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B'Alma Epps Jones

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Rita Wicks-Nelson  
(Agent of Receiving Organization)

B'Alma Epps Jones  
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12/15/99  
(Date)

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WITH  
MRS. B'ALMA EPPS JONES**

**November 22 and December 15, 1999**

**St. Albans, West Virginia**

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

**Transcriptionist: Gina Kehali Kates**

**RW-N:** We're in St. Albans at the home of Miss B'Alma Epps Jones. Ancella Bickley and Rita Wicks-Nelson interviewing, and it is November 22, 1999. Okay, we can begin. You were just saying that you were born some place else besides West Virginia?

**BJ:** Yes. I started with my name, of course. You have it?

**RW-N:** Yes, do, do that. No, put it on tape.

**BJ:** My name is B'Alma Epps Jones. I was named by, for my father. And his name is William Monroe Epps, was William Monroe Epps. And my mother's name was Bessie Kincaid Epps. I was born in Bryson, Tennessee. And when I was two years old my parents moved to Manring, Tennessee.

**RW-N:** Could you spell those names for us?

**BJ:** I'd be glad to.

**AB:** Bryson.

**BJ:** Capital B-r-y-s-o-n, Tennessee, and Manring, capital M-a-n-r-i-n-g, Manring, Tennessee.

**AB:** And you moved to Manring when you were how old?

**BJ:** When I was two years old.

**AB:** Uh-huh.

**BJ:** And my uh, my uh, the [inaudible] my father worked with-, my father worked in coal mines. So I'm a coal miner's daughter.

**RW-N:** In Tennessee.

**BJ:** And I have uh, they had four children, a brother, McGhee Epps, capital M-c-capital G-h-e-e, McGhee Epps. And I am the second one in the family. My sister, Essie, capital E-s-s-i-e, LaVivian, capital L-a-capital V-i-v-i-a-n, [inaudible], and Mildred [inaudible] Epps. So there

were four children in the family. My mother was a housekeeper, and uh, always, was always very energetic, making ends meet. Am I going too fast?

**AB:** No, no, you're fine.

**RW-N:** No, not at all.

**BJ:** When I was two years old—I told that—we moved from Bryson, Tennessee to Manring, Tennessee, which was about two miles away. Our childhood was very, very pleasant there, because all of the families were practically on the same level. And it was a mixed community.

**AB:** That's both black and white?

**BJ:** Yes. A mixed community. And uh, we had, uh, I started out to school when I was five years old. My parents taught me my ABCs and how to count—taught us, rather—ABCs and how to count. I went to a one-room school, which served as a church also. And it was a very small community, but uh, we lived there and we enjoyed our childhood. There was a company store. Some call it-, I forget now what they call it-, company store, where we bought our supplies. As I said, my mother was very energetic. And so she raised a garden. And my father also wore many hats, other than being a coal miner. He played the guitar. He was interested in music and he taught us the first notes, which were shaped, the shaped notes. Probably some of you aren't too familiar with that.

**RW-N:** Tell me about that. I don't. . .

**BJ:** Well, do-re-me-fa-so-la-te-do. They had shapes. (RW-N: Okay) I did have a shaped-note book. You know the notes now are round.

**RW-N:** Yes, right. Right.

**BJ:** And these were shaped notes. Anyway, he was taught by a minister there. And so he

organized choirs and was very much interested in, uh, music. He also barbered. These were ways, of course, making ends meet. And uh, candy maker. So as I said before, he wore many hats.

**RW-N:** He made candy? And did he sell some of it?

**BJ:** Yes. And he barbered, of course, and so, I mean, was paid, of course, for that.

**RW-N:** He sounded pretty energetic too.

**AB:** Did you children help sell the candy?

**BJ:** No. People would come to our house and buy it.

**RW-N:** What kind of candy?

**BJ:** Taffy and, uh, fudge. (AB: Do you...) And he got his supplies from somewhere, he ordered his supplies. And it was very, very rich. In those days, you know, could get pure cream and pure butter, not oleomargarine. So uh . . .

**AB:** Do you know how he made it? Do you have any of his recipes?

**BJ:** I did. I'll have to ask Mildred to see if she can look them up. Because, yes, he paid \$50, I remember, for these candy lessons that he ordered from some company.

**AB:** Ohhh.

**RW-N:** That's interesting.

**AB:** Yes, that is indeed. That is indeed.

**BJ:** I'll probably come back later. [inaudible] The nearest town was Middlesboro, Kentucky, because these two communities that I mentioned were on the borderline of Tennessee and Kentucky. And uh, of course we went to town occasionally to get clothes and so forth, other than what my mother made.

**RW-N:** Was that mountainous in that area?

**BJ:** Tennessee where we lived was located between two hills—we called ‘em hills—and between two hills. And uh, there were trees always around, and uh, not as mountainous as- it wasn’t as mountainous as West Virginia but there were Tennessee hills around us. I started to school, I believe, as I said, at five years old. And my first teacher was a Mrs. Gaither.

Capital G-a-i-t-h-e-r.

**RW-N:** What was the name of that school?

**BJ:** It served-, it was just a building where it served as a school and the church. I don’t believe it even, I don’t believe we ever . . . unless it was Manring Grade, it was a grade school. (RW-N: Yeah, uh-huh) And we moved away from Manring, Tennessee when I was a teenager. And we moved to St. Albans, West Virginia.

**AB:** What caused your father to come to St. Albans?

**BJ:** The mines would have strikes. And every time the miners were on strike, naturally the income, you know, decreased and so forth. And then, too, he wanted us to have a better education by moving closer to West Virginia State College.

**AB:** Do you know how he knew about West Virginia State College?

**BJ:** Yes, there was a Mr. Noble. I don’t remember his first name. And uh, he came down selling lots for houses and so forth. So my father invested in two lots, where the house now stands. And uh. . .

**RW-N:** Where this house stands?

**BJ:** Yes, where this house now stands. It was built on it. And uh, he uh, I’m losing my train of thought again.

**AB:** When. . . was, was Mr. Noble black or white?

**BJ:** Black.

**AB:** He was a black man.

**BJ:** Yes. And the company was Summers & [inaudible], in Charleston.

**AB:** A real estate company?

**BJ:** Yes, a real estate company.

**AB:** And this man was just kind of traveling around selling the property?

**BJ:** Yes. Yes, because there were other families, too, who bought lots. And one other family moved to West Virginia and lived right up here on this road. They built on also. But they're both dead now. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

**RW-N:** And do you think that uh, that this property was seen as valuable because there were better jobs, better schools?

**BJ:** Yes, definitely. (RW-N: Yes) That's one of the reasons that he, uh, moved here, in order that we would have a better education than had we stayed in Tennessee. At that time schools were not as good, I'll say, as they were here in West Virginia. And Mr. Noble told him all about West Virginia State College. And so my dad decided then he would move his family here. And we've been here ever since.

**AB:** How much education, uh, Mrs. Jones, did your father have?

**BJ:** My father was a sixth-grade boy. And uh, quit school in those days. And another thing, teachers came but they weren't paid very much, so they only stayed about six months. So my father was-, my father was from Newport, Tennessee. That's another, uh, that was a small town nearby. And my mother was from Powell's Valley. And both of them were-, never did finish



grade school.

**RW-N:** How far did your mother go?

**BJ:** My mother went to about the fourth or fifth grade. She was an avid reader, though. She loved her bible. She had, uh, could read the newspaper. And I would say very intelligent—naturally I would think that.

**RW-N:** So both of your parents could read and write?

**BJ:** Oh, yes. And uh, my father kept literature, books and so forth, there for us all the time, and encouraged us to read.

**RW-N:** Do you remember the names of any of those books?

**BJ:** Pardon?

**RW-N:** Do you remember the names of any of those books?

**BJ:** Yes, my first book was a primer. They called it a primer in those days—not a first grade book. And, uh, Baby Ray—all about Baby Ray—Baby Ray has one dog or something like that. He has two cats and so on. See, we were learning to count, along with studying about Baby Ray. And the name of that primer was Baby Ray.

**RW-N:** R-a-y- or R-a-e-y?

**BJ:** R-a-y.

**RW-N:** R-a-y. And that was a typical book used in the schools in those days? (BJ: Yes, yes, it was) And somehow your father had a copy of that.

**BJ:** Yes, he did. And he would make frequent trips to Middlesboro, Kentucky, the town, and buy books for us.

**RW-N:** Do you remember any of those?

**BJ:** No. We all, we . . .all sorts, I would say. Because True Romances, as I began to grow up, you know. And none come to my mind right now.

**RW-N:** So you had (BJ: But in school, though...) books and magazines in the house. You had books and magazines in your home?

**BJ:** Yes, yes. From the time we learned to read we had books and magazines in the house.

**AB:** Was the church a very important part of your growing up while you were still in Tennessee?

**BJ:** Yes, yes, it was. They would give Christmas programs and have fish dinners.

**AB:** Did you have a regular minister or one who just came maybe once a month or so?

**BJ:** Well, he was a—what do you call those ministers? He wasn't there all the time. I remember some of their names. The Reverend Garnett, the Reverend Madden, M-a-d-d-e-n, and they stayed at our house seemingly, because my father would sort of show them around.

**AB:** How many. . .how many children were in the school with you there?

**BJ:** Around twenty.

**AB:** And how many people, families came to that church? Was it a big church?

**BJ:** No, it was a small church. It was a building-, I don't know what it was built for but it wasn't built for a church. But it was a building, nice building, that was used for a church and uh, school.

**RW-N:** What church was this?

**BJ:** Baptist, it was a Baptist church. I don't remember the name of it either.

**RW-N:** And so did you go to church on Sundays?

**BJ:** Yes.

**RW-N:** And other. . . .

**BJ:** And Sunday School. And as soon as I grew old enough, they would give me a Sunday

School class. We older girls would try to teach the younger girls, you know, the younger children rather, in Sunday School.

RW-N: How old were you when you started that?

BJ: Uh, I would say around twelve.

AB: In your school, did you have blackboards or slates? What did you have?

BJ: We had blackboards and pencil and paper.

AB: From the beginning?

BJ: From the beginning.

AB: What about your water and lunch and that kind of thing?

BJ: Oh, well, we carried our lunch. And, uh, had an outdoor toilet. And the water was near the school. They did have a hydrant near the school. And by the way, where we lived, there was, there wasn't running water up to the house, but there was running water in the community. And we would carry water. And my mother would catch rainwater in a barrel to do the laundry.

AB: And did you have lamp light? Or what? How did you. . .?

BJ: Uh, no, the company, the miners company installed electricity early when we went to-, when we moved or when I was born rather in Tennessee. They had electricity.

AB: And how did you heat?

BJ: Coal. We had coal stoves.

AB: You had a coal stove in your school as well?

BJ: Yes. And my mother cooked with coal.

RW-N: Now those were company houses, I guess, that you lived in. (BJ: Yes, they were company houses.) And how, how large was the typical company house?

**BJ:** Four rooms. (RW-N: Uh-huh) So we didn't have a living room, but we had two bedrooms and a kitchen and a partial dining room and pantry together.

**AB:** Did-, as a girl growing up there, did you have family chores that you had to do?

**BJ:** Oh, yes. Well now, of course, we didn't have washing machines and so forth in those days. And I, as I was old-, as soon as I was old enough, I helped my mother do the laundry. And we washed dishes. We each of us had something to do. My brother and all of us.

**RW-N:** How did that get decided, who would do what?

**BJ:** Beg pardon?

**RW-N:** How did you decide who would do what? Did your mother make that decision?

**BJ:** She told us. And we obeyed her. That's one thing that I think if I've ever done anything worthwhile in my life, my parents were, uh, what do you call 'em? Old time parents or what? But we didn't argue with our parents. Our parents' word, I won't say was law but—not only my parents but seemingly most of the parents in the community.

**AB:** Was that true of both your mother and father, or was one of them more the disciplinarian than the other?

**BJ:** Well, mother was easier on us than my father. [chuckling]

**AB:** Did he spank?

**BJ:** Yes, he didn't spare the rod. The girls-, Mildred didn't get as many as I did. [laughing softly] I was the middle child. And seemingly they're supposed to be worse than the others.

**AB:** Did your mother spank, too? (BJ: Yes) Both of them did.

**BJ:** And my mother would promise me if it was Sunday and I did something, she would promise me that on Monday or another day she'd get me, would whip me. Sometimes Sunday, sometimes

no. Sometimes she would, I mean, sometimes she forgot. [laughter]

**RW-N:** And did they use a, uh, twig or strap or. . . ?

**BJ:** A twig, just a twig. They were not, as they say nowadays, abusive at all. And uh, every lick I got was one that they might have hit at me and missed me, but I. . . I uh, appreciate everything that they did.

**RW-N:** What kind of a child were you?

**BJ:** Beg pardon?

**RW-N:** What kind of a child were you? If you had to describe. . . .

**BJ:** I was mischievous. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And as I said, being the middle child I guess I-, my brother—"My son", you know "My son," how men go on over their sons—and Mildred being the youngest, I don't think they were-, they got as many spankings probably as I did. I was mischievous, but yet, they loved me. Yes. And my dad used to call me his own little image, because I looked more like him than my mother. And Mildred looks like our fa-, our mother. And so did my brother, does my brother.

**RW-N:** Now your father was, uh, stricter with you than your mother. (BJ: Yes) Was there much, uh, outward display of affection in your family? (BJ: Oh, yes) I mean, hugging or kissing or . . . (BJ: Definitely) and did that involve your father too?

**BJ:** We uh, all of us at night would kiss our mother and father goodnight. And uh after Dad-, my father would spank me or give me a switching, he would say, later, Daddy loves you but he's doing it for your own good. [laughter] And, of course, I wondered then if it were. [chuckling]

**AB:** Now when you were a teenager, you all made this move from Tennessee to West Virginia.

(BJ: Right) Do you remember how you got here, physically? Did you take the train or how?

**BJ:** We came by train. There was, uh, there were trains where we lived. And one would come up to about eight miles away from Middlesboro, Kentucky. Uh, one would come in the morning and then one would bring us back in the evening. So transportation wasn't a problem. There were no automobiles, of course.

**AB:** And when you came, did you just bring suitcases or did you have furniture or what not that came along with you?

**BJ:** We started out with our furniture. And there was an ac-, my brother came on the truck with uh, two other, two drivers. And the drivers seemingly began to have a happy time, and they had an accident. So when we came here, we uh-, we didn't know about that though. We left uh, Tennessee in the evening, after we'd had dinner with my mother—my mother's sister and her family; they lived there also. And we were sitting in the hotel there when we saw my brother coming up the steps with a sack. Well, my mother had deposited some change and uh, we were-, we began to get worried the minute we saw him. And they'd had an accident, and he wasn't hurt.

