

Sammie Shavers Holmes
First Person Plural
Tape Summary
8 April 2021

Intro – Acadia Roher interviewing Sammie Shavers Holmes for First Person Plural via video conference on 8 April 2021.

AR Birth, parents?

SH Born in Little Rock, 20 February 1943
My mother was Alice Halliburton Shavers from Arkansas County, who came to Little Rock to attend Dunbar High School
My father was Wade James Shavers from Malvern, Arkansas
They met in Little Rock
Father was a student at Philander Smith College [came to Little Rock to attend Philander; ten years older than mother]

AR Siblings?

SH One brother, Wade, Jr., deceased
Another brother, Stanley Shavers, lives in Lincoln, Nebraska

AR Birth order?

SH Older brother was from father's first marriage, much older
I am the first of my mother's children
My brother is the baby

AR Middle child

SH Kind of, almost like the oldest because Wade Jr. was 21 years older

AR Out of house before you were born?

SH Yes

AR Experience as the oldest in the home?

SH My parents separated when mother was pregnant with brother
Just the three of us growing up
My brother was told he was the man of the house
I didn't necessarily feel like I was the oldest because brother was in charge of a lot, took that role seriously

- AR Team effort
- SH “Everything in my mother’s home was a team effort.”
- AR How did parents meet?
- SH Not positive, but think they met at Dreamland Ballroom on Ninth Street
Mother said they had balls all the time, like the Cotton Ball
Mother’s two sisters [Anne Lee Halliburton and Rosine Katherine Halliburton] came to Little Rock to attend Dunbar
Attended balls for fun
- AR Came from a farm in Arkansas County?
- SH Farm family, mother said they lived far from other people on 80 acres
Other family was around
- AR Wanted kids to attend Dunbar?
- SH My grandfather [Rose Halliburton] wanted to attend Arkansas Baptist College, it was a high school at the time
His father [James Halliburton] wouldn’t allow it, needed him to work on the farm
Both grandparents [Rose and Alice Payne Halliburton] were always set on kids attending school
Aunt Alma [Halliburton, married name unknown] went to school in Arkansas County [at Emanuel Institute]
Grandmother and grandfather wanted as many kids to attend Dunbar or other schools as possible
- AR Stayed with family?
- SH Mother stayed with brother, Uncle Clement [Halliburton], and his wife [Minnie Mae Kimmons Halliburton] when she first came
Her younger sisters did, as well
Mother was older
After getting jobs, they lived in rooming houses on High Street (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive)
- AR Mother’s work?
- SH My mother worked in food service her whole life
During senior year at Dunbar was at church when a tornado came through

5 mins

- SH She was blown out into the street and injured, collarbone broken
After recovering was not able to go back to school and finish last semester
Worked at ammunition plant in Jacksonville [during World War II], many women were working there
Mother was here in the 1930s, came in 1932, so that was not the first job she had
She tried to get Aunt Rosine to come, she worked one day at the plant and came back and found another job
Mother worked in food service her whole life other than that
My parents separated but never divorced
Went to stay with her parents in Humnoke, Arkansas for Stanley's birth
Grandmother [Alice Payne Halliburton] delivered Stanley
Grandmother wanted to keep him, but mother wouldn't allow it
After six weeks, mother returned to Little Rock
Sister Anne had a job for her, a place to stay, childcare lined up while she worked
Worked at restaurant, Old King Cole, at 6th and Broadway
Spent over 20 years at restaurant, Lido Inn, at Roosevelt and Main
Ended her career at Capitol Club in downtown Little Rock
My husband and I were living in Germany, mother came to visit
At 64 years old, decided to retire and move in with the family in Germany
Wonderful for me because I was in school and working, happy to have her help
- AR Intergenerational family on a base abroad? Common?
- SH Don't think it's common, but does happen
My former husband was in the military for 23 years, retired in 1977 or 1978 [confirmed 1977]
A few families had parents staying full time, many parents visiting
- AR Relationship with father?
- SH I was a baby when they separated
My father left Little Rock, went to Hot Springs, then New Orleans, ended up in Detroit
Tried to get my mother to come with him at every stop
When we were small, he always called and sent chocolates and movie projectors with film
I didn't think about him much
As I got older, I didn't like him that much so didn't have a relationship with him
Brother had real desire to know him, I did not
"I am a mother's child, and my mother was enough for everything for me."
- AR Why didn't mother join him?

