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(Agent of Receiving Organization)

Mary M. Elston
(Donor)

May 5, 1997
(Date)

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WITH
MRS. MARY M. ELSTON**

May 5 and June 6, 1997

Bluefield, Virginia

Interviewers: Rita Wicks-Nelson, Ph.D. and Ancella Radford Bickley, Ed.D.

Transcriptionist: Ms. Gina Kehalia Kates

RW-N: It's May 5th, 1997. We're in Bluefield, Virginia, talking to Mary Elston, who is telling her life story to Ancella Bickley, and to me, Rita Wicks Nelson. Okay.

ME: Well, I was born January the 14th, 19 and 27, in Bluefield, West Virginia on Brown Street. (RW-N: uh-huh) And uh, my mother died when I was about 5 months old. And my grandmother raised me. And I think my grandmother must have been about 64 or 66 at that time. She was a small woman, beautiful woman of stature. And I dearly loved her. Then my father married when I must have been about...3 or 4, or 5, I don't know. And I had a lovely stepmother, who loved me and my brother, but my grandmother just wouldn't let me go. So they were forever bickering. And I was a happy child. I was born 10 years after the brother next to me. And I had an older brother and sister. So we had a very nice life, and...

AB: There were three of you altogether?

ME: Four of us. (AB: Four of you) An older brother and a sister, and the brother before me was 10 years older. So I was their baby. (RW-N: You were the baby, yes.) We had a farm in eastern part of Virginia, Pamplin, Virginia. Tobacco was our main crop for our finance. We had an aunt and uncle who had a family and they lived on the farm. I stayed in Bluefield, West Virginia and attended school in the winter. The day that school was out we'd always go to the farm. And I got to tag along because my cousin there was an adult. They were all grown up, and I got to tag around all over the place and in the tobacco fields and I learned to pop the worms and do all the things that they were doing. I wasn't afraid of snakes or anything. And my uncle made me—his name was Samuel Tucker and my aunt's name was Liza Tucker. He made me a little whip and he taught me to use the whip. And I'm pretty good with a whip, picking things off and doing things. If you see a snake in a tree, you can just pick him off...with a flick of the wrist. I was more or less a little tomboy. I wore brogan shoes

and bibbed jeans. I got my hair cut every summer and it grew back down to sit on. (RW-N: mm-hmm) It grew awfully fast; uh, by the next time it was time to cut, it was long again. And I hated to get it combed.

So that was that, as far as childhood was concerned. And I think my grandmother took me to school when I was four. Because I could read. And I could write and I could do a lot of things. And, uh, she just thought, well, if I could do a few alphabets and with numbers and I could read a little bit, it was time to go to school. She turned us away, took me back at five, and I got to stay a little while. Then they put me out again, and then I went back at six and I got to stay.

AB: And this is in Bluefield, West Virginia?

ME: Bluefield, West Virginia, yes. And when it was snow on the ground, school wasn't out then, and my father was a short fellow, about 5'8", he would always carry me to school, [or] one of my brothers, on their back. And I didn't never miss a day; I was there. And some how or other, I don't know how I did two grades...but I did. And, uh, I graduated from high school, I think I was the valedictorian, yeah. Well, there was a big fuss because my best friend had a problem. And, uh, some how or other they switched it around and I got to be salutatorian and she got to be valedictorian, and I knew it was no way, because she couldn't make anything but D's in chemistry. And I didn't have any D's. We were all honor students, except the poor child just couldn't do her science. And, ah, we loved each other and we just had a great time. And it was nine in my class in high school.

AB: What was the name of your high school?

ME: Genoa. (RW-N: General High School?) Genoa...Genoa.

RW-N: Genoa, which was in...Bluefield?

ME: Bluefield. They tore it down. Uh-huh, yes.

RW-N: And this was a black high school?

ME: Yes, it was. And they had everything there. And J.C. Tonselor was my senior high school home room teacher the whole number of years that we were in there. And, ah, Mavdina Jefferson Howard was my, uh, junior high home room teacher the entire time.

AB: Who was the principal?

ME: At the time that I went there it was W.C. Spencer, I think it's his name, Chaney Spencer. And then it got to be Alphonsa Brown. Those were the principals at that time. And you may know some of these people, uh, Philip Jefferson. (AB: I don't think so.) Okay. Well, anyway, my elementary school teacher and principal was in high school teaching English when I took English there. And her name was Anna Shade. (RW-N: Shane?) Shade. (RW-N: S-h-...) a-d-e. And she married a James and moved to Philadelphia. And I thought she was the most beautiful woman with red hair, and I've always loved red hair. And I had red hair, but not like her red hair. And through the years it turned dark and I just kept on coloring it, trying to keep it red. [chuckles] So that's that.

But, uh, anyway, I...some how or other, my class was the last mid-term class in Bluefield, at the high school. And we finished in January of '45 and went right straight on to Bluefield State College. And I thought that I was going to take a pre-med course to be a doctor and my uncle had promised to send me to school. And after I had taken two years of pre-med course, and I went to see him and I was talking with him, he said, well, he didn't have any money and he looked at me and I don't think that I shall ever forget his face. I could see all of his teeth, just like with a lax mouth, and he didn't have any money. I said, "Well, I can't quit." So I went on back and I,

just continued to take the science courses and to finish. And I went to summer school. And there I met my husband. No, I met him in uh, let me think...I guess it was after January he came to school. And this was in 19 and 46, I believe, yes, '46.

AB: So you were about a junior in college when you met your husband?

ME: Yes. I was kind of in between because I went to summer school; I don't know where I was. [chuckle]

RW-N: You, you graduated high school in January of '45?

ME: Mmm-hmm, and met him in '46. And I was afraid to death of him because my grandmother warned me against all of these men coming back from the service that might have families over in Europe or somewhere, and to be aware of those guys and I was deathly afraid of him. He kept chasing and I kept running. [AB: chuckles] If I'd go play tennis in the morning, at 6:00, he would be there. I don't know how that man kept up with me, but he did. And then he would bribe the girls to get to play with me. And I was just furious with him. And he thought I was too skinny at the time, so he always wanted to give me lunch. Well, anyway, he just kept after me. We were going to the movies. And he was waiting to catch the bus to come to Bluefield, Virginia. And my sister-in-law thought he was such a fine fellow and he said, "Hello," and then he asked where we were going or something. Anyway the conversation led to the movies. And they used to have a bank night. [Phrase edited out here by ME] He said, "Would you mind if I walk along with you?" And of course, she invited him to sit with us. Now, that was just detrimental to my temper, to my temperament. And he even tried to hold my hand. That was just terrible, that old man trying to hold my hand. [laughter] He's seven years older than I am. So anyway, it just went from there. And he asked if he could come over some time, and of

course my sister-in-law answered everything I didn't. And I had another friend that I liked – I thought I liked. But he just stayed right on my case. And so I think we must have been out one evening and he asked me would I marry him. And now, I couldn't seem to get away to get in the house, so I told him yes. But I laughed to myself; I said, "Now, I'll just fool you and tell you yes."

RW-N: And you were only about what? Eighteen, nineteen? (ME: Uh-huh, yes) And he was seven years older, which would seem [inaudible].

ME: Yes, like an old man to me. [laughter] Anyway, I had this boyfriend that was in the service; his name was John Roland. And I thought he was so handsome. He was a strange looking fellow. He had red hair.

AB: Very fair skin? (ME: Yeah) I knew John Roland.

ME: You did? John Roland, okay. John Roland. (RW-N: I'm not going to get into this!) [laughter] Okay, John Roland came home and he came over [to Bluefield State] to walk me home. So I said, "Edward," I said, "John is walking me home." And Edward walked up to him and he says, "I'm walking Mary home so you may walk along with us if you like." [sound of feigned exasperation] That's the type of man I married. So I told him yes when he [asked me to marry him], and then he bought me these beautiful rings. And I put the [rings away]. Eventually I put the ring on my right hand because I didn't want Miss-, Dean Myles to think that I was engaged.

AB: Were you living on campus?

ME: Noo. Never did. And so she called me in and gave me a good talking to and I [put the ring] on my left hand and all the girls teased me. And I actually had a diamond bigger than anybody's

in the school, the teachers. And I just didn't know what to do, or how to handle that. And then we didn't get married until November because his checks weren't coming and we decided we'd wait. Everything I thought I wanted and saw, the man bought. We were walking along the street and I saw this beautiful bedroom suite. It was in Clark's Furniture, and he bought the whole thing, the lamps, everything, and had it put in for me. Well, we went to get married and I wasn't old enough, and my guardian went with [phrase edited out by ME] to Tazewell. And, they wouldn't give us a license because I wasn't old enough and because she wasn't my legal guardian. So I went back to the hospital and told them they made a mistake, that I was twenty-one. And we got on the bus...and I had to get married right away because my sister-in-law had told the next door neighbor...that we were going to get married. And I was talking to her nephew; he was the fellow I thought I liked. So I couldn't go back home single; I had to go and get married. So that's why I told them I was twenty-one. And so we got the new blood test papers and we went to Pearisburg and got married. And when I got on the bus, my best friend was sitting on there. How in the world did she know it? (AB: chuckle) She was sitting on the bus. We married at the Thanksgiving break. And that was November the 26th. And he has just been such a lovely husband. And he wanted these four sons and I laughed and I said, "You wish." [laughs] And I told him I didn't want any children, not right now.

However, I graduated then, let me see...from Bluefield State, May of 19 and 48. And then, uh, we had our first son in September '48. I refused to stop; nobody ever went to school pregnant. His mother could sew. I had the finest wardrobe. That's when they first start to making the dresses with the stomach out and the loop come across with the narrow skirts and stuff. I had a wardrobe, I can assure you, everything. Jimmy and I graduated together.

RW-N: Who's Jimmy?

ME: My oldest son, our first son.

AB: So you dropped out of school?

ME: I never dropped out; I told you I never dropped out! [AB: chuckle] We walked across that stage together.

AB: [laugh] You were pregnant when, uh, when you...

ME: Yes, I said we graduated together. (AB: okay, okay) We walked across the stage together.

And, uh, my husband finished like in two and a half years, the four-year work. And he graduated also that year, in August. [After graduation] I didn't do anything. I didn't work for two or three years. We had a new principal come to town and he came to our church. And I told him that I wanted a job, if he had an opening, I'd like to have a job. And his name was J. A. Hubbard. So, uh, he called me over and told me he needed a secretary and could I type. I told him yes and so I got to work a half a day starting in the year of 19 and 53. And then in September I had a full-time job. I told him I didn't like clerical work. I was trained to teach. Well, I had to teach one class to have that job...it was business math and you know that was simple to me. And then I worked full time for twelve years there. I taught all the sciences. I think they had general science at that time, biology, chemistry, and physics, and I taught all the sciences. I taught a remedial English class. And I had twenty-five young men who'd failed social studies and I taught them geography. They taught me about all kinds of sports and I taught geography through sports and it was the most fun.

AB: Now where was this school? Was it in, here in...?

ME: Here in Bluefield, Virginia. (AB: in Bluefield, Virginia) And the name of the school was Tazewell County High School.

AB: So you were teaching at an all-black school?

ME: Yes, all-black school for twelve years.

AB: And how big was that school?

ME: We had a total of three hundred. [phone ringing, interview interrupted]

AB: You were telling us how many students were at the school.

ME: We had a total of about three hundred or three-ten [this means 310] students and it was elementary and high school grades, one through twelve.

RW-N: Now, when you first went to the school you went part time working as a secretary?

(ME: Yes) And you only asked for a part time job?

ME: No, I asked for full time job. (RW-N: No...and they said...)

AB: That's what was available (ME: Uh-huh)

RW-N: But they didn't have any, and they had no teaching jobs?

ME: Well, I had to teach one course.

RW-N: You had to teach one course, right.

ME: Yes, to be the secretary.

RW-N: And that's the best they could give you at the time, they said. Okay.

ME: And I started out at the salary of \$200, full-time teacher, a month. And I drew \$164. And I always gave my mother-in-law \$60 for keeping my children; I had two children then. And I paid her first, always first. And I really didn't have to work. My husband did heavy equipment work and he worked several jobs.

AB: But you worked because you wanted to work?

ME: I wanted to, I went to school, I had to work! I just had to use [my education]! I couldn't go to school all my life and not work.

AB: What about the, the other women in your family? Your grandmother, any aunts or so, did they work?

ME: No, no.

AB: Nobody, none of the women? You were the first one to hold a job in [inaudible].

ME: I guess I was. I'm the only person who finished college and, uh, the first person to work. I worked as a teenager.

AB: Doing what?

ME: Well, I went down to St. Luke's Hospital and told them I wanted a job, and so they just hired me. Well, at first they just gave me a fly swatter and told me I had to kill all the flies. [RW-N: chuckle] And I was supposed to do the bathrooms but the student nurses had to do the bathrooms, so they said, "Well, if you see a fly, just act like you're busy and kill it and you can be paid for the summer." So I got my breakfast there and my lunch.

RW-N: Got paid for the summer.

ME: Yes, uh-huh. I just worked part of the day. But I was busy learning and doing and I went right on with the student nurses and learned with them.

RW-N: What were you learning? What were you doing and learning?

ME: Well, how to give injections, and how to take temperatures, how to make hospital beds.

RW-N: How did you do that?

ME: I just did it because I wanted to. How did I do it? I have no idea. These were all white

people.

RW-N: So you just went into their classes?

ME: It wasn't a class. They were doing, (RW-N: You were learning from them.) they were doing their working as they went from room to room, (RW-N: yes, right) or whatever they were doing, I just went with them. Not a class [inaudible].

RW-N: You were learning watching them.

ME: Yes, uh-huh. I did [whatever they did or learned].

RW-N: You did it too?

AB: You gave injections?

ME: No, they said, "Well, give Mary a chance; let her have a turn." So I had a turn. And I was sixteen and I had a turn.

AB: What, during that period, were you doing for, uh, recreation, uh, to just...sheer enjoyment?

ME: Well, nothing. We went to the movies occasionally.

AB: Where did you go to the movie?

ME: In Bluefield, West Virginia.

AB: Uh, was it segregated?

ME: It was the [inaudible]. Yes, it was segregated. Occasionally if it was some movie that we'd like to look at. I've always been a great person to read, I love to read. And my grandmother was living when I was in junior high and I always helped her with her quilting and with whatever, you know, whatever she was doing.

AB: What kind of books did you read? Do you remember any of the titles of books that you read?

ME: Lord, no. I read so fast I don't even remember the novels hardly. I write them down, I write them down.

RW-N: But you did read novels? (ME: Yes)

AB: Did you read anything like the Nancy Drew books or any of that sort of thing? Does that...she was a detective girl [inaudible].

ME: No, I didn't like detectives. I liked historical books, about countries and what was happening there, and I liked historical romances. But that's a recent thing. That wasn't then. It was whatever they had available for that age level.

AB: Did you go get those books from the library or what?

ME: No, I got most of them from the school library, from there. And poetry and stuff like this.

AB: So you read and you would go to the movies...

ME: The school was open the entire year. I could just go get whatever I wanted.

AB: Uh, tell us about the movie. Where did you sit when you went to the movie?

ME: In the balcony. The [movie] that I remember going to see was Gone With The Wind, and... I don't remember [others]. We used to see Shirley Temple movies, Jane Withers movies, those kind of things. And, uh, we could go on Saturday after we finished our chores. It was only a dime.

AB: When you say "we", who?

ME: My friend next door, [Ollie Banner]. It was another girl next door and we were about the same age.

AB: Uh, how do you feel about sitting in the balcony? Did that bother you?