**AB:** But he had turned around and come back to Tennessee then?

**BJ:** Somehow or other they'd come back. We hadn't left Tennessee. It was while we were sitting in the hotel that night waiting on a train—the train ran around 10 o'clock—that we saw him coming up the steps with this sack. And we knew something had happened. And they'd had an accident. And, well, our furniture and everything.

**AB:** So was everything lost?

**BJ:** No. Yes and no. Uh, my mother had a sewing machine and it had to be repaired, because I remember it always had one wooden leg.

**AB:** That was part of the repair, from...?

**BJ:** Yes, yes.

**AB:** So the family then came on, took the train that night?

**BJ:** Yes, we came on that night to, uh, and we stayed with the other family I told you about that had bought also up here. And we stayed with them until my dad got furniture here and we got ourselves together after the accident. We were just thankful that nothing had happened to my brother after the accident.

**AB:** Was the house already built when you got here?

**BJ:** Yeah, yes. After he purchased the lot-, lots-, he came back and made another trip and saw about the house being built. So we moved into a new house.

**AB:** Is this the house that. . . ?

**BJ:** This is it with the addition off the living room in here. You might go on and see it. And Mildred had that done about ten years ago, an addition added to the house. And then during World War II he uh, began to remodel the house, add on kitchen, another bedroom, a basement and so forth. Because uh, well, when he came to West Virginia he got a better job at Barium Reduction Company up here in South Charleston.

**RW-N:** Would you spell that for us?

**BJ:** Beg pardon?

**RW-N:** Would you spell that for us?

**BJ:** Yes. Capital B-a-r-i-u-m Reduction. Do you remember that?

**RW-N:** No, but, yeah, but now it makes sense, Barium Reduction.

**BJ:** Barium Reduction Company. It was a chemical company. Oh, and he got a much better job because he became one of the operators. And uh, when he retired, he retired as an operator from

Barium Reduction Chemical Company.

**RW-N:** Now what does that mean to be an operator?

**BJ:** He mixed chemicals. They told him how to do it, of course, and he mixed chemicals. I know he-, and at times he would sort of be overcome with mixing these chemicals. I remember, I remember chlorine, c-h-l-o-r-i-n-e, was one of them. And get in his eyes and so forth and so on. But he liked his job.

**AB:** So he came, got a good job, you all have a house to live in, (BJ: Yes) and you children start to school.

**BJ:** Yes, we enrolled in school as soon as we came, a day or two later.

**AB:** Where did you go?

**BJ:** I was ready for the eighth grade. And there used to be a school over here on the hill, but it's been torn down now. So I got certified and was ready for the ninth grade the next year. And I started at teacher training high school over at Institute.

**AB:** And where were the other children going?

**BJ:** Mildred was still in the grades. She went over here. And my brother also.

**AB:** And what about your other sister?

**BJ:** She's dead, she's deceased. I forgot to tell you about that.

**AB:** Was she deceased by that time?

**BJ:** Yes. Oh, yeah. She lived to be two years old.

**AB:** Oh, I see.

**BJ:** She was born two months before Mildred was born. She's between Mildred and me.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm. So there were only three of you children, you and Mildred and your brother,



McGhee, who came to West Virginia.

**BJ:** Yes, that's right.

**AB:** This community in which you lived, was that an all-black community at that time?

**BJ:** No. There were white people and colored people—well, I still say colored—living side by side.

**AB:** And is that the case now?

**BJ:** Oh, the community is there no longer now. The mines soon closed after we left.

**AB:** But here in West Virginia, when you came to West Virginia to St. Albans, was that a black community? (BJ: Practically) When you came to...?

**BJ:** Practically. But there's still white families up here now that were living here when we came, the grandchildren.

**RW-N:** So it's mostly black in this area (BJ: Most) but not completely.

**BJ:** Not now.

**RW-N:** Not now.

**BJ:** No, there are only a few black families left. (RW-N: Okay) And, uh, people are just moving in trailers and so forth. It's really increasing now, the population is really increasing.

**AB:** But you could walk to school from here? Mildred and-, could walk over to the high-, to the uh...

**BJ:** Oh, yes, she could walk to her school. (AB: Uh-huh) And I doubt whether you remember, Mrs. Bickley, but uh, we crossed the Kanawha River. (AB: Ferry?) Yes, way over at Institute.

**AB:** Now, how did you get from where you live up on this hill down to-, did you walk? (BJ: We walked) You walked down?

**BJ:** We walked, uh, not summer but the fall and winter, we walked. And my father walked to

catch a street car that came out here, not out here but in town. And my father walked down to his job-, to catch a street car going to South Charleston to his job. So we walked.

**AB:** So you would walk over to the ferry. . .

**BJ:** No, no, we walked to the street car.

**AB:** To the street car, took the street car. . .

**BJ:** Yes, up to Stop 1, I believe, or 16, one of those numbers. And we crossed the ferry and get out, what was that? in the grove, and walk to, uh, I was ready for the ninth grade then, Fleming Hall.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm. And so you finished high school (BJ: Yes) over there, nine through twelve.

(BJ: That's right, uh-huh) And uh, how-, was that very expensive? Did you have to pay for your own transportation and what not?

**BJ:** Yes. But the Board-, we paid for our transportation but the Board of Education paid our tuition. Because there wasn't any, uh, well, there was a high school here in St. Albans, but we weren't allowed, naturally, to go to it until integration.

**AB:** Were there many of you kids from St. Albans who were going over there at that time?

**BJ:** Oh, quite a few. Yes, I would say around fifteen or twenty. At different times because they had classes at-, some of them were in college. And we were in high school four years. And they're still some living, too, who are around who attended high school at Fleming Hall over there.

**AB:** Do you remember any of your teachers?

**BJ:** Yes. [chuckling] I do. Mr. Moore, Mr. Paul Moore, was one that teased me so because I was and still am, I suppose, extremely shy. And when I got married, first thing he wanted to

know from Mildred, did I have any children. [laughing] “Did she have any little babies?” He was in the chemistry depart-, I took chemistry in college. And uh, let’s see, Mr. Paul Moore—this is college. But in high school a Mr. Holland and Miss Jamie Everett, Miss Angie Turner, yeah, and uh, Mr. Saunders, these were—he was a science teacher—Mrs. Turner now, isn’t she? No, Angie, uh, King now. (AB: King, mmm-hmm) She was the math teacher. And Mrs. Everett was the English teacher and Mr. Holland the history teacher. And Mrs. Maybelle Jones was my home ec teacher. Mrs. Eubank and let’s see if there’s anyone else. My music teacher was—I forget her name—but we did have music.

**AB:** Did you ever think of not going on to school? (BJ: No) Just quitting and maybe getting a job or anything like that?

**BJ:** No, because my father, although he and my mother both were, uh, and they hadn’t finished grade school, his one reason for coming to West Virginia was so his children would receive an education. No, never, I just felt like, we felt like we just had to keep going. And we worked. We worked in the service here in St. Albans for some of the white people—they call it domestic work, I think. And the girls did. And of course, my brother worked also.

**AB:** Now when did you work? After school or during the summers?

**BJ:** During the summer and after school.

**RW-N:** And was this in high school (BJ: Yes) that you were working?

**BJ:** And part-time in college. Because we uh, I didn’t stay on campus. I rode this ferry back and forth, except in cold weather. And once when we were gonna have a test in class and when I was in college, I walked, walked across the bridge and then all the way up to Institute.

**AB:** Oh, my, that’s a long distance.

**BJ:** Well, four or five miles. But I didn't want to miss that test. [laughing] I'm not all that smart, but sometimes I just felt like I had to stick to it.

**AB:** What about your social life? When you were in Tennessee, what did you all do to have a good time? I mean, did you have friends? Did you go to parties?

**BJ:** Well, my cousins were near, so we visited a lot, stayed [inaudible] and so forth. [Inaudible] And we didn't have parties, but they had amusements, you know, at school. And uh, we kept busy. My father would tell us stories at night when we were real small.

**AB:** Do you remember any of the stories?

**BJ:** Yes, believe it or not, *Les Miserables*.

**RW-N:** Ohhh.

**AB:** Really? You mean your father had...

**BJ:** He was widely read, that's why he'd named me, it was from some book, B'Alma. Uh-huh, yeah, my father, I remember that one. And uh, *Nero Played While Rome Burned*. He was quite a gentleman, I would say. And he was an avid reader.

**AB:** And when you came to West Virginia, what about social life here? Were there parties here in St. Albans?

**BJ:** Yes, yes there were.

**AB:** Where were they?

**BJ:** Some lady—house, from house to house. And some lady played the piano. And naturally the youngsters danced. I never did learn to dance very well. [chuckling] It wasn't because my parents didn't approve, because they wanted us to have a good life, you know, a full life. But they had house parties and we were able to attend some of them.

**RW-N:** And could you do things like play cards? Was that allowed?

**BJ:** No, my father didn't allow cards in the house. He said that many a persons had started a card game and started playing and somebody had been killed. So I never learned to play cards well until I went to Clarksburg. I didn't learn to play well then, but that's the first time I played cards, when I went to Clarksburg to teach.

**RW-N:** Mmm-hmm. But you could have music and you could dance.

**BJ:** Oh, we had music, we had dance. They had dances. And uh, and we used to walk quite a bit, my friends and I, over the hills, you know, in nice weather. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) We did a lot of walking. We had fun.

**RW-N:** I'd like to go back again to, to . . .to your Tennessee days. Uh, you had cousins there, you had one-, was it one aunt and uncle or were there several?

**BJ:** One, my mother's sister, one aunt and she had eight children and all of them were born in Tennessee. And uh, we uh, were together quite a bit. An extended family almost, because we'd go down to their house, they would come here. And they would have, uh, they would eat at each place, you know what I mean?

**RW-N:** So even after you moved to West Virginia, you still saw them a lot? (BJ: No, they. . .)  
No, that was in Tennessee.

**BJ:** That was in Tennessee.

**RW-N:** Uh, did you have uh, were most of your playmates your cousins (BJ: My cousins)  
because the families were. . .?

**BJ:** And we had other friends, though, schoolmates. (RW-N: You did, uh-huh) And some families moved from the south, a mining company brought several southern families to work in

the mines.

**RW-N:** You don't remember the mining, the name of that company, do you?

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

**RW-N:** Did you have, did you have white playmates?

**BJ:** Yes. And I used to baby sit white playma-, uh, white children.

**AB:** In Tennessee?

**BJ:** In Tennessee.

**AB:** Were there any quarrels or racial name calling or anything like that, that you remember?

**BJ:** I don't remember any, if very few. A very, very few. Because we were, well, we were told to come on home after school. And we had-, my parents had something for us to do. But uh, we never had any, I think between the boys there might have been one or two, my brother. But uh, we got along well. And we lived right across the road from one white family. And this lady had a lot of children. And every time a little baby would come along, my mother was right there. She wasn't a mid-wife, but she and my mother were good friends.

**AB:** Did your parents teach you anything about race? Did they teach you to be afraid or to stay away from white people or anything like that?

**BJ:** Not to stay away. But we knew our place. Now that's saying-, they didn't tell us that. And I'm using that expression. But that's what I think the white people might have expected, some of them, for us to stay in our place.

**AB:** And so you did that?

**BJ:** We did that.

**AB:** And you didn't have any problems that you remember?

**BJ:** No, no, I know I didn't, the girls didn't. But as I say, my brother might have gotten into one or two, as boys will. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

**RW-N:** Well, when you were growing up now in a coal camp and there were white and black families, what did that mean when you say you stayed in your place?

**BJ:** Well, well. . . [chuckling]

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

**BJ:** I wish I could explain it. If my mother were living, she would, be able to more so than I.

**RW-N:** Did you go into the homes of white families?

**BJ:** Oh, yes. Our neighbors were white. As I said, one family lived right across the road. And I would look after her children whenever she would go away and so forth, as I grew older.

**RW-N:** Now when you went to town, which was over in Kentucky, right? (BJ: Yes, Middlesboro, Kentucky) Middles-, Middlesboro. (BJ: Yes) Were there obvious-, was there obvious racial discrimination there, in terms (BJ: Yes) of the places you could go to?

**BJ:** Yes, the usual discrimination that you probably have heard about. We sat in the back of a train—they had a section for us. We didn't know any better. Because my parents hadn't taught us. Like I said, we stayed in our place, so to speak. We knew that there was a place for us to ride and we went. We sat there and went back and forth. We'd go down in the morning to town and the train would bring us back in the-, the rest of us, too.

**RW-N:** And were there certain stores that you went into?

**BJ:** No, not that I know of. Now there were quite a few Jews that had stores. I remember Ginsberg store and that's where we did some shopping.

**RW-N:** And you went into those stores?

**BJ:** Oh, yes, I don't know of any place that we couldn't go.

**RW-N:** Could you go to the soda fountains?

**BJ:** No, we didn't. First time I went to a soda fountain was in West Virginia. [chuckling] On Summers Street. Excuse me.

**AB:** You said that you were in a hotel when your brother came back to tell you about the accident. Was that a black hotel?

**BJ:** Yes. Campbells, C-a-m-p-b-e-l-l-s, Campbells Hotel.

**RW-N:** And how about the movies? Did you get to the movies much when you were a child?

**BJ:** Uh, the first movie I saw was a silent movie. And it was showing in a church. And uh, we attended it.

**AB:** But there was no movie in your town that you could go to?

**BJ:** No, no. Middlesboro is the closest town where we could go to the movies.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm. And did you go in Middlesboro?

**BJ:** No. Most of the time we uh, would go to Middlesboro on business. And that's when I came to St. Albans, well, you know the movie was mixed there, I mean, the movie there was uh... West Virginia's movies also were integrated-, not integrated,- segregated. (RW-N: Segregated)

**AB:** Well, and there was a movie here in St. Albans, was there not?

**BJ:** Yes. But we didn't attend it.

**RW-N:** Well, I'm curious about something you said earlier that when the minister came—now this is in Tennessee—(BJ: Yes) uh, that he would stay at your house. (BJ: That's right) Do you know why it was your house and not someone else's house, how that came about?

**BJ:** He and my dad became friends and uh, I don't know why, because he seemed to think a lot



of my father. There was no-, nobody ever thought anything about it either. No reason why he stayed with us. My father would go-, he attended church regular, too. And, uh, cause we went to church and Sunday school. But for some reason or other, he liked my-. . . . And one time he even almost encouraged my father to become a minister. But uh, he didn't. My dad was stuck in his own little, whatever he was doing. [softly chuckles] He didn't feel as if he could, I suppose, carry out the duties of a minister and uh, raise his family, you know. He liked, my father, to dance, he liked to dance. He grew up in town. He grew up in Newport, Tennessee.

**RW-N:** Do you have any special memories of Christmas when you were growing up? (BJ: Yes, yes) Can you tell us about that?

