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### Oral History Interview: Susie H. Guyton

Susie H. Guyton

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I, Assie N. Guyton, do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program (archives or organization) the tape recordings and transcripts of my interviews on May 5, 1997.  
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(Agent of Receiving Organization)

Assie N. Guyton  
(Donor)

May 5, 1997  
(Date)

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WITH  
MRS. SUSIE GUYTON**

**May 5 and June 6, 1997**

**Wolfe, West Virginia**

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

**Transcriptionist: Gina Kehali Kates**

AB: Let's identify the date, place, and people, since we're starting over, please.

RW-N: Okay, all right.

AB: We're in Wolfe, West Virginia, (SG: Wolfe, West Virginia, right) talking with Mrs. Susie Guyton.

RW-N: It's May 5th, 1997.

AB: And this is Ancella Bickley and Rita Wicks-Nelson.

RW-N: And we're re-taping because we seemed to have lost 40 minutes or so of taping. But we're actually not re-taping; we're going to go on. Where were, what were we talking about specifically?

SG: She had asked me if my aunt had, uh, taught me uh, with housekeeping and ironing, (AB: right) and so on. And I said no. And I did learn that with my mother so I had certain chores to do. And, uh, I had my own ironing to do and cleaning to do. So I did learn that from her.

AB: Mrs. Guyton, would you go back and tell us your aunt's name, uh, please?

SG: Camellia Hayes Morehead.

AB: And why were you living with your aunt?

SG: Because my mother and father had separated and, uh, she had left us...she had left...my mother had left my younger sister and I with my aunt and her husband. And uh, she, was uh, our mother, so to speak. Because really I did not know. (RW-N: And that was until you were eleven?) I was eleven when I left. (RW-N: when you left, right) Right. Because really she was the only one that I, I really knew, as a mother. Because uh, the time that my mother left us I was very young and my sister was an infant.

RW-N: When you look back on, on those days, until you were eleven, um, what kinds of things do you believe that you were taught in that home that have become important to you, or even

because you accepted them or because you rejected them even?

SG: Well, I accepted. I didn't reject anything that happened. I accepted it. And uh, I really don't remember, you know, (RW-N: because eleven is really young.) too much. Right uh, about, about what happened and what went on, but uh, I know that she, she wasn't what you say, you couldn't breathe, so strict you couldn't breathe, but she didn't allow you to, to rip and run and, and you had to stay at home and, or you'd go when she would take you. And we went to church. And then I had a cousin, her daughter, that was out—she was married, older and out—and she would take us different places, you know, on different trips and so on, when she would go out of town or so. She would take us with her.

AB: Mrs. Guyton, would you tell us again, uh, where you went to school?

SG: I went to...school—in the beginning I went to school at Haveco, uh, Elementary School. And then when my aunt moved to Maitlin, I went to Maitlin Superior. And I went to Welch Dunbar for a while, and then move into Mercer County I went to Bluestone School, uh, and I graduated from Bluestone School.

AB: And what about college?

SG: I graduated from Bluefield State College in 19 and 53.

AB: What made you decide to go to Bluefield State?

SG: My mother. [chuckle] She enrolled me in Bluefield State. She took me to Bluefield State and she enrolled me in Bluefield State. So she was the cause of me going there. (AB: Uh, you had no-) We didn't have money to go any place else, cause at that time, I think tuition fee was fifty dollars, so....

AB: How did you afford that?

SG: Well, I had to work. I went to New York every summer, and I worked and saved money.

AB: We were talking earlier about working and about expectations. Did you always think that you were going to work?

SG: Not really, I never gave it a thought, really. Uh, I guess after I went to school and, and got my degree I expected to work, you know. But just to say that I would go out and get a job, I never thought about that.

AB: How did you think you would live?

SG: I don't know. [laughs] I guess gettin' married and like and, and, and expected my husband to take care of me, I suppose. Uh, but then after I, I did get my degree and I was able to work, so then later after all of the children were up I did get a job. I started with Head Start. I drove ah, the Head Start children in the summer, and then I did get a job at Blu-, at Bramwell School, in the remedial. They started a Title...I can't remember now exactly what the title was, but it was a new program that the government had, uh, started. And I got a job with remedial reading and I taught remedial spelling, at the ah, high, at the high school, which we used the junior high. We saw the junior high and high school in the class, the ones that needed that remedial program.

RW-N: Now later on you taught sciences. Had, so had you studied the sciences at...?

SG: Yeah, I graduated with the field of physical education, health, and biological sciences.

RW-N: And was that uh, for what grade levels?

SG: Seven through twelve.

RW-N: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

AB: We were talking earlier about your mother's work. Uh, would you tell us again what your mother did in terms of [inaudible, overlapping voices].

SG: My mother was a domestic. Uh, she worked for one of the Poca Fuel-, I guess he would be an executive, he was one of the big shots, so to speak. And she was a domestic there, and she would go daily because she lived with my aunt in uh, in Wolfe, and she would go to Pocahontas, which was about a mile. So she would go there to work every day.

AB: And did you ever do domestic work yourself?

SG: Yes, in the summer, when I went to New York I would do, I had sleep-in job with the children, taking care of children and keeping the house, domestic work. And I think I got paid twenty-five dollars a week.

RW-N: What kind of an experience was that for you?

SG: It was all right. I mean uh, I didn't have anything else to do. I didn't uh, go to the city to, to explore the city. I went to work so that's what I did. And uh, and staying on the job was just fine with me because I didn't have anything else to do, you know, afterward.

RW-N: And you saw some relatives there? You said you...

SG: Oh, yeah, on weekends I would go into uh, to my aunt and we would go out and shop and....

RW-N: And your mother had many sisters there?

SG: Yeah, she had about seven (RW-N: Yes) living in that area.

RW-N: So you visited on the weekends?

SG: I visited on the weekends, right. And then my aunt belonged to different organizations and they would have things and I would go to that. Uh-huh. And just like I say, we would shop and buy things that I would need for school, uh, coming back to school.

RW-N: Did you make friends there at all, or you didn't have the chance to do that?

SG: No, I did not make friends. I didn't.



AB: Would you describe the community of Wolfe for us, please?

SG: Well, it's a very small community. And most of the people in here are, we'll say retired people, older people, at the present. Now, before it was just a little town where it was a lot of people here at one time and they were mostly blacks. But then you had some uh, Polish people and you had some Hungarians and you had some Italians. And uh, but the biggest majority of the people that lived in the area, or in the community, were blacks. Uh, everyone got along fine with each other. Uh, we would visit each other, uh, eat with each other. And we got along fine.

AB: Where did the people work who lived here?

SG: They were miners, and so they worked in Pocahontas, Virginia, or either [inaudible name], Virginia. Some even went to Bishop, which was uh, I guess, about twenty miles or so away.

AB: Now, there is a church in this community and there was at one time a school, you said. (SG: yes, uh-huh) Would you tell us about the church, please?

SG: Okay, the church is a Baptist church and it was a black church, or it is a black church. It was then, it is now. Uh, we had socials and, on the weekends at the church in the basement, uh, we had a regular pastor that came in. And we did have quite a few members at that time, uh, when I was, say, younger. But now...

RW-N: Would you say fifty? A hundred?

SG: Oh, we never had a hundred, but we had, we'd say about fifty people.

RW-N: Might have been...

SG: Yeah, about that many, attended the church here. Uh, because usually everyone in the community went to church.

RW-N: And those socials were...dinner?

SG: Oh, yeah, we would have dinners, we would have ice cream suppers, whatever they used to call them, and sell ice cream and hot dogs and that sort of thing. Uh, and we would have those. And even with the school, was a one-room school, and we would have socials and dances and so on there. And we would have money-raising projects for PTA and so on, and they would have socials and things. And we would all gather there, and uh, have fun together with each other. That was the only entertainment, only activities that we had to do except for, we would go to the movies in Pocahontas. We-, a group of the kids would get together and they'd walk to Pocahontas to the movies. And uh...

AB: Uh, would you tell us about that movie, uh, how much did it cost, uh...?

SG: Oh, we used to—fifteen, ten cents—we'd get popcorn and all for a quarter so, I mean, it was very cheap. And we could afford it, you know.

AB: Was that a segregated movie?

SG: Yes, it was; we sat in the balcony and the whites sat down on the lower section.

RW-N: And what did you think of that, when you were a child?

SG: Well, I never gave it a thought because I knew it was to be. It was to be. So I never gave it a thought. I never questioned it because I knew that was the way of life at that time. So things like that didn't, really didn't bother me...it didn't bother me at all. Because I knew that was life and I expected that. So, it didn't....

AB: When you look back on that now, how do you feel about it?

SG: Well, I figured we had the best place to look. We could see the movie better. [laughs] We didn't have to look up. At that time they were putting us back, but we had a better view.

AB: So you don't have any anger at all about that?

SG: No, I don't. I don't have any anger about it, I really don't. Not in—the things—now, in our

community we never really had problems. So uh, I guess I really didn't get into any problems to really know what was what. I would read a lot, you know. We used to get the Pittsburgh Courier and everything would be in that. And I used to read about it, and I would get angry, I really would. And I do right now with things that, that uh, some of the movies and things that come on about what happened back then; I do, I get angry. And I don't like to watch things like that because I don't like to get angry, you know, and bring up old-, hash up old memories, you know. But uh, I accepted it because it was life, so.

AB: But you were going back and forth to New York during the summers, you said, working. Did you make a comparison between what was available to you in New York as a black person versus what was available to you back here in West Virginia?

SG: No, no, I did not. Because in some places in New York uh, it would be just as bad, in some places. The way I felt about that was here it was open and in New York it wasn't. You know what I mean?

AB: What do you mean, open?

SG: When I say open, people here, you knew how they felt and what would, you expected to do. But in New York, uh, you-, say they were sort of undercover, like, or whatever you call it, if you want to put it that way. You didn't know what to expect, unless you got into the situation because some places in New York they didn't want you in it. So, but you knew where you could go here. And, and if you didn't wanna-, you knew where to go, so you didn't go. And in New York, just like I said before, you uh, some places they don't want you and you don't know that they don't want you until you get there. And then they tell you are not to be here, or you, they don't want you here. So uh, that's what I mean when I say it was more open here than it was there. You knew—

understanding—you knew what was what. So you didn't expect it here, you know. But I never really ran into, I never really ran—sittin' in the back of the bus and that sort of stuff, I never ran into that. Because when I started to ride the bus, you could ride the bus anywhere. (RW-N: Here?) Yeah, coming out of here to Bluefield, at that time, uh-huh. When I started riding the bus. Now I remember, I didn't ride the bus until I was grown, you see what I mean.

RW-N: Until you were, like, how old are you talking about?

SG: I was in high school, high school, (RW-N: yes) so that was a different thing. And then maybe once...once in a lifetime, you say, you would ride it.

RW-N: So when you grew up, uh, you went to all-black schools? (SG: Yes) Um, all the way until, until what age? Completely?

SG: Completely.

RW-N: Completely.

SG: Right. Even say college. Right?

RW-N: And even college? (SG: College, right) Was it during that time that Bluefield State was integrated?

SG: No, it was...

RW-N: It was still...

SG: ....it was after that.

RW-N: It was still, no, it was probably right after...

SG: It was in the '60's, I think, right after that.

RW-N: Yes, in the '60's, okay. (SG: uh-huh, uh-huh) So where you noticed, but—and you have described that you just accepted the world that way—but—and you lived in a community where there

were some white families and where (SG: Right) you got along pretty well, you have described, (SG: Right) to us. Uh, the other white kids who were around you tended to go to the Catholic church in another town, because that was their ethnic and religious background, (SG: right, right) but that you basically got along well with them. (SG: mm-hmm) However, the theater was segregated. What else when you think back? The schools were segregated; what other kinds of things were segregated and limited to you as you look back at it? Did you have—nobody had swimming pools around here, (SG: That's right) so that didn't matter? (SG: No, it didn't matter, right) Were there other public places?

SG: They didn't, they—let's see, they had restaurants or whatever in Pocahontas. Now, if we wanted anything, we could go in and get it, uh, soda or whatever, and come on out with that, you know, come back out with that.

AB: You couldn't sit down?

SG: Well, really the places that we would go to, to get the hot dogs, they didn't have places for anyone to sit down. Unless it was at the drugstore. And I never did go in the drugstore to sit and eat, anyway. Uh, if I went to the drugstore, it was to get medication or prescription filled and right back out and that was it. Now, it used to be place on the corner there, and these were Chrises and they were...I don't know if they were Italians or Hungarians or what. But anyway, they sold hot dogs and they sold sodas, the fountain, you know, and stuff, but it wasn't a place for anyone to sit in there. If anyone went in, they had to buy it and come out, you know, with it. So we could go in and get it, never had any problems with that.

RW-N: Where did you do your grocery shopping?

SG: It was at Pocahontas Company Store, Poca Fuel. (RW-N: uh-huh) They had a company store

there. And that's where they did the grocery shopping there. Which, it uh, was not segregated. All the Poca Fuel people, that worked for Poca Fuel, went in to buy whatever they wanted.

RW-N: And who worked for Poca Fuel in your country-, in your family?

SG: Uh, my uh stepfather was a miner.

RW-N: Your stepfather did, yes. Was a miner for them, uh-huh. (SG: mm-hmm)

AB: What about buying clothing? Where did you buy clothing?

SG: At the company store.

AB: Did you have any problems trying on clothing?

SG: I really don't know, because I never did go in there to buy any. My mother would always buy our things, you know, our clothing. So I really don't know. And then we used a lot of mail order catalogues at that time, too, and ordered from there. But I don't know if he would have had any problems trying on clothes or not. I don't think so. I haven't heard of anyone saying that they did, you know....uh, have problems trying on anything. I really don't.

AB: I wonder, Ms. Guyton, if we could go back and talk again about your family uh, life. I think you said that you had a brother and a sister?

SG: Yes, I had two brothers and a sister. Now, one brother died when he was six years old.

RW-N: Do you remember that?

SG: Yes, I do. I remember when he was in the hospital and when he was sick. And I remember when he died. Mm-hmm.

RW-N: And he died from what?

SG: Kidney failure.

RW-N: Kidney failure. And you were a few years older than this brother?

SG: About four years older, yeah.

RW-N: About four. So you were about ten when he died?

SG: Well...

RW-N: Something like that.

SG: Yes, something like that, yeah, he was six, he was, yes. Ten.

AB: And I think you said that you and your sister went to live with your aunt, while your brother went to live with...?

