and my aunt lived in the house with us, so I had three brothers, a grandmother, a mother and father, aunts and uncles, all together in my early years.

And do you have any childhood memories that you'd like to share with us?

Oh, I have many childhood memories. When I was growing up on 28th Street in the early years, I guess until I was about eight years old, I don't know whether now that area was zoned within the city or not. We had a big lot. And we had cows, or a cow. I can remember churning and my grandmother milking the cow. We had chickens, I can remember a hog and then they killed the hog. And those are experiences that many of my colleagues, my school mates, didn't have. Because ours was sort of that country experience still, while theirs was more city-based than ours. But lots of memories of that kind. One of the things that I think about, I've always loved books. And when I was a very little girl, I wanted to read Uncle Tom's Cabin, and I was ill and was in the hospital and my father went down to the, I think it was the Frederick Bookstore in downtown Huntington, and ordered the book for me. And I remember I used to watch for my dad to come to the hospital, because the sun would go down and I knew when the sun hit a certain point on the house, that I could see him coming. And he bought that book for me. And I think I may still have it around somewhere. But that was a very precious moment in my life. Wonderful memories.

What about your education experience as a child?

I had an aunt who taught school. And she took me to school with her from the time that I was very young. I don't really remember when I began going with her. I heard stories later from some of the

other young people in Huntington at that time, who were in her class, who used to tell me that she allowed me to lie down on my stomach in the front of the classroom and read. Now, that is a very difficult thing to believe because my aunt was a very, very stern woman, and a very stern teacher. But evidently, she was very indulgent with me. But by the time I was five, I guess they decided that they might as well enroll me, because I was going anyway. And so, they enrolled me in school when I was five years old. And I had a wonderful first grade teacher. Her name was Mrs. Mae D. Brown. And she was a wonderful, nurturing woman for me, at least. I think about that a lot. I probably, this is an adult interpretation of a child with experience. But I suspected that when I went to school at five, I still had a lot of baby in me and a lot of growing up to do. And Mrs. Brown would allow me to come into her classroom while the other children were out on the playground. I sat in the classroom with Mrs. Brown and she always had something that I could do; I could color or I could cut or I could look at picture books or something. And I believe she was providing for me, some of that kind of growing up space that I had missed by going out so early from home to go to school. So I went to what was then Barnett School, which doesn't exist in Huntington any more. At that time, it was on the corner of Eighth Avenue and what you now call Hal Greer Boulevard, but in those days we called it Sixteenth Street. From there we went to from first through the sixth grade there. And that was before the days of kindergarten, so I had no kindergarten experience. But from the first through the sixth, I was at Barnett. Then we went to Douglass High, which was down on Tenth Avenue about two blocks away from there. And I went to Douglass from seven through twelve. By that time my mother and father had moved from the family home place on Twenty-Eighth Street, and we lived on again, what was known as Sixteenth Street, now Hal Greer Boulevard and Ninth Avenue during my high school years. And when I graduated from high school, I enrolled at West Virginia State College, and went to West Virginia State College, graduating with a Bachelor's degree, a Bachelor's of Arts degree, in English. And I believe I integrated Marshall. I think that was I was the first full-time black student at Marshall University in 1951. I was a graduate student. See, many people think that integration came about only in 1954, but I was here three years before 1954. I came under what was probably a legal decision. Gaines vs. Missouri. Mr. Gaines attempted to be admitted to law school in Missouri, and was denied access, and sued and finally won the right to enter law school, though I don't believe he ever did. But the West Virginia State Teachers Association requested an attorney general's opinion of that case, when some of their members attempted to get admitted to an extension course that Marshall University was having in I believe it was in Logan County. And there was an attorney here in Huntington, Attorney Ambrose, who was the attorney who took, or requested that decision from the state attorney general. And he interpreted to say that if there was no opportunity for graduate education for black people at any of the state schools, then the state of West Virginia was either required to open those schools to black students or to provide education for them somehow. And in many cases, black graduate students were given financial subsidies so that they could go out of state to school. I chose to enroll at Marshall. And so, in January, 1951, I became a full time graduate student at Marshall, and I think that was the first ever.... Many of the people who had enrolled previously in the extension courses, have may have taken a single course. But I think I was the first person to take a full, to become a full-time student here.

What were the differences within your education between being in a school that was segregated and then being integrated?

Well, by that time, I was a graduate student, and I had had a wonderful social experience, as well as a wonderful educational experience at West Virginia State College. When I was a graduate student here, I was living at home with my family. And I guess I wasn't looking for the kind of social interaction that many younger people would have had, would have been looking for at that time. I was really wonderfully well-treated when I came here. I was very much welcomed by my classmates, by my teachers. I had absolutely no problems and no complaints about those, those first days here.

Did, just to go back to your childhood for a minute, did you have any particular aspirations as a child, any particular goals?

No. And I still don't! [laughter] Well, I don't know, I may have changed a little bit. Still waiting to find out what I'm going to do when I grow up. No, I really didn't. And I often think about that. I have kind of stumbled through life and perhaps you think that perhaps you **are** *being guided in ways that you really don't, you don't know, don't understand. But no, I had no career aims when I was in high school. When I went to college, for some reason I thought that I would go into medicine. Now, ask me why, I don't have the vaguest notion. Except I had read, there were some novels called about a student nurse, who's name was Cherry Aimes. And I had read the Cherry Aimes student nurse and a bunch of other things of that ilk. And so I thought that I wanted to go to medical school. And I've had a pretty good experience with science in high school. But high school science and college science were NOT the same thing! And when I got into a chemistry glass and they gave me a little vial of something and said, "This is your [inaudible]...find out what it is," I kind of decided I had made a wrong decision. And I had no calling for medicine anyway. And it was certainly not anything that I had a driving ambition; it was accident. And I suppose I went into English accidentally, as well, as I look back on it. I had no real reasons or real understanding of why I chose that as an area of concentration. I'm pleased that I did. But I don't know why. I'm sorry that I didn't have more direction, because I think I may have [inaudible].....*

What led you to become a professor? Because you taught at West Virginia State.

Accident, again. My husband was a career military man, and he got assigned to West Virginia University. I had completed a master's in English here at Marshall, and had done some teaching before we came back to West Virginia, on the high school level. And I had taught adult education through the Army. But I had no thought, again, of being a college professor. And one evening while we were at West Virginia University, we went to a dinner party and my table companion was the dean of the College of Liberal Arts at West Virginia University. And he, we talked and he found out that I had a master's in English and he said, "Do you want a job?" And I hadn't thought about getting a job. And he said, "Well, why don't you come and see me?" And of course, I did not go. And in a few days, a week or so, he called and I went down for an interview, and he hired me to teach English at West Virginia University. So I had, I had taught in Maryland before we came back to West Virginia on the high school level. And I found that teaching high school, the kind of preparation that I had, and this had been a long time ago, the kind of preparation that I had in English Literature, did not give me the skills that I felt that I needed to teach high school students, who even thirty years ago could not read. So I thought after I taught for a year or so at West Virginia University, I thought I should take advantage of being on a university campus to begin to do some background work that would prepare me to go back into the public school classroom. Because I thought that that was what my profession was at that time, that I would be a public school teacher until I retired. So I left, I quit teaching and went into the doctoral program. I really didn't go into the doctoral program, I went in to take an advance certificate and again, this is all accidental. I was going to take an advance certificate in education preparing me to go back into the public school, because my husband was going to be stationed at West Virginia University for three years and I guess by this time, we were two years into the assignment. And I thought at the end of that time, he would be re-assigned and since I was a camp follower, I would be re-assigned with him. So I started taking courses. I quit teaching, began taking graduate courses toward an advance certificate. And I sat down and looked at the catalog one day and I thought, "Well, there really isn't a great deal of difference between the advance certificate and a doctorate. Maybe instead of going towards an advance certificate, I should try for a doctorate." So I enrolled in a doctoral program instead. And I finished all of the course work just about the time he was to be re-assigned. Except this was during the 60s and they were a little bit afraid that the black students were going to revolt at West Virginia University. And by that time, my husband had

very good rapport with the students. In fact, he may have been the advisor to the black student organization at that time. So though he had no intentions of getting out of the Army at that time, he was invited to get out of the Army and to stay in an administrative position at West Virginia University. And we talked it over and he decided to do that. And I had, by that time, finished my coursework and had to do my dissertation. So I went back to teaching at West Virginia University. And after a couple of years, they looked at the staff at West Virginia State College and saw that a number of the black professors who had been there a long time, professors there were retiring. And they were very anxious to try to maintain a component of black faculty. So they invited my husband and me to come back down to West Virginia State College as faculty. He would take an administrative position and I would become a faculty member. So we, again, talked it over, thought about it for awhile, and decided that we would do that. So we resigned at West Virginia University and came down to West Virginia State College, and had been in the area [inaudible].

Were you very active in the civil rights movement? And what organizations or activities did you participate in?

No, I was not active at all during the civil rights movement. Because I was a camp follower in those days.

What...what is a camp follower?

[laughingly] Camp follower...my husband was in the service, and as he was moved about from Army post to Army post, our children and I went along with him. And in the early 60s we were in Germany and came back to the United States. We were always kind of isolated on an Army post, which kept us sort of apart from the regular civilian population, insolated in many respects. At that time, we were probably at Ford Mead, which is about halfway between Washington and Baltimore. And an Army post is very much self-contained. You have schools, you have movies, you have churches, you have bowling allies, you have what is the equivalent to a grocery store and the equivalent of a department store. And so you really don't have to leave the Army post to do anything, unless you simply want to do it. And so you became a very insular self-contained community. And that's pretty much where we found ourselves in those years. And when we came back to West Virginia and went to West Virginia University at the tail end of much of the civil rights activity. I did serve about ten years, with the state Human Rights Commission. But again, that was in the latter part of the 60s and early 70s. By that time, much of the most intense action of the civil rights movement [inaudible-fading out]....