SH My father became abusive, that's why she left him and went to her parents
She was not going to go back with him
He continued to call
Several years later he almost convinced her to come to Detroit and bring us

10 mins

It was a Sunday afternoon, they were talking on the phone and mother heard "the old Wade" again and cut off communication
Father's mother was so angry mother didn't go with him, spent very little time with Stanley and me
She thought they were going to get back together
Father was an alcoholic, womanizer
Worked at the post office in Little Rock
My mother was not set up for that to be her kind of marriage
Mother came from a large family, three boys and nine girls
That wasn't what she had planned for her married life, never remarried

AR Had support network to catch her

SH Had my grandmother and grandfather
My brother and I would go to Humnoke every summer until about 12 or 13
We stopped going when we were old enough to go to camp, baseball
Aunt Laura [Halliburton Montgomery] had a big family, canned vegetables, fruit, meat and sent them to mother on a regular basis
She had a strong support network

AR Summer in Humnoke?

SH It was wonderful, loved our grandparents
By the time I was five, grandfather lost his sight and one leg, don't know if it was diabetes
My grandmother was small, energetic, hard working woman
Always tried to get up earlier than she did and never made it
Pumped the well water
She had seven acres of farmland across the street and raised crops
Brother usually at Aunt Laura's playing with cousin Curtis [Montgomery]
I helped my grandmother
Brother and I played together a lot down there
Aunt Madora [Halliburton Sharp] came one summer and brought her grandchildren, first time I met them

AR Schools attended?

SH I started at Old South End where South End Boys Club is now
“Old, ragged, wonderful building”
Elementary school on top floor
Washington Elementary opened was finished in the second semester of my 1st grade,
completed elementary school there
Went to Dunbar Junior High School
Central High Crisis was the year I finished 9th grade
Attended 10th grade at J. C. Cook [High School] in Sweet Home, Arkansas
11th grade at Horace Mann
Married the first time after 11th grade
Graduated from Burt High School in Clarksville, Tennessee

AR Moved to Tennessee between junior and senior year?

SH Finished junior year, got married in July
Moved to Hopkinsville, Kentucky near Fort Campbell on TN/KY border
Clarksville, Hopkinsville, and Fort Campbell are all close by

AR First husband? How did you meet?

15 mins

SH Charles Eugene Rodgers, 85 years old, retired US Army Ranger, trainer for the Ranger school
He was home from Marine Corps on the way to join the 101st Airborne in Fort Campbell
Met him while walking home from school one day and there he was
Started talking, never dated because Mother did not allow it
Probably met in 1959 because married in 1960
At that time, no cell phones and had to pay for long distance calls
Started writing back and forth, a few phone calls
One week he came home and asked my mother if he could marry me
Mother fell down in the chair, said she would let him know in two weeks, don't know what that was about
Asked if I wanted to get married, still had to finish senior year of high school
Said yes because he was about to leave for Germany for two years
I didn't have a plan, just knew I wanted to go to Philander [Smith College] and be either a teacher or nurse
She gave me a beautiful wedding
Moved to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, about 16 miles from Fort Campbell
All three of my children were born there [Fort Campbell]
Left there and went to Florida where he was a trainer for the Army Rangers
We lived in Germany five years
Had a pretty good life
Returned from Germany in 1976

Assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas, but schools were not good there for military kids
No room in the schools in nearby Manhattan, Kansas
Everybody who could had moved there
Husband retired then after 23 years in the military
Moved back to Little Rock, kids went to Hall High School, which was not good

AR Mid-70s?

SH We were used to military where parents were responsible for behavior of children if disrespectful to teachers, fighting
In military, if parents couldn't discipline their kids they would be sent back home
Bad scene at Hall

AR Culture of military and parental discipline?

SH The school had its place, but if school couldn't handle it would be turned over to parents first
Especially overseas, the military did not tolerate people embarrassing America
If parents couldn't handle it, commanding officer would handle it
A mother and kids living near us in Germany were sent back to the U.S.

AR Before left Little Rock, lived in South End?

20 mins

SH Lived in Tuxedo Courts
In 11th grade at Horace Mann, not coming from school, but out walking

AR Tuxedo Courts right below Roosevelt [Road]?

SH Now built into a big apartment complex
When we moved there, Tuxedo Courts was a lot of upwardly mobile Black families
New at the time, white buildings, nice neighborhood
It stayed that way through the early 1960s
I got married in 1960, brother went to UAPB [University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff] in 1962
It became a very rough place

AR What happened?

SH People who are poor in spirit, have no plans, no family background to want to have more are left behind
My friend's [Leola MacFarlin] parents built a home
Many people used Tuxedo Courts as a launching pad

My mother could not move because had two children to get through school
People were there who were on their way out
Many now well-known people, their families lived there and moved on
In communities that become slums, people left there don't have a plan or any
background to make a plan

AR What was community like when you lived there?