ME: At that particular time, yes, but we didn't go very much. So if we wanted to see [a movie]

bad enough, you'd go on and look at it and sit up there fuming and just angry and everything.

RW-N: It did bother you?

ME: Yes! Well, I'll tell you what. I didn't sit very much in the movies at that particular time, in the balcony. If I wanted to go downstairs, I went downstairs. And the only time that they tried to put me out is when they were, uh, going through this integration thing. And I took the scouts, we had some-, well, I used to do the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts, work with them because I had all these-, I had sons. So we went to the movies and so we decided that we were going to integrate the movies and I told them, "Let's go." And they tried to put us out, I believe it was Old Yellow, and they tried to put us out and we just refused to go.

AB: And before that, though, you said that if you went to a movie and you were sitting upstairs and you decided you did not want to sit upstairs, you would get up and go downstairs and sit?

ME: Well, I'll tell you what. Yes, uh, my hair is curled; I had it done at the beauty parlor. But my hair was straight. (AB: mm-hmm) And I was fair-of-skin person. And they had no idea what to think. And really, I've never had a problem. I just did whatever I wanted to do.

AB: They never were sure you were black?

ME: I'm not sure, I'm not sure about that. But I didn't think of it like that. I just did what I wanted to do.

AB: But you knew that as a black person you were not supposed to be down there?

ME: Oh, I didn't think of myself as black. I didn't think of myself as anything, as any color. I just thought I was human. I just did what I wanted to do. I've always done what I wanted to do, and I'm still doing what I want to do.

AB: Well, what about, though, if you were going to an all-black school and your neighborhood was all black, was it?

ME: I didn't think of those people as black. We weren't allowed to say the word black. There were all colors in my family. And, uh, my father was so fair. It was a white man—he was a Jew—and my father, and they both wore these black suits. If I'd run down the street and thump him on the back and he'd turn around, it might not be my father. It might be the other man. And it was okay, he got used to me. And, uh, that was that. Yes, I went to all-black school and we didn't know anything about black and white schools at that time. I don't think I even knew anything about it. I don't guess I knew too much about it until I must have been a teenager, ah, maybe almost through high school. I didn't think of it like that.

AB: What about, uh, the kids that you knew in high school? I'm sure your hair was longer, your color was lighter. Um, did they give you a hard time about that, ever? The black kids?

ME: No, no, it was okay. One girl cut my hair and I told on her because I didn't like her, but other than that, I'd been happy for her to cut it. In assembly one day; it was the principal's daughter and my grandmother was great friends with them and they were from Pamplin, Virginia also, originally. I told on Clarice. But other than that I don't think anything happen to her, but I did. I hated to sic my grandmother on her.

AB: But the kids never called you names or never tried to fight you or anything like that?

ME: Mm-mm. I'm a great fighter. No.

AB: What about your brothers? Did they ever have any-, are they, were they the same color as you and what not?

ME: My sister was brown, had brown skin, but my brothers had, uh, light skin.

AB: And nobody ever said anything to them? Never called them names?

ME: I don't know what they said to them. They were grown up when I came along.

AB: By the time you came along....okay.

ME: They were already grown and gone.

AB: What about dances or church activities or anything like that?

ME: Oh, well, I went to church every Sunday with my father, from age 13 on I went every Sunday evening with him. We went in the morning to Sunday School. At first I went to Scott Street Baptist Church with my grandmother. And I've always had to do speeches and stuff like this and I took music and I hated to practice but I had to.

RW-N: What kind of music?

ME: Piano. [chuckles] And I always wanted to play the boogie-woogie, and I'd get beat up for that. And Mrs. Louetta Spencer was my music teacher. Do you know her?

AB: That name sounds familiar.

ME: Her people are from Institute. [Phrase edited out by ME] So she could hear me and she'd come over if she had time and beat me on the back. Then when [I went for my] lessons it was just thump, thump, thump on the back. I had to stop taking music because she went up to a dollar and I didn't have a dollar at that time. My father died and we had very little money then. I didn't take any more music, but I was glad not to. My sister could have taught me, but I wouldn't listen to her. And I'm so sorry today because when somebody needs a pianist I can bang for myself but not for anybody else.

So then when I was thirteen, I joined Mt. Zion Baptist Church. My father was a deacon there and I wanted to belong to the church that he went to. So I left Scott Street and went to Mt.

Zion. And Ollie Banner was my next door neighbor and her mother and father belonged there, so we went to church together and Sunday School together. Then in the evenings they had BYPU, and we'd go to that and then stay for church.

RW-N: BY...? (ME: BYPU) Black Youth...?

AB: Baptist Young People's Union.

RW-N: Baptist Young People Union.

ME: All right. [chuckles] And then when we would get out of church, well, we could stop at Franklin Dairy and get one of those ice cream cones that was real tall; it was made tall. And we liked that-, although it was [there was] a dairy close to where I lived on Williams Street in Bluefield, West Virginia. And uh...what else would you like to ask me about?

AB: Well, when your father died, uh, you were still living with your grandmother at that point?

ME: Yes, my grandmother was living and my sister was there and I was fourteen.

AB: Mmm-hmm. And, and you said but financially that was difficult, a difficult time for you?

ME: Yes.

AB: Uh, how then, how – did your grandmother work? How was it [inaudible]?

ME: Oh no, no, no. Nobody worked.

AB: How did you all manage?

ME: Well, my brother was in the Army, my oldest brother. He made out an allotment to us. But what happened, he made out an allotment up to us and it was so small, I went to the Red Cross after school every day and I sat there for two weeks to try to get that woman to talk to me, to explain to her that we couldn't live on that amount of money and that we needed the money increased. So, after two weeks when she couldn't get rid of me, she began to talk to me. And we

immediately got our check increased to \$89. And I've always been skillful in making a penny scream. So I would get day-old bread, and the vegetables off of the quick sale table. And at that time, sausage and hamburger must have been oh, not, twenty-, a few cents, you know. And I'd get a half of pound of sausage and a pound of hamburger and we'd make a meatloaf. And then we'd have beans and my aunt would bring us eggs, which she had to slip to bring the eggs to us.

AB: Why?

ME: She would come and wash. (AB: Why?) Because poor old Uncle Will was so stingy. [laughing] You want to know the truth, that's it. Anyway, she would come every Monday and wash our clothes and help us. My sister wasn't well and my grandmother was like eighty-something. And I went to school. And every day I'd go home and my sister would have the beans ready. And today my favorite food is still pinto beans. I had them yesterday. [laughing]

AB: So it was through the help of your brother that you all made it through that time? (ME: Yes.) And when you graduated from high school, uh, how was it that you could afford to go on to college?

ME: Well, I went to live with my other brother who had married. And they were helping us, also. And they...[we] took my grandmother to her daughter in Pamplin, Virginia, and we, and I sold all the furniture, everything.

AB: You were making the decisions for the family at that time?

ME: I've been making them for a looong time. I was making them at fourteen. [laughs] And I sold everything. And I banked my money. And I had nine hundred and eighty-two dollars and seventy-five cents. And, uh, I put that money in the bank. And I would walk a mile to save a penny. I have never in my life been without money.

AB: Where was your sister when your grandmother died? What, what did she do?

ME: My sister was an epileptic and she got out of control and we took her to Lakin, my brother, my youngest brother, and I. And when we got there, ah, they, uh, looked at us both and my sister looked so intelligent and I guess I must have been looking rather wild and so they said, "Is this the one right here?" and I said, "Oh, no." [laughing] And she just laughed; she thought that was so funny. She had some good times, you see.

RW-N: Now where, where was this?

ME: Lakin. (RW-N: Lincoln) Lakin.

AB: Lakin. Mason County. [overlapping voices]

ME: Lakin, West Virginia, that's where they took It wasn't any place to put anybody except insane and I couldn't take care of her, so that's where [we] took her. [ME is suggesting that although Lakin might not have been the most suitable placement for her sister, there was little or no alternative.] And, uh, I would go up about once a month on the bus to visit with her and I continued to get my eighty-nine dollars, because my brother was still in the Army. And I would put that money in the bank and used very little, as I needed to use it.

AB: Now, had you graduated from high school at that point?

ME: No. (AB: You're still in high school?) No. No.

AB: You're living with one brother and going to high school?

ME: Yes, I moved to live with him when I took my grandmother to, uh, Pamplin, Virginia. When I moved over to live with him, I had one year in high school. Then I went to college.

AB: And then you, you lived at home with your brother and commuted to college?

ME: Yes, yes, to Bluefield State.

AB: Mmm-hmm. What about your social life when you were in Bluefield State? Did you, uh, did you go to the dances, football games, or anything like that?

ME: Yes, mmm-hmm, I went to everything that they had. To the prom, to whatever they had, I went to it.

AB: As you look back on your high school and elementary school days, uh, were they good?

ME: Yes. I've always had a good life. I've been a very blessed person all of my life, a very good life.

AB: And you see your time at Bluefield State the same?

ME: Yes. Lovely.

RW-N: And why do you say that?

ME: Why do I say it?

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. Because let me tell you what you've told me. (ME: All right) You told me that you lost your mother early on, you told me that you were in high school when your father died (ME: sure), you told me that, uh, your sister had epilepsy, which is sad, right? (ME: yes) What else in this...?

AB: Well, the brothers were out and gone...and...

RW-N: You had to scrape for money sometimes.

ME: I even carried a ton of coal [under] the house so fast until you, you wouldn't even believe it. In buckets.

RW-N: So what, so what makes life good?

ME: Everything. I just feel good all the time. And I'm happy all the time. And I'm just so happy

to be alive. And I've had just such a good life, I've never been ill in my life, per se. I've never had an operation, I've never had any female problems, I've never had anything. And, uh, when I was talking to the fellows, they were always nice fellows, that were not imposing. And, uh, my grandmother always told me, "Don't ever try out anything, just one time you'll get pregnant." And I believed her. And my grandmother was a source of information; whatever she said was gospel. I believed that.

AB: This was your father's mother or your mother's mother?

ME: My father's mother.

AB: What did she look like?

ME: Oh...now, you want me to tell you, the first thing I thought of was beautiful. All right, she was a small lady about five feet, four-eleven, and she was, uh, very fair skinned, and she had blue eyes. And, uh, from the weather her skin tanned but she was still fair, very fair. And her hair was not exactly straight but nice.

AB: And what about her husband, your grandfather?

ME: Oh, you don't want to hear that. [RW-N: chuckle] All right. Well, my grandmother was married at the age of fourteen to this young man who was twenty-one from North Carolina, and he came to Pamplin, Virginia, as a school teacher. You see, when the Civil War ended, our people were taken-, my family was taken to Pamplin, Virginia, and they had a farm there. I don't know how many acres, fifty or more, it was more acres. But anyway, they had a farm there. And, uh, this fellow-, my [great] grandmother was a house servant and, uh, I told you about the coloration and what have you. So, he would have the men to come up and plow for her; she had no husband there. They would come and plow and they would plant the garden

and then [my great grandmother and her children] could keep it going. [The men] would come back and harvest things and put them up. And they built her a home there and bought that farm. And that home [was] passed on down through the family.

AB: When you say “they built the home,” who built the home?

ME: I think they were McKinneys, out of North Carolina.

AB: This was the white family in North Carolina?

ME: Yes. Irish.

RW-N: And when you said your family was taken to Virginia, what did you mean by that?

ME: My grandmother’s mother, who was a house servant, was taken to Pamplin, Virginia, and she was placed on a farm of her own. And he had his laborers—I don’t know what kind of people they were, they weren’t slaves any more—to come—I guess, you know, they previously were—to plant her whatever they had and then to harvest it.

AB: This was your great-grandmother that we’re talking about?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: And she was a house servant? (ME: Mmm-hmm) Am I to read slave house servant, or house servant....?

ME: Yes. Slave house servant, concubine. [laughs]

AB: She probably was the favorite-she was [overlapping voices] And her grandmother was probably the child of the slave owner. (ME: [inaudible] she was.) But he was taking care of them because he...he gave her the farm.

ME: You understand; I didn’t exactly know how to get that over to you. Okay, so...anyway, when Grandmother was fourteen, he bought her a husband up there. And he was a tall,

handsome...Grandmother told me he was a tall, handsome black man. And that he was to teach there. And I don't think that they got along very well. She never had any children by him. And meanwhile, there was another family, of Brightwells, and Willie Brightwell, my father's father, had his eye on Grandmother all the time, I assume, from what they said. And so it's a long, long story. I could you tell you forever, it's a long story, but anyway, she had her first child by him at the age of twenty.

AB: Still in Virginia?

ME: Still in Pamplin. (AB: Still in Pamplin.) And he had a wife and family also. (AB: Mmm-hmm) And then, I suppose, I don't know how many years later, three years later, she may have had my Aunt Liza.

AB: Still he's...with him?

ME: They're all very fair skinned and with straight hair. And some of them have blue eyes, some have brown eyes. (AB: mm-hmm) And he built her a home midway between town and the farm, a big white house, beautiful. So that's where my grandmother and her children lived and his children. He, uh, ran the husband off.

AB: Was he white?

ME: Willie Brightwell? Yes. And he ran the husband off and the husband went to Washington, DC. And uh, I don't think he was there but two years, or a year. He was not a farmer; he couldn't farm.

AB: Mmm-hmm. So how did your grandmother get from Pamplin to Bluefield?

ME: My father brought her to [live] with him.

AB: So she had a lifelong liaison then with Willie Brightwell?

ME: Yes, she would run off and go to [work]—she could speak several languages and she would work in Louisiana and different places, you know. Or maybe she would go to New York and get her a job as a servant. And maybe she'd stay there, get to stay a year or so, and he'd come and get her and bring her right back home.

AB: Where were the children when she went away?

ME: I guess her mother must have kept them. I really don't know.

AB: And do you also own this property down there?

ME: No, no, this property was sold, let me see...Lord, have mercy, let me see.... While I was in college, I believe, or pretty soon afterwards.

AB: Did your grandmother tell you that story?

ME: Yeah.

AB: How did she feel about—what happened to him? He died, I guess, eventually?

ME: No, he didn't die, Willie didn't. Oh, yes, he did. Willie died, but he had a son, Willie. And Willie, Jr. and my father are just, look exactly alike.

AB: They're half-brothers?

ME: Uh-huh. My father's short and, uh, Willie is tall. (AB: mm-hmm) And so, uh, she nursed both children.

AB: So what happened to Willie? This is really an interesting story.

ME: Well, he went to school, finished as a pharmacist, and he had the drugstore and a kind of like a grocery store there. And whenever we would leave Bluefield and go down there, we'd always go to Uncle Willie's store. And I'd have ice cream and whatever, you know. And nothing was integrated then either, you know, but...

AB: Now, tell me, did he have any problem claiming you as his niece?

ME: No, he came to our house every year and brought my daddy, uh, fresh meat and cured meat. He came every year. They were great friends, great buddies. And I always remember, he'd said, "Alfred, your house is better than my house. You've got more electrical stuff than I have." He'd come and stay the night, stay, you know, a few days. And Daddy would go down there.

AB: And he didn't meet any, any problems, any trouble, when we went down there?

ME: [inaudible] any trouble, no. And we always went to the store. And I took my husband and children, teen-aged children by to meet him. And Uncle Willie was eighty-three and married to a young woman and had a baby. [RW-N: chuckle]

AB: And you called him Uncle Willie?

