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Mary F. Montgomery

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Dita Wick - Nelson  
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June 16, 1997  
(Date)

Mary F. Montgomery  
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**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WITH**

**MS. MARY F. MONTGOMERY**

**JUNE 7 AND 16, 1997**

**BLUEFIELD, WEST VIRGINIA**

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

**Transcriptionist: Gina Kehali Kates**

RW-N: Ancella Bickely and Rita Wicks-Nelson are talking to Ms. Mary Montgomery in Bluefield, West Virginia. Today is June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1997. Uhm, Ms. Montgomery, we'll start off as we had agreed, more or less, that you will begin by telling us your name, your birth place and date, and a little bit about your early family life, all right. Then, we'll go from there, wherever it takes us.

MM: I am Mary Frances Montgomery. I was born May the 13<sup>th</sup>, 1926, in Bluefield, West Virginia. I am the only child of Mrs. Bertie Montgomery. My father died when I was very young. I have no remembrance of him at all.

RW-N: What was your father's name?

MM: My father's name was Charles Montgomery. I was greatly influenced by my mother. I was the center of her life. And like all mothers, she wanted the best for me. She was a very hard-working lady. She was instrumental in my obtaining a college degree, by encouraging me and making sure that I always did my very best. She was a very hard-working lady. And she always wanted the very best—I think I mentioned that—for me. And she made sure that I had a secure education.

AB: Could you tell us a little bit about your mother's parents? Did you know your grandmother? On either side.

MM: My. . . my. . . uh, no, I only knew my mother's mother. And she died when I was very young, just before entering the first grade.

AB: Was your mother born here in Bluefield too?

MM: My mother was from Giles County. (RW-N: Giles?) Giles County. (RW-N: How do you spell that?) G-i-l-e-s-s. Uh, she was from Poplar Hill, Virginia. [MM later corrects spelling to

Giles.]

AB: Poplar Hill. (MM: Mmm-hmm) And what about her family? Do you know anything at all about them?

MM: Uh, most of her people—she had a sister. And her sister died in 1941. I have an uncle that died on, I don't remember exactly the date of his death.

RW-N: This was your mother's brother, right?

MM: Right. And uh, I remember when I was very young, we all lived together on Burton Street in a two-story house.

RW-N: Now, that's here in Bluefield?

MM: In Bluefield, West Virginia.

RW-N: Is Burton, B-u-r-t-o-n?

MM: B-u-r-t-o-n. Uh, I was very close with my aunt and my uncle until their death. My uncle has quite a few children. And uh, let's see. . .

AB: Are they here in Bluefield?

MM: No, they were raised here in Bluefield. But uh, because of the economic condition, uh, the railroad, the mines shut down; they left home to seek work. So, they are now, I have one cousin living in uh, Decatur, Georgia—my uncle's son. He's a coach there. I have another cousin, Elizabeth Morris; we're very close. That's the closest thing that I have to a sister since I am an only child. She lives out in Willingboro, New Jersey.

AB: And you see her?

MM: I see her often, because she has three children, and three grandchildren. They visit me just about a couple months ago, so we keep in touch. We're real close.

AB: So, you were, after your, this extended family, your sister—your mother's sister and uncle passed away, it was just you and your mother, then?

MM: Right.

AB: And what kind of work did your mother do?

MM: My mother was a domestic worker. Uh, first, she worked, out of what we say south Bluefield. In her later years, she worked at the old Bluefield Sanitarium in the dietetic department. (AB: Mmm-hmm) She worked there until she retired.

AB: Mmm-hmm. And she made her home after her retirement with you.

MM: We always lived together. I've always lived with my mother.

RW-N: Except the years you were teaching in Virginia? Or were you commuting then?

MM: Oh, when I was teaching in Virginia, I commuted every weekend. I was close enough to come home every weekend. (RW-N: Uh-huh, I see.) Like I said, she looked forward to me coming home. So, I came home every weekend, and we always shared a home together. (AB: Where did you. . . ) We were very close.

AB: Where uh, did you go to elementary school?

MM: I went to elementary school right across the street; that was Lawson Street Elementary. It was a community school.

AB: What do, what do you mean when you say community school?

MM: Well, all the children around in this area attended Lawson. All the north side children—I'd say this is the north side of town. And we had community schools, like for the north side, for the south side of town, and for the east end. And so, the children attended schools in their area.

AB: And when you finished at Lawson, where did you go?

MM: After I finished Lawson Street Elementary, I went to Genoa Junior High, which is on the south side of town.

RW-N: Now, those were black schools? Black students?

MM: They were. We were segregated at that time, black schools. (RW-N: yes, mm-hmm)

AB: And from Genoa where?

MM: From Genoa Junior High—there was Genoa Junior High and Genoa Senior High. And you went to Genoa Senior High.

RW-N: Can we go back to your family for a moment. (MM: Yes) Uh, your mother had come from Virginia, did you say?

MM: My mother was from, I said Poplar Hills, Virginia, in Giles County. That's G-i-l-e-s; I might have put too many i's in earlier.

RW-N: Uhm, and what brought her here to Bluefield?

MM: I imagine, Giles County was just a small place. It was more or less just country. So she came here seeking employment, I imagine.

RW-N: Alone or with her family?

MM: I really don't know. She never did say. I just remembered her saying she had friends here, but none of her family. But later. . .

RW-N: [inaudible]. . .person.

MM: Yes. But later, her sister came to Bluefield, and my grandmother. And they all lived on, further down the street in a great big house.

RW-N: Uh-huh. And do you know anything further back on her family? (MM: No) Do you know if her family uh, came out of slavery? Do you have any notion of any of that?

MM: No, she never talked about slavery. Apparently they did, but she never talked about it.

RW-N: And your father's family background. . . ?

MM: I didn't know.

RW-N: ...nothing about.

MM: No, apparently they weren't together.

AB: Did your mother meet your father here in Bluefield, or did she know him before she came?

MM: I have no idea, because she never talked about him.

RW-N: Your mother and father were not together or [inaudible]?

MM: No, they were never together. (RW-N: They were not together.) I have no remembrance of him.

RW-N: And then he died when you were (MM: Yes) young? (MM: Yes) Okay. So, let's see, we have you, junior high. . . [overlapping voices]

MM: More or less from a one-parent family. My mother, uhm, she was the one that provided for me the whole time.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm, mmm-hmm. And you graduated Gen—how do you say that?

MM: I graduated from Genoa High School.

RW-N: Genoa High School in Bluefield. And then what happened educationally?

MM: After I graduated from Genoa Junior, I attended Genoa Senior High and then from there, I entered Bluefield State College. (RW-N: Right away? [inaudible]) Yes, yes, yes.

RW-N: Graduated in. . .

MM: I graduated from Bluefield State College in 1949.

RW-N: And what did you major in?

MM: My major was biology and general science. And later, I went back and got a certificate in elementary education, also.

RW-N: Was that at Bluefield, too?

MM: I'd done some extra work or did extra work, uhm, through COGS. But at that time, when I got my degree, my BS degree, it was at Bluefield State.

RW-N: Okay. And the certificate was through COGS?

MM: No, that was from Bluefield State.

RW-N: That was from Bluefield State. But then you also did some graduate work (MM: Some extra work, yes) at COGS. And COGS is the College. . .

MM: College of Graduate Studies.

RW-N: . . . Graduate Studies, which I'm doing for the tape. [Now Marshall University Graduate College, still located in Charleston, WV]

AB: When you did the, uh, your certificate, you graduated with a straight BS. Had you taken any education courses or student teaching, or anything like that?

MM: Yes, oh, yes, yes. Student teaching was required.

AB: Mmm-hmm. So, when you came back to the, the teaching certificate, you had to take [inaudible words].

MM: I had, uh, I had, I had already been teaching at elementary at—because in Virginia, you didn't have to have that certificate. So, when I got my first teaching job, it was in Virginia. (AB: Mmm-hmm) And then later, when I came to Bluefield, I had to have, West Virginia, I had to have that certificate in elementary education.

AB: Where in Virginia did you teach?

MM: Okay, let me go back and let me tell you how I arrived in Virginia. Uh, I finished school in '49, I finished Bluefield State in '49. There were not any teaching jobs available at home in Mercer County. So I took employment at Bluefield Sanitarium Hospital. I worked there for seven years before I obtained a teaching job. And that job came accidentally. My mother owned some property in Giles County, in Pearisburg. You go up to the courthouse to pay your taxes. And on this particular date, she was going to Pearisburg, Virginia, to pay her taxes. And I was asked if I wanted to go along. At first, I thought, "Oh, I don't think I want to go." Later I changed my mind. And I, I went with her to Giles County. And since my mother was born in Giles County, she has people there, and she knows everybody. And as I got off the bus, a friend knew that I was seeking a teaching position and was standing there when I got off the bus, and he said to me, "Apply for a job here. There is a vacancy." And so, to apply, the superintendent's office was also in the courthouse. So, when my mother went to see about her business, I went in to talk with the superintendent. At that time, he wasn't in. So, his secretary said, "Well, just wait. We do have a vacancy. And he will probably want to talk with you." So I waited. And he didn't give me too much encouragement. He said, "Oh, I have a lady uh, that has applied for that job. And I'm almost sure she's going to take the position." But anyway, he had me to fill out the application, wanted me to talk to his assistant. And we waited, and she was busy—she never did arrive. So, anyway, he took my application. I returned home, went back to my job at the Bluefield Sanitarium. Our supervisor called me in, she uh—I've forgotten her name. But she was a real nice little neat lady. And she acted like a sergeant; she was real strict and real straight. And so she said, "Where did you go on your vacation?" And I said, "I went to Pearisburg." She said, "Why didn't you tell me you were a teacher?" And I said, "Oh, I just didn't mention it." So, she

said, "Well, they asked me for reference, and I sent them one." I thanked her and forgot about it. Later on I received in the mail a letter saying that I, I qualified for the position, and I had the job. It shocked me, because I'd forgotten all about it. So, that's how I got the job in Pearisburg, Virginia. Uh, the job was at Bluff City Elementary School. And it was for the third and fourth grade. And uh, it was neat going there to teach, because all of the people there knew me because of my mother. That was her home. And so, it was like a family affair. They just welcomed me with open arms. So, that's what happened, why I went to Pearisburg.

AB: Uh, let me ask you, your preparation, though, had been for high school.

MM: On the high school level.

AB: Now you've got to work with little kids. How did you manage that?

MM: Well, I had done my practice teaching. . . I done my practice teaching in general science at Genoa. I don't remember the grade level it was on. I believe it was maybe. . . I don't remember. But, uh, I was able to handle high school students. So, my first year in Bluff City—this is the odd part about it—the principal was always so busy. He never found my teacher's manuals for me. But I adjusted nicely. I taught that whole first year without finding the teacher's manual, because I didn't have time. I just had to go right into it. And at the end of the school year, when I was cleaning up, back in the closet and pulling things out, there were all the teacher's manuals. But I'd done a lovely job with my kids. They were real nice. That was my first year teaching, and, uh, the principal thought—the principal was a Bluefield State person. And I had met him previously, but not knowing that he was the principal there, and that also happened in my second job. So, I know, my students—they were, they were, I had good students that first year. And they—students have a tendency to imitate you. And the principal would get such a kick and a thrill out

of, when he would have, on Mondays, what he called, well, a get-together like similar to chapel. And he would have some of my students to be on the program. And they had that little [inaudible] specialty on my smartest little girl to sound like me. And that would just tickle him no end. [laughter]

**AB:** How big was that school?

**MM:** Uh, Bluff City, we had, we. . .it went first grade through high school there. So, we had about eight teachers there. It was small, a small community. It was a community school. Uhm, all the little programs, it was the onliest, I guess, entertainment center that they had beside church there. And the people there loved, they were really into coming down to help you with anything that was happening at the school. It was just a, you know, a center, I guess, of. . .what would you say? Uhm. . .they were really interested in their children.

**AB:** When you say you taught third and fourth grade, were they in the same class?

(MM: Right) Third on one side and fourth on the other? (MM: Mmm-hmm, they were.) Uh, and well, that must really have been a challenge for you.

**MM:** But I loved it. It was my first job, and I enjoyed it. I could relate to the kids, and the kids enjoyed, uh, me. And even today, those same children, I run into them occasionally when they come to Bluefield, say—they all belong to a Baptist church there, and when the church, they bring their choir to Bluefield. They're looking for a Miss Montgomery. I met their pastor recently, and he said, "You're Miss Montgomery?" He said, "I know of you." He said, "I, uh, some of your students that have grown up talk about you a lot." And so, I told him, I said, "Yeah, those are my people in Giles County."

**AB:** Where did you live while you were there?

MM: Well, at that time, you didn't have apartments, and what not. You stayed with families in the community. And the principal would select a family for you to stay with. And uh, the principal was Laurence Leftwich and he's still alive. He lives in Roanoke, Virginia. And he had selected this family for me to stay with. Later on I'll show you some pictures. I have some pictures of where I stayed. And the lady's name was a Mrs. Hopkins. And uh, of course, like I said, everybody knew me because of my mother. And so, they just took me in like I was one of the family. And right down the hill from her house, her sister, was her sister's home. And uh, her sister's daughter was a teacher at the school. And Doris was my cousin. And, so, it made it real nice.

AB: I found, I had a similar kind of experience in my first teaching job. And I found that people sort of govern your behavior a little bit. I mean, people—you were not supposed to smoke in those days, and if you did smoke, certainly not publicly, or wear pants or anything. Did you have those kinds of expectations of you when you were at Bluff City?

MM: No, I . . . I . . . I wasn't, I was never was a smoker. And at that time, I guess pants weren't popular. So, I didn't have a problem there. The onliest thing that uh, my landlady said to me was, "Mary, do not talk about anybody, because everybody around here is related to each other." And that's the onliest thing she said. I didn't have a problem with smoking or dating or anything like that.

AB: And how did you get back and forth to Bluefield?

MM: At that time I wasn't—I didn't have a car, and I didn't drive. So, I commuted by bus.

RW-N: And how long a ride was that?

MM: Well, it was just about maybe an hour.

RW-N: An hour. (MM: It wasn't a long ride) Mmm-hmm.

MM: Because if you drive now using your car, it's about forty-five minutes. But I didn't mind that.

RW-N: And you came home to Bluefield every weekend?

MM: I came, my mother looked for me every weekend. She would have been disappointed if I did not show up on the weekend. I remember once there was a big snow. [chuckling] I couldn't make it, and she was just so hurt. And I said, "Well, if the snow is deep,"—and I didn't live right in town. I lived in what is called Virginia Heights, that was out from town. And, uh, I would probably, uh—a cab probably couldn't have gotten out there at that time because the snow. . .it was a very deep snow. And, uh, I would probably had to walk down to the highway to catch the bus. So I—that was the onliest weekend that I missed coming home. Except another time when my friend and I, that I taught with in the first grade, her husband was teaching in Wytheville. He was coaching there. And we went to Wytheville to a basketball game. And there was a deep snow. It was a real deep snow. And after we got there, while we were there, uh someone kept telling us, it's time to leave because the snow was getting deeper. And, uh, it was a weekend, and her husband was coming home, too, that weekend. And we waited too late and the snow was, had accumulated so. We were coming across Cloyd's Mountain. And, uh, we couldn't get across that mountain. So, the car kept going on to the wrong side of the road. So, finally, we just had to stop there 'til daylight. And the roads between Christiansburg, Virginia, and Blacksburg had been closed, and we couldn't get home. We couldn't get back to Pearisburg. So, luckily for us, uh, Doris Haywood was my friend's name, her uh, what was it? Her uncle's brother lived in Christiansburg, so we went to his house. And that was a lost weekend for us; we had to spend

the weekend there.

RW-N: Since you fit into that neighborhood, uh, so easily, were there times when you wanted to stay there on the weekends?

MM: Not really. I always wanted to come home. Not really. It was just a little country town, and there was—I was eager to come home on the weekends.

AB: What did the people do there? Were they farmers or what?

MM: No, uh, the main industry there was, and still is, the ceylonese plant in Narrows, Virginia. And they have what is called a tannery where leather was made.

AB: So, you would then take the bus up on Friday evenings, here to, from there?

MM: Mmm-hmm, take the Greyhound Bus from there to home.

AB: Uh-huh. And then you'd go back when? Sunday evening or Monday morning?

MM: Sunday evening. (AB: Sunday evening) And there usually, if any of the people were visiting—like Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Hawkins' husband, where I stayed, he belonged to the Masons here in Bluefield—he'd come over and pick me up. Or uh, Doris, my friend that taught the first grade, if her father was up here. He, he's really uh, a close member of our family. My mother thought a lot of him. He would come by and pick me up. I have cousins there that lived in Pembroke, Virginia. And if any of them happened to be in this vicinity, they'd always come by and pick me up.

RW-N: Is the Greyhound bus still running? (MM: Yes, yes.) Do you know?

MM: It's uh, the Greyhound Bus Terminal's located now in a, between Bluefield and Princeton.

(RW-N: Mm-hmm)

AB: When you, uh, left Giles County, where'd you go?

MM: Okay, that's a long story. I stayed in Pearis-, I taught in Pearisburg for eight years. And uh, I, at first I stayed, I think I told you I stayed with Miss Hopkins. And then they moved uh, they had a little newer school uh, down from Bluff City, uh, and they sent, they divided the classes up. And they sent a group down to the foot of the hill in this little newer school that some of the white students had vacated. And so, I moved, I moved out, I moved to Bluff City to stay with another teacher, Mrs. Franklin, 'cause that made me closer to the school. And I was there for two years before they integrated the schools. Now, when they integrated the schools, they told the black teachers nothing at all. They didn't tell us that they were going to integrate. Uh, we had heard it. But, uh, you know, you heard rumors and you dismissed it. And one Sunday I came home to Miss Franklin's house, the other teacher that I was living with, and propped up on my dresser was a letter. And Miss Franklin hadn't said one word to me about the letter. When I opened the letter, uh, it said, "Thanks for your years of service to your people. The schools are being integrated." And it was such a shock. I called her—she'd gone to bed. I said, "Miss Franklin, what is happening?" So, she said they just dismissed all of us. So, well.