Okay. When you first went to West Virginia State, with what experience did you have? This was what, at the end of the 60s? Or early 70s?

Do you mean when I went as a student or when I went as a teacher?

Uhm...

Both? Well, when I went to West Virginia State College as a student, it was just at the end of World War II. We were on a campus that had been pretty much built for, I suppose, a thousand, maybe twelve hundred students. And we had that great bulge of returning veterans and their families and many, many young people. So there were probably two thousand students there, full-time students at the time I was there. Every system was crowded. My room, which was a very small dormitory room, I had four roommates; there were five of us—two bunk beds and a single bed in that room. We stood in line for just about everything. Going into the dining...in those days for us, the dining rooms were not in the dormitories. They were the dining hall, we all had to go to the same place to eat. And that was very crowded. But I remember that now as a wonderful experience, as do many people who

went to West Virginia State College at that period. A lot of things that I remember most was what we called being in freshman probation, which lasted from the time that you began college. In those days you began about after Labor Day generally, until homecoming. All the freshmen were forced to wear what we called dog tags. Which was great punishment. You had, on that you wore a sign on your back, which had your name on it and your hometown. Think about that now. It was great punishment then. But do you know, I understand the psychology of it now. It was a wonderful way for us to all get acquainted. You knew, somebody knew your name and you knew theirs. There were many activities that we had to do together. For example, I just attended the funeral of Dr. William Wallace, who was for twenty years, the president of West Virginia State College. And as a part of the funeral service they sang the alma mater. You could always tell the old timers at West Virginia State College because they stand and hold hands and began to sway as they sing that song, whatever the event is, even at a funeral we're tempted to do it. New people there don't know the song. Some people mouth the words, but they certainly don't have the cadence and the swing that we all did. But the freshman orientation or the freshman probation was run by the athletes who banded together in an organization they called the W Club. And they were the ones who told us what we were supposed to do and we were really at the beck and call of any upper classmen at that time. But one of the things that I remember, is that every day after dinner, we met at the, what was the administration building, but we all called it the A building. And we had to walk down the campus, picking up paper, cleaning up the campus as we walked. And then at the end, we stopped, stood in a circle and sang the alma mater. It was a wonderful kind of ritual now, but it was painful for me, because I was very shy, not accustomed to any kind of public performance sort of thing, such as we were constantly called upon to do because the upper classmen could make you do anything. Press dresses, whatever it was, go on errands, that they asked you to do. So, we, I think about those days, the spring prom season, the fraternities and sororities, some of the rituals, some of the kinds of things that we did. They did a lot of singing; I think that was probably true generally in the black community because there was a lot of singing. And some of the fellows particularly in the fraternity, had marvelous voices and they all had beautiful songs. And after they had a fraternity meeting, they used to gather at night out on the campus and sing. And I can remember hanging out the window—course, they were very, very strict on girls in those days—but I can remember hanging out the window, listening to those fellows sing and there were points where one of them would stop and take a solo part, and we'd hear this wonderful voice wafting over the campus; just absolutely wonderful. One of the other things a lot of us remember is that West Virginia State College had a very strong ROTC tradition. And they had a very excellent band. And on Friday afternoons the ROTC would assemble in full uniform, the band would assemble in full uniform and they would parade out on the campus and there was a cannon in the middle of the campus and they would go through all the presenting arms and things military people do and at a specific time in that ceremony they would fire the cannon. So there were all those wonderful kinds of, I guess, rituals and ceremonies that were part of our being there. And there was a sort of a...there was a friendship and kind of a, almost one big family sort of atmosphere, back there. I remember when the snow came, that they built snow forts and you would get snowballs passing back and forth, up and down the campus. And the art students would sculpt out of snow, not just an ordinary snow man, but a wonderful big sculpture. Some really wonderful memories about that time, in addition to, I think the quality of education that we were getting. Because at that time black teachers didn't have opportunities to teach in white institutions across the country. So we had wonderful professors with degrees from Harvard and Yale, from Columbia, from UCLA, probably I think this has been established...one of the best, if not ***the*** *best faculty in the state of West Virginia at that time. Because there was this national pool from which the faculty was drawn. And so I have really great experiences there. And I just saw a couple of months ago my freshman roommate; I see her frequently. We've known each fifty years now and we're still speaking to each other. So that's something to be said. But so...we have friends still from those early West Virginia State College days, that we'll see, still hear from regularly. By the time we came back to work at West Virginia State College, of course, the institution had changed. It was no longer a residential institution—it was*

largely commuter institution, and largely white. And a few of the rituals that I remembered continued. Perhaps in fraternities and sororities largely. But beyond that, not much that I knew was still there. It, it just was completely a different place, both in appearance and probably in outlook [inaudible-reply fading out]

Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW 1

INTERVIEW 2

When you were talking about your experiences at West Virginia State, you spoke about your alma mater, do you remember it?

Of course.

Could...would you sing it?

Oh, no! [laughing] No, no.

Would you just give us a little, I mean, say a little bit of it to...?

"West Virginia's Praise will sing, [inaudible]...will ring, as we gaily march along, we'll sing a song, alma mater, how we love her." I haven't...[inaudible]...recording around some where. Which might be interesting to use [inaudible-fading out]

And you were speaking about the big changes that you saw when you returned back to West Virginia State to teach. What...I mean, there were a lot of differences? Or...? What was the time difference between when you were a student and when you came back?

Twenty years, about twenty years. And yet, the campus had expanded. Where there used to be a very confined, smaller area, they had built two or three new buildings. By the time that I came back they had moved some others. And I think maybe one had been torn down. [inaudible]...changed. What used to be a dormitory had become an office building. So there were changes that had been occasioned by the changing population, the different needs, the administrative needs that had surfaced since we had been there. So yes, there had been many changes.

What activities or organizations did you become involved in when you taught at West Virginia State?

I don't think that I was really involved very much in organizations at all. I only taught, when I came back to West Virginia State College, I only taught for one semester. And then I was invited to take an administrative position and so, I did that. And for the next fifteen years I was in administration. Which meant that here was something for which I had not prepared. And so I had to pay a great deal of attention at that time, to learning how to be a college administrator. Because it had not been a part of my experience, nor ambition. So there was a whole new way of relating to the work, the faculty, to students, that I had to learn to do. There's a big difference between managing my own checkbook and working with a college budget. There were administrative reports and letters and interactions with the public that I had now to undertake, that consumed pretty much my time and my creative energy. I think that probably the only organization, external institution in which I was associated at that time, was the state Human Rights Commission. I continued to be with the commission for a few years. And then I became a part of the what was newly formed then, Humanities Council of West Virginia, which was really, the transformational experience [inaudible]....

What did the Humanities Council do?

Promote humanities education in the public in the state of West Virginia. And I was with the Humanities Council for eight years. And though that official association ended a long time ago, I have continued to be involved with them and their programs since that time. So it happened [opened?] a whole door for a whole new [inaudible]...for me, that I had not been tied into before that....

Were there ever any conflicts between your roles as...as a wife and that of an employee...[inaudible]...do you have children?

Yes, I do have two children. And of course there were conflicts. There always are. [chuckling] Well, I can remember when my younger daughter was about eight or nine years old, I suppose, and we were living at Fort Meade. And the house in which we were living had been constructed as a sort of a fire-safe house, all of the door frames and what-not, were metal. And I was teaching in Annapolis, which was about twenty-five miles from where we lived. And so I had this long drive back and forth, and I had bus duty, for Heaven sake. I had to go either earlier to be there when the youngsters came in, in the morning. So we were all up hurriedly getting dressed to get out to go to school one morning, when she was standing too close to this metal door frame and turned around suddenly and banged her mouth into the door frame and cracked off the corner of her tooth. Here she is with this piece of tooth in her hand, weeping and moaning, and I have twenty-five miles to go to work and my husband and I had this BIG argument about who was going to take her to the dentist. He kept saying if he was in the military, his time was not his own, and I kept saying, "But I have to go twenty-five miles while you can get off for an hour and a half and take her to the dentist while for me it will take a whole day. I don't have a substitute, I have to go to work. [chuckling lightly] So we had this BIG argument and finally, I won, and I went to work and he took her to the dentist. So there are always those kinds of conflicts when you have multiple obligations. I can remember being up at five o'clock in the morning baking cupcakes for my daughter to take to school, or being a girl scout leader and they expected me to sleep in the woods. I like being outdoors, but I like warmth and I like indoor toilets. There are certain things about Girl Scouts that I just could not deal with very easily! So there are all those kinds of things that you have to do, and thinking about what is best for your family. But because we had those years in the military, we were a very close family unit, and military people, I think in those days—I don't know how they are now—but in those days they were a very special breed. Because we were all away from home, we were all away from our families. Children do have measles, you do have the men would leave and go to the field as we would call it. Which would have been a maneuver, which might have taken them away in place from a week to six months and you never really knew. And so there you were, in many cases, in a strange place, with children with all kinds of things that were demanding your attention, having to figure out how to cope with them. So I've had a lot of that, and juggling the job and family, which was just another part of that. But I have been fortunate in having a good family and both my children and my husband were very cooperative and supportive of things that I have done in my life. And so it has made it easier to deal with. [inaudible] [chuckles]

What constraints did you see on yourself as a woman during...during your experiences?