**BJ:** We believed in Santa Clause and did the usual things. And my mother fixed nice dinners.

**RW-N:** Did you have a Christmas tree?

**BJ:** We did. It was one we went out and got ourselves. It wasn't pine. But we lived near the trees down in this valley, and yes, we had a Christmas tree.

**RW-N:** And would you all-, would the kids decorate it or would your parents decorate it?

**BJ:** We did. And I remember I got a little toy piano once and a doll always.

**RW-N:** So you had toys?

**BJ:** Yes. And we'd hang up our stockings, and they would fill them full of oranges. We didn't get fruit very often; it had to come in on a train. And uh, nuts, candy and so forth. We had the usual, a nice, nice Christmas, I would say.

**RW-N:** And those, those patterns of Christmas followed you into West Virginia?

**BJ:** Right. But when we got in West Virginia, we were almost teenagers (RW-N: Yes) and so therefore we slowly began to observe Christmas, and we still have a Christmas tree now, my sister

and I. And my brother, he has a real, real tall one. Now he has uh, three children living and one dead. Yes, my brother, he lives on Eighth Street in St. Albans.

AB: Did you uh, did your brother go to West Virginia State College high school too?

BJ: No, he quit school in high school. And he got a job also at Barium Reduction Plant. And he got married when he was twenty-one.

AB: So he never went to school here in West Virginia at all?

BJ: Grade school.

AB: Grade school.

BJ: Yes, but not high school or college.

AB: So he quit about the eighth grade then? He finished the eighth grade?

BJ: Well, he-, for some reason or the other, seems as if then I was ready to go to Clarksburg, so I don't remember too many other things about it. Now he was a great member of the shrine of, Masonic Lodge. And I imagine he might have met your husband (AB: When he was there, or some of my family) at one time probably.

AB: What about your mother and father? Were they Lodge members too?

BJ: My mother wasn't, but my father was. He was a Masonic and he went several degrees higher.

AB: Mmm-hmm. Was that here in West Virginia?

BJ: In Tennessee, and also West Virginia. But not too long, because he passed in 1965. Of course, we were here a long time before then. But my brother is the one now that was a shiner,- shiner?

AB: Mmm-hmm. What year did you all come to West Virginia? Do you remember?

**BJ:** Nineteen and twenty-nine.

**AB:** Just about Depression time.

**BJ:** Yeah, well, we were here when the Depression began, that's right.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm. Did it affect your family?

**BJ:** It did, but it's a shame to say it, my father got more work and better jobs, the men did, you know. And my dad worked at [inaudible], uh not [inaudible], uh, Barium Reduction Company in South Charleston and got a good job. And that's when he began to get a little more money to remodel the house.

**RW-N:** So, so Depression was not a hard time in your house?

**BJ:** Noo, it wasn't.

**RW-N:** Not really.

**BJ:** It wasn't even-, make that much, but during those days, well, a little money would go a long ways.

**RW-N:** And your mother always stayed at home raising the children?

**BJ:** Yes, until we came to-, I forgot to mention it. When we came to West Virginia, she went to work also and would take us with her to these homes where. . . . She helped one lady, a Miss Hopkins, bake cakes. And then we did other work in the home, cleaning or whatever was to be done.

**RW-N:** So the two daughters would go with her. (BJ: Yes) Yes, uh-huh.

**BJ:** We went with her to work, in the summertime. And of course, after school, well, I know I used to stop at one of the places and get their dinner and then come on home and kept up with my work in college. I was in college then. And still worked, and that was right after the Depression.

**AB:** What made you decide to go on to college when you graduated from high school?

**BJ:** It was expected of me.

**AB:** Your parents?

**BJ:** My parents expected it. I remember one lady told Momma once when Momma would go to work sometimes and we were in class. And this lady said, “Bessie,”—my mother’s name was Bessie—“If I were you I wouldn’t work so hard to educate those girls.” That’s what this lady told her. [chuckling] And uh, of course, we tried our best after we finished school to—we couldn’t pay her back—but to see that she had a better life, you know what I mean, didn’t have to work then. And she worked all the way, all the time I was in college to help then. It was after the Depression, but still she felt like she wanted to help out. And she could get the job.

**AB:** What made you decide to become a teacher? Did you ever think of any other profession?

**BJ:** No. Uh, I think Miss Maybelle Jones was the one that influenced me to take home economics. But to become a teacher. . .well, my early teachers, Miss Gaither, and her sister, Miss Kyle, was her name, and I just admired them. And teachers used to stay at our house also.

**AB:** In Tennessee?

**BJ:** In Tennessee.

**RW-N:** You mean they lived with you?

**BJ:** No.

**RW-N:** You mean they...

**BJ:** They would come in the morning on trains. See, it was only eight miles away. The train would bring passengers in the morning up where we lived and take them back in the evening. That’s white and colored.

**RW-N:** What was there about these teachers that you admired?

**BJ:** Uh, now that's hard to explain. I think when we were children, we used to play teaching, you know, play where someone would be the teacher. And we'd imitate our regular teachers. I don't know, it's just one of those things. I suppose, my parents, too, influenced me, encouraged me I'll say to become a teacher. Dad was proud of us.

**RW-N:** So you never considered doing any other kind of work particularly?

**BJ:** Well, in those days, there wasn't, where we lived there wasn't any other kind. I mean, when we came to West Virginia, there wasn't any, weren't any jobs for young, Afro-American girls that I know of. I mean, other than, like I said, working in, for someone else, you know, white people.

**RW-N:** Were there any other kinds of things that you could have studied in college, at that time?

**BJ:** Oh, yes. I majored in science and home economics and English. I took three majors. And since that time, I've attended, I had to go every five years, we had to keep up our certificates. And I attended West Virginia University, Salem College and uh, West Virginia State. I took extension work after I finished college to keep my certificate in good shape.

**RW-N:** So let me see if I understand this now. When you came to West Virginia, you were in the eighth grade? (BJ: Yes) Okay. And you finished here (BJ: Yes) locally, very close to your house, (BJ: Right, right) the eighth grade (BJ: That's right). And then you went over the river to high school (BJ: Right) at, at State. And then you went right on to college, right? (BJ: Right, eight years was spent over there on the campus) Right, okay. And do you know what years those were? Let's see, you came in '29, right? (BJ: Yes) So around 1930. . . (BJ: '32) '32.

**BJ:** From '32 to '36, when I was in school. (RW-N: Uh-huh, okay)

**AB:** But you were in college those, those years?

**BJ:** Four years in college.

**AB:** 1932 to 1936.

**BJ:** 1932 to 1936.

**END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 1 - SIDE 2**

**AB:** When you finished high school, did you have a ceremony, a graduation ceremony?

**BJ:** Oh, yes. I had a white dress, [chuckling] white shoes and then my robe was black. We didn't have robes in high school. I was graduated in a white dress and white shoes, of course. And my parents-, taxis were running. I remember it rained and I got sort of disappointed because I didn't want to get my white shoes muddy. And Dad called a taxi. And he and mother and all of 'em went to my graduation.

**AB:** And did you have baccalaureate and all the, those other. . .?

**BJ:** Not from high school. But from college, though, we had everything. But most everything that they have now. (AB: Mmm-hmm) And President John W. Davis was the president.

**RW-N:** Now did you earn a bachelor of science degree?

**BJ:** Yes, in home economics. And then I went to West Virginia University and got masters in science.

**RW-N:** In science?

**BJ:** Yes. I beg your pardon, home economics.

**RW-N:** In home economics, yeah.

**BJ:** And science was one of the courses that I took to be certified to teach it. And I taught science, and one English class, ninth grade junior high English.

**AB:** Now when you graduated from West Virginia State College, what did you do?

**BJ:** Oh, London, West Virginia. I, uh, was lucky enough to get a two-and-a-half, I stayed there two-and-a-half years and taught at Washington High School, London, West Virginia. And then, uh...

**AB:** That was from maybe 1938 to 1940?

**BJ:** 1938 and 1939. And there was-, I know my supervisor's a Miss Pauline Stout, somehow or other found out—I guess I must have made some fair grades—uh, recommended me for the job at Kelly Miller. And so I finished, I went to, uh, I finished Christmas holidays and got word to go to Kelly Miller midterm. So I went to Kelly Miller in 1939 to 1940, and stayed there until 1954.

**AB:** Now when you were at London, what were you teaching?

**BJ:** Home ec and chemistry.

**AB:** Home ec and chemistry. So you were always on the secondary level. You never taught elementary school?

**BJ:** Uh, no. I taught now one more school. After I left Kelly Miller and schools were integrated, Summit Park Junior High School, and I taught seventeen years there.

**AB:** Was that... Summit?

**BJ:** Summit Park.

**AB:** S-u-m-m-i-t. . . .

**BJ:** ..i-t Park Junior High. (AB: Mmm-hmm) And uh, I brought that book. [Mrs. Jones showing a book to the interviewers.] And where you see that sticking out there, my picture, a little picture's in there. That, now that book was published last year by one of the Summit Park students who's now gone and so forth. But uh. . .

**RW-N:** We're looking at a paperback , (BJ: Yes. Oh, excuse me) uh, large, quite large, I guess 8 ½ by 11½, something 8 ½ by 11, attractive, uhm, white covered book with black design on it, including of children. And it says "Summit Park, It All Began on Murphy's Run." And it is by Mary Virginia Davis Sprouse. And it is, it's a history of that school, isn't it?

**BJ:** Yes, and the community.

**RW-N:** And the community, uh-huh. And your picture is in here you say?

**BJ:** Yes. Keep going til you turn to down there. (RW-N: Well, we'll...) Page 87, (RW-N: Oh, okay) I'm sorry, 287.

**RW-N:** Two-eighty-seven. (BJ: 287) And we're looking at Mrs. Jones' picture, page 287.

That's 283. . . .

**BJ:** There. (RW-N; Ahhh) And I know on that day, I put on another dress. [chuckling]

**AB:** Want to read that?

**RW-N:** Yes, so we can get a copy of it, too. Could we maybe get a copy of this at some, at some point in time? (BJ: Sure) I can read it, too. I'll read it quickly. "B'Alma Jones, graduate of West Virginia State College, has a masters degree in home economics from West Virginia University. She first taught at London High in Kanawha County,"—that's Washington High School, right?—"then at Kelly Miller High. A pioneer of school integration, she came in 1954 to Summit Park Junior High where she continued to teach for seventeen years. She's a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and the American Legion Auxilliary. Mrs. Jones is a Sunday school teacher at Mt. Zion Baptist Church and a twenty-year member of the women's study club, serving as its president for two years. Her husband, William H. Jones, a teacher at WI," (BJ: Washington Irving) Washington Irving, "died in 1988. Both had retired in 1973 and lived in Clarksburg."



We'll get a copy of that later.

**AB:** Mr. Barnett was the principal up at Washington. . . .

**BJ:** Yes, Mr. Leonard Barnett.

**AB:** . . . yes, when you were there. And who was the principal at Kelly Miller?

**BJ:** Mr. E.B. Saunders. And I have his picture here.

**RW-N:** Now where is Kelly Miller?

**BJ:** Clarksburg.

**RW-N:** I see, okay.

**BJ:** And they named the street E.B. Saunders Highway, because he spent thirty-nine years there as principal. Now this is uh, they have a foundation now and they're still, uh, I think this is in this book. I'm not sure. . . . anyway, I, I uh, have his picture and a write-up about him. I thought this was the right book.

**RW-N:** Mrs. Jones is showing us a soft-back book that looks like a history or yearbook type of book about Kelly Miller. (BJ: [Inaudible] faculty)

**AB:** How many teachers, uh, were at Kelly Miller when you went there, Mrs. Jones?

**BJ:** I think there were six grad-, Kelly Miller, the elementary school and the junior high and the high school are all in one building. And there were six teachers in grades, [elementary grades] four in the junior high, that's ten. And uh, the junior high went up to the tenth grade-, and uh, three in the high school. So that would be thirteen, fourteen plus with the principal.

**AB:** And about how many students do you think were at Kelly Miller?

**BJ:** I would say somewhere around two hundred.

**AB:** About two hundred. And that, that would be in first. . .

**BJ:** Including all the way through. (AB: All the way through) That's not the right book, though, that I intended to show you. I do have the principal's picture and a write-up about him in another book.

**RW-N:** And the book we're looking at is Kelly Miller Association Twelfth Reunion in July of 1998, in Clarksburg, West Virginia.

**AB:** Uh, as I think I have told you, I was always amazed that Kelly Miller had a swimming pool. (BJ: Mmm-hmm) Was that pool there already when you went to work there?

**BJ:** Yes, yes. And I think I saw it about two or three times the whole time that I was there. I was so busy upstairs in the home ec room. [laughing]

**AB:** Did you ever hear any stories about how that came to be there?

**BJ:** No, that's why I suggested that you uh, maybe could talk to Miss [inaudible name] Monroe, uh-huh. Because she was born, I think, and reared in Clarksburg.

**AB:** When you came to Clarksburg, where did you live?

**BJ:** Right behind Kelly Miller school. I had-, Mr. Saunders was the nicest principal. My mother had told him to, you know, had talked to him and so forth, so she was a go-between. And uh, he was very, very fortunate in securing a boarding place for me right behind Kelly Miller school on Ben Street, with a childless couple. And so they seemed to have been happy to have had me, and I was-, it was just like being at home. They were very, very nice. I could get my meals and room, I roomed and boarded there.

**RW-N:** Now do I, do I understand you correctly that you were at Washington High for one year? Is that right?

**BJ:** Two-and-a-half years.

RW-N: Two-and-a-half years.

BJ: Yes. London, West Virginia.

RW-N: And offhand do you know the dates of those years? Was that 1938 to 1939?

BJ: Nineteen and, excuse me, nineteen thirty-uh, six. 1936. (RW-N: Right out of college you went there?) Yes. (RW-N: Okay) I was fortunate to get a call. I graduated in May— commencements were in May then—and uh, went to work in September. My mother went with me also, and she told the principal, believe it or not, if I didn't behave—she was teasing—but if I didn't behave, to make me behave. [laughing]

RW-N: She went with you what? For your interview or. . . ?

BJ: Yes, for my interview. And she also went with me—someone, a man up here, had a nice job at the capitol building in Charleston, the first time she went with me—both times when I was getting, was getting ready to teach. [chuckling]

RW-N: Do you know we have, interestingly enough, we have other stories of other women who tell us about their mother arranging for their first jobs or going on their interviews.

BJ: Oh, yes, mothers were active. And we appreciate it. I'm sure they did, too.

RW-N: And there was a protectiveness about that, wasn't there?

BJ: Yes, that's right.

RW-N: That these daughters were being protected in some ways by (BJ: Right) the mother being with them, taking care of them.