SH Many of us skated on a concrete area in the middle of the Courts, called it "the
swimming pool," skated around and around all day
Where the church [Saint John Missionary Baptist Church] is now used to be Lido Inn
Broke my arm at 12 jumping the steps near there
Field to the side where people played baseball, that's where my brother was usually
Washington Elementary had baseball field
Family oriented place, upwardly mobile, people knew each other, cared about each
other
My husband grew up in a small community that was all family, and growing up in
Tuxedo Courts was almost the same thing

AR Mother eventually moved?

SH Mother moved to High Street/Martin Luther King [Drive] into a duplex after both kids
gone
Expenses were low in subsidized housing, paid small amount of rent, utilities weren't
much
After we were out of the way, moved out on her own, kept working

AR Moved to KY, what was it like living outside of Arkansas?

SH Almost the first time I had ever even been outside of Arkansas
Uncle Clement brought me to Chicago at age 15 for the summer
Went by train, stopped in Poplar Bluff, Missouri to visit friends of Mother's
Got back on train to Chicago and stayed with uncle and his wife for 2-3 weeks
Only out-of-state trip
After marriage, first time living out-of-state and away from mother and brother

25 mins

Hopkinsville was interesting
Only 17 ½ at the time, other people were 23 and 24
Met Alma Vaughn who was 18, became lifelong friends
Activities: skating rink next door to our apartment, drive out to Fort Campbell
I was really trying to go to school
When arrived in July, I went to Attucks High School up the street to enroll

They told that so many girls had gotten married to soldiers, not allowing them to go to school, would not accept me going to school

AR Why?

SH People used to have very backward ideas about married women going to school with single women and girls
Afraid of the single girls becoming more knowledgeable sexually from the married girls
“Sex, race, and religion: that’s America.”
Started trying to find another place to go to school
Somebody told me about Eagleton, Kentucky
Husband was always away at Fort Campbell, I was home with the car
Drove over the Eagleton and enrolled in school
On Monday, went to start school, only stayed a few days and couldn’t stay any longer
It was heartbreaking, so backward, felt too sorry for them to stay there

AR What were you noticing?

SH Ragged school building, less than 10 students
Teacher was not educated
They were extremely poor, extremely backward
Drove there in a big green and white 1954 Buick, felt terrible
It’s like a place that was left behind
Want to take a trip back sometime
Great-grandfather from Kentucky originally

AR Decided couldn’t stay?

SH No, there was just no way
Found an advertisement for the American School, a correspondence course
Took and completed and passed the correspondence course, thought I was all set
Applied to Austin Peay State College, said they could not accept the American School

30 mins

Told about Burt High School in Clarksville, Tennessee just before we moved onto the base at Fort Campbell
By now this is 1963, I should have graduated in 1961
It was just like being in school again
Principal called and got records from Horace Mann in Little Rock, waived the fee for being out of state
Best experience in the world, still go back for reunions
Started Austin Peay after graduation

- AR Still wanting to be a nurse or a teacher?
- SH No, definitely not a nurse because of blood
Would have enjoyed being a history or civic teacher, possibly English
I had a dream one night in Hopkinsville about a big fire and my mother was in it, I was promising her I would get school finished
I woke up and it stayed with me
Mother was adamant about me going to Philander, my father and half-brother went
Would have gone if had stayed
I was feeling so guilty about not finishing high school
At that point, just wanted to get my degree
- AR Went to college?
- SH Austin Peay, first school
Later attended UALR, completed 12 hours before having to go somewhere else
Went to school wherever I was and slowly built the hours
- AR Degree?
- SH University of Maryland, Business Management and Psychology
- AR Experience moving around, being home while husband was away?
- SH We always lived in the same place together except twice with Vietnam
Moving around was nice when I was young
Kids enjoyed it, would get into the back seat and start singing
Enjoyed moving around, meeting different people
Didn't live a lot of places
Lived in Fort Campbell, Kentucky for eight years
Florida was next
Germany for five years
The whole family loved Germany, traveling overseas
- AR Kids ages when moved overseas?
- SH Youngest, Sam, was going into 1st grade, Charles Elaine [Elaine Charles Rodgers, later changed to Fernand Elaine Charles Rodgers] into 4th grade, Earl going into 3rd grade
We went to Germany in 1971
Charles Elaine was 10 years old, must have been in 5th grade and Earl in 4th
- AR Daily life on the base?
- SH I worked

At Fort Campbell, I worked for telephone company in Clarksville, Tennessee at one period
Kids were small, so mostly did not work

35 mins

Worked at night, which I liked, but physically could not do it
Children were young, I got sick and had to give that up
Worked in Germany at a bank for almost 2 years
Worked as test proctor at the Army Education Center for 3 years
Lived on base in Schweinfurt in southern Germany, two hours from Frankfurt and three hours from Munich, southern rural Germany
Nice apartments, not crowded, American Youth Authority for the kids
It's home when you're there, it's what you know about
Most military wives didn't work and didn't go to school, I did both
Husband was a Staff Sergeant, an E7, before becoming First Sergeant
I would go to luncheons and one lady asked me about school and work in a negative way, trying to embarrass me in front of the Sergeant Major's wife
Many of the women looked down on that in the 1960s and 1970s

AR Thought you should just be in the home?