ME: Well, what else did I know to call him? That's what he was. (RW-N: That's right.) And I took my husband and my two older sons by there, let me see...I can't remember how old they were then. I don't know...let's see, '57...it was in the year of 19 and 57 that I took them there. Let me see, forty-eight, yeah, because we'd been to Atlantic City and a whole lot of places. And we came back through there and I took them by the drugstore. And somebody else had bought the drugstore. And Uncle Willie was eighty-three years old and they told us all about him. And they said, "Do you want to go up to the house and meet him?" And I said, "[No]." I didn't want to meet the new wife. We didn't go there. We went there to meet him. But I took my husband and children there. No, it was a family, kind of like a family affair. And Grandmother had a nice home. Oh, I didn't intend to tell you but that's my grandmother's cut glass over there.

AB: I was looking, I was looking at that when I came in.

ME: I've got loads of that stuff, my grandmother's stuff. Some of it comes from Civil War time.

I'm going to sell all of this and all of my things before I get [interruption; recorder beeping]

RW-N: You can go on for a few more...are you done? [asking AB if her recorder is finished]

AB: No, un-un.

RW-N: I've got a couple more minutes on this.

AB: Okay. So your grandmother...she was well taken care of then?

ME: Yes.

AB: If she had cut glass and what not.

ME: She had everything and china, sure. And I've got all of it here.

RW-N: Why are you going to sell it? Or should I ask?

ME: Well, I don't think that my children can use it and I don't think they'll know the real value of it. And at least one of her cream and sugars, say twenty years ago, would have given me three hundred dollars. (RW-N: yes, mm-hmm) I don't know that it's any there. [refers to dishes being looked at] I have a berry bowl; that's a berry bowl. And that's sitting on an upside down compote. (RW-N: uh-huh, yes) And I just turn it around, do things with it, cause I use it all. Now this is not cut glass. That's my mother-in-law's; that's just an ornament. Well, what else do you want to ask?

RW-N: Let me, let me-this is going to stop in a minute anyhow. [refers to recorder] Let me, let me get myself straightened out here. When your mother died, you lived with your grandmother?

ME: No, my grandmother came to our house and she took care [of us].

RW-N: Your grandmother came to your house. And then your father remarried after that?

ME: Yes, and we all lived together [for eight or nine years].

RW-N: And you all lived together.

ME: All of us. In the same house.

AB: What happened to your stepmother?

ME: Well, my father and my stepmother were in the process of getting a divorce. And she had to leave because of her behavior. And I'd like to leave it at that.

END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1 - SIDE 2

RW-N: I'd like to ask you one question about that, when you said they were divorcing, when was this? How old were you at that time?

ME: Well, I must have been [twelve years old]...he died when I was fourteen. And so I suppose it was...

RW-N: Oh, that's right; it had to be earlier, obviously earlier. Right, uh-huh. So she then was not in your life any more?

ME: No, not for a while; after I was married we got back together again.

RW-N: Oh, uh-huh, okay. And she is not living now or you don't...?

ME: No, no. (RW-N: okay, mm-hmm)

AB: What about your brothers? Are they living?

ME: No. Uh, I'll tell you how we all got together. My brothers were all away and I was the only one left in Bluefield. My oldest brother lived in Newport News, Virginia, and he was one of those people who worked on the Enterprise, that aircraft carrier. And he developed lung cancer—he'd been in the service and everything—and he developed lung cancer. He died in 1964, I believe. [Before then] I would go to see him and visit with him. [When] my aunt died, my mother's sister, and when all the family came in, I looked at them and I said, "We never

see each other. Every time somebody dies everybody comes home.” And I said, “We never see each other.” I said, “Why don’t we have a family reunion?” And I’ve always been one to come up with all these ideas. So I said, “Everybody come back to my house next summer and let’s just do nothing but enjoy ourselves and get to know each other.” My sister was dead then; it was just my oldest brother and my youngest brother and myself. And my oldest brother’s wife was dead. He didn’t remarry. So, uh, everybody came to my house and we had a family reunion for about a week. Which was lovely. And then I said, “We’ll do this every year.” And so we did.

RW-N: And are you still doing that?

ME: No; they’re dead; I’m the only living person.

RW-N: No, now they’d dead now; you’re the living one now.

AB: What about nieces and nephews?

ME: Well, uh, my oldest brother didn’t have any children, my sister didn’t have any children, and my brother next to me had two daughters. They live in Detroit, Michigan, and the, ah, his wife’s name is Edna McKinney; she’s still living. And the oldest daughter is Emily Fay McKinney Johnson. And the second daughter is Shara Penelope McKinney Waites; she has four children. As a matter of fact, her oldest son is getting married this month and I’m supposed to go to Detroit, but I’m not going. I’m just going to send a gift. And-a-that’s that family. And we’re still close together.

AB: As you look back on your life, is there anything that just kind of jumps out at you as being an exceedingly important moment, or a...or even an exceedingly important person? Is there anybody who’s really made an impression on you in your lifetime?

ME: I really don’t know. I think...what do you mean, like teachers or...?

AB: Teachers or a friend...

ME: Well, the classmates in our class, those of us who are living, we're all still close.

AB: That's at Bluefield State?

ME: No, no, (AB: High School?) from elementary school on. (AB: Oh, really) We're still close.

And, uh, we have some of them are in New York and some are in Princeton, just different places.

And we're still close. And even in college, I'm still close with those people. And we

communicate. I used to think highly of Mrs. Othella Jefferson at Bluefield State. I liked her

because she was supposed to be a holy terror. And I liked just the opposite of people and things;

I got along well with her. [When] I found out that my son, my oldest son, wasn't reading at the

level he should have been reading in, I told her because she was [telephone ringing in

background]...the psychiatrist. [interruption by telephone]

AB: ...Mrs. Jefferson, I believe it was, who was, was she a faculty member?

ME: She was a faculty member. She had the Aesthetic club, she taught psychology, and she was

the director of Elementary Education, and she was just supposed to be the holy terror of the

campus. And I loved her.

RW-N: And why did you love her?

ME: Just because she was a holy terror.

RW-N: Because she was the holy terror.

ME: She was different; she was hard, demanding, and I'm a demanding person. And I want

things just so.

AB: When you say you are a demanding person, what do you mean?

ME: I like honesty first, no matter what...honesty. I'm not a wasteful person; I like to save; I like

to economize; I like to budget; I like to see what I can do as far as investments are concerned. I love math and numbers and things like this. And, uh, those are the things that are most intriguing to me.

AB: Uh, so at a high point your life, is there any moment that you look back on your life that you think, "I wish I could have stopped the clock and just stayed in that moment, or that was a wonderful experience...", uh...?

ME: No, I've had such a fast, interesting life. We don't have time to sleep. We don't...we don't have a given moment.... You see that box we've got to go through? That bag on top...I was at a workshop, at, uh, Roanoke, at the Marriott, that's on church and tax law. I stayed in that workshop all day; I didn't even get sleepy. But if you ask questions that's boresome, I'm bored to death. Uh, those are things that I have to do and go over right away; I didn't dare to move those.

AB: But why are you doing that? I mean, is that just for personal...? Learning...?

ME: No, no, no, no, no. I'm the assistant treasurer and our pastor asked the treasurer, the assistant treasurer, and financial secretary, and assistant to go. And I did. Of course, I'm going, I've got two kids living there. I've got something to go for. [laughs] And, uh, I just do the things that we like to do. And my husband didn't always travel with me. He did at first; he would take us in the car. And then I start to travelling with a friend, Altha Rowden, over in Pocahontas. And we'd go to the teachers meetings and the, uh, sorority meetings together—we belonged to the same sorority.

AB: Is that AKA?

ME: No, Delta Sigma Theta. (AB: You're a Delta, okay.) Are you AKA?

AB: No, I'm a Delta. [ME and AB laughing]

ME: Well, I was going to say it's okay. I know-, listen, I know the AKA stuff because I had a cadet teacher and she had me studying the Ivy stuff and I went to Bluefield State. Letitia Byrd, Letitia Johnson Byrd—she was just recently in the paper—approached me and she said, “When you come to school tomorrow you wear this black dress,” and she said, “I'll pin you with a red rose.” And I said, “Why?” So she told me. I didn't know anything about Delta. So she said, uh, I said, “Well, is Mary Reed,”—Mary Coleman, Mary Coleman, my friend then—I said, “Is Mary gonna wear her black dress and are you going to pin her?” And she was talking to Bernice Reeves Manns, I don't know whether you know her or not, but they were the main Deltas at that time, and there were others, and so they looked at each other. And so I said, “Well, if Mary doesn't wear hers, then I won't wear mine.” So they had to take Mary if they got a hold of me. So they did and so the next day we wore black dresses and got pinned and then we were pyramids. We had all that stuff to learn. I mean, to really learn. And, uh, it just went on from there. That was in the year 19 and what? 46.

AB: And you continued to be active? With the Deltas?

ME: Fifty years, I went down and got my fifty year pin.

AB: Did you?

ME: Mmm-hmm. It's a beautiful pin.

AB: I didn't go and get a pin.

ME: I'll show you my pin before you go.

AB: Tell me about your children? How many children do you have?

ME: I have three sons.

AB: And how old are they?

ME: Jimmy is 48; he'll be 49 September the sixth. Randy's 45; he'll be 46 September the second; I only work on Labor Day, [Anella chuckling]...have 'em on Labor Day. And, uh, Charles is 30, and he'll be 31 August the fifth. And we never did understand where I got that baby from. [chuckling]

AB: Is he different from the other two boys?

ME: Quite different. He is so different. Uh-huh, yes.

AB: And you said two of your sons live in Roanoke?

ME: Yes. Charles and Jimmy. The oldest and the youngest.

AB: And do they have families?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: And what are they doing in Roanoke? What kind of work do they do?

ME: All right. Jimmy's retired now. He worked at Appalachia Power Company and it's American Power Company now. (RW-N: mm-hmm) He went in as a draftsman, but he hated it because he liked the outside. And they gave him a hard time on the job, his...I don't know if he...I don't know what they called him, but whoever he was over him, gave him a hard time. And he decided he would work in the field. And he liked working in the field, and he got three back injuries and he had three back surgeries, so they retired him. He was named Mr. Bass, in December; he's a great fisher-hunter person. And I think about third in the state or something. And, ah, it brings good money.

AB: Oh, really? He enters in contests?

ME: The tournaments.

AB: Oh, I see. Does he have children?

ME: Yes, he has-, they have, they had three children. One died before birth, and so they lost a child. But they [had] Maria . [Tape is blank for several seconds] A few years later they [had] a son, James Edward, Junior. And he's the only grandson we have, biological. And, uh, Maria's married, and she has two children.

AB: Does she live in Roanoke, also?

ME: Yes, a little boy and a little girl. And she teaches at a magnet school. No, I don't know what it is. Maybe you can tell me. It's where these children have disa—there're not disabilities. It's kind of like a mental thing, if you ask me. Strange things. Now I don't know what you call that in the elementary school. I don't know anything about elementary education. But, uh, anyway, she likes that; that's her major.

AB: And your second son is in Roanoke, also?

ME: No, he's in Bluefield, West Virginia. And his name is Alfred Randolph. And, uh, he, uh, is like a jack of all trades. He has many things that he can do. He was, uh, I can't tell you what he was, but I can't remember right now. But anyway, [Mrs. Elston's husband, from the next room, provides her a word] okay, that's good enough, machinist. And he does all kinds of machines.

AB: And does he have a family?

ME: Yes, he has two families. [chuckles] The first family, the daughter is Alpha and she graduated from West Virginia University. And she's finished her master's, and she's working on a second master's, and she's married, and she has a child, and she married a football player. And

uh, I call him old Number 88, old 88, because that was his number. And they're there.

AB: They're in Bluefield, also?

ME: No, Morgantown.

AB: Oh, Morgantown.

ME: Morgantown. And then, the second family is in Bluefield. And he has a daughter that is seven. No, she's eight now; she just had a birthday in April. She's eight. And she goes to elementary school there. And his wife has a daughter who's grown. And she has a daughter. So that makes the wife a grandmother, so he thinks he's a grandparent. Well, he is, he has two grandchildren. [AB: laughing] And, uh, he was working a job in Roanoke, for Ingersol-Rand, as a machinist or something; anyway, he just kept falling off of the machines and things. Found out that he had multiple sclerosis through a long, long, long process. So he got to the point that he couldn't walk. And, uh, so he's disabled.

AB: And what about Charles?

ME: Charles is a man of many functionalities. [laughing] You name it, that's Charles. Anything dangerous is his life. Danger. I'm looking for a call from him any time if he hasn't called already and talked to his father. Charles is a male nurse at Lewis Gale Hospital. And he was the first black person to finish the nursing school there.

AB: Who is Lewis Gale? In Roanoke?

ME: Uh-huh, Roanoke. And he's a paramedic firefighter. And he worked as a fireman for a while, a paramedic. And every time you see all those big forest fires and things...

AB: He's there.

ME: He's there! And, ah, he, ah...let's see what else does he do. He operates a computer; he

works...well, he's worked at the bank, like First Union Bank. He was like an assistant something.

I can't ever remember the jobs that Charlie's had so many jobs. Just like when it comes to do income tax he has about eleven papers to go through. And if he goes on vacation, he'll work.

He's a workaholic. And he loves money. [AB: chuckle] He's a workaholic and he spends it as fast as he gets it. He has a daughter, Jaimie [inaudible name] Elston, and she's six years old.

She'll be seven in August. She's a beautiful child. She looks just like him, and I pray she doesn't get to be six-two. [chuckles] And, uh, he and Kim are expecting a baby in August. They say it's a little boy.

AB: And neither of your-, none, uh, your sons chose to follow you all to Bluefield State?

ME: No, we tried, we tried, even made them go to school. They wouldn't do anything but waste time and money. They just went off on their own, did their own thing. We tried. And no, they wouldn't go there.

RW-N: Has that been a disappointment to you?

ME: Well, yes, and then we-, after a while you get used to it. (RW-N: yes) If you just keep on getting stepped on, you get used to it. So...but each of them have had good jobs, where they are able to take care of themselves and do well. (RW-N: mmm-hmm) But they didn't do any of the things we had hoped that they would. Randy was in the Navy. Of course, Charles [is] in the Navy Reserve, and Jimmy was in the Army Reserve. And uh so, they just kind of do their thing. Charles plays—we went Thursday night to hear him play with the band. He plays all instruments, but of all things he was playing trombone. I was really shocked. I had hoped he would play guitar; he's good.

AB: How far are you from Roanoke?

ME: About two hours. And if you move fast with the fast track.

AB: You maintain a good relationship with your sons?

ME: Yes. And my daughter-in-law, my oldest sons's wife is Eva. Yes, we stay with her, and she, when I go in I just hand her the keys and she just drives me around wherever I want to go. She loves to drive our car. Oh, not that gray one out there. [chuckle] Eva's mother gave him that car and he won't get rid of it. But the man next door's going to do the rust spots for us and everything. Edward likes Buicks and he, uh, likes big cars. And so, I always thought I would buy a Chevrolet, but I decided...I hate to say that I'm stingy. But I could not, my friends bought new cars when they retired. And they said, "Mary, when you going to get you a car?" I said, "I don't see any sense in me getting a car. Edward's got two cars. I'll drive one of those." I just couldn't see myself buying a car. I'll drive what he has. And you see, they have cars. But like some of [their] husbands don't drive their cars; this is my car. We don't have that kind of relationship. And we would let the children use them. The children...I couldn't have a vehicle and my kids couldn't use it. So I didn't need to drive it.

Then my husband had a stroke, and so I became the principal driver. He still drives better than I do. When we were coming from Roanoke I was tired, so he drove from the Salem rest stop through the Bland, uh, rest area. I don't know whose side of the road he was on or if he was on any, I was sleeping. We got to Wytheville, he says, "Mary, you better wake up and tell me where we turn off." [laughing]

AB: So the center of your social life, is it here in Virginia or is it over in Bluefield, West Virginia?