Well, that's really difficult for me because as a black female, I never had a question about whether I was going to work or not. I was ***always*** *going to work. I mean, I've worked since I was twelve years old. That was not a decision for me. The social milieu in which I existed, I think, was always very supportive of personal development on the part of women. I just...I didn't have that kind of constraint saying 'you are not supposed to do that.' And I grew up with a bunch of brothers. So, I was accustomed to riding a bicycle, boy's bike, standing up on the seat and hiking and climbing trees. So I just didn't feel that there were things that I shouldn't do. Now I look back over it, and I understand the gender-shaping that was occurring, in spite of that. I didn't know it then. So there probably were constraints that I didn't understand. I'm sure my choice of profession might have been different if I had been.... And I didn't make a choice of profession, let me put it like that...I fell into a profession. If I had been white and if I had been male I might have done things with my life that I didn't do, I was shaped to do, but didn't know how, if that makes any sense to you.*

Do you feel...and so, do you feel a stronger connection to your race than you do your gender?

Oh, absolutely! Absolutely, I'm black first, yes, no question about it. No question about it.

Okay, you mentioned that you worked since you were twelve. What various things did you do?

Well, when I was twelve years old I worked as a domestic. I washed dishes and washed walls and put clothes on the line.

Was that here in Huntington?

Here in Huntington, yes. I babysat, I guess that was all that was available. And then I worked at the Sylvania Plant in Huntington for awhile. Which was probably the only non-domestic job that I ever had.

What kind of plant?

Sylvania...it was a plant that was making...I never really was quite sure what we were making. There were electrical devices, light bulbs, no, I don't think there were light bulbs. At the time I was there it was in the post-World War II years and we were probably doing devices, electronic or electrical devices that were going to be part of the war effort somewhere. But I never saw it. I have a little thing with wires on it and I put little sleeves down and welded it and I passed it on to somebody else, and it was, it was an assembly line. It was hard, you know, the problem with the assembly line, you don't see the finished product. The only thing that you know is your own little part in it. And what that thing is that peeks out at the other end, I had no idea. And how it was going to be used. And of course, I wasn't very inquisitive in those days either. So, I didn't even ask.

As a child, what rules did the community church, other organizations, have in shaping your experiences?

Well, some of my early memories of the church were of people coming to our house because we had a big yard for church parties. And I can remember the [inaudible]...I must have been a tiny child, the lanterns that they hung for the church parties. And I believe that they used to make apple butter probably as a fund-raising project in the church, and I remember the quilting frames that they used to set up in the house, and I think that they ladies from the church would come and they would help to make quilts. And I remember some of the early ministers and their families who would visit from time to time. Then more active church experience that I had, was after our family moved from 28th Street to 16th Street. And the teacher that I told you about, Miss Mae Brown, was a very active member of the 16th Street Baptist Church, and so I followed Mrs. Brown to 16th Street Church. And the church in those days was a very, very much a part of the community. Sixteenth Street Church had a playground, there was vacation bible school during the summer. There was a choir called the Little Jewels, and I have no voice at all but I sang with the Little Jewels as a, as a kid. And there used to be I guess, two or three, two services at least on Sunday and then there was a, what they called first the BYPU, which was the Baptist Young People's Union, I believe that met at night. And there were always activities for holidays, there were Halloween parties with the judging of costumes. And there were Easter Sunrise services and Christmas programs. And I think now that children were taught to be on stage, we were taught to, not to be on stage, a certain sort of presence, a sort of a dramatic delivery, because we all had parts in those Christmas programs. I can see the angels and we were wrapped in sheets for angels and we were, the fellows were always the Three Wise Men wearing their bathrobes to be the Three Wise Men. And we all had a little two-line part or so, we would be up on Easter Sunday for Sunrise Services, doing our little parts in our little plays. And the same thing for

Christmas. So the church was a very, very active part of our lives in those days. And extending beyond a religious message, there was a, there was sort of a feeling of community that was engendered by being a part of the church at that time. And people, part of that is we all lived within probably a ten-block radius of one another. And you walked back and forth to school and church, and so you were very respectful of your elders because you had to speak. I can remember, if I was out of humor and didn't want to speak to people, I went down the alley. Because I knew that if I walked down the street and didn't speak, I would be in deep trouble. And so I could hide by going down the allies by not having to speak to people and the story wouldn't get back home about my being rude or discourteous or so. So there were very important parts…and I must say here, too, that the school also played a similar role in our lives. We were very closely tied into school in those days. You went to graduation, not because you had a child who had a child that was graduating necessarily—you went to graduation because everybody went to graduation; that was a part of what you did in the community. When there was a play or any kind of program at the school, they never had to worry about an audience, because the community was the audience. And I can remember noticing when I went back to West Virginia State College to work, how the audience behavior of the students had changed. When I was a student at West Virginia State College, we had what we called Chapel, in those days. And we went probably three times a week. We went on Sunday evenings, we went on Wednesday, which I'm sure was a sort of a transformation of prayer meeting, which was traditionally on Wednesday, but we went to Chapel on Wednesday's and we went again on Friday. Now the Chapel was a sort of a convocation. Sometimes there were national and I won't say world-class speakers who were brought in. At other times campus organizations at West Virginia State College, had responsibility for the Chapel program. For example, if you were a member of a fraternity or a sorority and your organization had a founders day, then you would be responsible for a program for founders day. So we learned a sort of polite listening, questioning, being quiet-behavior, which was sort of an extension from the kind of thing that we had had in our community through our church and our school. And when I came back to West Virginia State College, I was amazed, first of all, you had had these wonderful programs and getting the students to come was very difficult. You could only get them there almost if you made it a requirement, a class requirement. And in the last years that I was there, their lives were cut up into fifty minute segments and I don't care if the good Lord himself was up presenting the Beatitudes or whatever, at ten minutes to the hour, the students would get up and leave! And that sort of thing was unheard of when I was growing up, church services, which weren't cut up into fifty minute segments in those days either. If you went to church, you might have spent the day there. And you didn't dare leave until it ended because you'd get backhanded by somebody if you did. Maybe your mother and maybe a neighbor, I mean, who know. But so, there were changes, yes.

Why do you feel the school and churches roles has changed? And if so, it's not such a good community effort now and what do you feel the affects are?

Well, I think there is a loss of community. Part…it may have been inevitable, given lifestyle, given transportation patterns, which broke up communities and took people at distances, television. I mean, there are lots of diversions that are available to people now, that were not available at the time I was growing up, that interfered with the kind of behavior that I'm talking about. So there was that closeness. And it was a different…it was a different time. There was a different relationship to the word, I believe, than there is now. See I'm just two generations away from slavery. Many people even my age, are three, maybe four. But my grandfather was a slave and I lived in a house with his wife and his son and daughters. So I'm very, very much tuned into that. My grandfather couldn't' read, well, he read, they taught him enough so he could spell out a few words from his bible and from his lodge book. But for those people, the word, both the spoken word and the written word was very important. I think almost in a mystical sense, it was important. And I believe that we have lost that kind of connection now. And that makes, made a difference in the way we responded to, to the

church, to the way we responded to a convocation, even, it was difficult for, for us perhaps, even though. My husband and I often talked about the kind of people who came through West Virginia State College, [inaudible].... But people, Lansing Hughes, people that I now know, were of national and lasting importance. I didn't understand that, but that didn't stop us from sitting there, because we had to. We had really no choices. It wasn't simply because we wanted to do these things either. But we had been trained differently, our expectations were different, our obedience factor was higher. When we were told to do something, we did it. And often unquestioned.

What projects have you been involved with lately?

Many projects. I just completed a few months ago, something I called "Our Mt. Vernons", which was sort of a cut-n-paste job of information that I drew from applications of sites in the National Register. And that was very interesting thing I learned a lot, from simply doing it and from reading the material. I'm currently engaged with Dr. Rita Wicks-Nelson in a project of interviewing black female retired teachers in West Virginia. And we hope to move with that this summer. I'm engaged with a project for developing a reunion of faculty, not faculty, but staff and former campers, at Washington Carver Camp which was a black 4-H camp in Fayette County in West Virginia. I'm involved with a project to try to bring together some men who were a part of the civilian conservation corps, black, in West Virginia in the 1930s and the 1940s. I am writing a play. [chuckling] I have started a novel. I have a series of short stories that I am working on. I just finished an article for Goldenseal that I called [inaudible]...which is about three men with West Virginia connections and were [inaudible]...and it kind of goes on and on.

Overall, what are you trying to contribute or trying to do with your projects?

I don't know. I suppose it's that.... I think that black people in West Virginia have contributed a lot to the development of this state, that they have, under some very severe pressures, lived full and rich lives, and have with in a really masterful way, met all kinds of challenges and have triumphed. And I suppose what I want to leave behind me, is the memory of some of those people, people that I have either known personally or have learned about in stories other people have told me, or have read about somewhere along the way. And I just want to put together whatever I can in whatever time that I have, information about those people.

Okay.

END OF TAPE 2

Tell us about your knowledge and relationship with the so-called father of black history, Carter G. Woodson.

Well, I don't really have a relationship with him—my husband does! Carter Woodson and my husband's grandmother were brothers and sisters. And he has memories of him from his youth and from his coming to visit and what-not. I simply know about him from an academic point of view. I never met him personally.

What was your role in bringing the Carter G. Woodson statue to Huntington and why is this important to you?