SH At home, volunteering, visiting
It has changed a lot now
Lot of military wives now working and going to school

AR What made you resilient to that pressure?

SH Being raised by my mother
My brother's wife is a law professor at University of Nebraska, facing some health issues, he's caring for her
"When you're raised by Mother, it's nothing"
Mother was not hard at all, just very consistent, we knew what the rules were, very loving
I did not have the need for approval and I still don't

40 mins

When you grow up in America between races like we did, you are among African American people but never become a part, around and friends with white people, but never become a part
My family, we like people, but never had the need to be accepted

AR Strong sense of self

SH Got that from grandmother, grandfather

AR Travel off base?

SH Mother and I used to go to the crystal factory
Bus for anywhere you wanted to go
Bought a lot of crystal
Trips to Berlin with neighbors whose family was from Berlin
Traveled to Austria
My daughter spoke four languages, passed away 25 years ago to cancer
She was the interpreter for the French class, Mother was the chaperone
Mother and Charles Elaine went to Paris at least twice, then to Copenhagen with friend,
Felecia
The family as a whole traveled a lot of places, like Rothenburg, Germany to museums,
Bad Kissingen for pottery, weekend driving through the countryside
Many roadside festivals where you could stop and buy and see things
Major places we traveled were Berlin and Paris
Did not get to go to England, still haven't

AR Any experiences that stood out to you?

SH When we went to the concentration camp, Dachau, that stands out
Berlin because it had been divided into east and west, clear differences
The countryside was beautiful
Jewish cemetery in Würzburg, only about 20 miles from Schweinfurt
Huge cemetery with huge stones, but not a Jews in Würzburg
"Man's inhumanity to man"

AR Conversation in Germany about the Holocaust at that time?

SH No, they didn't want to talk about it
Worked with Germans at the bank, they did not want to talk about it
My supervisor, Mr. Chibic [spelling may not be correct], was from Czechoslovakia,
remembered when he was a boy they would hear people at the end of the war going by
at night attempting to clear the concentration camp near his home, shooting people
along the way

45 mins

Some of the younger Germans didn't know about it, hidden history

AR Dachau was a museum?

- SH Yes, you can go to all of them, Dachau is still open
When you come to it, big monument in concrete, pictures of people coming on the trains, the ovens
Germany is trying to make up for what happened, but you can't really make up for that
I had a professor who was a German whose Catholic father was killed in a concentration camp because he helped Jews
- AR Was the U.S. telling this story when you were in high school?
- SH No
I took American history 1865 to the present and others, the whole truth about everything was glossed over, didn't talk about WWII, slavery, or Black people being in America
I learned it in elementary school, but high school, while segregated, used books not chosen by Black people
Black library on 16th and High Streets [Ivey Branch, named for Helen Booker Ivey, was a segregated library branch for African Americans], I lived at it
- AR Heard about this library
- SH It was wonderful, not big
"Big enough for somebody who knew nothing to learn a lot."
Learned a lot of history there
- AR What led to return to Little Rock?
- SH It was time for my ex-husband to rotate after three years
Nobody wanted to leave, kids wanted to stay, so he put in for two more years
I decided the children needed to get back to the States for schooling, but feel guilty now
Assigned to Fort Riley
Planned to go to Fort Riley, but it was not a place we wanted to take the children
He had option of retiring
- AR First husband not from Little Rock originally?
- SH He's originally from Carlisle, AR
Went to Dunbar High School and Saint Bartholomew
- AR Where did you settle after returning to Little Rock?
- SH At our house at 2016 Bragg Street
Before last Vietnam tour, came to Little Rock and had no housing
Stayed with mother and looked for houses
Had a friend, Carl Jones, who was in the Air Force, he and I used to walk all over the city

50 mins

We would go by an area near East 21st and Bragg, drove by and found an empty house for rent

Knocked on the neighbor's door [Barbara Phillips], have been friends for years now, called the owner from her house

Owner, Mr. Gaylor, had moved to southwest Little Rock

Rented the house, got settled in before ex-husband left for Vietnam

Bought the house next door when came back from Germany

AR First time husband went to Vietnam?

SH That was the second tour and last

AR Ever talk about that experience?