SG: My grandfather. And he lived here in Wolfe. And we were in McDowell County, which was in Havaco. And then, when they moved from Havaco to Maitland, because he—you know, at that time miners used to move from camp to camp, wherever they found a better job; I suppose that's the reason they moved. But he first worked at Havaco in the mines. And then he got a job in Maitland, so they moved to Maitland.

AB: And how long did you live with your, uh, aunt?

SG: I'd lived...I'll say...ten or eleven years. Because I was small when I went there and I don't know exactly how old I was. But just like I said, my sister was an infant. And uh, so it had to be anywhere from ten, nine or ten years, I'm sure.

AB: And then what happened?

SG: Uh, then I came to live with my mother here in Mercer County, in Wolfe. My mother married again and uh...

RW-N: Was that difficult to do? Since you had not lived with her? (SG: No, it wasn't.) No. You had seen her a lot.

SG: I had seen...not a lot, but I had seen her.

RW-N: Not a lot, but you had seen her. So that moving from your aunt's house to here was...

SG: It didn't...you know what? I'm a very passive person. And at that time, I, I just accept things, you know.

RW-N: That was gonna happen; (SG: that was, right) that, that was a family decision.

SG: Right, and it didn't bother me one way or the other.

RW-N: You weren't asked, (SG: no, no) it was a family decision, an adult decision.

SG: That's right, right.

AB: What about the emotional aspect of that, of being separated from your aunt? How did you feel about that?

SG: [pausing for thought] I don't know. Uh, uh, it never bothered me; it never bothered me. Because when I came to live with my mother, I was not mistreated, you know. And, so, if I had been mistreated, then I could have, looked back to see, you know, the differences, to compare. But it, it never was like that. So I never did. I just accepted that I had to leave because she wasn't able to take care of me. And, and....

AB: Did you cry? When you left her?

SG: I don't remember, whether I did or not. Knowing me, I don't think I did. I was a very hard person, you know, I mean, hard-hearted. And, and still to a point. And I think that might have been the reason that I turned out to be the way, you know, that way, was (AB: what do you mean?) moving from place to place, you know, leaving at that early age for so many years with her, and not being in contact with mother and father. And then...moving back. And so I just didn't let it bother me. You know, children can block things off like that, sometimes. And I don't know whether it's good or whether it's bad. But it can happen.



AB: What about your sister? Uh, because...

SG: She did, making the change, because she was spoiled—they had spoiled her to the point that...my sister, uh, could go to the company store and she could get anything that she wanted, you know.

She could carry the script card—what they had, you know, at the time they cut script— (RW-N: yes, mm-hmm) and spend it and buy whatever she wanted to do. So she did; she missed all of that, because she didn't get it at, at, with my mother. And she did miss that, and she did take it kind of hard, at first. But then uh, she uh,....

RW-N: So when you first moved back with your mother, you were alone with your mother and your stepfather? (SG: right) Just the three of you?

SG: Right. Just the three of us.

RW-N: And your sister came a few years later?

SG: Yes, yes, mm-hmm.

RW-N: Um, did you have any sense of being special during that time—or did you have a sense of being separated from your sister?

SG: No.

RW-N: Or was it nice to be separated from your sister? [chuckle]

SG: [chuckle] Well, we didn't stay away that long; it wasn't that long that we stayed apart.

RW-N: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

AB: What about your brother? Uh, did you get to see him during those years?

SG: No. No, we did not. The only time I got to see my brother, get acquainted, was when we moved, when I moved here when I was eleven. And then a couple of years say...then. It might not have been a couple of years. But I guess it was. It had to be, for him to uh—but still, he stayed here

and I stayed down there. So we still didn't see each other.

AB: How does he feel? Uh, was he angry? Did you all ever talk about that?

SG: No, I don't know how he felt, because we never did talk about that. We never have talked about it. And I didn't ask him because I felt like if he had wanted me to know he would have mentioned it to me, or he would tell me now how he feels.

RW-N: Now he went, he went into the service early?

SG: Yes, he, he went into...

RW-N: Quite early, right?

SG: Yes, he was about seventeen. Because just like I said, he used my birthdate to-, because I often tell him I, before you retired, before I retired, before you retired, I told him if he retired before I did, I was going to report him. [chuckles]

RW-N: And so-, you mentioned earlier then that he went away, he went off into the service and then...

SG: Yes, he went to the Korean, he was in the Korean conflict, right. And when he got out of service, he never came back. (RW-N: for years and years, and you didn't know where he was) For years we did not know where he was. Right. We did not know where he was.

RW-N: But meanwhile, he had married, had children, and lived in Washington, D.C, worked there, (SG: Yes, and he was living in Washington) has now retired here.

SG: Right, and he lives here.

RW-N: And he's now part of your life?

SG: Yes, he is.

RW-N: Eating back and forth and he's really right down the road (SG: right, right) with his wife and

family.

SG: His family, his children. One of his children lives in Bluefield and the other one still lives in Washington. But he comes to visit him, and I get to see him. And then I have gone up there with him to Washington. And I have seen him up there, so....

AB: Would you describe your family as a close family?

SG: Not as close as some people, no, I wouldn't. Not as close as some families are.

AB: And why would you...feel that way?

SG: I think it came because of the separation. You know, when you are small children, you bond together when you're small. And we never were uh, together that much, so, therefore, we aren't as close as we should be. But we are closer than we have been, we'll say that...uh, now. (RW-N: Uh-huh, yes) Because my sister, we call, we talk to each other on the telephone. And then she, if she doesn't get a call from one of us as soon as she thinks that she should, she calls and she lays us out. [chuckle] He said he had received a call from her, last week, I think he said, and he told her, he said, "I hear from you through Sis." She said, "You couldn't hear from me through Sis cause she doesn't call me that much." So....

AB: You described yourself as being sort of a calm person? (SG: Yes) And your sister, how is she?

SG: Oh, she's not. She, she gets angry and she tells you she's fiery, you know.

AB: What about your brother? What's his temperament like?

SG: He's, he's worse than I am. [laugh]

AB: You mean calmer?

SG: Yes, he's very, very passive. He, he does not like to create problems, you know, uh, he does everything to keep peace.

RW-N: And is that the way you see yourself?

SG: I do. I do whatever I can to keep peace.

RW-N: To keep peace?

SG: To keep peace.

RW-N: Because when there isn't peace, how do you feel?

SG: Well, I feel...upset. I, I, I don't like it. I feel-, I worry.

AB: Do you, uh, you mentioned the church being here next door; do you have a strong religious orientation?

SG: Yes, yes, I do. I uh, I uh try to treat people like I'd like for them to treat me. And I like to do whatever I can for people to...help them. Uh, I like to be around people and I like to help people, I do.

RW-N: And you think that came from the church?

SG: Well, with the church and, and uh, with—after I came to my mother to live, her teachings, too.  
Mm-hmm.

RW-N: So your mother was like that?

SG: Yes, she was.

RW-N: Tell us a little bit about your mother because I think we don't know a lot about her.

SG: Well, my mother liked to entertain people, she liked people. She liked to have people around and she liked to always be doing something for them.

AB: When you say entertain, do you mean like parties?

SG: Well, not really parties. Uh, now, she liked to cook, she loves to cook. And she would always cook and she would cook for people, gifts and things to people, you know, cook things for them and

send 'em to them, when she was able. She was always doing that...fixing things for people, cause she liked to do it.

RW-N: And she, so she continued to work in the years that you came back with her, as a domestic.

SG: Yes, she did. She continued to work. And then after they shut down Pocahontas, she moved with a family in Bluefield. (RW-N: uh-huh) Uh, yeah, he was a banker and she lived with them, and she kept house and she cooked.

RW-N: She lived with them?

SG: Mmm-hmm, she lived with them. (RW-N: now, what...) And she would come home—she lived with them during the week, (RW-N: right) and she would come home on weekends or on Saturdays or whatever. [inaudible, overlapping voices]

AB: Were you living with her by that time?

SG: No, no, no. No.

AB: This is before you came back to her?

SG: No, this is after I got married she did that. (RW-N: yes, uh-huh) That was after I got married. And uh, she did that. And she lived with them until uh, she got so that she had, she had a deterioration in her hip, and she wasn't able to move about as much as she uh, wanted to, as well as she did.

RW-N: Now, is your mother still living?

SG: No, she died, she was eighty-four when she died. She's been dead about three years.

RW-N: And your step-father?

SG: Oh, he's, he died before she did. He's been dead quite a while. See, they separated, too. He, after he—the mine shut down, he went to uh, Pennsylvania to work, and she would not leave here

to go up there with him because he was a heavy drinker, you know. And she, I guess she had taken all she was taking, so she said no point getting back into it. He was gone. So she didn't go.

**RW-N**: Now, what was your life living with your mother and your-, okay, you said that she liked to entertain, to cook for people, to do for people. (SG: mm-hmm, mm-hmm) Uh, she continued to work. What were the lessons that she taught you? You sort of have said one of them that you got from her is this business of helping people, to some extent came from her. (SG: yes, yes) Is there anything else that you...?

**SG**: And I never, say, refuse people. If they ask me to do something, I never refuse, you know.

**RW-N**: Would you like to refuse sometimes? You have described yourself as passive.

**SG**: I don't know, I don't, I don't know, I, I don't know if I would be satisfied if I refused. I, I don't think so. I don't think I would be pleased with myself if I refused.

**RW-N**: Because you should be helping, or because it would upset you if you...?

**SG**: Well, I figure that I should be doing; I should do that to help them, I should do that. I do hate to refuse people to do anything.

**RW-N**: Do you think that people take advantage of you sometimes?

**SG**: I don't think so, but some of my friends think so.

**AB**: Could we go back for a moment and talk about your home? Uh, what was life like in a home with a step-father who was a heavy drinker?

**SG**: Well, on the, during the week everything was fine because he did work. You know, he didn't drink and work. But as soon as Friday night came, Friday, and your payday or whatever, he would start drinking. Well, he would stay away from home until he'd come back, say Sunday, he would stay away, and he'd come back say Sunday. Uh, he was the type of person that, uh, if he did happen to

come home with friends, he wanted you to, oh...uh, be there to—this is my mother—and wanted to, don't care what time of night he'd come in, if he came in with friends, he wanted her to be there and he wanted her to cook and he wanted...and with drunks. And she resented it. She didn't like doing that.

AB: Was he hard to get along with when he was drinking?

SG: Oh, yes, he was very high tempered when he was drinking.

AB: Did he strike you or anything like that?

SG: No, no, he never did. No. Mm-mmm. And he never did strike her, either, but he was just so mean, you know, so... but I, I, did, on Saturdays, Fridays and Saturdays, you hated to see those days come, you know.

RW-N: Yeah, how did you manage that?

SG: Well, just like I said, he'd stay, well he'd go Friday and he'd come back Sunday. (RW-N: yes, uh-huh) And when he did come back Sunday—uh, if he did not come back Saturday or anything and bring his friends, he would come Sunday and he would go right to bed and he'd sleep, getting ready for the work, you know.

AB: Were you afraid of him?

SG: Not really. Not really. But he was just...you just had to treat him with kid gloves, you know, so to speak. And she had to, too, you know.

RW-N: Is, is that-, could that be-, is that related in any way to the fact that you, that you want peace now, that you don't want things to be upset? Cause that had to be...

SG: It may be, but I just...

RW-N: Did that happen in your earlier life with your aunt? (SG: no, no) That was more peaceful?

(SG: yes). And then when you went with your mother it got more complicated in that it was...?

SG: Yeah, because, see, we didn't have that with my aunt. No drinking or any of that, no.

We didn't have that.

AB: What about money? Did he spend his money out on the weekends?

SG: Well, he didn't spend all of it. He'd pay, you know, get the bills, but he'd spend most of it.

AB: So you all had to rely on your mother's salary?

SG: She, so she, so she, [overlapping voices] that's really when she went back to work, you know.

Because she, uh, after she married him, [inaudible] the other people that she worked for in Pocahontas. That's when she went back to this place, you know, I told you where the bosses and things would eat, she got the job there at the.... (AB: mm-hmm) With him, when he was carrying on the way that he did, you know. So she relied on that.

RW-N: When I grew up and became at least an adolescent—I think I feel a little bit differently about it now—I remember thinking that there were some things about my mother that I wanted to be like, and there were some things about my mother that I did not want to be like. (SG: mm-hmm, mm-hmm) Does that...do you relate to that at all as you think back on your mother?

SG: No, my Momma was a nice person. She was a nice person. I would like to be like her, right. I guess in some instances that might be why I do the things that I do, or I feel that I have to do the things that, that I do.

RW-N: You mean in helping people and...?

SG: In helping people, right. Because she did, she was a nice person.

AB: Was she a happy person?

SG: Mmm-hmm.



AB: In spite of, of the things...

SG: Of what he did, uh-huh. But then I think, just like I said, when he lost his job in the mines here and he moved away, that was the way she got rid of that. That's the reason she would not go with him. Because he would call, you know, for her—"you know, you could come"—and she's not coming; she said, "I'm not coming." So she's just finished with that, you know.

AB: When he was at home during the week and working in the mines, what were his expectations of meals, of washing his clothes, or anything like that? Did uh, did he expect a lot in that regard?

SG: Well, I don't think he expected no more than my mother was willing to do. In which she was a good housekeeper. She cleaned and she washed all, you know, and kept things clean. And she cooked meals; she cooked the meals, regular meals, breakfast, lunch and whatever, and dinner. She did.

AB: I've heard people talk about fathers who expected hot bread at each meal. Was your step-father like that?

SG: Well, I don't think he expected, un-un, no, he didn't expect it, but whenever possible, she had that. Cause she would make the rolls, you know, and she'd make the biscuits and, and, and that sort of thing. But I don't think he, say, demanded that she do that. He did not.

RW-N: Do you have—uh, he, he obviously had a drinking problem, but do you have any nice (SD: but he was a nicer person) memories of him?

SG: He was a nice person when he didn't have alcohol in him, (RW-N: uh-huh) a very nice person. Yeah, I have memories of him.

RW-N: That are, that are somewhat affectionate or fond or at least accepting?

SG: Yes, he was nice, yes, yes, he was.

RW-N: Was it affection or...an acceptance of him?

SG: Well, he did not show a whole lot of affection. You know what I mean? Uh, uh, hugging you...he didn't do that. And I didn't want him to do that, you know; (RW-N: yes) I didn't expect that. But he laughed, he talked, he'd talk with you and laugh and joke and, and give you money or whatever when you needed. But he, he was a nice person.