RW-N: How many teachers were there, in that school?

MM: There were—it was seven or eight of us. And the principal had been there a long time, Laurence Leftwich. He came very, very upset about this.

AB: What year would they have been?

MM: Let's see, that was in. . .uh, sixty-four. I have clippings here for you to look at, too.

RW-N: Yes, [inaudible].

AB: Let, let me see if I have the chronology straightened out. You went there to work somewhere around 1956?

MM: I went to Virginia 19-, I started teaching in 1956, in Pearisburg, Virginia.

AB: Okay, 1956 in Pearisburg. And you stayed at the Bluff City school for six years?

MM: Uh, Bluff City schools, I just stayed for eight years, a whole eight years.

AB: Oh, eight years at Bluff City schools; so it was 1964 when you left Bluff City. (MM: Right)

Uh, and then from Bluff City you went down the hill to this other school?

MM: No, no, no. No, no, well, it was still Bluff City, but they just divided the classes up, that's all.

AB: Okay, so when you, you went to another building.

MM: All of this is Bluff City. That's it.

AB: And you went to the other building after about six years? (MM: Yes) Okay, so, okay. So, you. . .

MM: Then my complete years of teaching at Bluff City was eight years.

AB: Mmm-hmm. And it was when you were in this second building that this radical change came? (MM: right) Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Now, that, that integration took place across the state, at that time? Or did they [inaudible]?

MM: At this time, no, at this time, that was just in Giles County. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And so, after receiving this information, the principal, well, he, he, he had a heated discussed with superintendent—his name was Ahalt. I'll never forget his name, Ahalt. And uh, [sigh] as a result, we contacted the Virginia Teachers Association, the VTA, in Richmond, because we were a member. We were a member of the Virginia Teachers Education Association, and the National Educational Association, NEA.

AB: This is a white, this was the white association?

MM: VTA is a black, at that time (AB: was still. . .) Virginia Teachers Association. (AB: Mmm-hmm) NEA included all. (AB: Mmm-hmm) All right. Then, uh, my principal, Laurence Leftwich, contacted, uh, the individual at that time was, his last name was Picott. He was a, probably the executive secretary of the PT-, uh, VTA.

RW-N: Can I ask you to stop and spell those names, please?

MM: Picott? P-i-c-o-t-t.

AB: He was in Richmond?

MM: Richmond, Virginia. (AB: J. Rupert Picott) You know him.

RW-N: And the principal's name, would you spell that?

MM: Laurence, L-a-u-r-e-n-c-e- Leftwich, L-e-f-t-w-i-c-h. (AB: mm-hmm) So, he uh, contacted Dr. Picott. Dr. Picott set up a meeting with lawyers in Richmond, Virginia. He had all of us to come to Richmond, Virginia, to meet with the lawyers, which we did.

RW-N: May I ask you how many were there now? You're talking about just your school, or you're talking about the whole county?

MM: I'm just talking about the seven or eight (RW-N: Of you?) dismissed teachers. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) So, we went to—black teachers, since we were the ones that this was concerning. So we did go to Richmond. We met with the lawyers. They said this would be a trial case, because this should not happen. And they were going to make it a test case. And they did. And all these papers will tell you about what happened later. We had to go to court. We had a court hearing in a, was, I don't—I think it was in Richmond. All of the teachers testified. They had Ahalt there. Later a decision was reached that if we wanted to come back to teach in Giles

County, that he had to let us, that we could. Only three teachers showed an interest in coming back. I was one of them. The lady that lived there, Mrs. Franklin, was the other. And Spivey, from Bluefield, Virginia. The other teachers were furious with Ahalt, and they thought never again would they teach in Giles County. Well, uhm. . .we had uh, a supervisor—I have her name somewhere, but I don't remember. She would come down a lot to my class. And she loved coming down and talking with my children. Somewhere I have a paper of her and the kids. But anyway, she was a real neat person. And she just, well, she thought the world of me. So, she had told the superintendent that. So, later, after all this happened, everybody was fussing and fighting and on his case, he came to the school. And he said to me, uh, "If you want, I can recommend you for a teaching position in Radford, Virginia. There is a vacancy there, if you want to go." Although everybody was real upset with him. And uh, well, I did want to work. And he said, "I've already contacted him and told him about you and what a good teacher you are." So he said, "If you are interested," he gave me a number, "call him." The other teachers—well, two or three—just wouldn't even talk to him. So, that's how I happened to go to Radford, Virginia. I called the superintendent there and he had a vacancy.

**AB:** Well, tell me, why, why were they going to close the school that you were currently working in? Why would you leave where you were to go to Radford? I mean, was it a better opportunity or what?

**MM:** No, they had dismissed us!

**AB:** Oh, this is. . .

**MM:** This is integration. (AB: Uh, okay) And they had dismissed all seven black teachers.

(AB: But you-) We were just out in the cold. When we were dismissed, it was May, school was

out. Nobody knew in advance to apply for jobs. And we were just out in the cold in May.

AB: Oh, I see. When you talked about the supervisor, the supervisor had been one that you had met while you were teaching there at Bluff City and . . .

MM: Right, but she had, she had left. (AB: Mmm-hmm, okay) She had gone on; she was from Richmond, too, but she had gone back to Richmond.

RW-N: Now, the courts demanded that you be allowed to teach in Giles County, is that right?

MM: This was a yes.

RW-N: But there were no jobs in Giles? Is that why they recommended you go to Radford?

MM: No, no, this was later. Now, when we're talking about Radford, this court case hadn't been solved. (RW-N: I see, okay) See, this was right at the very beginning, when he had just said all black teachers are dismissed. And everybody was all up in the air. And we didn't know where we were going. And that was at this time, not (RW-N: later?) . .no. So, uh, I, uh, had contacted the superintendent in Radford. And uh, he was a real nice person. He gave me a date for an interview. And he told me to uh, of course, he knew I'd be riding the bus. And he told either he or the principal would be at the bus terminal to meet me and take me to the school for my interview. So, that's how I went to Radford, Virginia.

AB: Were you, when you went to Radford, was that an integrated school? Or was that an all-black school?

MM: No, that was still a segregated school. They hadn't had integration there at that time.

AB: And what was the name of that school?

MM: Fred Wygal.

AB: W-e-i-g-e-l?

MM: Fred, F-r-e-d, Wygal, W-y-g-a-l.

AB: Uh-huh. And uh, what grades were there?

MM: Okay. The grades that were available at that time, or the position that was open, was first and second grade. So, uh, when I went to, when I arrived, say, at Radford, at the bus terminal [sigh], well, I looked for-, I didn't know who was going to meet me. I looked for the superintendent. I knew he'd be white. And I didn't see anybody. So I asked a lady at the bus terminal. And she said, "The onliest person here is a black guy, and there he is over there." And that was the principal. [chuckling] That was Bill Manning. And so, when he saw me he said, "I know you. You finished Bluefield State." And so he took me to the school for my interview, and I met the teachers and what not. Now, Fred Wygal was a mod-well, Bluff City was a nice school, uh. . . . Virginia had very nice schools. Fred Wygal was a very modern school on the main street. First grade room was very convenient. The students only had to go out for recess and lunch. They had restroom facilities in the big, it was a big, nice, sunny, modern room. Their water fountain right in the room. It was a real neat building.

AB: And how long did you stay at Fred Wygal?

MM: Well, I stayed there for two years, from 1964 to 1966. And my principal was William Manning. And he did the very same thing that the principal in Pearisburg did. He looked out for me a place to stay. And I stayed with a lady by the name of Weda Trigg Haley. And she was originally from Bluefield. And her family lived right across, up on the hill, the Trigg family. So uh, I stayed there two years, until. . . uh, my mother wanted me, she always wanted me to come home. And she knew the principal of Lawson Street School; it was called Stinston [inaudible], it's still called Lawson Street, the school that crosses Lawson Street. But there was another

school up on North Mercer Street called Stinston that was used formally by white students. So, the school here was divided into two parts. The first and second grade down here in the old Lawson Street School building, and third through the six was up on the hill at the old Stinston School. So, that's why we say Stinston School.

AB: Is that S-t-e-n. . . ?

MM: S-t-i-n-s-t-o-n, the Stinston School. And, but, uh, let's see, am I gettin' ahead of myself? I was done with, oh, how I came to Bluefield. I was in Radford, I said, from '64 to '66. And my mother knew the principal of Stinston School very well, Mr. Holcomb, and she would always say, "Whenever you have a vacancy, I would like for my daughter to come home." And—cause sometimes he'd come over and have coffee—and he had a vacancy in '66, and he contacted my mother. My mother called me at the school—school was almost out—in '66, those last few days. And uh, she told me to call Mr. Holcomb. I did. And he told me, "I have a vacancy and I'm quite sure that you can get the job." He said for you—said, "Please apply." Well, uh, at Radford, they say, "You're not talking about leaving?" They didn't want me to leave. But I did contact Mr. Holcomb, and he had me to contact the superintendent of Mercer County schools. And they assured me that I would get the job. In the meantime, I, after coming home, I contacted my superintendent at Radford, because they were real nice to me in Radford, too. I get along well with everyone. So, he said to me, "I will not release you from your job until you are certain and you have signed a contract." So, after I signed my contract, I called him. And he did a very nice thing for me. He, uh, the reference, he said, "Instead of sending the reference to the superintendent, I'm going to send my reference to you so you can read it first, and then you send it on." He gave me a real high rating. So, then I came to Mercer County. When I came to

Mercer County, the vacancy was in the second grade. And the second grade was across the street from me. [chuckle] Lawson Street School. And I taught with Mary Frances Brammer, which is my best friend. Uh, she had the first grade, and I had the second grade. And there was just the two of us over in this big building across the street. The rest of the classes was up on the hill at Stinston. So, that's how I came to Bluefield in Mercer County.

AB: And how long did you stay at the Lawson Street School?

MM: Well, excuse me. . . .

AB: Had the schools begun to integrate in Bluefield by that time? This is the 1960s. (MM: This was a-) This is ten, twelve years after Brown.

MM: Right. I came here in '66. And uh, I taught here, or I taught at Lawson Street School from '66 to '68, before they integrated. And I taught under William Holcomb.

AB: And what happened in '68?

MM: Well, in '68, that's when the, integration began. But I will mention; I would like this to be included. Uh, when I was interviewed by the Radford superintendent, he thought it was a bad thing that had happened to the Giles County teachers. And when he interviewed me, he told me, "This wouldn't, that will never happen to you in Radford. If we are going to integrate, we will tell the teachers first. That will never happen again, not here, anyway." And I enjoyed teaching in Radford because, like I said, I knew the principal from Bluefield State. And uh, in commuting, sometimes I would go—I would, commuting—I would go from here. . .let's see, where did I have to stop, going to Radford? Looked like there was a place I had to stop. I don't remember now.

RW-N: Did you do that on the bus, mostly?

MM: I rode the bus again. But now, coming back home, the principal would give me a ride to, as

far as where? Because he was going to Roanoke, and I would make connections—to Blacksburg. And I'd make connections with my bus.

AB: How far is it from Radford? You're a little bit more distant now than you were in Giles County.

MM: I'm more distant than I was in Giles County, yes.

AB: Uh, another hour or so?

MM: It was probably about uh, a hour.

AB: Did that suit in Giles County ever get settled?

MM: Yes. The suit-, they settled the suit where he had to, the superintendent, every time he had a vacancy, he had to notify all the teachers that he dismissed, and if we wanted to go back to teach, we could. And we would receive those letters by registered mail, where we'd have to sign to make sure that we received the letters, if we wanted to go back.

AB: Do you know (MM: but at that time...) whether anybody ever went back?

MM: Yes.

AB: They did go. . ?

MM: One teacher that lived in Pearisburg, uh, Mrs. Franklin went back, and taught there for a while.

AB: Do you have any idea how she was treated, what her experiences were?

MM: I haven't, I haven't heard that she was mistreated. She, she was-, Miss Franklin was a real good teacher. And she lived in Pearisburg, so I had no indications of her being mistreated.

AB: Then in 1968, when you were at the Lawson Street School and integration occurred, what happened to you then?

MM: Okay. When, in '68, when the integration took place, of course, I was the new person. I was the last one hired. So, of course, being the last one hired, you would not get a choice position. So, most of the teachers were, uh, put in a position, or placed in a position, here in town. I was the one [chuckle] that had to go out—still in Mercer County—but I went to Oakvale, West Virginia.

AB: How do you spell that?

MM: O-a-k-v-a-l-e, Oakvale. (AB: Mmm-hmm) It's close to Princeton. So that was about, mmm, maybe about twelve miles from here. I still wasn't driving. So, uh, my third grade teacher that was also teaching at the time that I came home, Mrs. Moore— she didn't drive, but she had a driver —so, I had bought a car by then. She had her driver to drive me. And he would drive me to Oakvale every morning and come back after me. Except the first day that I went to Oakvale, [laughter]—this is real funny. The first day, he didn't pay any attention to his gas gauge. [laughing] And I waited, and I waited. My first day at Oakvale. And the people had said about Oakvale, "You don't want your car to break down on the Oakvale Road." And this was, the teachers, I was the onliest black teacher there. And my co-workers, they lived in Athens and Princeton. And they would tease me, they'd say, "You better not let your car break down on Oakvale Road." It was curvy, real curvy. And they claimed that all the people there were red necks. They said, "Mary, make sure your car don't break down." That first day, there I was.

But let me tell you the funniest thing about it. I had some of the best students. They were not prejudiced. The first day of school they put me at ease. And you know, I was, I was timid because I heard everything about Oakvale. And, uh, standing in the auditorium, the principal going to read off your students' names and you were to take 'em to your room. Uh, one little boy,

little red-headed boy, came up and he made me feel at ease. He said, "I'm going to be in your room, she's going to be in your room, she's going to be in your room," blah, blah, blah. And so that made me feel pretty good because they just thought of me as their teacher and nothing else. I wasn't any different, I was just their teacher. And I couldn't believe this because they had scared me to death about going to Oakvale. "You're going to be the onliest one down there black."

[laughter] So, uh, anyway, we were, at Oakvale, we were departmentalized. And I was to teach language arts. All the teachers were real nice; the principal, the assistant principal, they were real nice to me. And I don't know, he made a comment, he said, "Well, I guess if [inaudible] we have to receive one of you, I'm glad it's you." [laughing]

AB: The principal said that to you?

MM: And so, they just accepted me. And I had four more teachers I worked with and they were real neat. They were nice. And I know I was—the first day there, they'd have their a little breaks, and I'd just stay in my room. And the three others that worked with me they'd come to the door, "Come on, come on, we take our breaks at this time, come on, come go with us." And they said, "From now on, bring you a little snack, bring your coffee and we'll take our snack, our, our break together." So, I enjoyed working at Oakvale. And the children were great. I had no—I didn't have any trouble with any of the parents. And I'd heard so much about Oakvale. I thought, "Oh, my gosh, how am I going to make it here?" But, uh. . .

RW-N: Where do you think these stories had come from? The bad stories about. . .

MM: Well, everybody just consider Oakvale a red neck section. That's the way it is. It's between here and Princeton. (RW-N: yes) And it was, it was a small community, sort of country. But the kids were real neat.

RW-N: But that didn't show up; that didn't show up.

MM: Not with the children.

**END OF TAPE 1- SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 1- SIDE 2**

AB: Uh, Ms. Montgomery, I wondered if you would tell us how you felt about that whole business down in Giles County. What kind of emotions did you have when that happened?

MM: I was very hurt. I was very disappointed. Because. . .I had been praised and the other teachers, also, as doing a good job. And to think that in just a fraction of a second someone would say, "Thanks for your service to your people," and dismiss us in that manner. It really did hurt.

RW-N: You, were you angry?

MM: I was angry, yes.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. I find the phrase "to your people" interesting. That was the phrase that was used?

MM: That was the phrase that was used.

RW-N: I mean, that sounds strange to me in a way, in terms of that's really to the country, to everybody, to be phrased that way—I find that interesting.

MM: Well, it was just a very hurtful situation. Everyone, everyone of us, all the teachers, were very upset. And they said, "Well, why did he wait until this time of the year to dismiss us?" and no one had any idea whether they were going to be employed or not. Some of them had families, they had new cars, they had homes. And so, it was just a bad situation to be in.

AB: Was there any comment made by the uh, parents uh, of the children who had come to

school? How did, did they ever speak out about that?

MM: The parents were very upset. They, uh, they wanted to protest. They rallied around the courthouse, around the office of the superintendent. And they confronted him. Because they, uh, it was like I said, it was a community school.

AB: And I would imagine, they probably, if he behaved that way towards them, with that kind of disrespect to you, I, if I had been a parent there, I would have been concerned about what was going to happen to my child once my child went into that school, if he showed no more sensitivity than that.

MM: I imagine they had those very thoughts.

AB: Do you have any contact with those people in Giles County after that? Did you ever find out how things went down there?

MM: Well. . .uh, I had very little contact after that, because like I said, then I went to, I went to teach in Radford. Uh, some of my people still live in Pearisburg. But they didn't after that, they didn't talk very much about it.

AB: So, you were, now, you have come back to uh, West Virginia, and you're in Mercer County, in Oakvale, at the Oakvale school. And how long were you out there, and where did you go when you left there?

MM: Let's see, I was in Oakvale two years, from 1968 to '70. I didn't stay there very long. Uh, like I said, I enjoyed the school, I enjoyed working with the teachers, principals. My onliest problem being at Oakvale was the distance and I wasn't driving at that time. Uh, I had a driver. And the roads were very curvy. The principal and the men teachers at Oakvale were always very nice. Uh, let's see, um. . .during the summer before I came to teach at Wade, I, uh, taught at

Ramsey Elementary School, which is right in Bluefield. And I sort of, I liked Oakvale, but I sort of resented being sent there, because of the distance and the curvy roads. But the principal at Oakvale didn't want me to leave. He said to me, he had gotten wind of the fact that I was going to come home to teach in Bluefield. And Mr. Hartman said to me, "I will learn you how to drive, I will teach you." He said, "We want you to stay." He said, "And uh, each day I will take you all the way out of the curves and the road until you get to the section in Bluefield and," he said, "if you ever have an accident or anything on the road," he said, "all you have to do is call the school; the men teachers love to help ladies in distress. They will come, they will assist you. We want you to stay. We don't want you to leave." But during the summer, uh, after teaching here in Bluefield at Ramsey, uh, I was hired at Wade Elementary School. And that's down on Bluefield and Holland Avenue.