Well, my actual role was, in the doing of it, was miniscule. But some years ago, at First Baptist Church, I suppose it was about fifteen years ago now—they had an activity, I've forgotten whether it

was a black history celebration…it may have been. And they invited some of us down to speak, who had grown up in Huntington but now were living elsewhere. Frank Cleckley was there, I can't remember who the other people were there. But Bobby Nelson was in attendance. And it was shortly after the Sixteenth Street name had been changed to Hal Greer Boulevard. Now you have to know that I have a constitutional opposition to sports, so anything I have to say about sports, you have to take with a grain of salt, okay? But I have always been upset about the choice of heroes for us, as black people. I'm not sure that simply because one achieves a certain kind of notoriety by being a public person that one ought to be considered a hero. And when the street was named for Hal Greer, I commented at that meeting, "We also had a long term association with Carter Woodson in Huntington. Carter Woodson came here as a young man, he graduated from Douglass High School, he came back and was principal of Douglass High School, his family lived in Huntington—not all of them, but his mother and father are buried out in Spring Hill Cemetery, he had very close relatives here. And throughout his career was in and out of Huntington visiting his family and what-not, and I thought if we were to choose a hero for our young people, my question was…why would we not choose a scholar?

Why do we always have to choose our heroes from sports figures? And Bobby Nelson, who was the mayor, was sitting with us during that meeting. So Bobby Nelson, then, left that meeting and a short time later he caused the Carter G. Woodson Foundation, as it later came to be called, to come into being. He agreed that Carter Woodson was a man who was worthy of Huntington has his adopted home, of being recognized by this adopted city. And so he put together that committee which labored a long time in order to raise money to build that statue and to develop other activities that they thought were worthy of following, or that did follow, the same kind of academic interests that Carter Woodson would have championed, whether it was publication or scholarship or providing scholarships for young people, or so. So, I perhaps had an involvement in that initial meeting, but on the long-term, the credit goes to the people here in the city who brought that into being.

You mentioned that you were working on plays and short stories. What are the subject matters of these?

Well, somewhere in the conversation earlier, somebody talked about the uses, maybe it was Susan, to which Oral History could be put. Well, I have found in moving about the state and talking with people, is that there are wonderful stories that people tell me or that I read about. For example, one of the stories that I have written is called On This Rock. And I wrote that story based upon an incident which is reported in the history of the First Baptist Church of Charleston. They wanted to do some repairs on that church. I believe they wanted to build a new church. I think that's what it was. They wanted to build a new church. The old church was situated at the end of a dead-end street, and the city of Charleston was thinking at that time, that they might continue that street through to the next [inaudible]. So they would not issue them a building permit. So the people of the church built their church anyway, but they built the church under the guise of doing repairs on the old church. They built a new church. They built it around the outside. Well, I sort of turned that around and had them build a church on the inside. And the people who saw it thought they were simply doing repairs. And at the end they removed this structure and they had a totally new church. So the things that I write about are based upon people or incidents in West Virginia, that I had met. Another of the things that I had wrote, I was telling you about my grandmother a few minutes ago, who was, who was married to the slave, Anderson Radford. My grandmother's family came from just across the river in Ohio. My grandmother was the child of [inaudible]…now that means they were freed slaves. They came, part of the family came from North Carolina and part of the family came from Virginia. They were all on both sides, on the other side of the river about 1850. Because that was, in those days, this was slave territory, that was free territory. The oral history of the family is that they were sent into the Ohio Valley as free people because they were the children of a slave owner in the south who sent them to Ohio to be free. And you must know that that story is told over and over and over again in every

black family. It did indeed happen. Well I was doing some research the year that I was down here at Marshall, I was doing some research about families in the valley, and I could trace my family only to a certain point. And when you're black, that happens. You get to the point where you get slavery and it's just awfully hard to get beyond that, because slaves were not named in the census records. They were counted for purposes of taxation and for voting privileges for the slave masters. But you might have had black male or some, or Muletto male or Muletto child or black child. And that's all that you had, you have a number. So when I was doing this, this research on my family and I got to a point where I couldn't find historical information beyond that point, and maybe I could have, if I had really scraped hard enough, but I didn't. I got to a point that I just got frustrated a little bit. So I then wrote a monologue, because I felt that I can go historically to a certain point, and from that point on I will do it creatively. And so I imagined what happened beyond that point. And I wrote a monologue that I don't talk a great deal about, but my husband thinks it's the best thing I've ever written. It is of a woman who comes to the banks of the Ohio River with her children, and she is waiting to cross the river because she knows that freedom is on the other side of the river. And she sort of remembers how she got to this point and why she is there and what she is going to do. So the things that I write are based upon these, these people that I have met or that I had imagined, things that could have happened. And when you write, characters take on a life of their own. And they move you in directions that you don't know that you're going to move in. You may start out writing one thing and end up totally somewhere else. Because that's where the characters want to go and as a writer, you're simply the conduit, you go wherever they tell you to go. But my things were all regional. And mostly, not always, but mostly, about women. If you want to be bored with one after awhile, I'll read you something. I just happen to bring one with me. [laughter]

You had mentioned that as a child you went to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Is there any connection between that and the Scott Community Center? What was the time...what was the years or the time you spent there?

I can't...I can't tell you about the connection at all. I don't know that. I had not looked at that. I went to Sixteenth Street Baptist Church because that's where Miss Brown went, who was my first grade teacher. Actually, as an adult I went back to First Baptist Church and it was at First Baptist that I was baptized. I lived down the street from Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, so it was within easy walking distance, and there was this active program, youth program, that drew me there. But beyond that I really can't tell you a great deal.

You also mentioned, when you were talking about West Virginia State, about renaissance people, such as Langston Hughes and Paul Roberts.

Paul Rosen?

Uh-huh. And did they ever come to the school, or did they have any connection to this area, or...?

That would have been a lot of people of that ilk who came in and out of West Virginia State College during its entire time. John W. Davis, who was the president of that college for thirty-odd years was a marvelous educator, politician and was well-connected. And if you look at some of the, of the faculty rosters of West Virginia State College, you will find the names of people who gained educational prominence or political prominence in years after. So it was a place where there were just lots of intellectual things happening. One of the men who was a long-time faculty member at West Virginia State College, was a man who's name was Mathis, who was a writer, who was a part [inaudible].... So yes, there would have been connections with lots of those people.

Were there any certain people, historical people, or just people in your life in general, who served as a role model or had any impact on your life?

Oh, yes, there were many. I've already mentioned Mrs. Brown. Another would have been Miss Myra Fairfax, who was a teacher of English at Douglass and it may have been Miss Fairfax who caused me, subliminally, not consciously, to go into English as a major myself. She was my homeroom teacher, so I was with her from the time I was in the seventh grade through the twelfth grade and continued to see her whenever I would come back to Huntington after that. And her sister was one of the dormitory matrons at West Virginia State College, so she was often visiting her there, and so I would see her from time to time. But she was both physically beautiful, she was a brilliant woman, she was a librarian and I have always had this great love affair with books. So she was very important to me. There was another woman. Her name was McDaniels. And during the summer, they used to open the library down at Barnett School, so you could come in and out and read and borrow the books. And I was always a sort of introverted, withdrawn sort of child, again because I lived in books with words and what-not. And I can remember spending hours and hours in that library with Miss McDaniels, reading during the summer. [inaudible] Remember the Oz? Not just the Wizard of Oz. They don't know that there was just a whole wrath of those books. So I spent a lot of time reading with her. Then, the third person I think who had a great influence on me, was a man who's name was Frederick Layner. Dr. Layner was an Austrian Jew, who got out of Germany just at the beginning of the Holocaust. Dr. John W. Davidson, whom I mentioned a moment ago, met Dr. Layner I believe, and recruited him and he came to West Virginia State College as one of the first white teachers. He taught German and I took German and in those days, teachers had sort of student assistants, and so I became his student assistant. And I used to go over to his apartment and grade papers for him, or with him. And he talked with me about scholarship, he talked with me about traveling in Europe. He talked about the kinds of things that he was doing, and he was always translating or writing or doing something. And so he inspired me greatly, as a scholar. There was another faculty member at West Virginia State College, a Dr. Agnes Brawley who was one of my English teachers who got her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in English. And in those days, the program in English as were many of the programs at West Virginia State College, was very, very rigorous. It was patterned after a doctoral program, in the sense that we had to be admitted to the program after our sophomore year, in the way that as a doctoral student you are admitted to candidacy. We had to take comprehensive examinations, both oral and written, in order to graduate. And I had to write and defend a senior essay before all of the staff of the Department of English. My senior essay was on Daniel DeFoe. And when I now see that Maw Flanders and things of that sort, are being made into movies, I had to read and do all them on original paper when I was graduating from college. And Dr. Brawley was my advisor for my senior essay. And on Saturday morning, we went up to, to the administration building and [inaudible]...English faculty. Now, you're got Ph.D. from Harvard, you've got Ph.D. from Yale, we've got Ph.D. from Columbia, we've got Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. This was the English faculty. For which I am defending my senior essay. Thank God for Dr. Brawley because she kind of brought me through that. So yes, there were some people who had been important influences in my life.

What were your experiences at Douglass High School?

Good, but I was an indifferent student at Douglass. I'm president of the procrastinator's club! [laughing lightly] So I probably would have done better at Douglass if I had been a little bit less than [inaudible] the way that I was, staying up the night before studying for an exam [inaudible]...turn in the next day. I think I had a reasonable experience at Douglass. Times were different then and our expectations were different. And I suppose, at that time, if we graduated from high school at all, we were to have been considered very fortunate in the times. Many of our parents had not had the opportunity to go beyond grade school at all. So, my experiences were good. I was at Douglass

during the war years. We had, as I had mentioned earlier, a close-knot community. I had good friends, I had a [inaudible]..-turning father who did not allow me than a few paces away from home. So, there were lots of things that I did not get an opportunity to participate in. I remember, the night that I was graduating from high school, County Baise or somebody like that was playing at a dance, a public dance downtown. I had planned to go but I did not tell my father that I was going. We were just all, after graduation, going to go out and do something. Now, he was willing to tolerate that. But somehow between the time I got home after graduation and got myself ready to go, and the time that I was supposed to go, he found out, and where I was going. Now, I suppose one of my brothers told him. So, but they probably didn't think that I should be there, either, but they didn't have the authority to stop me. And certainly my father did. But at any rate, he stopped me, and I never, and I often thing about that and often regretted I never got to go hear Count Baise as I would have done, had my father not interfered at that point. But I think mine was a reasonably good experience in high school.