AB: Did he have any biological children?

SG: No, no.

AB: Had he ever been married before?

SG: No, no. Mm-hmm.

AB: What about holidays? What about Christmas and Easter and times like that?

SG: Well, we always had uh what the uh kids would have, we had-what would you say?- the new clothes. And uh, we had dinners, you know. We always celebrated them.

AB: You had a tree?

SG: Yeah! Yes, and gifts, we all did, mm-hmm.

AB: So, did you feel that you had...

SG: And she cooked up fruit cakes and she made all kinds of cakes and she had, you know, and, and we had all of that. We had everything.

AB: You didn't feel deprived at all?

SG: No, no, of nothing. Really, not of anything.

AB: Would you tell us again about your own family, your husband and, and children? What was your husband's name?

SG: My husband's name was M.B. Guyton, M.B. Guyton, just two initials, nothing else. I

thought that was pretty strange to name a person just two initials, but....

RW-N: Did they stand for anything, those initials?

SG: No, that's what I said, just two initials. (RW-N: uh-huh, uh-huh) Uh, let's see, my husband was a schoolteacher and a coach at Bram-, at Bluestone. Uh, and then after he left there, after the integration of schools, he was transferred to uh, Park Central, which is Bluefield, Park Street. And after he...they closed Park Central, he was transferred over to Bluefield High School, assistant principal. Uh, one of the assistant principals; they had two. Uh, then the job became vacant at Bramwell, where I was, I was teaching at the time. And he applied for the principalship and he got the job down there at uh, at Bramwell High School. And he was the principal there until 19 and 81. And that's—he was killed in a car accident, at that time.

AB: And how many children do you have?

SG: We have four. We have three girls and one boy.

AB: And where are they?

SG: My oldest daughter is in uh, Burbank, California; uh, my next daughter is in Bluefield; and my son is in Boston. And the baby girl is here with me, Deirdre.

AB: And I believe you, you told us that during the time that your children were infants, you did not work.

SG: No, I did not work. Uh, I went to work when Deirdre was two years old. And I had a neighbor across the street there that would uh, take care of her during the day while I was at work. Uh, and then I, then she, when she became at school age, she went to school. She went to Head Start first, and then she went to uh elementary school down at Bramwell. And they, all of my kids graduated from Bramwell except for the boy; he graduated from Bluefield High School

cause his father was working up there and he wanted to play football cause Bramwell only played basketball. And so he wanted to play football, too, so he went with his father.

RW-N: How many of your children went to college?

SG: All of them.

RW-N: They all...?

SG: All of them, college graduates.

RW-N: And did they go to Bluefield?

SG: Un-un. My second daughter graduated from Tuskegee; my first daughter graduated from Long Island University in New York. And Michael graduated from West Virginia State, but Michael was at West Point for three years. After he graduated from high school, he went to West Point. And it got so, so much pressure on him up there, uh, he had to leave. He had, he was hospitalized twice for high blood pressure, so his daddy told him he didn't have to stay. So he...

RW-N: And he finished where, at State?

SG: At West Virginia State.

RW-N: At West Virginia State, yes.

SG: But he was commissioned into the Army. So he stayed in the Army until ooh...he came out a captain, he came out when they started uh, cutting. You remember when the year, I don't know what year that was in - eighty something, ninety, might have been ninety when they started cutting.

RW-N: A while back, you mean, yes.

SG: Yes. And so he got out of the Army then. Because he did ROTC work at A & T; he worked there. (RW-N: Uh-huh, uh-huh) My oldest daughter works with the VA in Los Angeles.

AB: Do you have any regrets uh, about spending your life in Wolfe?

SG: No, no, I don't. I enjoy it. Most of the people around me are older people. And I like older people. So, and I work with them, you know. [recorder beeping in background]

RW-N: There's still something that uh—it's signaling me now properly [reference to recorder]. Earlier on, before we lost this on the tape, I had asked you about the days that you, ah, stayed at home. And I'm still trying to get a better sense of whether that was somewhat unusual for women of your generation to be home with their children.

SG: No, not with me it wasn't unusual. I mean, and it was satisfying with me. (RW-N: Okay) Uh, because, uh, every day I was home to give—see, when one-room school, the kids would come home for lunch or they would take their lunch.

RW-N: Yes, cause it was right here.

SG: ...was right here. So I had hot lunches for them, fixed it. And if it was snowing so bad that they couldn't get, you know, I didn't want them to...I would take their lunch to them. Which was just right across the road there.

RW-N: When you went out to, um, when you would see some of your friends of approximately your own age, were those women mostly working out of the home?

SG: [pause] Mmm-mmm, no, they weren't.

AB: Were they at home with their children, too?

SG: They were at home with their children, too, mm-hmm. The ones that I, uh-huh.

AB: Were these—uh, would your friends in that period have been your high school friends or people that you met at Bluefield State?

SG: At Bluefield State, people that I met at Bluefield State. The ones that I, I...that I really...now at; remember now at this time, when we had the, when we got married and we had these kids and my husband was working, he wasn't making that much money, uh, where we could uh, do so much traveling...you know what I mean? To...to...to get out of Wolfe. [laughs] (RW-N: yes) Because it really was hard, you know, to even have a car at that point, you know, at the time. So he wasn't making but two-, say, drawing say two-hundred...I remember two-hundred and ninety-five dollars or whatever a month. And you know what that was like. So, uh, I never really saw uh, any of my friends that often. Uh, but the ones that I did know, that were around that I had.... Now, the ones, the high school people, none of them were in this community with me.

RW-N: They had gone.

SG: They were all gone. (RW-N: yes) Uh, so, the older people that I really associated with in the community. Uh, then it was a few that I knew that I had graduated with at Bluefield State—that I had met at Bluefield State, maybe they graduated a year ahead of me or so—they were married also and had kids and they didn't work either, you know, at that time, because they didn't get jobs until later, after their kids were in school and so on and so on. With the kids in high school before they even started to work.

AB: What were you doing for social life during that period? Did you uh, go to parties? Were you associated with fraternity, your husband, or...?

SG: My husband was fraternity, right. And ....

**END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 1 (and first interview)**

**BEGIN TAPE 1 – SIDE 2 (and second interview)**

**AB:** Hello, this is Ancella Bickley speaking. I am in Wolfe, West Virginia with Mrs. Susie Guyton and Dr. Rita Wicks-Nelson. Today is June 6, 1997. Mrs. Guyton, uh, I was- we were talking coming up-, you were living here during the time of the, the integration of Bluefield State College, (SG: yes) and the Civil Rights Movement (SG: yes) and what not. I know that there were a lot of activities which took place in Bluefield, uh, down at the Alpha house, uh, in Bluefield; do you know the house I'm talking about? The one that the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity [inaudible; overlapping voices].

**SG:** ...out on the east end, the east end section, yes.

**AB:** Uh-huh. There were, there were some activities that took place there. So could you talk a little bit about integration as it took place in Bluefield and at Bluefield State College and, and what your involvement might have been with all of those things?

**SG:** Well, at the time uh I had left Bluefield State during this period, integration; I was not there. Uh, (RW-N: you had graduated?) I had graduated, uh-huh. I do remember that they, they had sit-ins at Woolworth's but I did not take part in any of that. Uh, a Mrs. Othella Jefferson started this with her group.

**RW-N:** What's her first name? What is her first name? Would you spell it? (SG: Othella) Othella, okay. (SG: Othella) Jefferson? (SG: Jefferson) Okay.

**SG:** Mmm. Uh, and I couldn't tell you too much about that, because I did not take part in that.

**AB:** Were you living here when the uh gymnasium was bombed at Bluefield State?

**SG:** Yes, I was.

**AB:** Would you tell us a little bit about that and how you as a graduate of Bluefield felt about

that?

SG: Well, at the time uh Bluefield State—I think it was Hardway that was the President at Bluefield State. (RW-N: yeah, probably) Yeah, he was and uh now what I felt he was sent here to do this, to clear up this, to start this, to clear it up.

AB: When you say, when you say clear it up, what do you mean?

SG: Uh, he was sent here to disarrange, I guess that's what I'm trying to say, Bluefield State. Uh, he was to change things around. And when I say change things around, get rid of certain things or certain people.

AB: Do you mean, you mean, you think he was sent here to get rid of black people?

SG: I do think so. [chuckle] I do, I think he was placed here for that and he did a good job.

RW-N: Now was that during the time that there was also talk about Bluefield being with Concord? Was that, that was essentially what was going on?

AB: That was before.

SG: That was before. This was before, this was before then. Uh, at this time—this was when the kids did the bombing there after they had built the new gym and uh and they named it Shott, and we all know that the Shotts in Bluefield were one of—the families were racist. I figured that, I thought they were and I think a whole lot of other people too but the gym was named after Shott. And so a group of boys—men, rather—that were on campus, they decided they'd take things in their own hands. But what I can't understand is uh, how did they get the dynamite; that's what I can't understand, you know. We do not have access to that type of material and uh, but I, I don't know, I never did understand how they got a hold of it. But then uh, later I think, several years ago, maybe a couple of years ago, they were building a elevator shaft at this, at Bluefield State in



this same building and they uncovered more dynamite that did not go off. (AB: umm) So uh, they intended to destroy the building, I think.

AB: Uh, did, did you all ever have conversations about that in, in the neighborhood or among Bluefield alumni or what do you think people were feeling, black people were feeling about that at that time?

SG: Well, I never did discuss it with anyone. Uh, the feeling that, that we had, that black people had...

RW-N: What was your impression of that?

SG: You mean destroying the building?

RW-N: Yeah, what, what your impression of how people were feeling

SG: ...of how they were feeling about the situation at Bluefield State. (RW-N: yeah) They didn't like it. Uh, they didn't like it because teachers resigned, some did. They left, they went on to different, to other colleges, the blacks did, and as each black left they would replace them with whites until finally they have gotten rid of all of the blacks on the campus there now. They don't have any instructors, black instructors, on the campus at all. They have one male instructor on the campus at Beckley, and all of the other instructors are whites.

RW-N: And most of the administrators are white as well?

SG: All of them. The administrators are white.

AB: Now uh, were you teaching at that time, when this, when that incident happened at Bluefield State?

SG: Mmm-hmm, at Bramwell.

AB: And your husband was teaching as well? (SG: mm-hmm) But both of you were in all-black

schools?

SG: No. No, no, no. Uh, let's see. When I started teaching, I went to Bramwell, which was integration. It was blacks and whites. Uh, and my husband- [inaudible, overlapping voices].

RW-N: And that was when you started, it was already integrated? Yes.

SG: It was already integrated, right.

AB: So you never really taught, you never really taught at an all-black school?

SG: No, I did not. (AB: all right) But my husband did. He taught in an all-black school. Mm-hmm.

AB: So were there any uh, was there any tension in the community or in the school that you are aware of either as the result of the integration of the schools or of that incident at Bluefield State?

SG: Well, when I entered teaching at Bramwell, uh, Bluefield State situation was over. Uh, it was never discussed at any time. Uh, now the tension at Bramwell when I started teaching there, the kids were—now my kids just hated it, they hated the situation.

AB: You mean your own children?

SG: My own children. They hated leaving from the all-black school going into the mixed schools. They didn't like it.

AB: Why was that?

SG: They just didn't like it at all. They didn't like the way that uh—they just felt bitter about making the change. They felt that they, they would rather have stayed where they were than to be integrated.

AB: Do you think that was because uh they had expectations of the way they would be treated (SG: yes) by the children (SG: right) or the teachers (SG: by both, by both)? Uh-huh. And did

any of that happen?

SG: And then, then the blacks were put in the lower classes. What I mean, the lower classes, they had A, B, and C classes. In the black schools, you didn't have that. You had- (AB: tracking) right, they didn't have tracking. Uh, you were in a tenth grade class, and that was that, all of you were there together. And all of you were expected to do the very same thing in the classroom, in the black schools. But then when they went over to the white schools, they had uh, put them in the C's and the B's and you had very few in the A's track.

AB: And how were-, how about you as a teacher? Were there any different expectations or behaviors exhibited toward you as a teacher, as a black teacher in what had been a white school?

SG: No, no, because when I first started, just as I said, I was in the remedial program and I had the remedial students and I was all separated, say back to myself in a section uh—I, I called it a little cubbyhole that they had us in, you know, a section of the school. But I was not expected to do any more, any less than any of the rest of them.

AB: Were there many black students in your remedial program?

SG: Yes. It was the poor whites and the blacks. That's what I had.

AB: And do you think that those children, when you—you were saying that the black children were put in the lower tracks in the school, do you think that any of the children were assigned into your program uh, who maybe should not have been there?

SG: No. No, no, no. Not in my program. But I do think in some of the other classes that they were, because they were put into them that they should not have been put in, uh, and that made them discipline problems. And they didn't have anything to do, so therefore they were discipline problems. And some refused to do, and uh, when they had the discipline problems they would

just always put 'em out. You know what I mean, out of school or suspend them and this, that, and the other. And then sometimes, they would put them in the back of the room, you know, to try to keep 'em straight but then that didn't work either. So uh, they would send them to the office and he would suspend them or whatever.

RW-N: Did that lead to much trouble between the schools and the black community, black parents?

SG: Not at Bramwell, it didn't. I don't know about the others because I guess some of the blacks just accepted what had been, been done with the students.

RW-N: And how many black teachers were there in the school that you were in, in Bramwell?

SG: Let's see. Mrs. Folks, Mr. Woods, myself; I believe that was all at the time.

RW-N: And that might have been like three or four out of twenty? (SG: three or four, yes) Or something like that? (SG: right) And, and those other teachers had probably taught in all-black schools before?

SG: The blacks had. (RW-N: yes) Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: And how- do you remember how you felt about how black teachers were perceived?

SG: Well, uh most black teachers in the high school, in junior high, that were teachers had the lower sections (RW-N: uh-huh) of say C's and the B's, they had those.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. And how did they feel about that?

SG: Well, they resented it cause they felt that they could teach the A section as well as (RW-N: uh-huh) any of the others. They resented it.

RW-N: Did you resent uh your job teaching remedial reading and spelling?

SG: No. No, I did not.

**RW-N:** You accepted the job (SG: yes) knowing you were going to be doing that (SG: right, yes, yes) and later on, of course, you moved on to other things? (SG: right) Mmm-hmm.