AB: And what grades did you teach there?

MM: When I came to Wade, I taught the sixth grade.

AB: And how long were you at Wade?

MM: I was at Wade until I retired.

RW-N: And when was that?

MM: I retired in '89.

AB: Now, uh, and how were race relations for you at Wade?

MM: Uh, Wade, there wasn't any problems at all because it was balanced at that time. We had, uh, oh, there wasn't an equal amount, but we had quite a few black teachers and white teachers; it was mixed. It was more mixed than Oakvale, because at Oakvale I was the onliest black teacher. So, Wade uh, it balanced out; there were black and white teachers and students.

**AB**: In the years that you've taught, have you noticed any change in the students?

**MM**: Yes, definitely. Uh, I, I really enjoy teaching. I love teaching. And like I said, when I first, my first teaching job, I was elated. And I enjoyed the children. The children in my first job was uh, I guess because of their backgrounds, they were well-behaved students. Because they knew if they misbehaved at school, they would be in trouble when they got home. But over the years, all of this changed. It began to change uh, the children weren't bad children either. At Oakvale, they were well-behaved children. But later on, the atmosphere began to change at Wade, especially when they took prayer out of the schools, and we were told that we couldn't discipline the children any more. There was a great change, then. The children realized that the teachers' hands were tired, were tied, excuse me. And the, you could even tell the difference walking down the hallway at the school. The children's behavior. . .it got to the point where their language was so offensive, they. . .they realized that they could just get away with anything, almost. At least they tried to. It's not that the principals didn't try to contain them, but the situation changed over the years.

**RW-N**: When you said that teachers are no longer allowed to discipline, what do you mean by that?

**MM**: Corporal punishment was not allowed any more.

**RW-N**: And what kinds of corporal punishment had teachers used?

**MM**: Beforehand, you were able, maybe, if kids were extremely bad, and only when they were extremely bad, you were allowed to spank them.

**RW-N**: And when it changed, was that—I had heard once the situation, you had to send them to the principal, but the principal could use the paddle on them?

MM: Yes, yes. (RW-N: It was institutionalized.) But before the principal, right, but before the principal could even do that, he had to notify the parents.

RW-N: And do, so do you think that change was a bad thing?

MM: It was, because the kids realized, that anymore, that, you know, “you can’t do anything to me, so what? And I can say what I want to.” And sometimes the children would just stand right up in your face and tell you, “You can’t do anything to me. You touch me, we’ll sue you.”

RW-N: So, some of what happened to the kids is related directly what was going on in the school systems. Do you think there were other things in the children’s lives that brought about this misbehavior?

MM: Oh, yes. According to whatever, maybe, maybe that child before he left home of the mornings, maybe there was a lot of disturbance at home. That affects a child’s behavior, also.

RW-N: So society had begun to change, too—that affected kids?

MM: I don’t know whether you’d say society, but there were a lot of changes. Even before that, though, if ,uh, there was a lot of disruption at home before the child left home, he’s going to come—be a little unruly when he comes to school. But the teachers would be able to sort of contain him. But later on, you could not.

AB: What about the racial aspect? Were there any changes in that? I mean, did, uh, did people continue to treat you well, both your students and your colleagues and parents and all, in racial terms?

MM: In racial terms, there weren’t any problems.

AB: Uh, we could go back then and talk about uh, your life in Bluefield? Were you here in, in Bluefield at the time the bombing occurred over [MM: at Bluefield State?] at Bluefield State?

MM: Yes, I was—no, I was working. But I know when it happened. I was working.

AB: You were in Virginia?

MM: Right, yeah. right, I came home on weekends. But I knew when that happened.

AB: Do you, do you have any recollections of what people were saying about that? How did you mother feel about that? Did she ever comment to you about it?

MM: The comments that I heard at that time was. . . I think they wanted, the way people around here felt, what was happening with the closing down of the dormitories. Uh, before that, there were a large number of black students that would come from out of state to Bluefield State. Bluefield State was well-known, and still is, although it's not what it once was because now it's mainly uh, I guess, uh, what? 85% white. But in that day and time it wasn't—all black. And people, well, they thought a lot of Bluefield State. And kids would come in from other cities to the dormitories to stay. People in Bluefield had the feeling that this sup-, not superintendent, uh, president, was hired to close down the dormitories, to do away with black students so that the school would be all white. And that's where all of the fuss and discrepancies happened. And that was one of the reasons the black students were very upset. And that was when all that bombing and what not went on.

AB: What was happening in the city of Bluefield at, at that time, beyond the bombing? Now, I grew up in Huntington, and there were no movies downtown or anything that we could go to in downtown Huntington. There was a movie you went and sat upstairs (MM: Mmm-hmm). Uh, what was life like in, in. . .?

MM: Oh, as far as integration, the same thing here. Uh, we had one theater, the Colonial. You had to go down a little alley, go up the back steps. The Granada and the State Theater, you went

in a side door and you sat in the balcony.

**AB:** What about the other aspects of recreation here in Bluefield for black people? What happened? When you were growing up, how did you entertain yourselves?

**MM:** Well, there were little school socials and things of that sort. And that's about it.

**AB:** Swimming pools, skating rinks. . .

**MM:** No, no, (AB: . . .anything like that?) we didn't have anything like that.

**RW-N:** Church activities?

**MM:** Oh, there were church activities, yes, at the church. And I forgot to mention, I am a member of John Stewart United Methodist Church.

**AB:** Is that a black church?

**MM:** Yes.

**AB:** And is that a family membership? Or is that something you've come to as an adult?

**MM:** No, my mother belonged there, also.

**AB:** And was that. . .were there activities? What were some of the kinds of activities that the church might have had that you participated in?

**MM:** Oh, they would have May Day festivals, King and Queen contest. . .uh. . .it was Mayflower—was it the Mayflower? Not the Mayflower. . .Dogwood Festival, that was it. . .they would have. And that was a big thing in my church.

**RW-N:** And did you have suppers. . .picnics. . .?

**MM:** Had picnics and that sort of thing, mm-hmm.

**AB:** Uh, what about the clubs and activities that clubs might have sponsored? Was your mother a member of any club in, in Bluefield?

MM: No, my mother worked all the time. She didn't have time to belong to clubs.

AB: Was there any clubs, were there clubs at the church, for example, in some churches they do have Willing Workers or something?

MM: Just United Methodist Women, now she was a part of that.

AB: What about you? Were there Y-Teens, or anything like that, that you belonged to? (<sup>MM</sup>Mary: No) Did you work when you were in high school?

MM: I worked when I was in high school. Uh, let's see, I worked in high school—when I was in high school. And I worked on Saturdays; I worked in the summer when I was in high school and on Saturdays. Just recently in the paper was death of a well-known citizen, Paul Criskus. And I could remember during those years, the Criskus and the Janellas, they were Greeks; they had a restaurant, The Ideal Lunch. And I worked at The Ideal Lunch during the summers. And on Saturdays. (AB: What did you do?) And before, before I started working there, I worked at their home—they had a little boy called Telemac and I would take care of Telemac and uh, I did domestic work at the house. And when they got the restaurant, they asked me to come and work at the restaurant. He asked me to clean off the ta-, I cleaned the tables off and things like that.

AB: When you went to Bluefield State, how did you afford to go to Bluefield State? It was just you and your mother. Now, did your mother. . . ?

MM: My mother saved, she saved for me, for my tuition. She worked real hard—she saved.

RW-N: Did you always know you were going to go to college?

MM: Yes. She was. . .she was really determined that I would go.

AB: Why?

MM: She just, she said she wanted me to have a better life than she had, because she had worked

so hard all of her life, and she didn't want that for me.

AB: Now, the home that we're visiting, is this the home that you and your mother lived in?

(MM: Yes) So, you've always had your own home, then?

MM: No, we didn't always own this house. Uh, let me see. . . . We bought this house the year that I started teaching. Before that, we lived in a little house up on Lawson Street, right next to the parsonage. But she always saved to buy a home. And she. . .she did this, and I didn't know that she had done it. I knew that she had wanted to buy a house. But I said, "Well, we need more." And she had saved, and she had a savings account. And uh, she was determined to own a home of her own. She said, "I always want you to have a place." And I was away in Pearisburg. I came back home, and I went to the old house. [laughing] And I couldn't. . . I said, "Where's everybody?" She had talked about buying this house and I thought, "No." I said I didn't want this house. It didn't look like this [inaudible], this house. I said, "No, we're going to buy a better house than that." She wanted this house. She said, "We can fix it up. I like the location. We're going to buy that one." I said, "No." I came home and she had bought the house. And you know what my mother had done? She didn't, uh, finish high school. But she had good common sense. She had put everything in my name. And she said, "I want you to go to the lawyers, and I want you to sign all these forms." But when I came home that Saturday, the bus terminal was just down at the bottom of Mercer Street, and we lived at the top of Mercer Street, uh, making a left, one house out. And I got to the top with my little suitcase and the house was empty. And down below us lived the Kerns family and they were friends of ours. And she had twin sons, and one of them came up and he said, "Your mother moved. I'll help you carry your suitcase, we'll go down on Church Street, where she moved." [chuckling] So, that, that was a big shock.

RW-N: Can you tell us more about your mother? She seems to be a very determined lady.

MM: She was. My mother was a hard-working lady. And if she, she made up her mind that we were going to do such and such a thing, or she was going to do it, she would. And she just always wanted the best.

RW-N: What other good characteristics do you remember about her?

MM: I can remember that uh, she worked, I said, at The Ideal Lunch, that I had worked there in the summer. And sometimes, let's see. . . I worked there in the summer and on Saturdays. And she worked there before she went to the hospital to work. And she was just a type of person that would save her money. And I can remember as a child she was always determined that I was going to have a Christmas tree. Even I can remember her waiting until the Christmas trees went on sale, and coming from work late about five or six o'clock and dragging that tree home. So I would have a Christmas tree. That was just the type of person she was.

RW-N: It sounds like you must have always felt loved. You always felt loved (MM: I did) as a kid.

MM: I was the center of her life. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And I can't talk about her without tearing up.

AB: What, what motivated uh, your mother? What, what do you think made her like that, uh, that she wanted to do these things for you?

MM: She just wanted me to have the best of everything, and to not to have a hard life, or to work as hard as she worked.

AB: Uh, was religion very important to your mother?

MM: Yes, she was a very religious lady.

**AB**: How about you? Has that spilled (MM: Yes, I am, also) over into your life?

**MM**: Yes. I am a member of John Stewart. I usher and this Sunday's my day to usher; I am the head usher. I get the ushers out on Sundays.

**AB**: Uh, you spoke about taking prayer out of the school, and, and saw that as a change, uh, with the students. Could you talk a little bit more about that, please?

**MM**: Well, before they took the prayer out of schools, we would start the day off with devotion; uh, maybe uh, we had uh, I remember I had bible stories on the level of the children, short bible stories, maybe would select—even started back in Pearisburg—one student to read a short story. And maybe we would have prayer, a short prayer, and, and, and the Lord's Prayer, and then the Pledge of Allegiance. That was always the way we opened our day at school. And then after, after that, everything changed, and we didn't open the school like that any more today.

**RW-N**: And most of your children came from Christian families? (MM: Yes)

**AB**: Uh, could we go back to Bluefield State again? You lived at home while you attended (MM: Right) Bluefield State? Did you participate in many of the extracurricular activities at Bluefield State?

**MM**: No. I was a very shy, quiet person. My friend and I laugh now. I have a friend, Dorothus, who is about as quiet as I am. We were always so quiet. We would just go to class and come straight home. Because we didn't live on the campus, so, you didn't participate in activities like the girls that lived on the campus.

**RW-N**: What made you decide to go into teaching?

**MM**: Oh, as a child—I have some notes here that I talked about that when I had to write this, why I've become "Teacher of the Year." Uh, when I was a-, I said here: [Ms. Montgomery reads

now] “I always knew I was going to be a teacher. During playtime as a child, while playing school, I was always the teacher. My friends who remember those days still tease me and laugh how serious I was, and determined that they learn their alphabets.” They still tease me about that. I was always the teacher. And they were to learn their alphabet. I was a strict teacher, even then.

RW-N: Do you have any regrets about becoming a teacher?

MM: No, I love teaching.

AB: How did you know about, uh, teachers? I mean, were there teachers who lived in your neighborhood, uh, or so? Why did you set on teaching rather than nursing or something else?

MM: Oh, uh, when I was at Lawson Street School, I admired my first grade teacher very much—Mrs. Mae E. Coleman—she lived on this side, so her house was this, turned in the corner. It’s falling down now. But uh, she always took an interest in me because I was good in art. She always had me to help with her bulletin boards and do artwork. So, I just admired her greatly. And I always imitated her.

AB: She was sort of your role model, then, (MM: Yes) uh, for teaching? Uh, back to Bluefield State. You are a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority. When did you join, uh, Delta?

MM: I didn’t join until later.

AB: As a graduate?

MM: I was not in school; I didn’t join while I was at Bluefield State.

AB: You joined later as a graduate student? (MM: Right) Did you go to football games, or anything like that?

MM: Yes, I attended the football games. (AB: Dances?) I very seldom attended their dances. I had to come home. But I did attend, uh, at Bluefield State, the big thing was the Homecoming

game. And we always attended Bluefield State's homecoming games. Usually at that time, they played West Virginia State, and that was always a big thing.

AB: What about the homecoming dance? Did you go to that, too? (MM: No) Uh, high school dances, socials, basketball games. . . ?

MM: I would go to, I'd go to high school basketball games, yes, and the socials.

AB: When you say you always had to come home, was that because your mother expected you to come home?

MM: Mmm, not really. She was—my mother wasn't a real strict person. If I wanted to go, she would never say no. Because she always felt that she could trust me. I would go mostly with my girlfriends and what not, or my cousins.

RW-N: It sounds like you very seldom had conflicts with your mother, then. Is that true? (MM: Oh, no, no!) You just got along marvelously well?

MM: My mother—I did. My mother was my best friend.

RW-N: And when did she died?

MM: My mother died in '85.

RW-N: Had she been ill before that?

MM: [sigh] Well, she had, uh, I knew she had hypertension, uh, hardening of the arteries. I could see her going down. And she, she sort of knew it. She tried to prepare me.

RW-N: How did she do that?

MM: She would just tell me, "I'm not going to be with you very long." (RW-N: Mm-hmm) And she, she was aware, you know, that uh. . . . I noticed that she didn't get around as much. But uh, she was still able to move about. She wasn't sick in the bed or anything. Just one night she woke

up very sick.

RW-N: Uhm, from what you have told us, it seems that losing your mother must have been a (MM: It really hurt) great loss in your life. Is that right? (MM: It really hurt) How did you deal with that? What, what gave you the strength to deal with that?

MM: Well, like I said, I was close, I'm close with my cousin—my mother's niece—and uh, we keep in contact. And I have a close friend that was visiting me when my mother became ill. He teaches at Alabama A & M. And he always come here for Memorial Day. And he was here with me when she became very ill that night, and I had to take her to the hospital. And him being here helped me a lot. Because she, she'd just woke up and she asked me to help her sit up in the bed and she was so weak, she couldn't sit up in the bed. And it scared me to death. And [inaudible] my guest room. He was down here and I came flying down here, banging on the door, "Help me, my mother's ill. You've got to help to get her to the hospital." And she'd had a stroke. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm)

AB: And how long after that did she pass?

MM: Uh, she died June the 4<sup>th</sup>.

AB: So, did you—were you ever able to bring her back home?

MM: No. After she had her stroke, she wasn't able to talk any more. She just became unconscious. (AB: Mmm-hmm) And even during the time that she was unconscious, though, I would talk to her. And she was trying very hard. She would try very hard to come out of that. Her arms and her legs would be going. And then I got scared. I knew that I maybe shouldn't be talking to her so much, because she was trying to come out of it, and she couldn't. I knew she heard me. She just couldn't. (RW-N: So in those first. . .) This friend that helped me during that

time he was here, he still keeps in touch with me. Although he doesn't live in Bluefield. He's at Alabama A & M. He calls me; that helped me a whole lot, with him calling me every week. He calls every week.

RW-N: Now, am I correct in thinking that you were still working at the time?

MM: When my mother died? (RW-N: Yes) I was.

RW-N: Yes, yes. So, you had to, you had to go out of the house to go to work, to . . . ?

MM: Uh, it was, it was the time of the year when school was almost out. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And I remember, uh, oh, it was about the last of May almost, when she took ill. I can remember going down and telling my principal; Everett Gravely was my principal then, by the way. And my mother was ill; I just didn't go back to school—I couldn't deal with that, I couldn't go back to school. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) So uh, I didn't go back that, you know, until school started in the fall, because I had to go back and forth to the hospital. Uh, my cousin, her niece, I called and she came and stayed with me that time, during that time. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) But I could not deal with school and my mother being that ill.

RW-N: Do you, uh, when you think of your mother, do you ever use the word strong? Do you see her as a strong (MM: Oh, she was very strong woman.) woman? Very strong. (Mary: Yes) Do you see yourself that way?

MM: I am a strong black woman.

RW-N: And what makes you say that? What qualities about yourself?

MM: Because whatever I have to do, I do.

RW-N: You get it done somehow?

MM: I can do it, and I will do it.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. Do you remember when that [phone ringing in background] feeling of strength uh. . .[phone interruption]. . . you, you, it didn't take you very long to answer about when I said do you feel like a strong woman (Mm: Yes, yes, I. . . ) Do you remember any certain time when you began to have those feelings?

MM: Mmm, I don't know. I guess I've always known. If I had something to do, or I have some goals set that I intend to accomplish, I'm going to work at it until I accomplish whatever goal I have set.

RW-N: And, and that inner feeling just goes way back and you were aware [overlapping voices].

MM: That I can do that, and I know I can.