Are you still involved, today, in the church? And in what areas?

No, I am not.

What factors do you think contributed to your desire to want to like, to become involved in projects, like in Oral History and....?

I think, last night Dr. Ewen was talking with me about what you all were doing. And she was saying that your project would be multidimensional, including photographs of things, not just conversations. Which made me stop and start thinking about what my past really was. And I began to think that, I believe I wrote when I was in high school for our school yearbook. I think I wrote my class history or class prophecy or something like that they used to do. Now, I had said over and over again I had no calling and no real ambition and I just kind of stumbled along. It may be, however, that one is directed more than one thinks that one is, all right? And it may be that I, my involvement was something that was going to be in spite of myself. But I told you that I grew up in the home of stories about my grandfather, who was a slave. My grandfather was dead before I was born. But he was a living presence in our home, because we talked about him. I also grew up at a time when history, the history that was taught to us in school, was very white. And...and it was also very male. But particularly it was very white. And it has taken me a very long time to understand or to recognize the difference between what was true and what I was being told. I came to understand that history was a matter of choice. That the decisions about what to be included and what was excluded were decisions that somebody made. And that the history of my grandfather, the slave, which had been excluded were as true as the stories of Washington crossing the Delaware, or Abraham Lincoln walking five miles to return two cents...that all of us have learned about. And somebody decided that what had happened to my grandfather was not important, and should not be told. I suppose, I always knew that in the back of my head, but I didn't know what to do about it or how to do anything about it. [inaudible]...in the 70s as many of us my age encountered the Alex Haley's <u>Roots</u>. And I can remember hearing Alex Haley talk about what he had done and how he had done it and what had inspired it. And I thought about the stories that he talked of hearing his relatives talk about in Henning, Tennessee, and that they weren't so different from the stories that I heard my family talk about on 28th Street in Huntington. But because I was involved in this academic career and was working pretty hard, trying to learn what to do as a college administrator, I really had little time to pursue any of that. And I must say...again, now this is hindsight and as my husband always says, "hindsight's 20/20 vision." I look back on those years and I recognize that I probably should never have been a college administrator. I probably should always have been a faculty member, where I would have had the opportunity to pursue my academic interests uninhibited and unfettered by the need to do other things. In the 1970s, these two ladies that you were hearing, Louise Anderson and Doris Payne, along with a fellow, Drewey Jenkins and Mrs. Lucille Meadows, who recently died, from

Fayette County, came to me and said that they wanted to do something with the history of the West Virginia State Teachers Association. Which was the Black Teachers Association that existed in the state from the 1890s to the 1950s. And the NEA was making an effort, or they were pushing the NEA, however it was, to recapture the history of all these black state teachers' organizations. So they asked me if I would do the history of that organization. By that time the organization had been out of business for maybe twenty, twenty-five years. But there still a number of people, such as Mrs. Garrison, still living, who had been an active part that association. So I thought about it for awhile and decided that I would do it. And that was a real task. Because Miss Fairfax, who had been the secretary of the organization, was deceased by that time. Nobody in her family could find any of the records that she had kept, any of the minutes, nothing. It was absolutely gone. Mr. Dickinson, who had been the president down at Bluefield State College, had been the historian of the organization and had collected over the years, a number of papers. But there had been an explosion in his office down at Bluefield State, and everything that he collected, had been destroyed. So we came into the writing of this history of this organization with nothing, nothing! So these ladies put out the call and they gathered in programs of meetings, they had an annual meeting. They had put out a little journal from time to time, but sporadically, and there weren't many around, but they gathered what they could find on those. They provided me with a list of names of people who had been members. And we traipsed around and interviewed these people who had been members of the organization and drew what we could of information about this. At this point I was dismayed to find that the organization had only been out of business twenty years, but so much of the information had evaporated in that short period of time. But that the oral history was invaluable. In the book I began it with something that Miss Garrison [Memphis Tennessee Garrison] said, where she talked about where they would stay when they would go into a community to hold their annual meeting. What you may not know is that black people didn't have hotels...and were not welcome at the white hotels. So she said, "We stayed with each other, and stayed with ministers." And she said, "Somebody would tell you in one community, 'When you get into that community, you go and see brother so and so, and you tell him that I sent you.'" And this person would kind of take them in and keep them overnight or so for those meetings. So I learned through that long and painful process, that oral history was essential in trying to put together the story of people who's history had either been systematically or accidentally destroyed, and that we would have to rely on it and that it was fleeting, because if we didn't go about interviewing, many of those people, they would be gone, and the information that they had with them, would be lost along with them. And so I began to get involved, at that point, only slowly and accidentally, with oral history. And then somewhere, I supposed, in the 1980s, the West Virginia Women's Commission did a book called <u>Missing Chapters In History</u>,--don't know if you know that book. But one of the essays done by Dr. Deutsch here at Marshall, was on Ann Kaplan Clagg, who was a poet and a playwright. I read the essay and I knew some of her relatives in Charleston. So I went to them and said, "Gee, I read this essay about Ann Kaplan. I'd like to read her plays." And her cousin, I think it was, said to me, that her plays had never been published. And I thought, never been published? Well, we need to figure out how we can publish these plays. So I went to the Humanities Council and said, "Will you give me some money to publish these plays?" And they said, "We don't pay for publication. But we're getting so many requests from about the state, about black history. Maybe we can work out a deal with you." This was Dr. Dowery. "We will, if you'll do a project, a black history project, in the state, we'll tie this, the publication of this document into that black history project and we'll publish the plays." And so we did that, and I got involved through the Humanities Foundation and those plays, into what has become a kind of all-consuming passion on black history in West Virginia, and [inaudible]...on oral history because it's, it's just so important in trying [inaudible]

END OF TAPE 3

....what are the greatest obstacles you've ever had to overcome? Due to your race, gender and in this region?

Well, I really feel that I had a blessed life. I'm my biggest enemy. And part of that is conditioning. From the society I didn't even know was happening to me, but nevertheless was there. But I have a basic insecurity that makes me...it doesn't always stop me but it makes me doubt myself a great deal. And so I go through a lot of personal agony when I'm going to do anything. And sometimes it stops me. And I...if...I think that's been my biggest obstacle. I think that I could have [inaudible]...procrastinate. If I didn't do that, if I were better disciplined.... But those are internal things, externally induced but internal I think is where my problem lies. I can't blame society. I can blame society in saying that if it had not been for the society, I wouldn't be the way I am. But that's a poor excuse. Convenient but poor.

Do you have an [any?] experiences of discrimination because of you being a black woman? Like actual...?

Well, of course, I do, of course, I do. Many. Perhaps the...see, my husband often says when he was growing up here in Huntington, he never knew that he was poor, because everybody else was poor too. And he couldn't get a job during the summer, but that suited him fine, because he could play all summer as a child. So he didn't bewail that. But when I was growing up, I wanted two things. I wanted to have a job that I didn't have to wear a uniform, because everybody that I knew, except for the school teachers, everybody else that went to work almost, worked either as a domestic or in some kind of service job. If they were lucky they got to run the elevator downtown, or they worked in.... Here at Marshall I can remember, as a small child, my mother worked in this building, used to come in the side door that goes down to where the AB print shop is on the side, there was a cafeteria there. She worked first as a maid making beds in the dormitory, and then as a dishwasher down in the cafeteria. And on Sunday's, when there was less work sometimes, I would come down and stay with her while she worked. For, for many years, that was our only contact with Marshall, that as people did the laboring jobs here at the institution. So it is hard for any black person of my generation not to have grown up with, without being scarred by race questions. My upbringing was different, a little bit different as a small child, because I lived on 28th Street. I lived in an area where there might have been fifteen black families. My next-door neighbors were white. I played with white kids when I was growing up. The family across the street was white, but that was 'Aunt Kate', who was across the street. Her name was Kate Gould, so Dr. Gould and I often...she was his 'Aunt Kate', too. She was really his 'Aunt Kate', but she was my 'Aunt Kate' because she told us to call her 'Aunt Kate'. And my family had been in that same spot. Now we've got the oldest deed in the community. They've been there for over a hundred years. At that point, they had been there for thirty or forty years. So we had long, deep roots. I did not live down here in this area. My association was up there. And, though we moved down here later, my formative years were different. And that made me, I think, a bit screwed up in the head a little bit, too. But I wanted, as I started earlier to say, I wanted a job that I didn't have to wear a uniform to go to. And I wanted, I never wanted to go to a fancy restaurant, I wanted to go to a drugstore or the dime store and sit up at the counter and eat. Because that's what I saw. I never saw anybody go into a fancy restaurant outside the movies or so. But that's what I say when I went downtown. I saw white people sitting at a drugstore counter, eating, or in the dime stores there used to be lunch counters. And I saw them sitting at a lunch counter. And so I wanted to do some of those kinds of things, as well. So I felt that kind of discrimination. The Orpheum Theatre, it's not the Orpheum any more. What is that theater? It's above 10th Street on 4th Avenue.

The Camelot?

The Camelot. No up the block.

The Cinema?