BJ: Right. And especially since I came from such a small place, you know. I wasn't used to so many things. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) And even up until I went to Clarksburg, my husband I would say helped also to uh, you know, inform me about so many different. . . . He used to say,

“B’Alma, stay alert, stay alert.” [laughing] He wasn’t-, he’s three years older than I. But uh, he uh, I would say also helped to advise me on so many things.

**RW-N:** And when you went to London, where did you live?

**BJ:** With a family, Mr. Barnett’s neighbor. He-, they arranged a place for me to stay there.

**RW-N:** Was that kind of scary? Moving away and. . . ?

**BJ:** Beg pardon?

**RW-N:** Was that kind of scary? (BJ: In London?) Well, up until that time you had always lived at home, right?

**BJ:** Oh, yes, yes, yes. No, I, I’m thankful that I lived with another family. They had one child. And their son was grown. And uh, Miss Coates, her name was. And they just, the people just seemed to take me under their wing, I suppose. And we got along well. I remember we used to listen to the radio together. If a program would come on the radio, she’d call me at night. So we had a good relationship.

**AB:** How did you find out about that job in London?

**BJ:** I applied to the Kanawha County Board of Education.

**AB:** And they told you that the job...

**BJ:** And a man here in St. Albans belonged to politics [inaudible] were prevalent in those days. We didn’t play politics or anything like that. But uh, I applied for a job. And another lady worked for this board of education president. And she told him about me too. She-, we worked together in Sunday School, so mine was sort of heresy. She told him and then he arranged for-, there was a vacancy. And I suppose I-, I don’t know how I got it. All I know is when I did, I shouted. [chuckling] I was so glad to get a job. (RW-N: Uh-huh)

**AB:** Was it unusual to leave a job in the middle of the year, rather than to finish out the school year?

**BJ:** My supervisor was in between there. And Dr. Farrell recommended me from uh, West Virginia State College. And Mrs.-, the supervisor for vocational home economics, was Miss Pauline Stout. And so she worked through the college. (AB: Uh-huh) Mmm-hmm. It was unusual, I suppose, but I was just fortunate. And I still thank the Lord. I'm not all that religious, but uh, the Lord was in the plan.

**RW-N:** Could you have stayed in London, had you wanted to?

**BJ:** Yes!

**RW-N:** Then what made you want to make the change?

**BJ:** Well, seemingly it was a better opportunity and more pay. There I worked in the junior high school and in Kelly Miller I worked in the high school. And junior high and high school and I had a summer job. We were supposed to do home visiting and the girls were supposed to have projects and we were supposed to go and supervise them all the year round. So I had a twelve months job in Clarksburg.

**RW-N:** And, and, let's see, in London you worked at the junior high (BJ: Yes) and then when you went to Clarksburg, you worked at the junior and senior high (BJ: right) and then had summer work, as well.

**BJ:** Yes, uh-huh, that was included. (RW-N: Yes) And we had to, of course, keep a record of our mileage—I was driving then—and send in reports to our supervisors. Miss Pauline Stout was one of my supervisors. Miss Virginia Thomas and Miss Dale White, she was from the other university. I had about three or four supervisors. And naturally during the summer we worked

hard also.

**AB:** Did you do vocational home economics?

**BJ:** Yes, mmm-hmm, that's what it was, when I went to Kelly Miller. But at London it wasn't.

**AB:** It wasn't. You were at Kelly Miller during the war years.

**BJ:** Partly, yeah, World War II. (AB: World War II) Yes, yes.

**AB:** How, how did that affect you? Did your brother go in the service?

**BJ:** No, he was married. He married when he was twenty-one and had a family. So he was exempted. But my husband went in the service.

**AB:** Were you married by that time?

**BJ:** Yes, uh-huh. We got married in 1941, and he went in the service two years later.

**AB:** What was your husband's name?

**BJ:** William H. Jones.

**AB:** And where did you meet him?

**BJ:** When I went to Clarksburg. He had charge of the band there. And he majored in chemistry in college. That's why I mentioned Mr. Paul Moore. And, but when he first finished college, he worked at uh, out at Anmoore, the chemical plant there.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm. And did he go to West Virginia State?

**BJ:** Union Carbide. Beg pardon?

**AB:** Did he go to West Virginia State College too? (BJ: Yes) Did you know him at West Virginia State College?

**BJ:** No, I didn't. No, we met-, his home was in Clarksburg. So he was a West Virginia State graduate. Several of the people in Clarksburg came to West Virginia State. Mrs. Monroe, she

was a West Virginia State graduate. And probably the lady in Fairmont. I hadn't asked her name.

**AB:** McCright, Anna McCright. [Who was also interviewed in this project]

**BJ:** Yes. And uh, so many of the West Virginians have come-, gone to West Virginia State.

**AB:** I was. . . (RW-N: Go head) I was surprised to learn that students from Weston, some of them, took the streetcar from Weston to Kelly Miller (BJ: Right) to go to school. (BJ: Right) Were there other students who came from outlying areas (BJ: Yes) to attend? What were some of those areas?

**BJ:** Barbour County students; there was no high school there for the Afro-Americans. Uh, Grafton. Did you know Miss Nelma Boston? (AB: No) Taylor County students and Buckhannon. What's that county? I forget it. (AB: Upshire) Upshire County. And there were buses running, though, after the war, when they. . . I don't remember whether it was after the war or before the war. But some of our students came on buses. And there was one lady, Mrs. Cooley—she's dead now—she went to the Board of Education and spoke for these children, and she came with them the first time to Kelly Miller. And Philippi, some of our students came from Philippi.

**AB:** Uh, Buckhannon, wasn't that where Victoria High School was? (BJ: Yes, that's right) So initially those students from Buckhannon came over to Kelly Miller (BJ: Right) and then they, when they built Buck-, built Victoria they stayed there? Is that it?

**BJ:** Now, let me think about Buckhannon. I'm not sure. (AB: Mmm-hmm) But I do know that I used to home visit in Buckhannon. But they did have Victoria High School. And the Warfield, [inaudible] Warfield, up there. So, uh, question mark after Buckhannon; I'm not sure about that.  
[AB chuckling]

**AB:** How did you find teaching those kids? Were they from coal mining families? I don't know what the industry is up there.

**BJ:** All around in West Virginia, yes, coal mining. But up at, from up at Philippi the parents farmed, I think; it was more or less agricultural area of West Virginia.

**AB:** You spoke of being a member of the women's study club? (BJ: Yes) Is it still going?

**BJ:** No. It, uh, closed about four or five years ago. But it was fifty years old when it closed. And now they have another group of women, the Shenyus, Shenyu Club. And they're still meeting and their daughters.

**AB:** How do you spell Shenyu?

**BJ:** S-h-e-n-y-u. Capital S-h. . . .

**RW-N:** What does that name mean?

**BJ:** I don't know. The daughters were Shenyettes. They would invite-, they only had twelve in the club, and they wouldn't take anyone else until someone passed. (AB: Mmm-hmm) And I'd be invited to their banquets, but they never asked me to join.

**AB:** The women's study club only took twelve, too, didn't it?

**BJ:** I don't know whether they had a limit. You were familiar with it, weren't you? (AB: Mmm-hmm) I'm not sure about it, the number.

**RW-N:** Can you describe what you did in the women's study group?

**BJ:** We studied different kinds of literature. And we'd have a banquet each year and give a scholarship to a outstanding student in one of the high schools, uh, in uh, well, it was from one of the high schools, it was Kelly Miller at first. And finally, of course, it was integrated also.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm. We were talking about World War II. Did you have special things as a



vocational home economics teacher that you did connected to the war effort?

**BJ:** Yes.

**AB:** What were those things?

**BJ:** Raising a garden, somewhat like 4H work. [inaudible] cooking is more than cooking and sewing, but they did, we did some of that. Home visits, that was the most important thing. We would, uh, and at school we would have demonstrations. And then the girls were supposed to-, they had a little book that they were supposed to write up what was done in school and go home and then try it out. Most of the parents cooperated there. And so they had projects. And each was supposed to carry a project. I remember one mother, though, we made a pie at school. It must not have turned out too well. And so when I went to home visits she told me about it. [laughing] And she said, "I taught her, I'm gonna teach her to make a pie." I said, "Well, good." I figured by the girl going home she was interested, and the mothers, you know, afterward I would tell the girls, "Now the mother's the one that's going to give you more practice than we have at school, you know."

**RW-N:** What kind of a teacher were you?

**BJ:** Oh, my, now that's a . . . [laughing]. . . . I would say... not excellent, because I had a lot to learn. And uh, in my home economics classes in college I learned quite a bit. I learned quite a bit from my mother at home. And by putting all those things together I believe that I managed to satisfy the Board of Education and did my job. But I came to grade myself. [chuckle]

**RW-N:** Did you uh, were you a strict teacher?

**BJ:** Yes, I was. I had some discipline problems, however. Because going, you know, into different-, getting acquainted with different types of students, and the principal was always there.

I tried not to send too many to the office. [chuckling]

RW-N: Now you said at one time that you were somewhat shy.

BJ: Yes, I was.

RW-N: Did that carry over into the classroom? I mean, was it difficult in the beginning to assume the role of a teacher and to be the boss?

BJ: Yes, it was. Yes, I won't say that everything was as-, you know, went just pleasant every day. And then, uh, now when I went to Summit Park, I haven't talked about Summit Park yet. The principal wondered, he asked another teacher why was I sending so many students to the office. Well, if I couldn't control them, I'd send them to the office. But when I got word of this, I did try to maintain better ...I wouldn't say order. But at first I was shy. And you know how some-, they're neither children and neither grown people and you know how they'll take advantage of you.

RW-N: How did you uh, how did you learn to deal with that, to overcome that, to get more confidence?

BJ: If they were in my class, we were allowed to cut their grades if they misbehaved. And we gave them uh, grades in conduct on their report cards.

RW-N: So you might have been a little shy, but you still could be strict, right? (BJ: Right) And expecting things from your students.

BJ: I had to be to keep my job. And I knew what was expected of me. Yes.

RW-N: Were those schools or did-, were they very helpful in helping a teacher who needed some help? Or could you find other teachers that you could get advice from? Or did the principal ever help? Or did you just sort of have to do it on your own?

**BJ:** No, I would ask; we helped each other. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) And I know of the rule now, I think [inaudible] County teachers on over there are allowed to paddle or not. But I do know that if you paddled a student, well, another teacher had to be present and all that. Because you were afraid of being sued, causing a lot of trouble. It would cause a teacher a lot of trouble. So I had help from some of the older teachers. Miss [inaudible name] Monroe and I were the youngest at one time, when we went to Kelly Miller. We went in about a year apart. And most of the other teachers were a little bit older. But he did have a fairly young faculty.

**RW-N:** Now Kelly Miller was an all-black school when you went there? (BJ: Yes, yes) Uh, did you have any special friends from that school as time went on or did your friends come from another area of your life?

**BJ:** Well, seemingly, I tried to make friends with all of them. And of course, in the sorority there were several members, you know, several West Virginia State graduates. So we all had something in common.

**RW-N:** Do you ever . . . have you been able to keep in touch with some of these women through the years?

**BJ:** Yes, until recently. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) Yes, until recently. We uh, up until . . . they're still meeting now. The chapter is still meeting in Morgantown. But I haven't been able to attend since I moved down here.

**RW-N:** Now this is your sorority. You're talking about your sorority still meeting? (BJ: Yes, my sorority) But that's a long way up.

**BJ:** It's still, that's in Morgantown now. Used to be different communities.

**AB:** Could we back up, Mrs. Jones, to uh, back to high school. Did you all date when you were

in high school?

**BJ:** Not openly. [laughing] Let's go back to grade school.

**RW-N:** Did you date in grade school?

**BJ:** I remember I didn't date, but I wrote a letter to this fellow. And he was nice looking.

[chuckling] The teacher got the letter and read it before the whole class. (AB: Ohhh) [laughing]

So that sort of curbed my. . . .

**RW-N:** Do you know what grade you were in when that happened?

**BJ:** Eighth grade. I was in the eighth grade, just before we left Tennessee.

**AB:** What did your father say about dating or going out with boys or so?

**BJ:** Well, I didn't go out with anyone on a regular date until I uh, got married and came to Clarksburg, West Virginia. And then I wasn't at home. But the fellows would come home, come to my home rather. Two or three, once in a while, they would come to my home. But I didn't go out with them.

**AB:** And your parents did not object to your having company at home?

**BJ:** At home, no. That's right. When we moved to West Virginia, uh, then two or three at different times, you know, would walk home after church at night. We used to have night services and different times. But my father, I think, always had an eye, you know what I mean.

He wasn't asleep when we'd come in. [chuckling]

**AB:** Did you have a prom when you were in high school at State College?

**BJ:** Yes, I did. Yes, I attended (AB: Did you go?) two or three affairs. No.

**AB:** When you said you attended two or three affairs, what kinds of affairs?

**BJ:** They used to have Saturday dances. And so I would stay, and then I would stay over

sometime at night to different programs.

AB: That was while you were in high school? (BJ: Yes) What about when you were in college?

Did you participate in activities when you were in college?

BJ: To a certain extent. But I never did have a, just a regular date.

AB: Did you go to ball games or anything like that?

BJ: Yes, yes. I took [inaudible], I took naturally physical education and participated in uh, sports to a certain extent.

RW-N: You mean after, you mean after classes?

BJ: In college.

RW-N: In college.

BJ: No, it was one of the subjects that was required two years. Physical education.

RW-N: Did you belong to any of the girls' teams though? (BJ: No) Anything like that? (BJ: No)

AB: As a commuting student, did you have to go to chapel? (BJ: Oh, yes) Did you have a seat?

BJ: Every Friday. No, I don't think so. In classes we sat different [inaudible], you know, according to your class, we would sit in a certain, (AB: You didn't have an assigned seat...) a certain section.

AB: ...where they were marking you present or so?

BJ: No, I don't think so. It was one of the things that. . .

AB: You escaped! [chuckling]

BJ: But later though, when you came along—did you finish West Virginia State?

AB: Yes, I did.

BJ: Well, you could tell me things that I . . . excuse me.

**AB:** When you, now, went to Clarksburg and you met William Jones (BJ: Yes) and you all decided to get married (BJ: Yes), uh, how did you break that to your family? Did you. . . ?