SH Yes, he talked about it a lot

After first tour, lived at Fort Campbell and he had nightmares

He had been injured on first tour

He and five people caught in friendly fire, he was hit in the leg, but others were killed

One of the reasons he has come out sane is because he got a chance to talk about it

Would wake up at night and we would talk

Had PTSD, still had it in Germany, saw a psychiatrist

Went to VA Hospital in Little Rock and got a good doctor, drugs made a difference

Vietnam was a terrible war, I didn't believe in it, we had no business there

At Fort Campbell, big going away parties during the war

At a party, saw a man walking around with his son on his shoulders, he was killed a few months later

Weekly *Army Times* had a list of everybody who was killed

AR Disagreeing with the war but sending husband to fight it?

SH Second time I tried to convince him to get out of the military

He wouldn't go against his contract

I wasn't against defending our country if it was really needed, just didn't think Vietnam was necessary

AR Rented the house in Little Rock, did you stay there?

SH We rented the house in August, then bought the house

55 mins

Mortgage was the same as the rent, \$94 a month
Offered house next door as well
We stayed there until Charlie returned from Vietnam
Left from that house to Germany

AR This was before Germany?

SH 1968 moved into the house and he went to Vietnam
1969 he stayed for a year in Vietnam, we were still in the house on Bragg Street
He got orders to Germany, we began making preparations to move
We were in Germany by 1971
Rented it out while away

AR He had retired?

SH We came back from Germany in 1976 to Bragg Street
He retired in 1977
Worked doing all kind of things
Went to the post office in 1977 or 1978

AR Kids were at Hall?

SH Sam started off at Pulaski Heights in the 6th grade
Earl Stanley started at Booker Junior High
Charles Elaine started at Hall, 10th grade

AR What were you doing at that time?

SH I went to UALR to finish last 30 hours
I got an offer from Kroger to be in their management training program, had to turn it down
Looked in newspaper, found secretary job at Department of Education
"I'm the kind of person, I get up and do things now. I don't put things off much."
Spoke with educational supervisor, got the job as secretary in Special Education
Took a job in Teacher Certification as an administrative assistant, a promotion
Stayed at Department of Education from 1977 to 1983
In 1983, went to work for the Division of Children and Family Services as the training coordinator for the juvenile centers in Wrightsville and Alexander
I procured trainers for the people who worked with children in and around the facilities
Charlie and I divorced in 1984
Morris [Holmes] and I married in 1989
Moved to Fort Worth, Texas with him

60 mins

AR How did you meet Morris?

SH At the Department of Education

AR His career?

SH He graduated Philander [Smith College] and worked at Horace Mann as an English teacher for 7 years
Vice Principal at an opportunity school, West Side
Completed Masters
Principal of Central [High School]
Doctorate at Fayetteville
Returned to Central High
Department of Education
Don Roberts, former director of Department of Education, recruited him for Associate Superintendent for Instruction in Fort Worth, Texas
Superintendent of Schools in New Orleans, 1993 to 1998
Did you live in New Orleans?

AR Yes, finished high school in New Orleans

SH Which school?

AR Parkview [High School] to Ben Franklin [High School]
Changed a lot since Katrina

SH Haven't been there since Katrina
When did you graduate?

AR 2005

SH Just before Katrina

AR Last graduating class

SH Still standing?

AR Still there, but now charter school

SH Whole different system
Here in Little Rock has become different

AR From New Orleans, came back here?

SH My mother was living at 624 East 21st, one of our houses up the street from the first Bragg Street house
Stayed with Mother for six months
During that time she lost her sister, Aunt Rosine
We were looking for a house
Princess Diana died
My daughter died
Morris' father died
We told realtor we wanted a house in the Quapaw [Quarter]
My father worked for someone who lived on Broadway when he was working at [narrator correction: attending] Philander Smith College, always had it in my head that I would live in the Quapaw Quarter
At first didn't see the house at 22nd and Broadway, trees too thick, but we came back and looked, that's when we got it

65 mins

AR Done a lot to the house?

SH Moved in November, big tornado came in January of the next year
I had planned a big 85th birthday party for Mother, went ahead and held the party
Lucky didn't have much damage
We've been here ever since

AR Separated from first husband in early 1980s?

SH Charlie and I divorced In 1984

AR 1984?

SH I don't believe in separation
I lived through all the stuff other people separate on
He was a good person, but it was time to divorce
I was married at 17 ½, never meant to last a lifetime
On my own for five years
First husband married again, was married 32 years before his wife died

AR Being on your own?

SH Son had finished high school, was still in Little Rock
While my husband and I finished paperwork and he got a new apartment, I helped him move
When the divorce was final, I came home, got in the bed and relaxed

I started Masters of Public Administration program at UALR, did not complete
Spent time with Mother, if either of us was going anywhere we'd call the other
No vacations, just working
I had two pieces of rental property and not enough money to keep them going because I
was charging almost no rent
No free time or money to do what I wanted to do, had obligations

AR Relationship with mother continued to be good?