ME: Well, I guess it's on the West Virginia side. Everything's on West Virginia side. We sleep over here. [AB: chuckle] And church is here. And my husband's Kiwanians, his Kiwanis Club, is

we'll go anywhere." So they sent us to Richlands, Virginia. And when we got there I noticed a lot of the teachers were working library and doing things like this. So I had my agenda ready when I [got there].

AB: These were the black teachers that were [inaudible]?

ME: Yes. I had my agenda ready when I met the principal. And, uh, he was coming in new, also. He didn't, he didn't have a library assignment for me; he had classes for me. But before he could say anything, I told him, I said, "Now, I'm not going to work in the library. I don't like it there; I'll go to sleep. I don't like it where it's quiet." And so, uh, he says, "Well, I have classes for you." And we worked what was called a split shift. We went in at 10:00 and left at 2:00, 10 to 2 or something like that. My classes started at 10 and ended at 2. Went straight through.

AB: Now, when you said you and your husband went, he was teaching, too? (ME: yes, uh-huh) And they, you could go as a team, I mean, as a married couple. They let you transfer? (ME: Yes) Where is Richlands? Is that...how far?

ME: Forty miles from here towards, uh...like you go to Kentucky; I don't know directions. I'm looking for him to tell me something, to say something to me, to tell me. [ME is referring to her husband, who is sitting in a near-by room]

RW-N: But it's about forty miles, away? (ME: uh-huh) But you were working here? You were both working here?

ME: Yes, we were both working here.

RW-N: In Bluefield, Virginia?

ME: How it was, how it was, I got the job like a year or so before my husband. And then this

here. And we're on the board of the CIL and that's in [Tazewell, Virginia].

AB: What's CIL?

ME: Committee for Independent Living, handicapped people, in Tazewell County.

RW-N: And that's Virginia?

ME: Yes, Virginia, Tazewell County. We're kind of half and half, I guess. But, uh, like fraternities and sororities, on West Virginia side.

AB: Is your husband a fraternity man?

ME: Yes, Kappa.

AB: Kappa. So's my husband.

ME: Really? Oh, how nice. Oh-h-....

RW-N: So the things that are on the West Virginia side go back to your college days, mostly?

ME: Maybe, and church.

RW-N: And church is on West Virginia, too?

ME: Yes, because I'm a Link, and, uh..those are the Links of southern West Virginia. And that's on the West Virginia side. And I guess it is with those people, some of them. Uh, and sorority, yes.

AB: Now you were teaching at the time the schools were integrated? (ME: yes) When you went, when you first started teaching it was all black? (ME: yes) And by the time you retired, you had moved into an integrated situation? (ME: yes) How...how, how was that transition for you, moving from...?

ME: Oh, it was beautiful. Everybody wanted to be close to home in 19 and 65, when schools were integrated. And I, and I spoke up and said, "We'll just ask my husband," and he said, "Well,

principal was retiring in Pocahontas. And my friend I told you about, Altha Rowden, told us about it and I called him on the job and told him. And he didn't know if anything had happened to me or one of the kids, at that particular time, and he ran all over the banks and everywhere trying to get home. And it was just a teaching job. And, of course, we asked him to go and apply for it and he did. And they hired him as a principal at this elementary school. And I don't know how many years he was there until they changed the schools, and so they brought him back to the high school and they told him that we would have to address each other as Mr. and Mrs.

AB: You were both working in the same high school?

ME: Mmm-hmm, when he came back to the high school.

AB: And was it an all-black high school still?

ME: Yes. We'd have to address each other as Mr. and Mrs. because usually they don't have husbands and wives working in the same school, and could we get along doing that. We said, "Yes," so we did. And then we-, he got to be great friends with the principal. And we were great friends with them. And, uh, it all worked out very well. And when it was integration, our principal went to...oh, my goodness...anyway, he went back east to work. And when he did, we-, my husband had a job offer in Wytheville as assistant principal. And I told him, I said, "Edward, you don't want that job as assistant principal. Assistant principals do all the dirty work. And you have to do all the registers and everything." And I'd been doing all the math and all that kind of work all the time for him, you see, and I wasn't going to be there doing that. And by the way, I wrote my husband's thesis for him. I typed it; he did the writing, but I did more or less the editing.

RW-N: You did more or less the what?

ME: The typing.

AB: And file editing and all.

ME: Yeah, the typing for him. And I didn't do a thesis when I got my master's. I, uh, (AB: did six extra hours.) Yeah, I didn't want to do that work.

AB: So he was invited to come down to Wytheville as the assistant principal and chose not to go?

ME: Uh-huh. And then we had a job in—I wish somebody would tell me where we had this job.

[ME hinting to her husband to help her with this name] Let me see...where did we have this job?

They almost took us to court 'cause we didn't take our jobs.

RW-N: Who's "they" almost took you to court?

ME: The school board. They were expecting us to come to work, and we said, "No." We went to Richlands, you see, instead. I can't even think. Well, anyway, uh, we...we went over there and worked. And we worked in Richlands twenty-two years.

AB: Now, when you went to Richlands, did you physically move? Did you keep your house here or what?

ME: Oh, no, no, no. We were living around town. And we commuted for twenty-two years.

AB: Forty miles each way?

ME: Eighty a day, eighty miles a day. Mmm-hmm.

AB: What about your boys? Where were they at this point?

ME: They, they were in high school. And one played in the band and the other one played football. And we yelled for Richlands when they played football. And then...

AB: You took them there to school with you?

ME: No, no, no, they stayed here in school.

AB: Oh, they stayed here in school. [chuckle]

ME: Uh-huh. And...

AB: So you had a split family then?

ME: Oh, it was all right. They, we've always-, I've told you we were always very fortunate. We raised the kids to do what we wanted them to do, or we all cooperated together. And if we, we could depend on them. We actually did depend on them. We took-, I took 'em with me to get my master's. I was the only person with kids on the campus. [chuckle]

AB: Where were you on the campus?

ME: Well, the first time I went away, oh, no, let me see. How did this go? Well, the first time I applied for a federal grant and I got one with the General Electric Company in New York. And our children were like about five and eight. And I paid my mother-in-law to keep the children. And, uh, my husband was here. And when my six weeks was over, he was to meet me in Philadelphia where my cousin lived that inherited the farm that I was telling you about; and they sold it. So we went to visit with them and to tour, and to take the children on a little vacation. And he met me there. And so we did, and we took them to Atlantic City and everywhere that they had, and to the planetariums, and what have you. And, uh, then I took them to class with me when I would go back to take classes; I'd just take the baby on with me and sit him down and give him paper and pencil and tell him to write. And the baby did.

RW-N: Now where was this?

ME: Bluefield State, anywhere that I went to school, I took...(RW-N: oh, anywhere you went) Anywhere I went, I took 'em with me. We never left our children. That was the only time I left

them. And then when we went to A & T, I wrote the-, a federal grant for him and he got one in economics in Troy, New York. And I was supposed to go to Greensboro, North Carolina, in chemistry. And that's what I was in there up there, in chemistry. And so, we had all of our clothes packed. And meanwhile, I had saved money that he didn't know about. And I talked to his barber, because he barbered during the summer. And, uh, I talked to him and he had a friend who had a garage and he would—my son could make a car then. He was fifteen, but he could build a car. And so they sold us one. So I told Jimmy, I said, "When we get down there and Daddy takes the car and goes to New York, we'll just buy ourselves a car." And, uh, so when I was paid, I put my money in the bank there and I had money. And, uh, the children could eat and stay on the campus, too. And so I cleared, when I came home, I cleared six-hundred and eighty-five dollars of that summer's money. That's how much I brought home. Plus all my cereal to last forever. I didn't, I told you I don't throw away anything. I took my cereal each day, but I didn't eat it. [RW-N: chuckle] And while I was there working in my chemistry classes, my sons would come up and bring me a fresh blouse because it was extremely warm and they could iron, they could cook. And so we just stayed together there and they saw Jimmy driving the car around. Oh, Daddy decided not to go to New York. And I said, "Now, you're not going to your class?" He says, "No, I think I'll just stay here and catch up on my reading." I said, "No"—I'm not going to tell you what I said up there. I said, "No, you'll have to take classes. You can't do that." So, uh, I said, "Now you go on in the morning." He said, "Well, I don't have money here." I said, "Oh, yes, we have money here all right. You just go right on over and register." And then I gave him the bankbooks and everything. And he says, "Well, Mary," he says, "no wonder you kept on giving us hamburgers and tuna fish." [laughing] So

he enrolled in classes there. So we were both in class. So Jimmy's driving the car around. And they came to report that the child had the car, [driving] around. Well, I said, "He has his license, so...." It was okay with me. And that child could drag race then, you know. He could make a car...he could build a car, so that was that.

RW-N: Now, your husband was in class in Troy, in Troy?

ME: Oh, no, no, he stayed in Greensboro. (RW-N: Oh, he stayed. Oh, okay.) He decided not to go to Troy. (RW-N: He didn't go there, okay.) So he had his clothes but he wasn't going to leave us and go to Troy. And we were going to be in Greensboro, so he decided he'd catch up on his reading. And I said, "No, you can't do that. You'll have to go to school, too."

AB: So where did you get your master's from?

ME: Well, I needed a few hours to complete my master's in chemistry there. The first year he was sick, or I was sick, somebody was sick. And then I was pregnant the next year with that last child. After two years [being absent], you know, you lose your grant. So I didn't go back there. Then I went to [the University of Virginia] when Charles was about five years old. And I took him and enrolled him in the college swimming classes. He was good, too, at that. And so he learned to swim with the college people. And I worked on my master's in science education.

AB: And you finished at the University of Virginia (ME: Uh-huh) in science education? And your husband did, too?

ME: No, he finished at A & T State University. (AB: At A & T) [The second summer we returned to A & T], Dr. Graves had more grants and the people didn't come. So I went up and

asked him could my husband have one. He didn't want to turn them back in to the government. So then Edward was officially in on a grant. And he [only paid for] the first summer. He finished his education [at A & T University].

RW-N: Now, where is—which school are you talking about now?

ME: A & T State University. (AB: Agricultural and Technical)

RW-N: Which is where, because there are lots of A&Ts?

ME: Greensboro. Greensboro, North Carolina. Mm-hmm.

AB: Tell me, how did you all manage affairs at home? Housework and laundry, with your being in the work place, too? Was that a shared family responsibility or...?

ME: We shared everything. We shared the cooking, we danced around the table if the music so fit; we did everything, together. And my husband did a lot of the cooking and he helped me a lot with the cleaning and the children. Everybody did something. And as far as washing, well, I used to send the things to the laundry. Then his mother started to washing when we moved in this house. She started to washing his...she was doing his shirts. I never did do his shirts. I couldn't please [him] and I never could do a shirt. But I'm doing them now. The kind that they have that you just have to do the collar. And anyway, she did his shirts. So she said, "Well, I may as well do the children's clothes and everybody's clothes," so that's what happened. And he paid her. And that was that.

RW-N: So you've lived in this house a long time now?

ME: [We've] been here twenty-nine years. And so...the lady that lived in that house over there used to clean for me. And she would clean once a week. And oh Lord, we'd be working like everything to get the house straight before she'd come here to clean. [laughing] Because she'd

beat us up and lay us out. She'd beat up on me, as well as the kids. And if she'd find any socks in under the couch or any place, ohhhh, she would get after us. We [were] almost scared of her. But we weren't afraid of her, but we just couldn't stand her mouth. Because it was a mouth almighty! That means it was bad. She didn't say bad things, but she could just mouth at you, mouthy, oww!

We go to nursing home to see her now. And she cleaned. And then my daughter-in-law helps me sometimes. She didn't help me today, but she helps me sometimes, [to] straighten up. And that's about it. But I've always been able to get somebody. I worked at-, I worked two jobs. I worked the college at night. And when I'd come in, in the evening and we'd start dinner, then it would be time for me to go to ...

AB: To-, is that Bluefield State?

ME: No, no, Southwest.

RW-N: Southwestern Community College?

ME: [Southwest Virginia] Community College. I taught chemistry there.

RW-N: Which is where? Where is that?

ME: It's at...[faint voice in background is Mr. Elston's] Wardel.

RW-N: So, so you, you used to teach chemistry there at night?

ME: No, no, I taught at the high school here. (RW-N: you taught at the high school, yes) The extension course at the high school. (RW-N: Uh-huh, yes, okay) So I would only go to the high school. And I would take my son as my assistant. And they knew the science, also. They knew, whatever we taught, they knew it. They could grade the papers, they could do anything like that. And they could set up the lab. So I paid them a hundred dollars a semester; that's all I gave

them, one hundred dollars. A new suit of clothes and a new pair of shoes. [background laughing]

AB: While we were talking a moment ago about integration when you left this area and you and your husband went to an integrated school in Richlands and taught there, you said...twenty-two years? (ME: Yes) Did you have any problems when you went in to start teaching these white students?

ME: No, they'd never seen any black people and they were afraid of us. And...I'd never been afraid of any job or anything. Uh, you have to be a master of whatever you think you're going to do. You have to be-, you have to have self-confidence. You have to be sure of yourself. And I've always been sure of myself, as far as what I was doing. If I wasn't sure, I didn't do it.

RW-N: And why have you always been sure of yourself?

ME: Well, my goodness, I read the book! And, uh, I can read a page at a glance. And if I can't, if I can't remember it, and I can't do that...and, of course, I depended a lot on prayer. I always said a prayer every morning before they came in class. I'm a praying person all the time, and I believe in a higher being and a spirit. I really believe in God. And I know that God takes care of me. And, uh, I have no fear. I have no fear of anything.

RW-N: Suppose you couldn't say a prayer?

ME: Well, I can think it. Thinking is just as good as saying it.

RW-N: Suppose you couldn't think it?

ME: Well, I won't have to worry about it. He's still taking care of me. And if it's time to go, go!

AB: So you have no fears of growing old or deaf or anything like that?

ME: No. It's sure to come. It's here. No, we don't, neither one of us. Do your best and the best will come back to you. Give of your best. And I didn't go in there lazy. I'm not a lazy

person. Except in housekeeping. [chuckles] I may never have gotten that down pat.

AB: You were saying a moment ago that you could read a page at a glance. Have you felt like an exceptional student in, in...

ME: No, it depends on the day. No. No.

AB: But as you compared yourself to others in your classes...?

ME: Oh, they were very competitive. We'd be so nervous when it's time to get a report card, until we'd eventually put our heads down and cry; that's the way it was in high school. That's how competitive we were.

AB: Were your boys competitive in...?

ME: Whatever they liked, yes. That's the strange thing. They're not like us at all. We don't know who they're like. [AB: chuckle]

RW-N: How, how did that happen, that they're not like you?

ME: I don't know. And from our training. I'm going to tell you something about those kids. We started, I started each one of them a bank account when he hit the seventh grade, a checking account. They already had savings. You manage your money. They did well; never had an overdraft. Just as soon as they got in college, they went amuck, crazy! I'll have you to know. We gave them a credit card. Got the credit, got the bill, was way out of sorts. And Charles had this credit card, he was the one. You would...would you believe I can tear up a credit card, from anger? [laughter] I said, "Charles, let me see that credit card." [inaudible] ...he gave it to me, I just took it and ripped it up just like that. It was cold—it was easy to tear it up, the card was cold. And he was, like, "Momma!" Yeah, he's...they're, they're competitive.

AB: Are they pretty good managers now?