**BJ:** Oh, that was tough, oh. They were, we were too close, someone said. The lady I stayed with said that my parents thought too much of us, my sister and I both. And uh, oh, believe it or not, Billy came a calling. Billy came to ask my father for my hand. [chuckle] Yeah, he came. We, uh, started talking and he would come over to the place where I was staying to see me. And uh, one time we came on down here and he asked my father and told him, you know. Now I think that gave my dad an idea that things were getting pretty. . . [chuckle]

**AB:** This was getting serious.

**BJ:** . . . yeah, serious, uh-huh. And so my dad just said—I was surprised—yeah, boy, take her. [laughing] But I know he didn't mean it like that, you know. And of course, my mother cried. She wanted me to come home and have a big wedding and so forth. But we got married on Saturday and went back to work, I did, on Monday and went to Reverend Younger's, the parsonage and got married. And his wife was witness. And Billy would tease me and say, "We're not married, because I only had one witness." And I said, "Well, Reverend Younger was a witness, he signed my birth-, uh, marriage certificate."

**AB:** And you got married in Clarksburg?

**BJ:** In Clarksburg at the parsonage, the Baptist parsonage.

**AB:** The Baptist parsonage. Speaking of churches, your association here in St. Albans, did you have a church that you attended here?

**BJ:** Yes. I still belong to it. St. uh, (AB: Paul's?) St. Paul's Baptist Church, here, Missionary Baptist Church here. And in Clarksburg it was Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. And

seemingly uh, that was one of the things that I put on my, uh, when I applied for a job, as one of the things that I put on there that I did attend Sunday School and church and I taught Sunday School. And when I got there, I tell everyone, that they had a Sunday School class waiting for me when I got to Clarksburg. [laughing softly]

**AB:** So before we leave West Virginia State College, you joined the sorority. Did you join the sorority at West Virginia State College or in Clarksburg?

**BJ:** Uh, West Virginia State College.

**AB:** While you were still an undergraduate?

**BJ:** Yes. New chapter. [inaudible] Both of them [inaudible].

**RW-N:** Now your sister is younger than you are? (BJ: Yes) By how many years? (BJ: Four)

So did-, you were already graduated from West Virginia State when your sister started (BJ: Yes) there?

**BJ:** That's right. And the grades, I was ready to, when she entered high school, I was ready to finish high school. And the same way in college.

**RW-N:** So she wasn't a companion in the sense that you moved ahead in different schools but you were close to her. (BJ: Very close) And still are? (BJ: Yeah, we try to be) And you live together now, is that right?

**BJ:** Yes, I moved here three years ago. I stayed in Clarksburg nine years after my husband passed. And I still have a home place there. His home place, see. Of course, mine now. And I have to go back and forth to check on it. It's a small place there.

**RW-N:** Can we. . . ? I want to ask you again about going back to your wedding and your early married days. You were married quietly in Clarksburg. (BJ: Definitely, at the parsonage) And,

and this was just the two of you essentially, right? Family didn't come.

**BJ:** No (RW-N: No). They knew we were getting married that Saturday. (RW-N: Yes, uh-huh) And my Mother was crying and begging us to come and get married here. (RW-N: Here, yes) Well, for some reason [inaudible], I don't know why. I just. . . we just...

**RW-N:** And then where did you begin your married life? Did you (BJ: At uh. . .) get your own place after a while?

**BJ:** No, we lived with his family. I lived there fifty-six years. They were his family. And of course, they passed, different ones. There's no one left now. That's why I have the home place. (RW-N: Uh-hmm) And uh we got along beautifully with my in-laws.

**RW-N:** So you moved into the house of your in-laws (BJ: Right) and lived there (BJ: been there ever since) and got along well. (BJ: Right)

**AB:** Now how many people were there? Was it just your mother-in-law and father-in-law and the two of you or. . . ?

**BJ:** My father, excuse me, my father-in-law soon passed and it was my mother-in-law, my husband and I. Because he, the family seemingly had lung, some kind of lung disease and uh, his sisters, he had three sisters to die, two while we were-, we had been married. And his father passed, brother. . . so he was the only one left. And the home was his, of course. And he left it to me.

**AB:** Did you have children?

**BJ:** No, didn't have any children at all. We were very much disappointed. We. . .

**AB:** I'm sorry. [apologizing for interrupting conversation]

**BJ:** I'm sorry. He worked at uh, during World War II until he went into the service, he worked



and stayed away from home quite a bit. It might have been one of the reasons, I don't know. We just. . . maybe I wasn't cut out to have children.

**AB:** When he was in the service, did you travel with him?

**BJ:** Yes. (AB: Where?) Denver, Colorado. He work-, he was assigned to Fitzsimmons General Hospital, and he was trained there for dentistry. And uh, we, I would visit him in Denver, Colorado, uh, Morgantown of course. He worked in Morgan-, he taught in Morgantown.

**AB:** Where?

**BJ:** At the Westover.

**AB:** At Monongalia?

**BJ:** At Monongalia, after Westover. Which one's right now? It's located in Westover.

**AB:** Monongalia was in Westover. That was the black school there. (BJ: Yes) So let me see if I understand then. He was at Kelly Miller when you went. You met and married. The war started. (BJ: Yes) He went into the service, (BJ: Right) you continued to teach but would visit him from time to time.

**BJ:** That's right, and he would come home (AB: And he would come home) as much as possible.

**AB:** And when, what did he teach?

**BJ:** Uh, math and science and chemistry.

**AB:** Math, science, and chemistry.

**BJ:** And in Morgantown he was the assistant principal for quite a while. Because I know they changed principals often.

**AB:** When the war was over, he came-, when he came back from the war, he did not come back to Kelly Miller?

**BJ:** Uh, he applied to the Harrison County Board of Education, and got a job right in Harrison County. He was very fortunate. And uh, he worked-, he was also a jack of all trades, like my father, I would say. He worked at the Carbide plant there and he was a janitor.

**AB:** So he didn't continue teaching?

**BJ:** Before he started teaching.

**AB:** his was before he started teaching?

**BJ:** Yes. When I met him that's what he was doing. But he did have charge of the Kelly Miller band. He was trained in music. And so, but he was taking-, he took this other job to help his mother because his father wasn't there then. And uh, he was always a family man, too.

**AB:** Uh, this time at Monongalia, was that before the war or after the war?

**BJ:** It must have been before. No, I'm sorry. It was after the war. Because he went into the service from the plant that he worked, chemical plant. He worked this chemical plant about three or four miles out of Clarksburg, and then he was called into the service. And after he got out of the service, he uh, taught school—he got the job in Morgantown. And then he went from Morgantown to Charles Town. (AB: Charles Town) And then Charles Town back to Harrison County.

**AB:** Was Mr. Glover principal up at (BJ: Yes) Monongalia? (BJ: Mr. Leonard Glover) when he was there?

**BJ:** Yes. (AB: Uh-huh) And then Miss Grace Edwards, she was the principal at one time. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

**RW-N:** So for how long then were you at Kelly Miller? You might have told us, but I don't remember.

**BJ:** I have it down here somewhere. I did write that down. From 19 and 39 through 19 and 54.

That was integration.

**RW-N:** Kelly Miller. . . .

**BJ:** 1939 through 19 and 54. I went to Kelly Miller mid-term.

**RW-N:** Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm, right. And did Kelly Miller actually become integrated in 1954? Or was that. . . that was the [inaudible]?

**BJ:** It closed.

**RW-N:** It closed in 19....

**BJ:** Yeah. And the Board of Education offices are there now.

**RW-N:** And did it close right away in 1954?

**BJ:** Soon after.

**RW-N:** Soon after.

**BJ:** Yes. We were assigned to different schools and I went to Summit Park.

**RW-N:** And then you stayed at Summit Park until you retired (BJ: Yes), is that right?

**BJ:** Yes, that's right. Seventeen years. [Inaudible], I had 95% white and 5% black students.

**RW-N:** At Summit?

**BJ:** Yes. I was the only black teacher, full time, and the music teacher was black, was part time.

The parents were nice, and I have nothing but nice things to say about Summit Park High School, junior high. It was a junior high school.

**RW-N:** Mmm-hmm. Well, how was it, though, to move from a black school to a school that was integrated but was so predominantly white?

**BJ:** At first I was lost. . . in my mind. But uh, I made up my mind, that I was gonna-, I couldn't

do anything but, you know, do what I was trained to do. And so I went out to talk to the principal. In other words, he sent me word we were having a meeting. And so I got acquainted then with the principal and the faculty. The faculty was most cooperative. And uh, it-, but somehow or other I was used to Kelly Miller. And I didn't do a lot of running around. I stayed in my room. And I planned my lessons and things like that. And some of the other teachers would tell me, "I didn't see you. Where were you?" and so forth. Well, I was, uh, getting my work out and all. So getting ready for the next class. And I finally became used to being there. But at first it was different. The schedule was different. It wasn't any different, the classes weren't any different. But for some reason, it was just a change. Now, I played with, uh,—we did—we played with the white children when we were children. (RW-N: Yes) And we lived in this neighborhood in Tennessee. But to be there in school seemed like at first I was just alone, you know. (RW-N: Right) And I was trying-, maybe I tried too hard to do my best. And everyone was so kind. They brought me out. They helped to bring me out. [chuckle] So I'll admit I didn't feel at ease at first. (RW-N: Yeah) And that was only natural.

RW-N: Yes, and we have, we have occasionally heard other women say that, too, that they would go and there would not be other black women or very other-, and it just (BJ: That's right, I was the only) felt strange to them.

BJ: Naturally. Uh-huh.

RW-N: But the other teachers were friendly with you and (BJ: Oh, very much so) tried to convince you to be part of the group. (BJ: Definitely) Is that true?

BJ: Yes. And uh, after I retired, I would meet some of them, you know, and they would tell me, I was glad to hear them say they missed me. I don't know why. But I did stay there seventeen

years. And the parents were so nice. We worked. . .they would come and P-, through the PTA, the parents would come and we would have-, they had sock hops, ways of earning money of sending the children to camp, 4H camp, and the mothers would come and help there and we worked together in the community. And I home visited some of them.

**RW-N:** Did you have any problems at all with parents, if you would home visit? I mean, because of race?

**BJ:** Mmm-huh, no, I didn't.

**RW-N:** No one ever said anything (BJ: No, no one ever...) about racial kinds of things?

**BJ:** Not a one. (RW-N: And how about...) And I was never made to feel bad or anything from any of the parents. As I say, I supposed they sort of helped take me under their wing. I was much older then, though, but I had no trouble at all.

**RW-N:** Like, if-, when they-, did parents come to parent-teacher conferences? (BJ: Yes) And did those go well or did...? (BJ: Yes) You never got the feeling that parents were discontent with you or ...?

**BJ:** At the parent-teachers conferences, I think they lasted three hours. And we would discuss their children's grades. Every time the report cards were given out the parents were supposed to come. And I never had any, uh, it was never made to feel bad or anything.

**RW-N:** No confrontations? (BJ: No) How about the children?

**BJ:** Most of the children were nice. But some of the boys, you know how teenage boys are at times. And that's when I would report them to the principal, both uh, colored boys and both the white ones.

**AB:** You didn't feel that those, whatever the situations were, were racially motivated?

**BJ:** Oh, no, never had. . . .

**AB:** They were just being boys.

**BJ:** They were being boys, right. No. No, I got along really well, I'm really thankful to say. There's one situation. Of course, oh, I don't-, we understand now. When one of the Afro-American boys began to become attracted to one of the white girls. And they discussed that in faculty meeting. Well, I did feel a little, you know, how you feel at hearing that being discussed. And I was there [inaudible]. But I just decided I wasn't guilty. And these, these two young people had gotten together. But that did come out once in faculty meeting.

**AB:** They were objecting to it?

**BJ:** Yes. Some of the lady teachers. (AB: Were they?) Mmm-hmm. And they even said the girl had lost her father and her mother had just sort of lost control of the girl, you know, over the girl's actions. Uh-huh. They weren't objecting that much, but they were discussing, discussing it.

**AB:** Did they resolve to do anything about it or (BJ: No) just, they just discussed it.

**BJ:** No, they just discussed it. And the people were not used to the two races (AB: Mmm-hmm) mixing like that.

**RW-N:** How did you feel about that?

**AB:** About their mixing?

**BJ:** How did I feel? To tell you the truth I was so busy, I didn't pay any attention. [chuckling] I tell you, I stayed in [inaudible] doing my work and I didn't feel bad at all, you know.

**RW-N:** Well, when the teachers at that meeting were discussing this young man and this young lady, did you have any feelings about whether that was good or bad for these. . . ?

**BJ:** No. I wasn't comfortable. (RW-N: at the meeting) I'll just say I wasn't comfortable while

they were discussing it.

**AB:** Was it the discussion of it or the fact that these, uh, this couple, this interracial couple was interested in one another that uh, bothered you?

**BJ:** It didn't bother me at all, but of the fact that it came up in the meeting, you know, and I happened to be present. I didn't feel comfortable, but I was. . . .

**RW-N:** Did you say anything?

**BJ:** No. No, I didn't.

**AB:** So what the young people decided to do was all right as far as you were concerned. I mean, if they wanted to date each other, that didn't bother you.

**BJ:** That was all right, yes.

**AB:** But it was uncomfortable sitting there listening to people talk about it.

**BJ:** Right, listening to them talk about it. But then I think that I'd been there long enough that they, uh, I was one of them. So they didn't pay any attention or nobody would [inaudible] draw in their breath when they would mention, you know, the situation. Because they understood me, I think, very well and I understood them. And I made a lot of friends.

**END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 2**

**BEGIN TAPE 2 - SIDE 1**

**RW-N:** It's December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1999. We're in the home of Mrs. B'Alma Jones in St. Albans.

Ancella Bickley and Rita Wicks-Nelson interviewing.

**AB:** [You went to Kelly] Miller in 1939.

**BJ:** '39, yes.

**AB:** And taught home economics. Home economics.

**BJ:** Yes. And English. (AB: Mmm-hmm) One course in English. Mrs. Bigelow, it's not on, is it? (RW-N: Yes, but you can say anything. It's fine.) Oh, well, uh, the teacher before me got married and they needed a vacancy there at Kelly Miller. And Mr. Saunders, of course, called over West Virginia State and I was recommended by Miss Pauline Stout, who was supervisor of home economics in Charleston, West Virginia.

**RW-N:** And Stout is S-t-o-u-t?

**BJ:** Yes, yes. And uh, I'll go on now to the teaching. When I arrived there, Miss Bertha Johnson and Mr. Saunders met me at the bus station, and went to my rooming place, and from there, the next day I went to my homeroom, my room at Kelly Miller. And I was assigned there seventh grade homeroom and uh, English, five subjects. Four home economics classes and one English class. Some of the methods that I used at Kelly Miller were visual aids, film strips, the overhead projector, and pencil and paper, and the chalk board. I did not do too much lecturing because students that age aren't too interested in hearing you. They'd rather see the demonstrations. That's for home economics. For English class I-, they used a workbook, a textbook, a tape recorder, and we had plays, diagramming sentences, parts of speech, and we used the textbook *American and English Literature*.