SH Mother died in 1997 [narrator correction: Alice Halliburton Shavers died in 2011.]
There's no way we could have had anything but a good relationship
She always said nothing would come between us
My brother and I are not perfect matches, he has his opinions, but nothing will come
between us
Stanley went to UAPB, graduated in 1970
Ann, his wife, had graduated and was working for the government in Kansas City
He got her and came back to get married, then went back and finished degree at UAPB
They went to Chicago after he finished
They both had fellowships at University of Wisconsin for Business Administration
degrees
Lived in Saint Paul, Minnesota
She got a job as law professor at University of Nebraska
He got a job in Washington, D. C. in finance, the job allowed him to travel
Ann and Amber would go on business trips with him to Mexico, Las Vegas, wherever the
job was sending him

70 mins

Very serious people
She filled her life with her job and raising Amber when he was gone during the week
He hasn't lived in Little Rock since 1974

AR Connection to Mary Kay?

SH In 1984, I went to a Mary Kay party and bought the whole skincare set and loved it
Kept trying to get in touch with lady who held the party, but it was hard to catch her
Found three sellers in the yellow pages, one signed me up in 1984
There were years where I didn't do much, but always stayed connected
In 1989 I started up more seriously in Fort Worth
Airport plant had a big strike, times were hard
I went to employment security division, but couldn't find work because local people
were prioritized
I decided to sell Mary Kay
"To everyone asking me what I did, I would offer them a facial."

I did pretty well in Texas, enjoyed it
Became a director for about 12 years
Backed off in recent years, deal only with customers now
I have a big customer base and a few team members, not trying to grow

AR Director role?

SH A person who has built team of at least 30 people, you are responsible for their sales, training
You receive commissions from their work
Teach them how to build a team so they can become directors
The company would die out without team system
When Mary Kay pulled out of the New York Stock Exchange, they made a deal that cannot sell in brick-and-mortar
Can sell online now, or sell at someone's house, or have them come to ours

AR Recruiting people?

SH You usually start with somebody you know, then ask them if they know anyone
First person I recruited in Fort Worth was daughter of my husband's secretary
She's still on my team, way over twenty years
In New Orleans, went with Morris to a school to do something
Met a teacher, Brenda [married name now Leonard], asked her if she wanted Mary Kay
We exchanged numbers, she became first recruit in New Orleans
Meet people many ways, functions you can invite guests to

75 mins

Everybody usually starts off with a mother or aunt, my mother started with me
You become comfortable talking to anybody
Lady came up to me in the mall, asked for cleanser, I had it in the car
Now I have a sticker on the back of my car

AR Anyone come up to you in a parking lot?

SH No, not in a parking lot
In Fort Worth, somebody stopped me after picking up laundry at a drive-in window, asked for a product
For safety reasons, pretty much has to be referrals or people you approach

AR Money making job or community?

SH My husband would laugh, this has not been a money-making job
There was a time when I was doing well in sales and recruiting

Many people I was bringing in didn't have money, I was helping them get started
Primary reason for getting going was because I couldn't get another job and didn't want
to be at home doing nothing
Then built big customer base, I have people all over the country I have never seen,
would never leave my customer base to where they had nowhere to go
Some women get involved and then disappear
Those things made me aware of leaving people hanging

AR How many people in network now?

SH Five team members, not a director now

AR Community organizations, other involvement?

SH In New Orleans, I worked at Covenant House, part of Boys and Girls Clubs of America, a
place that brings in homeless kids off the streets, loved that volunteer work
New Orleans closes streets off when important people come to town
Police go through the streets and pick up all homeless and throw them in jail until later

80 mins

At least in 1993-1998, might be different now
Doubt it, New Orleans doesn't change
Covenant House had two vans and to pick kids up off the street and bring them in during
those special times
Ordinarily, runaway kids came to New Orleans because of the mild weather, would
come into Covenant House
I was receptionist, I'd get their pertinent information, then they'd move on to get a
shower, clothes, and a bed, schooling
One young boy stands out in my mind, young African American man from California, son
of a physician, father loved him but mother did not, he was gay
After his father died, mother put him out
Made his way to New Orleans, Tulane students took him under their wing, got his
schooling finished up, he's an attorney now
One of the Board members of New Orleans Public Schools was director, needed
volunteers and asked, really happy I did
I still donate to them
In Little Rock, involved with Friends of Haven of Rest Cemetery
My daughter, mother, maternal grandmother, two aunts, cousins buried there
When came for daughter's funeral services, I had no idea that cemetery had been
allowed to go down
In 1996, I started trying to find out who would do something about the cemetery
I wrote to the Securities Department

Came back to Little Rock in 1998, joined [Friends of Haven of Rest Cemetery], which was just getting started
Part of a book club, 13 of us, read everything
I belong to Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in North Little Rock
After Morris retired the last time, said I was going to limit myself to 4-5 activities
“You can retire and find yourself working your tongue off.”