ME: When they want to be, for what they want, yes. Sometimes they [inaudible]. I...I don't lend them money. I give it, or I don't. But I've always been able, praise the Lord, to be able to give. And we've been able to give them all a good start in life. Like a down payment on a home, vehicles, and we've given them vehicles. And, uh, I don't have anything to think about that I haven't done. Not anything. And I'm not bragging.

AB: So you feel pretty...pretty good about life, then?

ME: Yeah, I've always felt good about life. I don't know that I've ever felt bad about it. We have our ups and downs, but we've never felt that bad about it. You just expect those things. No, we're happy. ... So what would you like to ask me?

Oh, about Richlands...I taught chemistry, physics one year, uh, general science when we first went there, biology maybe one or two years. I chose not to teach biology. I thought it was nasty. It's easier to do for chemistry. I have as many hours in biology as I have in chemistry. But, uh, I just didn't want to fool with the animals. I got to the point that I didn't want to fool with them. I used to like to do that. Then I thought, well, if he's going to be the biologist, everybody thinks he's the brain, you do the biology. I'll do the chemistry, you don't know that. I can do that. So I'm his chemistry teacher.

AB: So you didn't have any problems with the parents, with the white parents or the white students? [recorder beeping in background]

ME: No.

AB: There was no name calling or....

ME: We never heard a name call until maybe one year before we left there. And it was snuffed out, just like that. No.

RW-N: When you went there, how many people were in the school? Approximately.

ME: Fifteen hundred, in grades nine through twelve.

RW-N: And, uh, how many were black people?

ME: Not any. Not even us. [AB: chuckle] I told you that's a word that's not in our vocabulary.

RW-N: Okay, which word would you substitute?

ME: None of them. We're Americans. (RW-N: mm-hmm) None of them.

AB: So you don't get into the black/white dialogue, then?

ME: Oh, I can say the black man or black [inaudible]...or whatever....

RW-N: But you recognize the difference?

ME: No, I don't see any difference.

RW-N: Well, how many people who come from different, purely different heritage are in your sororities or fraternities?

ME: Oh, I don't...I don't know what their heritages are. They are varied, I can assure you that. But I don't think of them as...I don't think of that at all, to tell you the truth.

RW-N: See, I, I wonder sometimes—because I have been told this by people, too—that you can't live in a society like ours without being aware of that.

ME: Of course, you're aware of it. But I don't feel...you ask me how I felt. (RW-N: mm-hmm) I don't feel a thing.

RW-N: So you are aware of it, but don't feel much about it? Is that what you're saying?

ME: I don't feel anything about it. (RW-N: You don't feel...)

AB: What about your boys? How, how do they identify, and your grandchildren?

ME: The same way. That's what we teach. No problem.

AB: So you don't think that your life has been made or shaped in any way by color?

ME: [sigh] I don't know about that. I'm sure it has or something has happened. But in my working career, I've always made the top dollar. I've never been given less. And...

RW-N: And you don't think you've been discriminated against on the basis of color? (ME: No) You've always gotten jobs or ...?

ME: Edward was president of the Kiwanis Club and they're all white and he's black. But, and I go every Thursday; they're all white and it's just the two of us, but we don't feel anything. We go to the parties, we go to everything with them. (RW-N: mm-hmm) And it's been like that all of our lives. We just don't.... I think we all know it. It's a known factor, but it's no problem.

AB: Did you ever think what it might have been like if you had moved to Washington, DC or New York or, ...?

ME: Oh, I worked in Washington. I worked for the government. When I graduated from high school, uh, I took the test and went there and worked as a clerk typist in the [inaudible] department. And I thought that I would stay there and go to school, but I chickened out and came back and went to Bluefield State.

AB: And how did you feel about your experience in Washington?

ME: Fine, I advanced quickly. I went from W2 to W5.

AB: But you didn't...

ME: In a summer. If somebody moves out you could do that.

AB: You didn't want that for your whole life?

ME: Oh, no, I hate typing and filing and clerking and stuff like that. I hate it! [AB: chuckle] I don't like it today. I have a typewriter; I can operate a computer. No, I don't like that stuff.

AB: What about living in the city and not in Virginia?

ME: Fine with me, it's okay.

AB: But it wasn't what you really wanted to do?

ME: Oh, yes, I wanted to, but my husband didn't want to. He wanted to...I don't know...I thought he wanted to stay here with his parents, close to them. But...they would have been happy for us to go. He chose to stay here, so I'm here. [tape recorder beeping]

AB: So you were saying that your husband decided that he wanted to live here and as you look back on it, you don't have any regrets about that.

ME: No, I, uh, I wasn't in love when I married, but I learned to love Edward.

[Note: The previous five lines, beginning with "...they would have been happy..." appear on another tape of this session.]

END TAPE 1 – SIDE 2

BEGIN TAPE 2 – SIDE 1

ME: And he's such a great person, such a great teacher. And so kind and he's just patient. And he's helpful. And he was just everything that I wouldn't image a person to be. And we're still having such a great life today, my goodness, I wouldn't go somewhere else. If he wanted to stay here, okay, I'll stay. [laughs]

AB: How long have you been married?

ME: Fifty years, November.

RW-N: Were you, when you married-, right now you say, "I wasn't, I probably wasn't in love when I married."

ME: I didn't even...I don't think I knew what love was. [laughs]

RW-N: Did you think you were in love at the time?

ME: No, I...

RW-N: Then why...

ME: ...wanted to leave home (RW-N: You wanted to leave home) because the people had these apartments on the campus, and I wanted one of them.

RW-N: Uh-huh, and that was a pretty good reason to go?

ME: Yeah, I didn't think about the love and the sex side and all that good stuff. [laughing]

RW-N: So, that was...

ME: When he was such a great teacher, 'til I enjoyed that, too. [laughing]

AB: Well, you have a wonderful sense of humor, I must say.

ME: No, it's the truth, the honest-to-goodness truth. It just worked out that way.

AB: Great sense of humor.

ME: Yeah, we're still having a great old life.

AB: That's wonderful.

ME: And we can sit right here at this table all day. I'll sit here and he sits here. We read the paper together—he reads to me. And I'm reading to him. And he's lost a lot of his ability in reading when he...

RW-N: Stroke, you mean, yeah, mmm-hmm.

ME: Mmm-hmm. He's not having problem with that or speech or anything. But his arthritis is just killing his legs. That's what's bothering him most. But we read and we go places whereas I told you, we don't stay home five seconds...for anything. We're only here because you're here.

[laughter] That's why I can't get all my work done over there. [refers to a stack of papers]

RW-N: We're gonna go in a few minutes. Did you retire together? (ME: Yes) At the same time?

And when did you retire?

ME: We retired in 19 and 87. (RW-N: Uh-huh) He was sixty-seven. And I was sixty-two-, no, I was sixty. And he was sixty-seven. And on the way home I said, "Let's go by the superintendent's office," and I went in and asked for a job. I had a retirement party and everything. And then I went in and asked for a job. There was two jobs available: one at the high school and one at the middle school. The middle school was new, and it's a magnet school here. So, I decided I would take that because I didn't ever get a chance to work in a new school, with everything that money could buy. (RW-N: Yes, yes, uh-huh) So, I chose that. And the teacher there, uh, was working on her master's when I was, Ann Whaley. And she always wanted to work at the high school and they never would let her go. So, that was her chance. I said, "If I take the job, and then train with you..." I went to see her, I said, "Then, I could take your job over here and you can go to the high school, where you always wanted to go. Now's your chance." (RW-N: mm-hmm) And she said, "Would you?" She said, "Mary, you're gonna do that just because I want to go?" I said, "Yes," I said, "I'll tell you the reason, I'm just gonna work two years." She said, "How do you know you're gonna work?" I said, "I know I'm not gonna work until about I'm sixty-two. I want to travel and do things. I don't want to work any more."

RW-N: So that's what you did? You worked two more years after you retired?

ME: Mmm-mmm. And Edward was so bored he started to substitute. [laughter]

RW-N: But you still retired at sixty-two, because you wanted to do other things?

ME: Yes. Then I retired at sixty-two. [Tape blank for several seconds]

[A new principal was brought in.] I don't know what we were doing but [the principal and I] were talking. He said, "How is it you know so much about school law?" I said, "My husband helped to write the book. And I [read the book] over and over and over and over again." And he said, "He [helped to write] these books?" And I said, "Yes, he did." [AB: laughing]

[Tape blank for a few minutes]

And he gave me an evaluation, and had something on the average. I went in that office and I had a holy fit on that man. And I said, "Average!" I said, "If I'd been average, I'd never been where I am today." And I said, "Furthermore, I never had an average; I've had nothing but excellent." And I said, "Here, you can have it. I don't need it." And [I] didn't even go back after it; [I] threw it at him. I don't know what he turned in and didn't care, because the [assistant superintendent was my] high school principal over in Richlands. [AB: laughing] So I just had a great old life, that's all to it.

RW-N: Okay. Well

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE 1 (and the first interview)

BEGIN TAPE 3 – SIDE 1

AB: Ancella Bickley and Rita Wicks-Nelson in Bluefield, Virginia, talking with Mrs. Elston.

Today is June 6th, 1997.

RW-N: You want to start then with your question?

AB: Uh, Mrs. Elston, when we visited with you before, you uh, showed us a picture of your adopted children and I wondered if you would talk a little bit about that, please?

ME: Was it a picture of four?

AB: I think so.

ME: All right. The young man's name is Michael Lee Lisman.

RW-N: Could you spell that?

ME: L-i-s-m-a-n, Lisman. He was adopted by the Lisman family. He was originally born a Burkhalter. And the Lisman family over in Jewel Ridge, or somewhere in that area, adopted him. And uh, when schools integrated, the children in Jewel Ridge and around were taken—the black children, there was just a few of them—taken to Tazewell, Virginia, where they were boarded out. Then eventually, they boarded Michael and his brother, John, out here in Bluefield, Virginia. (AB: mmm-hmm) And I think he must have been like the second or third grade; I don't know, somewhere young. And Michael was across the street from us; we lived across the street from each other. And Michael and my second son are about the same age, so they decided they would become brothers. So that's how we got Michael.

AB: [chuckle] So he visited back and forth, then, with you all?

ME: Yes. And he'll be here this year, sometimes.

AB: And the relationship has continued?

ME: It's even greater now. And I, I can't, I don't remember all the things that we did for those children. He remembers. And he tells us about them. But he told me that when Jim and Randy were small and I used to go buy their school clothes, that I bought his clothes and John's clothes. Of course, I went to K-Mart's then. And I got everybody, I got my kids five pair of overalls and a parka. They got three pair of dress blue pants because they did not wear jeans, and a parker. And whatever else they said, I don't really know. But uh, this is what he told me.

AB: Uh, you talked about the kids in the integrating of the schools, and that they boarded the black kids. Would you talk a little bit more about that? How, what-, how'd that come about, and why was that?

ME: Well, schools...I don't know if schools were really integrated then. Schools weren't integrated. I don't know how this happened that they were boarded out. I really don't know the history to it, and I should know it since I was here and taught in the schools. But uh, the children were boarded; I think they may have closed those schools now. And they boarded them out in other towns. The school board paid for it.

AB: Uh, and, and how old was this little boy when you first met him, when he was boarding?

ME: Well, now, I thought he might have been somewhere between eight and ten, I really don't know.

AB: That's awfully young.

ME: They were boarded before then.

AB: Now, they did some of that in West Virginia in areas where there was not a black school. And because the state and the county were obliged to provide education, they would send these

kids to live with a family and pay for it, so they could go wherever there was a black school. So I suspect that might have been.

ME: That was probably it. But uh, I started to tell you something about that....

AB: What about when the schools were integrated? Were your children in school when (ME: Yes) schools were integrated? Would you talk a little bit about that? You may have touched upon it before. But would you talk a little bit about that process of integration and how it affected you as a teacher, and how it affected your children as students?

ME: Well, how it affected me? You don't want to know mine first; let's say the children. Uh, I don't know truly how it affected the children. My oldest son played football, and he played center, he was good—he's small of stature, compared to some of the fellows. And uh, he played, I think, one year. And after that, somehow or another the coach was a little abusive and he decided he wouldn't play. (AB: mmm-hmm) He would rather not play. And the second son was in the band. And he continued in the band until he graduated. And this was during the year of '65, and...I think Jimmy was in the 10th or 11th grade.

AB: They were in integrated schools here?

ME: Mmm-hmm, yes, Graham High School. Jim was in the 10th or 11th grade when schools integrated. And Randy must have been in the 8th grade...he was, he was in 8th grade. And they both graduated from Graham High School.

AB: That was here in Virginia, though, not in West Virginia?

ME: Right here in Bluefield, Virginia.

AB: Were you uh...where were you when the bombing occurred at Bluefield State College? Do you remember in the '60s or so?

ME: Yes, we were teaching at Richlands, and we had a student teacher. And I can't remember his name and that's the reason I said Edward needs to be here. [refers to Mr. Elston] Uh, we had this student teacher. He may have been Edward's young person. And he was accused in a part of that. And we offered to testify for him, in case that he needed any help.

AB: Character witness or something?

ME: Yes, yes. Because at the time that that happened, he was with us.

AB: As graduates of Bluefield State, were you caught up in that, the emotion of it? Or alarmed by it, or anything like that? How did you feel about it, about the bombing?

ME: We thought it was awful. But uh, I'm not an excitable person. And so... and I don't think my husband is, either. As far as being caught up in excitement, even the war doesn't push us too far. We just said, "Well, it's happened. What can you do about it?"

RW-N: Now, was that during the time that-, why was, why did that bombing occur, does anybody know? Does it have to do with integration of the school, or...?

AB: [inaudible]

ME: I'm sorry to tell you that I don't know much about this. (RW-N: Okay) I'm very sorry to tell you that. Now, did you ask Suzie...[inaudible]... [ME is referring to a friend, who was also interviewed in this project] Suzie may be able to tell you more about it. And I couldn't possibly tell you. You better listen to what she says; she's more with that type of stuff than I am.

RW-N: Well, you don't have to apologize for not telling everything. [background chuckling]

ME: It's just like reading in the paper. Maybe I read it, and maybe I didn't.

RW-N: Right.

AB: If you're like me, I didn't.

ME: I'm sorry I can't help you.

AB: No, that's all right. We were just curious about it, that's all.

RW-N: Can we go back...uh, do you have other questions that you want to follow through here?

(AB: No) I'm going to switch gears, okay? And again, some of this is by filling in some things I don't understand well. Uh, I know that you said that your mother died when you were about 5 months old. But are you able to tell us anything about her? Her name, where she came from, where her family came from? (ME: Yes) Could you share that with us?

ME: Mmm-mmm. My mother's name was Harriet Love Ann Minerva Calloway McKinney.

(RW-N: Okay).

AB: Harriet Love...

ME: ...Ann Minerva (RW-N: Minerva) Calloway McKinney. Yes, and all of those names, I don't know if they're from friends or relatives.

AB: One, two, three, four, five?

ME: And she was called Hattie.

AB: Now, her maiden name was Calloway?

ME: Yes.

AB: Was she a West Virginian?

ME: No, she's from Rocky Mount, Virginia. Born in Rocky Mount, Virginia.

RW-N: Rocky Mouth?

AB: Mount.

RW-N: Mount, M-o-u-n-t.

ME: Rocky Mount.

AB: And she died when you were 5 months old, you said? And the next brother to you was 10 at that time? He was 10 years old.

ME: Yes.

RW-N: And do you know what caused her death?

ME: Complications of many types. She had high blood, a disease called Dropsy, I think she may have died from heart failure. Just all types of...[inaudible]...

AB: How old was she?

ME: In her '30's, I think.

RW-N: Oh, she was young.