**AB:** Did you teach English after that first year or so? Did you continue with English?

**BJ:** No, I, no, I didn't at Kelly Miller. I went back to, uh...I'm mixed up now. I taught science at Kelly Miller. (AB: Uh-huh) One course in science. And Mr. [inaudible name] was the science teacher. At Summit Park I taught English for seventeen years. (AB: Oh my) Ninth grade, uh, ninth grade.

**AB:** Ninth grade English. (BJ: Yes, uh-huh) When you taught home ec, did you have a lab that



the kids could cook in?

**BJ:** Yes, yes. I wish you could go inside the building and look. Of course, they remodeled it now. And the Harrison County Board of Education now is there. Yes. A nice big kitchen. And it was set up for about sixteen girls. We could have had-, used more space. Miss Tanna Leversy came one summer and demonstrated. I called in some women and she demonstrated canning. And I have pictures of that in Clarksburg but not here.

**AB:** And what about sewing? Did you have a sewing lab too?

**BJ:** Yes, we had a large sewing lab, with tables, sewing machines, one for every two girls. And of course, the chalkboard, cabinets for the supplies and it was very nice.

**RW-N:** Did you ever have any boys in class?

**BJ:** No. That's one of the newer methods of teaching, I imagine, after I quit teaching.

**AB:** And did you work with the parents at all in the, in the parents groups, homemakers or anything like that?

**BJ:** Yes. We had, I had an adult class for several years. And a Miss Virginia Franz Thomas—I don't know whether you know her or not—would come, she was my supervisor also. And she was from Huntington, West Virginia. Yes, I had plenty of supervision. And I worked with the parents groups. I attended PTA, Parent Teachers Association.

**RW-N:** Would you tell me a little more about the parents groups? I don't know what that is. Is it parents come in to learn some of the skills?

**BJ:** Adult education.

**RW-N:** Adult education.

**BJ:** And I had adult education-, adult home making class for several years, is what I meant to

say.

**RW-N:** Is that, was that mostly sewing or was it. . .?

**BJ:** Sewing, it was sewing. Most of them, they were better cooks than I. [chuckling] So it was sewing. And I had good cooperation from the parents.

**RW-N:** And how was it teaching adults?

**BJ:** Nice. Very nice. And some of them naturally could sew better than I, because I was just right out of school, you know, when I first went there. And it was nice. We would have after so long, we would have refreshments. Seems a little bit more social. And a lot of them came out because they were interested, you know. I had a nice group of parents that cooperated.

**AB:** Did they come just from Clarksburg? Or did they come from some of the surrounding mining communities as well?

**BJ:** A few came from some of the surrounding mining communities. That is, you know, mining was the chief industry there, at that time. But the mines have closed now, I think, most of them.

**AB:** Did you have to do home visitations? (BJ: Yes) In those mining communities? (BJ: Definitely) And how did you find that?

**BJ:** Fine, I, I loved it. Because the mothers were always so-, the daughters had gone home and told them, you know, different things we had done and I enjoyed, in the summer time especially, home visiting. I didn't have too much time in the winter time. Yes.

**RW-N:** Now did you drive into those communities? (BJ: Yes) You drove a car?

**BJ:** Yes. I managed to get a car soon after I went to Clarksburg.

**RW-N:** Uh-huh.

**BJ:** Second hand! [laughing]

**RW-N:** When did you learn to drive and who taught you to drive?

**BJ:** Mr. Mark Cardwell, the coach at Kelly Miller, and another fellow named Robinson—I don't know his first name—and my husband. The three of them. And Miss Bertha Johnson was our chap-, was the chaperon. That was before I got married. I learned to drive. I found it was necessary, because home visitation was a part of my work. I worked twelve months.

**AB:** Now you were doing-, were you still doing home visitation when you were working at Summit?

**BJ:** No. No, the vocational, uh, home economics closed. There was a home ec teacher there though, before I came to Summit Park. But I only worked nine months.

**AB:** Now during this time you're working, you're married. So you're keeping house yourself, at the same time that you are working. (BJ: Yes) Did you have time for much of a social life during that period?

**BJ:** Yes, because his aunt came to live with us soon after we were married. She was a widow. And she was so sweet. She took care of the meals and I did-, I wanted to keep on doing the laundry, so I did it on weekends. But she was-, she did my husband's shirts and things like that. And uh, I managed and I joined-, I began to join clubs, so I wasn't used to that. [chuckling] And my husband once told me I was overextending myself, because if anyone would say, "Will you?" I'd say yes before they would finish asking me to join. I'd joined the women's study club, and the AKA sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, church sewing club. And there was one, oh, I taught Sunday school for over thirty years.

**RW-N:** And I think before we saw a plaque that was given by your church (BJ: Yes) honoring you by naming you the teacher (BJ: Teacher of the year) of the year (BJ: Right, Sunday School

Teacher) for Sunday School Teacher of the Year.

**BJ:** Mmm-hmm. And did you know Mrs. Helen Thomas?

**AB:** No, I don't believe I do.

**BJ:** She and Miss [name inaudible] were quite good friends. And she and I both taught Sunday school, uh, practically every Sunday. The only thing about it, the principal, Mr. Saunders, turned around, turned, switched classes that were compared to those in every day school. Miss Thomas taught the second grade every day school. And uh, I taught the junior high and high. And when we went to-, when we taught at Mt. Zion Baptist Church, I was given the second grade younger ones and she taught the junior high and high school. I suppose to give us a break, you know.

**AB:** He switched places.

**RW-N:** Now when-, you said that you began to join a lot of clubs. (BJ: Yes) And I thought you indicated that that was kind of new for you, (BJ: It was) that you had... (BJ: It was, definitely. It was) What, what was happening there that that was starting?

**BJ:** I was glad to be asked. [laughter] Country girl, going to school.

**RW-N:** Were you kind of shy earlier than that when you were. . . ?

**BJ:** Yes, definitely, yes, I was.

**RW-N:** Like in college, you were shier? (BJ: I was) More retiring?

**BJ:** Yes. One of my classmates said she didn't think I'd ever get married because I was just that shy. But with my classmates I wasn't quite so shy. People in the community-, I didn't like, naturally, public speaking. So I'm not a good speaker.

**RW-N:** So then when you went to Clarksburg people began-, (BJ: Asked me) people were interested in you (BJ: Yes) and asked you and you were happy to say yes, to join the groups.

**BJ:** Yes, and I was-, I enjoyed them. All except giving the book report; each of us, a book review. And I didn't care too much for that, because I didn't like to talk.

**RW-N:** But you did okay in the classroom, even though you were shy?

**BJ:** I made good grades, I think.

**RW-N:** But even as a teacher, though, you were, you were the. . . (BJ: Ooh, I think so). So you were not...

**BJ:** I was always, I was always used to talking, and I still am, to younger uh, people, teenage girls is mostly what I taught. And I had one class with English, the boys too, you know. But somehow I managed. I suppose I gradually got used to, you know, a mixed class with the boys. And I suppose I did all right. The principal once suggested that I give, that I give the English class twenty-five sentences to diagram overnight. Homework. He wanted to be sure that I kept them busy. [laughing] That was Mr. Loren Hull, Summit Park Junior High, who was so nice.

**AB:** What was his name again?

**BJ:** Loren, L-o-r-e-n, Hull, H-u-l-l.

**AB:** Uh-huh. Uh, when you were talking about joining the clubs in Clarksburg, you said that you were a country girl.

**BJ:** Yeah. I call it a mining community country girl, right.

**AB:** And what about living here in St. Albans, though? This is, well, you're out from town, but did you feel that this was sort of rural out where you live now?

**BJ:** No, this to me then was a big city. St. Albans is—wasn't as large then as it is now—but to me it was, naturally, to my brother and sister even father and mother, we weren't used to a town to live. This is not a town.

RW-N: So you still saw yourself, though, as kind of a country girl when-, back from the days of Tennessee?

BJ: Definitely, yes. We had our social activities, you might call them that, in Tennessee. The church, the activities revolved around the church.

RW-N: When you joined the organizations in Clarksburg, did you tend to become an officer very often in those clubs?

BJ: Well, before it was all-, before I left Clarksburg, they had put my name up for president, which I refused. But I was elected vice-president. And I tried that, assumed the duties of a vice-president. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And uh, they'd never in Sunday school [inaudible], but in the sorority was rather more active than in any of the other clubs.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. It, it seems then from what you say that you were growing in, in-, your confidence in your social skills (BJ: I guess you might call it that) was growing.

BJ: Call it that, you might do it.

AB: Were there social activities in which you and your husband participated together? I mean, couples kinds of things much?

BJ: Mmm, well, we, seemingly-, he taught school also. That isn't social or nothing about that. He taught in Martinsburg and came to Monongalia High School in Morgantown, and then he uh, one time in between he went in the service. And finally he taught at W.I., Washington Irving High School, in Clarksburg. You might say we both graded papers at the same time. [chuckling] That sort of thing. And went to church, we attended church together. And the sorority affairs or the club, whenever the club would have a social affair, or the women's study club, he would attend with me. But he himself, he was, he wasn't active in his fraternity after we got married.

He was an Alpha.

**RW-N:** So your husband did not belong to a lot of organizations (**BJ:** No) to which you went?

**BJ:** No. But when we had, would have a social affair, he would attend with me.

**RW-N:** When we talked with you the last time I think I misunderstood you. I was under the impression that you lived with your husband and his mother.

**BJ:** His aunt. (**RW-N:** His aunt) My husband's aunt. It was the Jones' house, the house you saw in there was built by Billy's, my husband, mother and father. And the aunt lost her husband about two or three years before we were married and she lived there with us. (**AB:** So it was just...) We lived with her you might say, in a way, and then she lived with us. We were just an extended family.

(**RW-N:** Yes)

**AB:** So there were just three of you there in the house?

**BJ:** That's right.

**AB:** Your-, his aunt and. . .

**BJ:** ...he and I. For thirty years.

**AB:** What about his mother? Had she passed by that time?

**BJ:** She passed the summer-, we were married in December and she passed in July, the follow-, the next year.

**AB:** And his father had already passed?

**BJ:** His father died, yes, two or three years before we were married. And he had a sister, Mabel, and she passed. The family, you know, quite a few in the family had lung trouble, that they would pass, one another, seemingly. . . a year or two apart. And he was the last of his family to uh, die.

**AB:** I don't recall whether we asked or not, whether or not he or you were active with lodges. I

know your father was a mason. We were looking at. . . .

**BJ:** My father.

**AB:** Yes. But what about your husband?

**BJ:** He had belonged to the Masonic lodge and some how or other he got out of it. I don't know what happened or anything. But you see, by going into the service, uh, teaching at two different schools and so on, he didn't have much time for lodges and so he was inactive, you might say.

**AB:** Did he like sports?

**BJ:** Oh, yes.

**AB:** What about you?

**BJ:** I sat up with him. I pretended probably to like them on Saturdays, yes. And he was very interested. And he played basketball. I have some pictures I haven't unpacked of, uh, he was on Mark Cardwell's basketball team.

**RW-N:** So did you go to the school basketball team-, basketball games-, or the local, the local sports games?

**BJ:** Yes, and we took an active part. The home economics department, the girls and I, had to prepare meals for the teams that would come in, you know, and so forth. And tournament time was a busy time but it was nice.

**RW-N:** It sounds then like a good part of your social life was really an extension of your work life, right? (BJ: Right) That some of it revolved around the school.

**BJ:** Yes, yes. They would always have a social, a dance or something, after the tournament was over. And of course, the school always had a banquet, junior and senior banquet. We took part in that. Quite a bit of my life did revolve around, revolve around the school.



**RW-N:** And then you had some other clubs that you belonged to as well?

**BJ:** Yes, yes. The ladies sewing club, from the church. Then the sorority affairs. So we had a busy life.

**AB:** What about your mother's life, social life, here in St. Albans? Did she have an opportunity to get to know other people and go out with them or anything like that?

**BJ:** Yes. We entertained the farm women's club. They organized it during World War II.

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

**BJ:** Farm (RW-N: Farm) Women's club. And she entertained the ladies once, and then she attended the meetings. And she was president of the-, they had a little school here on the hill then when the schools were out in the district. And she was president of the PTA, Parent Teachers Association. It was a small school. And she attended church regularly.

**AB:** In looking at the picture of your father with the derby, (BJ: I knew you'd come to that) [laughing] he seems to, from that picture, to have been a man who enjoyed company and people. Is that... ?

**BJ:** Oh, he did. Yes, definitely. But as he grew older he became more retired then, into-, I suppose he didn't feel well, you know. But uh, he had-, we have the guitar here. He played the guitar. And uh, of course, music, I told you about directing the choirs. He was quite an active person, along with his job.

**AB:** And was he easy to get along with, or... ?

**BJ:** Yes. People liked him. They called him Bill Epps. And both races. He used to go play his guitar at some of the affairs that the people had and they'd ask him to come. He cut hair also. He was a barber on weekends. And, in fact, where we lived, practically all the people did similar things.

I mean, there's one—I told you that my father worked in the mines—there was one professor there from Tennessee that had quit teaching school, and he and his large family moved to where we were, and he worked in the mines. And some of the teachers at Kelly Miller used to work in the mines during the summer time, to make ends meet.

**RW-N:** When you think back on your mother and father, uh, what are the kinds of lessons that they taught you that have been important to you?

**BJ:** Well, as Abraham Lincoln said, “All that I have and all I ever hope to be,” and so forth, I owe it to them. Lessons of life. And my mother would say, “Now don't do so-and-so, don't, and always wear clean underwear, because in case you have an accident.” [laughing] As all Mother did! And so they taught me, if I ever amounted to anything, I owe it all to them really.

**RW-N:** Who do you think that you're most like, your mother or your father?

**BJ:** What was that now?

**RW-N:** Who are you most like? Your mother or your father?

**BJ:** You mean my features?

**RW-N:** No, no...

**AB:** No, your personality. . . .

**RW-N:** your personality. . .

**AB:** Characteristics.

**BJ:** I would say, since I've gotten older myself, I suppose more toward my father, remembering his principles and so forth. And but growing up, my mother. See, we were, we were around her more.

And I was often quoting about her going out to work in her flowers. And when she got so she couldn't tend the flowers, they-, we'd take her a chair and some little children would come and she'd

show them what to do. So uh, and also household habits we took, naturally, took from her. And her disposition, I think, I took from her; my dad was more reserved.

**RW-N:** Your dad was more reserved?

**BJ:** Yes. But of course, he liked fun.

**RW-N:** I had the picture of your father as being very out-going, but that's not particularly true. Your mother was more outgoing?

**BJ:** Yes, she was. She didn't meet a stranger. (RW-N: Yes, right) My mother was very much an out-going person.

**RW-N:** And so you, you picked up a lot of her habits. Her work habits. (BJ: I think so, yes) But you were more-, but you see yourself as more reserved like your dad. (BJ: Yes) Is that right?) (BJ: Yes) Uh-huh. And who do you look like?