**SG:** That was giving me an opportunity to get a job, (RW-N: yes) so I did not resent any, you know, that, un-un.

**AB:** You said earlier that your husband started out teaching at Genoa.

**SG:** No, he started out teaching at, at Bramwell. At Bluestone.

**AB:** At Bluestone. (SG: Bluestone) Then he went to Genoa.

**SG:** No, he did not go to Genoa, cause Genoa, it was no longer Genoa. It was Park Central.

(AB: Park Central. I'm sorry, Park Central.) Right. So he went to Park Central.

**AB:** Both of those were black schools?

**SG:** Black schools.

**AB:** Bluestone was a black school (SG: black school) and Park Central was a black school. (SG: right) Uh, what grades were at Bluestone?

**SG:** Uh, Bluestone at the beginning was K through—not K, but first grade through twelfth grade. (AB: mm-hmm) And uh when he went there, that's what it was. (AB: mmm-hmm) And he taught social science and math. And he was also uh the basketball coach and football coach.

**AB:** And then when he went over to Park Central, what did-?

**SG:** When he went over to Park Central, he was assistant to Coach Willis, football and basketball coach and he also taught social studies.

**AB:** And Park Central was grades what?

**SG:** That was uh, junior high—not junior high but ten through twelve.

**AB:** Ten through twelve.

SG: Yes, ten through twelve.

AB: Now, and then when he left Park Central, was Park Central closed when he left?

SG: Yes

AB: So it was integrated? (SG: yes, it was-) I mean students were integrated.

SG: It closed and they sent them to Bluefield High School, that integrated them. Then they made Park Central uh, uh, what do you call the school uh...? (AB: special ed or something?) Special ed. (AB: Uh-huh) They made it special ed.

AB: And, and from Park Central then where did your husband go?

SG: He went to Bluefield High School, assistant principal, at Bluefield High School.

AB: And did he spend the rest of his teaching career there?

SG: No, he stayed there for several years and I don't know exactly how many and then he was transferred from Bluefield to Bramwell as principal.

AB: Now, what grades were at Bramwell?

SG: At Bramwell, the grades were un one through twelve.

AB: One through twelve. And you and he, were you in the same school?

SG: Yes.

AB: And there, there was no—sometimes they didn't let husbands and wives work together.

SG: I know, I know. We had that, we had that problem. Uh, before he came uh the assistant principal and I talked and I asked for a transfer to, uh, for physical education where in elementary school, where I would transfer from school to school. Uh, they said that I was not certified for that, so I had to stay there. Uh, after being there for a couple of years, we had a problem with some of the people in Bramwell.

AB: What kind of problem?

SG: Uh, it was one particular family, or man, uh, he did, resented M.B. being principal of Bramwell High School. So, he did everything that he could, every little nit-nat that he could find to go to the Board with. So he went to the Board with this, with teaching, both of us teaching in the same school. So then—I think Superintendent Cook was the superintendent then—he sent down a fellow that represented the Board to me and asked me, offered me the physical education job with the traveling, you know, from elementary school. And I refused to take it because at that time when I had asked for it, he said I was not certified. And I had not been back to school uh, one day, to certify myself in the field. So I said no, that I would not take it, I was gonna stay right there because I had asked to be transferred and they wouldn't do it. And uh, he could fire me if he would like to. So, he said no, he couldn't do that because I didn't – “You do your job.” That was my physical education supervisor from the Board, he came. Uh, said, “No, we can't do that because you did your job, you've always done your job,” and this, that, and the other. So, I said, “Well, that's the only way that I will leave.” And I said, “Now you brought the message so you take the message back to Mr. Cook, and tell him what I said. And I'm not leaving, but he can get rid of me if he'd like to.” And he said, “Oh no, you got NAACP.” I said, “That's right!” [laughter] “I also have the Human Rights Commission.” [laughter] And so that's what happened; so that dropped.

RW-N: Now when you made that decision to stand up to that, did you make that decision in consultation with your husband or-

SG: No. No, I did not. I did not. I don't even know that he knew at that time that that's what he was there for. (RW-N: mmm-hmm) But I told him because I had asked before to leave and

they wouldn't let me, because I figured this would come up and they said no, that I was not certified. So I stayed. Well this particular man, he still tried to find uh, uh different little things to get things going, you know, started. He also, uh, after school he would drive by to see what he could see going on. So I think one day, was a couple of kids sitting on the uh stoop—not the stoop but the steps—and he called them that he's got, he's got the boys and girls up there doing this, that, and the other, you know. So they would call. It was always somethin' that he would do. Uh, and always something about M.B. and myself, that's the way it was. So I had gotten so angry. One day he came up to pick up some boys to take 'em to uh—he was a Kiwanis man and he was taking these kids, boys, to the this Kiwanis program. And I was so angry with him that I uh, went in the office and he was there to pick up these boys. And I walked out of the office and the devil got in me (AB: chuckle) and I went back and I confronted him. And uh, oh, we had a round and I was so angry with him.

RW-N: What was motivating him?

SG: He just didn't want us there.

RW-N: He jus—the two of you?

SG: He didn't want him there, that's right.

RW-N: Was, was-, you're not saying this was a racial thing-?

SG: I am saying that was a racial (RW-N: you are saying this was a racial thing). That's what I'm saying! [chuckle]. (RW-N: okay) Cause that's what it was!

RW-N: Well, I wasn't sure whether you were emphasizing the husband-wife thing or the race thing.

SG: No. It was that too; he was (RW-N: that made, that made it worse but-[chuckle]) Right,



right, that was it too. So I did; I got so angry I got up in his face.

RW-N: What'd ya say?

SG: And I took my fist. [laughs] Oh, I said everything.

RW-N: Like what?

SG: I didn't cuss him though; I didn't do that. [laughs]

RW-N: Did you accuse him?

SG: Yes, I did. And I was tired of his mess, I told him that. And the secretary was there and she was so afraid. So after he left she said, "Mrs. Guyton, I was so afraid that you was gonna hit him." I said, "No, I was not gonna hit him." But then he goes back and he calls the Board and he tells them that I [chuckle] confronted him, you know, and so the assistant superintendent came over and he told M.B., he said, "You know what," he said, "you know I think you all need to get you all a lawyer and stop this mess with him," you know.

AB: The superintendent was telling you that?

SG: The assistant superintendent, yes. He and M.B. were friends. And he told him that he thought that uh, we needed to get a lawyer. And uh...

RW-N: Was that assistant superintendent a white man?

SG: Yes, he was.

RW-N: And the other man was a white man? (SG: Yes) Yes.

SG: Right. But they could see what was happening; they could see. I mean, any dummy could see what was happening. And uh-

AB: Do you remember what year that might have been, Mrs. Guyton?

SG: No. I tell you I don't remember dates; I never have. I had a problem in high school with

remembering dates. [laughs]

AB: Well, your husband then was one of the few people that I know of who got appointed as a principal in a formerly white school, early on—this must have been the '70's or so.

SG: It was in the '70's. (AB: that was unusual) I think he was the first one really. And then I think the next guy was the guy in Charleston.

AB: Jimmy Morris.

SG: I think so.

AB: Oh, but that didn't happen until the—that was the 1980's. Uh, that must have been '85, '88, something like that when Jimmy was appointed so your husband was early.

SG: Yes, he was, the '70's; he was [inaudible].

AB: Because most of those men were really demoted.

SG: Right, right.

RW-N: If that's true, how did—do you have any feelings about how the white population felt about that, about having a black man as a principal?

SG: Well, uh, in Bramwell this particular family man was the only one that ever created any problem. He had uh, another family, say, uh, to go along with him. But they were the only two families that created any kind of problems.

AB: Well, that was so unusual for your husband to be appointed. Can you remember how that came about because it wasn't happening in other places?

SG: I don't know unless they considered him being a smart man, which he was, a smart man. At that time he had his doctorate. And before then he had master's in guidance, you know. He has his master's in guidance. Uh, I really-, and then they had a lot of faith in M.B., uh, the

superintendent and assistant superintendent. Because a lot of times they would come to him with problems that they had, you know. Uh, and, and, and they would get together with that. They even had him on the committee for—let's see, I can't think of the name of the committee that they had but it was for children that were being suspended, uh, the law, so to speak, of, of suspending kids from school for certain things and length of time and so on. And he was on that committee and he was the only black on the committee. Uh, so I felt that they had a lot of faith in him.

AB: So when he was appointed there was no outcry from the white community (SG: no, no), just this problem with this one or two families there. (SG: no, with this one or two families, right) And was your husband still at Bramwell—I mean, did he finish his whole career there at Bramwell?

SG: Yes.

AB: And he remained as the principal?

SG: Yes. He uh, in '81 he was killed in a car wreck and he was still, he was principal at Bramwell then.

AB: Mm-hmm. Now, as we talked earlier, you described yourself as a passive person, (SG: yes) and yet you were able to confront this man. How, how do you account for that?

SG: But you must remember, we had taken it for years, you know. We had taken it for years. And, and it got to the point that uh, you can't take but so much. And then just like I said, the devil got into me that particular morning. [chuckle]

AB: And there were no real repercussions to you in terms of your career or, or anything after that?

SG: No, no, no, no. I thought-, I think that sort of lifted him a little bit, you know. He stayed away and I think he started to accept things.

AB: So he didn't bother (SG: so he didn't) you so much after that?

SG: No, no not so much. No, no, no, not so much. So finally it just died, you know; he didn't, he didn't do anything else. He just sort of accepted it and went along with everything from then on. Cause he even to the point where he took his children—he didn't let them go to Bramwell school; they sent them to Bluefield High School. Uh,

AB: To get away from you all.

SG: Yeah, but then the baby girl, she refused to go. She refused to leave and go to Bluefield High School, so she stayed and she graduated from there.

RW-N: When you confronted him, did you confront him about the racial issue?

SG: Yes, I did. About the way he had done, yes, I did. And, and about the way he had treated us. (RW-N: mm-hmm) I did. But see my husband didn't know this. He was in the office with the door closed. He might have heard it and wouldn't come out. [laughter]

AB: Did he say anything to you about it?

SG: No, he didn't. (AB: He never...) He never, he never said ...

RW-N: Do you think he heard about it?

SG: I sure he did, [laugh] (RW-N: uh-huh) because the secretary wo—if he didn't know about it, she told him about it. Yeah, I'm sure he knew about it.

AB: Was the secretary white?

SG: Yes, uh-huh. (RW-N: While we're talking about integration...) She thought a lot of M.B. She thought a lot of him.

RW-N: While we're talking somewhat above,- about integration, can we broaden that conversation out a little bit? Uh, on the local scene, of course, clearly the schools became integrated and other things became integrated. Do you see that as happening very uh, with some calmness around here? Was there much upset around the Bluefield area? Did it just sort of slide into change without a lot of confrontation? How do you see that?

SG: Uh, with the high schools, is that what you're talkin' about?

RW-N: Yes, or, or, or the movies that had been integrated or the buses or anything else.

SG: Well, I think that it just—it was no big deal, you know. I think it sort of slide in. Uh, naturally change of any kind, you have to adjust to it. But we had no problem. No serious, you know, problems. Maybe people might have said a few things to you in that sort of way, but no, no serious problems.

RW-N: Did you participate in any direct way in any Civil Rights (SG: No, I did not) marches or writing (SG: no, I did not) letters (SG: no, I did not)? Did your husband? Did you have friends who did?

SG: No.

AB: Were you NAACP members?

SG: No, not—I mean with the organizations, our organizations that we were in contributed to NAACP, you know. But not members, financial members. Un-un.

RW-N: How did you feel about that—what was going on at the national level, with Martin Luther King and the marches, and jailing Martin Luther King?

SG: I went along with him. I, I, I agreed with him. I mean, I approved of what he did. And, and I admired him because it took a lot of nerve to do it. A lot—it was dangerous and each time he

did any of that, he put his life on the line. I admired him. I really did.

AB: I remember that the state Human Rights Commission came to Bluefield. I had just come back to West Virginia so I don't have a clear notion of that, but they came to Bluefield and held hearings about the incident that had happened there. Do you remember any of that? They were there for several days, I think.

SG: The incident that had happened there...

AB: With the bombing of the (SG: oh, the bombing) dorm-, I mean of the gymnasium at Bluefield State led to a series of hearings, public hearings from the state Human Rights Commission.

SG: No, I'm not familiar with that. Now my husband was, I think, called as a juror for this bombing. Uh, he was not appointed directly but, you know, I think they have to go and substitute or whatever they are. You know, for people that uh, you know what I'm trying to say. (AB: the jury, panels) Yeah, ju—uh-huh. But he never served but he attended, he had to attend the hearing every day. And I never discussed it with him, and he never discussed it with me. Cause I don't think really he was allowed to do that. (AB: mm-hmm) So I never discussed it with him.

AB: You spoke about your husband uh, Mrs. Guyton, I wonder if you would tell us a little bit more about him. How did you all meet?

SG: I think it was in Pocahontas I met him. Uh, I don't know if you've familiar with Pocahontas; are you familiar with Pocahontas? At that time, Pocahontas was blooming, you know, uh and they had different uh, uh beer joints and so on, you know, [chuckle] on the street. And I met him in one of those places up there.

AB: You were both adults at that time?

SG: Yes, yes.

RW-N: Pocahontas was a little, is a little town, uh, and it was booming or blooming because of the coal mining business?

SG: Yes, that's true, that's true. They had, uh, the trains would come in and uh, people would get off the trains for the weekend and they would spend the weekend in this area and then they would catch the train, sixteen or whatever, and go back to down McDowell and Crystal or wherever they wanted to come from, for the weekend, those were the miners, and they—I guess they would party all week [chuckle].

RW-N: So you were both in Pocahontas when you met?

SG: No, I lived here. (RW-N: no, you lived here) And he lived in Pocahontas and I met him there.

RW-N: Oh, okay, so you were visiting there.

SG: Right, and I met him there.

AB: Had he finished college by that time?

SG: Yes, he had.

AB: And you, what were you doing?

SG: I was in college.

AB: You were in college. (SG: uh-huh) Uh, what about your husband's family? Were they from this area too?

SG: Uh, my husband's family came from Alabama. Uh, and they—his father and mother moved in this area. I think the first town that they moved to was Gary in McDowell County. And then they left McDowell County; they went to Tazewell County, which was Amonate. And then from

Amonate they moved to Pocahontas. You must remember that in those days miners moved from community to community, wherever they could get better jobs, they would move.

AB: So your husband's father was a coal miner?

SG: Yes, he was a coal miner.

AB: Was your husband an only child?