ME: Yes, in her '30's. The number 33 sticks with me, but I'm not sure. It's sounds like that's right, 33.

RW-N: Now, do you know anything about her parents?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: Could you tell us about that?

ME: Her father was Doc Calloway. Just Doc, D-o-c. And her mother was Dolly.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. And they came from Virginia?

ME: Rocky Mount, Virginia.

RW-N: And what did they do, do you know?

ME: Farm, I would imagine.

RW-N: But you're not sure about that?

ME: No, but I'm most sure that's what they did. They didn't move here. Uh...I think he must have died in Rocky Mount, Doc did. And I think that her mother died here. Because I knew my

grandmother. And she died of mini-strokes, you know, one after another.

AB: So, what brought her to uh, Bluefield?

ME: I don't imagine she was able to take care of herself and the farm there. And my, my uncle brought her to live with him. Her son, Ernest Calloway.

AB: So, how many children did she have?

ME: Maybe about 10. That's what I think I heard somebody say.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm, it's a good sized family, anyhow.

AB: And Ernest was the only one that you knew?

ME: Oh, no. Uh...I knew my Aunt Mary.

AB: Were you named for her?

ME: I don't know. I was just given a name. I think nobody truly wanted me. I was one of those babies that nobody wanted. (AB: chuckle) And I don't know who gave me this name. But I was just given one name.

RW-N: Now, are you kidding us? Or do you really...

ME: No, I'm telling the truth. [good natured chuckling]

RW-N: Or do you really mean that you think nobody....

ME: I'm serious as a heartbeat, all the way.

RW-N: You think nobody wanted you?

ME: All the way. Well, my sister told me so. Because our mother was ailing and they-, she wasn't to have other children. And uh, then they just thought of me as her death. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm)

AB: Did you, did somebody say that to you, or did you just....?

ME: Oh, yeah, my sister told me. How would I know if she didn't tell me?

AB: My.

ME: I didn't feel bad, I can assure you.

AB: You did not?

ME: Oh no, they gave me the [inaudible word].

AB: Why so?

ME: Why? I don't know. Determination; the joy to outwit and outlive someone else, has always been my life.

AB: To, uh, change their expectations, I mean, to defy, I guess, their expectations.

ME: Even now, with my children and my husband, that is the fun thing of my life.

RW-N: To do what? Describe that for me more.

ME: The joy to out-think, out-do, out-maneuver.

RW-N: Is fun for you?

ME: Mmm-hmm. To excel.

RW-N: To excel, uh-huh. So you, so you don't think being told that you were an unwanted baby hurt? It only drove you on more? Is that what you're saying?

ME: More determination.

RW-N: More determination.

ME: I'll show you. That's my attitude.

RW-N: Oh, that's your attitude, yes, uh-huh. Could you, uh, could you trace your mother's family back even further than her parents?

ME: I'm thinking, I don't know. I've heard the talk, but I don't think that I could do that. (RW-

N: Yeah) You-, do you want to stop a moment and let me check and see if I have anything on it?

RW-N: No, it isn't necessary, it's not really necessary. [AB in background agreeing on this.]

Uh, can you trace that family back into slavery? Do you have any inkling at all?

ME: Not her family.

RW-N: Not her family?

ME: On my father's side, yes.

RW-N: Yes, mmm-hmm.

ME: I did that for you.

RW-N: Right, yes, you did. Now, your father, uhm, what was his name?

ME: Alfred.

RW-N: Alfred?

ME: Alfred Randolph.

RW-N: McKinney?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: Right, okay.

ME: He couldn't be a Brightwell.

RW-N: Right. Well, I get all these names mixed up. [laughter] Uh, and what kind of work did he do?

ME: He was a brakeman on the railroad, [Norfolk and Western Railroad].

RW-N: And I think you mentioned last time that he had been a deacon of a church, too?

ME: Yes, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, mmm-hmm.

RW-N: And he died when you were 14?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: And you have traced his family, right?

ME: Yes.

AB: Your grandmother had your father and the daughter that she went back to live with.

ME: She had five children.

AB: She had five children in all.

RW-N: This is paternal grandmother? Obviously.

ME: Mmm-hmm. Five.

RW-N: Five.

AB: Five children. And did you know all five of them?

ME: Mmm-hmm, yes.

AB: Were they in West Virginia? Did they come up this way, or did they stay down in Pamplin?

ME: No, no. My father came towards West Virginia. And his brother, Eugene, who was called Lugie, came out here; they came out here together from Pamplin. The sister, the two sisters, stayed in Virginia, Eliza and Hamlet.

AB: Eliza and what?

ME: Hamlet, H-a-m-l-e-t is the best I know for that. They stayed in Virginia. And Bolden went to, was sent to Lynchburg to school by his father. And he went into the ministry and moved to New York.

AB: This is Mr. Blackwell? Who sent Bolden to school?

ME: Brightwell. B-r-i-g-h-t-w-e-l-l.

AB: Brightwell, Brightwell, Mr. Brightwell. Mmm-hmm. Yeah, that's what I [inaudible].

AB: He took care of all of them.

RW-N: Now, I'm a little bit confused about who Samuel Tucker is.

ME: Samuel Tucker is my aunt's [Eliza's] – my father's sister's husband.

RW-N: Okay. And they, and they have the farm.

ME: And they lived in the homeplace, yes. They, uh-huh.

RW-N: You mentioned about going to the farm there.

ME: Yes.

AB: Who's that? Eliza or Hamlet?

ME: Eliza.

AB: Eliza.

ME: Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: See, this is easy for you, but not for us. [chuckling] (ME: It's okay, it's okay)

AB: Is...do these all have children, Eugene and Eliza and Hamlet and Bolden? Do they have....(ME: yes)...families?

ME: Not...Hamlet, Hamlet died at an early age. I met her and I knew her, but.... So, uh, yes, they had children.

AB: And you got to meet them and know them?

ME: I didn't know my Uncle Lugie's children very well. I met them, but I didn't see them often. I think they had five children. (AB: uh-huh) And uh...and Bolden had three children. I called them and met them by phone, but I've never met them in person.

AB: Mmm-hmm. He lives in New York, you said?

ME: Yes, and I didn't ever meet him, not really.

AB: And they, they are McKinneys, it was Bolden McKinney?

ME: Yes, uh-huh.

AB: Okay.

ME: All of my grandmother's children were McKinneys.

AB: Mmm-hmm.

ME: Because that was her name.

AB: That was her name, mmm-hmm. But I think you told us that she...uh, when Mr. McKinney came and brought her husband in....

ME: Oh, he brought her husband from North Carolina.

AB: From North Carolina.

ME: Yes, and his name was McKinley McKinney.

AB: Oh, he was a McKinney, too?

ME: See, because he was from his plantation, but he was an educated man. (AB: I see) And he was a teacher there in Pamplin a couple of years (AB: Mmm-hmm), until he got run off. [laughs] I shouldn't have told you all this scandalous stuff.

AB: Oh, those are the great stories. That was the fun part of it. [all chuckling]

RW-N: Well, it can't hurt anybody now.

ME: Well, I thought it was funny. To me it was comical. I'm sorry to say it.

RW-N: Okay, I feel straightened out on the family. Do you, Ancella?

AB: Yes.

RW-N: Uh...when you think of your life in general, are there any women who come to your mind who you see as-, that you think particularly influenced you? For good or bad, or any women who

really stood out as kind of heroines, or people you would look up to? Role models, if you will?

ME: Well, do you mean after I finished school or while I was in school, or which do you mean?

RW-N: At, at both times.

ME: Okay. My grandmother [Virginia Frances McKinney] is the greatest person in my life. And my husband said she had a Ph.D. in common sense. [chuckle] So...anyone else?

AB: Why, why about your grandmother? What was there about her that makes you feel that way?

ME: I...I'm still, I'm living by her principles, everything that she taught me.

AB: Such as?

ME: My whole life. Well...selecting a husband.

AB: What did she tell you about selecting a husband?

ME: Uh...don't talk to any man that doesn't have a job, a bank account, and some wheels for you to ride on.

[incidental tape interruption]

ME: And don't talk to any man who is not as smart as you are—look for someone who is smarter because you'll just run right over you and you'll have a miserable life.

RW-N: Did you follow that?

ME: Of course. And such things as saving.

AB: Uh...did you learn homemaking skills from your grandmother, as well? Housekeeping, things like that?

[tape audio low]

ME: No, I didn't learn homemaking skills and housekeeping per se. I read and studied and went to school most of the time. I didn't have many chores. I only worked on Saturday.

AB: Well, uh, how did you learn how to cook and wash and iron, and all those kinds of things?

ME: After I married.

AB: Did your husband teach you?

ME: No, we didn't either one of us know very much. He said he'd made corn bread with his grandmother. But his mother taught me. And when we moved out after...out, we stayed with them maybe two years. When we moved out on our own, our oldest child was eight months old. And the lady where we got this apartment was one of the best cooks in town, and she taught me—her daughter taught me. I didn't know how to make a pancake when I moved there. [chuckling] So, they taught me. And then another teacher moved in another apartment, and she and her husband helped me. And I had the best teachers in town, just to tell you the truth.

RW-N: And meanwhile, you had a grandmother who was teaching you all kinds of other important things?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: Uh...you, you might have been an unwanted baby, you said. (ME: Yes) But how did your grandmother feel about you?

ME: Oh, she loved me.

RW-N: So....

ME: She loved me and I loved her right back.

RW-N: Uh-huh, so you did not-, you were not an unloved child?

ME: Oh, no, I had a lot of love...my father and my brothers, my sister. Eventually, you know...

RW-N: So those feelings operated at an early age. They told you that or it disappeared...?

[overlapping voices]

ME: Oh, no, they just told me that. But they didn't ever treat me like that, no.

RW-N: Well, did you half believe it? But did you half believe it?

ME: No. Well, I took them at their word. And I didn't even think of it. What difference did it make? I couldn't do anything about it. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm)

AB: How did you get that kind of sense of self that you seem to take charge and do what you can, and then beyond what you can do, you don't agonize over it a lot? Is that...?

ME: I don't know, don't know.

RW-N: Is that true about you? Does that describe you well?

ME: Yes. Yes.

RW-N: But you don't know where that came from?

ME: Maybe from my knowledge of the Bible. And with an understanding of that. If God is in charge, and whatever happens, you can't undo anything. You can't undo what happens, and you can't undo death. You can only improve and try to prevent and try to help. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm)
And that's all. So, why think about it? As you read the Bible, you don't see a lot of mourning and grieving and...what have you.

RW-N: Do you read the Bible a lot now? Or did you do that more when you were younger?

ME: I don't know how to answer that. I don't know if I'm reading more now.... I research more now. I've always researched. I never take anyone's word for it.

RW-N: Including the Bible?

ME: Oh, I'd go home and look up everything the minister said and read the words. And if he mispronounced it, I was grumbling, saying it to myself. I don't know why I do that. I don't know. I can't give you an answer.

RW-N: But one of the lessons that your grandmother taught you was...to go to school, to read a lot, or did she encourage that?

ME: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes.

RW-N: Do you think that she believed you were smart?

ME: I don't think we thought in terms of smart. You do as much as you can, do your very best. Now, that's all that I heard. We didn't think in terms of smart. I didn't, I don't think of myself as smart. I feel very inadequate a lot of times, but I don't grieve over it; I don't think about it. I've done all I can do.

RW-N: Well, you skipped in school, didn't you? You skipped a grade in school?

ME: Maybe around first grade or second. The second grade.

RW-N: Did that not give you some feedback that you were smart?

ME: No, we didn't know...we didn't know terms like that. I just...

RW-N: Did it give you a feeling of confidence that at least in school work that you were very good? Whether you used the word or not.

ME: No. No, no. I could read and I could write. And spell a bit. And I loved math; numbers were fun things. They were games for me. (RW-N: mm-hmm)

AB: Beyond your grandmother, were there other women that you knew who were important in your development?

ME: Oh, I've known a lot of influential women. Dr. Rose Butler Brown, have you ever heard of her? All right. Othella Jefferson.

AB: But tell us, tell us who Rose Butler Brown was.

RW-N: I don't know her.

ME: Dr. Rose Butler Brown was a teacher with the state college. And let's see, what did she teach? Economics? No. I can't even remember what she taught now. But I took course under her, [Test and Measurements]. But anyway, I knew her from a young person; I don't know what age. Her husband was the minister of Scott Street Baptist Church; he was the minister there. And my grandmother would visit with them, and I always knew that she was such a smart woman and such an influential woman. She was a tall, stately person, and I always thought I would take her class. You know how you make up your mind about things like that. I don't know a lot about her. They had one son. And she moved away from here, and she's deceased now. Her husband died while they were here, I think.

RW-N: Why was she important to you?

ME: Well, she looked like she had her life together, a smart woman, she had something to offer.

(RW-N: Mmm-hmm) And I liked people like that.

RW-N: So you signed up for her class? (ME: Yes) For what she might give you in the way that, those things. (ME: Yes) And who was the other woman you just mentioned?

ME: Othella Jefferson, taught psychology. Othella Harris Jefferson. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And she taught psychology and student teaching at Bluefield State College. And I took psychology under her.

RW-N: And what did she give you? Why do you call her one of the....

ME: Personality, personality. She was so exact, so...it seems like to me she was a perfect person, if you could be that. She had it all together. The only thing that I didn't like, she had so much going for her. I'd been to her home, many times. And she had everything going for her and everything. But she would never dress up. I could never understand that. That was our conversation. "Why don't you wear your clothes? Why have them if you never use them?" And maybe one of my liking for furs

RW-N: And they, these women had furs?

ME: Oh, yes, in elementary school. They were wearing fox then, the fox fur, those big old long fox things. And then, too, I told you that I played in furs and diamonds and all of the jewels, Aunt [inaudible name]'s things; she was an aunt, you know. But I always had so much fun playing in her things and wearing her clothes, and I just knew what I wanted. I just thought they were nice. Even if they don't want to kill 'em, I still love 'em.

RW-N: Yes. And were there other women, as you grew older, who were important to you in some way? Either personally or because you thought that they were doing special things in the world, or influencing the world?

ME: Those two women...I can't think of others. Uh, we had several young teachers at Bluefield State College. And my elementary school principal's daughter was back here teaching economics or something at Bluefield State. And I took a course under her, Aurelia Toyer.

AB: T-o-y-a?

ME: T-o-y-e-r, Toyer. And uh, I just looked at the young people and how they were doing so many great things now, and I wanted to do something. But I didn't do very much, except get married. And teach school, have a family.

AB: Sounds like a lot to me.

ME: I didn't do the things that I had in mind. I'll tell you, I had some wild ideas.

RW-N: Tell us about those.

ME: Oh, I can't even begin to tell you about them. My husband remembers all of those things. He likes to tease me about all of those things. And I can't even think of it. But if I had not married at that age, I probably would have never married. It was so many things I wanted to do. So

many...[overlapping voices, not intelligible]...

AB: What, fly an airplane? What?

ME: Yeah, going abroad, just visiting, just traveling all over the world, going places and seeing things and doing things, and getting higher degrees, going to other schools.

AB: And getting married and having a family sort of tied you to this place, then you didn't get...

ME: Oh, now, well, yeah. I don't...he didn't want to go anywhere, he wanted to stay here. And we don't go as much as I'd like to now. We go, but not as much as I would like to go, because, uh, he just doesn't want to go. And uh, I always thought that children needed their, both parents. I thought about a divorce many times, many times.

RW-N: Why?

ME: To be free.

RW-N: To be free, mmm-hmm.