RW-N: Uh, it, it seems obvious from what you have said already, that, that your mother was in some way a role model (MM: She was) for you, right? (MM: Yes, right) What other particular characteristics that uh, you have taken from her? Her strength, for example?

MM: Her strength. . .her determination. . .to accomplish whatever goals she set forth. Like when she decided, "I am going to buy us a home," she meant that, and she did.

AB: You keep everything so very nice here. It's all so clean and attractive and all. Was that something you learned from your mother? Or was that something you decided on your own?

MM: Uh, I'm a creative person. I like art. And uh, I think my creativeness have a lot to do with it.

AB: Did your mother—did you have chores that you had to do? I mean, did your mother. . .

MM: Responsibilities?

AB: Uh-huh. At the home. I mean, how did you and your mother juggle housework and going to school and that kind of thing?

MM: I always had responsibilities. When we lived on Lawson Street, we lived in a little three-room house, and you didn't have a central heating then. And uh, my mother said, "Okay, if you want to go"—you mentioned games, basketball games, my cousin and I loved to go to basketball games—"if you want to go to basketball game, now, uh, the fella's going to bring us some coal this afternoon, and you have to see that it's in the basement." So my cousin wanted me to go with her. So my cousin would come down to the house and we would get that coal in and get washed up and be ready to go to the game in the afternoon. So, I always had chores.

RW-N: I'm interested in your creativity. Where do you think that came from? Maybe I should ask you what you mean by it?

MM: Creativity? I'm good in art. (RW-N: Uh-huh) And I love art, I love making things. I like crafts. And I always have outstanding bulletin boards. (RW-N: Uh-huh) Uh, and I enjoyed teaching my children art and working with them, and I always had a very attractive classroom.

RW-N: Do you think you can teach creativity?

MM: I think it's something that comes from within.

RW-N: Excuse me?

MM: I think it's something that comes from within.

RW-N: Uh-huh. So as a teacher, you don't—can't necessarily teach it to children?

MM: No. I just, you know, it's just an art. (RW-N: Uh-huh)

AB: Uh, could we go back to the basketball games and what not? How did your mother deal with you and boys, when the boys wanted to come courting? Uh, how did she handle that and what did she say to you about that?

MM: She didn't have to worry too much about me with the boys. I wasn't that outgoing. I

always was a quiet person. I didn't have many boyfriends. And I guess I was just a, probably a bookworm. I didn't have many boyfriends. I was quiet.

AB: Did she offer you any advice about how to deal with men?

MM: At that time, mothers didn't talk to girls about sex. She never did.

RW-N: I'm going to pick up on the books. How, are you, are you, were you, as a child, a big reader?

MM: I loved to read. I've always. . . (RW-N: And you still do?) Yes.

RW-N: Do you have any favorite kinds of books that you're reading now, at this time of your life?

MM: I like historical novels. And then I like uh, inspirational books, fiction.

RW-N: Was your mother a reader?

MM: She read the bible, mostly.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. So, if you—how do you see yourself as different from your mother?

MM: My mother didn't have the opportunities that I've had. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) She didn't have opportunities to attend, probably didn't even finish high school because the schools were too distant—they lived back in the country—they lived back in a little place called Poplar Hill, Virginia. So, she didn't have the opportunities that I had. If she had had the opportunities, I'm quite sure she would have gone quite far. (RW-N: Mm-hmm)

AB: How do you see, uh, Bluefield State in your life, your experiences? How do you-, when you look back on your time there and Bluefield State in the community at the time that you were going?

MM: Bluefield State played a big part in my life. Uh, the teachers, I've been inspired by Bluefield

State teachers, mostly because they really were interested in you. They tried hard to help. And one teacher that really stands out at Bluefield State, that uh, played a big part in my life was Othella Marie Harris Jefferson. She played a big part. When I first—my freshman year, uh, I was really influenced a lot by her, because in her classroom, you did not play around. You really got your work out.

RW-N: What did she teach?

MM: Uh, Mrs. Jefferson taught in the education department; she taught Philosophy and, uh, Psychology.

AB: What about, uh, you mentioned chapel in, uh, a few minutes ago. (MM: At Bluefield State) What, what was chapel like for you?

MM: Chapel was nice. I remember, uh, Dean Whiting was determined that we would not miss chapel. Uh, and like. . .

AB: What was chapel?

MM: Chapel was a religious experience. . . inspirational. . . singing, and sometimes they would have good speakers.

AB: How often was it?

MM: Every week, onceth a week, usually on Monday. I remember like the city children, sometimes we'd think, "Oh, we can skip chapel, we're going home." I don't know whether you know Dean Gregory Whiting or not. He would come to that window and some of us sometimes would be slipping off. "Come back, come back, come back." You couldn't slip off; you had to go to chapel. And since you mentioned chapel and I mentioned Dean Whiting, I met, last month, a young lady and I wasn't in Bluefield, I was in Huntsville, Alabama. I was at Alabama A & M, at

the inauguration ceremony for the new president. And I met a young lady who was—I went to school to a class with my friend. And before he came in to start his class, this young lady was speaking with me and I mentioned I was from Bluefield. She said, “I know someone from Bluefield.” She told me that she was the god. . . huh, Dean Whiting’s wife was her godmother. So, I found that interesting, just thought I’d mention it, Dean Whiting.

AB: Other than Mrs. Jefferson, were there any other uh, people like that in your life, that you remember who were influential?

MM: My third grade teacher. She was still teaching when I came to Stinston to teach. And I told you she was the one that uh, found a driver for me to go to Oakvale, Mrs. Moore.

AB: Mmm-hmm. Uh, what made you decide to become a Delta?

MM: Well, uh, I’ve always been inspired by the Delta women. Uh. . .how they hold themselves. A lot of my friends are Delta. Most of my friends are Deltas.

AB: You have an active chapter here in Bluefield? (MM: Yes) Do you participate in national?

MM: Yes, and I’m the secretary of the local chapter.

RW-N: Would you tell us what Delta is?

MM: Delta is an organization of educated, college educated women, that stand for public service, service to the community.

RW-N: Now, this is a national organization? (MM: yes) With local chapters, right?

(MM: yes) And it is a black and white organization combined?

MM: We’re now taking white also. Originally it was all black. But now we accept white.

RW-N: And as it functions today, is it mostly black?

MM: Well, uh, in Bluefield it is, yes.

**AB**: Uh, are there other organizations that you belong to?

**MM**: I belong to Bluefield State Alumni Association. I belong to uh, the Retired Mercer County West Virginia Teachers Organization, NEA. And let me see what else do I belong to. I'm trying to think. Let me see. I might have some of them jotted down. You always forget. I think I mentioned everything, though.

**AB**: You seem to stay pretty busy, because we have uh-, was that with company coming, or do you travel or. . . ?

**MM**: I travel and I have uh, company quite often. And then I, I, I belong to different organizations here in town. I think I mentioned Bluefield State Alumni, John Stewart Church, and Delta Sigma Theta.

**RW-N**: Now, have you been single all of your life? (MM: Yes) So your life now, since you've been retired, is just busy with your friends, some relatives, visiting, traveling and (MM: And my organizations) and your organizations, right. You mentioned earlier to us that you saw yourself as, as quiet and shy when you were younger. (MM: Mm-hmm) It seems like right now you belong to a lot of-, you-, that people-, that you have a lot of people.

**MM**: Well, I'm not as shy now. (RW-N: Yes) Once I guess I became a teacher, and I think before that I came out of my shyness before I started teaching when I worked at the Bluefield Sanitarium.

**RW-N**: Yes. What did you do there, by the way?

**MM**: That was a great experience for me. Because I think—I wasn't really spoiled, but,uh, I wasn't spoiled, but I thought, I don't know, that some things I should have this and I should have that. But once I worked at the hospital and I was around patients and, hmmm, I changed my

thoughts on life because I'd been in with some patients. I wasn't an aide. I was just a domestic worker at that time. I would just go up and change the beds when the patients left, and that sort of thing. But being around patients and seeing people come in one day, uh, walking around, and the next day you go in the room, you become familiar with them and you look for the person and all of a sudden, you look for the person, they're not there any more. It really changed my philosophy on life.

RW-N: So that broadened your experiences, your life?

MM: Right. And it made me a more mature person, I would say.

RW-N: Uh-huh. And, and you started to become less shy gradually?

MM: Uh, because I came in contact more, with more, with people, I think.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. One of the things we..[overlapping voices, inaudible].

MM: Because at first I didn't talk much at all, I was a very quiet, shy type person.

RW-N: Do you see yourself as quiet now?

MM: No. (RW-N: no) My friends say now I don't know how to shut up.

RW-N: One of the things that we do ask people often is how they see themselves changing over their lives. And sometimes people have a really hard time thinking about that. But you seem to have thought about it to some extent.

MM: I'm a more positive. . . I'm a positive person.

RW-N: And has that grown? Have you even become more positive?

MM: It's grown over the years, yes.

RW-N: So, I get the sense that you've become more, uh, outgoing, more at ease with yourself, with people and more positive.

MM: All of that is true.

RW-N: Do you think when you first-

MM: I think teaching had a lot to do with it, coming in contact with the children. (Rita: mm-hmm)

AB: Sometimes people who are teachers say that, that you have to kind of play-act, I mean, you have to be a dramatist, in a sense, when you are teaching. Did you find any of that. . .I mean, that you, you're kind of performing?

MM: You become more, right, you become more assertive. All of those things, I think, makes a good teacher.

AB: Uh, do you think, then, that you had to learn to do those things? Was that hard for you in your first work?

MM: No, I think once you get in that position and you're working with kids, you're thinking up every way to reach those children, to get over, uh, the points that you want to make. And you really, you try everything to reach them. And that, that, and that just comes from that. Like my first year teaching, without my uh, the teachers manuals—I, I felt I did a good job.

RW-N: Even without them. . .yes, uh-huh.

AB: So you had to find your way on your own? (MM: Right) Did that build any kind of resourcefulness, then, cause you didn't have that to lean on?

MM: It gave me confidence in myself.

AB: That you could do it?

MM: Right.

RW-N: Was there a way in which, uh—well, lemme, lemme reconstruct this in my mind and then

ask. It seems that when you grew up in a single parent home, you were very close to your mother, she was a working woman (MM: Right) so that certainly left you on your own, to some extent. (MM: To some extent) But there were two of you, and you were close. When you left for Virginia and lived on your own more during the week, did that al-, was that good for you in some way?

MM: Uh, you know, it was, it was odd. Because it seemed like I was there, I was involved with my problems there, teaching, uh, whatever I had to do. And then when I come home, looked like you were in a whole-, you're in a whole different world.

RW-N: Yes. (Mm: Mmm-hmm) So you had, you had these two worlds [inaudible]. (MM: Right) Was that uncomfortable?

MM: It wasn't uncomfortable. I adjusted, I adjusted.

RW-N: You found you could do it. Uh-huh.

AB: How did you and your mother reach decisions? Were there ever times when you wanted to do something that she didn't think you should do?

MM: We would talk over our problems together. And she would just say, "Well, if that's what you want to do, and you really want to do it." She'd leave it up to me.

RW-N: Did you ever quarrel?

MM: Probably we did. But not over anything. I can't remember having a big, just a big quarrel. I know we did, about some things, maybe, but I don't remember anything that was just, you know, big.

AB: Was your mother a touching person? I mean, (MM: No, she wasn't. . . ) did she hug you or kiss you or anything like that?

MM: Un-un, my mother wasn't that type of person. She wasn't a real affectionate person. But I knew that she loved me. She might pass by me and tap me on the head. Or, if I'm in the bed, she might pass and touch my feet or something like that. But she wasn't real, you know, affectionate person. . .to hug and... I guess that was the way she was brought up. But I knew that she loved me dearly. Uh, she was very protective of me, as I was growing up. I remember all of my friends had bicycles and I wanted one so badly, but she was overprotective. She thought that I would hurt myself badly, so I never did get a bicycle.

AB: Uhm, did-, and did you ever resent things like that? I mean, were you angry with her when you didn't get that bicycle?

MM: No, I wasn't angry. I just thought, "Well, if I can't have one, I can't have one." And took it in stride.

AB: Do you see yourself as a passive person?

MM: Maybe at one time. But I am not now.

AB: So if somebody does something that you think is, to you, that you think is wrong, what do you do?

MM: I going to let 'em know about it. You know, I might not raise a lot of sand, but I'm going to let 'em know that I don't approve of whatever it is.

AB: Uh, would you do that publicly too? I mean. . .?

MM: No, I think I'd probably take 'em off to the side and, you know, let 'em know that I disapprove. (AB: Mm-hmm)

RW-N: What are the characteristics of yourself that you like the best? That you really feel good about? Even though you may not talk about it.

**MM:** I feel good about the person I was then—shy, quiet—and the person that I've become today. I'm a little bit more assertive. But I know what I want, and I usually work, uh, hard to acquire what I want.

**END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 2**

**BEGIN TAPE 2 - SIDE 1**

**RW-N:** . . . just asked Ms. Montgomery about how she feels about good characteristics of herself. And I guess we'll ask her to repeat those again. You. . . let me help you with that, since you've said it already. You, you see yourself as traveling a path from a kind of a quiet, shyer person to a person who's more assertive and outspoken and at ease, and you feel good about that. Uh, feel good about uh, getting things for yourself that you think are right, and saying things. But let me, let me hand this back to you, because you need to describe this better than I can.

**MM:** Uh, I mentioned that at one time in my life I was a quiet, shy type of person. But over the years, and meeting lots of people, and being thrown in a situation where I had to be in charge, I've learned to be more assertive, more at ease with people, and happy with my life and myself. I'm a more positive, I'm a more assertive person than I was in my earlier years.

**RW-N:** Let me ask you that from the opposite way. If, if there was one characteristic of yourself that you could change, what would that be? One or two. . . .

**MM:** Mmh, what would I change? I can't think of anything that I would change. I like myself as I am. (RW-N: uh-huh)

**AB:** Uh, do you depend on what other people think about you to determine what you are going to do?

**MM:** No, not at all.

AB: Does it bother you if people were disapproving of something you did?

MM: No, if I don't see anything wrong with whatever it is, I don't disapprove. Because I usually know what's right for me.

AB: How do you, how'd you come to that, uh, kind of feeling?

MM: I think as you grow older and you've experience life, you know what's good for you and what's not. So, it doesn't matter what other people think, as long as I know it's right.

AB: You, uh, when we were talking a moment ago about uh, your being a Delta, and that's a public service organization, uh, do you see public service as an important part of your life, uh, was that something you feel that you should do, or what?

MM: I think public service is a great part of my life. And as a part of Delta, helping others, helping people that need assistance. Uh, for example, I was trying to think of a project that Delta was involved with not too long ago. It has uh, I can't think of it right off the top of my head, but it has to do with providing housing for people uh, that don't have homes of their own. We were greatly into that. And uh, we were also, as a Delta, involved into helping young, unmarried mothers. We have quite a few projects that has inspired me and to help others. Also, I try to help others, too. Uh, when I'm not busy and don't have anything to do, and people that need help, sometimes I have friends that do not have transportation, they need someone to take them to the doctor, or the doctor's appointment, or they just need help; I'm always there for them. Recently I just took, well, a couple of days ago, I had a cousin that didn't have transportation and she's ill, just by herself. I took her to the doctor for her appointment. So, I'm into helping others, too.

RW-N: Now, did your mother do much of that? I, I assume from what you said, that she was very busy working.

MM: My mother worked every day. When she came home it was late.

RW-N: So, I assume she didn't have time.

MM: But if she could, anyone that-, if she-, need-, if someone needed help and she could, and if she had the time or the energy, she would. (RW-N: So you learned) But she, she worked hard.

RW-N: You learned some of that from her. But it seems that you may have even, that's even become more important to you. (MM: Yes) Is that true? (MM: That's true.) Uh-huh.

AB: Is that something that came to you through, through your church, or just through your feeling of community needs?

MM: It's just my feeling of community needs.

AB: Uh, before we stop, I wonder if you'd tell me a little bit about your driving, cause you mentioned earlier [chuckle] that you uh, you didn't drive and that was a problem for you. You bought a car before you learned to drive. How about that?

MM: [chuckle] Uh, I didn't drive at first. My uh, my first car that I bought was a little white Buick that—I've always met real nice people. All the people that I have dealt with, people that I have working for me around my house and doing odd jobs have been nice. So, when I bought my car, from the Buick company, uh, the person that sold me the car told me that if I bought a car, he would provide someone to teach me how to drive. And he did. So, that's how I first bought it to drive.

RW-N: Now, where did you get the idea to buy a car before you knew how to drive? [all laughing]

MM: I don't know.

RW-N: You just said, "I'm going to do it this way."

MM: [laughs] When I was teaching, sometimes my [inaudible] to Pearisburg, when I was teaching in Pearisburg, my friend and I would always talk about what kind of car we were going to buy. So when I bought my first car, I just decided, "Well, I'll learn to drive sooner or later."

RW-N: And did this person help you, or someone else?

MM: He helped to some extent. I, I drove for awhile. And then, and then I had a little accident getting in my, backing in my parking space, and I stopped for awhile. (RW-N: uh-huh) And then, another teacher, this fellow was Mr. Harris, Lineus Harris—he's a twin, they're dead now—  
Marshall and Lineus Harris. He was determined, "You are going to drive that car." So, he came over and he told my mother, "Help me to get her out, I'm going to teach her to drive," after I stopped driving. So, he did, and from then on, I just started driving.

RW-N: How old were you?

MM: Oh, I don't remember. I've been driving for some time now.

RW-N: A long time, yeah. And did, and did your mother encourage that?

MM: My mother encouraged me; she wanted me to drive. (RW-N: She wanted you to drive.)  
My mother would be standing out on the porch, waiting for me to come home. "I'm going to help you to park in this driveway." And she'd be beckoning, "Come on, come on in." [laughter]  
And she was, my mother—I've gotta have my driveway blacktopped. It hasn't been blacktopped since she did that for me. My mother took care of everything, uh, when I was teaching, and around the house. I really miss her. Uh, she had my driveway blacktopped. I'd come home from school, she was the one that'd insist on the remodeling to the house. She said, "Look upstairs, look what I've done." She was just a lady in charge.