SG: Yes, he was.

AB: And he came down to West Virginia State College and took his bachelor's degree?

SG: Yes, and in the meantime—I think it was in '40, I don't know exactly what year it was—uh, it was the war broke out and he joined the Army. After he—I think he had been at West Virginia State a year or two and he and a group of fellows, they joined the Army. Uh, then after the war was over he came back to West Virginia State and reentered. So he graduated in '42; it was '42.

RW-N: And when did you marry?

SG: We marry in '53, '53.

RW-N: And how long had you known each other then?

SG: About three years. About three years.

RW-N: So you met when you—let's see, he was teaching already when you met him and you were a student?

SG: He was just—he had just received his master's and he was back. And the year that I graduated from high school, he got a job at Bramwell cause it was in '48.

AB: Where did he get his master's?

SG: Northwestern.

AB: And what about his Ph.D.?



SG: In Texas somewhere, Houston, Texas.

RW-N: And that Ph.D. was in what?

SG: It was in administration.

RW-N: Uh-huh. So you courted for two or three years?

SG: Yes, mm-hmm. [chuckle]

RW-N: And married and stayed here; he was (SG: yes) working here and (SG: stayed here).

And...?

SG: Then I went back to school. I, I had a baby; we married, I had a baby and I went back to school and I graduated in fifty-, say '52; I finished up in '52, December '52, but then I got my—marched in '53.

RW-N: So-this is, this is news to me so I wanna understand it. (SG: mm-hmm) You, when you married you left college for a while (SG: yes) without your bachelor's degree (SG: right) and had a child (SG: right) and then returned to school, (SG: right) right away though, right? (SG: right)

And then you had what? Another year to go or something like that?

SG: I had a semester to go.

RW-N: A semester to go. (SG: mm-hmm) Did you know when you married that you were going to go back to finish school?

SG: Mm-hmm.

AB: How did you manage that with a baby?

SG: My mother kept the baby.

AB: Your mother was not working at that time, cause you had said she...

SG: Not at that time, no, no, uh-huh, not at that time. She kept it.

RW-N: Can you describe your husband to us, briefly? You've already said that you thought he was an intelligent guy (SG: mm-hmm), uh, he was chosen to be a principal so we know that he had other kinds of skills, right? Um, what other kinds of characteristics that he had, are you willing to share with us?

SG: Well, I think he was attractive [chuckle], well-built, uh, and I think he was a athlete at West Virginia State—he played football and he played basketball. (RW-N: mm-hmm). And he also played baseball, uh, he was just a nice person.

RW-N: Now you have described yourself as passive. We're not so sure about that anymore since we know the devil gets into you once in a while.

SG: [chuckle] Well, you know, I'm, I, I, I am a type of person, I mean, I'll take a whole lot.

RW-N: Before you blow.

SG: Before I blow. Right.

RW-N: How 'bout, how 'bout him?

SG: Well, he, he was quiet. I don't know if I've ever seen him—well, one time I saw him real angry. I think it was one time, and it was with a parent at school. Uh, he, he, he got to the point so that I thought, I thought he would, he was gonna' hit the man but he didn't. And I was afraid so I went to the guidance counselor. I happened to go in the office for something—I don't know what it was—and he and this man were into it in there. And the man told him what he was gonna do to him and so on, and he said he wasn't, and so I really, I really was afraid so I went to the guidance counselor and told him what was happening and asked him to go in, you know. So he did. But uh, other than that he was always uh, low, you know, calm, [inaudible].

AB: How about at home? Who was the disciplinarian with the children?

SG: I was. I was. He left all that to me. I did it.

RW-N: Who made, who made the other kinds of decisions, like about jobs or whether you would, whether you would work or whether you would stay at home? Who, who made those decisions?

SG: Well, we discussed them. We were together, we were.

AB: Is that the way you all made decisions for the family, (SG: mm-hmm) that you talked them over?

SG: We were together, right.

AB: Did you bring the children into those discussions or did you two just make...?

SG: The two of us discussed them.

AB: Mm-hmm. Did you spank your children?

SG: Yes, I did. [laughs] Yes, I did, and I didn't hurt 'em one bit. [chuckle] Because you have to let them know who's boss cause if you don't they'll take over. (AB: chuckle) So, and then my oldest one was, she was very stubborn. She was a stubborn child.

AB: Is that the. the daughter who went to Long Island?

SG: Yes, uh-huh, she was there.

AB: How did she get to Long Island?

SG: Well, I have a sister that lived in Brooklyn and she went up there. She first entered Brooklyn School of Pharmacy and then before she graduated they combined, they went together, Long Island University. So when she graduated, that's where—it was Long Island University.

RW-N: Now when you lost your husband—cause I have trouble with years too—were you retired? (SG: nooo). He was not retired; you were, you were both working.

SG: We were both working.

RW-N: And this was an accident? (SG: yes) Which changed your life dramatically.

SG: Right. Uh...

RW-N: How did things for you after that?

SG: Well...

RW-N: You kept your job?

SG: I kept my job, right, and I had to have surgery after that. Uh, I went into the hospital twice and, and my oldest daughter, she said, later she told me, she said, "Momma, you had me worried." She said, "After Daddy died," said, "looked like you stayed sick, you know, you were in the hospital with this; you had, had me worried." But it wasn't anything serious. If he had lived I would have had to have this, you know, that done. So uh, being uh, I guess, kids, they thought the worst, but it wasn't bad. But then uh, I got so that uh, I was looking for an opportunity to get out of teaching, after then, and the first opportunity that I got, I took it. It was the incentive that they offered, age plus experience. (RW-N: mm-hmm, the retirement incentive) Right, right.

RW-N: Why were you uh, looking to get out of teaching at that time?

SG: Because the uh, the kids had-, the kids were beginning to change. I mean, they weren't the same students they were at the time that I started teaching. Uh, uh, kids weren't bad. We had a good school at Bramwell; we didn't have problems with, you know, the kids, they were nice kids.

RW-N: But that had begun to change?

SG: It had. Right.

RW-N: In what ways?

SG: Uh, the kids defiant; they bring things to school they shouldn't be—alcohol—and, and, and they'd get caught, you know. Uh, they fight uh, and they just were not doing the class work like they should.

RW-N: Now this was black and white kids?

SG: Right.

RW-N: You didn't notice any difference in that?

SG: No, no, no. [chuckle] They just—I think one thing about the blacks that—and I might be wrong—but I still say it and I still feel that way—that the black students, when they were in all-black schools were different from students that today that's in white schools, uh, that's in integrated schools. I think, and I've said it and I might be wrong, that we have a tendency to copy, to do what the white kids do. And, and our culture's much different, at that time it was different, because certain things we weren't allowed to do, weren't allowed to say. I mean, we were respectful because we were taught that in homes. But anymore the kids aren't.

RW-N: So are you telling me that the black kids learned bad things from the white kids?

SG: I think they did; I really do. (RW-N: right) As far as discipline, you know, being uh, uh, uh, mannerable and that sort of thing, uh, and doing—yes, I do. [chuckle] Because we used to—we were told that you can't do this and that was meant, that you couldn't do it. Cause if you did, what you had to suffer the consequences, whatever it might be.

RW-N: So integration of the schools was not all positive in your eyes?

SG: No, it was not. No, it was not.

RW-N: If you could change that today, would you divide the schools up again?

SG: Yes, I would, but give them the same opportunity for education. I mean, what I mean is

give them the same materials cause when we were growing we used to have to get the books from the white school and they'd have in there uh, "Bramwell High School." We would get those books when they discarded them. (RW-N; yes) And, and, and that, we didn't like it; I didn't like it. Uh, just give us the same opportunity but put us back over here and let us work with our own. And I think the world would be a much better place, I really do. I might be wrong but that's the way I feel about it.

RW-N: Do you see that, uh, today that the races are quite different? You, you mentioned before, you used something like "our culture" or "our people" were different. How do you see that as still true today, if you see that as still true today?

SG: I don't see it as being still true today in some instances; I don't see it that way. Uh, just as I said before, we've picked up things from other people. And then I guess they, in turn, have picked up things from us.

RW-N: Yes, I wanted to ask you (SG: uh-huh) if you do see that.

SG: They have, uh-huh.

RW-N: Can you, off the top of your head, give me an example of that?

SG: Well, the way they talk, you know. We, we have a (RW-N: mm-hmm) way of expressing ourselves; we are always quick with words, you know. [chuckle] We've always been quick with words. Uh, and I see that the others are pickin' up that too, now. Certain words like "babe," now we've always—our man have always used that term, "babe." And I see the white men are using it now, uh, and the students too. So we're, we're, we're, say, learning from each other and, and not all things are good things, I would say. [chuckle]

RW-N: But would you say some of them are?

SG: Well, I guess so, sure; we all have, all of us have some good traits. [chuckle] So...

RW-N: Do you think that, do you think that—it could be argued that if two groups of people become more like each other, that they will also get along better with each other. (SG: well...) Do you have any hope of that?

SG: Well, that might be true, it might be. At least they would, I guess they would understand each other and once you understand each other, then you will be able to get along better with each other because you'll know what makes that individual tick. And once you do that, uh, that's with all people, I mean. (RW-N: yes) Even with me and with her, with her, because she is me. [chuckle] [SG refers to AB] When I understand her, uh, (RW-N: right) then she can understand me, then we do get along better.

RW-N: Right. It's not just a black-white problem.

SG: Right. No, no.

RW-N: It's people in general.

SG: That's right.

RW-N: Could I apply that a moment to men and women, two different, two different other groups? All right? We've been talking the last few minutes about black and whites as groups. Uh, during, or at, largely during the time of the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Movement also started, in terms of women saying that, in a variety of ways, they were not—they didn't have equality. (SG: mm-hmm) Uh, were you-, to what degree did that play any role in your life? To what degree were you aware of it?

**END TAPE 1 – SIDE 2**

**BEGIN TAPE 2 – SIDE 1**

**AB:** This is a continuation of the tape with Mrs. Susie Guyton and Dr. Rita Wicks-Nelson. We are in Wolfe, West Virginia, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

**RW-N:** So Mrs. Guyton, I was asking you, in effect, about the women's movement or feminism or womanism, right, and how that tied into your life in any way.

**SG:** Uh, the woman's movement, the women's movement. Uh, some things, I thought they went, they go to extreme with, really. Uh, to me, uh, women—how can I say that? [softly] Women are expected to do certain things. A woman cannot...be or she cannot—her body is not made to do the things that the man's body is made to be. I mean, to do. And certain things I think a woman should not do. I mean, as far as work. . . . This is what you're talking about, is it not? Uh. . . .

**RW-N:** I'm talking about any of your feelings.

**SG:** Any of my feelings, okay. In the beginning I felt that the woman's movement, they went along too strong, I thought. And then a lot of women wouldn't agree with me with that.

**RW-N:** Now, do I understand you correctly? You're saying, for example, a woman's body is made such that she perhaps can't do certain kinds of work, is that...?

**SG:** Right, that a man can do. Uh, but then, just like I said, a lot of women would disagree. They do what they want to do. And I say, well, maybe that's to each his own. But to me, I would not try to do a lot of things that the women do. And, and even to the feelings that a lot of them have about, uh, let me see. . . . Uh, I think that a lot of women—I'm gonna put it this way—they don't have anything to do to occupy their minds. Uh, so they sit and think of things to get started, you know what I mean? I don't know if you know what I mean or not. I'm trying to explain what I mean. But, uh. . . .



**RW-N:** They invent things, (SG: Yes, they do!) to fill up their time.

**SG:** To fill up their time, that's right. And if they had something else to occupy their minds, a lot of things would not happen or would have not happened, that has happened with this women's lib.

**RW-N:** Do you see the women's movement as mostly a white movement?

**SG:** Well, that's what started it, because the black woman has always been a strong woman.

Even from the beginning, the black woman has. Uh, she's always been a worker, and she's taken care of the family—that's back in slavery with that. Uh, because the man did not have the opportunity to do, because he was pushed back, but the woman did. So she worked and she took care of the family and the home and all. And the white woman never had to do this. She stayed at home. And just as I said before, she had nothing to do. So her mind wandered. And she would (RW-N: or at least [inaudible]) come up with this, right, with these ideas about certain things.

**AB:** What do you think, Mrs. Guyton, about uh women coal miners or, or women, uh, there's a mayor of Huntington who is a woman, and Parkersburg has had a woman mayor.

**SG:** Well, now, that, that she could handle, being a mayor. She could handle that, she could do that. But a coal miner? Un-un-un, I can't see that.

**RW-N:** So you're talking about mostly the physical. . . (SG: Right) capacities limit women in certain ways.

**SG:** Right, right, in certain ways, it does.

**AB:** What about salaries, for example? When we look at salary structures across the country or job opportunities uh, for women; for example, we were talking about principals of schools. As far

as I know, there was only one black female principal in the old days. And that was up at Elkins at Riverside. What about job opportunities and equality in terms of salary and what not for women?

SG: Well, I think if a woman's gonna work the man's job, I think she should get the salary that he gets. But then I can see, too, uh, maybe society says the man is the head of the household, or he should be the head of the household. So maybe that is the reason for this salary uh, uh, difference, maybe. But I think that if she's gonna do the job that he does, she should get paid like he does.

RW-N: So you agree with at least some of the basic things the women's movement might say?

SG: Some of the things, right, but not all.

RW-N: But not all.

SG: But not all of it, right.

RW-N: Do you know any women who have been, who have worked uh particularly for women's groups, whether they belonged to organizations or not?

SG: No, I do not know of any. No, I do not know of any.

RW-N: Could I ask you how your daughter feels about these things? I'm talking about Deirdre, who's the only one who I have met, because she's of a younger generation. That's why I'm asking you.

SG: I can't tell you, I cannot speak for Deirdre. I don't know how she feels about that. I couldn't tell you about any of them, because, really, we have never discussed it. So I couldn't tell you how she would feel.

AB: But your, your daughter who graduated from Long Island was in pharmacy. (SG: Mm-hmm) Which is not what I would have thought uh, to be a woman's occupation. Yet she's made a

career.

SG: And she's not in pharmacy now. (AB: Uh-huh) (RW-N: yes) She is in environmental, in environmental uh, uh, let me see what is it that she's in. She is the chief of environmental . . .well, anyway...

RW-N: So she has a leadership role in her job.

SG: Yes. And, and, and it is maintenance. It's maintaining and keeping up uh, the hospital. So that's still, it's like you say, it's leadership, and it takes on a lot of responsibility. And it's so time-consuming. And she has a lot of men working for her, which she has problems. Because they resent the woman telling them what to do.