AR Friends of Haven of Rest?

SH Fallen trees, trash, broken headstones, no paved roads, signs knocked down, gate off
My daughter was Jewish, her rabbi flew here from Minnesota for services
A year later, recognize the deceased [Jahrzeit]
In his summary, the Rabbi said she had been buried in a “small, rural cemetery,” it looked so bad
Past 10 years, we have cleaned up the cemetery

85 mins

A funeral home was supposed to be buying it, ran into financial trouble
It’s a perpetual care cemetery, so the Securities Board had authority to cut grass, but money had been used up
We raised funds, but cleaned up in the meantime
Men from Department of Corrections came to clean up, provided lunch
Volunteers came and helped
We paved the roads, put up new fence
We put out a memorial for boys burned in Wrightsville [Negro Boys Industrial School Fire of 1959]
We don’t own it, we are just “Friends of”
Membership is older
I started inviting younger people, cousins
Main concern is ongoing care

AR Land owner?

SH Not sure
There was a time when four entities said they wanted to buy it
It is owned by a financial company in Pennsylvania, a deal to buy it may go through, ownership may change hands
A man bought the land many years ago, he and his wife took care of the cemetery, got it into Perpetual Care
After their deaths, care was picked up by funeral homes
Care has gone up and down

AR Legal nightmare. Who owns these cemeteries?

SH We were talking about buying it, but could not because of age, money, needed upkeep
There are other cemeteries in the same situation

AR Connected to African American Cemetery Preservation group?

SH I don't think we're connected
Some people there started with Haven of Rest and have moved on
There was a time when people were not getting along, personal stuff getting in the way
Right now, things are working well
Senator [Irma Hunter] Brown is President, good Board and group of people working

AR Visited last year, seemed well maintained

SH They are doing good job of keeping it up
We pave roads, repair headstones, working together to get it back up to some standard

AR Kids?

90 mins

SH Daughter attended Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota
She stayed in Minnesota until her death
She came to New Orleans with us the last week of her life, but we couldn't get her to travel or do much of anything
My middle child has moved around, mostly with his girlfriend until she died of cancer
He is back in Little Rock now
My youngest son, Sam, is an international flight attendant with American
He has a home in Little Rock, but also travels a lot to Central and South America
During pandemic he took the opportunity to have surgery done on his leg
He does a lot of taking care of his father, who lives at the VA Hospital [Home] at Fort Roots, has Parkinson's
Sam takes him on vacations
Earl became serious drug addict, he's been up and down
He had a lot of family support, but took advantage of people and hurt a lot of people
I'm the only one who still communicates with him, only occasionally
I have three step children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren

AR Close to your daughter?

SH Close in some ways, but had a lot of differences
She only lived 11 months after her diagnosis
She prepared cards for the future for Mother's Day, birthday

She wrote me a quick note at the hospital saying, "I know you love me, and I have always loved you. I'm sorry I haven't always acted like it."
She would not travel much
She came to Little Rock in 1986 and visited after she finished college
Her brother tried to get her to travel around the world with him, she wouldn't do it

AR Spoke four languages?

SH French, English, German, Spanish
She learned Spanish at Hall High from a student from Central America
She joined Spanish club at Macalester
"She and her father had memories like elephants."

95 mins

She was very interesting to talk to
She was old fashioned, didn't experience life very much
She died on my birthday, February 20, 1996
I had been there for three weeks straight after failed bone marrow transplant in January
Tried to get her to M. D. Anderson in Texas
She had a doctor [Dr. Verfille] she loved and wanted to stay in Minnesota
Mother went and stayed the last three months of her life
I was in and out every other weekend
Weather was bad the week after the failed transplant, I decided to rent a car and drive from Minnesota to New Orleans
Doctor gave her extra blood platelets so she could continue to live
In Kansas, her energy kicked in, and we talked all the way
In New Orleans, I lived on Pearl Street near Tulane
She loved the house, wished she had come sooner
"You just couldn't pull her loose. And I'm not quite sure what held her down to that place."

AR After she passed?

SH It was very difficult
My postman had a son with leukemia
After the funeral, told the postman, and his son had passed, too
It crippled his wife
Support from my husband, across-the-street neighbors TroyLynne Perrault and Mark [Stahl], friend Helen Katz, mother, brother, son Sam

100 mins

"You can't stop living because of this."