AB: Are you a kind of fearless driver now?

MM: I'm afraid I am. [laughing] I'm afraid I am.

RW-N: Yeah, let's quit for today.

**END OF TAPE 2 - SIDE 1 (and first interview)**

**BEGIN TAPE 3 - SIDE 1 (and second interview)**

RW-N: We were asking Miss Montgomery about her uh, occupa-, other occupational work that she may have been engaged in besides teaching. She's already told us when she was a young woman, first out of school, she worked for the Bluefield Sanitarium for seven years. Was there anything else, Miss Montgomery, besides teaching that you've done?

MM: Before I finished Bluefield State, uh, on Saturdays, and before working at the Bluefield Sanitarium, uh, on Saturdays I worked uh, worked for a Greek family. And then later, uh, the head of the household had a restaurant on Bland Street called the Ideal Lunch. And I would work there on Saturdays.

RW-N: I think you did tell us about that. (MM: I probably did.) Yes, okay. And that, and that was it, right? (MM: That's it.) Then you became a teacher.

MM: After the Bluefield Sanitarium.

RW-N: And you were a teacher how many years then?

MM: I was a teacher for about, I think it's 33 years.

RW-N: Thirty-years, uh-huh, okay. You lived most, really, all of your life with your mother.

MM: I lived all of my life with my mother. I was her only child.

RW-N: Were there other, during that time, was there ever anyone else who lived in the house with you, in that household, with you?

MM: No, just the two of us.

RW-N: That's fine; that was our understanding, but we again we wanted to check on that. Uh, that's really all that I needed to check on those kinds of things. So, uh, let's go back to talking a little bit about your teaching days, because I think you've already told us you'd like to share more about that, too. Let me ask you this general question about teaching. As you look back on it now, what do you think you enjoyed the most about teaching?

MM: Let me see. I just enjoyed, I enjoyed uh, all of my teaching experience. I enjoyed the children most of all, I enjoyed everything associated with teaching. I would look forward to getting up mornings, going early to school, checking my lesson plans, making sure that everything was prepared for my students. I, uh, enjoyed creating bulletin boards. I would change my boards often. And I loved art, so I enjoyed doing that. I enjoyed working with the children, meeting their families. When I first went to Giles County to teach, now, this is the onliest county that I can remember that has a program set up in the same manner as they did. At the beginning of the school year, I think it probably was about maybe the second week of school, we had what is known as visitation week. And we would go around to meet the families of the children that we taught. And we would use a whole week for that. And that was real nice, because we got to meet the parents, and to mingle with them. And it sort of helped us with the children, um, because sometimes children have difficulties that we do not know about, um, when they leave home a morning. It helped us a lot to deal with their emotional needs.

AB: Uh, we noticed that you have pictures, uh, Miss Montgomery, of the children with whom you worked over the years. Not only do you have pictures, they're not in a pile, in a box, but you've got them well-organized in a scrapbook. What made you start doing that?

MM: Oh, I don't know. Because I often, I would think about my students. I loved 'em, and they

loved me, and I enjoyed working with them. I often think about now, how they said uh, maybe they had to take uh, corporal punishment out of the schools. But my kids knew, and they very seldom got spanked, unless it was something that they'd done was just...just horrible. And uh, but the kids realized that if I get involved in something that bad, that I need to be corrected or punished. And the funny thing about it, after I had to discipline them I never had a kid to stay angry with me, because they expected it and they knew they were wrong. And I had one little boy, and that was when I was teaching across the street from where I lived at Lawson Street School, he'd been particularly bad that day. And uh, he had stayed in trouble. [chuckle] And uh, I didn't—"What am I going to do with this little guy?" And uh, but we were only using two rooms at Lawson Street School, and I thought, "Oh, my goodness, what am I going to do with Vincent?" But anyway, I had to punish Vincent and that afternoon I thought, "Well, maybe I did come down pretty hard on him." He said to me, "Miss Montgomery, may I carry your books home?" So it just didn't, he knew that he had been real bad. So most of the kids, they, they accepted their punishment, whenever they had to be disciplined. But I just enjoyed children; I enjoyed working with them.

**AB:** Did uh, you teach Sunday School, or uh, do anything uh, outside of the school with the children with whom you worked?

**MM:** Uh, sometimes I would teach Bible School during the summer. But I didn't teach Sunday School.

**RW-N:** When you went to, uh, when you changed from an all-black school to uh, an integrated school, did that change other things for you? I mean, I imagine it did. But what kind-, would you talk to us about that?

**MM:** All right. Very little change. Kids, kids, if their parents don't say anything to them, you are their teacher; they accept you for who you are. And I have never had any problems with children. For me, children were just children, regardless of what color they were. And I am lucky, because that's the way they accepted me. I was their teacher. I've had 'em to run up when they got ready to leave at the end of the school year, black and white, and hug you goodbye. And just a couple of nights ago I was in a restaurant down on Bluefield Avenue, Hardee's, and one of my little girls that I had taught in the sixth grade, a little white girl, it was Elizabeth, uh, she was a twin, I had Elizabeth and Lisa. And uh, she waited on me. And I said, "Which one are you? Elizabeth or Lisa?" She said, "I'm Elizabeth." And she had finished high school. And I told her, "I remember you. You gave me some kind of little toy; it looked like a little rabbit but you could change the color of her dress and her hat by pulling the dress over her head. On one side it was blue and on one side it was pink." And this child, and those children, I don't know, they just really accepted me. Because on Wednesday—there was a lot of teachers at Wade that were Deltas—on Wednesday we would wear our red and white. Uh, not the little black girls, the little white girls came to school with red and white on that day, too. [laughing] So, the kids just accept you as their teacher. I really had no problems with my kids.

**AB:** There is a women—a black women's club in Charleston, that has a motto, which was also the national motto, called "Lifting As We Climb." And those women clubs, women's clubs, saw it that they were supposed to do certain kinds of race work, to help black people to move up in the society. Did-, was there anything like that, that involved you here in, in Bluefield, or did you feel any, any commitment to do that with your teaching or so?

**MM:** No, we haven't had that type of organization here. But uh, always, always, during

February, I always uh, celebrated Black History month. My kids were, both black and white, uh, would be involved. And they loved it, both. I probably would start off with a bulletin board. Uh, black people that have accomplished something. And instantly, it would pique their interests. And they would start looking and going to the board. And so, I would say, "If you want to, if you would like to, you can select any of those figures and do a report." And both black and white kids would be interested. And we found that real interesting.

**AB:** So, there was no real push here in Bluefield that uh, to, to sort of, I guess, advance the race or elevate the race or so, that you felt a commitment to, to participate in or to do in your teaching, or even in your personal life?

**MM:** No. In my, in my teaching, I did.

**AB:** Not in your personal life (MM: No) in terms of a [inaudible word] commitment?

**MM:** No, except maybe, except maybe with organizations. Like I said, when I retired, for five years I worked for Dr. Jean Gilbert. Dr. Jean Gilbert came from New York, and she was a former president of the Bluefield State Alumni Association. And uh, she decided she wanted to buy or find a building in Bluefield that she could use maybe for headquarters for the alumni association. And uh, she had uhm, instructor from Bluefield State College uh—I'm trying to think of his name, as well as I know him—Marvin, Dr. Marvin Rogers, to look around for uh, location for her. So right in the middle of town, there was a empty building and it was formerly used by the old Bluefield Sanitarium. Uh, I think that it was next to the Bluefield State Sanitarium clinic. And they used this building; it was earlier a church, a Christian church, white church. And so, the old Bluefield Sanitarium staff and the clinic used this as storage space. And so, uh, Dr. Rogers was able to acquire this building uh, for taxes owed. And he acquired that for Dr. Gilbert. And

she...at that time, had not retired. She was still teaching at a college in New York. So, I had uh, informed her that when I retired, I would do volunteer work for her. So, I was in charge while she was in New York, sort of supervising the renovation of her building. And she called this building the Academic Development Center. And uh, so, she would have various programs there to encourage black students to uh, be more motivated and better themselves. And she had uh, she had set up tutoring there. She also had set up a program for senior citizens that needed help in uh, sometimes they'll have forms and what not to fill out. So, I worked with her there for five years. Uh, I was there until she arrived in Bluefield to take over, to get herself situated.

AB: Is that still in existence?

MM: The Academic Development Center is still in town. But Dr. Gilbert hasn't been too well. And she hasn't been able to spend as much time there as she'd like.

RW-N: You worked with her for five years, did you say?

MM: I worked with her even before she arrived in Bluefield, making sure her building was together.

RW-N: And why did you decide to do that at that time? You were retired now, when you...

MM: That's when I first came out of school. Well, because I knew her because of the Alumni Association. (RW-N: yes) And I liked the way that she thought. (RW-N: What did you like about that?) And I thought that she would be a big help. She was interested in the young people, black people, like motivating and building their self-esteem, and what not.

RW-N: So, you think that those things were important?

MM: Very important, yes.

RW-N: And what did you do in that center during those five years?

**MM:** During the time that I was there, I did quite a few things. She, she named me her executive director. Uh, she would send me sums of money; I was to set up a bank account for uh, uh, uh, the Academic Development Center. I set up a bank account there. And I paid all the utility bills for her, uh, until she—well, even after she arrived, I still went ahead taking care of that for her. And then her programs, whenever she had programs there, I would be in charge. I was the person that was always there to open up and to be in charge.

**RW-N:** So, you really helped to run the thing (MM: Right, right) on a daily basis. Did you go there many days of the week?

**MM:** I, I didn't spend, I spent maybe three days a week there.

**AB:** Was she a native West Virginian?

**MM:** Originally, uh, let me see...I think her parents uh, was originally from here. And they lived over on the south side of town. But I didn't know her then. But she told me that her grandmother lived on the south side of town. And then I think they must have gone to Tuskegee, Alabama for a while. And then they came back and they located in Roanoke, Virginia. But she finished Bluefield State College. She uh, she can't be there every day at the center now; she's not well at all. She has a problem with asthma and breathing, and what not. But I keep in touch with her, and I told her I'm available sometimes when she needs me.

**RW-N:** You, you have mentioned to us a couple of times that you have written down your philosophy of teaching, of education. (MM: Yes) Would you like to share that with us at this point?

**MM:** Yes. Uh, my philosophy of teaching...I had to write this for and turn it in when I was nominated Wade's Teacher of the Year. And I was one of the nominees for Teacher of the Year

for Mercer County.

RW-N: When was this, Miss. Montgomery?

MM: It was, I believe it was two years before I retired, it was in '87.

RW-N: So, what you have written here is uh, fairly recent? (MM: Yes) Yes.

MM: My philosophy of teaching: "I base my philosophy of teaching on the belief of two great teachers, and from my own personal experience in teaching. Jesus reminds us of the importance of sympathy in education. He never talked down to his audience. He always respected their ability. He saw life through their perspective. Sympathy is the prelude to wisdom, and understanding is the basis of progress. Like Jesus, a teacher must have a vision of his importance. He must see beyond technical details. His test is not nearly to impart knowledge, but to develop patterns for behavior. He must stir his students. And this can only be achieved when he really understands them and become a part of their lives. Johann Pesalozzi, 1746-1827, the idea of love governs the educational philosophy of Pesalozzi. Such love is to be unrestrained. It is to include the successful, as well as the poor student. It is to be unfailing, even when students misbehave. Pesalozzi thought of the teacher as like a gardener, and the pupil as like a plant, which had to be carefully nurtured. He believed instruction should proceed step-by-step, according to the ability of the child. Nothing should be forced. I am a positive person. I'm a firm, but fair teacher. I encourage my pupils to be positive, to develop a good self-image, set their goals high and strive hard to reach them. I have not met a child incapable of thinking and participating to some degree in school. If we let them know we value what they have to contribute, we make an outstanding teacher, a caring teacher. I am rewarded when I see pupils that I have taught as outstanding citizens, working in worthwhile occupations. I see them everywhere, as teachers in the bank, and

it makes me very, very proud to be a teacher and to have touched so many lives.”

AB: That’s very nice. Uh, you wrote that in 1989. (MM: ‘87) ‘87, ‘87. Before you put those thoughts into words, had they kind of governed your…?

MM: They have always been with me. You know, I probably just hadn’t expressed it. But that was my, always my feelings toward my students. And I really believe that. I don’t think I’ve told you what type of certificate or maybe I wasn’t clear, but I’d like to clear that now. I hold a permanent professional certificate and I have a bachelor’s degree, plus fifteen hours in my specialization, biological science major 7 through 12, general science major 1 through 12, elementary education 1 through 8.

AB: And uh, you, that’s, you, when you graduated from Bluefield State, you had the Bachelor of Science with a specialization in biology (MM: And general science) and general science. And then you went back later, back to Bluefield (MM: Right) to get the elementary uh, specialization. (MM: Right) That was after you had gotten the job in Bluff City, and you came back and did you go during the summer?

MM: That was after I got my job teaching in uh, Bluff City and Pearisburg, Virginia. And after I taught in Radford, Virginia. So I got this when I was ready to teach in West Virginia, when I got to West Virginia. It was required when I got to West Virginia.

AB: Did you go to summer school to do that, or uh…?

MM: I took classes in summer school at Bluefield State. And then to, to get the rest of the requirement, I again, took the teachers’ test.

AB: Oh, the NTE? (MM: Mmm-hmm) Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: You also mentioned before to us that you had a poem that you wanted to share with us.

Do you want to do that now, or would you like to do it later?

MM: That'd be fine to do it now. (RW-N: Okay, could you do that?) Yes.

RW-N: And would you again, repeat why you're reading this poem, where it came from?

MM: I certainly would. Uh, my last year teaching in Pearisburg, Virginia, this was the year that they integrated school, 19 and 64. We had, at that time, uh, elementary supervisor that came to our school. And her name was Jane McCoy. And she often came to my classroom, because once she started to come to the classroom, the kids were so friendly. And the kids enjoyed and they related to her. They would uh, love to read stories for her, and uh, dance for her. And so, at the end of the school year, this was May, 1964, she was getting ready to go back to Richmond, Virginia. And she sent each one of the teachers a poem. And the poem tells of her experience in Pearisburg. "There was a fat flatlander, who went to the mountains to live. Her courage did flop and flounder, which she had enough to give. The mountaineers came to her rescue. Offered her acceptance and care, gave her a challenged job to do. Even taught her to say "hair" and "bear". She dwelt there for two years among them. She forgot she didn't belong. She loved them and learned so much from them. Time dashed away like a song. She was called back down to the flatland, her heart was heavy and blue. How could she leave these mountains so grand, how she hated what she had to do. I cannot go away without grieving, bless you each and every one. A part of my heart won't be leaving, a mountaineer heart it's become." This is May, 1964. And there was a postscript on my poem and it said, "I'll shall never forget the book reports and singing. It is a lucky child which starts to school with you. I have certainly enjoyed working with you. Best wishes, Jane McCoy."

AB: Very nice.

RW-N: We always ask women who we are working with what-, about their sense of accomplishments in their lives. And it seems to me that to some extent, you have been already talking about that. And don't let us put words in your mouth. So, I'm asking you the broad question about what is your sense of accomplishments in your life.

MM: Oh, I am, I'm so proud to have touched so many lives. And sometimes I think, "Gosh, if all the children that I have taught and met...how proud." I don't have any children of my own, but I feel like they were my children and I see them and they all holler, "Miss Montgomery," and you can tell by the tone of their voice that they're so glad to see you. And it just makes me feel real good to know that I've touched so many lives.

RW-N: Several times when you were talking to us, you talked about having a sense of accomplishment that, that you were a good teacher. Were there ever any doubts, during that long career that you had as a teacher, where you doubted yourself and had to work, work your way through things and went to certain people, perhaps, to talk about those things?

MM: To be honest, not that I can really think of, that I've always been able to work out any problems. I can't think of really any big problems that I had. It seems to me, I don't know, that it always just came naturally. I know I was talking to a friend of mine, my close friend, uh, that lives nearby—we grew up together. And uh, Dorothus used to live right up the street from me, and I would stay at her house until my mother arrived from work of evenings. And she said uh, to me, "You always knew you were going to be a teacher." She said, "Because when we always-, when we played, and we played school, you were always the teacher." She said, "You always made us be the student."

RW-N: Do you recall that?

MM: Yes, I do.

RW-N: Does that seem right to you that (MM: it's correct). But when you look back on that, do you remember saying to yourself, when you were a little girl, "I want to be a teacher," or were you just showing that in your behavior in...?

MM: It was in my behavior. (RW-N: Uh-huh)

AB: Do you have any idea where that came from?

MM: I think maybe, maybe because of my first grade teacher. I admired her so much, Mrs. Mae Coleman. She was the one that took an interest, and she saw I uh, was artistic and good in art. And she would always help-, I would always help her with her artwork and with her bulletin boards and what not. And I think maybe I used her as a role model.

AB: As you worked with both black and white children in your teaching career, did you feel that the black students had any special needs that you as a black teacher were able to help them with?

MM: Yes. I, I have been able to help some of my students, especially as I think back, maybe some of little kids in Giles County, because it was very rural section. Some kids came from, not from the town of Pearisburg, they came from White Gate to uh, very rural section. And, and my heart would go out to some of those little kids; they didn't quite have as much as the other children had. And uh, I was teaching, I believe, the third grade then. And the first grade teacher, first and second grade teacher, we were good friends. Uh, I think I mentioned we lived-, I lived, I lived with her aunt. And those children didn't have as much as other kids. And uh, we really tried to help 'em. We set up a system whereas we uh, would get extra clothes. I don't even remember where we got those clothes from now. But we had an extra room in school. And we kept them there because sometimes those little kids would come to school and they had slept in

their clothes. And so Dorothus and I always tried to make sure that uh, they would improve their hygiene. We tried our best to help those children as best as we could.

AB: So, you saw that as a special calling with the black kids that you worked with there at Bluff City. When you came to Bluefield and you were working in an integrated situation, did you see the same kinds of needs among your black students?

MM: No, I didn't.

AB: So, you think that was a rural problem.