RW-N: And how do you feel about that?

SG: Well, I wouldn't want the job. But she has it, so I guess it's all right for her. [chuckle] But I wouldn't want the job.

RW-N: Because. . . ?

SG: Because of the men that you have with you and knowing the feelings, you know, the way that they feel. I just couldn't do it.

RW-N: You mean it would be a tough thing?

SG: It would be a tough . . .yeah, right. (RW-N: Are you proud of her?) Because you—yes, I am—because you have a lot of decisions that you have to make. You have to stick with it, you have to mean what you say, and I couldn't do it. I couldn't.

AB: So you see then that there's a generational difference in uh, in what women can do? [phone ringing in background; interruption for phone]

RW-N: So we were picking up; oh, so do you think it's a generational thing that's between

women?

SG: Yeah, it has to be, yeah. It has to be. Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: And are you largely-, do you largely approve of that change, or do you have some misgivings about it?

SG: Well, I really hadn't given it any, you know, I mean. . . (RW-N: See, as a black...)

[inaudible] Just like I said before, uh, to each his own, you know. (RW-N: Yes) You do what you wanna do, and I do what I wanna do.

RW-N: See, as, as a black woman, uh, you have said that you, you have always seen black women as strong and as doing in the home and out of the home, and at least, a generation or so back, white. . . .

SG: Is it too hot for you? [Apparently an aside; AB replies; inaudible]

RW-N: . . .white women weren't doing that. At least not white middle, middle-class women.

(SG: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm) Uh, and now, of course, now in society we're talking about how destructive it is, maybe, that women are going outside of the home, because now there's a lot more doing it. (SG: Mmm-hmm) Do you see that as a problem?

SG: No, if they can handle it, I don't. I don't see it as a problem, if they can handle it.

RW-N: Have you ever had any close white friends?

SG: Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Who, who have they been?

SG: Well, it was—I still have her. And she's very close to me. Uh, she was a home economics teacher that we taught at Bramwell together. And she's at Princeton now. And I see her quite often.

**AB:** Do you visit back and forth?

**SG:** Well, no. . . .

**AB:** In one another's homes?

**SG:** No, no. And the reason I would-, don't visit her home—she would visit mine, I'm sure, if I visit her. She has a cat. [chuckling] I used to go, you know, and I don't like cats, and cats all over you, you know, and so I just stay away. But I do go over to the school sometimes and holler at her and, you know, when she's free at school, I'll go there.

**AB:** Have you ever spent the night in a white home?

**SG:** No. No, I have not.

**AB:** Has a white person ever spent the night in your home?

**SG:** Mmm-hmm.

**AB:** Who would that have been? Is that a friend of yours or your children's friends?

**SG:** It was a friend of my husband's. A friend of my husband's.

**AB:** And have you ever gone on trips or gone out to dinner or to any kind of social activity?

(SG: inaudible;overlapping voice) Parties or anything?

**SG:** Gone on trips. Right, I have.

**AB:** And do you see that as an important part of your life or. . .or just kind of accepted it as, I mean, they're friends wherever you go?

**SG:** Well, they're just friends, wherever they go, right. Mmm-hmm. Yeah, we've gone on tours, we've gone, a group went to, we went to uh, on a cruise with a group of—I did, with a group of white people. Uh. . .and then uh, I'm with the uh, RSVP now. And most of them are white and I go. . . .

**RW-N:** What is that? RSVP?

**SG:** Uh-huh, that's Retired Senior Volunteer People, you know, citizens, senior citizens.

**AB:** What about your kids? Did any of your kids ever date white, uh. . . ?

**SG:** Yes, uh-huh, my oldest daughter and, and Deirdre and my son. Mm-hmm.

**AB:** And how did you feel about that?

**SG:** Well, at the time when my son dated, I did not like it. I really didn't. But then I accepted it, so. . . . And uh, and Deirdre, the boy that she went out with several times, I knew his mother and father. And M.B. knew them and they had been on track teams together, you know, different schools. And they had communicated with each other and I had communicated with them, too. Cause I was the coach of the girls' track team and they participate. So it was all right; I just didn't bother.

**AB:** If they had gotten to the point of marriage, what would you have done? [chuckle]

**SG:** Well, I would have accepted it. I would have accepted it. I might not have really, really been in love with it, but I would have accepted it. And I would have been nice to them. [laughing] Because we have some blacks that I don't accept.

**AB:** Tell me about your children. Only uh, well, your son has a degree from an in-state college, but your, but they, he started away from home. Why did you send your children out of state to go to school?

**SG:** Well, he went to West Point.

**AB:** But you had a daughter that went to Tuskegee.

**SG:** I have. . . yes, went to Tuskegee. She wanted to go to uh, an all-black school. And I guess she figured Tuskegee was as black as you can get. [laughing] And uh, Alissia, I don't know,

with her pharmacy, she didn't want to go to West Virginia U because a lot of the kids from this area that had gone to West Virginia U—I don't mean only blacks, I mean whites—they said how they were treated, you know, up there, because they didn't accept the southern end as anything, you know. So she did not want to go there. So then my sister lived in New York, and she got accepted there, so she went there.

RW-N: So it had more to do with uh, their individual (SG: right) needs or desires (SG: right, right) that that happened?

SG: Right. Yeah, because when Michael got accepted to West Point, he had so much pressure on him that he stayed in the hospital a lot up there. High blood pressure and everything-.

AB: Now, what kind of pressure did he have? You mean, social or the academic pressure? What was it that disturbed him?

SG: Well, one thing that disturbed him was a sergeant that, that, that was there. Uh, my son was a long jumper; he did a triple jump. And uh, this man, this sergeant, would always appear, you know. And I don't know what the problem was. But he was always there. Wherever he went, he was there. And it irritated him, he didn't like it. So and then I guess it was the pressure of the—I really haven't talked to him any more about that. But he would always tell us about this particular man. He would call and tell us about him, and how he was doing him, you know. He'd talk to his father more than he would with me. Uh, so he told; his daddy told him that he didn't have to stay up, if he didn't want to stay up there. So he did; he transferred back to West Virginia State. And then he joined the ROTC. So I really didn't get. . . say, to the nitty-gritty of all that went on with that. But I do know that he, he was hospitalized several times to get his blood pressure down. So uh. . . he told him he didn't have to stay up there.

RW-N: I want to ask a very general question. How has being a black person affected your life?

SG: It really hasn't affected it; I like being black. [chuckle]

RW-N: So has it been very. . . what have been the positive parts of that? What would have been the negative parts of that, if there have been any?

SG: Of being black? I guess opportunities for different things would've been the negative, but positive, I just. . . I didn't want to be anything else but.

RW-N: There might be a limitation, though, in opportunities.

SG: In opportunities, that's the only thing that I have seen.

RW-N: Let me ask you the same question about being a woman. (SG: Uh-huh) How has that affected your life?

SG: It hasn't.

RW-N: What are the positives, what are the negatives?

SG: I. . . [laughing]. . .

RW-N: We're reacting to the face that Mrs. Guyton is making. [SG laughs]

SG: Uh, I don't have any negatives, you know, being a female.

RW-N: Do you feel that being a female has limited you in some ways?

SG: No. No, because what I set out to do, I did. And that was that. You know.

RW-N: What is it that you set out to do?

SG: Well, I went to school, I got a college degree, I finished high school, got a college degree. And I have worked and that's it.

RW-N: And uh, if I can go back for a moment about why you decided to go on to college. I know that you were in New York and then you said your mother [inaudible; overlapping voices].



SG: Uh-huh, because my mother enrolled me. [laughs]

RW-N: So, was that your decision or her decision?

SG: Well, uh, I guess it was both of our decisions. [laughs] Because being from a black family, and if you could go, you were expected to go.

RW-N: So your family expected you to go?

SG: Yes, mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Why?

SG: Because my mother wanted me to do something that she didn't do. And she knew that you had to have an education to do anything, really.

AB: Was that the same expectation of your sister and brother, or just of you?

SG: It was of my sister, too. She got a degree, she finished. But my brother, my brother was, I guess you'd say he was hard-headed, and he did what he wanted to do. Because he ran off and joined the Army. And I told you before he used my birth date (RW-N: yes) and my age and he got away. I think one reason he wanted, he-, get away because he stayed with my grandfather on the farm and he had to work and he had to do this. And he was getting away from it, I'm sure that's what it was.

RW-N: So he didn't like that life?

SG: No. Who likes to work so hard a way early in the morning up and late at night? No, un-un.

AB: What happened to your grandfather's property? The farm?

SG: Well, the state took it over. The state took it.

AB: Taxes or something?

SG: Yeah, mmm-hmm. Because all of the children were away, except for my mother. And she

didn't need it. She said she didn't want it. So she didn't bother to uh, to take care of it.

RW-N: Now, let, let me ask you about that again, too. Your, this was your mother's parents.

(SG: Yes) Who lived here and you said the farm was (SG: was in the back, yes, right) over the hill, right in back (SG: Mmm-hmm) where they farmed. And how long had your mother's parents been in West Virginia? Do you have any, any—can you go in the background of that any more? Can you trace your roots, either on your mother or father's side back to slavery? How far back do you know (SG: mmm-mmm) about the family?

SG: Mmm-mmm, I can't go back to slavery.

RW-N: Do you know that, that they were in slavery?

SG: I don't know that they were in slavery. That's what I, had...

AB: What was your grandfather's name?

SG: My grandfather's name was Rufus Thompson.

AB: Rufus Thompson.

SG: Uh-huh. And he was born in AbbsValley, Virginia, which is Tazewell, oh, back, out.

RW-N: Is that A-b-s, Abs Valley?

SG: Abbs, uh-huh. A-b-b-s.

RW-N: A-b-b-s. (SG: yes)

AB: Do you have any idea when he was born?

SG: No, I do not. I could not-, and I hate that, that I don't have that information. You know, it died out and, and not get the information as to what was what. And the same way with my father.

Uh, my father's people came from Madison, North Carolina. And I guess I could go to Madison and I could find out if-, just what was what.

RW-N: Now, what was his name?

SG: His name was Font Hayes. Which was. . .

AB: Spell that first word.

SG: F-o-n-t. Font.

RW-N: And the last name?

SG: H-a-y-e-s.

RW-N: Now this was your biological father?

SG: Yes. His, his, his father. And uh, he, he was part Indian. He was Indian in that. So I don't know that my people were even slaves. I don't know. I don't know that.

RW-N: And you know in your background that you—it's African American, as far as you know?

SG: Yes, mmm-hmm.

RW-N: And, and, with a little bit. . .

AB: Well, you're awfully fair-skinned. Now, there must have been something other than black.

SG: Yeah, it was. Because my father, my grandfather, say, in Tazewell County, Virginia, which is in Tazewell and around. And he, uh, it was some mix-up there, you know. [chuckling] Uh, whites in the, in the family.

RW-N: And, and also American Indian. (SG: Yes, mmm-hmm)

AB: Uh, so, your grandfather, Mr. Thompson, (SG: Mmm-hmm) What about your grandmother?

SG: Well, my grandmother died before I was even thought about, I mean, born, you know. Uh, she was a darker complexion, you know, complexed lady. I do know that much. She was a Barnes. And they came from over Tazewell. So uh, I had people in my family that were red headed and light-skinned, freckles, you know. And then I had 'em, say the blackest black, you

know. So it's all mixed up. In both sides of my family. Uh, my father was fair-skinned and had straight hair, uh, then uh, my—I don't even know my father's father. Because he died before I was even born. And then my father's mother died when I was still small. So I don't really know those people, you know. And uh. . .

**AB:** But your grandmother and grandfather Thompson you did know, I mean, your grandfather Thompson.

**SG:** My grandfather, did. But then I had a step-grandmother. And I knew her.

**AB:** And it was (SG: But that was it.) your step-grandmother and your grandfather with whom your brother lived?

**SG:** My brother lived, right, mmm-hmm.

**AB:** And how many children did your grandfather have? Your mother and what other children were there?

**SG:** It was fourteen of 'em.

**AB:** By the first wife?

**SG:** By the first wife, because she died in child birth, you know, with the baby. It was fourteen. So it was only two boys in that group, and the rest were girls.

**AB:** Did they all live to adulthood?

**SG:** All lived to adulthood. And one is living now.

**AB:** And they all moved away from here, from West Virginia.

**SG:** Yes.

**AB:** Now, and your grandfather chose to farm rather than work in the mines?

**SG:** Yes. Because if you—you're not familiar with Tazewell County, over in Tazewell in that-,

that's nothing but farm land over that way. And uh, and that's where he came from. So that's all he's ever done was farm. And that's what he did.

**AB:** So your mother, out of those fourteen children, was the only one who continued to live here in West Virginia.

**SG:** No. Uh, my mother had another sister that lived in Huntington. She lived at Gary, from Gary they moved to Huntington.

**AB:** What was her name, the one in Huntington?

**SG:** Moore, Clarence Moore; her name was Daisy. . . Moore.

**AB:** And the aunt. . .

**SG:** Do you know Rufus Moore?

**AB:** No, I don't; I'm gonna ask, though, when I go back down there.

**SG:** He lives in Huntington. That's a second cousin of mine; my first cousin's son. But then there was, Clarence Moore was his, his grandfather. And he lived in Huntington. Uh . . . but Rufus lives there now in Huntington, and I think he teaches in, in uh, in the schools there somewhere, Cabell County. In Huntington, I'm sure it is. But then. . .

**RW-N:** So you had a very large extended family?

**SG:** Yes, but then. . .

**RW-N:** But a lot of them moved away?

**SG:** Yes. My mother had, let's see, about seven, eight, nine, maybe, sisters that all lived in New York. (RW-N: Ooh.) See, cause, one went up and they all . . . (RW-N: Uh-huh) Okay, then I had one aunt that lived in Pocohontas and she died. And one lived in Bluefield. And she's still living. But my mother was here. [inaudible]

**AB:** Now the, the aunt with whom you lived then was your father's sister?

**SG:** My father's sister, mmm-hmm.

**AB:** And was she the only of his brothers and sisters that you knew? Or were there others?

**SG:** There were others.

**AB:** Now was that a large family, too?

**SG:** That was a large family, too. Uh, let's see, I knew three, four of his sisters. I mean, I knew them. And I knew three of his brothers. And the others, let's see, it was, so that meant there was three, six, it were about nine or ten of them. And the others, let's see, one moved to Detroit; I didn't know anything about her. The other one in St. Louis. Uh, and then another one was in, I believe Texas. And I didn't know them.