**BJ:** He used to call me his own little image. So I suppose I look like him, [chuckling] more like him than I did my mother. (RW-N: Uh-huh) Now, Mildred and my brother look like my mother. But I look more like my father. I guess I remember he went to Tennessee once, and he wrote a note back and said, "How's my own little image?" [chuckles] (RW-N: Uh-huh, uh-huh)

**AB:** His own little image.

**BJ:** Yeah, because I looked like him. And about that time, I was about thirteen, I suppose, and I guess I might have looked around at a boy or two. And [laughing] so he was checking on me, even in Tennessee.

**AB:** From long distance.

**BJ:** Yeah, from long distance. He was a good father, though. He told me when I finished college, he said, "Now Daddy has done all he-, and mother-, have done all they can do. Now the rest is up

to you.” That’s just the way he said it.

**RW-N:** Mmm-hmm. Who do you uh. . . who do you think of your parents had the most influence on you? Or do you think it was more or less equal?

**BJ:** I would say just. . . I would say that uh, it’s a little more than equal, because my father was strict. He was seven years older than my mother. And she called him Dad, along with us children. And uh, I would say that he had more [inaudible]; she was easy-going at times, you know, and I suppose we got by with more with her than we did with him. And he was the one I believe had the most influence.

**RW-N:** So to some extent he was a little bit more dominant in the family?

**BJ:** Right, yes, yes, ma’am. And his idea was that the man’s the boss. [chuckling] So Momma listened to him and called him Dad. Only once or twice would she stand up to him, if she thought it was necessary. But they got along beautifully, to be a young couple. Because she was only 18 and he was 24, I believe, when they were married.

**RW-N:** Do you think he made most of the decisions in the family? How did that go between them?

**BJ:** He made most uh, he made, I’ll say, monetary decisions, along that line, with money. But Momma stood her ground. And, uh, it’s hard to say there. It might have been equal on most occasions. As I told you, how she would talk as we were growing up, the girls especially, you know. Yes, so, she did her share of counseling as well as he did, I would say.

**RW-N:** Let me ask you something in that-, when you just said something it reminded me of this. How do you feel today about that idea that the man is boss of the family? Or head of the family?

**BJ:** Well, times have changed now. And my husband and I agreed, we had, even had a joint bank account and things of that sort. And we agreed more so, I would say, maybe than my mother and

father, because my dad knew then, he knew more of the world, he would say, than my mother did.

And uh, I don't know whether I've answered your question or not.

**RW-N:** Well, am I right, then in, in concluding then that you saw that in your marriage there was more equality (**BJ:** Right) in terms of who was, (**BJ:** Yes) who was the dominant one? (**BJ:** Yes) Did you always have joint bank accounts from the beginning of your marriage? (**BJ:** Yes, always, always) Did you discuss that, or did it just. . . didn't, didn't really require a lot of discussion?

**BJ:** We both were working. I worked all the time and so did he. And we just had one account. So we-, there was no discussion, it was just sort of an unspoken agreement.

**RW-N:** And when you, when you two had to make a decision, how would that go, between you and your husband?

**BJ:** I don't think we ever disagreed on any decision that had to be made. I don't believe we did. We didn't, believe it or not, we didn't have that many decisions, you know, no real important decisions to make. We lived there in the house in Clarksburg with Aunt Em and she was good and we were, we were kind to her. She made her home with us for thirty years. And uh, we never disagreed about any of the family that I know of. And the family would come and go. And the girls still come to see Aunt B'Alma every fall. There are two girls in the fam-, his two nieces. (**RW-N:** Yes) His sister is dead. And they call it a pilgrimage. [laughing]

**AB:** Where do they live?

**BJ:** One lives in Virginia, Berk, Virginia, and the other lives in Washington.

**AB:** But they were born here?

**BJ:** No, they were born in North Carolina. (**AB:** Oh, were they?) Yes. And their sis-, their aunt-, their mother married a North Carolina man in college. She went to uh, was it Hampton? Hampton,

yes, and met her husband.

RW-N: Now you lost your father in 1965, (BJ: Yes) I think you told us. When did you lose your mother?

BJ: Oh, uh, she died in 19-, let's see, she's been dead, she died the third day of August in 19 and 87, third day of August, August 3th, 1987. (RW-N: Uh-huh, yes) And my husband died five months later, January 26, 19 and 88. January 26, 1988. Five months later he died.

RW-N: Now your mother was past ninety, wasn't she? (BJ: Beg your pardon?) Your mother was past ninety when she passed? Your mother was over ninety years of age, right?

BJ: Yes, she was 94, yes, yes.

RW-N: Uh, and your husband, of course, was a good deal younger than that.

BJ: He was in his seventies when he passed.

RW-N: How was that time for you, losing them both so close in time?

BJ: Well, it, it's hard to describe. You'd have to go-, a person would have to go through that themselves, I believe, you know, to actually know. But my family and his family, they rallied and that helped us. It helped me, I know, a lot, yes, indeed. But we had always said and hoped we'd grow old together. [chuckling] And of course, he wasn't young, but he was younger, naturally; we both were. It's been twelve years now. And it was really rough, yes, indeed.

RW-N: So you got a lot of support from family?

BJ: From the family. And others, too. Our pastors and friends. And that's when I began to-, Mildred, bless her heart, she began to take me around. That's when I had my first trip to the sorority national meeting. So she and I have traveled together since then.

RW-N: So the traveling you've done in your life, a lot of it has been done since that time? (BJ: Yes)

You didn't travel much before that?

**BJ:** Well, while he was living we made the two trips to New York and Denver, Colorado, where he was stationed in World War II, and North Carolina and two or three other, I can't remember all of them right now.

**RW-N:** Have you ever been out of this country? (BJ: No) So your travel has been around in the United States?

**BJ:** In the United States. (RW-N: Uh-huh) Now, Mildred is the one that's done the traveling. And I would stay with my mother while she would go on her trips.

**RW-N:** How do you see yourself now? Uh... (BJ: I'll let you finish, then I'll...) No, well, I... (BJ: You're questioning me) yeah, I think, I think we talked a little bit, earlier, we asked about what kind of child you were. How do you see yourself now?

**BJ:** Well, that's hard to say. I enjoy each day. Mildred and I get along beautifully—let me knock on wood there—my sis-, superstitious. [laughter] And my brother, he's, he's-, I wish you could meet him. He's jolly. He had a stroke last year, but he's coming along nicely. And we go down there once a week and help out. And I keep busy. And so I read, I like to read. And uh...

**RW-N:** What kinds of things are you reading these days?

**BJ:** Fiction mostly. I'm reading now, I forget, but anyway, the name of the book that I'm reading now-, I like Danielle Steel's stories. And one or two others. I like fiction, though, most of all. And I like poetry. I like poetry. I used to recite a little bit when I was a child coming along. From stage, believe it or not. I was shy, but I would do what I was told to do. (RW-N: Uh-huh) So I really, to repeat myself, I really enjoy life, as much as I think as anyone else would my age and so forth.

**RW-N:** Would you describe yourself today as shy?

**BJ:** No. Sometimes I believe I talk too much. [chuckles] My mother used to say, “You don’t know when to quit.” As I grew older. No, I wouldn’t describe myself as shy today, but I do not-, still don’t like to make public speeches and things of that sort. And my lady in church one night told me, “Why, you’re a teacher aren’t you?” when they asked me to speak. But I wasn’t trained to be a public speaker. I was trained to teach children. Younger people.

**RW-N:** I’m not sure whether we asked you this the last time we were with you. But just to make sure that we cover it, uh, how do you see your life as having been shaped by two things: Being a black person and being a woman? And maybe you might want to divide those in half.

**BJ:** I understand you perfectly. Beautiful. I made some wonderful friends at Summit Park. And I see them on the street now, those who are still living; several have passed. And I think about the fun we had there, with our classes. And uh, it’s hard to describe it, but I see my life there very, very pleasant. And I’m not worried about the great beyond, because again, I’ll bring religion into it. I trust in the good Lord, and I figure each day that I’m in His hands. And as my neighbor died—she passed recently—he made us and therefore the good Lord will look after us, as long as I live. But I do get along well with people, I think. Yeah, I see some of my former parents out Summit Park, and they’re just as nice as they can be.

**AB:** So you don’t feel that there have been things that you wanted to do that you could not do because you were a black woman?

**BJ:** No, I don’t. Years ago I said I wanted to be a nurse. But as I mentioned, Miss Maybelle Jones sort of influenced me—she was the home economics teacher at the college—to become a home economics, or teacher, rather. No, I don’t feel that I could have done more by being white. I feel like my life has been full. And uh, that’s that.



**RW-N:** Well, how do you feel about the kinds of discrimination that, uh, you experienced as a child, like when you went into town (BJ: Yes) in Kentucky? (BJ: Well, yes) How do you feel about those kinds of things, as you look back on your life? How do you feel about the, uh, Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement?

**BJ:** I accept it all now, and then my parents, it's another thing they did, my dad and Mother both, tried to help us accept conditions as they were. I remember when we left Tennessee and came to West Virginia, we had to sit in the back of the coach and so on. Well, my dad had prepared us. And we just, seemingly, we were integrated just right along. And then when I came to West Virginia, I had another incident, [chuckles] a little girl, I sat down beside a little white girl. And she wasn't used to a black person either, and so she pushed me off the seat. Well, I had [inaudible]. They, they laughed.

**AB:** Was that on the bus?

**BJ:** Street car. We were going up to uhm, Stop 16 to get on the boat to go across the river. And there are my classmates and everybody just laughed at me. And I did-, I didn't know how I felt. But anyway, I got right back up and sat back down again and the child, I think her mother was somewhere near, you know, it was no big deal, so to speak. So I've never had any hatred or anything like that.

**RW-N:** How about just plain old anger? (BJ: Yes) Which is different from hating.

**BJ:** I was embarrassed most of all. (RW-N: You were embarrassed) Because my classmates laughed at me; I was sitting on the floor. I still laugh about that. But I don't blame the child. She just wasn't used to, you know. . . . Yeah, I have no hatred about any, any race. I saw the cutest little foreign boy at Char, uh, the Char House—we went out to dinner, my sister and Billy, our nephew and I. And

this little boy had performed, a little foreign boy. He was the cutest little fellow. And he had performed and evidently a caretaker had him and some white children, other children—he's white, too. And he had gotten angry and threw his dinner on the floor. And so when I passed by, I couldn't help but pat him and he looked at me with those pretty little eyes, you know, and I thought, "Well, bless his heart, he doesn't-", you know what I mean. And I talked to him and settled him, seemed to help settle him down. And the other children were white. But that was an incident I thought was kind of cute.

**AB:** Now, so when you went to Summit as a black teacher, you integrated the school; integration was going on in other schools in the area at the same time, I assume.

**BJ:** Oh, yes, uh-huh, WI, Washington Irving, and out at Anmoore, you know where Anmoore is, Bridgeport and other areas. All of us were-, all of us high school teachers and junior high teachers left Kelly Miller the same year and we were assigned, each of us, to different schools in the county. And there were two black ones assigned to where my husband was, he and a Mrs. McGhee. And then Miss Bertha Johnson, she was assigned to a school and I was assigned to Summit Park. And different ones.

**AB:** And as you remember that period, not just in the school in which you were teaching but in other schools, were there any other problems with integration?

**BJ:** There was one. A Mrs. Mattie Varner, V-a-r-n-e-r, a patron in the community, they didn't, uh, seemingly, they did not send the grade school's children, they didn't send the grade school children to, up to Tower school up town and she took a group of children and went up one day and they had a sit-in. And so I don't know what happened, because I was busy at my school. But someone said that they came in just as quiet, you know, walked around, so on. So they, I imagine the next year or

next, they integrated the grades. It's the only incident that I know of that was interracial. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

**RW-N:** Was that an upsetting time for teachers or for you? In terms of you getting shifted and you have to get used to other. . . .

**BJ:** It was, excuse me, it was just uh, a time when you were decided—we decided, I know I did—I was going to try to make good. I didn't care, regardless, you know what I mean, of what school I was in. I was gonna do my work, do the best I could and that was it. So uh, my husband also teased me and told me "Now," —he said the morning that he took me out, he did drive me out to the school, said I was clinging to the car. [laughing] He was a jolly person. But the principal, the principal did more than his share there, seemingly he was going down the line when I walked in that morning, patting little children on the, you know, and I heard one of them say, "Is she gonna teach here?" [laughter]

**RW-N:** So it was a little scary?

**BJ:** Naturally. (RW-N: Yeah) Naturally. I could understand. But I was just anxious to try it. It was a challenge. I was anxious to get started and do my job, the best I could.

**RW-N:** We-, I remember one of the women we talked to said that she found it difficult in a way, because, uh, she was with all white women, and it wasn't just quite the same as being with black women. (BJ: Yes. Sure) You know, it was different experiences and that it was sort of lonely for her in that respect. (BJ: Yes, well, I suppose I. . .)

**RW-N:** Did you find any of that to be true for you?

**BJ:** Well, it was different from Kelly Miller, naturally. And uh, I would stay in my room most of the time, preparing for the next class. And there was a sort of a lone-, (RW-N: Yeah) there is, difference

naturally. There was at first.

**RW-N:** Right. When you go through things in your life, you have gone through things in your life that have been challenging, as you say, do you talk to yourself about them? Do you depend on God? Do you talk to God about them? What, what do you depend on to help you through those hard times?

**BJ:** The church, and as I said, my parents. Now, of course, my father was dead. But Mildred and Momma came up and helped me I think more than anyone to get-, they came up the week before school started and stayed until after, you know, I'd gone out to the school and so forth and met the teachers and the principal. And that helped a lot. But I didn't have any problems.

**RW-N:** So you've really had a supportive family.

**BJ:** Yes, definitely.

**RW-N:** Mmm-hmm, definitely.

**BJ:** That's right. And Momma also was raised near, uh, well, in almost a white community. My mother was. And uh, she, and she had several white friends. And they loved Bessie. Bessie, her name was Bessie. And she-, well, it's just hard to say now, when I think about it. Because I wasn't afraid. I was anxious, you know, to get started. And I wanted a job, naturally.

**RW-N:** Can we turn the tapes off for a minute. [recorders shut off then on] We're gonna go back then and talk about your mom and dad and their family. What do you know about the racial backgrounds of your family?

**BJ:** Uh, both had mixed, both of them were from mixed race. By that I mean, my mother's mother, my grandmother was white.

**RW-N:** Your mother's mother was white?

**BJ:** My mother's mother and my father's father. The fellow sitting in the chair in there, his father. (RW-N: The pictures you were showing us, uh-huh.) Yes, the pictures, mm-hmm. (RW-W: Yes, uh-huh) He was white. So they both came from mixed-, they were mixed.