I told myself that and went back to work as Mary Kay consultant and director
I would find myself suddenly crying, that went on for a while
Support you get from people is very important
I said I would never have joy in my life again, but it came back after two years

AR Long process

SH She was my only daughter, which meant I would have no grandchildren from her, that was a big loss
I found my faith after her death
Mother was not a pusher of religion, attended Sunday school and church
She didn't go many times, but the kids went every week
I learned I did have faith when Charles Elaine died
Caused a total change, things I once worried about I didn't anymore
People would tell me, "you're so brave," but they don't know what you're feeling inside

AR Bethel where you grew up going to church?

SH No, I grew up in Saint Andrew AME Church in the South End, now on 32nd and Bishop
When I was growing up it was on 33rd and State, but the building burned
Lived in that part of the South End until 5 or 6 years old

AR Still AME, just across the river

SH Yes, I will always be AME
Father's side have been AME for the last four generations
Even though I'm not super religious, Morris says we AME's are not religious anyway
In Germany, went to Baha'i services
In Little Rock, went to synagogue, Catholic services, I've tested everything and they were all fine
I decided you should just stay with the one you're born into
My father belonged to Bethel when he and my mother were married
Mother then went with Aunt Anne to Saint Andrew

AR Generational connection to AME church, goes way beyond religion

SH That's correct
Not many people understand that, my husband understands it

AR Probably need more history about it out there

SH Because my mother and father were separated, I don't know a lot about that side [father's] of the family
One of my grandfathers helped establish the AME church in Malvern

105 mins

Before the pandemic, Morris and I went down to the church
They had built a new church, but niece Amber and I got to see the old church a few
years ago
When I went that time, I met cousins I didn't know about
They were all expecting us
They have dinner after church, met more cousins there

AR Grandparents in Malvern?

SH I never went to Malvern as a little girl
Grandfather, Samuel Shavers, died before I was born
My grandmother died when I was a young adult
I went with my older brother to take her to the nursing home in College Station when
she was in her 80s
She was living by herself in her house in Malvern
He came from Detroit to make arrangements
I was 21 when I went to her funeral in Malvern
Father came, tried to walk next to my mother, my brother got between them
The grandparents I visited were in Humnoke, mother's side

AR Not too far from Carlisle where first husband was from

SH Not too far in a way
Took highway through England, Coy, Keo on the bus and then Humnoke

AR What have we missed? Any major areas of your life?

SH What will you do with this?

AR Recording will be "as is"
Summary of main points

SH Scipio Jones is my great uncle and third cousin
Father's mother and Scipio were half brother and sister, same father, mothers were
sisters, Jemima and Laura [Jemima was Scipio's mother, Laura was Martha Wade's
mother. Martha's son was Wade James Shavers.]
Both girls were enslaved [father was plantation owner, Dr. Sanford Reamy], and after
emancipation they went to Malvern and lived with an uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs.
Smith
Cousin I met in Malvern was a Smith

My great-grandmother married Mr. Wade, grandmother named her son Wade after her step-father

110 mins

AR Scipio Jones house?

SH I drive past sometimes and look at it
People at Horace Mann trying to get it for some of their meetings
Another group trying to update it for historical purposes
Everybody has noticed him and paid attention
Growing up I just knew the basics, my father called him Cousin Sip
Mother told us he was a good person, but not to be like our father and brag
I knew he was buried at Haven of Rest Cemetery, found the grave
Through Ancestry.com, I met a cousin in Detroit who had a lot of information
I've been tracing back, planning to write an article or book to pull everything together

AR Would be an incredible resource
Women's roles changing over the course of your life?

SH I have seen the roles of women change very much
Biggest change is the way women think about themselves
We were very brainwashed, especially women in the South
We have more self-confidence because we see women doing more
So many young women are doing things that they would not have thought about before, standing up for themselves
My mother was good example for us
From my book, written August 7, 2015: "Driving home from Kroger today, I thought of all Mother did for Stanley and me. You cannot say she sacrificed, because she said raising us was the happiest time of her life. Mother made 'a safe haven' life for us. She worked and accepted no welfare from the system. 'Therefore, we were never beholden to anyone.' No men came to our house and had impact or input on Mother or us. Mother had us very organized and on Sunday after Stanley and I went to Sunday school, we went to Higginbotham Store and paid the bill. We also bought whatever Mother had 'on the list.' The Higginbotham's knew that we were Alice Shavers' children and never worried about us in the store. Today's thoughts remind me of what we owe Mother: self-confidence, a sense of security, and appreciation of what we have. Many Sundays, Mother took us to either the zoo, Mary's Chicken Shack, or the movie."
My mother was ahead of her time, only one of six girls who did not stay married and own her own home
My grandfather worried about that, and that's one reason they supported her so much

115 mins

She had this belief that she was not going to have men “over us”
She knew of many situations where wives and children were abused, was not going to
put up with that
She worked in an area far beneath her skills and abilities
I have great appreciation for women who do the same

AR Perfect, full circle wrap up
It's been an honor