**AB:** Did you all have family gatherings?

**SG:** No. No.

**AB:** So, so even though there were big families, it was really just you and your aunt and your sister, and then later your mother was a part of that group and that was all?

**SG:** Right. That's all. And as we grew older, we'll say, we would visit in New York and we would visit the other sisters there. But they never came back this way. I don't know why. But they never did.

**RW-N:** We talked to you earlier about both your aunt who you lived with and your mother.

(SG: Mmm-hmm) Are there any women in your life, other women in your life, or including men who really stand out as kind of a role model for you? And I may have asked you this a little bit earlier, that you really wanted to be like. And, and that mean any, any teachers, any friends? Is there anyone that pops into your mind like that?

**SG:** No, no.

**RW-N:** Did you know of any women who you felt really changed the world in important ways?

**SG:** No. No.

**RW-N:** Are-, is there any that you really looked up to? Do you have any heroine women who you admire? Not necessarily in your family (SG: Mmm-hmm), but even in a broader way? Like is it fair to say that you admired Martin Luther King? You said that earlier. (SG: Yeah, I did) Is there a woman who stands out. . .(SG: In the same way?) Maybe not equal to him, because he was very extraordinary. But in some similar way that you can really, is a heroine in that, in that sense?

**SG:** I can't think of any.

**AB:** Uh, what about during the war years? Were you personally affected by what was happening with the war? I mean, did you have friends, high school mates or anybody who went off to war?

**SG:** No, I did not. No friends, no school mates, no, I did not.

**AB:** What about uh, Eleanor Roosevelt and the things that she was doing? Did you hear about, do you remember anything about that? People talking or reading articles about any of, of her attempts to sort of broaden the armed forces or so for blacks?

**SG:** Eleanor Roosevelt? Yeah. I knew a lot about her, I did. And uh, and her husband, too.

You know, but you're talking about women now, uh-huh. But I did. And I admired, uh, Bethune—what's her name? (AB: Mary McLeod Bethune) Mary McLeod Bethune, right.

**AB:** How did you learn about Mary McLeod Bethune?

**SG:** Through reading.

**AB:** Newspapers?

SG: Reading newspapers, right.

AB: Did you all get The Courier?

SG: Yes, we did. Uh-huh. Through reading.

RW-N: What is The Courier?

AB: Uh, The Courier is the Pittsburgh Courier, a black newspaper in Pittsburgh that circulated through many of the adjacent states and also often carried a column. Did you all have a column up here about what was happening in your area?

SG: No. No, no, no, un-un.

RW-N: But you received that paper, or you had access to it? You had that in your home?

SG: Oh yeah, we had- yeah, we read-, yes, we had that paper.

AB: Did you also get the McDowell Times?

SG: McDowell?

AB: The black newspaper from McDowell County?

SG: Mm-mmm, no, I didn't. It's the first I've heard about it. I didn't know they had one.

AB: Oh, really? Mmm-hmm. For many years, many years.

SG: Really. Who was the editor?

AB: I can't tell you. Uh, yes I can.

SG: Where'd it originate? Welch or where?

AB: I thought it was Gary.

SG: Oh, it might have been Gary, mmm-hmm.

AB: I'll tell you the name. I'll tell you the names in a few minutes; I can't remember.

RW-N: Earlier you described yourself as uh, a passive person and that you like peace, you don't



want a ruckus and all the rest of that. Uh, when you think about yourself, what other kinds of characteristics would you use to describe yourself? You said your husband was a nice person. Are you a nice person?

SG: Yeah, I consider myself being a nice person! I have a lot of friends. And I do for others. I mean, I will go out of my way to do. And I'm the type of person that I don't like to say no. I always say yes.

RW-N: yes.

SG: Yes. I do that. And a lot of times I shouldn't say yes, but I will say yes.

RW-N: What is, what is, what is the part of you that you value the most, yourself?

SG: Doing for others. (RW-N: mm-hmm) I like that. And I do whatever I can. I'll go out of my way to do with, you know, if we're gonna help someone do something, I will. Do all I can to see that it's done. And like it should be done. I do that.

RW-N: So you have a sense of things needing to be done correctly? (SG: Right) And you have the capacity to get them done correctly?

SG: Try to get it done correctly.

AB: Have you ever been constrained by the society, in terms of whether you would wear a mini-skirt or a long skirt? How you would do your hair, what kind of car you would drive or how you would decorate your home or anything like that?

SG: No, no. [chuckling] I would not wear a mini-skirt. I would never wear. . . (AB: Why not?) a mini-skirt. (AB: Why not?) First of all, at this age I'm too old for it.

AB: Well, what about your daughters? Suppose your daughters wanted to wear it.

SG: Well, I'd leave that up to them, really.

**AB:** Are there, are there certain kinds of things that, that you have felt that a lady, however you would define that, just does not do? (SG: Yes) What are some of those kinds of things?

**SG:** I hate to see a lady smoke a cigarette. I do. Especially in the street. I hate that! That irritates me. I hate to see a lady drink, you know, drunk or whatever, in the streets. Now she's gonna drink, she can drink at home. I mean, that's a problem, you know, that's her business. But to get in the street and to do that, I do, I dislike it. Uh, I think a lady should carry herself like a lady. And I mean, dress properly, uh, look neat, uh...

**RW-N:** How about cussing?

**SG:** I don't like that. I don't like that.

**AB:** Now where did you get these, these feelings from? Were you taught that? Or have you come to those ideas on your own?

**SG:** In, in our house we were taught that. We were taught that. (RW-N: And is that. . .?) You don't do things like that. I mean, you know, ladylike, uh, uh, it's a certain way, certain things that you do and certain things that you don't do. Uhm . . . .

**RW-N:** As a child you lived in two homes. (SG: Yes) Did both of those homes teach that?

**SG:** Yes, right. We did not have smokers in either home. We did not have drinkers, except for my father, step-father, you know. And my mother didn't, and so therefore we never—we never even played cards. I, today, I don't know how to play cards. [chuckling] Because we never had them in the home. I, I guess they figured you weren't to do it, I don't know. But we never did. Now my kids could play cards if they wanted to, they could play cards in the house. I allowed them to do that, you know.

**AB:** Did your husband feel the same way?

SG: Well, he played cards.

AB: But did he have certain beliefs about things that were proper for a woman to do, versus. . . ?

SG: I don't know. I don't know, really. Cause we never discussed that either.

AB: As we were coming along we were talking about various social classes. Do you sense any kind of social class division among black people? Would you talk a little bit about that?

SG: Well, let's see now. You have uh. . . (RW-N: You shook your head yes.) Yes, there is. I, I think there is a different class. See we have a middle class. And then we have that, that scum or whatever you want to call it. [laughing] Yes, that, that...

AB: Is that based on money or. . . ?

SG: No, it's character.

AB: So I could be poor and be considered middle-class?

SG: Yeah, if you act, you know, a certain way, you know what I mean. Act respectful, you could, I think you could. Mmm-hmm.

AB: Does education have anything to do with it?

SG: Well, not really, not really. Cause I've known some people that uh, that hadn't gone so far in school, but they carried themselves well. And they've uh. . . I guess it's action, I guess that's what I would use in describe. . . action speaks louder, they said, than words. How you act has a lot to...

RW-N: Is there a class above the middle-class?

SG: Well, uuh, yeah, I guess so. I guess it is. You got the <sup>Ritchies</sup> <sub>^</sub> And I don't know about them.

AB: Down Beckley?

SG: [laughing] I don't know about them, because I've never been in that class, you know.

RW-N: Do you have some black people in the, in the Bluefield area, this large area, that you would put into that above middle-class?

SG: Uh. . .we don't have any rich blacks in Bluefield, not that I know of. Uh...

RW-N: And would the behavior of rich blacks be different?

SG: I don't know. I don't know. Cause I've never been associated with any. So I couldn't tell you. [chuckle] I've never associated with any, never known any, so I don't know.

AB: But you do associate with black people that we would consider middle-class? (SG: Yes)

And, and that's based on character? Probably, a little, little- their jobs, too, would have been a little bit out of the ordinary, (SG: Right) I mean, they would have been teachers (SG: Right) or now there are other jobs opening. But in, in my day it probably would have been teachers or funeral directors, maybe beauticians or barbers. . . . (SG: Right, right) or so.

RW-N: But what about coal miners?

SG: Well, you have some coal miners that are, what'd you call it? Classy. You could be classy.

Uh-huh, you do.

RW-N: So it's not all job related?

SG: No, it isn't.

RW-N: Does it have to do with the kinds of homes people have?

SG: Well, not really.

RW-N: Does it have to do with the way people keep their homes?

SG: Well, yeah, that could have something to do with that.

RW-N: That could have something to do with it.

SG: To do with it, right.

RW-N: So taking care of your home, even if it's modest, puts you into a better class?

SG: It sure does. I, I, with me now.

RW-N: Yeah, that's what we're asking.

SG: Right, with me it does. Mmm-hmm.

AB: So it's kind of the way people chose to live and behave (SG: Right) more than education or money, as you see it that puts them in a certain kind of class.

SG: That's the way I see it, right, that's true. Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Mrs. Guyton, uh, when we were here last time you were participating in uhm, cooking a lot of food for the alumni association. Do you consider yourself to be a leader in any way? [Mrs. Guyton sighs] Mrs. Guyton is making faces again. [laughter]

SG: Well, I, maybe somewhat. Maybe somewhat.

RW-N: How so?

SG: Uh. . .[pausing for thought] [heavy sigh] That's hard for me to answer. [chuckles]

RW-N: Lemme, let me, lemme just push out some things, then, and you can respond to them. Uh, does it have to do with your standing in the community? Does it have to do with that you belong to organizations? Does it have to do with that you speak out about how you feel?

SG: Well, it's not belonging, not with organizations, I mean, no. With me, it's.. uh, I don't use that to try to influence or you know, uh. . . .

RW-N: So you see a leader as somebody who influences other people, right? (SG: I do) And you belong to some organizations, right? (SG: Yes) What are they today? Besides the Alumni Association of Bluefield? [refers to Bluefield State College Alumni Association]

SG: Mmm, I belong to the Links and [inaudible]. (RW-N: the Links, uh-huh) Mm-hmm.

AB: You belong to a sorority?

SG: No, I do not. I don't belong to a sorority. Uh. . .

AB: You said you're a member of RSVP?

SG: Yes, I'm a member of that. Senior uh. . . .

RW-N: And when your children were small. . . ?

SG: And then I have several other social clubs that I belong to. Uh, but uh. . .

RW-N: But you don't tend to be an official, like the president or the vice-president?

SG: No, no.

RW-N: Okay, then let me go back. . . .

SG: I'll follow you.

RW-N: You'll follow in those organizations. [inaudible]

SG: Yeah, just as long as you don't lead me. . . I'll go so far. [laughing]

RW-N: Yes, okay. Okay. But I'm still going to ask you about how, how you think you are a leader because clearly you see some of that in yourself.

SG: Well, I try to make things happen, if that's what you mean. Uh. . .let me see how can I. . .

RW-N: Can you give us an example of that?

SG: Mmmh. . .if, I'll say if someone comes up with an idea, uh, just like we're supposed to have, in one of the organizations that I belong to, we're supposed to have a flea market tomorrow. Uh, a lot of 'em are calling in saying that it's too cold, you know. And I say that it's not. Because if you start postponing things, you'll never get anything done, you know. It, it's always a reason to stop doing something or not to do something. And so I told them that if we'll

meet tomorrow with our little belongings that we have and if it rains or if it's too cold for us to stand, you know, to do this then we can leave, but to show up, you know. And I figure once we show up, some of us will stay, you know, and do something. That's what I try, I mean...

RW-N: Now in that example, you seem to be an encourager, right?

SG: Well, more so, I guess, than a leader.

RW-N: And you're going to participate too.

SG: Yes, yes.

RW-N: No, I'm not saying that that's not leadership; (SG: yes, yes) I'm just trying to define it specifically.

SG: Yeah, yeah, but I'm gonna always if, if I, uh, I'm gonna always be there, you know, with the group unless something comes up that I cannot, but I'm gonna always be there too.

RW-N: And do you play that role in some church activities too?

SG: Yes, I do.

RW-N: Have you ever played any formal leadership roles in church, I mean, to belong to a church organization and be the president of that?

SG: Well, at one point I was the president of my missionary society. Uh-huh. And I was that for years, long time. And the other organizations that I, I mean, I have been president at one time, you know. (RW-N: yes) But uh, I don't want to be president, you know what I mean, I mean, if someone else...

AB: You prefer not to; you prefer someone else to play that role.

SG: Right, I would, uh-huh.

AB: Is that because you're shy or...?

SG: No, it's not because I'm shy, I don't think. Uh, ...

AB: Does it bring you in confrontation with people when you are in that role, and that's something you try to keep away from?

SG: Sometimes, so that, yes, sometimes, yes, so that's one of the reasons, might be.

AB: So that would be one of the reasons that you move back.

RW-N: Or is it just a lot of work?

SG: Well, I don't mind working.

RW-N: Cause you work in other ways, quietly.

SG: Yes, uh-huh. I don't mind working.

AB: Uh, Mrs, Guyton, I think—your husband was a principal of a, of a school at a time when black people were not. They had—he had a Ph.D. That seems to me to put you in a category where you are kind of out there—and your family—out ahead of, of other people. Did you, did you feel any of that, or did people react to you in any way? Because that, that was, that's quite an achievement uh, for you.

SG: No, mmm-hmm, I never felt that way. And I don't think any of my family, my children, never felt that way.

AB: But how did other people react to you, uh and to your family uh, because, that, that just was unusual? I mean, there wasn't, weren't many people who achieved those kinds of things.

SG: Uh, we were accepted very well, accepted uh...

**END TAPE 2 – SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 2 – SIDE 2**

AB: We were talking, Mrs Guyton, about uh, your husband's role as a principle and yours as a



teacher and the way that other people in the community might have related to uh, to those achievements of your family.

SG: I, I, uh, in this community, and I'll say in others, I, I think we were well accepted as just being a part of the community. People didn't treat us any differently. And we didn't want that. And we didn't treat them any different. We were all neighbors and we all uh, we all got along. I mean, we didn't separate ourselves from the other people in the community. We've never done that.

RW-N: Do you think other people saw you, though, as, as a family that is really a family of achievement?