**RW-N:** So both of your parents (BJ: Were mixed) had a white parent and a black parent, is that right? (BJ: That's right) Okay. And you knew those grandparents, of course.

**BJ:** No, they died.

**RW-N:** Oh, oh, you did not. We've seen pictures of them, but you did not know them.

**BJ:** No, no, they died. My mother's mother, or my mother's grandmother, my mother's mother who would be my grandmother, uh, my mother, her mother died young. I think she was in her 30's. She was still bearing children when she-, but she married a black man the second time. She was married twice, my mother's mother. But her-, no, I'm mixed up. My grandmother, mother's mother, was white. Isn't that what I just said?

**AB:** Well, you said they married. . .

**RW-N:** Let's see. Well, let's just do it all over again. [all laughing] (BJ: All right) On your mother's side. . .

**BJ:** I should be looking at the pictures but I, I can't remember.

**RW-N:** On, on your mother's side...

**AB:** Wait, let me get a couple of these pictures.

**RW-N:** Okay, yeah, yeah. [Interruption] Okay, we, we've been talking to Mrs. Jones about the background of her family, and we're looking at pictures, as well, which kind of helps straighten this out a little bit. [chuckle] So this woman here, very beautiful woman we're looking at, is your grandmother, (BJ: Right) uh, your mother's mother. (BJ: Yes) Yes. And she was a white woman.

(BJ: Yes) And she married a black man, (BJ: man) who was your grandfather. (BJ: That's right)

And you also said her sister married a black man, too.

BJ: Yes, this is her sister.

RW-N: Right. And pictures you have of your cousins, uh, the family is lots of shades of colors, right?

BJ: Right, that's right, excuse me. [coughing]

AB: Now where were they living?

BJ: Powells, P-o-w-e-l-l, Powells Valley, Tennessee.

AB: And white women could marry black men in, I mean, in Tennessee?

BJ: They did, they did. And it was right after slavery. Now I don't know about her father. But his father. . .

RW-N: And now you're referring to a picture of your father's father. (BJ: My grandfather) Who is also a white man, (BJ: Right) your grandfather. (BJ: Right) Uh-huh. And his name is, uh, Elbert Epps, (BJ: Yeah, mm-hmm) your grandfather. (BJ: Elbert Epps) And of course, he married (BJ: A black woman) a black woman. . .

**END OF TAPE 2 - SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 2 - SIDE 2**

AB: [The two pictures that we are] looking at one is Elbert Epps, who was white, who married a black woman whose name was Charlotte, who is the grandmother of Mrs. B'Alma Epps [Jones] that we are interviewing.

RW-N: We're still looking at pictures. And I just want to introduce this name, Mrs. Jones' grandmother, that is her mother's mother, name was Tennessee Emily Jane Kincaid. All right. And

there are several pictures of the family, and of cousins, as well.

**AB:** When your family has had a family reunion, have they ever made any contact with the white side of the family?

**BJ:** I think most of them are dead, my mother's people. Her, well, her relations, I think most of them are dead. But there used to be some man, and a few years ago they would butcher-, cut, uh, in the winter time they would kill hogs, butcher. And he would come over where we lived from the valley and this is at the mining camp. And he would say, "Hello, Aunt Bessie." [chuckling] And he's dead also. All of them are dead. I don't think any of them would remember, that was so long ago, my mother, you know. (AB: Mmm-hmm)

**RW-N:** And do I understand you correctly now that you did not know any of your grandparents?

**BJ:** No. I didn't, you're right; I didn't know any of them because they died young, years ago. (RW-N: Yes, okay) I think my grandmother was in her 40's, I imagine. (RW-N: And this is your mother's mother?) Yes. And this is her son by a black man, this little fellow here.

**RW-N:** By another husband are you saying?

**BJ:** Yes, yes.

**RW-N:** By a first husband.

**BJ:** By her first husband, was [inaudible].

**RW-N:** Her first husband was a black man, too.

**BJ:** Yeah, both of them, yes.

**RW-N:** Yes, uh-huh, yes. (BJ: That's right) Do you know if your family has any American Indian in it?

**BJ:** It does, mmm-hmm. So I'm kind of like Tiger Woods. [laughing]

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

BJ: Cause he said—although his family's part Asian he says. Well anyway, though, there is Indian blood in the family.

RW-N: On what side of the family, do you know?

BJ: I think Momma's, my mother's side.

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

BJ: If I'm not mistaken. I can't be sure. So it's just a mixture of races, I suppose. I'm glad this came up, because I wanted to say something but I didn't. So I'm glad that you-, we could discuss it quite openly.

RW-N: Yeah, I'm glad, too. Yeah, we-, as I said, it often comes up when we're talking about mothers and fathers and it occurred to me that it might not have come up on, on the tape. (BJ: It hadn't) We re-listened to your tape before we came today, (BJ: I see) but I didn't quite finish part of it and I wondered if we had missed it. So, we didn't want to miss that. Uh, is, is there any thing else that, uh, is there anything that we have missed that we should be talking about?

BJ: Well, I wanted to finish telling you about Kelly Miller, and I think I've done that. Someone else has told you, too, probably about Kelly Miller. And the Summit Park School, I've discussed that I think enough. And London, I didn't stay there long enough. But Mr. Barnett was the principal, and Critchlow, Mrs. Lillian Critchlow-, Miss, and Miss Anna Gardner were the teachers that I knew, and a Miss Morgan I think from Montgomery. As I said, I didn't stay there too long. But while I was there I was getting experience. And I know it was rather hard on the principal [chuckling] and Miss Gardner. Because I remember now I wasn't taught how to keep a record in schools, in college. And I guess my record book didn't look too good when it had to go to the office, but she taught me how



to keep a record of the children's attendance. So I can't think of anything else, of importance.

**RW-N:** How about you, Ancella? Do you have anything?

**AB:** I don't think so. Uh, the one question—and I don't know whether we've touched upon it—did you feel that the black children, after integration, got an education that was equal to that which they had gotten had Kelly Miller and other black schools?

**BJ:** In some respects, they didn't apply themselves, I don't think, as well in the, uh, integrated school. I, I don't think they applied themselves as well. Some of them were in there-, were influenced by some of the white boys or girls. And they would, they tried to, I say, show themselves, you know. Instead of listening to the teachers. I think some of the white teachers even had some problems with them. And they were-, as teenagers will act sometimes, want to be seen and so forth. But as a rule, most of them-, we had some really smart ones who left Kelly Miller and went to college and were good students, did real well. And some of them dropped out of school. But they did accuse some of the teachers, you know, of being prejudiced. I understand some of them, high school students. But most of them did well. I see them on the street now. They have good jobs. Jimmy Williams, lawyer Williams. And he's a lawyer and a very good one, I understand. Does he work for your husband?

**AB:** No, but I know him.

**BJ:** Uh-huh. And there was another one. Many of-, some of them became teachers, and they're now teaching. I think there are three or four in Clarksburg teaching in an integrated school. So they seem to become adjusted. That was the thing, I think, getting used to, most of them, getting used to mingling.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm. Did you notice a change generally in students over the years during which you

taught? Black and white? (BJ: Mmm-hmm) In what way?

**BJ:** A change that I taught. Well, the ones that I taught are now grandparents, and they've grown up, have their families. And to my mind they're all-, I see them on the street occasionally, the ones who are still living, like the ones who wrote that book, the girl and her mother. And uh, she wrote-, the reason I say I don't think there's been too much of a drastic change, because the mother of the daughter that I taught wrote me a note and said we were sisters in Christ. And they're more willing, I think, now than ever to accept us, I'll say. We mingle and know each other better. I think a lot of the trouble is know-, actually knowing a person.

**AB:** Do you think that your attitude of tolerance of accepting people, of getting along with white people well, came because you had white people in your own family, or uh, was that something that you learned to do in other ways?

**BJ:** Uh, I believe that ordinarily I just grew up, you know, it grew up with me and my mother and father would talk to me, to us. And uh, there were no problems. Because as I said once before, when some of the women had little babies had sent for Momma. She wasn't a midwife, but then she was a friend to them.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm.

**RW-N:** When you were a relatively young teacher, say 30, 35 (BJ: Sure) from then until the time you retired, did you find that students were more difficult to handle in any way? That discipline in the schools had become harder to maintain?

**BJ:** Yes, definitely. And I believe even now, nowadays, they even offer solutions or try to offer solutions to the younger teachers, both white and black, how to discipline the children. They-, it's even discussed in the teachers meetings, I understand. Yes. Along about that age they're neither-,

our principal used to say they're not children and they're not grown, and they're harder to get along with. And we're at the age, too, where we just wanna, you know, want them to do. If we say write an A, we want them to write an A, or a B and so forth. But a lot of them, they begin to talk back, you know, I understand, to the teachers.

**RW-N:** Why do you think that's happened?

**BJ:** Now I wonder myself. I just wondered why. I know teachers nowadays, I don't envy them in their jobs. I know it's hard.

**RW-N:** You think it's tougher?

**BJ:** I think so, yes, I do.

**RW-N:** But you're not sure why, what's, what's caused that.

**BJ:** I believe so many changes in the whole world. Now, I listened to Billy Graham the other night on television. And he seems to think that it's Satan. Now I don't know anything about that theory, his theory, but he thinks it's Satan that's causing a lot of these problems.

**RW-N:** But your theory would be more that there's more changes in the world?

**BJ:** Yes, in the world in general. There's more things to distract their attention. Now we didn't have television, you know, then and we didn't have so many-, computers seems to take over, you know.

**RW-N:** Do you think families have changed and that that has anything to do with it?

**BJ:** I think so. The families, two persons working and mothers not, uh, doesn't have time and doesn't feel like it lots to really spend the time that she should with a lot of the children. But I don't think it's a real, real big problem. I really don't think so. I think most young people are doing well.

And they have more opportunities nowadays than they had years ago. And more things to keep them busy than we had years ago, when I was teaching.

**RW-N:** You sound like an optimist.

**BJ:** I am. I hope I am, really. I would hate to be a pessimist, [chuckling] (RW-N: Yeah) and just think there's nothing in this world can be done to save it. (RW-N: Uh-huh, uh-huh) I really think everything's going to turn out all right. I'm not afraid of the millennium that's coming. [chuckling]

**RW-N:** Uh-huh, uh-huh. Have you always felt that way, kind of? Have you always had some faith (BJ: Always) that things will turn out okay?

**BJ:** I have, I really have. I get that from my mother, I think. (RW-N: Uh-huh) Of course, my father wasn't a pessimist. He was a hard worker. He figured that whatever's to be will be.

**AB:** Did, uh, we learn whether or not your father-, he had one brother, is that right?

**BJ:** He was the only child, whole child, [chuckle] and he had two half brothers. Years ago, they were-, during slavery, one set of children-, they had children-, and one set of children, two brothers, went by the name Nicholas. And that was the name of the slave woman. And my father went by the name of Epps, E-p-p-s. And Mildred has visited one of them-, had-, but he's dead now, in Chicago. Frank.

**AB:** Now Nicholas, was that from your grandfather or grandmother? You said they were half brothers.

**BJ:** That I don't know.

**AB:** Mmm-hmm, okay. And your mother had sisters and brothers?

**BJ:** Yes. Yes, uh, her sisters are here, two of her sisters. [refers to a picture] Oh no, I'll show you from this picture. There she is, of course, and the other two women are, three women, are her sisters, two, Aunt Mossie, Aunt Sarah, and Aunt Maggie.

**RW-N:** Now there was slavery in your father's family that you know of. (BJ: Both) Both fam-,

both families, uh-huh.

**BJ:** My great grandmother was a slave, great grandmother. That would be her mother, the picture of the lady there, the picture of my grandmother, her mother was a slave. She worked in the house, I think. Another thing here that I've heard now that the lighter complexion ones worked in the house and did the work like that, and the darker complexion ones worked in the field and so on. Now I just heard that. That's heresy. I have no proof.

**RW-N:** Did you hear any of the stories of slavery that was passed down in your family?

**BJ:** I might have, one or two. But my mother had a good feeling. I mean, she knew what had happened. And her mother, she lost her when my mother was around 16. She lost her. So she was devoted to her whole family. And her older sister sort of helped raise them after Mother's mother died. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And she had no hatred at all [inaudible]. It was just one of those things that happened. And I'm so thankful she lived to see integration. And uh, but she had already integrated (RW-N: Yes) over the years. [chuckling softly]

**RW-N:** Is that it? Are we going...?

**AB:** I think so.

**RW-N:** Okay, all right.

**END OF INTERVIEWS**

## Mildred Depalma Epps

Jesus victorious, mighty and free: teach me how glorious death is to be!

Mildred Depalma Epps, 93, of St. Albans passed away

March 19, 2010, at Hubbard Hospice House.

She was the youngest of three daughters and one son of the late William M. and Bessie K. Epps. She was born on September 23, 1916, in Manning, Tenn. Beside her parents, she was preceded in death by her



brother, William McGhee Epps; and sisters, LaVivian Epps and B'Alma Epps Jones.

In the late 20s, the family moved to St. Albans, where she completed elementary and secondary school. She was a graduate of West Virginia State College and earned a master of arts degree in English from Ohio State University. Her post-graduate training included Teachers College, Columbia University and the University of Chicago.

As an associate professor of English, she taught at West Virginia State College for 35 years. Other teaching experience included teacher training high school, Institute, and Page-Jackson High School, Charles Town.

Membership was held in several professional and cultural organizations, among them the National Education Association, National Retired Teachers Association, Life memberships in the West Virginia Association of Retired School Employees, Ohio State Alumna Association and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. She was member of St. Paul Baptist Church for over 70 years.

In 2008 she was inducted into the Black West Virginia All-States Hall of Fame for high schools.

A serenity of purpose, genuine interest and dedicated service were reflected in her life.

Mildred is survived by nephews William M. Billy Epps III and Donald M. Epps; a niece Gwendolyn Epps "Zilber" Plan of Maryland; and great-nephews, Dr. Gregory Epps "Kisstaman" and children and Donald Kevin Epps; a great-niece, Chandralyn Brown and children; and many other loving relatives.

Service will be held at 1 p.m. Friday, March 26, at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, 8th Avenue and B Street, St. Albans, with the Rev. Dr. Michael A. Poke Sr. officiating. Burial will follow in Cunningham Memorial Park.

Visitation will be from noon until 1 p.m. at the church, prior to the service.

Preston Funeral Home Inc., Charleston, is in charge of arrangements.

This is the obituary of Mildred Epps, the sister of B'Alma Epps Jones. It notes that B'Alma Epps Jones preceded her sister in death.

This obituary appeared in the Charleston Gazette, March 24, 2010.

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