MM: It was a rural problem. (AB: mm-hmm) Because when I went to Oakvale, uh, I didn't see that particular problem there. Uh, at Oakvale, we had black kids, but we didn't have a lot of black kids there, not a lot. But they were, kids were, they had good feelings about themselves.

RW-N: We've talked on and off about your teaching black children, white children, how you went into the schools and the schools became integrated and how that was for you. Uh, I wanted to ask a somewhat more general question, though, that has to do with race. How do you see that race has affected your life?

MM: Hmm, the onliest time that I say that it's affected my life, when they just all of a sudden integrated in Giles County, that was the onliest uh, the onliest incident that I can remember that really affected me. Because uh, before that, well, when I, when I think about it, and I've talked to some of my friends about it, I, just recently Dorothus and I was talking about that when, over on this side, ages ago, it was mixed....as children.

RW-N: You mean in this community here?

MM: In this community. Uh, on this next street, there was Lawson Street, over where Dorothus lived—the house is torn down now—but below her there was a white family. There was a Jones

family. On the corner here, this big house that you pass on the corner, white people live there, the [name inaudible] live there. And so, we, we played with 'em. We didn't, [chuckling] we think anything about it. All of us played together and....

RW-N: Got along reasonably well?

MM: We got along-, we were just kids.

AB: You know, Miss Montgomery...

MM: And then later, you know, later they moved away, and it became all black. (RW-N: yes, mm-hmm)

AB: Your experience, when you graduated from Bluefield State, sort of parallels my experience when I graduated. I, too, came from a town where the black teachers didn't move around very much, and so there were very few jobs that were available to new people coming into the system.

(MM: Mmm-hmm) I think if I had been white that would not have been the case, that I would have gotten a job teaching. Instead, you went to work at the Bluefield Sanitarium. I went to work in a factory. I did domestic work and with a college degree, and worked in a factory for a time. In fact, I never did get a job uh, in my hometown. Uh, and I think that that was because I was black. Uh, do you have any feelings like that about, about your job opportunities when you graduated?

MM: Uh, during that time when I graduated and I was looking for a job, we had here, in Mercer County, a black assistant superintendent. But, he was in name only. He had, you know, I don't think they even-, from what I hear, now this is just heresy, I heard that he didn't even attend the regular meetings that he was supposed to with the superintendents and the board, that they didn't invite him in. He was a token assistant superintendent. And he had a policy, and this, this was a

whole fact. And that was one of the reasons at that time, I **imagine**, that I wasn't hired in the county. He would do the hiring of black teachers. And he **had** a tendency to hire teachers, black teachers, only that came from uh, family of teachers, teaching **family**. And that's what he told my mother, because she was worried about me not getting a job. **And** she went to talk to him about it, and that's what he told her. So it's, that made it real **hard**.

But later on, after I'd been away sometimes, I guess he **wasn't** the assistant superintendent any more. And I got the job, probably because my mother **worried** the principal that was the principal at Lawson Street schools to death, about, "I **would** like for my daughter to come home." And that's how I happened to come home. And Mr. **Holcomb** needed a teacher, and he had a vacancy. He was a pretty nice person. [laughing] **And he liked** my mother. And uh, sometimes he'd come over and have coffee. And every time she'd **see** him, she'd say, "I'd like for my daughter to come home, if you ever have a vacancy." **And** that's how I happened to come home.

**RW-N:** Could we go back and talk, switching topics a little bit (MM: mmm-hmm) about friendships a little bit more. I know that we've touched **on** it already. And you have just mentioned here in your neighborhood, in your neighborhood, I think, you still have a very good friend? (MM: Yes, we grew up together) And she is **the** person who you have probably talked-, told us about earlier. (MM: Yes) She's been a very **old** friend of yours. What about your other friendships? Do you-, you now see the people a lot in your sorority? (MM: Oh, yes) They are acquaintances (MM: Yes) and friends?

**MM:** They are friends, also. (RW-N: They are friends, also) All of us are good friends. And most of the people in my sorority, I won't say most but some of them, I was in school with, quite a few of them. Like I mentioned that you interviewed Mary Elston. Uh, she and I were

classmates. I don't know whether you have interviewed, or was interviewing, Maxine Cooper. Most of the people in my sorority were my schoolmates and we were all close; we were good friends, too.

RW-N: So is it fair to say that at this time of your life those friendships are important to you?

MM: They are very important. (RW-N: Very important.) Because uh, like I said, I don't have any brothers or sisters, so I cherish their friendship.

RW-N: Have you had friendships with men? (MM: Yes) Could you share some of that with us?

MM: Uh, I have a friend that's very close. Uh, I told him, I said, "I'm going to mention your name in the interview." [all laughing] Uh, his name is Roosevelt Stewart. He taught at Bluefield State. And uh, after he left; well, he taught at Bluefield State, and when he was teaching at Bluefield State, he lived the next street over. And so, that's when we became friends. Uh, was it when I was at...no, it was after...let me see...I was teaching in Pearisburg. And I would commute on the bus. And uh, he would be in the bus terminal. Sometimes my mo—most the time my mother on Sunday night would—the bus terminal at that time, was just right across the bridge. And my mother would go with me sometimes on Sunday nights to see me off on the bus. And most of the time, he would uh, be sitting there drinking coffee and reading. I passed him for five years before I spoke to him. And he teases me about that now, that I was teaching in Pearisburg and I passed him five years and didn't speak to him. And finally, I think all of us that teaches—was at Lawson's—I'd just come home. I was at Lawson Street school, and we all went to—the big thing here was Big Blues, the big game at Bluefield State, it was the Big Blues, West Virginia State and Bluefield State. And we would all go to that game. And I think all of us had gone to Charleston, all the teachers from Lawson Street school. Our principal then was Mr. Holcomb.

And all of us had gone to Charleston. And, of course, I'd been passing Roosevelt Stewart and just not speaking, he said, for years. And I think maybe I spoke to him the first time, when we were there at the game, probably we were shopping downtown. The thing then was to go, when you go to Charleston, you'd go to the Diamond and Stone and Thomas and shop. And all of us, uh, were downtown and he'd pass me, and I think I spoke for the first time. And we became friends. He used to come home from his nine o'clock class and come by here and sit until the news would come on, and he'd go home. So, we became good friends. And he happened to be visiting here when my mother—it was on Memorial Day, when my mother became ill. I think I told you that. And uh, I don't know what I would have done if he hadn't been here. Because she called me and she was so weak, she couldn't sit up in the bed. And it scared me so bad. And uh, I remember running down here, knocking on his door and telling him he had to help me, my mother was ill, and to come and hold her while I call the rescue squad.

RW-N: Now, he had moved away from Bluefield, (MM: He was...) but was visiting at the time?

MM: Right. He had moved away, he was teaching. He's teaching now at Alabama A & M in Huntsville.

RW-N: So you're still in contact with him?

MM: Yes, he's still visiting. He visits often. He always come back on that Memorial Day. He went with me to take flowers to put on my mother's grave this Memorial Day.

RW-N: Does he have family here? I mean, did he come from Bluefield?

MM: He doesn't have any family here. His family...

RW-N: So he comes back to visit people he knew or he comes back to visit you?

MM: He comes back to visit me, un-huh.

RW-N: So, you're special in his life?

MM: I think so.

RW-N: You think so. And he's special in your life?

MM: Yes. And he's really been a big help because I would have been awful lonely after my mother died. Uh, he calls every Sunday. I have uh, cousin, she calls sometimes, but not as often, because she has a family of her own. So I feel very close to him, because he keeps in touch. And he calls me every Sunday. And in October, they have their family reunion and I always go to the family reunion. I met all of his people. And we go to the big game in Tuskegee; it's always Tuskegee's homecoming.

RW-N: Yes. So, are there any. . .

MM: So he's a very neat person.

RW-N: Are there any other particular friends or relationships in your life?

MM: I'm close with my mother's niece that lives in New Jersey. She's family and they come often to visit, she and her husband. And I'm close with her children. We've always, my mother and I were always close with her children.

RW-N: Now, is this the family whose pictures you have. . [overlapping voices].

MM: Yes, all the pictures around there, right.

RW-N: On the way out last time, you showed those pictures to us. (MM: Yes) I think at the time you mentioned particularly with a young man, if I remember correctly, uh, you felt particularly close and (MM: Yes) helped guide him in some ways. Could you-

MM: Right, that's another one of my cousins and uh, they used to live, oh, on the next street.

And uh, his mother was about, I believe Judy was fifteen years old when Patrick was born. And

she just started bringing him down here as a tiny baby, and of course my mother and I just loved him to death. And so uh, I think I was instrumental in helping him to grow up to be the person that he is now. I provided educational toys for him, taught him his first phonic sounds and all that sort of thing, and encouraged him in school. He became a very good student; he was very smart. Uh, they moved to uh, Winston-Salem. He finished college there, uh, received a scholarship, went to South Carolina, the College of South Carolina, and got his degree. And I'm close to them. Last night his mother came by. She called first. She said uh, "I have something I want to show you." She, his mother has uhm...let me see...two more sons younger than Patrick. Patrick's the oldest. And uh, she said, "I have something I want to show you." She was visiting her mother. And she wanted to show me Patrick's little girl. And she is the cutest little girl, she brought her by last night.

**RW-N**: Straighten me out for a moment. This is a cousin who lived close to you? (MM: Yes) Related...in what way? To your mother?

**MM**: Uh, my mother.

**RW-N**: So, this is a sister of your mother or...?

**MM**: No, this is like uh, second cousin.

**RW-N**: Okay. (MM: Mmm-hmm) So, you have an extended family of cousins who are second cousins who you have talked to us about?

**MM**: Right, right. I've got a few cousins. And the closest cousin, though, is my mother's niece that I speak of. She and her family come to visit. And her children. We were always fond of her children, too. Those are the pictures that you're seeing in there, my mother's nieces, (RW-N: yes) her family.

**RW-N**: One of the questions that we also like to ask women is for them to think about the kind of major points in their life, major times of their life, major events that changed their lives. We kind of think of them as transition points in people's lives, where something happens and your life really changes after that. Can you address that in any way?

**MM**: The onliest change, major change that I can think about is when I got uh, my first teaching job. Like I told you earlier, it was unexpectedly. I, uh, I always wanted to teach, but nothing—you know, I sent out application after application after application, and nothing ever came of it. So the major change would be when I went to Pearisburg and uh, was interviewed by the superintendent there, not thinking I was going to get a job, and it happened. Because I couldn't believe it, you know, when I received the letter.

**AB**: When you sent out those applications, were they to West Virginia schools?

**MM**: I sent 'em everywhere I could think of. Yes, I did.

**AB**: Uh, you've spoken about the closeness between you and your mother, and we were talking about transition points. When you lost your mother, was that a major transition, change point, in your life?

**MM**: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, it was, uh, well, I guess, the worst thing that I can think that ever happened to me in my whole life. I still, it's just still fresh in my mind. And it's been-, that was in '85, that's been twelve years ago. And it's still that fresh in my mind, that I don't enjoy, I can't talk about it. Because my mother, my mother was the center of my life, because I'd been with my mother my whole life. And we were good friends. Not only she was a mother to me, she was my friend. And I would just tell her all about my little incidents that happened to me during the day. And she was someone that I could talk to and share with...my feelings.

RW-N: Is that how you're defining friendship there, as someone—when you say that she's not only my mother, but my friend (MM: My friend) can you distinguish those for us? What do mothers do and what do friends do? And how is it different? [tape beeping] That's just signaling we're getting to the end.

MM: Uh, my mother, I think of a mother as a person that nurtures you and cares for you. And she had always sheltered me. She'd always sheltered me, because I was her only child. And then, I say as a friend, I could always tell her my thoughts. And not be talked down to. She would listen. And maybe if there was anything that she could help me with, she was there to help me. To support me always.

AB: Did your mother kind of manage the home things? I mean, did she take care of the cooking and the checkbook and the, the washing and house cleaning and what not, and your major task was to teach those children and she made the home?

MM: My mother did all of that. Yes, she managed the home. And my free time was my free time to do what I had to do as a teacher.

AB: But now, once your mother passed, you had to do all those things that she used to do for you?

MM: Had to go through a big adjustment period, yes. My mother made the home and took care of the house and everything like that.

RW-N: So that, did that actually mean that you had to then, for the first time, think more about keeping bank accounts, paying taxes, those kinds of things that you were not responsible for before that. (MM: Yes, yes) So you had to learn all of those things, kind of fresh?

MM: Yes, it was a big change. I had to go through, had to adjust. I had not only to adjust to all

of that; I had to adjust to being in this house by myself, uh, living alone. And that was a big adjustment. I'm not usually a timid person, but it wasn't a very good feeling at first. So, uh, I managed that. I'd be tense, nervous, a little nervous maybe after she died, but I managed that by having a security system installed. And that helped a whole lot, because I had a fear of coming in this house at night, after I'd been out, you know. To me, it seemed to me the house was quite large after my mother died. I had a fear of coming in the house at night, uh, just that somebody might be in here somewhere in this house. But after uh, right after she died, I had a security system installed. At that time, I was at Wade Elementary, and they were installing a security system at Wade. So, I was able to talk to the fellow that installed their system. He was a very nice person. So I had, I got mine installed through Hilton.

**AB:** What about retirement? Did that mean—was that another big moment, change for you in your life?

**MM:** Retirement wasn't, uh, a big change in my life. I just accepted that and got along with it pretty nice. Uh...

**END OF TAPE 3 - SIDE 1**

**BEGIN TAPE 3 - SIDE 2**

**RW-N:** You were talking about retirement, then; it sounded like you sort of slipped into retirement, right? (MM: I did) It didn't seem very dramatic; you were ready to retire.

**MM:** I did. Because when it came, it sort of, it came sort of, I had retired a little earlier than I could have. I could have, I could still be teaching. I saw in the paper today where a lady's still teaching-, just retired at 72. So I retired much earlier than that. I retired before I was 65, because at that time there was an offer that was too good to pass up. And uh, so I hadn't really thought

about it, until this offer came up. And uh, I think it was, what was it? The 80 thing, that if your years of experience, let's see, if your years of experience plus your age totaled 80, you could come out with a pretty good ret—they had a pretty good retirement system at that time. And uh, well, uh, a lot of my friends, some of the people that you are interviewing now, they were classmates of mine. They started calling around, "Mary, are you coming out?" I really hadn't thought about it much until then. We've talked about Mary Elston, and I think you're going to interview Velma Bradshaw. They started calling, "Mary, are you coming out?" It seemed like they wanted somebody else to be coming out with them [chuckling], and I said, "Well, I gotta think about it." So quite a few of my friends were coming out at that time. And I thought about it, and I thought, "Boy, this is too good to pass up." So, uh...I said, I thought about it and I thought about it. And we checked everything out, we checked how much we're going to get and how much, trying to balance it with what we were making. And uh, we really thought about it, and worked on that. And so, I thought, well, I think I better come out now, because they're not going to offer this plan, not again, anyway soon. And really, they, they haven't thought about, they thought about it, but they can't make it. A lot of teachers wished that would happen, but it hasn't. So after talking with them about it and I thought, "I might as well." So, I'm glad I did, because I've have more time for myself and I've traveled quite a bit, and I really enjoy that. I enjoy having time for myself. I miss the students, yes. But at that time, the students had changed so drastically, and they were-, begin to be hard to reach. They weren't listening, and the discipline problems had become so great, until it was time.

AB: Uh, you-, we talked earlier about your association with Delta Sigma Theta. And you said that you went into the Deltas as a graduate student; I mean, after you graduated from Bluefield

State. (MM: Yes) Was that an important decision for you to make and was that an important moment for you?

MM: Yes, it was an important moment, like I said, because most of my friends were Deltas. And uh, they had been asking and encouraging me to come in. So, uh, after thinking about it, I thought it was time, past time.

AB: Did you think of doing it when you were in college?

MM: Not too much at the moment because like I said, uh, I didn't have a whole lot of money then. And I knew my mother didn't have a whole lot of money and I never worried her to death, because I thought, well, you know, she was doing the best that she could. So, it never bothered me when I was in school, because I knew my mother didn't have a lot of money. And she worked very hard, so I didn't really think about it too hard then. Maybe that's one of the reasons I didn't go in Delta then. But I just-, you know, I just accepted things as they were. [clears throat] Excuse me.

RW-N: If you had to uh, say, use four or five words to describe your mother, what four or five words would you use?

MM: My mother was a lovely, kind, caring person, who loved me dearly.

RW-N: And if you had to pick four or five words to describe you, how would you describe you, right now?

MM: Mmmh. Well, I would say that I am a thoughtful...caring...strong individual who believes in doing what I think is the right thing.

RW-N: I'm interested in, in that word "strong". How do you define that?

MM: I'm the type of person that uh, if I have a decision to make, if I have a task to do, that I

consider it's going to be a problem, I will first pray about it, think about it, and then know that I could do it. A good example, I didn't want to be at church Sunday...almost everybody was going to be away, my pastor, the secretary, that usually take over, quite a few members...all had gone to conference. I, I am not a person that enjoys being in front of the public. I'm not a public speaker. I can, if I have to. I'd rather not. And I was asked to take charge Sunday. And I thought, "Oh, my gosh. I don't want to do this. I don't enjoy being in front of an audience." But I knew that I could do it, [chuckle] and I was gonna almost have to because everybody else had gone to conference. And I knew the pastor, Dr. [name inaudible] was relying on me. And he had uh, I know he had related to the secretary, "Call Mary Montgomery." And I thought-, oh, I told her, I said, "Only if you give me the bulletin earlier so I can look through it and uh, do what I have to do and get my materials together." And she said, "If you come over this afternoon, I'll have the bulletins run off and I'll have one for you. And uh, I might have some books here that you can look through them." And I thought, "Well, I have some, a few, too, get your materials together." I didn't want to do it, but I knew I could, and I knew they were relying on me. So, that's the way I am. I knew I had to do it.

**AB:** So, but it sounds, too, as if you're a person who organizes. (MM: Yes) So you, would you, when you describe yourself, would well-organized, would it be one of the ways you describe yourself?

**MM:** I am a person that organize. Because I went over there and I checked to see what she had. I come back home, I had quite a few books to the library, and I pulled out my books and I worked that night to pull everything together. I like to make sure I have all of my, my materials ready and planned beforehand. So, I think I done a pretty good job. However, I didn't want to do it.