ME: Free. When I was straightening up before you came here, you know what I thought? I said, "Edward, let's, let's check into a hotel and not come back here and dirty up our house." Let's not put the table full of papers any more. [chuckles] Let's go to a hotel and stay a few days." And then I said, "How silly." Just wild thoughts.

AB: That whole notion of being free, uh, is that something that has come to you in later years, or did you feel that earlier?

ME: No, no. I don't care to be free now. I love having a husband, and I love my husband and children. And, uh, I wouldn't have left him on account of the children, I don't think.

RW-N: But, but when you were younger you had...

ME: I thought about it a lot, and you know you daydream. (RW-N: Yes) But not really tell

anybody. (AB: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm)

RW-N: So you remembered that at various times throughout (ME: Mmm-hmm) your married life feeling that.

ME: Mmm-hmm. And it wasn't any problem, it wasn't any problem. He's always been a kind, thoughtful person.

RW-N: So it's been a question of wanting to do other things? (ME: Yes) That's what you wanted the freedom for.

ME: And what changed my mind, if I, if I left, I said well, I couldn't take the children. And I'd be so lonely without them.

RW-N: Do you think that's common for women to feel that way?

ME: I think so. I think-, I've talked to many women and they've said they've thought similar things. But when we think about leaving our children, and then they wouldn't have their father there. We had a good life, so I had no reason to even want to think it...but I did.

AB: Do you think that men are freer than women?

ME: Some of them may be. But my husband is so dedicated. And he was such a good father, still is. And, uh, even he tries to help me. If I'm straightening up in here, he's straightening up in there. He's still trying to help me, whatever we're doing. And then we'll say, "Well, we didn't dust." And then I'll say, "Well, maybe next time."

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. Do you think that your husband had those feelings of wanting to be free?

ME: No, Lord, he is conservative, very conservative.

RW-N: When you had those feelings from time to time, you sometimes said them to him?

ME: Oh, no. (RW-N: No, never). I wrote him a letter. (RW-N: You wrote him a letter) And then

I'd tear it up. But one time I gave him this letter. It was about three pages, and he kept it; he still has it.

RW-N: How long were you married, do you remember, when that happened?

ME: Oh, maybe about 15 years, maybe.

RW-N: So this was during the time when you were very busy raising a family and....

ME: Oh, that was always fun.

RW-N: That was always fun, but you still wanted to be free.

ME: Oh, I, I wanted this freedom to go and to do things. (RW-N: Do things, yes, yes) And to learn things. (RW-N: Yes) But I didn't want it enough to leave, to truly leave. You know how your mind runs amok? (RW-N: Yes) That's about it. That's the sum of my mind...running amok.

RW-N: I know well what you're talking about. [all are laughing] That's why I'm so interested in it.

ME: But uh, other than that. No, we had, we've always had a good life. And the children have had a good life and they talk about it, and we're a very close family.

RW-N: Did you ever seriously consider divorce?

ME: Seriously, no, I think it was only just what I told you. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) I didn't-, I couldn't find a reason.

RW-N: Let me ask you something about that. Was there a time in your life when that need to do things—I understand what you mean about freedom—you want to do things, see things. Was there a time in your life when that seemed to get, that need got larger? (ME: No, it didn't get larger; it was like wishful thinking or something) Do you remember one particular time? Do you remember one particular time, though, compared to others, that it got stronger?

ME: No.

RW-N: It was there, kind of on and off.

ME: It was just a little minor thing like that.

AB: It wouldn't be when you were annoyed...because two kids had the measles [chuckle] [inaudible]?

ME: Oh, no, no, no. We've had the best experiences in all the world. I think I told you about going on the vacation and we were ready to go and everything's packed, and I go in there, the child has the mumps. [chuckling] And we're going to the beach. But uh, no.

RW-N: I was actually asking that question because there have been some studies that show that some people particularly feel those kinds of things when they get to be 35, 40 years old. That there's a commitment to life that obviously has—limits people, too, when you have a commitment, and that time of life gets that way. So, I was just curious to see whether...

ME: No, Edward would, uh, for example, if I wanted to go to the teachers meeting, he would take me. If I wanted to go to a sorority meeting and I didn't want to leave the children, we'd all go. I suppose I must have been the only person with the children everywhere with them all the time. I even took them to college with me.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. ...We're going to ask you about two related things (ME: Okay) that were happening historically more or less at the same time. (ME: Okay) One was the Civil Rights Movement, which we've talked about a little bit. And the other was feminism or the Women's Movement, or womanism. So, since we're kind of talking about men/women things here, I'm going to ask you about that. When the Women's Movement began after the Civil Rights Movement, how aware of that were you, and what does that mean to you, if anything? Does the word feminism mean anything to you? Womanism? Did you relate to that at all?

ME: No. No, I didn't relate to it, and I don't relate to it now. I've done just about everything I

wanted to do. And uh, I didn't ever feel down—I felt up most of the time, I would think. And as far as salary is concerned, I'm making the same salary. When we first started out, the superintendent didn't think that, even though I'd taught a year or two before my husband, that a woman should make more money than a man. So, they had to raise his salary at least a hundred dollars more because they just didn't do that. And I felt that I could take whatever I had and do more with it than he could with whatever he had. And since I was the manager, I, I didn't mind if they gave him an extra hundred dollars. [chuckle] So it really didn't bother me. And I like...I like having a male leader. I like having a husband. I like having children, and I like my life, just to tell you the truth. I like it very much. (RW-N: mmm-hmm) And I think it's wonderful that the women want to do things, and that they want to try out all of these things. But I would never want to go in the Army or the services. I don't want to do that. Now, if I were a young person, I may want to fly a plane, yes. But I thought if I had that ability and that opportunity, which I didn't at that time, I don't look back and feel sad about it, you see. But for the people coming on now, I think that's great. I think it's great.

RW-N: So, so you're in favor of women having...

ME: I'm in favor of them (RW-N: opportunities) having the opportunity in doing. But I don't want to be a leader.

RW-N: Do you agree with the argument that if women are doing the same work, they should be making the same pay?

ME: Oh, yes, definitely so.

RW-N: Even though in your life you excused that little hundred dollars?

ME: Oh, well, I eventually made more.

AB: But it didn't bother you that a man would be paid more than you? (ME: oh, no) Even though

he was your husband?

ME: No, because he was bringing it home to me, and I was managing...

AB: But suppose he hadn't been, suppose he had just been the teacher in the next room who was doing the same, background you had, except he was getting more money?

ME: Well, I'll tell you. I think it was an understood thing. And it didn't bother me. It was just understood that I wasn't going to-, I just kind of understood it. I didn't have any resentment. I had been taught to use what I have wisely, not to worry about what you get. I wouldn't care if you got \$500 more.

AB: Do you see yourself as a person who brings about change, or, or do you accept things the way they are and just say, "Well, that's the way it is."

ME: No, I'm a person for change. No, I'm definitely a person for change.

AB: Do you work actively for change? (ME: Yes) Have you....in your community?

ME: Yes. Like for integration, for community things, yes, yes.

AB: Well, back to this question of feminism. Uh...it was going on, but your life was untouched by it, you felt, your thought processes, your [inaudible].

ME: No, it wasn't untouched. But...I don't even know how to describe how I felt about that. I wanted...I wanted the people who wanted this to have this opportunity. But I didn't particularly want the things that they wanted. That's what I told you before.

RW-N: Did you support...did you support the Women's Movement in any way?

ME: No.

RW-N: Did you support it in a private way, if you heard of a woman being treated unfairly, that you might say something, or?

ME: Oh, now I would go for support now, if anybody's treated unfairly. I would go public, not privately. I would go right out there and speak up, yes. But I haven't had that opportunity to do so here.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. In your own experience?

ME: No. But I knew that whatever I wanted, I'd have to speak up for it.

RW-N: Did you know, did you have any friends or colleagues at work who were speaking out more for women, perhaps more than what you were? Were you aware of that going on...among your friends?

ME: No. We were all, well, no more than sorority and the Links organization that I'm in. And just different organizations that I'm in. Ah, whatever they were doing.

RW-N: Do you think it's harder to be a woman than a man, in terms of opportunities?

ME: No. Really it's easier being a woman than it is a man. Our opportunities are greater. We'll get a job any time before a man.

AB: What kind of jobs?

ME: Whatever you're qualified to take, to do. I would think. Now, I've never thought of anything on the lower scale, to tell you the truth. [laughing]

AB: You think big?

ME: Yeah. [laughs] I hadn't thought of that. But if you didn't tape this, I'd tell you if I had to go into all of this other business, I still thought big. I didn't think on two dollars, I'd think three hundred. [AB: chuckle] As a matter of fact, that's what the banker called me: three hundred dollars. Well, I never wanted any little money. [laughs]

AB: So you don't think—we were talking about feminism—that the kinds of things that they

were talking about, had any real relationship to you as a person? It was all right for somebody else, but it wasn't-, didn't affect your life?

ME: Well, yes, it- you can't- I couldn't very well say that it didn't affect me at all. And I couldn't very well say that it didn't affect me some. But I felt good about the life that I'd led because I'd asked for what I wanted, and I got that. And I couldn't tell what I got because other people weren't getting the same thing. And uh, I'll give you an example of that. When I was teaching for the Community College, most teachers got \$500 a semester. I think I got \$500 one semester. And I negotiated my salary. If I couldn't have what I wanted, I didn't work. And then I was told that you can't tell this, because you'll upset the whole apple cart. I asked for what I wanted. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) And I got it.

AB: What made you think you could do that?

ME: I didn't think. I thought it was right. All right now, this is the way I think. If I'm making X number of dollars teaching high school, and you want to give me \$500 and I'm going to work two hours a night, twice a week, and it amounts to just maybe a few cents on an hourly basis per semester, I couldn't do that. I had a family. I had something to do at home. I had better use for my time. That would be defeating the purpose. Now, that was my way of thinking.

RW-N: There's something I...I haven't been able to put together. When I asked you before about who has it easier, men or women, you said, well, to some extent you believe women do. (ME: Mmm-hmm) If that's true, then it would seem that there was no basis for the Women's Movement, if women.... How do you put those two ideas together?

ME: Okay. All the women don't

END OF TAPE 3 – SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 3 – SIDE 2

ME: All women don't think alike. And it depends on the geographical location. It also depends on the job that they're asking, and what they're asking for. Some of us don't know that we can negotiate and ask for what we want, and get what we want. Some of these women in the Women's Movement had tried that and evidently they failed. So, there was a necessity to have the Women's Movement, you see? (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) I, as I told you, I have been a very fortunate person, and I've been able to look out for myself. And I've been well-blessed, all the way through retirement. And so, if I had the difficulty that they had, I'm sure that I would want to do something else, too. But I didn't have that. I just asked for it. And if they wanted a reason, I gave a reason. And since nobody else asked, then they didn't feel obligated to give.

RW-N: Did you ever have feelings that the Women's Movement was composed of and for white women and not, did not include black women?

ME: No, I didn't think like that. I've never thought-, I don't think in a black and white world. I just think of people. I realize that it is. I certainly do. But I just don't think like that. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm)

AB: How did you feel about the Civil Rights Movement and the sit-ins and all those kinds of things?

ME: Well, evidently it was necessary. And I did work a little bit with the-, here in this area with the Boy Scouts at that particular time. And we did sit in at the theaters. I didn't participate in sitting in at the counters at the various stores because I was working all the time. I don't know that I would have done that.

RW-N: Did they do that locally?

ME: Yes. Kresgie's and different places like that. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) Uh, but uh, I don't know what I would have done in that case. But uh, yes, I thought it was necessary. It seems to be the only way that we got a change.

AB: Do you think, then you think it was, it was an important time and (ME: Yes, it was) and do you think that your life was improved or those, that of your children by what happened during this period?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: How so?

ME: Well, with, uh, do we want to say the term "integration"?

RW-N: Sure, anything.

ME: Okay. Well, with integration and the opening up of facilities that had not been opened to all people before, it has made a beautiful life for us. I uh-, especially travel to the sorority conventions and what have you. I do it to stay in the finer hotels where the rooms are three and four hundred dollars a night for \$95. And uh, I fly because I like flying, and my husband likes it now; he didn't like it before. Sometimes we drive. I don't like to drive. But I drive.

RW-N: Now, how is this related to integration and the Civil Rights Movement?

ME: She asked the question did it help us, did it help our lifetime, yes. We could not have done that before. (RW-N: Those kinds of things) And so, I enjoyed that. And I was telling her some of things that I did.

RW-N: So it just opened up your life more.

ME: Yes, mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Have you had any especially close relationships with white people and white women?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: Would you tell us a little bit about those?

ME: Like what? Say...

RW-N: Do you have a special friend or have you had special friends who are white, who you're close to? I know you don't think in those terms, and I know that I'm asking you to, so.....

ME: I'm not truly close to anyone. But I will name some people that I feel close with and I talk with. I'm getting ready when we leave here, at 4:00 I will go to the VFW. And I volunteered to help the president, and I'm the senior vice-president. And I started a system whereby she wouldn't have to always work the kitchen alone, that all of the women should volunteer. And that at least two or three of us each night and rotate around the membership. And I've been a member for, oh, some twenty years or more. But I didn't always attend. And then when I-, they kept asking me to come back and I decided to go. And uh, and I participate with them. And the president is Jo Ann Tolbert; she's a lovely person.

AB: Is this a black VFW?

ME: No, we're the only black people there. They would like to have others, but nobody told us, and so we just go.

RW-N: This is the VFW?

ME: Yes. And there's the Kiwanis of Bluefield, Virginia. My husband was the-, is the only black person. And he's been the president. And we go to dinner. Well, I don't go every Thursday. I try not to. I have this fat thing going. And I can't leave anything because I love to eat. So, I uh, I go in the winter time and whenever it rains because I drive for him. But uh, if I can find something else to do, which I do have plenty to do, I do that. But we go there and they're all

white and I don't feel anything about that.

AB: Are you...have you...do you have white guests in your home?

ME: I guess. There's somebody here all the time, coming and going.

AB: And, and do you visit in their homes?

ME: Yes. But we don't do a lot of visiting here.

AB: You mean here in Bluefield, Virginia?

ME: Yes. They are welcome, but I'm always on the go. If they can catch me, they can come in.

RW-N: Have you ever stayed overnight in a white person's home?

ME: Here?

AB: Anywhere.

ME: Mmm-hmm, I came up in a white home.

AB: Uncle Willie.

ME: Uh, let's see. Not only there, there were other families that we were involved with.

RW-N: You mean friends? You say other families, or family-family?

ME: Yeah, they were friends. I guess they were my grandmother's friends. We were always some place, one place or other. And she wasn't working for them. So I assumed that they were. As far as here, have I stayed in any homes? No, that I can think of. And if they had stayed here? No, that I can think of. No. But we're friendly with a lot of people. I think more white people than we are black people. And my husband and I are on the board of CIL, that's the Committee on Independent Living (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) in Tazewell County. He was asked to be on the board, and I always have to drive for him, so they didn't ever have a quota so I eventually got asked. [chuckling]

RW-N: And there are a lot of white people on the board?

ME: They're all white; we're the only black people.

AB: What is the black population here? Is it small?

ME: I actually don't know. (AB: You think it's small?) It's small, yes. But I don't know. And it's growing smaller.

AB: So, most of your activities are here in Virginia, not across in West Virginia?

ME: About half and half. I belong to the Women's Club. Now, there are more-, there are other blacks there, about...maybe five or six of us.

RW-N: Which....here?

ME: Mmm-hmm, this town.

RW-N: And of course, you're tied to Bluefield in West Virginia?

ME: Yes. And there's a historical society. But I can't join anything else there. They're after me; I can't; I don't have any time for myself.

RW-N: So you belong to five, six, seven organizations now?