The Cinema…oh, okay, that was the Orpheum Theatre when I was growing up. And the Orpheum Theatre sat blacks in the balcony. And I can remember, I was going to see a movie that was there, but you had to go in this little side door and down a long passageway and what-not, so there was always a kind of embarrassment, of really feeling like a fifteenth class citizen when you darted in that little door and got tickets and went up and sat in the balcony behind the post, all the while trying to see the movie. So you, you didn't escape from it. But I think perhaps the bitterest experiences that I had, well, when my husband went into the service. And in those days, just after World War II, the military he was in started out as what they called anti-aircraft, and then they introduced missiles. And when they introduced missiles, they introduced the deployment system. This was a major city like Washington, D.C. Then they would establish all around Washington, D.C. like this. This is Washington. And all around Washington, [inaudible]….

She placed a cup in the center of the table and surrounded it with other objects.

Right. The center cup is Washington and these other objects were missile sites. And the theory was that the missiles would be there to protect, to intercept any incoming missiles or to protect this city from attack, even though that they thought there was likely to be Russian attack all over the United States. And so there was this whole series of military plans to protect the major cities. So one of these major cities was Norfolk, Virginia. Well, let's start back at Savannah, Georgia. He went to Savannah, Georgia. He really went to a place that was called Camp Stewart, which was about forty or fifty miles from Savannah. And we couldn't find any place because of segregation, we couldn't find any place that was close to where he was stationed, to live. And so we lived in Savannah, which was fifty miles away. Now he was just getting started in the military. And one of the jobs that a young officer had to do, was to take [inaudible]…in the morning, which was at 5 o'clock. Now we are an hour away from the base where he has to be at 5 o'clock, which meant that he had to leave home at 4 to drive there to be there at 5. Now if you back that up, if he has to leave at 4, means that we have to get up about 3 in order for him to get dressed and get himself organized and to go there. So we left there and came up, now in the deployment of this military tactic, to Norfolk, Virginia, because Norfolk was a primary shipbuilding area. And so, as one of the protected cities, Norfolk was one that was ringed by these anti-aircraft sites. So we go to Norfolk, his battery, as they called the smaller unit, was stationed over on the Norfolk side, but Norfolk, you know, is on the bay. And Ft. Monroe was the headquarters for it. And in those days, they now have a tunnel, but in those days you had to take the ferry, which was about twenty minutes from his site over to Ft. Monroe, where all the headquarters was. Well, I came home from Savannah, I had a small daughter at that time, about…she was about five or six months old. And I was going to go back down and stay with him at Norfolk. But we couldn't find a place to live. Now, where he was in Norfolk, they were surrounded by beach areas and this was in the winter time. You know what a beach area is like in the winter time, everything is empty! Okay? Apartments and rooms and houses. But not for black people. So there was no place there that we could live. So they had guest quarters over at Ft. Monroe. So I went over to live in the guest quarters while we were house hunting. The guest quarters for the white officers—Ft. Monroe is an old, it goes back to Civil War—beautiful, brick buildings, ivy covered, lovely place. The white guest quarters were these beautiful old brick buildings. You know what we were living in? We were living in what we called temporary quarters. We were in rooms with two army cots pushed together for a bed, with a bathroom somewhere down the hall. It was in February and I stayed there…. And the temporary quarters were kind of wooden buildings. I mean, they were one-story, wooden old converted barracks buildings. I stayed there for awhile and I thought, "I can't, I don't have to tolerate this with a baby. I am going to go home." So I came back. My mother and father were always generous. They always kept a house that was big enough that I could come home and stay

one day or one month or one year, and they tolerated me. So I came back home with my child, and stayed until somebody that we knew at West Virginia State College had a small four-room apartment, and the fellow was a traveling salesman. They had no children and his wife was alone much of the time. So they invited us to come and live with them in this four-room apartment. We had two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom...small. And a small living room, a tiny little place. But they shared that apartment with us. Now, coming from West Virginia, one thing was that you never, you could do in West Virginia, you could vote, and we didn't have to sit on the back of public transportation. Well, one day I got on the bus out in, we lived out in the county in Norfolk, and I was going into downtown Norfolk. This was the days when buses were segregated. So I got on the bus and I'm unaccustomed, first of all, to being segregated on the bus. But I sat in the back of the bus in the seat that was just in behind the back door. And there were seats up front, in front of me. But there were only single seats, not two seats together. So somewhere between the time I got on the bus at home, going into town, these two white women got on the bus. And they came and asked me to get up and give them my seat. Now, there are seats up front, but they wanted to sit together. And there were no two seats, I mean, there weren't two seats, so they asked me to move. So I sat there for a moment thinking about this. Now, this is humiliation, par excellence, okay? I sat there for a moment thinking, "What shall I do?" I have no idea where I am, if they put me off this bus, because I knew where to get on the bus and where to get off! I didn't know anything in between. And probably didn't have money to pay the bus fair anyway, if I'd gotten off. And we were like, it was a like a long distance from the place that we were living into town. I mean, we're talking ten miles or so. So I sat there and thought for a moment and got up and gave them my seat. That was my most humiliating moment. So, you asked me about segregation and racism. Those early experiences, trying to deal with the military.... And uh, my husband took it better than I. When we left Norfolk, came up to Washington, he was in Maryland. And by that time, they had introduced the weapons with the nuclear warheads. He was in the first battery in the Washington defense area, that had a nuclear warhead. It was a VIP battery. Whenever they brought in foreign dignitaries, foreign military men, as they always did, they would be training officers from all around the world, and they would bring them in to see this site and the nuclear capability. The commander of that battery was transferred and my husband was second in command. He was the person who should have stepped into the command of that battery. They took him in behind closed doors and said, "You know, we cannot make you the commander of this battery. It has nothing to do with your being qualified or so, but you're black, and we're bringing dignitaries from around the world to visit this site. Now we can't bring them to a site with a black man in control." They weren't saying black in those days—probably saying negro. So they moved him from that and put him in another position to get him out of there. So when we talk about what it's like, what I have experienced and things as a black person. Oh, sure, many times.

Just for some factual information, can we have your mother's and father's name, your husband's name and your children?

Okay, my mother was, my father was Willard Radford, my mother was Amelia Radford, my husband is Nelson Bickley, my children are Renee Bickley Hill, and Ancella Bickley Lighters.

Is Radford spelled R-a-d-f-o-r-d?

Yes.

Okay. And so is there anything else you would like to add?

No, I don't think so.

[Dr. Ewen and others talking in background]

I wanted to ask, since you are a writer, what others have influenced your writing?

I don't know that I can point to a single writer who has influenced my writing. I am very impressed with Toni Morrison, for example. I think she...she's a marvelous writer and I like her use of black material. But I think that there are some absolutely wonderful black writers who are writing now. I think that Lucille Clifton is just absolutely a wonderful writer. And there are, there are many others, Paul Marshall...I mean, there are many really fine writers now, and I don't think there is one.... In fact, what I do probably, I may dignify it by saying that it's writing. I don't really know what it is. And part of what I worry about sometimes, is who wants to read what I write. Then I kind of decided that's not important. I won't worry about that any more, because it is different, I think, from the things we see in other places, or things that have been published. And I sometimes feel that I would do myself an injustice by measuring myself against some of those other people. So it may be best that I don't read anything that other people are writing, at least until I done what I want to do.

And another question that I had was, you mentioned the fact that you all were in Germany during the Civil Rights Movement. Was there any difference in the way they treated you, the Germans, to the way you are treated by citizens of the United States?

Yes, there was. Though I don't know what it's like now, I haven't been back to Germany since that time. And I suspect that race relations have deteriorated there just as they have every place else. But when I first went to Germany, we lived in a little town by the river. And they had only seen-, you must recognize that this is a small town, like maybe Barboursville or so. And many of those people live and die in those communities without ever going any place else. That pretty much...I mean, they may go into Frankfurt or someplace like that, to shop or do whatever, the next big town is then. But they seldom, a lot of the old people don't move far away from home. So we were oddities. There had only been black people in that community once before, and that was during World War II. They had had some black soldiers who were prisoners there, up in the town square somewhere. And so when we came, they hadn't seen black people, many of them before. And so they were kind of entranced by us. We would go out walking sometimes, and they would stop and touch us, you know, people who had-, I had no idea who these people were. And talk to us and I guess they wanted to see whether or not the color was going to [chuckling] rub off or so. But I felt no unease at all. We lived with a German family. And they lived downstairs and we lived upstairs. We spoke a little of the language. There's a lot of difference between school book German and what they were speaking. But we managed. But we got along beautifully during that time. And I have a lot of really good memories of the time there. This was also true with our white colleagues. We were all Americans there. And I still hear...in fact, I have a white Godson, I still hear from the family. Not frequently, because once you come back and get pulled in other directions. But the military family was very close and very supportive. And so, yes, it was a good experience. Very good experience.

Would you actually say that, at that time, it was better for black people in Germany than here?