RW-N: Still speaking of that word “strong”, and you’ve given us an example of that, has there ever been a time in your life when you felt that other people or society even, might be wanting you to do one thing, but that you wanted to do another thing, felt the other thing was the right thing and that you had to sort of go up against public opinion, or perhaps, your mother’s opinion? Can you think of any example of that? And if that happened, how you managed that?

MM: Not really. ‘Cause I, I learned a long time ago when to say no, and how to say no in a way that would not be offensive to anyone. And the case that I just mentioned, I knew that there-, that at least the pastor thought, well, she should be the one to do this. And so, I just did what I had to do. But uh, most of the time, I know when to say no.

RW-N: So that if you felt that you weren’t really suited to that, you would (MM: Say no, right) tell the person I cannot, I’m not able to do it. Is that what you’d say?

MM: Sure, yes. Yeah, at one time I didn’t know how to say no but now I do. I think you mature as you grow older.

RW-N: And you did not define yourself now as a shy person, although you said earlier on that when you were younger you were shy?

MM: I was very quiet and shy.

RW-N: Quiet and shy.

MM: No, I’m not shy anymore.

AB: I wonder if we could back up a little bit and talk about World War II. Do you have any memories of World War II?

MM: Uh, World War II...the onliest thing I can remember is uh—talkin’ again about my cousins, uh, because I didn’t have sisters or brothers, I was close to my cousins. And this is not the cou-,

this is not my mother's niece that I'm speaking of now. I had some more cousins. But, of course, I'm closer to my mother's niece. I had some more cousins that lived close to us. And it was-, when we were children, there was a family of them. And uh—this was living at a different location; this was on Lawson Street. A big family of cousins. And their mother always treated me as one of her own, too, 'cause at that time I was younger. I'd come home from school and go to their house. And their mother would always have gingerbread or she would have uh, something else that I liked; I can't remember now, for us, hot. And uh, one of the cousins was in love with a young man that was enlisted into the service. And uh, he was a favorite of all of ours. And usually, if he took her on a date because we all were so young, all of us would tag along, the sisters and brothers. [laughing] And I was considered in the family, and me, also. And we would go to the movies on Saturday, we'd go to the State Theater as a group. And I know we worried this ticket agent to death, because we would sit there and see the westerns and a serial over and over, until her boyfriend would come from work—he worked at the grocery store—Joe worked at the grocery store. And he would come in; he's going to bring some goodies. He'd bring us bags of fruit, you know. And we were waiting on him to come, and pay [inaudible] front and see the movie, too. And he uh, enlisted in the Army, it was World War II. His name was Joseph Robinson. And I remember so well, we all thought a lot of Joe. And like I said, he considered us close because we had to go along on his dates. And he would write to me, too. I still have his airmail letters. And uh, Joe was killed in service.

**AB:** In the war?

**MM:** Yes. And I remember recently, seeing list-, in the paper, the list of men from uh, Merce County and from Bluefield, that was killed. And I had-, I searched to see if Joe's name was t

and it was. Uh, so that really affected all of us and made us very sad, that Joe lost his life in the service. And I can remember, we would go, growing up as teenagers, the main thing that we would do is go to the movies, we'd go to the movies a lot. And uh, I remember uh, [clears throat], excuse me, coming up Reese Street—that's the next street over—one night, I believe it was Dorothus and myself. Because at that time, I was living on upper Lawson Street and Dorothus lived, was living up here. And so, halfway, we would walk halfway, we'd come up Reese Street, and she'd, I'd go to the right and she'd go to the left. That would be halfway distance for us. And uh, the sirens sound a blackout and the lights went off. And of course, we being young, we screamed, we screamed. And we bumped into a body coming down the street, and oh, that made it worse. And he tried his best to tell us who he was. He was a friend of ours. But we just screamed our heads off. And those were one of the incidents that I can remember. And I can remember also, to pass time on Sunday, we would go to the train station and watch, you know, the soldiers come through and wave and talk to them.

RW-N: Now, the blackout, you uh, spoke of was where you were having a . . .

MM: It was just a test, a test.

RW-N: ...a test, where everyone in the neighborhood had to put the lights off and things like that.

MM: All the lights would go off.

AB: Do you remember any uh, talks about patriotism, either in school or, or church, or...? How did the community-, do you have any feel for the way they felt about the war effort?

MM: Yes, I remember selling bonds. And I remember uh, there was, at the West Virginian Hotel, we had a movie star to come to sell bonds. Greer Garson came to Bluefield. And I can remember all of us going over there to see Greer Garson come out on the balcony to talk. That

was when we were young. I can remember people buying bonds and things like that.

AB: Did they uh, sell tin, uh, save tin cans or pots or aluminum or anything like that? It was aluminum.

MM: Yes. And I can remember, was it? - I think sugar was rationed and things like that.

AB: Meat, there were coupons (MM: yes) and tokens, that people would use.

RW-N: Do you recall um, at the end of the war, I guess it was, certainly the war in Germany where the pictures first came out about the Holocaust and the heaps of bones, (MM: yes) the concentration camps, do you have any recollection of any of that?

MM: I just can remember uh, I think it came out probably in Life Magazine, how sad I felt for the people. But since you're mentioning that incident, I can remember maybe my first year at Wade. And one of our readers, uh, the students read and it was in a play form, The Diary of Anne Frank. And my students really got into that, and the sadness that they felt about this Jewish girl, The Diary of Anne Frank; they enjoyed reading that so and felt so sad about it, until, like I said, it was in play form, written in a play form. Uh, I had an aide, Mrs. Calfee, she later became the secretary at Wade, she said-I said, "You know, I'd like for my sixth graders to give this as a play." It was long, it was very long. Ms. Calfee was so neat. She typed that up for us and ran off copies and made a booklet for my kids to participate that wanted to give a play. And uh, my kids really got into that. They worked hard. And I can remember there was a little girl, her father was at Bluefield State, he'd just gone to Bluefield State, he was a English professor. And I don't know the child's name now, but she took the part of Anne. She got into that, she loved it. And I can remember Mary Rucker took a part-I forgot-the Germans, no, it was a Jewish lady. But she portrayed-, and Mary took that part, and another little boy took the friend of Anne Frank. And

those kids, they done everything themselves. They provided everything for the stage setting, their clothes, the type of clothes they were to wear, and everything. So, they were so good at it. Until we decided to have the play. And it took us a week because we didn't have enough—we couldn't seat all of the grades at Wade at that time, in the auditorium, so we'd have to take about three grades maybe, or two grades at a time. And we had that play for a whole week. And it was good. And uh, my friend that I told you about that was teaching at Bluefield State, we even had him-, made sure he came over to see the play. They invited their parents. Uh, I had some students that were such good students, they knew how to—when they invited the parents, they decided they were going to entertain them, set up a uh...uhm, serve them. And they brought their cookies and they brought their crystal, they brought everything. They made their punch. And one little girl brought her mother's lace tablecloth. And it was after the play the parents came in and had-, enjoyed their refreshments. So, they really got into the play. And it was neat.

Later on, at the Barter Theater, Anne-, The Diary of Anne Frank was shown. So [inaudible] I had a pretty neat relationship with all of my principals. So, I told him about it. And I told him my kids wanted to go. So, they went. [chuckling] And they enjoyed the play so at the Barter Theater. Oh yes, and they ate at the Martha Washington Inn, and they enjoyed that. And they said the next day, "Miss Montgomery, can we go again?" So, they really enjoyed it.

AB: Was that an integrated school? (MM: Wade?) Wade (MM: Yes) And the cast of The Diary of Anne Frank was an integrated cast, both black and white kids that were participating in it?

MM: Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.

RW-N: Have you had any uh—let me stick to the war thing for a moment. We asked you to, to reflect on World War II. What, what would your reflections be about the Korean War, the

Vietnam War after that?

MM: Mmmh. I, I, I don't know. I can't say too much of what I thought at that time about it. And, looked like people didn't talk about those two wars as much as they did the other wars, except, let's see, the Vietnam War. I had a friend-, no, another one of my cousins-, had a son that was involved in the Vietnam War. And it really affected him, because I think that's when people really were introduced to drugs. And somehow or the other, Sammy took up the drug habit. And after he came home, he couldn't shake that. And uh, he went to New Jersey, to Patterson, New Jersey, to live. And later on, he died of an overdose. He was missing for days and they couldn't find him, and later his body was found in someone's basement. So, that was a sad incident, because this was one of the cousins that I said we were all treated like brothers and sisters, and it was her son and it just about killed her.

RW-N: In, in your speaking of what happened in this country with the drug culture, if I can use that terminology, uh, we'd like to ask you about two social movements that have also occurred during these years. One is the Civil Rights Movement and one is the Women's Movement, so we can speak about the Civil Rights uh, Movement. Uh, when you, when I even just use that phrase, what kinds of things does it bring to your mind?

MM: Of course, when I think about the Civil Rights Movement, you know, Dr. Martin Luther King instantly comes to mind. And how he brought about the bus boycott and what not. And I can remember that greatly. But uh, I don't know, somehow around here we talked about that, too. Uh, there was an article in the paper not too long ago. I'm, I'm still going back to Bluefield State alumni and the people that come home. Uh, in May, the last part of May, I think it was. And we had the last gathering...yeah, it was around gradua-, commencement time, we had the

gathering of alumni, people...somehow or another, people that attended Bluefield State still love to come back here whenever there is an opportunity. And the night that we had the banquet, there was a fellow that came back and I've forgotten his name now, because I didn't know him. But anyway, he wrote an article—he, he said he was one of the Tuskegee Airmen. And he mentioned that uh, getting on the train there was uh, how shall I phrase it? Uh, section where black was to get on, and where white was to get on. And I said, "Dorothus, do you remember that?" We couldn't remember. We, we often went down when the troops came so—Dorothus couldn't remember. Dorothus said, "There's only one place to get on the train." I said, "Well, he mentioned it in his article." So we disputed him. And we didn't know him, but we were talking amongst ourselves. We said, "That wasn't right." And then, uh, she said, "You know what? Even though we couldn't eat in the lunch room," she said, "they didn't segregate in the train station or the bus terminal." And to my recollection, they didn't. But my cousins in New Jersey said they did. But she or I could not remember that they did. And so we just decided this fellow was wrong. And so, you mentioned civil rights. Well, at that time, maybe I was looking for jobs then, and I remember one of my teachers telling me, Mr. Cardwell, about...he didn't-, I didn't set up an interview. I was sort of young then and immature. He told me to make sure to go for an interview, go to Martinsville, Virginia, for an interview. This was before I even got a job teaching. And uh, go speak with the superintendent. Well, I know the bus terminal must not have been segregated, because I did, I went for that interview. And in Virginia, you know, they did have separate facilities. And I got off the bus in Roanoke, and went right in the wrong facility because I wasn't thinking. And I came out, then it occurred to me that I wasn't supposed to be in there, but I'd already been. [laughing] And uh, I remember little things like that happening. So I

thought it was a good thing that happened, the boycott and what not. And I really believe that it achieved quite a bit.

RW-N: Do you recall when you were young um, in, in the days of segregation um—how, how do you recall feeling about that, when you were younger?

MM: I don't remember thinking too much. I guess it didn't really, when I was young, it didn't have a big impact on me. Because like I said, we didn't think, too—I can remember the bus terminal, we'd go down there a lot, and the train station. But I know we were affected by not being able to eat in restaurants. We didn't feel too good about that. Because I, I don't know, I guess I must-, apparently I didn't travel a lot during that time to worry about it. But the people that did travel, I think they took snacks and lunches with them. But apparently I didn't travel that much.

RW-N: You don't remember feeling angry about it particularly when you were younger?

MM: Not really.

RW-N: Uh, did that change at all, for you?

MM: Well, maybe, maybe I thought differently about it as I grew up, but I don't remember getting just terribly angry. Because I guess it was something that we had accepted earlier. We didn't like it, but you know.

RW-N: In, in, uh, in both, I think it's fair to say that in the Civil Rights Movement and in the Woman's Movement, uh, one of the things those movements are described as kind of making people more conscious, more aware (MM: Right) of circumstances of their lives. Would you say that that was true with the Civil Rights Movement for you, that what you were not aware of, didn't think about, didn't remember whether it was segregated, that it made you more aware of

those issues?

MM: Uh, at that time, I don't think we thought too much about it. We just didn't-, I guess we were used to being taken care of. We didn't think much about it. Not at that time, until later, you know, there were more discussions and more in the paper. But growing up, we didn't, it didn't bother us.

RW-N: Now that you look back on it, you certainly think the Civil Rights Movement was a good movement?

MM: Oh, it was. It was; it should have happened. It should have happened earlier.

RW-N: Do you think segregation of schools has been helpful? I'm sorry, desegregation of schools has been helpful?

MM: In one sense, yes. And in another sense, no. In the sense that I think it's helpful, is that the children are getting uh...how shall I say it? They are getting materials and they're involved with materials that they did not have before. Because some of the schools didn't have all of the materials the white schools had, books and what not. Uh, they were given little books and so forth, castoffs, handouts, hand-offs and stuff like that. But uh, in one sense it's good, and in another sense it's not. So, I guess it just balances out. Because I know we gave-, the black teachers gave a lot of attention to our students, to make sure they behaved themselves. And that's not always true in integrated schools. Sometimes they get pushed back in a corner if they are problem children. And it's better to just push 'em aside and forget about them, than to try to discipline them, in that sense.

RW-N: And you think that, that happens too often to black children, is more likely to happen?

MM: It happens a lot.

RW-N: Mmm-hmm. Did you, have you ever had many white friends in your life? Or acquaintances?

MM: I have a few white friends. Like I said, when we first moved over on this section, the only first, was, was—white lived around. And I still have, still a friend, one that lived nearby, Eva Jones. We see each other, ever so often we bump into each other. She still calls me by my nickname. [chuckling] And uh, last time I saw her, she gave me her address to come to see her.

RW-N: Do you go in and out of white people's homes?

MM: Well, I have.

RW-N: Have you ever stayed overnight in a white person's home? This is one of Ancella's questions. [laughter]

MM: I'm trying to think.

RW-N: She's frequently asked this question of other women and....[laughing]

MM: Now, I can't remember. But I had a lot of white friends at Wade, see white teachers, we were good friends. And uh, I'll give you a good example of one that I thought wasn't my friend. And it was real funny; it's the funniest thing. We can laugh about it now. Uh, three sixth-grade teachers, we all worked together as a whole, at Wade, [clears throat] excuse me. I thought she didn't like me because I was black, but I found out later it wasn't the case. It was just that uh, I don't know. She didn't want my children to be ahead of hers. [chuckle] But I didn't know that at the moment. Because like I said, we had that play. And she thought, well, she didn't have a play. And she was just a little jealous-hearted. If my kids got a little bit more recognition than hers, and uh...

RW-N: How did you work that out? Did you two...

MM: How did I work that out? (RW-N: How did the two of you?) Let me see. We had a principal, and we talk about him a lot now too; Michael McPherson came to Wade. And he didn't

want anybody to think that he wasn't, he was prejudiced or anything.

RW-N: And he's a white man, he was a white man?

MM: And he was...he was a good principal, but he was a hot-headed person, too. I don't think he was prejudiced. But he knew the situation existed between Judy Kiser and myself. And then there was another fellow that was with us, he just, he just wasn't going to...he was just being right in the middle of us. But he would have, [inaudible] and I remember, I don't know, something came up on the playground, and I thought Judy was being really, really prejudiced toward a girl that was in her room. And I said something about it. It was Judy's student, not mine. And I think we had some words that got back to Michael McPherson. He had all three of us in the office, all three sixth-grade teachers. "I'm not going to let this happen," blah, blah, blah. But uh, it wasn't that she was so much prejudiced, she just didn't want me to do things that she hadn't done or I had. And I didn't find that out until after we had retired. And we all, [clears throat], excuse me, they invited all the ex-teachers back to Wade. They usually every year at Thanksgiving time for lunch. And I went one year—Judy and I never did find out. We always talked later on and everything, but I knew she had this little peculiar feeling toward me. Uh, I went one year and the second year I didn't go back to the lunch. And then a lady that lives down the street from me here, she's a substitute, was a substitute teacher. And she said, "Mary, you know what?" I said, "What?" She said, "Judy called up wondering where you were." I can't believe Judy missed me. She said, "She's been asking about you, are you well, where are you." 'Cause we usually bump into each other at Kroger's store. We'd, we were always friendly toward each other and speak. She just had this little thing about not letting my kids get ahead of hers. And so uh, so this lady asked me again, "Mary, have you seen Judy? She's still asking about you." And I said, "No." And then I couldn't believe that when I did finally run into Judy Kiser,

she was so glad to see me. She ran up and hugged me. I said, "I can't believe this is Judy." So I knew it was just a thing, she didn't want my-, me doing more with my kids than she was doing with hers and she wasn't really prejudice.

**AB:** Uh, you spoke a moment ago about talking to the teacher about the way the teacher was treating a student. Did you ever feel that a black student was being mistreated? And did you feel it was important for you to speak up in behalf of those students?