SG: They might have. Maybe—well, the two families might have. But the other families, made no difference, you know.

RW-N: Do you, when you think of your children today, do you look at your family as a family of achievement?

SG: Yes, I do.

RW-N: Uh-huh. With the children?

SG: With the children. [pause] But we get along uh, and we've always gotten along with the people in the community. We've always uh, worked with the people in the community, we've ...

RW-N: Have you had a sense that the community holds you in high esteem?

SG: Umm, I hope not.

RW-N: That would be a bad thing?

SG: [chuckle] Yes.

AB: Did they hold your husband in high esteem?

SG: No, I don't think so. Mmm-mmm. Because he was friendly with everyone. He'd talk to everyone; they'd laugh, you know, joke and everything. No, he, he...

RW-N: Do you think that you—do you have a sense that the community had respect for your family?

SG: Yeah, I'm su—yes. (RW-N: yes) Uh-huh, uh-huh.

RW-N: And is that a good thing?

SG: Yeah, everybody wants to be [laughing] respected. (RW-N: okay, I'm-, yeah) We all want that. [laughing]

RW-N: I'm gonna, I'm gonna ask you another one of these very broad questions, all right?

What are some of the most important influences on your life? I'm, I'm really asking you to think back on all of this path that you traveled through life, all right, a relatively long path now. Lots of things have happened. What are some of the major influences on your life?

SG: [sighs, long pause]

RW-N: What main people, what main events?

SG: I don't know. I, I, I, uh...

AB: Did moving from one place to the other, was that uh, (SG: it didn't bother me) an important moment for you?

SG: No.

AB: Going to a new school?

SG: No. It didn't bother me.

RW-N: But I, and I'm not only asking the question about how things bothered you but also what kind of shaped you as a person and helped you make decisions or what would come into your life

that really changed your life or set a certain pattern for you life. What are the—what, what things did you do in your life that might be the one or two most important things that stand out in your life? I mean important to you and the way you lived your life, not to other people.

**AB:** You're a member of a Baptist church; you uh, were baptized as a part of that. Was that a moment to remember for you or...

**SG:** I was young, I was young when that happened, you know. Uh, very young. And uh...

**RW-N:** Did getting married change your life, change you as a person?

**SG:** No, it didn't change me as a person. No.

**RW-N:** What happened when you lost your husband? Did you find then that you had to do new things in your life? Change? Become more independent or maybe not?

**SG:** Well, I, I, I, more independent, I was always uh [chuckle]—he didn't—oh, gosh, you know I have never really sat down and, and thought of these, these things. Uh, and it's hard to-, for me now to just, uh.... Naturally when he died things were gonna change. Uh, where there was two there was just one now. Uh, things that we did together, I do by myself—if I do. Uh, if I chose to do, and...

**AB:** The kind of shocking change that with a sudden death, I mean, it isn't like one is ill and uh over a period of time you get sort of accustomed, as accustomed as one can get to the idea of being alone, but yours was sudden change.

**SG:** Yes, it was. A sudden change, it was. Uh, [pause] I'll say this, that it—a sudden change with, say with my children, really. Because they had, uh, all of them had depended on him for certain things. Uh, they would talk to him; uh, they would go to him with different things that they would not come to me, you know, with. So then they would have to, or they did, have to

make that change. They would have to come to me and I, in turn, would have to uh, uh try to help them solve their problems, which was a big change there. Uh...

**RW-N:** So your husband had done a lot of that with the children?

**SG:** Well, yes, after—yes, he did. (RW-N: yes) Mmm-hmm, and they depended on him for certain things. Even grown they did, you know. And then they would have to come to me and then I, in turn, would have to try to help them solve a problem or correct a problem or do whatever. That was different because I didn't have to bother with that before.

**RW-N:** Did that change you?

**SG:** No, no.

**RW-N:** Because that really made you do things differently. [telephone ringing]

**SG:** Not really, not really.

**AB:** Uh, the things that you had done as a couple—what I've found sometimes, the people that I know that wants-, there's no longer two, there're one-, that your social life sort of changes too, that uh as a widow there are things that you don't do anymore or people that you don't see or places that you don't go, that you used to do when there were two or you. Has that occurred with you?

**SG:** Well, yes. Uh, because he, he, he, he was a, belonged to a fraternity and we would always look forward to going to the conclaves, you know, and uh also to the [inaudible]. We'd all, family, we would all look forward to going to that, but we don't do that anymore. So what I have had to do was to do things on my own. Uh, I would uh—when he was living I wouldn't fly, uh, so now I have to fly if I want to, you know, cause I cannot drive, and then all the time Deirdre can't go to drive me. So if I want to do things, I have to do it on my own so I have to fly. Uh,

and to take cruises or whatever, vacations, if I can't do it with Deirdre, and if I can't find someone else to do it with, then I'll have to do it by myself if I want to go.

**RW-N:** And do you do that?

**SG:** And then sometimes I do and then some times I don't go at all because I don't want to go by myself. But I was just thinking the other day that I'm gonna have to uh, get out and do things on my own and meet other people. You know, other friends to do things with.

**AB:** What about your children? You talked about doing things with Deirdre. Has,- did their lives change in terms of their relationship and their need to be with you, or to be sure that you were looked after; did that add a certain dimension to their lives?

**SG:** I think it did. I think it did, especially for Deirdre and, and the older girl. It did, uh, because uh, Deirdre will tell me to go ahead and do such and such a thing and then she'll say, "Momma, I'll pay for you to do such and such a thing," you know. And the older girl will do the same thing. Uh, now when I went to California last, they'll pay my way out, you know, and so on. And take me when I get out there; she'll take me to different places, you know, and everything. So uh, when she lived in Delaware she would always call me and tell me to come up or catch the train and come up and do this or that, and I'd do it, I'd catch the train and go up and stay and then come back. And go and do different things while we were out.

**RW-N:** Do you see yourself as having changed much over your life? I mean, you try to think of yourself when you were younger—were you more energetic, were you happier, [inaudible] more self-confident?

**SG:** Oh yeah, I did a lot of things. Well, I, a lot of things I used to could do I can't do now. Uh, and not because—uh, I guess it is because I'm older. I just can't do those things. Uh, but I

haven't changed; I haven't changed.

RW-N: Let me just throw something out at you, based on (SG: uh-huh, uh-huh) on what other people say sometimes (SG: uh-huh). Many people say, as they go through life, that they feel more self-confident of themselves. Has that been true for you, or has it maybe been the opposite?

SG: Well, self-confident, I, mmm-hmm, more.

RW-N: You think that that has grown?

SG: It has grown, yes. Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Do you consider yourself more outspoken than, than when you were younger, less shy, more shy?

SG: Well, I don't think I'm shy but uh, I'm not that outspoken. [chuckle] But I, I'll listen a lot and uh think as I listen. Uh, and then if you ask me what I think about the situation, I'm gonna tell, you know, I'll tell you. But I won't uh, just come out and tell you what I think, you know.

RW-N: You don't put your two cents in easily?

SG: No. I don't.

RW-N: But you'll, but if people ask, you certainly—you have an opinion.

SG: Oh yes, I have an opinion.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. When you look back on your life, uh, how do you see it in the sense of— let me give you some examples again; I think it's easier. Some people see their life as kind of a smooth road, and others see it as going up and down. Some see it as getting better and better, and so it goes up all the time. Some people describe their lives as chapters in a book, where they lived a certain time and then it changed, then.... How would you describe your life? And it doesn't have to be one of the ways I mentioned; it could be in another way too.

SG: Well, I uh, I, let me see now. [sigh] Sometimes it's up and sometimes it's down, so uh, I'm not doing so bad [chuckle] with my life.

RW-N: So it goes up and down?

SG: Yeah. I mean, I don't have a big jolt, you know, where it go up and fall down but (RW-N: yes) uh, some days and sometimes it's all right, and sometimes I have problems. I think we all do have problems some time or other.

RW-N: Right. When you look back on your life, uh...

SG: I don't think it's anything that I would change. [laughing]

RW-N: If you had to pick—I'm not letting you off that much—tell me a couple of things that you regret happened, you know, whether you could change them or not. [SG laughing]

SG: I regret losing my husband when I did. Uh, because we had planned to do certain things after we retired and we're not able—I'm not able to do it. Uh, but other than that, uh, just like I said, I wouldn't change anything else.

RW-N: You'd change that?

SG: I would change that, yeah, but nothing else.

RW-N: Would you have fewer children, more children, would you have more schooling, not as much schooling, [inaudible]?

SG: No more schoolin'; I had enough. [laughing]

AB: What about children? You have four children.

SG: I have four children.

AB: Would you have liked more?

RW-N: Or less?

SG: No, no, no, I wouldn't want any more.

RW-N: How about less?

SG: No, I, no, I wouldn't want less. [chuckle]

AB: Did you plan your children or...?

SG: No, I didn't, I just had them, mmm-hmm. But I'm glad I didn't have more. [chuckle]

RW-N: What sense of accomplishment do you have in your life? Things that in your heart you feel good about, whether you talk about 'em or not.

SG: Uh...uh, that I, that I was able to, the children that I did have, that we were able to provide for them, take care of them. Uh, we might not have given them all that they wanted but we gave them the things that were necessary, I feel, we gave them the things that were necessary to make them, say, well-rounded people. Individuals.

RW-N: So you see them as well-rounded? (SG: I do) Productive? (SG: mmm-hmm) And again, I don't want to put words in your mouth so (SG: I know, yeah, I know) [voices overlapping; inaudible].

SG: Uh-huh. They have—one of my daughters, I'm not pleased with the way that things have happened with her. But still, it was her life and she chose it to be that way and so therefore I have nothing to do with it because uh, we did what we were to do, what we were expected to do, and that was to rear them and give them an education and then what they do afterwards is no fault of mine.

RW-N: So you feel good about that?

SG: Yes, I do.

RW-N: What other areas of your life do you feel good about, that you feel that you—in any way,



however you want to define that?

SG: Uhh. [pause and sigh] Well, the main thing, the main thing that I have, uh, I say with my children, that's the only thing that I uh, really, really pleased or happy with, or whatever, is the way that they turned, turned out except—you know, the way that they turned out.

RW-N: How about, uh, you, you taught for how many years, twenty-six, was it?

SG: Mmm-hmm. Twenty-four.

RW-N: Twenty-four. Do you feel any particular things that are good about those years, about that?

SG: I enjoyed uh, those years, and I enjoyed the students. Just like I told you at the beginning; we've had some (RW-N: yes) good times. I've had some good times with my students. Uh, and I have enjoyed them and I enjoy seeing them, meetin' them, uh, on the street and, and everything. And they seem to enjoy meeting me. Of course, half of them remember me and I don't remember them, but I act like I do, you know. But don't ask me the names. But uh, I do...

RW-N: So how do you feel about your accomplishments as a teacher, or isn't that very important in your life? Or it's just not as important as your family?

SG: Well, I did my job; I felt like I did my job with all of my students. Uh, and a lot of my students have gone out into the world and they have accomplished things, uh, and uh, I feel good about that. (RW-N: mmm-hmm) Uh...

RW-N: I have read in books and I, I, being a white woman, really had to read it in books in the beginning, that in black families, some black families, there was a sense of uh, doing things for black people, to kind of raise, raise black people. Were you ever taught that in your family or were you, did you become aware of that feeling yourself? Was that an important idea to you or

did you just live your life as well as you could?

SG: That being black that you had to (RW-N: or that you should, that it's a good thing to raise the race) Right, uh-huh. Being proud of who you are and you expected to do better. We've always been taught that—that you have to do better to succeed.

RW-N: Now is that as a person, though, or-? Like I was taught that as a child too, but I was not taught that I had to do that to raise my race.

SG: Uh-huh, well, we-

AB: Did you, did you feel that you had to give something back to the black community?

SG: Well uh, I, I felt that I should give something back to the black community. I mean, I feel that I should be proud of who I am uh, and try to instill in, in, in the kids and the people in the community that we are—uh, let's see, what am I'm trying to say. Uh, that we, let's see, that we are as good as [searching for words]. I felt like we had to be proud; I mean, and you have to do things to make people proud, uh, of being who you are.

AB: Did you feel that you had to say to black kids, uh, "Don't be so loud" or "Don't dress this way," or "Don't wear your hair that way," or so, uh, did you feel any need to do that?

SG: Yes, I felt, yeah, because sometimes I didn't think that they weren't carrying themselves as they should or doing the things that they should, being black. Uh, and I felt like uh, uh expected of me, uh, uh the people expected blacks to be certain ways, you know, and to act certain ways. Uh, if you loud, you suppose to be loud and boisterous because you black, you know. But that's not true. And, and I would always try to tell the kids to watch it, you know, keep yourself, uh, watch your tone of voice, watch-, don't be so loud, that's right, don't be so loud. I have, told them that. I don't know whether that was right or not, but I felt like the white people felt that

you, that all black, all blacks were loud and boisterous and whatever, and which it is not true.

RW-N: What do you see for yourself in the next years? Where are you gonna be ten years from now or where would you like to be?

SG: Right here, right here. [chuckle] Right here in Wolfe. [chuckle]

RW-N: What do you hope for the next few years?

SG: Well, I just hope that I'm in good health.

RW-N: Stay in good health.

SG: That's right. In the next ten years, that I'm able to think. Uh, I'm in the right mind, have my right mind. (RW-N: mm-hmm) Able to move about. Uh, able to be productive in some way.

Uh...

RW-N: Productive in what ways?

SG: In doing things for others, and for myself. (RW-N: mmm-hmm) [inaudible]

RW-N: Pretty much in the way you have been doing it? To go on with that life and to be healthy?

SG: With along with the life, right, to be healthy. Right. Be able to do for myself, that, that's the main thing. I, I want to be able to do for myself. You don't have to depend on someone else to...

RW-N: Are you quite content with your life now?

SG: Yes, I am. [chuckle] Yes, I am.

RW-N: That's a nice thing to be able to say. [chuckle] Is there anything that you wanna ask us? We've been doing a lot of asking you.

SG: How did you get in, what are you getting, how did you get into this?

**RW-N:** How did we get into this. (SG: Mmm-hmm) Um...

**SG:** What encouraged you to do this?

**RW-N:** I, I think it happened uh, I think there's a variety of things that came together. Uh, Ancella can speak to hers, uh, her issues in a moment. Uh, for me, it's, for me it has uh—I'm a psychologist by training and so I'm interested in—we don't need this, I guess. [recorder turned off]

**END OF INTERVIEWS**