Well, but you see, when I went there, my experiences were very [inaudible]...in the United States. I had not traveled widely here. I'd never, and still haven't, lived in Chicago or Washington, and I don't know what life would be like in a black society in a big city. So I can't, I couldn't make, even then, those kinds of comparisons, because I hadn't had them. Even when in Savannah and Norfolk, I was going through these miserable racial experiences. I was surrounded by supportive, warm, loving black people. We had a school mate in Savannah—again, the West Virginia State College Tentacles, at that time, spread all over the country. And we had a school mate in Savannah whose family literally adopted us. And uh, I mean, on Sunday night they fed us and if I were in any kind of difficulty, though I was far from my own family, that family was there. The people that we lived with in Norfolk

were school mates and wonderful, warm, supportive, beautiful, friendly people. And so there was this cocoon, this black cocoon. In fact, when we went to, I guess when we went to Savannah, was it Savannah? No, it was, later we were going to, to Texas. And in those days, as I said earlier when I was telling you about the teacher's association, you didn't just go out and travel as a black person. Because you never knew where you were going to sleep. So we learned all kinds of survival mechanisms traveling across the country. I mean, we had camp stoves—we'd stop and cook on the side of the road. You had to figure out where to go to the bathroom. You had to figure out where you were going to sleep, if you were on a long trip. And it was as Mrs. Garrison said, in about the teachers, people would literally, it was like going by the underground railroad. Somebody in Greenville, South Carolina would say, "When you get to so and so, you go see so and so at this address and tell him that I sent you." And we would go there, and that person would either take us in to spend the night or tell us where we could go to spend the night or where we could eat or so. So you got hop-scotched all through the South and we went south. And I've never been really in the deep South. We drove south, crossed over to Texas. So we're going through Mississippi and what-not. And stopped at Vicksburg and places that I'd never been before. So it's difficult for me to say that the experience in Germany was better than...I certainly felt freer. And that's something, if there is anything that I hate about this moment, I hate being, not feeling free to travel. I hate...I have some friends in Lincoln County [West Virginia] and I want to go out to Lincoln County but I don't feel terribly free and comfortable about driving into Lincoln County. I think, "What will happen if I come back at night, if I have a flat tire, if I get lost...what am I going to do and what are those folks going to do to me, wondering around Lincoln County". I hate that. I hate, and I never felt that when I was in Germany. I felt that I could, even though there was a language barrier, I felt that I could go anywhere I wanted to go and that I would be reasonably well received. And I haven't always felt that here in my own country, and certainly right here in the United States.

END OF TAPE 4 – BEGIN TAPE 5

[inaudible]...how did you feel [inaudible]...did you feel like it was a big loss to you?

Oh, I can tell you what I was thinking almost of not so much Malcolm X but certainly with Martin Luther King, and absolutely it was a big loss. Absolutely, no doubt about it.

Did you feel like their loss, especially Dr. Martin Luther King, that it really set back the progress that we were making at that time?

No, I don't think so, because I think he was in the throes of changing himself. And you never know what would have happened, had he lived where he would have gone, what direction he would have taken, very clearly after Cicero and some of those other things that had happened, the whole civil rights movement was changing. And whether, what would have happened, had he lived, is just a matter of speculation. We don't really know. I guess I hadn't really thought about it being set back. I thought it was a terrible tragedy, something that should not have happened. And I feel the same way about Malcolm X—they were minds and [inaudible]...hearts that we should not have lost, should not have had to go on without. But again, sometimes you accept that things happen that way because they happened that way. Maybe that was what was intended, maybe that moved us in a direction, makes us face things that I think that he would begin to do, recognizing that the visible aspects of racism were being tackled, but the subtle, hard-core kinds of things were not yet visible and we hadn't worked-, and still haven't, worked out ways to deal with it.

Since you were involved in the civil rights movement, because I know [inaudible]...how do you feel since you weren't able to [inaudible]...part of that?

Well, you see, you have to…you're…you're putting the civil rights in, in a bracketed time frame, and a bracketed set of activities. I was not a person who was carrying signs on the streets. But people served in different kinds of ways. And I think that's what you have to think about for yourself. That time, that…that consuming visible kind of activity is not there for you to do now. That doesn't mean that there isn't work for you to do. There is a great deal of work. And I think that the work that I have done and that I hope, if the good Lord's willing, I have a little time yet left to do, is a different kind of work. But again, people serve in different ways. And I think that what you, what you have to do is to look at what your part in this great human drama can be. And it may be, it may be in a different place and in a different way, a different time. I just think that the demons that we have to face change forms. And you have to wrestle that demon any way that you can, and that your contribution, you look at the past in order to chart the future. And that your contribution is yet to be made and may be made in a way that is a little bit different, but just as important as the past. That's it. So I wouldn't think that, that the work is all done. It is not…it is not. And they used to say in Sunday School, "Brighten the corner where you are." You may brighten your corner in a different way. You may write the great American novel, you may, I mean, there may be things that you will do that will make a significant contribution, not the same contribution, but a significant one.

When [inaudible]…thrilled with some accomplishment. Were there one or a few that stand out?

I suppose the thing that I'm proudest of, is that I had two wonderful daughters, and we have a good relationship. I love being with them and I think they enjoy being with me and we are friends. And I think that's…we've been able to make the transition from not just mother and daughter to friendship, and that doesn't always happen with parents. Sometimes you get fastened into those roles, and you never get out of them. And though I find myself creeping back into them, I mean, I do have the tendency to try to tell them what to do, recognizing, or forgetting that they're women in their own rights. But they're my chief consultants, they and my husband. And I suppose that we have been able to maintain that level of our relationship—it's probably the thing I'm proudest of.

Also I would like to know, do you have visions of the future, and what, where do you think [inaudible]…community support? Do you think youth today have the same concept of community support? Where do you think they could go for…encouragement?

I bounce back and forth between being very despondent and being very encouraged. Last week I was driving back from somewhere. And I heard [inaudible]…at the National Press [inaudible]. And he was talking about sort of what all the frontiers of the future…. And the whole suggestion that there has to be a kind of a spiritual and humane sort of development for mankind. And that's, that's where the next struggles have to be. And I guess I have to feel sort of encouraged by that, to think there is hope. I certainly feel that there has to be a cultural revolution in the United States, that we're not ready to undertake yet. I believe that there are some very, very difficult times ahead. And how we will get through those times I don't know. I think that the cult of materialism in which we had been ensnared for the life of this country, has just about come to its end. And that in order to change that, you have to change the mindset of human beings. And there are some people who will hang on to the old mindset with teeth and toenails, and moving them beyond that is going to be a, you talk about bloodshed, it's going to be a difficult, difficult move for, for people to make. Whether they'll…they'll certainly not make it in my lifetime. But I was listening again to public radio and they were talking about the mineral deposits of the world and richest mineral deposits of the world are in Africa. And though they're battling with one another in Africa, steadily for awhile, but they're going through the throes of revolution just like any other country goes through. They're behind because of…we kept them that way. But whether or not they are going to willingly give up their mineral deposits to enlist

the rest of the world in the next hundred years, I don't think so. And it's fine to tell folks not to cut down the rainforest so we can drive three cars and they can have an oxcart? I don't think so. So how you, how you get through the American mind, that your children are not going to be better off than you are, that everybody's not going to have fifteen cars and two swimming pools. I mean, it just is not in the long term. And when I say long term, I'm talking [inaudible]. I'm not talking about tomorrow, I'm talking about real long term. I just don't believe that that's going to happen. And I believe that in order to see us through that, that there will have to be major, major cultural changes. And I don't know how that's going to happen. I don't know, for example, how you can tell [inaudible]...about not having abortions when you use swimsuits to sell everything from toothpaste to sanitary napkins, practically. I mean...I went in the library. They had a poster in the library encouraging people to read and it had "Take a book to bed," no, "take an author to bed." Now if that isn't...if that isn't a sexual message, I don't know what is. How can we use sex to sell everything and then say, "Oh, no, not abortion". That's wrong, just say no! How can we do that? I mean, if we're going to talk about this kind of behavior on this one side, it has to be all permeating. I mean, you've got to talk about it over here, too. You can't isolate these things. And that's what we tried to do in American Culture; he tried to compartmentalize things. And I just don't think that life can be compartmentalized. I think it slows one thing to another, one country to another more and more. And somehow [inaudible].

As far as school integration went, do you feel like the social [inaudible]...do you feel like the blacks may have lost anything from being integrated? Like [inaudible]...education and things like that?

Yes, but it's too easy to answer to say, "Yes, we lost by integration, and the problems we find are so [inaudible]...now are directly related to integration", that's too easy. There are other things that happened. I mean, the whole community movement. When I grew up, my father never owned an automobile. And I suspect that there are, half the families around us, never owned an automobile either. Which meant, and the school bus went far from home. The community was small and close and supportive. Communities separated not just because of integration. We separated because of the automobile, we separated because of the change in employment patterns. We separated because of the change in marriage patterns. I mean, there's whole lots of things that caused communities to splinter. And once a community splintered, when I was a kid, the teachers passed back and forth in front of my house, going to work every day. They walked too, for the most part. They may have, some had cars, but many of them walked. And so, there was that kind of communion you got; you went to the same churches and what-not. So you interacted with one another on many different levels, not just in school. But when you passed them on the street or they passed your house, or you ran into them in the grocery store or something, catching the bus together. You stood and talked while you waited for the bus. Those things don't happen. That's not related to integration. That was related to other kinds of changes that took place. So it seems to me that the question is, and again, as I said earlier, many of us had a kind of a reference for the word and for learning, that has been lost. We didn't have television, our attention span was different. Our inquisitive nature was kind of kept in check a little bit, because we didn't know what it was like to have disposable income. The money that we had for the most part was used to take care of the necessities of life. So there were a lot...there are a lot of economic, cultural, social changes that have taken place that would have happened anyway, that were totally unrelated to integration. So the question is now, given that fact, those facts, and given that we are where we at this time, how do we build community, how do we...not necessarily restore, because I think that we have to stop looking backwards and bewailing the fact that something isn't here. But how do we figure out how to go on? How to instill values and concern among people? Now, what are the kinds of laws and rules and concern that we need to get us through these next years. I guess sometimes people think that schools don't function because the homes don't function. Well, so what else is new? If the ones

don't function, don't sit around and bewail it—do something to take the children from wherever they are and move them. I get tired of hearing black students say, "Oh, because of segregation". Again, what else is new? I came up under a segregated...I can sit with my fingers in the air forever and say, "I can't do thus and so, because I am segregated against". What I say let's do, is find out how to get around it. And don't let it stop us, let's see where we need to go. So, I think we need a new [inaudible]....