ME: Uh, 25.

RW-N: 25.

AB: You're kidding?

ME: Or more. No, my husband counted them. [laughs] Not all different. Well, there's the uh, RSVP. I don't like to go to RSVP because you have to make things and work all the time.

RW-N: What is that again? Retire-, no, what is RSVP, again?

AB: Senior volunteers. (ME: uh-huh, retired, uh-huh)

RW-N: You don't like to make things?

ME: No, but I go and help every now and then.

RW-N: What kind of things?

ME: Oh, like we made dolls for Christmas and (RW-N: You don't want to be making things.) you have to make hair and I don't like, I don't like crafts. I can do them, but I don't like-, I felt...well, I had to learn, I had to do them, I have to crochet, I have to do all of that stuff.

AB: Why? Why? Why do you have to?

ME: Because you should not grow up dumb and not be able to sew and crochet and stuff.

AB: Who says that?

ME: Grandmother, my grandmother. [laughs] And I feel like that, too. Because when I went to Richlands, I couldn't crochet. And the Home Ec teacher just stayed after me all the time. And I had this friend from 1st grade, Maxine Cooper, and she loved [crocheting], this is her life. And she always wanted me to do this. And I didn't want to. So, I decided to learn, to surprise her. And uh, I can read a pattern; it's easy and it's fun, but she can't [always] read a pattern. She's the teacher. [chuckle] But anyway, uh...we had this thing making these roses that set up. And I made this queen-sized thing with the quilt and the big red rose sitting up on it. All of them. And she could [not] make a rose that sat up. Now, that was fun. I told you I like to do-, out-do somebody; it's just a fun thing. [AB: chuckling] Just to see if I could. My first thing that I made when I went to the Singer Sewing Machine class was a dress ensemble, a coat, lined, and a dress. And now, I'm looking at everything to see if it's right. You know, when you buy clothes (RW-N: right) you're looking at all the seams.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. So, some of those things you really wouldn't have picked to do, but...(ME: Never) for one reason or another you got into them, and then it became fun to see whether you

could do them.

ME: And I didn't like-, I don't like cooking, but I work at it to do my best, because I was taught by all the better cooks. You-, like you never stir in a pot, you got to shake it....

RW-N: So, if you could have your perfect day of getting up in the morning and doing what you want, what would it be?

ME: Shower and dress and leave the house and never come back until time to go to sleep.

RW-N: And what would you do during that time? Fly to Russia...[teasing voice]

ME: Oh, no, no, no, no. I'm not going anywhere without my husband. We're going somewhere.

Whatever we're doing, we're just doing that. Or maybe to wake up that day—well, we still shower, dress and we'll come down like we're working, so we're ready to go. We, we don't come down without being ready to go. Even if we put on like a robe or something...or duster.

But we're ready to go when we come downstairs. And uh, we sit here at the table. He sits where I am, and I sit where you are, and we read to each other. And maybe we'll look at TV and I'll play tapes or make tapes, or do whatever...discuss the news, just anything. Some days we don't want to do anything.

AB: Have your children developed the same kind of relationships with their mates that you and your husband developed?

ME: Now, that is the \$6400 question. My second son is almost identical to me, even in looks. Nobody sees his identity because people look at color and they shouldn't. But the child is exactly like me. And the first son is like-, the first and third sons are like their father. But they think like I think. They think like we think, because that's what they came up doing.

AB: Mmm-hmm, but their wives...?

ME: But their wives don't think like...

AB: Like that?

ME: Uh-uh. They try. And uh, I think they're good mates. (AB: mmm-hmm) Not that because they're mine, but their wives think so, I guess. [AB: laughs] They don't forget holidays, they don't forget anniversaries and birthdays. And their children have a great vacation. Their kids have vacations in the summer, 'cause they had vacations. And they get to do things. And they make fun things for themselves to do. Then we all do things together.

RW-N: So, you're a pretty close family?

ME: Yes. Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, too. And they're grown. So, we'll be sprinting to Morgantown any time. Or to Roanoke, that's where we run to.

AB: So, you don't feel, as a black female, you don't feel that your life was boxed in, that you were boxed in at all?

ME: No.

AB: If you had to choose, if you were more boxed in by one or the other, being black or being female, which one would you say? [ME and AB overlapping voices, inaudible] circumscribed? I mean, if you were not able to do some of the things that you wanted to do, whatever it was, which one would you say caused that, being black or being female? What kept you from doing some of what you wanted?

ME: Because I didn't have the knowledge to do it. Not being black, nor female.

AB: If you had not been black, do you think you could have gotten the knowledge? Or if you hadn't been female, do you think you could have gotten the knowledge?

ME: No, that's not it. It wouldn't be black, and it wouldn't be female. I'm going to be black and I'm going to be female. And if I don't get to do it, it's because I don't know how to go about doing it.

AB: So, you don't feel at all tied in, (ME: No) closed in (ME: No) by race or sex?

ME: No. Oh, I'm happy to be what I am. I don't wish to be anything else. I've never wished to be anybody else, or anything else.

AB: We were talking earlier about social class among blacks. Do you see any social class differences, working-class versus middle-class versus upper-class in black society as you know it?

ME: Yes, they try to make it so. It's always been like that. One time, many years ago, it was the color scheme. Then it was the type of jobs...

RW-N: I'm sorry, would you say that again?

ME: It was the color.

RW-N: That put people in a class.

ME: ...of the skin, it was the color of the skin, the type of hair. All right. And then it came along with...what else? The type of job. And uh, I learned from my grandmother that you don't look at such things as that. I have a friend. She finished high school, I think she got a GED. I've had her for about forty-some years. She's a cook; one of the best—well, these people work for wealthy families. We don't mean thousand dollars, we're talking about millionaires, the billionaires. Okay. She got a GED since I've met her. But she was always a smart person, but she didn't have an opportunity, she didn't know how to make that happen for herself. But she's one of the most educated women I've ever encountered. Now, we get into it almost to blows. She gets on my nerves with a passion, and I get on hers with a passion. My husband calls

her the flying cook, because they're always flying up to New York, to Atlanta, or somewhere. She stays within the family, that family. All right. She's had so many experiences. She knows so much about valuable things. I'm not nearly as up to date on the stock market as she is. That woman can reach; she knows, that's her thing, from being with those families, you see? (AB: Mmm-hmm) And about clothing and sewing and dressing. Now, she's really done more for me in teaching me about the finer things of life in cooking and stuff like that.

AB: So, you're saying then, that professionally if you wanted to say that this woman is a cook, in terms of the hierarchy of professions, that's not very high. But in terms of her personal and cultural development, it's very high.

ME: Very high. To the very best.

AB: So the profession was not the defining (ME: mmm-mmm) characteristic there.

ME: She's been so many places I doubt I'll ever go, as far as the...the plays in New York. When they send her to New York to baby sit a couple of weeks or a month or so, well, they give her a new wardrobe of clothes from the very best stores and all of the tickets to all of the plays and shows that are going-, Broadway plays and shows, and money to spend and...

AB: But it is possible that somebody would say, "Oh, she's only a cook."

ME: Oh, now, a lot of people like to think of her like that. But her knowledge of the Bible and her prayers and...just everything [is far beyond average].

AB: So, we were talking about social class then and we find that there was at one time a division based upon color and hair, there was a division based upon profession-job.

ME: Job, uh-huh.

AB: Any other divisions?

ME: I don't know, I really don't know if it's any other.

RW-N: Does education fit into that?

ME: Yes, of course, uh-huh. You'd have to have that.

RW-N: To have the jobs?

ME: Yes. Yes, it would be.

RW-N: Money, a lot of money?

ME: Yes. ... I don't think money mattered. Let me give you a relationship here, and then you help me. For example, the number person, he had the money, he had the clothes, he had the vehicles. (RW-N: yeah) But he wasn't thought of very highly as compared to an educated person that was... And also, the miner, the man who worked in the mines had the money, had everything...but he was a miner. You see? And here was a teacher making \$200 a month and he probably had a thousand. (RW-N: mmm-hmm)

AB: How do you equate the difference between the regard for a teacher versus the regard for a miner? When the miner had more money? You're right.

ME: Well, I was taught to think of each person as an individual, and not to class him according to his job and his money or his anything. Treat them according to whatever, how they ever-, however they could respond to you.

AB: But generally [inaudible].

ME: And you don't embarrass them.

AB: Generally, in black society, do you think that helps?

ME: Of course, yes. I'm sure.

AB: Do you think people see each other as individuals, and not...?

ME: Oh, no, no, no. They see them as jobs and money doesn't matter then. And uh, they see them as, as I told you, the color thing doesn't go now, that used to be, many years ago. (RW-N: That's not important.) No, that's not important. Well, to some people it'll be important 'til they die, I guess.

RW-N: So to some people it still [inaudible] important.

ME: Yes, but you see by having all colors in our family, you didn't-, we weren't allowed to say black or say all of the "N" words and things, you see. [AB: chuckle] We couldn't say anything like that. And we couldn't say any of the poor white words. [chuckling] And we couldn't say anything like that. Nobody was allowed to, you see. So you just had to live and let live. That's the way Grandmother said, "Live and let live." (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) Treat everybody with respect.

RW-N: Oh, my gosh, I have some very important questions. (ME: Okay, go ahead) And some of these again, may be somewhat uh, repetition, repetitious a little bit. Uhm...some of these you've answered, that's why I'm orienting here. How have you have seen yourself as changing much over your lifetime? Do you see much change in yourself?

ME: Like what?

RW-N: Anything. Are you more independent, less independent, more outgoing, less outgoing, more aware of racism, less aware of racism? Think of your own development as a person. How have you developed?

ME: I truly don't know how to answer that.

RW-N: Have you thought about that much?

ME: No.

RW-N: Uh-huh, okay. Is that why it's hard to answer that, maybe because of that?

ME: Yes, maybe. But I've always been-, I've felt like I've always been independent. And you have the life that you make for yourself.

RW-N: And you've always thought that? Have you become more self-confident as you got older?

ME: No, I've calmed down tremendously. [AB chuckling] I think before I act now.

AB: What, what do you account...why do you do that now?

ME: Maturity.

RW-N: Okay, so you've become-, well, so you've become less impulsive, if I can use that-, impulsive means what? That you...

ME: Yes, I quite understand.

RW-N: Have you become less impulsive? Are you thinking more before you act?

ME: Yes, I think that I do think a little more [before] I act now. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) And I talk to Edward about everything and he calms me down.

AB: Do you lose your temper fast?

ME: I don't know. I don't think so.

RW-N: Are you emotional? When you say "he calms me down," when you're not calm...

ME: If I really get riled up and angry, he says, "Well, now, let's discuss this, let's see." But I hardly ever get that way. So, I don't know.

RW-N: Do you think you used to be that way more?

ME: No. Calculating. If I didn't like it, I was always calculating, you know. The outcome.

AB: You mean, what to do about it?

ME: Mmm-hmm, what I would do.

RW-N: But you're, but you've even more thoughtful now, in certain ways?

ME: No, I just say I'll forget about it.

RW-N: You're still...you're not sure about that?

ME: I said I'll forget about it, I'm not going to bother with it.

AB: You, you don't worry with it any more?

ME: Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

AB: The things that used to upset you don't upset you so much now.

ME: I don't think things have ever upset me very much. No. About the same. I, I, well, if anything did, it surely doesn't now. Why get upset? I'm wasting my, as Tracy Chapman says, my precious energy thinking and worrying.

RW-N: When you look back on your life, uh, if you can kind of see your life as a path that you've traveled, how do you see that path? Do you see that as a smooth one, ups and downs, it got better and so it's going up. Do you see life as a chapter in a book where you've done different things in different chapters?

ME: Kind of smooth.

RW-N: Kind of smooth? Mmm-hmm. Smooth going up? Smooth going down? (ME: Up)
Smooth more or less the same?

ME: I don't think I've ever been down. I don't think I've ever really been down in my life.

RW-N: Have there been harder times in your life, though, than other times? When you think back on it, was it-, did you have a particular time when things (ME: yes) were kind of harder for you?

ME: Yes, when I was a teenager, but uh, there's always ways to overcome and so.... It was just like a problem I had to solve.

AB: You're a pretty optimistic person. You think that things are gonna come out all right, there's something that you can do to....

ME: Yes, and if it doesn't, it's not intended to be. And so far, everything's been okay.

AB: You haven't run up against any obstacles, any problem you really couldn't solve or alter in some way?

ME: No.

AB: Do you think that happens because you change your definition of what you want the outcome to be? Or that it really does go your way?

ME: I've been blessed to have things to turn out beautifully, all the way. Even if I asked for a job, I got a job. I retired for about two hours one day, in 19 and 87, when my husband retired. And when we got near Tazewell, I said, "Go by the superintendent's office, I'm going to get another job." And I received all my retirement things. And then I went in and got a job. And I had two jobs. Not one, but blessed with two; I could choose. So, what more could you ask of life?

RW-N: If you could change anything in your life, what might that be? Or one or two things?

ME: If I could change anything, what would that be? The one thing I've always wanted to move far away from here, since I was born in Bluefield, West Virginia. If I could change that and could go back, I would move away. I may have to come back, but I've always had the desire to be away from here and to come back and visit here.

RW-N: Why is that true?

ME: I don't know.

RW-N: Did you not like this place, or did something else...?

ME: No, it's just a dream like you, uh, grow up and you finish college and you're gonna go somewhere, some far off place, and get a job and, and do all of these things and then come back here and visit. It's just a dream. This has been a good life here. But if I could change, you asked what it would be. (RW-N: right) I don't know even where I'd live. I don't even know which state I'd live in. And when I say I want to go somewhere, my husband says, "Where do you want to go?" "I don't know where I want to go. Can't you think of some place to take me?" [AB: chuckle]

RW-N: What do you think your biggest accomplishments are in life? What are you proudest of yourself, or you know, what you have accomplished? What you feel in your heart that you've done well and you feel good about?

ME: I don't have any one thing I can think of. I've done the best I could do with everything that I did.

RW-N: And you liked that feeling, right?

ME: I did my best, yes.

RW-N: So, when you're gone, I can put that on your tombstone and you'd be proud of...

ME: I won't have a tombstone.

RW-N: You won't. You'll be gone.

ME: Just gone. I won't be buried.

AB: What are you going to do?

ME: Cremation. And the children are not to bring the ashes back. They may be mixed up with

somebody else's. Let him dispose of them. It's all written down and ready.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. What do you hope for in the next years of your life?

ME: [laughs] A good life. Just to keep on, well, I hope for good health. And I pray for good health for myself and for my husband. And I always thank the Lord for what we have. And I pray for good health. And if it is not to be, then we can live with whatever. Just to adjust to whatever. And to travel a little. I don't know that I would like to—I would like to have a smaller place to live in. I really, now, I would really like to have a apartment or something where I had just to take care of the place that I have, but I wouldn't have to be responsible for the outside and the taxes and all of the stuff (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) to go with all of that. I would like that eventually.

RW-N: You would like to simplify your life?

ME: Yes.

RW-N: With regard to that. So you could still go out in the morning and do-, have all the fun all day. [all are laughing]

ME: Or maybe we wouldn't go out at all. I might read all day. (RW-N: You might read all day.) I might just read. So, I don't know.

RW-N: Is there anything that we haven't asked you that you think that we should have asked you that you'd want to add to this story?

ME: Lord, I've told you everything under the sun. And every kind of tale. But they were all true.

RW-N: Are there any questions you want to ask us?

ME: I really don't know what to ask you.

RW-N: I mean, is there any...[ME invited to ask about the project, if she had questions. Tape recorder now off]

END OF INTERVIEWS