**MM:** If I saw a black child being mistreated, I'm going to speak up. Just like I said about uh, the child that I thought she was coming down too hard on, that was on the playground; that was Judy. And I spoke up, I spoke up to the principal. And let me see, something else. I don't know if that was the same instance or some—I know, there was another case. So you got me to talking and I run my mouth. (AB: It's all right; it's great) Uh, we were depart—we decided that no one wanted to departmentalize. Then we decided to departmentalize, and McPherson was there then. We really put him on a spot. We really had him going. So my children were in Judy's room for math; she was the math teacher. She loved math. And she would-, she'd really come down hard on my kids if they did any little thing, and she was coming down hard on them that day. And I don't know what they had done, something. And she had called for the principal to come to the room. Well, our rooms were next door to each other; this is her room and this is my room. And they were in line to come back; it was time for them to change classes and I'd opened my door for them to come in. When they saw me open my door—they knew she had sent for the principal. They scooted out under her arm and all of 'em came in my room. She was real upset with them. And he came up there. They thought he was going to spank 'em. So they got in my room for me to speak up for them. [chuckle] So, he didn't, he didn't that day, he really didn't discipline 'em. But I called him. I called him at

home that night, and I told him how I felt that sometimes she mistreated my students. And like I said, he was a hot head. And uh, we had just-, I had another friend that taught at Wade, Brenda Brooks. Brenda had just got through-, oh, Brenda loved to clean her room and make it look pretty. She had really done a big job. She'd even scrubbed the—we weren't supposed to do that, though. She'd scrubbed around the baseboard and all that kind of stuff. He came the next morning. He was so angry after I called him. He said, when he came in, "I am going to move every one of you all. All of you are going to change rooms." And I said, "Oh, gosh, what have I started?" And I knew Brenda was going to go crazy. So I said, "Let me get him off to the side." I couldn't talk. He wouldn't listen. I said, "Mr. McPherson, don't have everybody to change rooms. Let us keep these same rooms." I said, "Brenda's going to be crying, she's just got her room spotless." [laughing] You couldn't tell him anything, so, he moved us all about. And the same fellow, he took us—he was pretty neat, although he was a hot headed principal. He took us all to-, the 4th and the 6th graders, he took us all to uh, Williamsburg, all the students. I think we were there about three days. So it was a nice trip for the students.

RW-N: Did you ever have any women administrators, principals?

MM: My last year, my last year I had a woman principal, Gail Poschak. She was very good.

RW-N: Your very last year?

MM: My last year.

RW-N: She was a white woman?.

MM: She was white.

RW-N: And she was a good administrator?

MM: She was very good. She was uh, strict, but she was down-to-earth, and you could talk with

her. Most of the principals have been very nice. Yeah, she was a good administrator.

AB: Uh, we started talking earlier about the movements, Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement. Did you have any feeling for the Women's Movement when it developed?

MM: Uh, yes. The women's movement, I thought, uh, I didn't, I didn't—some people didn't approve of it. But uh, I didn't disapprove. I thought it was time that women get recognition.

AB: Why did people not approve? Do you remember?

MM: Oh, a lot of people disapproved of it. They thought a women's job was to be just at home, take care of her family and what not. Women shouldn't really leave the home and work outside of the home, that her place was with her children. So I think this came about as a change, that you do have women uh, out in the work place, not always at home. And they could do both.

RW-N: What do you see as the goals of the Women's Movement? That women had, had more freedom to work outside the home if they wanted...?

MM: And, and women working outside of the home, women getting recognition in their jobs for what they do, and that sort of thing.

RW-N: Now, when I have read history books and also talked to many people in the black community, uh, frequently I had—well, black women have, have very often worked outside of the home anyhow, (MM: Yes) so that that's not an issue so much for black women. How do you feel about that? Was that just a white women's issue, because it was white women of middle class who didn't work outside of the home?

MM: I don't know. Because like I said, like you said, black women have always, most of the time men were unable to find work. And they have been most of the time, the sole supporters for their family.

RW-N: But you, you apparently see that as reasonable for any women, any woman (MM: Sure), black or white (MM: right) in between or whatever. (MM: No problem) Did you ever uh, do anything active for-, to support the women's movement?

MM: Not that I can think of.

RW-N: Have you done anything indirectly, by speaking out at meetings or...?

MM: No. No.

RW-N: Do you think that in your sorority that there's any way in which the sorority deliberately tries to help develop women, develop young girls?

MM: Yes, because as of now, the Secretary of Labor is a black woman, and she's also a Delta. And we supported her. We were asked to write letters asking that she be confirmed and what not. And I think we did, most of us, most of the sorority.

AB: But the projects you undertake here in, in Bluefield are not directed towards women, I mean as a sorority? Scholarships...

MM: Yes, yes, yes, we give out, Deltas give out scholarships. We give out at least, I think there's Tazewell County we give a scholarship to, Mercer County, and there's another....McDowell. McDowell, Mercer, and Tazewell, we give out three get scholarships.

AB: To girls? (MM: to girls) Always to girls.

MM: Uh-huh.

RW-N: I have a couple of general questions. Earlier on we talked about your sense of accomplishment in your life. I want to turn that around. I want to ask you uh, what things in your life, when you look back on it, have been less than satisfactory, or might you change, if you had the freedom to change it?

MM: Well, the onliest thing I can think of was less than satisfactory that I had to wait such a long time to get a teaching job. But, it was a good thing, because I think I benefitted a lot from working at the hospital. I became a more mature person.

RW-N: And I think you have described that to us, (MM: Yes) and that process. Is there anything that you would change about yourself, uh, when you think about yourself as, as the kinds of things that you've done in your life, is there anything that you said, "Gee, I wish I had done better or hadn't done that?" Anything stick out in your mind?

MM: I can't think of anything else. [inaudible]

RW-N: You're completely satisfied with yourself?

MM: Not that I'm completely satisfied, but I can't really think of a thing that I would change.

RW-N: Yeah, mm-hmm. So, it sounds like in general....

MM: I've, I've accepted who I am.

RW-N: You've accepted who you are?

MM: Yes.

RW-N: And you're fairly content with your life these days?

MM: I certainly am.

RW-N: Could we ask you about where you see your life going in the future?

MM: Who knows? [laughing] Who knows?

RW-N: Do you have any dreams, aspirations?

MM: No, I just probably want to travel more. (RW-N: Uh-huh) I would like to uh, probably visit some European cities or just do a little traveling.

RW-N: Has most of your traveling so far been in this country?

MM: Yes, just been, you know, fun trips.

RW-N: Uh-huh. And do you travel alone or do [inaudible; overlapping voices]

MM: No, I usually uh, there's a group, there's, we have a 3A club here in Bluefield, and they offer a lot of special trips. And uh, we also, we went to a luncheon, a lot of my friends and I, a couple of days ago. It was RSVP, Retired Volunteer Seniors Program. They offer quite a few trips. And they have the first annual luncheon. And they have planned quite a few trips, and I plan to take advantage of the trips that they're offering. I take advantage of the 3A trips, groups, because everything is so well planned, when you go on groups of trips.

RW-N: Yeah. [machine beeping] So you go on several trips a year?

MM: Yes.

RW-N: So at this point in your life, you uh, you're enjoying retirement, you're traveling, you see some family, you have some friends who you spent time with. . .

MM: Yes.

RW-N: Your sorority is very important to you. (MM: Yes) And the other organizations that you belong to, you certainly; your church plays a role in your life.

MM: Yes, it does.

RW-N: And what other kinds of organizations?

MM: Bluefield State Alumni Association.

RW-N: The Alumni Association, of course. Right. Do you see your life right now as pretty full?

MM: I really do.

RW-N: Pretty satisfying?

MM: I'm enjoying my life. (RW-N: Mmm-hmm) I'm able to do some of the fine things that I've

always wanted to do. I miss teaching some. But I enjoy having time for myself. And sometimes I'm a sleepyhead. I enjoy if I want to stay in bed until 10 o'clock, sleeping late. I've always been a sleepyhead. My mother used to let me sleep on Saturdays. I enjoy reading.

RW-N: What, what things about your life should we have asked about and we forgot?

MM: I really and truly think that you have not missed a thing! [laughing] You have been, both of you, have been very thorough. My goodness. [Lots of laughter]

RW-N: There's nothing else you're dying to tell us?

MM: No, I think I've told you everything. You know more about me than I do.

RW-N: Ancella, do you have anything that you want to . . .

AB: I, I don't think so. Uh, one question. Would you regard your days at Bluefield State as happy?

MM: They were. You know, they were. I wouldn't say they were fun days. They were just days that I went to school because I knew I was going to get a degree. I didn't, you know, I, like I said, at that time, I was quieter than I am now. I went to school and I took my classes and I came straight home.

RW-N: Sounds to me...

MM: I'm more outgoing than I was then. And now when we have alumni meetings and some of the people come back, some of the fellows tease me; they said, "I remember she wouldn't say anything to anybody. She wouldn't smile. We would pass her and she just would, her head thrown up in the air, going straight home." [laughter]

RW-N: So it sounds to me like you almost described yourself as blossoming more as you got older.

(MM: Yeah) Yes. And that has continued?

MM: I think so.

RW-N: Even though you've been without your mother, that still has continued?

MM: Right. I learned that you do what you have to do but life goes on.

RW-N: And you miss her but you still are happy these days?

MM: Right. Yes, I miss her very much.

RW-N: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MM: No, I think that's all.

RW-N: Okay.

**END OF INTERVIEWS**

# Dismissal Of Giles County Negro

Teachers Protested

## Legal Aid Is Being Sought

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — A legal fight shaped up Wednesday over the dismissal of Giles County's seven-member Negro public school staff this fall when the county's schools are totally integrated.

The six teachers and one principal have been told their the county's only Negro school — Bluff City high and elementary — is shut.

The State Pupil Placement Board acceded to the Giles request Tuesday that the county's 131 Negro students be placed in the white schools. Then the Negro schools would close.

### \$30,000 Savings

This would make Giles, a Southwest Virginia county bordering West Virginia, the first locality in the state to eliminate segregated schools. It also will effect a savings estimated at around \$30,000 annually for the county.

The Virginia Teachers Association, a professional organization for Negroes, is moving to get legal aid for the teachers.

Dr. J. Rupert Picott, executive secretary of the VTA, promised the teachers legal aid and assistance in securing employment. He met with them last week.

Picott wouldn't say so but presumably efforts will be made to secure jobs for the teachers on the Giles white faculty. Apparently additional white teachers have been hired to teach the Negroes.

### Jobs Abolished

School Supt. Paul E. Ahalt told the seven, with a combined total of more than 60 years' service in the Giles schools, that their jobs had been abolished by the school board last month.

Those who lost their jobs include: principal Laurence H. Leftwich and these instructors, Mary F. Montgomery, Sylvia D. Austin, and Sylvia J. Harvey, Mesdames Mary A. Franklin and Alma G. Spivey, and Hugh Woodliff.

NOTE

July 1997. These are copies of newspaper articles, given to us by Mrs. Montgomery. They are about the court case that Ms. Montgomery was involved in — and that is mentioned in her transcript

Virginian - Leader

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## Giles School Board Is Rapped For Discrimination Practice

School Superintendent P. Ahalt was in Roanoke yesterday conferring with attorneys on procedures that must follow as a result of the Federal Court ruling that the Giles County School Board discriminated against seven Negro teachers who were released last year when the schools were totally integrated.

Ahalt declined comment on the effect of Judge Thomas J. Michie's ruling, but noted that its import will have to be studied at a special meeting of the school board.

Although under the order Negro teachers are not guaranteed jobs if they apply for them and in the event there are other teachers being consid-

ered who have better qualifications, it requires Ahalt to notify those of the seven teachers who are qualified or experienced of any vacancy in the school system occurring within one year from the date of entry of the order.

Judge Michie said the order will not be entered for a week or 10 days

to allow either the plaintiff teachers and the Virginia Teachers Association, Inc., or the defendants to make objections.

There is an indication, however, that neither the plaintiffs nor defendants plan to appeal the District Court ruling.

Under the court order Ahalt will be required to write to any and all of the Negro teachers in the event of a vacancy occurring where one of them has the requisite qualifications. If the teacher or teachers express an interest in the job, then Ahalt must evaluate each of the plaintiffs and consider them together with other applicants.

Should he decide that an applicant outside of the plaintiffs is better qualified, then he must send the court a written statement of his reasons for so doing and the court would decide whether the superintendent's decision was arbitrary.

If the plaintiffs still are not satisfied, they would present evidence at a hearing as would Ahalt. Then the court would decide if the teacher should be

In the hearing at Charlottesville in March, lawyers for the school board and Superintendent Ahalt had contended that there was no discrimination and that the Negro teachers were not rehired because their qualifications were not as good as those of the white teachers.

On this Michie said, that although Ahalt, "appeared to be an excellent administrator dedicated to the best interests of Giles County School system" there is evidence that "his action deprived those teachers of their rights under the 14th Amendment."

"Although I sympathize with a school administrator who has this very thorny problem thrust upon him after what appears to have been a long and bitter battle over consolidation of schools" Michie said, "my duty to assist in the transition from segregated to integrated schools requires  
(See GILES Page 6)

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Giles...

page 6

that I direct him to re-examine his decision". that Ahalt's normal policy in closing schools was to transfer teachers rather than to consider them as unemployed. He concluded then that it was the Superintendent's policy to evaluate right of the seven Negroes to continued employment in terms of vacancies existing in the system rather than by comparison of their effectiveness with other teachers.

Michie said that this procedure was too restrictive and that due to the fact that considering their certifications only, some of the plaintiffs were better qualified than the teachers hired, it seems like race was the real ground for a change in hiring

The  
**ROANOKE** TIMES

4 Sections—48 Pages

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Roanoke, Virginia

April 7, 1966

# Giles Ordered To Re-Employ 7 Teachers

By BEN BEAGLE  
Times Staff Writer

A federal appeals court ruled Wednesday that Giles County must reinstate seven Negro teachers who were fired when the county integrated its schools and there were indications the teachers will seek their old jobs.

"I would assume that all would give consideration to it," said Dr. J. Rupert Picott, executive secretary of the Virginia Teachers Association, one of the plaintiffs in the original suit.

Dr. Picott said, "I know that at least one" will apply but he said he hasn't talked with all of the teachers.

The ruling from the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals remanded the case to the U.S. District Court for Western Virginia, in which Judge Thomas L. Michie had entered the original order.

The appeals court said the teachers, who left the system when Giles County totally integrated its schools in 1964, were "discharged because of their race" and "they are entitled to a mandatory injunction requiring their reinstatement."

Judge Michie's original order had ruled the teachers were discriminated against because of race but it did not order their reinstatement. It said their applications should be considered when there were vacancies in the system and ordered the superintendent to let the seven teachers know when such vacancies occurred.

The appeals court said the order "did not go far enough."

It left intact, however, a provision which would not require the displacement of current teachers as a method of giving the seven their jobs back.

The order said, however, that the court believed "normal turnover" of teachers in the system by September would make such positions available. It said it believed the school superintendent's faculty requirements will be "sufficiently flexible" to allow rehiring.

Dr. Picott said after the district court amends its order to comply with the higher court's order, "I would assume . . . that we could contact these people (teachers)" about reapplying for the positions.

He called Wednesday's decision "a total victory for the Virginia Teachers Association and its members. Through the federal courts, Virginia has set a basic example of the entire United States in the treatment of professional educators."

"This is a case for the other teachers in Virginia where Ne-

Continuation, not available here

# Hearing Set In May On GILES

TEACHER REINSTATEMENT

## 3 Of 7 Want To Get Jobs Back

ROANOKE, Va. (AP)—At least three of seven Negro teachers who lost their jobs when Giles County desegregated in 1964 apparently want the jobs back, and there will be a U. S. District Court hearing of the case again in May, lawyers here said Thursday.

There might be more than three seeking reinstatement, according to the lawyers.

Which jobs they will get may be a matter for argument before the court.

### Decision Reversed

Last month the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a lower court, ordering reinstatement in a decision which Negroes regard as a landmark in faculty status legislation.

U. S. District Judge Thomas Michie of Charlottesville, who heard the case in Roanoke, cannot set an earlier rehearing date because of an earlier scheduled trip to Europe.

Not clear yet is whether or not the teachers who lost their jobs will get back pay.

Reportedly seeking their jobs back at this time are Miss Mary F. Montgomery, Mrs. Alma G. Spivey and Mrs. Mary Franklin.

### No Reinstatement

Last summer Judge Michie ruled the county had discriminated against the teachers, but he did not order reinstatement. But Judge Michie directed the Giles School Board to offer them jobs as openings appeared.

All seven teachers have been teaching elsewhere.

The appeals body decided Judge Michie's ruling did not go far enough and ordered the district court to amend its December order.

The classroom desegregation battle is in many areas now largely a matter of faculty mixing and faculty rights rather than pupil mixing and pupil rights.

# Giles Discriminates, Federal Judge Rules

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Federal Judge Thomas J. Michie ruled Monday that Giles County School authorities were guilty of discrimination in not hiring seven Negro teachers when the county desegregated its public school system at the start of the 1964-65 term.

He issued an injunction "against further discrimination in carrying out personnel practices by the school system, coupled with a system of preferential hiring to protect the interests of the individual teachers."

There were only seven Negro teachers under contract in Giles County at the time the complete desegregation of public schools was voluntarily effected in the mountainous Southwest Virginia area, where Negroes constitute only approximately 400 of a total population of 17,000. None was retained.

## Circumstances

While "the interests of the individual plaintiffs in this litigation would be best served by placing them as nearly as possible in the positions that they occupied immediately before their discharge," Judge Michie said circumstances dictated against entering such an order.

He pointed out such a directive would require a re-evaluation of the seven Negro teachers in comparison with all other county teachers and also that the seven teachers have accepted other employment "and the record is by no means clear as to how many . . . would now accept jobs in the Giles County school system were they offered."

## The Procedure

Because the plaintiffs did not insist on such an order, Judge Michie said he was ordering Giles County school authorities "to carry out the following procedure in employing new teachers for a period of one year, from the date of the entry of the final order in this case:

"Upon the occurrence of any vacancy in the teaching staff superintendent (P. E. Ahalt) will write to each of the individual plaintiffs who are certified or experienced in the area of the vacancy inquiring whether that individual would be available to fill the vacant position and would like to be considered for it.

"Should any affirmative replies be received, the superintendent will be directed to consider the qualifications of that individual . . .

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"Should any affirmative replies be received, the superintendent will be directed to consider the qualifications of that individual or individuals together with the qualifications of any other persons who have applied for the position.

## Written Statement

"Should his decision be to offer the position to an applicant other than one of the individual plaintiffs, he is to notify the plaintiffs who have applied of his decision and submit a written statement of his reasons to this court as soon as possible.

"The court will then review his decision on the basis of his statement and either affirm his decision, in which case an offer may be made to the applicant selected, or will ask him to reconsider if it appears that his action was arbitrary. Any such statement will of course remain completely confidential for the protection of the individuals involved.

". . . By this procedure those

(Turn To Page 2, Col. 8).

Remainder  
not available