[inaudible]...in the black communities, though, as far as the young people are concerned. Especially with real problems with drugs and [inaudible]....

Dr. Ewen: Dolores, I am supposed to have a meeting for CSEGA. Can I ask that two questions be answered? We've probably got about ten, fifteen minutes left on this last tape. I'm interested in going back to Jamaican mother. Because one of the things we're interested in, in this ethnicity stuff in Appalachia, is African Americans are usually [inaudible]. And I'd be interested, [inaudible], so I'd be interested a little bit in some of that ethnic analysis of your background. And secondly, any of the history that you have of the start of The Alliance for the Collection of Dissemination of Black History. And thank you very much. We've got this big meeting.

Let me talk about the Alliance first. I was talking earlier about the Ann Flag book. At the first conference with the trade-off Humanities Council, that they would help me publish the Ann Flag plays and I would do a conference on black history. That first conference was dubbed in Charleston with Reverend Ron English at First Baptist Church. And Ken Blue came to the conference, brought some students here at Marshall. And when the conference ended, Ken, okay dear, take care. Ken invited us to come down to Marshall to hold a second conference. And the conference has been here ever since. As, as we developed that conference, we began to think that we really needed some way in the state to come together as a group of people who were interested in black history. And just as we have said with Oral History, we found that our elders were dying and that people were disposing of things. When the old folks died, the young people come in, the first thing they want to do is get rid of mommy's junk, so they can get the house for themselves. And just as I had learned that to put together the history of the West Virginia State Teacher's Association, we had to rely on things that were in personal possessions, whether they were programs or pictures of memories or whatever. That we needed to begin to say to people, "Don't throw away your church histories, the fiftieth anniversary history, don't throw away the graduation program from Douglass High School from 1926, because it tells us who was in the graduating class. Don't throw away your kid's kindergarten teacher's name, valentine or something, until we get a chance to look at that. So we felt that it was important to save these things. We thought it was important to try to figure out how we could share this information, collect it, share it, preserve it and share it, so that people.... There were some wonderful people who were coming to the conference from all out of state, the Panhandle, Wheeling, and so, we put together this organization with the long name, the Alliance. It was probably Ken who came up with that name. The...in fact, I think we had big arguments about what we were going to call it. But we thought it was important that we would say that we would collect, that we would preserve, that we would disseminate this information. And so we had a kind of a loose-net structure. We really didn't have secretaries and presidents and all of that, but we did come together maybe once or twice a year and talk about what we wanted to do, and to begin to collect and try to archive some of the material. We published one book, [inaudible]. What we found is that the papers that were being presented at the black history conference, which had become at that time, an annual affair, that there was some wonderful information that wasn't available anywhere else, that was being presented at those conferences. And what we wanted to do was to put out some publications, so that people would have, in hard copy form, the presentations or at least some of them that came out of those conferences, so they could then expand upon them, use them as teaching tools, or whatever. So we

published one document that was proceeding from the first two conferences and then Dr. Johnson has edited some of the other papers, and I suppose somewhere along the way we'll try to get those in print, so they'll be put in the [inaudible] to people. Now, my Jamaican mother. My name is Ancella. I'm named for my Jamaican grandmother, who was also Ancella. And my daughter is, also carries the name Ancella, so that there are three of us. My mother and my father met in Cuba. And my father had gone to Cuba, I guess he went about 1913 or so. And he stayed fifteen years and came back in 1928 and brought along with him, his Jamaican wife. We talk in, in black history about the [inaudible]...the dispersion of African people outside of Africa. So my part of the [inaudible]...was my dispersion or my mother's dispersion, her family, to Jamaica. Slavery ended in Jamaica about 1832 or so. So her immediate family were not slaves, probably her grandparents were. When I went to Jamaica, they lived in a little homestead in St. Ann's Parish in Jamaica. And one of my mother's sister's name was Maria Melvina. And she hated that name, Maria Melvina. But they called her Oney, because she was a first child who was born after her parents acquired their little homestead. And they called her Myoney. Because it was their own piece of ground. And Myone got shortened to Oney. So she was always Oney. [inaudible] So, there isn't much else to say that my parents met and married in Cuba and came to the United States in just...1928 when my father came back home. Just the time that the Depression hit. So they were out of work and very poor for a long time. Fortunately, his family had property on 28th Street, and so they always had a roof over their heads. So we didn't have a lot else. And it's funny, I was laughing not long ago. My mother taught us a prayer when we were kids. And she spoke with an accent. But when you are accustomed to an accent you don't recognize that it is in accent. So I never recognized that my mother had an accent. And she had...she didn't speak like in the Jamaican [inaudible]...but she did have a, certainly the Jamaican sing-song kind of accent. If you've ever heard Jamaican's talk, it's a very distinctive speech expression. But anyway, my mother taught us this little prayer, that was 'Gentle Jesus, meek and milk, look upon a little child, pity my simplicity, and suffer me to come to thee'. Well, she said, 'Simplicity', it sounded to us as if she was saying simple city. [chuckling] So I was listening to my niece's, one of my niece's children, saying their prayers some time ago, and he was saying this prayer. And he got to that and he said, 'Pity my simple city'! [laughing] And I knew immediately how he had learned the path that he had taken to learn that prayer. So one of the things that I'm writing, is called <u>My Simple City</u>. Because of my mother and this prayer. But growing up in a...with a mother who is foreign, in a place where there aren't any foreigners, and it was difficult for her and it was certainly difficult for me, there was, in the black community when I grew up in Huntington, there was nobody who was not from this area. Either they were born in Huntington or they had migrated to Huntington, but they were all Americans. My mother was the only one who was not. Until during the war, they...they brought some Jamaicans over to the United States as field workers, because Americans were being drawn out of agriculture and into the war effort. So they used people from other countries to replace them. And so there was a fellow who's name was similar to mine...his name was Ancel Taylor, he was a Taylor, and he came from Jamaica. And he was the second Jamaican that I ever knew who came to Huntington. And he stayed here maybe a couple of years. But that also makes me think when we're talking about integration, I have a cousin, Oney's son, who was as brown as I am. And...but he had very straight hair. He came, he came to the United States as one of these agricultural workers during the war. This would have been about 1942, '43 or so. We took him downtown to the Keith Albee Theatre, it may have been the Keith Albee, one of those theaters or The Orpheum, stood across the street while he went over and bought a ticket and went into the movie. He could do that. It wasn't a matter of being colored, because he was my color. He was as brown as I am. But he spoke with an accent. And there's a peculiarity in the United States, as long as you weren't an American black, you could do anything you wanted to do. So it wasn't a question of color. It was a question of their prejudice, I guess, against the American black people. So you had a question, I think?

[interviewer pausing for thought] Have we talked that much?

It was so far back now! [laughing]

Well, you were talking about…I was just thinking about the future of the black community…

Oh, okay.

….in this country and what's happening, you know, with all these problems they're having.

I don't know. I wish I had a crystal ball that could look into it and say that this is, what's going to happen. I just think that somewhere along the way that [inaudible] has to come into play, that we have to say, "This far and no further. I'm not going to do that." And that means a matter of self-determination and self-will. I am not going to live my life this way. Therefore, I just won't do this. I just will not take drugs, I just will not handle guns, I just will not. And I don't know how we get to that point. But I think that's where it has to come. I remember hearing Nikki Giovanni, she came to West Virginia State College while I was still working there. And somebody asked her about being a role model and she said, "I refuse to accept the designation ***role model****. Because that takes the pressure off of somebody else, for their behavior, for them controlling their own behavior and say that they do that because there wasn't anybody else." And her feeling was that as human beings and as black people, we have to take responsibility ourselves. And I can't blame somebody else because I do something. Somewhere along the way, I mean, I have to recognize all of the evils of society, that's true. But somewhere along the way I have to recognize that I am the final authority in my life. I have to make the decisions. And that's where we have to come to one day.*

One of the things that we discussed over lunch was the, the other women that we're studying too. What was it? Was it this strong centrality or some like, just like they had a compass inside them that…that told them where to go and what to do. And…do you see a difference in, you know, self-esteem or inner guidance in youth today, than…. I mean, where did it come from?

I guess I'm going to say…women maybe look at the world differently. I don't know. I've had this discussion with Dr. Rita Wicks-Nelson and we haven't really come to an agreement. I think she totally disagrees with me. I hate to say this, but sometimes I feel that black women have kind of been the lynch pin of our race. And that when black women no longer perform the traditional roles, things fell apart. Does that mean that I'm being like Micki Giovanni says, we shouldn't be. That I put the responsibility for what happens to us on black women. I hate to do that. At the same time, I recognize that maybe the world isn't equal. Maybe there's certain kinds of things that we have to do. And maybe, just as they're talking about from the womb we begin to lead, train children. Maybe we have to start saying things to these kids early on. [inaudible]…the responsibility is maybe bigger than you are. I don't know. It's awful, isn't it, to say that women bear the responsibility for…for what the culture…. Maybe those women did. What I found, my daughter is doing her dissertation [inaudible]…between 1920 and 1955. And it's interesting to see that gender determination and behaviors change from decade to decade. And there was a point where women, black women were not taking the primary leadership role. You would have found them president of the NAACP, but they were in the background. They were the 'behind the scenes' thinkers and planners and movers and shakers. Later on they began to take…..

END OF TAPE 5

END OF INTERVIEW WITH ANCELLA BICKLEY

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